THE CIVICS OF ROCK: SIXTIES COUNTERCULTURAL MUSIC AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

by
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ABSTRACT

MICHAEL KRAMER: The Civics of Rock: Sixties Countercultural Music and the Transformation of the Public Sphere
(Under the direction of Professor John F. Kasson)

For the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s, rock music was not only mass entertainment, but also a form of public life. While many scholars have argued that rock was incompatible with civic participation, this book claims that in music scenes such as San Francisco, in poster art and dancing, on the radio and in print publications, rock served as a flash point for dilemmas of citizenship and civil society. As frequently as it deteriorated into escapism and hedonism, rock also created an atmosphere of inquiry in which the young might listen, think, move, and feel their way through issues of public and civic interaction, such as identity, belonging, power, and democracy. Even when exported by the American military to Vietnam or when circulating to youth movements worldwide, far from eclipsing public life, rock music transformed it into a mass-mediated mode of association that prefigured the civics of global society.
To all my teachers,

beginning with my mother, Judith Clayman Kramer, 1946-2005
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**Introduction - The Civics of Rock**

The musicologists of tomorrow will find rock's history somewhat bewildering...it is fast and sensual, ill-suited for a chronicle. - Mark Crispin Miller

So much of the ecstasy and urgency of the 60s arose from this need to take the private experience of breakthrough and go public with it. - Nick Bromell

We can no sooner imagine all the uses the average citizen might find for a song than we can imagine what he or she might do with an empty coffee can. - Mark Slobin

They gathered around stages, letting the sound waves wash over their bodies. In abandoned vaudeville theaters, in old union halls, in deindustrialized warehouses, in parks, on streets, and in trendy clubs, they circulated into and out of crowds. The thundering vibrations of electronically-amplified noise, the sea of colored lights and flickering strobes, the smells of bodies and incense and smoke, perhaps the first puffs of marijuana or licked tabs of lysergic acid -- these made the world porous for them, turning their insides out and bringing the outside in. Many felt frightened by these experiences. Others were baffled by the mixture of the profound and the banal. Still others felt a sense of wonder at the energies -

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- electric, sonic, and social -- unleashed in and around them. They felt transported to new time zones and new communicative spaces (see figure 0.1).

![Figure 0.1. Gathering around the stage at the Trips Festival, Longshoreman's Hall, San Francisco, January 1966 (Photograph by Rod Mann)](image)

Many felt summoned to these spaces by songs heard in the privacy of a bedroom, on a radio broadcast coming in over the hum of a car engine, or on a record circling the spindle of a phonograph machine in a friend's basement. Or they had read about these new sounds in grainy, mimeographed fanzines or in the slicker, glossy magazines available at the corner newspaper stand. They saw glimpses on television sets, in films at the local movie palace, and among the bins at the local record shop. They eyed ornate posters on telephone poles or on the walls of college dormitory rooms. Fliers appeared around campus, in the school parking lot, or on downtown street corners. A number of these listeners fiddled with electric guitars or drum kits themselves -- in garages after school or at a local teen club on a Friday
night. After attending a concert, they often returned again, not only to the concert hall, but also to this multifaceted world of circulating sounds.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, rock music provided a mediated realm for the strange social phenomenon known as the counterculture -- a phenomenon whose exact nature continues to evade settled historical explanation. Rock music's listeners, whether alone in a bedroom with the radio or surrounded by hundreds of sweaty bodies on the dance floor, found themselves altered to various degrees by the sounds they encountered. "Week after week we go inside the music," rock critic Sandy Darlington wrote of attending concerts in San Francisco's psychedelic ballrooms during 1967 and 1968. "As they play and we listen and dance, the questions and ideas slowly germinate in our minds like seeds: This is our school, our summit conference." For Darlington, rock music was "more than entertainment"; it was a means of entry into a new realm of inquiry.

For Darlington, the music occupied space. One could literally "go inside the music." According to Darlington, rock concerts were "clearing grounds" and each performance resembled an "immigrant processing and indoctrination center" for the counterculture. A rock concert was "our school, our summit conference." It was a gathering of representatives from a larger network of people. And it was a space of representation. Darlington insisted that live music was but one aspect of a larger "Community" that was "defining itself through all its activities put together." Rock concerts were gatherings that linked individuals to a larger public life beyond the concert hall.⁴

Rock's "Community" as a Transformed Public Sphere

How do we understand this collectivity -- this "Community" -- that took shape through experiences of rock music? Participants such as Darlington and other observers saw rock and the counterculture in a positive, even utopian, light. Alongside the civil rights movement, growing student unrest on college and university campuses, the antiwar movement, and a general rejection of Cold War American values, many assigned rock a fixed ideological meaning that paralleled the radical political movements of the day.\(^5\)

To these participants and observers, rock was part of an impending revolution even though it was part of "the system" of American capitalism. "Rock is *per se* revolutionary," Chester Anderson insisted in 1967. "Its apparent domestication by record companies & Top-40 DJs can't counteract its political effects."\(^6\) To commentators such as Anderson, rock's

\(^5\) See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1968; Reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). The history of rock in the 1960s has often conflated the ideologies of the most famous countercultural leaders, such as Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and John Sinclair, with the larger social phenomenon itself. To be sure, these figures shaped the counterculture, but this project views their ideological positions as voices in a larger public life created by aesthetic entities such as rock music and political experiences such as the Vietnam War. For more on the voices of these figures, see: Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (New York: Putnam, 1968); Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album* (New York: Vintage, 1969); and *Steal This Book* (New York: Grove Press, 1971); Jerry Rubin, *Do It!* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) and *We Are Everywhere* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); John Sinclair, *Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings* (New York: Douglas Books, 1972). For an intriguing study of how leaders such as Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies forged a media politics, see David Joselit, "Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics," *Grey Room* 8 (Summer 2002): 62-79.


important events were as significant as protest marches and assassinations, elections and foreign negotiations. These events included the Beatles touring the United States during the mid-1960s and the release of their album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hears Club Band*, in 1967. The crossover of Bob Dylan from folk music to rock in 1965 was another key moment. The appearances of Otis Redding, the Mamas and the Papas, Jimi Hendrix, the Who, Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin and other newly-minted pop stars at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 provided another crucial marker. The Woodstock Arts and Music Festival in Bethel, New York, which took place during August of 1969, was perhaps the most crucial event of all. Six months later, in December of 1969, the Rolling Stones headlined the violent festival at the Altamont Motor Speedway, outside of San Francisco. These mile markers in rock history were (and continue to be) invoked to tell a story of rock music as cultural revolution.

Indeed, to many in the counterculture, rock not only fomented a radical transformation in American life, but also in the very foundations of Western civilization. "Rock music was born of a revolt against the sham of Western culture," the editor Jonathan Eisen announced in his 1969 collection of essays about the music. "Rock is definitely a music of revolt...it is profoundly involved with the search for new categories of thought and action." To the activist John Sinclair, manager of the MC5 and leader of the White Panther Party in Detroit, Michigan, rock "made the leap from the mechanical to the electronic age in the space of three minutes, forty-five revolutions per minute, crystallizing all the new energy generated by the clash between these two monstrous technologies and squeezing it into the most compact possible form, the most explosive (and implosive!) form possible." To Sinclair, rock music "shot that energy out through the radio into every corner of Amerika
[sic] to retribalize its children and transform them into something essentially and substantially different from the race which had brought them into the world." For observers such as Eisen or activists such as Sinclair, rock outblasted its own means of production, subverting regimes of power and producing radically new modes of identity, subjectivity, and technology. "To talk of destroying the media is not even the point," Sinclair insisted. "The communications media are just an energy form which can be transformed by revolutionary content into revolutionary media." ⁷

Almost immediately after rock's arrival as a genre, however, both participants and observers challenged this view of rock as revolution. The counterculture seemed suspiciously unable to escape the grip of the dominant culture. "The za-za world of rock is almost entirely an uptown plastic dome," Abbie Hoffman claimed about his experience behind the scenes at the 1969 Woodstock Festival. "It meant being hustled under guard to a secluded pavilion to join the other aristocrats who run the ROCK EMPIRE." In one version of this critique, mainstream forces -- especially corporations, but also religious institutions and even the United States government -- coopted entities such as rock music. Certain countercultural writers lambasted bands such as the Jefferson Airplane for recording music for Levi's Jeans television commercials. Liberal churches created rock music liturgies. And as we shall see, the United States military imported rock music to American troops fighting in Vietnam. ⁸


⁸ Abbie Hoffman, Woodstock Nation, 5. On the Jefferson Airplane Levi's jeans commercials, see Larry Miller's comments in Michael Keith, Voices in the Purple Haze: Underground Radio and the Sixties (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 96: "As early as 1968, Jefferson Airplane did some Levi spots, which resulted in it being accused by the underground press as having sold out. It was a ticklish time." On the use of rock in churches,
But this one-directional notion of an authentic rock music coopted by larger forces was not the only view of how the music related to a counterculture. Others were suspicious of the notion of rock as revolution because the music seemed corrupt from the start, already produced by the mechanisms of Cold War consensus liberalism and consumer capitalism. "Where is there a more commercial scene than the recording and button business?" Peter Stafford asked in a 1968 article entitled "Rock as Politics." This more critical view of rock music and the counterculture has been developed in more recent histories such as Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool*, a study of the business culture of the 1960s.9

Many other historians and social scientists have since concluded that rock was both a commodity and a creator of collective engagement. Writing in the early 1980s, British sociologist Simon Frith argued that, "Rock is a mass-produced music that carries a critique of its own means of production, it is mass-consumed music that constructs its own 'authentic' audience." Similarly, the American studies scholar George Lipsitz identifies an "authentic" counterculture that, through rock, "intersected and overlapped" with a commercial version. Examining the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in San Francisco, the historian Alice Echols likewise offers a, "story of hope and hype.... Everyone knows about the peace, love, grass, and groovy music, but the counterculture was always more complicated -- edgier, darker,

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and more tied to the dominant culture -- than most anyone at the time could see." These historians of rock deepen our understanding of how a participant such as Sandy Darlington could hear rock both as "entertainment" and "our school, our summit conference."\textsuperscript{10}

Even a historian-memoirist such as Nick Bromell, who wants to rescue rock's political effects from latter-day dismissals, registers the music's mixed status as both a commercial and a public entity. To Bromell, rock was a leisure product with civic capacities. "Rock was fun, but it was also a vital and spontaneous public philosophizing," he suggests, "a medium through which important questions were raised and rehearsed, and sometimes focused, and sometimes (rarely) answered." Bromell noticed that rock circulated a sensibility of public engagement to a larger audience. But it did so at a cost. "By publicizing our values in the marketplace," Bromell wrote of rock groups such as the Beatles and the Band, "they risked losing whatever force rock's critique of capitalism carried." As the cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg posits, "Rock's politics were firmly located within the commitment to mobility and consumerism, perhaps not as ends in themselves but as the necessary conditions for a life of fun." To Grossberg, who wants to grasp how the emotional experiences of rock fans could tap into illiberal impulses, "Rock sought to open culture to the needs and experiences of its own audiences, not to deny or overturn the consensual and institutional structures that had made those experiences, and rock's existence, possible."

Writing from very different perspectives, Bromell and Grossberg both locate rock within the historical context of Cold War mass consumerism.\(^{11}\)

By identifying rock music's embeddedness within the larger political economy and cultural framework of late twentieth-century commodity capitalism, studies by Grossberg, Bromell, Echols, Lipsitz, and Frith reject simplistic conceptualizations of "authenticity" or "rebellion."\(^{12}\) Rock was not a pure or transcendent political, aesthetic, or emotional force that completely rejected or opposed the supposed corruption of the marketplace.\(^{13}\) Instead, rock


demonstrates the intermingled nature of rock and consumerism, of counterculture and mass culture.\textsuperscript{14}

Nonetheless, as Peter Stafford first noticed in his 1968 essay "Rock as Politics," the effects of rock music in the countercultural moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s continue to elude precise explanation. "In all that I have said about rock music," Stafford wrote, "at no point have I been able to put my finger down squarely and say: this is why I

think it is important. I can point to the parts, but where is the whole?" Placing rock at the center of a larger "psychedelic revolution," Stafford concluded that, "The reason I can't more neatly sum up the effects of psychedelics and rock seems to me in the nature of what's going down. The most important quality of the psychedelic revolution -- if that's what it is -- is possibly its elusiveness, its essential imperceptibility."15

This project links what Stafford calls the "elusiveness" and "essential imperceptibility" of the "psychedelic revolution" to the formation of a public sphere. What Sandy Darlington described as a "Community" came into being through rock music. But participants in rock, even Darlington himself, did not exclusively link the music to specific, face-to-face gatherings. Rock also circulated beyond particular individuals to a vast population that was categorized as "the people." Many commentators explicitly made this link between music and the masses. Robert Levin, for example, argued that, "music and musicians are important in the widest sense, as they reflect and likewise shape the consciousness of the people out of whom they emerge to make the music." In these interpretations, rock music represented the feelings and ideas -- the "consciousness" -- of a large group of participants. Rock was the music of a "people," or, we might even say, of a public.16

However, as Walter Lippmann pointed out in the 1920s, in complex, modern societies, the category of "the people" is a fiction. It is a "phantom public" invoked to signal a body of citizens in consensus or agreement. Public opinion, the *vox populi*, can, in fact,

15 Stafford, "Rock as Politics," 31.

never be precisely measured. It can only be approximated. It can never include the sum total of all individual perspectives. The vast diversity of beliefs, values, ideas, opinions, positionalities, and subjectivities cannot be truly captured by one totalizing, collective entity. Instead, "the people" (or "the community" for that matter) provides a conceptual metaphor through which to imagine a public. The problem is one of representation, both in terms of political participation and in terms of symbolism. There is a larger whole -- a publicus or civitas -- yet the link between its component parts and their assembly into an entirety cannot be absolutely established.17

What kind of problematic collectivity of "the people," then, did rock music foster and sustain in the late 1960s and early 1970s? By studying not only rock music, but also the web of responses to rock that arose in the countercultural moment of those years, this project understands the counterculture's "community" neither as collectives of passive consumers, nor as a coherent political movement, but rather as a new kind of public sphere. Drawing upon the political and social theories of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and other theorists, I contend that the counterculture marked a "transformation of the public sphere" in the late 1960s and early 1970s.18

17 Walter Lippmann, The Phantom Public (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925) for his analysis of this concept and its problems. Debates about "popular culture" similarly revolve around the fictive category of "the people," which has often been invoked by scholars in relation to definitions of popular or folk culture.

In the public sphere theories of Habermas or Arendt, mass society invades and corrupts ideal versions of the public. For Habermas, the idea of the "public sphere" meant, "first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed." The closest realization of this realm, for Habermas, was the Enlightenment space of "rational-critical debate" in which economic or political status did not influence debate, differences of identity were left behind, and the best argument won out. The actions of individuals as *citoyen* took place in the public sphere, which mitigated against the forces of the market and the state. For Arendt, by contrast, the ideal public sphere was found among the Romans of antiquity, for whom the public arose after each household's material well-being and status had been secured; only then could debate and competition among equals without difference exist.

In both of these theories, the public sphere is largely a static entity, existing separately from (though structurally related to) private life, economic activities, and the actual governance by state institutions. The public sphere takes shape as *civil society* -- a realm of interaction that flourishes in a space between the household, the market, and the state. With the onslaught of commodification and political manipulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, mass culture increasingly pressed in upon and destroyed the public sphere. To Habermas, newspapers shifted from entities of "rational-critical" debate to vehicles for advertising. To Arendt, the demands of securing material security, previously confined to the private sphere, infiltrated the public realm. Mass commodification, mediation, and manipulation corroded civil society, reducing it to a

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(Citations: Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," 49.)
contorted, skeletal ghost of its previous, vibrant, lively condition.

In recent years, though, theorists have challenged declensionist interpretations of mass culture's effects on public life and civil society. These theorists, from Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt in Germany to Michael Warner in the United States, believe that a public sphere might still exist within the mediation of mass culture. Unlike Habermas and Arendt, they place greater weight upon differences of identities rather than the achievement of sameness. They consider interactions among participants for whom differences in identity do not necessarily lead to inequalities in the public arena. Moreover, not only "rational-critical" debate, but also more complicated interactions between the emotions and reason are valid to these theorists.\(^\text{20}\)

Drawing upon these revisions of public sphere theory, I argue that in the counterculture and rock, we glimpse (and hear) not the decline of civil society in the face of mass culture's expansions, but rather a transmogrified civil society. Rock, and the counterculture that it helped to publicize, was part of mass culture's globally expanding electronic circuitry. But rock and the counterculture flowed uneasily within this mass culture. For its listeners, rock was more than just consumerism. It helped constitute a social body -- one that was strangely disembodied by mass media, but nonetheless strongly felt. This, I contend, is because responses to rock generated what Bruno Latour has playfully called not a public sphere, but an "atmosphere of democracy."\(^\text{21}\) This "atmosphere of


democracy" demands closer inquiry. In radio broadcasts and print publications, in San Francisco and as far away as the war zone in Vietnam or youth movements around the globe, responses to rock reveal the shifting patterns of mass culture's transformation of the public sphere. Reactions to the music by countercultural participants demonstrate the persistence of civil society even in a new context of mediation and consumerism.

Bruno Latour is not the only theorist to argue that the public sphere did not vanish in mass culture. Bruce Robbins names a similar entity when, borrowing from Walter Lippmann, he writes of a "phantom public sphere" that fluctuated into existence like a ghost in the machine of mass culture. Arjun Appadurai calls the world of mass culture a "mediascape," a space in which a public sphere might take shape among the contested interactions of a globalizing capitalist economic structure. Using a slightly different nomenclature, Michael Warner describes oppositional forces and alternative challenges that exist within the mediascape as "counterpublics." Dropping the "subaltern" from Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics," Warner moves away from the notion of subculture. Instead, he understands a "counterpublic" to be, "a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like."22 What


rock's performance halls, light shows, dance styles, clothing, poster art, criticism, cartoons, graffiti, and spoken language all suggest is that a new kind of public life arose in the counterculture. This project explores how rock music sustained many of the qualities of public life that Habermas's revisionists have outlined. Most of all, responses to rock in the late 1960s and early 1970s manifested a civics that did not get eclipsed by the waves of mass mediation or the pleasures of mass consumerism.  

**Rock's Transformed Public Sphere and the Cold War "Consumers' Republic"**

A close examination of the "community" that Sandy Darlington noticed in rock music during the late 1960s and early 1970s contributes to a larger history of the culture of democracy in the United States during the last half of the twentieth century. Noting its many problems as well as its possibilities, Lizabeth Cohen has called this culture of democracy a "Consumers' Republic." But, while she focuses on political culture, my project understands civic culture and civil society as worthy of consideration as well. As public sphere theorists have argued, the political and the civic are separate, though related, entities. Narrowly


defined, politics consists of policies, elections, laws, and struggles over governmental power. Civics, by contrast, consists of the broader social life of personal associations, anonymous interactions, and public engagements in which politics is embedded. Civic culture informs politics (and vice-versa), but the two are not identical. Nor, crucially, is civic culture synonymous with commercial culture. As I argue in this project, civic, political, and commercial culture intersected with each other in curious and confounding ways during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but they were never all one and the same.

Instead, civic culture can be understood as a conduit. It is a conductor of publicness that mediates between politics and commerce as well as between the massiveness of mass society and the minutiae of intimate, personal experiences. Civic culture is the very stuff of civil society and the public sphere. It consists of the ideas, sounds, writings, images, gestures, and emotions that float between the state, the family, and the marketplace without

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solidifying into any one of these structuring institutions. Civic culture's modes of communication and interaction move invisibly. Like the air, they permeate the market in which commodities are bought and sold; they interact with state infrastructures; and they flow into and out of family structures. Civic culture allows people to breathe. It offers what Harry Boyte and Sara Evans call "free spaces." But it can also gather more ominous forces. Manipulated in the name of power, civic culture can suddenly unleash a deadly storm. And if manipulated in devious ways, civic culture can injure individuals and societies through subtle methods, carrying the equivalents of pollutants or infectious diseases into a civic population.

What responses to rock suggest is that in the context of mass culture's expansions, the one thing that did not happen to civil society was that it vanished. As rock music permeated the personal realm of family life, the economic domain of consumer processes, and the political activities of the state, it did not simply disappear into these other institutions of society. Instead, rock music fostered a mobile space for engagement, interaction, critique, and awareness. Rock was a crucial, but invisible, resource, like oxygen, that circulated to enliven a civic body in the Cold War American environment of mass mediation and mass consumerism.

**Rock's Transformed Public Sphere and the Counterculture**

By examining responses to rock, we can better perceive how rock functioned as civic culture, giving birth to the entity known, confusingly, as the counterculture. The

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"counterculture" is a confusing term because it suggests that the transformed public sphere of rock promised an escape from mass culture. However, more often than not, rock did not provide escape. Rather, it provided an arena in which participants could consider the dilemmas of mass culture from within mass cultural life. To borrow from the parlance of the times, rock music provoked an "awakening of consciousness." This awakening was often ineffable, but also, in its moment, essential for the formation of the counterculture as civic culture.

An awakening of consciousness was not the same as an achievement of revolution. Though the word "counterculture" bears the weight of utopian, revolutionary hopes, in retrospect it might best be understood only as a set of swirling "counterflows," swells and gusts in the atmosphere of a larger mass culture. During the decades after World War II, mass culture spread across the globe. Simultaneously, it penetrated deeply into intimate lives. What responses to rock indicate is that mass culture raised new problems about how democracy would function. Participants in rock music confronted these dilemmas of democracy. Through their debate, interaction, and inquiry, they helped generate the counterculture as a new, transformed public sphere. Civil society and civic culture lived on -- the associational life of Darlington's "Community" continued to breathe -- even behind the institutional masks of politics, commerce, or intimate experience.

In making this argument, I both build upon and revise the latest interpretations of the counterculture's complicity in commerce. Thomas Frank's 1997 investigation of the American corporate advertising industry, The Conquest of Cool, contended that the counterculture arose not only as a political and social movement on the margins of Cold War American life, but also in the proverbial "belly of the beast." Neither only Beat poets and
African-American rock and rollers, nor only New Left political activists and hippies, but also advertising agencies on Madison Avenue and giant, transnational corporations sought to sell a more hedonistic, rebellious mass culture in the 1960s. They did not "co-opt" the counterculture so much as help to create it, as Frank demonstrates.

Figure 0.2. Columbia Records sells rebellion: "But The Man Can't Bust Our Music" advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, 7 December 1968

To make his case with regard to rock music, Frank cites the infamous 1968 Columbia Records advertisement "But The Man Can't Bust Our Music," which appeared in rock publications such as *Rolling Stone*, as an example of how the counterculture was a product of the culture industries (see figure 0.2). For anyone who doubts the authenticity of rock's rebellious stance, or who believes that consumerism and politics are mutually exclusive, this advertisement seems to be a smoking gun. Here, the political energies of the 1960s were
produced, packaged, and sold by a corporate giant; here is style falsely masquerading as substance.  

Frank's study, however, neglects the printed materials that appeared around these advertisements. A look beyond corporate intentions to a wider range of responses to rock music reveals a growing cognizance of the ironies of the counterculture's relationship to mass culture. This recognition emerged not from a rigidly ideological oppositional political movement, but from a sphere of inquiry that rock music helped to sustain. Outside the space of the advertisement, civic culture thrived. Writing in a Creem magazine record review in 1970, for instance, one critic remarked, "Remember Columbia's 'the man can't bust our music' ads? Guess who 'busts' more music than anyone else, often for periods of time longer than the usual grass or draft sentence? Sure, it's the record companies." As this quotation suggests, the audience to which these ads were actually directed was quite conscious that rock music was caught up in, and corrupted by, the processes of corporate capitalism. In fact, perhaps the only people who took these advertisements seriously as a form of authentic political subversion were agents in the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Columbia Records'
advertisements were canceled after an FBI memo claimed they were aiding and abetting the enemy.  

Far from being passive recipients of advertising, rock fans were often quite sensitive both to the music's complicity in capitalism and to record companies' desires to exploit youth culture. Rock, then, wound up being neither pure commercial product nor pure political revolution. Instead, rock listeners considered the ways in which the counterculture might reshape mass society through the formation of a new public collectivity -- or as Sandy Darlington phrased it, through a new "Community." Civic culture rather than political dissent became the crucial realm in which these participants engaged with issues of democracy, representation, justice, and equality.

In this sense, many participants in the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s themselves offer a starting point for the stance that Thomas Frank pursues retrospectively in his business history of the counterculture. By uncovering the civic dimensions of responses to rock, this project does not reject Thomas Frank's key insights into the role of American business in shaping the counterculture. Instead, it answers his call for, "a more critical perspective on the phenomenon of co-optation, as well as on the value of certain strategies of cultural confrontation, and, ultimately, on the historical meaning of the counterculture." It is this consideration of co-optation, cultural confrontation, and the ironies of the counterculture that participants themselves began to confront through civic interaction in the heyday of rock music itself.  

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Rock’s Transformed Public Sphere and the American National Imaginary

Responses to rock reveal how participants in the counterculture were often as aware of the counterculture's impure commercial status as Thomas Frank is in retrospect. But, participants in rock also perceived the music's civic capacities. In particular, rock musicians and their audiences sought to appropriate and resignify nationalistic symbols. They listened to rock versions of patriotic music such as Jimi Hendrix's famous reinterpretation of the "Star-Spangled Banner." They appropriated iconography such as flags, Uncle Sam, and other images of the United States to question conceptualizations of the American nation-state. And by arranging themselves into tribes, collectives, bands, communes, and homes marked by fictional rather than biological kinship, rock's participants experimented with associational formations beyond the dominant American structures of the nuclear family, the municipal government, or the corporation.  

As participants experimented with a transformed mass cultural public life, rock music provided a way to communicate and interact. Even as it circulated as a commodity form, rock linked participants together as a collectivity whose possibilities hinted at more than just the exchange of goods. The processes of appropriation and awareness that responses to rock entailed continually provoked participants in this collectivity to ask whether the larger economic and political system could be refashioned for better purposes. So even though the counterculture was embedded within Cold War mass consumerism, it possessed critical capacities, especially when it came to reconceptualizing the American

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nation as what Abbie Hoffman called the counterculture's "Woodstock Nation" or what the historians Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle have recently called the counterculture's "Imagine Nation."  

There is also a deeper history to the dilemmas of mass culture that countercultural participants faced. John Dewey first noticed the new difficulties that mass culture posed for American society decades earlier. As Dewey wrote in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), the modernization and industrialization of the United States posed difficulties for an ideal public life. Gone was the direct, face-to-face "Community" of small-town nineteenth century life that Dewey and other Progressives idealized (how ideal that life had been was another matter). Yet, the urge to sustain a public life lingered. Responding to fellow Progressive Walter Lippmann's analysis of the "phantom public" that had arisen in complex, modern, industrial, mass society, Dewey argued that new strategies in civic education and public communication might foster a transformed public suitable for twentieth-century America. The legacy of Dewey, Lippmann, and other Progressives set the stage for Cold War struggles concerning the culture of democracy in the "Consumers' Republic."  

**Rock's Transformed Public Sphere, Seizures of Feeling, and the Ambiguous "New Working Class"**

Through rock music, participants in the counterculture explored the conundrum of creating a civil society -- a public life -- in the changing technological context of mass media

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and mass consumerism. Their confrontations sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed. In both cases, they helped generate a "transformed" public sphere that fluctuated into existence whenever participants engaged with dilemmas of democratic practice through musical experience. This public has been difficult to recognize because rock did not reflect or produce a "structure of feeling," in Raymond Williams's famous and quite useful phrase. Instead, the music sparked what can be more accurately called *seizures of feeling*.³⁴

The notion of *seizures of feeling* rather than "structures of feeling" captures more precisely how the transformed public sphere of the counterculture moved within the flow of mass culture. Rather than forming a transcendent region of social life outside of personal, economic, or political activities, rock allowed an immanent public life to emerge within larger structural forces of the family, the market, and politics. Inequalities in this public sphere did not vanish. Rock did not make for an ideal, utopian reality: the hierarchies of the family, the market, and the government did not melt away and a new definition of the self did not emerge wholesale from rock's public life. Nonetheless, this public provided a way for critical collective interaction, debate, and deliberation to take place.

But what were the structural underpinnings of this new public? The new modes of collectivity that rock music inspired appeared in a particular historical moment in America: the final flowering of the corporate-liberal New Deal consensus before the rise of neo-

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conservatism. The *rapprochement* of labor unions and corporations gave many working Americans access to the middle-class. The limited but real triumphs of the Civil Rights movement suggested that this middle-class might eventually include many non-whites as well as white Americans. The stirrings of a women's movement indicated that the patriarchal gender roles at the center of the suburban vision of middle-class life might shift as well. What Daniel Belgrad calls the corporate liberalism of Cold War America was deeply problematic, but, in the late 1960s, its possibilities for improvement remained alive.  

Grappling with this corporate-liberal order, certain New Left political activists argued that a "New Working Class" was emerging. As Students for a Democratic Society (S.D.S.) rapidly expanded between 1966 and 1968, precisely the years when rock music also exploded into national and international consciousness as a genre, the "New Working Class" theory identified commonalities between middle-class students and blue-collar workers. As wage laborers, the theory went, these groups shared an alienation from the means of production. The "New Working Class" of the post-industrial order -- the white-collar workers -- might join in common cause with blue-collar laborers to create a progressive coalition in Cold War America. In opposition to corporations that were consolidating power with the help of state apparatuses, changing class formations suggested a possible, though nascent, political movement. At its core, the "New Working Class" theory linked transformations in class to the military-industrial complex: alienation from the means of production hinted at shared structural positions between elements of the middle and working classes.

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In the United States, the "New Working Class" theory served a particular purpose in the political culture of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), but, in retrospect, it also offers a way of understanding a larger civic culture. The "New Working Class" theory suggested that as the dematerialization of both labor and commodities increased in a post-industrial society dominated by mass communications technologies, the realm of culture took on a growing importance. A new kind of collectivity developed -- a civic culture embedded within the flow of mass consumer culture. This immanent public was elusive, but

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37 For political activists, the "New Working Class" idea had strategic value. It provided a tool for organizing the massive influx of students into the organization by positioning them as revolutionary agents themselves. Simultaneously, the "New Working Class" thesis provided a response to the Black Power movement, which, by 1966 and 1967, increasingly urged white radicals to organize in their own communities rather than among African-Americans. These are the political dimensions of the theory. The New Working Class theory represented quite a leap from the Old Left's traditional Marxist focus on the industrial proletariat, and Old Left activists let the New Left theorists know it at various S.D.S. meetings in 1967 and 1968. See Rossinow, 193-205; Echols, 38-41; Breines, 96-114.
quite powerful. And rock music resonated at its center.\textsuperscript{38}

Historians of rock have noticed this link between class and music, but never in terms of transformations of public life. What I am getting at here is not a simplistic assignment of rock music to a static class position, but rather the idea that the music arose in relation to a class that was itself crucial to the new postindustrial economy, yet also fundamentally \textit{in transition and possessing ambiguous boundaries}. If structural changes in economic production gave rise to a "New Working Class" whose members included, potentially, a combination of working and middle class youth from a variety of backgrounds, then rock provided one resource for the forging of the subjectivity and collectivity around which this class existed.\textsuperscript{39}

Rock generated a network of interaction and circulation that wired together dispersed modes of experimentation. This is one reason why rock, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was such a highly unstable genre. Later, it would coalesce into "classic rock" for nostalgic baby boomers. But, when it appeared in the late 1960s, rock lacked consolidation. Not all

\begin{footnote}{38}With its flickering presence within, yet not entirely of, mass consumer commodities and the technologies of mass communication, rock's embedded public life appeared at precisely the moment when the economy shifted from Fordist to post-Fordist modes of production and from modernist to postmodernist cultural practices. For more on post-Fordism and postmodernism, see Frederic Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); David Harvey, \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change} (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). For a full treatment of the 1960s and postmodernity, see Marianne DeKoven, \textit{Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Also see Brent Whelan, "'Further': Reflections on the Counter-Culture and the Postmodern," \textit{Cultural Critique} (Winter 1988-89): 63-86.\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{39}See Negt and Kluge's observations about the student movement of the 1960s as an example of the "proletarian public sphere" that sprang up in response to new relations of production and class: "The students strove for a fulfillment of the substantive content of a bourgeois-liberal idea of a public sphere by demonstratively forcing discussions. They wanted to bring experience, contexts of living, the historical present (Vietnam, the liberation movements in the Third World, their real experience as students) into a context of public discussion that was blocked by the formal public sphere." To Negt and Kluge, the student movement was a "mediation between the situation in the workplace (including reflection on the meaning of subsequent employment) and the present global context." \textit{The Proletarian Public Sphere}, 84, 86.\end{footnote}
rock sounded the same; not all originated in the same ways; and not all was consumed by the same populations for the same purposes. This was partially because so many entrepreneurs and corporations sought to market diverse commodities under the rubric of rock -- to cash in on the genre. But rock's instability also stemmed from the ways in which participants used music to forge a tentative public collectivity that did not rest in any one place, socio-economic location, racial identity, or gender position.\textsuperscript{40}

The network that participants in rock created can be understood as a collective or a public, but only if we update and contextualize those terms. Just as Habermas located the rise of an eighteenth-century public sphere in shifting class structures that marked the emergence of the bourgeoisie and its capacity for "rational-critical debate," so, too, shifting class structures made possible the emergence of a "New Working Class" and its capacity for seizures of feeling and a transformed public sphere. The public sphere that arose from rock was not the same as Habermas's "rational-critical" public of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. This was a public life that arose in its own historical moment.

The corporate-liberal consensus that had emerged from the New Deal and World War II began to collapse in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many factors contributed to this collapse, including the resurgence of a conservative political movement heralded by the election of Ronald Reagan to the California governorship in 1966. But, the most prominent factor was the Vietnam War. The bureaucratic approach to waging the Vietnam War called

\textsuperscript{40} As both Simon Frith and Alice Echols note, students in training for the professional-managerial class interacted with working class adolescents through rock (sometimes, participants occupied both these class positions simultaneously). See Simon Frith, "'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community," \textit{Popular Music} 1 (1981): 159-168; Alice Echols, "Hope and Hype." Moreover, as George Lipsitz has explained, rock itself was rooted in post-World War II working class life. The music's aesthetic forms and social uses contained multiple traces of working class existence. As a site of popular memory, rock mediated between experiences of class in the past and changing circumstances in the present. See Lipsitz, "Against the Wind."
rationality itself to question. The Cold War logics of "mutual assured destruction" and the "domino theory" undermined claims that those in political and economic power in fact acted rationally. Simultaneously, the Cold War seemed linked to a corporate economy that, as the "New Working Class" proponents pointed out, provided alienating, unrewarding, dead-end jobs -- many of which were crucial, at the same time, to the manpower needs of the corporate-liberal order and the military-industrial complex. Because "rationality" itself came into question, participants in rock and the counterculture dismissed the strictures of a narrowly-defined public sphere.

In place of Habermas's "rational-critical" public or Arendt's nostalgic publicus of antiquity, listeners to rock sought out multiple pathways to collective and individual understanding: feeling as well as thought, spirituality as well as rationality, the body as well as the mind. Though rock musicians and audiences flirted with madness and danger in response to their times, most participants did not reject rationality. What I want to emphasize is that responses to rock reveal a broadening, a reconceptualizing, of rationality in response both to aesthetic forms of expression -- music, clothing, poster art, dancing, even, one might argue, psychedelic drugs -- as well as to the larger historical context -- the Vietnam War, the incompleteness of the civil rights movements, and other crises of Cold War American capitalism as it shifted toward deindustrialized postmodernism.

Because the strange public life that participants forged through rock music itself arose from a class formation -- the "New Working Class" -- that was transitional and nascent during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the public sphere of rock was not limited to one

\footnote{For example, see Peter Henig, "Selective Service System: or, The Manpower Channelers," \textit{New Left Notes}, 20 January 1967. Kirkpatrick Sale remarks that this article made a crucial intellectual intervention, drawing many to the anti-Vietnam War movement; see Kirkpatrick Sale, \textit{SDS} (New York: Vintage, 1973).}
Rather, the public life that rock fostered sprang up whenever and wherever participants circulated an expressive culture that questioned the status quo, posed tentative alternatives, and enabled a process of heightened self-awareness. This does not mean that rock solved ongoing inequalities and injustices. Rock's audiences did not uncover perfect solutions or enact utopias. Indeed, this was not even the point. Instead, the expressive creations of these participants in rock music -- the kaleidoscope of radio broadcasts, posters, dance styles, clothing, critical writing, and vernacular culture -- repeatedly emphasized the cultural construction of identity. This could lead to oversimplistic solutions to thorny structural problems, but it also led to new possibilities for self-understanding and collective connection in which difference might play a role in the public sphere alongside dreams of unity and equality. Responders to rock began, tentatively, to rethink gender, to alter the public presence of women, to seek both imaginative and actual spaces for figures such as the "black hippie," and to explore more democratic visions of economic life on local, national, and even international levels.

For a critique of totalizing models of the public sphere, see Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions*.


My project joins recent work on gender, race, class, rock, and the counterculture. The dominant argument about rock and roll's passage to the genre of rock concerns its move from black to white and, simultaneously, from working-class to middle-class, youth. Almost all of this occurred within a misogynist, or at the very least, masculinist context. There is much truth in this analysis, but responses to rock also reveal an unstable genre formation in which participants sought to recognize -- and even challenge -- cultural and economic inequalities as well as reassert them. The most powerful arguments for rock as an appropriation of working-class and black forms of musical practice can be found in: Simon Frith, "'The Magic That Can Set You Free'"; George Lipsitz, "Who'll Stop the Rain?"; Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (1970; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996); and Philip H. Ennis, *The Seventh Stream: The *
Yet rock's public life -- Sandy Darlington's "Community" -- never managed to turn experiments and inquiries into permanent structural improvements in equality, justice, or democracy. This is because, as a collective entity, the public sphere of rock and of the counterculture posed a deep irony. It could never be constituted in its entirety, even at an event such as Woodstock. Nonetheless, participants sensed that they were linked into a powerful collective structure of some sort. The irony was that their sense of collectivity arose precisely through the mass-communications technologies and mass-consumer commodities that rock's listeners ostensibly opposed as alienating forces. Faced with this situation, participants in rock music and the counterculture did not overthrow the larger mass cultural system, but rather sought to redirect that system's energies by constituting a transient assemblage of critique and engagement from within. Their seizures of feeling never became structures, but they did leave a lasting legacy by seeking out modes of public life suitable for addressing the possibilities and problems of modern, mass society. What the historian Alice Echols calls the aftershocks of the 1960s continue to resonate in this phantom public, this atmosphere of democracy, which floats through the contemporary age of digital, hyper-globalized capitalism.45


45 Alice Echols, Shaky Ground: The '60s and Its Aftershocks.
Chapter Overview

To understand the history of rock's transformed public sphere and its civic culture, this project maps out the responses of participants in rock music during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The prologue explores an aircheck on San Francisco's free-form FM rock radio, KSAN, made by the disc jockey Tom Donahue, in order to examine how rock's sounds circulated on the air itself. By paying close attention to the music on the program, as well as its mediated context, the prologue provides a framework for considering the kinds of responses that rock generated.

Focusing on one aircheck allows for attention to the details of rock's sounds themselves, and how they sparked responses in listeners in the new radio format of "free-form" programming. However, rock on Tom Donahue's KSAN aircheck was but one example of how rock circulated far and wide, not only on San Francisco's new free-form FM station, but also on AM frequencies across the nation, on radio waves across the world, and even on broadcasts of Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam. As Susan Douglas has argued, in these different contexts, radio broadcasts modeled ways of listening. Whether in the sound fidelity of stereo engineering on FM frequencies, or in the relationship between songs and advertisements, or in the personae of the disc jockeys, radio created an "imagined community" that was at once invisible and ever-present.

As rock migrated and mutated throughout different sites and locations via radio, it established a sonic civitas -- what Greil Marcus calls, in another context, an "invisible republic" of the mass-mediated air. The prologue shows how, on one particular show, rock's sounds enabled a social imaginary. But it is worth noting that Tom Donahue's show
originated in one of the most crucial regions for rock and the counterculture: the San Francisco Bay area. It is to San Francisco that part one of the project turns.  

In part one, the performance spaces of San Francisco serve as a case study for examining how rock music's participants transformed the public sphere in response to American mass culture. The civics of rock took shape in these performance venues not against, but rather through, consumer market processes that also affected conceptualizations of the family and relationships to the state. At once embodied and electronically-mediated, San Francisco's rock music scene provided an arena in which participants confronted the structural dimensions of what Michael Warner calls "the mass public and the mass subject." Concerts became town halls for the emergent public sphere of the counterculture.

In ballrooms, dancehalls, and outdoor spaces, a dance took place: not only of bodies, but also of amplified music, electronic light shows, and poster-art iconographies. Both literally and metaphorically, this dance fostered a sphere of competing ideologies, contested gender identities, and various positions on the nature of collective consciousness. The result of "dancing around rock" was a fluid world of involvement and engagement in which participants turned the mechanisms of mass culture toward potentially more democratic, egalitarian modes of citizenship even as they confronted stubborn problems of authoritarianism and inequity.

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Part two details how the music press fostered a *critical-public* in print, rather than in particular locations such as San Francisco. Though responding to a different historical moment, these publications resembled the newspapers crucial to Jürgen Habermas's bourgeois "rational-critical" public. However, the rock press also displayed interest in the emotions, the body, and experience. Publications diverged from a narrow construction of the rational. With little regard for the difference between mainstream and underground venues, participants such as critics, reporters, photographers, graphics artists, letter writers, and readers pondered and debated the nature of life in mass society, generating a vibrant public sphere of opinion-making, deliberation, disagreement, and self-critical awareness.

Most histories of the rock press focus exclusively on *Rolling Stone* magazine, founded in San Francisco by a young journalist, Jann Wenner, in 1967. But to understand the more diverse *critical-public* of the rock press -- the larger arena from which *Rolling Stone* emerged -- I examine two other significant publications. The first is *Crawdaddy!*!, founded by a young writer, folk music aficionado, and science-fiction fan named Paul Williams in 1965. *Crawdaddy!* was perhaps the first magazine of rock criticism. The second is *Creem*, a Detroit publication that by the early 1970s had became one of *Rolling Stone's* main competitors in the rock press.

At *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem*, which chronologically bookended the rise of the more famous *Rolling Stone*, topics of engagement included the nature of art and popular culture, the utopian possibilities of electronic technologies, the dilemmas of identity politics, the workings of capitalism, the meanings of authenticity, and the prospects for individual and collective freedom in a global mass society. Even as the high-water mark of the
counterculture passed, print publications such as Creem offered a place in the 1970s to reconsider and refashion the relationship between counterculture and mass culture.

If parts one and two focus on the national context, part three turns to the international situation. In part three, I explore just how far rock's civic culture and public sphere could travel by tracing how American fighters in Vietnam related to rock music. During the Vietnam War, rock music appeared in Southeast Asia through both commercial and military channels, completing a circuit between home front and war zone. The music did not stop the war in any direct sense. One could even interpret rock as part of a larger American cultural imperialism during the Cold War. But within the violent, often surreal environment of the Vietnam War, rock music also helped spark a struggle for civics.

The music did so in Vietnam on radio broadcasts, tape recorders, phonograph records, jukeboxes, and through performances by soldier-musicians as well as by Vietnamese and other Asian bands. At times, rock reinforced moods of orderly soldierly commitment. In other moments, it served as the soundtrack for violent frustration, rage, and disorder. The music also generated a space for alternative citizen-soldier identities, challenges to military order, and new conceptualizations of the global. Tolerated by the military because it "brought a taste of home" and raised troop morale, rock also gave rise to a public life of critique, debate, and engagement deep within the war zone.

In the epilogue, I move from Vietnam to what might be called the global countercultural moment. Bringing together new secondary literature about rock's worldwide impact in places as disparate as Brazil, Mexico, Czechoslovakia, and Nigeria, the epilogue explores how rock provided an aesthetic and social framework through which young people could challenge the structures and mentalities of their respective societies. Listeners outside
the United States did not merely hear rock as the soundtrack for American commercial imperialism. Rather, in countries that were often dominated by authoritarian governmental control, the sounds of rock provided spaces for associational relationships outside of state apparatuses. In the global response to rock, we hear hints of an emergent transnational rock civitas. This global civics of rock arose through the mechanisms of American Cold War consumer culture, yet rock's dissonance also posed alternatives to dominant modes of state and corporate power, regardless of whether that power emanated from the United States or existed in a particular nation -- even a communist one.

"You're Just a Young American Citizen in the Twentieth Century"

Reflecting back on the Woodstock Festival as a symbol of the 1960s, Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia articulated how much participants felt as if they were living in a time of heightened historical importance. "You could feel the presence of invisible time travelers from the future who had come back to see it," Garcia remarked, "a swollen historicity – a truly pregnant moment." Now, as travelers from that future, we can further assess the "historicity" of Garcia's moment. Like the logbook of one of Garcia's invisible time travelers, this project returns to the late 1960s and early 1970s to explore the circulatory systems of rock music and the kinds of public life, civic culture, collectivity, and "Community" they could sustain.48

As the singer Country Joe McDonald asserted to a fan in 1968, "You're no revolutionary, you're just a young American citizen in the twentieth century." In the midst of

this tumultuous year of assassinations, generational tensions, and political unrest, this particular rock star did not believe rock music was at the vanguard of the new society. Never mind that his band's name, Country Joe and the Fish, was taken from a quotation from Chairman Mao: "The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea." Never mind that the group's career had taken off as part of the 1965 anti-Vietnam War protests in Berkeley and Oakland, when it had begun as a one-off group for a cut-out phonograph record inserted into an antiwar magazine. Never mind that Country Joe himself was a "red-diaper baby," the child of parents who had been active in the Communist Party. By 1968, at least to this rocker, music and politics had parted ways.49

Yet, Country Joe's use of the word "citizen" signaled a lurking assumption that rock was more than just a passive leisure activity or a purely aesthetic experience. The fan might not be a political revolutionary, but he was also not a mere consumer either. Perhaps Country Joe turned to the word "citizen" to try to encapsulate his sense of rock music's uncertain place between politics and entertainment. At once inside and outside the mainstream cultural life of the United States, the unstable position of his fans, not to mention Country Joe himself, could be best understood through the categories of civic culture and citizenship.

Thinking of rock as civic and its participants as citizens begins to explain how rock could seem to whisper so many secrets in the roar of its electrified power chords. For participants, a whole new public life and a whole new role for the individual seemed to beckon. To the most idealistic among them, rock howled for political change, movement, and transformation. To the most passive, rock was merely a form of consumption,

pleasurable and fun but nothing more. For many more participants between these two extremes, rock most of all provided a medium for engaging with the terms of existence in a mass consumer society. The civics of rock operated at a threshold. It hinted at the vibrations of a new public life in which the culture of democracy might thrive. Simultaneously, rock marked the limits of democracy's perfectibility through civic culture alone.
Prologue -
Broadcasting Rock: Radio and the Soundscape of the Counterculture

Oh at last again the radio opens / blue Invitations! / Angelic Dylan singing across the nation / ...Language, language, and sweet music too - Allen Ginsberg¹

They use the radio as a background, the aural prop for whatever kind of life they want to imagine they're leading. - Tom Wolfe²

Where auditory experience is dominant...singular, perspectival gives way to plural, permeated space. The self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imaged not as a point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises, and musics, travel. - Steven Connor³

"This is Tom Donahue and I'm here to play phonograph records." The statement is straightforward enough, but the tone has a wry edge, as if the mere act of playing phonograph records on the radio might involve something far more subversive. The Beatles have just finished their insistent request that we, "come together, right now." The next song starts immediately after Donahue introduces himself. A cry -- "Yeah!" -- can be heard in the background. Electric piano and distorted electric guitar erupt into minor-key harmonies. The rhythm grows -- an insistent march over a steady four-four meter of cowbell and tambourine


that climaxes in a drum roll before proceeding forward again on its piano-guitar riff. The music beckons. It is a fanfare, inviting us to step forth into the song's sonic imaginary. What world are we entering?

To consider responses to rock, we need, first, to listen to the sounds that sparked those responses. Radio provides a sonic window back to the rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although histories of rock tend to focus on the careers of particular artists (the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin), studies of radio most often concentrate on behind-the-scenes accounts of the music business. Tuning in to the broadcasts themselves and listening in detail to their aural environments, however, offers access to fragments of the lived, everyday experiences of participants in the counterculture. What echoes are preserved in these crystallized fossils of sound? What was in the air during the counterculture years?4

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The "Community Voice" of Radio and the Soundscape of the Counterculture

The song continues on. It is just after six o'clock in the evening in the San Francisco Bay Area on a Saturday night in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Tom Donahue, one of the founders of free-form rock radio on the FM frequency, has settled his three-hundred-pound-plus frame behind the turntables at KSAN, the "Jive 95," broadcasting at 94.9 megahertz. Developed by DJs such as Donahue, Larry Miller, John Leonard, Bob Fass, Steve Post, and Vin Scelsa, free-form radio marked a departure from the careful programming of mainstream radio.

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5 Tom Donahue, Aircheck, KSAN-FM, San Francisco, 1971, archived at http://www.jive95.com. The exact date of this aircheck remains somewhat unclear. The tape that the www.jive95.com webmaster, Norman Davis, possesses is labeled "Tom Donahue on a Saturday night in 1968," however the aircheck contains songs, concert announcements, promotional advertisements, and a news segment that place it mostly in 1971. The tape could possibly be a compendium of Tom Donahue airchecks assembled for KSAN's tenth anniversary in 1978. Norman Davis email correspondence with author, 24 March 2006. Regardless of whether the aircheck comes from one night or a number of broadcasts by Donahue, it does provide direct sonic access to what participants in the counterculture heard on the radio during the counterculture's heyday of the late 1960s and early 1970s.
popular radio on the AM dial, which moved rapidly between hit songs and advertisements. Instead, free-form DJs slowed their pace down, and moved from one genre of music to another based on their mood and the surprising resonances they could find between radically different tracks. They often played long sets of music, interspersed only by advertisements and the news delivered in a relaxed, often humorous manner. More adventurous than commercial AM radio, free-form FM radio would eventually turn into a format known as "progressive" in the mid-1970s. Progressive was a more cautious approach that overtook free-form as rock grew to dominate the popular music business.

But, when Donahue started his free-form broadcasts in 1967, the format was still quite eclectic and experimental. Donahue started at KMPX, an ethnic program station located at the upper limits of the FM dial. In 1969, however, he brought his staff with him to a new station, KSAN. A labor strike between the disc jockeys and the company that owned KMPX concerning who would control the music and tone of broadcasts led to the split. Donahue's new home, KSAN, was no anti-capitalist media outlet, though. Unlike non-commercial stations such as Berkeley's KPFA, started by the pacifist Lewis Hill in the 1940s, KSAN was owned by a corporation, Metromedia. This company welcomed the new free-form approach to radio as a means to gain a foothold in the emerging consumer marketplace of rock music and the counterculture.⁶

Donahue never bothers to identify the song with which he started his program, but many listeners might have known it. The tune is "Fresh Garbage" by the Southern California

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band Spirit. The song was released in 1968 and became a staple of FM radio. "Fresh Garbage" was one in a wide-ranging set of songs Donahue would play over the next six hours. The aircheck of his broadcast only contains a sampling of a typical evening's broadcast, but even within its fragments, a sense of the diversity of the free-form approach emerges. The African-American group the Chambers Brothers performed the urgent psychedelic-funk of "Time Has Come Today"; the British singer Joe Cocker sang the ersatz-soul song, "Delta Lady"; the band Ten Years After declared "I'd Love to Change the World"; a San Francisco group, Quicksilver Messenger Service, asked, "What About Me?"; and the Byrds offered advice in the song "So You Wanna Be a Rock and Roll Star." As befit an approach to radio known as free-form, Donahue's broadcast incorporated a far-flung range of sounds and styles, moods and tones, information and emotion.

Figure 0.4. Tom and Raechel Donahue, early 1970s (photograph: unknown, source: www.jive95.com)

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Between the music, Donahue offered occasional commentary in a quiet, friendly voice. A few homemade-sounding advertisements, often filled with adolescent humor, giggles, and references to sex, gave listeners information about local record and clothing shops. Donahue announced a set of weekend concerts headlined by the Youngbloods at the Family Dog on the Great Highway. A montage of sounds that combined Borsht Belt comedians and Indian guru mystics introduced a short, irreverent newscast about a banned Miami concert by the Doors and Richard Nixon's secret peace talks for the Vietnam War.

Listened to in detail, Donahue's aircheck hints at the civic interaction that rock on the radio helped circulate. This is the soundscape of the counterculture. R. Murray Schafer coined the term soundscape to broaden the focus of musicology beyond formal composition. He included the entire aural environment as a proper subject for analysis. As Mark M. Smith notes, Schafer came to believe that shifting from music narrowly conceived to sound as a phenomenon raised new questions about the nature of human hearing. Schafer argued that, "hearing is a way of touching at a distance." Douglas Kahn, drawing upon a similar idea that John Cage once articulated, also emphasizes that hearing is a quintessentially public sense -- one with the ability to make contact across space.\(^8\)

Radio, then, presents the soundscape of the counterculture as a public sphere that existed within as much as outside or against mass culture. Radio provided a possible commons of the air -- what Greil Marcus calls, in another context, an "invisible republic."\(^9\)

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This shared space was widely available for Tom Donahue's audience, since all listeners had to do was dial in his station. Yet, simultaneously, the exact nature of radio's public commons was elusive. The commons were sonically embedded -- hidden and concealed -- in the larger circulation of mass consumer culture.

We might think of rock on the radio as an amorphous atmosphere of public energies that spread across metropolises, nations, and the entire world on commercial airwaves.\(^{10}\) Like lightning bolts from suddenly unpredictable configurations of larger weather patterns, seizures of feeling could leap out from the radio. Rock on the radio might take over the emotional experiences of listeners for brief moments, providing participants in rock with forces to absorb. Listeners might respond to these charges of energy in many ways, from dancing to critical reflection to sharing the music with others to engaging in political activities. In flashes of power and in seizures of feeling, rock music on the radio fostered more than just the passive reception of consumer goods.

But more often than not, rock on the radio was just there, humming in the ether. It provided a kind of semi-permanent, mobile, shape-shifting structure in which participants might invent, encounter, critique, and respond to new modes of individual identity and shared collectivity. Tom Donahue's broadcasts did not dictate a monolithic ideology. They did not even generate a unified space. Broadcast across the diverse communities of the San Francisco Bay Area, and rebroadcast in the even more varied Los Angeles region, Donahue's shows constituted an aural form that contained multitudes. On the radio, the presentation of rock in the free-form format provided a shared aesthetic realm that, if it had an ideological

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program at all, only raised dilemmas and issues -- as well as pleasures -- to consciousness. It
did not assert so much as question. The rock music on Donahue's programs did not issue
propagandistic messages, but, rather, offered listeners a process and method for intellectual
and emotional engagement with the larger context of the times.

Participants in the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s believed that
rock's presence on the radio was significant. "In the air, another major change," the young
rock critic Paul Williams wrote after visiting San Francisco in 1967 and hearing KMPX for
the first time, "not just radio for heads but rock radio for rock heads, a station that totally
ignores the Top 20." To Williams, KMPX was, "like a college radio station…they're human,
and they like the music -- and that's what's been missing in radio till now." For Williams,
writing at the dawn of the Summer of Love in 1967, rock on the radio signaled a shift in
popular culture from the cold, automated approach of AM formats focused on counting
down the hits and selling products. On FM radio, by contrast, to Williams, a more direct
communication occurred between disc jockeys and listeners. Rather than following the
trends of hit songs, Williams liked how disc jockeys on KMPX forged communities of
listeners through their own tastes. He appreciated the creation of what he heard as a more
"human" sonic environment broadcast over the technology of FM radio. Williams used the
moniker "rock heads" to describe the new kind of common identity that rock on the radio
began to establish.

Williams was eager to hear solidarity in the new sounds on the FM airwaves as the
much-anticipated Summer of Love began in San Francisco. But even two years later,
listeners developed a less monolithic understanding of the new kinds of identity and
collectivity that rock on the radio seem fostered. For instance, the political activist Michael
Rossman only heard the Bay Area's free-form station as a start on the creation of a shared public life. Writing about the strike that moved Donahue's KMPX staff to KSAN in 1969, Rossman believed that, "The station's changes were somehow linked to the changes of an emerging community trying to find and shape its identity." To Rossman, KMPX's evolution did not assert a rigid ideological position, but rather served as a sonic representation of the search for solutions to collectively-perceived social problems. The radio station provided a public forum in which the "emerging community" of the counterculture attempted to discover its identity. As an aural space in which participants were able to confront and explore the nature of this nascent public life, "KMPX began to serve many as a community Voice," according to Rossman.11

A crucial aspect of this process and method by which KMPX, and then KSAN, became a "community voice" was by ignoring typical boundaries between the political and the personal. As radio broadcast rock music far and wide, the sounds of rock on the radio also penetrated to the most private recesses of the self. The public airwaves, in other words, entered the most private areas of intimate life. As the media scholar Susan Douglas argues, "radio has worked most powerfully inside our heads, helping us create internal maps of the world and our place in it, urging us to construct imagined communities to which we do, or do not, belong."12 Rock on stations such as KMPX and KSAN did not not constitute a public sphere in one place or insist on homogeneity in the identities of its listeners. What rock on the radio did do was establish a network of participants.

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12 Douglas, 5.
In this network, listeners interacted with the same aesthetic forms -- the same broadcasts and songs -- but they tuned in from a multitude of different vantage points, experiences, perspectives, and positions. They shared an object of scrutiny and experience when listening to rock on the radio. But both the object of their listening and the experiences that listening ensured were heterogeneous. Even Donahue's one radio show comprised a messy complex of meaningful and whimsical allusions, emotional and semantic possibilities, multiple forms and singular expressions for constructing the self and imagining a larger collectivity.

"Fresh Garbage": The Soundscape of the Counterculture's Mass Cultural Context

Paying close attention to the aesthetic forms of rock on the radio, as well as the larger historical context in which rock's aesthetic forms emerged and reverberated, provides a starting point for considering responses to rock music and their relationship to public life. Broadcasts such as Tom Donahue's KSAN show most of all presented a powerful mediating form between larger collectivities and each individual listener. The whole construction of the relationship between the mass and the self in mass culture manifested itself in rock on the radio. Donahue's show offered a set of dialectic experiences for listeners as they simultaneously investigated their own identities and considered the assembly of listeners through the radio as a whole. Even as radio's "invisible republic," embedded within mass consumer culture, offered a sense of belonging, of presence, it also allowed individuals to feel invisible, simply part of the larger network of sounds.

The self could gain definition from rock on the radio, or could vanish into the frequencies of the broadcast. At an emotional level, participants could engage with feelings
of presence -- of mattering as part of a collectivity of listeners. For instance, the songs and presentation on Donahue's show consistently addressed the social and political problems of the time. Rock on the radio encouraged intellectual and emotional engagement with dilemmas of consumerism, war, conflict, freedom, and democracy. Yet Donahue's program did so through an escape into the aesthetics of musical and aural experience.

Figure 0.5. The self and the mediated collective in the soundscape of the counterculture: An advertisement for KSAN forerunner KMPX, circa 1969 (source: www.jive95.com)

Rock on the radio may have made a listener feel present in a mass-mediated collectivity engaged with the larger issues of the day, but it also registered feelings of absence. The self disappeared into the pleasures of stereo sound or into the overwhelming and sublime vastness of mass culture's communications infrastructure. The self and the collective possessed an odd relationship to one another with rock on the radio. Perhaps Steven Connor is correct in arguing that, "Where auditory experience is dominant... singular, perspectival gives way to plural, permeated space. The self defined in terms of hearing rather
than sight is a self imaged not as a point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises, and musics, travel.”

If, when auditory experience dominated, the self became a channel, what was the larger entity in which individuals existed when listening to rock on the radio? Songs such as Spirit's "Fresh Garbage" expressed how, through rock, participants in the counterculture also became channels -- membranes -- within mass culture. Particularly in the decades after World War II, as mass culture emerged from a corporate-liberal system of mass consumerism, radio linked the counterculture to a larger mass cultural context.

What came to be called mass culture involved dramatic transformations in economic and structural forces. Statistics provide a broad picture of what this "mass culture" was. Between 1950 and the oil crisis of the mid-1970s, for example, rising real income yielded even working-class Americans an unparalleled amount of discretionary income. By 1971, the value of the American leisure market alone was estimated at over one-hundred-fifty billion dollars a year (overshadowed by an even larger military budget, but still a substantial

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element of America's trillion-dollar 1970 economy). During the 1950s, the consumer use of electricity had almost tripled, while money spent on advertising more than doubled. By the mid-1960s, ninety-eight percent of American households had electric refrigerators; ninety-four percent of American homes had at least one television set. Air surpassed rail travel as the main means of commercial passenger transport. Powerful new technological links bound Americans to each other -- and to the world -- in consumption communities of circulating people, goods, images, and sounds.

Adolescents were a crucial part of this leisure-oriented mass consumer market. While Paula Fass and many others have documented a youth culture dating back to the 1920s, if not earlier, the notion of a "youth culture" emerged in full force after World War II. In 1963, the baby-boom generation of teenagers, whose annual birth rate in the late 1940s and 1950s averaged four million a year (keeping the United States apace with India in population growth for a time), spent approximately twenty-two billion dollars. Adolescents purchased over half the soft drinks and movies in the country, and one-fifth of America's high school seniors owned a car by the mid-1960s. By 1968, youth under twenty-five spent over one billion dollars per year just on music recordings alone. This spending was directly connected to the commercial rise of rock music since a year earlier, in 1967, music marketed as "rock"

17 Statistics from William E. Leuchtenburg, A Troubled Feast: American Society Since 1945 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973), 37-69. Leuchtenburg makes the point that the military budget dwarfed even the leisure economy. He also notes that the trillion-dollar mark was reached partially through inflation. Nonetheless, as Allen J. Matusow emphasizes, substantial real growth in both the overall economy and the leisure economy did occur in the postwar boom.


had overtaken that sold as pop. By 1970, sales of music records and tapes passed the two billion mark. Later in the 1970s, rock would constitute eighty percent of all recorded music.  

A song such as Spirit's "Fresh Garbage" registered the material abundance in the United States during the Cold War era. Moreover, in its aesthetic form, the song allowed listeners to explore the ways in which the new consumer processes of Cold War America both created problems and provided fantasies of escape. The music combined flamenco-flavored sonorities with a heavy-metal thud. At first, we seem to be entering a fantastical past. We're in a castle, surrounded by tapestries, knights, kings, and queens. But the first words of the song quickly interrupt that mood. "Frrr-eeeh-sh ga-arrr-bagge," a voice sings. Fresh garbage -- are these the right lyrics to match the mystical, medieval music? Repulsed yet fascinated, the singer urges his listeners to, "Look beneath your lids one morning / See the things you didn't quite consume / Your fresh garbage." Why would the song travel, in under thirty seconds, from an escape into fantasy in the introductory music to a focus on the stink of the present?

The members of the group Spirit, including the guitarist Randy California -- who had gained prior expertise in Jimi Hendrix's mid-1960s New York City band, Jimmy James and the Flames -- had written the song "Fresh Garbage" during a Southern California sanitation-worker strike. With its mixture of jazzy exploration and ecological observations, Spirit invited listeners to consider the absurdity of modern life even as their music provided a

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fantastical escape from that very same existence. The lyrics noted the problems of over-abundance in a mass consumer society, yet the music -- especially electronic pianist John Locke's (yes, that was his name) extended solo in the middle of the song -- seemed to soar above the detritus.

The lyrics were also a double entendre, since the lids that listeners should look under in the morning were not only the garbage cans outside their homes, but also their own eyelids. The things you did not quite consume could also be your own dreams, your deepest hopes and fantasies. These scraps of vision, sound, and feeling were so elusive that they remained unconsumed. Their irreducibility was ridiculous -- they were just the latest garbage your subconscious had produced. And yet, they also might provide hints and clues to a better life, a better world, if one explored their dream-logic more fully. In this pun on "lids," Spirit incongruously, but provocatively, linked the problems of material abundance in consumer society to the spiritual quest of many in the counterculture.

The dilemmas of consumer abundance and its ecological ramifications were brought up right alongside the spiritual quests of counterculturalists to unlock the unconscious. Spirit did not provide a programmatic answer or solution for either materialism or spiritual longing, but like a concentration of fluctuating atmospheric energies, their song brought these issues into the same aesthetic space for listeners to experience and consider. Spirit's "Fresh Garbage" fostered a method of critical intellectual and emotional inquiry for listeners, who could absorb and reflect upon the strange connections between consumer abundance and spiritual dissatisfaction at which the song hinted.21

21 Although scholars such as T. J. Jackson Lears and Thomas Frank have noticed the ways in which consumerism harnessed the desire for spiritual fulfillment merely to sell goods, they do not address the ways in which rock music also provided channels for an awareness of consumerism and its tricky relationship to
The song "Fresh Garbage" ends. Donahue returns to the microphone on the aircheck. "This program is brought to you by Leopold's," he explained, "who are urging donations to the Berkeley Free Clinic. I think it's wonderful that they sponsor the show and that they are being light on the rap. I hope that a lot of you are going to put out some money for the Free Clinic before this night is over." Donahue's acknowledged that advertisers paid for KSAN's existence, but he emphasized that Leopold's, a phonograph shop in Berkeley, was taking a different tack toward its customers. The store wanted to turn a profit -- it was capitalist -- but Leopold's also positioned itself as part of a larger community.

Later in the aircheck, this sense of civic interaction occurring within commercial processes emerged again. Donahue played a pre-recorded message from Leopold's. The speaker in the message explained that Leopold's puts money back into community projects, such as the Free Clinic, a health center in Berkeley. Another advertising "spot," as they were called, from Leopold's alerted listeners to the controversy around misappropriated funds from George Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh. The advertisements did not call for revolution. They suggested an acceptance -- even an embrace -- of consumerism. But they also expressed civic concerns. The goods of the marketplace and the good of the larger society intertwined on Donahue's airchecks.

"Time Has Come Today": The "Psychedelicized" Soul and the Transformed Public Sphere

Just one song at the start of one broadcast, but Spirit's "Fresh Garbage" provides an access point to the sonic imagination of the counterculture. Issues of consumerism and spirituality, presence and absence, counterculture and mass culture, were among a larger set of concerns and pleasures that the radio made available for listeners. Rock on the radio also raised questions. For example: Could the personal gratification of mass consumerism -- of purchasing records at Leopold's or listening to rock songs on KSAN -- harmonize with the demands of building a caring collectivity, one that addressed the needs and problems of the civitas? What kinds of individual attitudes and self-identities could accomplish this difficult feat?

Without introduction, we hear the tick-tock of a clock. No, it is a cowbell. A man's voice whispers, "Cuckoo, Cuckoo." A drum roll and electric guitar enter in another fanfare, another announcement. The guitar trills suspended fourth and second notes on a classic folk-rock open D chord. The band builds up steam and then the lead voice enters. It is a bullfrog of a male voice whose growl is coded ambiguously in terms of race. It sounds like a younger British white rocker imitating an older African-American soul singer imitating a younger British rocker. "The time has come today!" the voice shouts.

Once again, Donahue does not bother to tell us what the song is called, or who performs it. Although one might feel for a moment that one is not "in the know," not a member of this sonic community, the pulse of the song charges ahead. Maybe it matters less what the song is called exactly, or whom it is by, than just listening to it -- seized by the feelings of its rhythm and energy. Lines leap out from the vocalist's growl. "My soul's been
psychedelicized," he explains at one point, almost sounding as if he is realizing this himself as it happens. "There are things to realize," he intones, almost as a question. Then you can almost hear him clench his brow in determination as the chorus rolls around again: "The time has come today!" "Hey!" the band responds to the singer, affirming his declaration.

The song is a thoroughly psychedelic-rock number. Before its ten-plus minutes are up, the band will launch into an extended instrumental section of exploratory guitar, a decelerating beat, and ominous, reverb-soaked, evil laughter. Time ticks down. Then, after coming to a standstill at the middle of the song, the verse and chorus return, triumphantly. The time has come today, the song insists. But for whom? "Time Has Come Today," in fact, was not by a younger, white, rock band. The song was a hit for the Chambers Brothers, a group consisting of three African-American brothers from Mississippi and a white drummer, along with a number of other band members.  

Their song -- "Time Has Come Today" -- hinted at rock's loosening boundaries of identity. The singer's racial identity is never explicitly acknowledged. Nor is the song's status as a part of the "soul" or the "rock" genre. Instead, as the singer notes, his "soul's been psychedelicized." The song indeed sounds like soul, mostly due to the vocal stylings of growls and screams, the way the singer hangs behind the beat in his phrasing, and the call-and-response of the lead voice and the band. But, the music also sounds like rock. It chugs along in a quintessential rock chord progression, dropping from the tonic to the flatted seventh to the subdominant chord, at a mid-tempo meter. Moreover, the various effects

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placed on the instruments -- fuzzed-out distortion on the guitar, echo effects on the ticking cowbell -- evokes a psychedelic mood. As a genre, is this "rock" or "soul"?

Perhaps in the soundscape of the counterculture, the question about "Time Has Come Today" was more about the links and overlaps between rock and soul. If the singer's "soul's been psychedelicized," as the lyrics claim, by implication the "time has come today," for a number of things. Perhaps the time has come for genres of music to liberate themselves from market constraints based on race. Perhaps the time has come for the African-American civil rights movement, linked to soul as a musical genre, to assert its triumph over longstanding systems of injustice and inequality. Perhaps, for this one individual -- a new citizen speaking forth in the public soundscape of rock -- the time has come to assert his own personal liberation.

The point here is not that the Chambers Brothers' hit song provided a fully-developed political program for addressing ongoing inequality and discrimination. It did not. Instead, it provided an escape into the pleasures of connecting rock and soul musical aesthetics through the bridge of psychedelia. Nonetheless, "Time Has Come Today" did help constitute rock’s public atmosphere -- the sonic imaginary or soundscape in which participants might consider political issues. For instance, in the exploratory instrumental section in the middle of the song, the guitarist makes a possible allusion to the Vietnam War by playing the melody of "One Tin Soldier." The lyrics never mention Vietnam, but the musical reference hints at one reason why the "time has come today" for the singer to take action. Indeed, as part three of this project explores, the small reference to Vietnam in "Time Has Come Today" was part of a larger circuit that rock music completed between the culture of the home front and the war zone during the war in Southeast Asia.
Both musically and lyrically -- in fact, in the very interplay between music and lyrics -- rock's audiences could join the Chambers Brothers in asserting that change was in the air. Rather than simply name problems, the Chambers Brothers perform a *process* of public discourse -- one that we might understand as crucial to the civics of rock. The singer combines self-inquiry with confident public statement. He does this through the movement from inquisitive lyrics in the verses, sung with a kind of question mark at the end of each phrase -- "Now the time has come? There are things to realize?" -- to the exploding chorus, in which he answers the uncertainty of the verses with a triumphant declaration, "The time has come come today," and is met with the voices of others when the band responds, "Hey!"

With "Time Has Come Today," the Chambers Brothers circulated a countercultural ethos of inquiry and action -- a journey both rational and emotional through issues of agency, self-doubt, and collective connection.

"So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star": Celebrity Culture, Gender, and the Soundscape of the Counterculture

So was the solution for listeners to become rock and roll stars too in order to assert that *their* time had come today as well? Following the Chambers Brothers on the aircheck, we hear a song by the group the Byrds: "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star." The song dated from early 1967, at the dawn of the media hype about San Francisco, hippies, the counterculture, and the Summer of Love. Once again the song arrives with no introduction. Unlike the long, exploratory journeys of Spirit's "Fresh Garbage" and the Chambers

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23 The Byrds, "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star," *Younger Than Yesterday* (Columbia, 1967).
Brothers' "Time Has Come Today," this song is quite short. But as with Spirit and the Chambers Brothers, the Byrds offer a performance of self-critique and inquiry.

Like the sonic equivalent of an Andy Warhol silkscreen, the lyrics both glamorize the life of a celebrity rock star and deconstruct the supposed authenticity realized by mass cultural success. This is a typical pop song -- two minutes of condensed energy over a fairly simple chord progression. It is a Campbell's soup can label or a Marilyn Monroe photograph, seen so many times it has become an iconic landmark, part of the mass-mediated terrain of everyday life. But just as Warhol's art distorted and transformed celebrity icons through odd choices of color and the mutations of the silkscreen process, closer listening reveals an oddness to the conventional pop song, "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star." A strange mélange of sounds tumbles over the electric guitar riff that starts off the tune. A twelve-string electric guitar chimes in with a vaguely sitar-like melody, a guiro scraper sets the rhythm over a muted drum set, and a horn peels a "Sketches of Spain"-type bolero melody (played by the South African jazz trumpeter Hugh Masekela). This may be a pop song, but if so, it is a strange one. Through incongruous sounds brought together, the music signals that something is off, something is not quite right.

"So you want to be a rock and roll star, then listen now to what I say," the Byrds sing in harmony. "Just get an electric guitar and take some time and learn how to play." Then the group explains how all one needs to do is look stylish, wear your pants tightly, and "sell your soul to the company who are waiting there to sell plasticware." The rest, the band claims, is easy: "If you make the charts, the girls will tear you apart." The Beatlemaniac screaming of girls explodes above the band's instruments, sounding both alluring and threatening. The screams are recordings of the audiences on the Byrds' first British tour in 1965. On the one
hand, these screams reveal the newfound power of young female audiences, whose screams of desire were one stream that fed into the women's liberation movement.\textsuperscript{24} On the other hand, the screaming girls in the Byrds' "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" suggest that rock radio mostly produced a soundscape from the perspective of males who might want to be screamed at by girls.

![Figure 0.6. "We Have Come For Your Daughters": Tom Donahue in England, 1970](photograph: unknown, source: www.jive95.com)

As Susan Douglas argues, the high-fidelity sound of FM linked in particular to a re-fashioning of masculinity in the aftermath of World War II's violence and destruction. FM burst on the scene from the world of obsessed hobbyists as a new way of paying attention to the sensuousness of sound itself. It marked a redirection of the technologies of communication not for rationalized warfare or masculinist aggression, but rather for modes of being usually coded as feminine: reception, sensitivity, meditation. Disc jockeys such as

Tom Donahue abandoned the adrenaline-rush chatter of AM radio, adopting quiet, meditative, or quietly sardonic personas. They urged a more passive, receptive, open relationship to sound.

But, even as FM adopted a more "feminine" stance, Douglas claims that it also limited access for women themselves. With its links to the power of new hi-fi audio systems, often primary advertisers on FM stations, and its focus on virtuosity in rock music, especially male guitar players, shows such as Donahue's were the province of men. To Douglas, FM radio helped forge an alternative to the classic Cold War masculinity, but it did not necessarily do the same for Cold War femininity. Tom Donahue's on-air persona, for instance, provided a social type for male listeners to imitate. Donahue was friendly and welcoming, but his broadcast also assumed an insider's knowledge about bands, concerts, and jokes. Donahue signaled that he was hip through the slang he employed, the position he took toward the commercial spots that he read, and his opinion about the sound quality of certain tracks, such as the Youngbloods' song, "Darkness, Darkness."

Susan Douglas's interpretation, which makes note of Donahue's persona and comments, begins to unpack the way that gender roles were raised up for scrutiny in rock radio broadcasts. Donahue's show participated in reimaginings of masculinity that were at once challenges to dominant modes of gender and, also, reinscriptions of gender inequalities. Donahue's wife, Raechel Donahue, is there in the studio, helping to create the broadcast, but we only hear from her briefly, off-microphone. She is behind-the-scenes, not equal to Donahue as a voice on the show.

Intriguingly, however, and in partial contrast to Douglas's argument, Raechel Donahue, Dusty Street, and a number of the other women disc jockeys at KSAN also hosted
a separate women's show on Sundays. According to Dusty Street, who worked as an
engineer and on-air host at the station, "I really got a lot of support from the guys. I find that
there is a lot more suppression of women today than there was in the late 1960s and early
1970s. All of the guys that I worked with just related to me like I was one of the team. I was
just one of the gang, and they were all there to help me. There was no male chauvinism, and
there was equal pay for equal work." Though the music and station were certainly dominated
by a male perspective, rock radio was, as Street suggests, ahead of other American
institutions in its access for women.  

FM radio broadcasts such as Tom Donahue's show did not overturn gender
inequalities, but as Susan Douglas suggests, they did reorient the type of masculinity that
dominated the larger society. In offering male listeners a more traditionally "feminine"
perspective by appreciating sensuous sound and its use of technologies for ends other than
aggressive control or warfare, rock music also seems to have loosened the static definition of
"femininity" and "masculinity" for women as well. As we shall see in both the San Francisco
scene and the rock press (parts one and two of this project, respectively), rock music did not
come up with a solution to gender inequalities in America, but it did provide aesthetic
experiences in which gender could be registered, addressed, explored, and investigated.

The ecstatic screams of the female audiences on the Byrds' "So You Want to Be a
Rock and Roll Star" remind us that rock music was capable of raising the issue of gender up
for consideration. But the screams did not issue forth an ideological program of any explicit

\[25\] Dusty Street, "Foreword," *Voices in the Purple Haze*, x-xi.
sort. What they did was contribute to a song that explored the conundrums of democratic identity and community in mass culture.

After the female screams grow and fade, the message of "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" turns darker, hinting at the lack of happiness and fulfillment that the thrills of mass cultural celebrity might bring. "What you paid for your riches and fame / Was it all a strange game? You're a little insane / The money that came and the public acclaim / Don't forget what you are, you're a rock and roll star."

Now the promise of power that rock stardom seemed to hold has been limited. Not only money, but also public acclaim has made it impossible for the rock star to do anything but "sell plasticware." If the Byrds wanted to bring other ideas, perspectives, and voices to the public, the process of commercial fame has prevented their articulation. All the band can do is sing "la, la, la, la, la" before their time is up and the pop song single fades out to as the female audience screams once again.

The lyrics themselves are crucial to the inquiry that the Byrds make into the nature of personhood in mass culture, of course, but this song is not a written text. The song is a performance. The voices of Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, and the other Byrds sing in harmony, but their individual voices are also overdubbed countless times. This causes the singing to take on an unearthly, angelic quality -- a kind of sonic sparkle -- that is also oddly artificial, cold, disturbing, and even claustrophobic. The ever-so-slight variations in pitch between the many unison tracks of McGuinn or Crosby's voices create this emotional mood.
One effect of this recording technique is to render subjectivity itself unclear. Who exactly is the "you" who wants to become a rock and roll star? Are the voices meant to be ringing in our heads -- subconscious utterances? Are the Byrds thinking back bitterly over their own rise to stardom? Or are they singing about other groups, such as the Monkees, who had risen to fame as more overtly commercial and manufactured responses to the Beatles by the American entertainment industry? In the final verse, the voices break apart, echoing each other, creating a dizzying effect, a rush of call-and-response that reinforces the ambiguity of rock stardom conveyed by the lyrics. This stardom is at once tantalizing and stifling, hollow and glamorous. Throughout the song, beneath the lyrics and other instruments, Chris Hillman's electric bass guitar pushes on implacably, its timbre slightly distorted as it climbs up and down chordal and chromatic arpeggios repeatedly, like a conveyor belt. The bass guitar reinforces the lyrics. Once you decide you want to be a rock and roll star, you will not be able to disintangle yourself from the wheels and gears of mass culture.
This critique of mass culture's affect on public life and personal subjectivity is sharp and stinging in "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star." Celebrity status, the limits of commercial forms of art, the concert setting of scream girls who can only "tear apart" the star in a ritual sacrifice rather than distinguish their individual voices or even form some sort of collective identity other than a mass audience -- these all come under scrutiny in the Byrds' song. Yet, the song joined the very process that it sought to critique. "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" was a top twenty hit for the Byrds in 1967. Its energy and power came from the very forces the song satirized and critiqued.

One might interpret "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star," then, as an attempt to have one's celebrity cake and eat it too -- to enjoy pop stardom while disowning its corruptions of purity and authenticity. But, heard on FM, the song might also have been understood as a kind of reminder -- a public service announcement -- for listeners to keep in mind the difficulty of seeking out a more liberatory public life and personhood in the setting of mass culture. "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" raises the complexities of mass culture to awareness. The Byrds present a performance of the problems of public life and individual autonomy from within the system of mass culture.

The music and lyrics together set out a mood of self-critique -- the Byrds are caught up in the star-making machinery even as they try to escape it. Anyone who identifies with them or finds the pleasures they describe alluring may also get caught up in the music industry's wheels and gears. But, they can also participate in the song's consciousness of the conditions of mass culture, in which freedom and power are at once available, yet full individual or collective liberation is limited and contained. "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" is an immanent critique, articulated from within mass culture and attracted to the
energy of mass culture, yet also harkening to an awareness of mass culture's shortcomings and fallacies.

"Get Together": Linking the Soundscape of the Counterculture to Gathering Places

What kind of alternatives might one seek out in this context? As the Byrds' "So You Want to Be A Rock and Roll Star" fades out to the soft stereo silence of FM radio waves, Tom Donahue comes on the microphone. This portion of the aircheck seems to have been recorded in May of 1971. "Well, folks, the Family Dog has got another big weekend of entertainment for you," he explains. "If you've been waiting to see the Youngbloods, tonight's the night. The Family Dog on the Great Highway is the place to go. They will be there tonight and tomorrow night." In his announcement for the performance, Donahue links the radio soundscape of rock music to an actual place of assembly -- the gathering site of the Family Dog on the Great Highway. The linkage is crucial, establishing continuity between mass-mediated collectivities and bodily gatherings.

Donahue's announcement connected the sonic imaginary to actual locations through his advertisement for the concert. "Colored lights will be supplied by Temporary Optics," Donahue explains in his concert announcement. "Advanced sale tickets are three-fifty for Friday and Saturday, only three dollars for Sunday. They may be purchased at all Roger Calkins music stores, Music Odyssey on Geary Street, or just get yourself on out there tonight. The Family Dog on the Great Highway, between Playland and the Cliff House, across the street from the Pacific Ocean. Didn't that look beautiful today? Again, that's the Youngbloods, Commander Cody, and Jeffrey Cain at the Dog, where you get yourself all kinds of good times and good friends."
Donahue does not attempt to hide the fact that the concert is a commercial venture. But his commentary suggests that it is not merely a commercial experience. The concert setting he describes reinforced a larger world beyond the band itself. Donahue not only mentions the amusement park Playland and a reminder of San Francisco's Gold Rush history, the Cliff House, but also the natural world: the Pacific Ocean. Moreover, Donahue hints at how the concert can also allow audiences to establish new social connections. At the Family Dog, attendees could discover "all kinds of good times and good friends," he notes.

The Family Dog at the Great Highway was, in fact, one of the more adventurous ballrooms (see part one on the San Francisco scene). Run by Chet Helms, the performance space ran all kinds of community events and artistic shows as well as featuring touring rock bands. At such a site, the commercial and the civic overlapped. Commerce may have compromised certain aspects of civic life. After all, one might listen to FM radio or attend the Youngbloods' performance at the Family Dog without making any meaningful social connections outside of purchasing a concert ticket. But, as radio broadcasts and performance spaces of rock entwined in a continual dialectic of mass-mediated broadcasts, amplified concerts, and audience gatherings, the marketplace also enabled a continual engagement with a larger public and one's place in it.

After the concert announcement, Donahue plays the Youngbloods' hit song, "Get Together." Previously recorded by the Jefferson Airplane, "Get Together" was written by Dino Valenti, not a member of the either the Jefferson Airplane or the Youngbloods, but of the San Francisco band Quicksilver Messenger Service, and prior to that a folksinger in the Greenwich Village scene in New York. "Get Together" as performed by the Youngbloods became a generational anthem for the counterculture only after it was re-released in 1969,
having appeared in a television public service announcement for the National Council of Christians and Jews. The song was also on the soundtrack to the film *Easy Rider* that year.\(^{26}\)

"Get Together," however, was anything but classically anthemic. Musically, it was a modal dirge. The lyrics did not assert triumph, but rather posed the puzzle of locating individual liberation within a collective context, much as the Byrds' "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" had. The song's harmonic structure moved hypnotically back and forth between a suspended A chord and a G major seven. The tentative twelve-string electric guitar notes wound their arpeggiated tentacles around a snaking bass line over a dragging half-time drum beat that -- in the chorus -- tumbled into a classic subdominant-dominant-tonic folk-rock harmonic progression filled with major-chord hope. A second electric guitar produced fluttering *obbligato* between the singer's relaxed, almost-crooning tenor. The instrumentation was reminiscent of the Beatles' "Ticket to Ride." The sound also resonated with the guitar style of the Byrds. The modal chord pattern and exploratory guitar solo was a simplified pop form of Miles Davis's explorations in jazz songs such as "So What." The music also resembled the Indian sitar raga style that many in the counterculture associated with a renewed focus on spiritualism.

The song's production qualities were professional, orchestral even -- one could picture the band recording in a cavernous, modern recording studio. The band has carefully and thoughtfully arranged the composition, subtly altering the instrumentation in each verse and chorus. The song is well-organized and full of space rather than chaotic and messy. There is a sense of vulnerability to the music -- a sadness kept at bay, even a kind of blues

feel to the duet harmony singing. These two voices form a performative community of the song's smiling brothers, especially in the last chorus, when the harmonizing singer emerges from his notes below the lead singer, leaping to the fore with the exultation, "I said!" The drums pick up speed with quarter-note cymbal crashes in a repetition of the chorus, and then the song ends suddenly on the tonic chord, but with suspended notes leaving it unresolved.

Will people in fact be able to "get together"? The Youngbloods hope so, but the music only poses the question. Similarly, the lyrics only present the puzzle of achieving collective or individual liberation. They plead and urge the listener onward in confronting this puzzle, but they do not propose a clear solution. Unlike a number of other countercultural anthems, the lyrics do not even indicate that the solution is easy to discover. "You hold the key to love and fear all in your trembling hand," lead singer Jesse Colin Young sings, "Just one key unlocks them both, it's there at your command." This is a song about the possible choices an individual makes in response to the emotional experiences of a scary, mysterious world. Befitting an atomic age, there is a millennialism to the lyrics: "When the one that left us here, returns for us at last." Death hovers throughout the song, and mortality. "Some will come and some will go, we will surely pass." Once again, as with so many rock songs, "Get Together" invites the listener to engage in a performance of self-awareness and collective connection -- inquiry and choice in response to larger forces and structures.

Other songs in Donahue's aircheck followed in this spirit of emotional and intellectual investigation, maintaining the soundscape of the counterculture as a space in which listeners moved fluidly between the private investigation of subjectivity and the public possibilities of collective connection and embodied gathering locations. For instance,
songs such as Donovan's "Atlantis" imagined utopian worlds to which the counterculture might imaginatively journey. Focusing on the confusing difficulties of contemporary times, Ten Years After raised the problems of mass cultural society up for investigation in the group's song, "I'd Love to Change the World." These songs maintained a countercultural ethos of inquiry within the channels of mass culture.

"On the Road Again": The Soundscape of the Counterculture and Racial Masquerading

Other selections by Leon Russell, Joe Cocker, and Canned Heat hinted at the complex racial and class origins of rock as a genre. Canned Heat's "On the Road Again," in particular, marked a countercultural attempt to connect disparate sounds in an unstable mixture. Two self-styled blues scholars in Los Angeles, Alan Wilson and Bob Hite, formed Canned Heat in 1965. Their biggest hit, "On the Road Again," merged the classic twelve-bar blues form with a droning sitar, a harmonica, an electric guitar shimmering with a tremelo effect, and Wilson's hauntingly high falsetto, itself patterned on the singing of the blues musician Skip James.

The lyrics and sound of "On the Road Again" alluded to rock's roots in African-American music. But, as Nicholas Bromell argues, the song connected this appropriated

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28 For more on these origins, see, among the many histories of rock and roll, George Lipsitz, "Against the Wind: Dialogic Aspects of Rock and Roll," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

29 Canned Heat, "On the Road Again," *Boogie With Canned Heat* (Liberty, 1968). See Lipsitz, "Against the Wind," for an analysis of the chronological links that rock provided to forms such as the blues.
tradition to the contemporary concerns of young Americans on the brink of adulthood.³⁰ Even though the lyrics referred to the blues, with lines about setting out on the road alone in some mythical American landscape of railroad tracks and hoboes, they were also filled with a mood of uncertainty about leaving the security of one's family behind. The music is both an escape to an imaginary world of adventure and an entrance into the anxieties of adjusting to the world of adult America. "My dear mother left when I was quite young," Wilson sings. "She said 'Lord, have mercy on my wicked son'." Here is a lyric filled with a combination of abandonment, anger, and determination. The words are a classic blues trope, but also might resonate with a young American man facing the threat of conscription to fight a war in Vietnam that he might not necessarily support.

And the singer's identity as "wicked son" is most definitely male. However, because of Wilson's high falsetto, the male protagonist of the song takes on a strange, uneasy gender identity. Wilson sings about not having a, "woman just to call my special friend," and how if, "I can't carry you, baby, gonna carry somebody else." But the voice offers a more ambiguous performance of identity. Wilson's vocal performance raised questions about simplistic definitions of masculinity and manliness. The voice performed -- and made available -- a consciousness of its own posturing, an awareness of the mimetic nature of a young white man attempting to sing the blues. If Wilson performs a kind of authenticity in "On the Road Again," it is not direct, but rather layered in the performance itself with an awareness of its

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³⁰ Nicholas Bromell in particular suggests that the blues, an expressive form rooted in the disruptions of African-American life by modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century, resembled the structure of feeling that many middle-class, white adolescents felt in the 1950s and 1960s. See Bromell, Tomorrow Never Knows, especially chapter two and appendix two.
own leaps across sonic markers of identity, skin color, and gender roles. Unloosed on the airwaves of mass culture, this protagonist is a shape shifter.\textsuperscript{31}

As Barry Shank argues about Bob Dylan's vocal appropriations of the African-American blues singer "Blind" Lemon Jefferson, Wilson participated in a long-running aesthetic practice that, simultaneously, emphasized the similarities and the differences between markers of white and black musical authenticity. Canned Heat's "On the Road Again," in other words, offered a performance rooted in the blackface minstrel tradition. This performance tradition revolved around race, but incorporated other masquerades as well, such as female impersonation. In blackface minstrelsy, the masks of race and gender marked a process of what Eric Lott has famously called the "love and theft" of African-American culture by a largely white, male, working-class culture.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite its reassertions of power inequalities and essentialist stereotypes, this tradition also includes a strong antifoundationalist tendency. By extending the use of racial or gender masks to absurdist extremes, the blackface minstrel tradition not only reasserted hierarchies of power based on one's identity, but also maintained a capacity to undermine


stable demarcations of identity. The pleasures of pretending to be another -- and an other -- have subversive as well as coercive possibilities. As Shank explains, the blackface minstrel tradition is complex enough, and central enough to popular and political culture in the United States, to serve as an interpretive framework for everything from rock music to the white participation in the civil rights movement.

On radio broadcasts such as Tom Donahue's show, the racial masquerade allowed performers such Canned Heat's Alan Wilson -- as well as his listeners -- to revel in the construction of artificial authenticities. To Shank, these constructed identities, if recognized as simultaneously artificial and compelling, allow participants to recognize that identity is neither entirely free, nor hopelessly essentialist. Instead, they allow us to perceive identity as shaped both by large structures and individual struggles. Within the soundscape of the counterculture, Wilson and Canned Heat's masquerading performance in the song "On the Road Again" provided possible experience of the antifoundationalist as well as the dominant power dimensions of racial and gender identity permutations.33

Echoing across the radio airwaves, the oddness of Wilson's high falsetto voice in Canned Heat's "On the Road Again" -- which was echoed in tone and timbre by the sitar, harmonica, and tremelo guitar -- opened up identity for consideration in an atmosphere of both personal and public scrutiny. The fluttering of notes created an aesthetic form of uncertainty. As the notes never quite resolved into stable tones, neither did the song's mood. The sitar's endless drone built tension. Wilson's vocals, the harmonica, and the electric guitar

bent notes gently around the steady shuffle rhythm. The uncertainty of the music, combined with the song's odd racial and gender masquerades, raised many questions: Was Wilson's voice an old bluesman or a young imitator? Was the song's protagonist a confident, manly tough guy or a lonely, vulnerable outsider? What era were we in when listening to this song? To where did Wilson and Canned Heat's road lead?

As the sitar droned in the background and mingling notes with the harmonica, whole continents were summoned into association with one another. The song sonically linked the blues to the raga music of popular countercultural musicians such as Ravi Shankar, who became celebrity symbols of alternate worldviews to dominant Cold War American perspectives. Later in the aircheck, we hear a sitar again. This time it introduced a topical public service announcement about the misappropriation of funds from George Harrison's *Concert for Bangladesh*. Particular sounds on the radio, such as a sitar, could bring together quite disparate elements.

On Tom Donahue's radio shows, the sitar became a sonic connector, a musical marker of a larger public forum in which political matters might be raised for consideration. As the sitar fluttered in the background, a representative from Leopold's Records asked KSAN's listeners to write in protest about the lost charity funds from George Harrison's concert, album, and film. Through the soundscape of the counterculture, then, the sitar connected the feeling of the blues as expressed by Canned Heat in "On the Road Again" to

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the problematic politics of Bangladesh. Rock on the radio presented an atmosphere in which the most intimate realms of life, such as one's feelings of being "on the road again," alone in the world, might flow quickly into vast, complex histories of the blues and race, or into a public event of world proportions, such as the relief effort for Bangladesh.

"On the Road Again," formed part of a countercultural soundscape -- a transformed public sphere -- that mingled history with the present, the mythic South with a mythic Orientalism with pressing political realities of the Third World. The song presented a haunting voice and instrumental arrangement that was at once intimate and distant, a muted whisper in the listener's ear that also faded into the distance, as Wilson and Canned Heat travel out on the road without us, over the horizon at the edge of town.

Will we follow Wilson and Canned Heat "On the Road Again" or listen to them fade into the air? The group's song only presented sonic associations for listeners to recognize, assemble together, or, perhaps, reject on their own. As with other songs, "On the Road Again" did not propose a program or a solution to issues of political or economic inequality based on race or gender. It did not even reveal a solution to problems of cultural appropriation. Instead, Canned Heat's song served as a resource. It was one formation in the atmosphere of democracy generated by rock on the radio.

Songs such as "On the Road Again" sustained inquiry into the nature of identity. Even if a listener was not familiar with the roots of rock in African-American expressive culture, or with the spirituality of the exoticized East, he or she could enter into the journey of "On the Road Again," and in the process could explore identity by utilizing the powerful aesthetic innovations of the blues and raga as channeled through rock. Canned Heat's song
provided a shared forum that was intimate and collective simultaneously as it circulated on the airwaves.

"What About Me?": The Soundscape of the Counterculture and State Power

By establishing an aesthetic form that bridges the private and the public, rock music on the radio helped sustain the emotional and associational network that comprised the soundscape of the counterculture. As I have been arguing, this was a soundscape that did not offer clear solutions to contemporary dilemmas. Often, it even reinforced the larger ideologies of the Cold War American mass consumerism in which it circulated. But just as often, rock on the radio opened up spaces and processes for possible alternatives. This was particularly true when Donahue's choice of music interacted with his spoken announcements to maintain an atmosphere of inquiry.

For instance, toward the end of his show, Donahue announced that the Hog Farm, the commune organized by Hugh "Wavy Gravy" Romney and others, would be holding a political gathering that weekend to advocate for the legalization of marijuana in California. The event, Donahue explained, would be held in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Linking his announcement, and the actual political gathering, to the soundscape of rock on the radio, Donahue sets up the announcement by playing the Dino Valeni-penned song "What About Me," performed by Valenti and Quicksilver Messenger Service. The song once again positions the individual within the setting of Cold War consumer America. However, this time not only the marketplace, but also the state becomes part of the story. "I smoke marijuana," Valenti sings in one part of the song, "But I can't get behind your wars / And
most of what I do believe is against most of your laws."35

The music's production quality is dreamy, distant, almost narcotic. But at the same
time, Valenti's voice leaps forth with urgency, even desperation. Over a simple harmonic
progression and steady mid-tempo beat layered with acoustic guitar, conga drums, and flute,
Valenti, who himself served time in prison for drug possession, sings of a world poisoned
and polluted by the powerful elites of American society. He sings of the need to take a stand
for what he believes, and seeks solidarity among those who the powerful also have started to
"shoot down," a reference perhaps to the Kent State student shootings by the National Guard
in Ohio during 1970, and other acts of violent repression against the participants in the
protest movements of the 1960s.

Like the songs on Marvin Gaye's masterpiece from the same era, What's Goin' On,
Valenti and Quicksilver Messenger Service's "What About Me" links rock music on the
radio to questions of political power and conflict -- even to revolution. "I live just like an
outlaw and I'm always on the run," Valenti sings. "And though you may be stronger now, my
time will come around / You keep adding to my numbers as you shoot my people down."
The song joins the public atmosphere of rock on the radio -- especially as it interacted with
other songs and public service announcements about the problems of mass society and
individual identity within consumer culture and a state apparatus that maintained a war in
Vietnam and repression on the home front in the face of growing unrest.

Incorporated, But Still Critical: A Psychedelic Signoff

The public atmosphere of rock existed within the structures of commerce. Rock was fundamentally a product of mass consumerism, as were the technologies of FM radio in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet, rock on the radio also sustained -- even expanded -- a mobile sphere of inquiry and debate. As Stuart Hall wrote in the late 1960s, "Hippies, who are the heirs of the mass media revolution, have an intrinsic feel for the existence of these channels, and are highly communications-conscious." To Hall, participants in the counterculture, "have created a quite complex substructure of communications networks, in radio stations which have been colonized, as well as in the host and variety of underground newspapers and little magazines." Hall noted that, "news appears to travel by means of this modern 'bush-telegraph' from one Hippie community to another, both across the country and between continents." Analyzing this situation, Hall concluded that, "There is a sense, then, in which the Hippie attempt to transcend the social controls exerted through official control of the mass media is also an attempt to transcend, by incorporation, the technology and infrastructure of a media-oriented society." 36

Hall argues that the counterculture of hippies attempted to "transcend, by incorporation" the larger mass-mediated and consumer culture of the late 1960s and 1970s. But, rock on the radio proved unable to transcend its larger technological setting. Instead, it possessed the capacity to generate a space of heightened consciousness and inquiry, as well as feelings of fun and pleasure. As we shall see in the performance spaces of San Francisco, the rock music press, and even in the war zone of Vietnam, participants in the mobile and

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fluid soundscape of the counterculture used rock to negotiate the ambiguous overlaps between the intimate and the collective, the civic and the commercial, the personal and political.

Rock music as a form of mass culture generated these new responses and interactions. In their responses, rock's listeners and participants tried to forge a civic culture out of rock's sonic suggestiveness, out of its strange presence and absence in their everyday lives. From its place within the flow of mass culture, rock created bubbles and ruptures of alternative possibilities. These were elusive possibilities, crackles of disturbance in the larger circuitry of mass culture rather than achievements of programmatic political change. Often, the possibilities that rock music on the radio suggested were so odd as to be absurd. How could a radically new public life take place within the alienating context of what many participants in the counterculture referred to as the "plastic" of mass mediation and mass consumption? And yet, in its very awareness, even its celebration of this absurd situation, rock music on the radio also managed to foster an atmosphere of inquiry deep in mass culture's crass processes.

Right in the belly of the beast of Cold War state repression, a vibrant public energy crackled in the radio-filled air. Rock music linked the individual sonic experiences of individuals to the most profound levels of political and spiritual collective liberation. Or, as Tom Donahue put it at the end of his aircheck: "Well, that's all for tonight.... And that's the way it was and that's the way it is and it's always changing and it's always the same." You can almost hear his lips breaking into a smile through the microphone as he pauses, perhaps turning to his wife Rachael in the booth to post the rhetorical question: "How's that for psychedelic?"
Part One -
Dancing Around Rock: The San Francisco Scene and the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

The heads were amazed at how big their own ranks had become -- and euphoric over the fact that they could come out in the open... - Tom Wolfe

How then to open the avenue of great debates, accessible to the majority, while yet enriching the multiplicity and the quality of public discourses, of evaluating agencies, of 'scenes' or places of visibility? - Jacques Derrida

The sound is also a scene. - *Time*, June 23, 1967

In the June 23, 1967 issue of *Time*, a photograph allowed the magazine's readers to peer into San Francisco's new rock music venue: the Fillmore Auditorium (see figure 1.1). The Jefferson Airplane performed, a sea of bodies before them. In front of the stage, audience members gazed up into the lights, perhaps high on marijuana or lysergic acid diethylamide, better known as LSD, or simply as acid. Further away in the darkness, dancers seemed to turn every which way, moving by themselves or with others. Most noticeably, the light show dwarfed the musicians, the music equipment, and the audience. On large screens behind the band, projections of color pulsated. Within these colorful swirls, images of the Jefferson Airplane themselves appeared, leaking beyond the screens to cover the walls and

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ceiling, bleeding over the audience and band. In psychedelic lettering, the band's name, "Jefferson Airplane," floated ambiguously between light show and actual auditorium space.

Figure 1.1. Jefferson Airplane at the Fillmore Auditorium, October 9, 1966; this photograph appeared in *Time* magazine, June 23, 1967 (photograph: George Hall)

"The Airplane is the anointed purveyor of the Sound Francisco Sound," the accompanying article declared. But what was this "San Francisco Sound" exactly? Noting that the "sound is also a scene," *Time* linked the rock music of the Jefferson Airplane to "a heady mixture of blues, folk, and jazz that began as the private expression of the hippie underground and only recently bubbled to the surface." With a group such as Jefferson Airplane, *Time* suggested, rock had gone public. What had been a "private expression of the hippie underground" had "bubbled to the surface." This occurred not only as a new combination of musical genres, "a heady mixture of blues, folk, and jazz," but as a social
phenomenon, a "reflection of the defiant new bohemians, their art nouveau and madly mod
fashions."

"Now," the article continued, "in such cavernous San Francisco halls as the Fillmore
and the Avalon Ballroom, as well as in roller skating rinks, movie theaters, veterans' halls,
park bandstands, college gyms and roped-off streets from Pacific Heights to Butchertown,
300 bands are inviting the faithful to 'blow your mind' with the new sound." Through
musical performances, among other activities, the "hippie underground" seemed to be taking
over public spaces in San Francisco. In doing so, it drew attention from a larger circuit of
mass-mediated entities, such as Time, which were nationally and globally distributed. By the
end of 1967's famous Summer of Love, perhaps 75,000 countercultural participants had
settled in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood alone, with thousands more passing through San
Francisco.4 Still millions more participated vicariously through the publicity generated by
news reports, kitsch paraphernalia, and chart-topping pop songs such as Scott Mackenzie's
"San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)."5 The San Francisco sound and the
San Francisco scene interacted to make the city a foundational site of the counterculture and
a place where a new sort of public sphere crackled within the electronic flow of mass
cultural technologies.6

1984), 245.

5 Scott MacKenzie, "San Francisco (Be Sure To Wear Some Flowers In Your Hair)," Single released
by Epic/MCA Records, June 10, 1967. The song rose to number four on the Billboard chart in 1967. Written by
John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas.

6 The puzzling relationship between sound and scene has been taken up by scholars examining more
recent settings. See Barry Shank, Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas (Hanover, NH:
University Press of New England/Wesleyan University Press, 1994) and Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation,
Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," Cultural Studies 5, 3 (October 1991): 368-388;
Almost forty years later, this *Time* photograph offers us another chance to peek into the Fillmore Auditorium so that we can begin to perceive how this happened and what it meant. In the photograph, we see machine-generated light, color, and sound surround the audience. Bodies and electricity collide in the performance of rock music. Actual place and representational culture intersect at a level of intensity perhaps never before experienced in popular culture. As the typographical letters "Jefferson Airplane" appear to migrate between light-show images of the group and the band performing live, the clear distinction between embodiment and representation suddenly seems less certain.

The unsettling of this boundary between inhabited place and electronic mediation is crucial to the transformation of the public sphere in the 1960s counterculture. By placing embodiment and representation in a back-and-forth dialectic, rock music performance in San Francisco generated a liminal space. "Once I saw the Jefferson Airplane at the Fillmore playing in front of a huge wall on which was projected a film of the Airplane playing at the Fillmore on a previous occasion!" the journalist Ralph Gleason, Jr. exclaimed. For Gleason, occasions such as this created, "the illusion of a total environment, a kind of rock 'n' roll space capsule in which the lights on the walls (sometimes on three walls and ceiling) and on the crowd on the floor give a totally unearthly impression to the proceedings." In Gleason's "rock 'n' roll space capsule," participants simultaneously joined in the immediacy of a "total environment" and found themselves lifted off into an "unearthly" setting of electronic

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mediation through sound and light. In venues such as the Fillmore Auditorium, they traveled back and forth between embodiment and mediation.

Making music, listening, dancing, experiencing assaults of light and sound, creating posters, remembering their entrances into the performative space of rock, participants were able to address possibilities for -- and the problems of -- an embodied public life within the disemboding technologies and structures of Cold War mass culture. As one person active in San Francisco's music concerts noted, "young people today are torn between the insanity and the advances of the electronic age." Rock concerts were leisure activities that, to this participant, resonated with the tension between the frightening dilemmas and the utopian promise of mass society.

Arising in the interstices between family, market, and state, rock's performance spaces helped constitute a new sort of postmodern public life. This public life had qualities of what Michael Warner, elaborating on the theories of Jürgen Habermas, calls a counterpublic: "A counterpublic enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print,

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10 The dialectic of embodiment and mass-mediation was central to the ideas of Marshall McLuhan. His optimistic opinion of the results of electronic connection was perhaps one reason why his work resonated with many participants in the counterculture. See Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, co-ordinated by Jerome Agel, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Random House, 1967) and *War and Peace in the Global Village: An inventory of Some of the Current Spastic Situations That Could Be Eliminated by More Feedforward* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968).
theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like.\textsuperscript{11} The nature of rock's
counterpublic in San Francisco could be alternately immediate and elusive: manifesting itself
palpably, then vanishing into the larger circulation of mass culture.

Because rock music performances moved so rapidly between embodiment and mass-
mediation in venues such as the Fillmore, we might also think of them as fostering a
"phantom public sphere," following Bruce Robbins's creative rethinking of Walter
Lippmann's seemingly bleak concept. In San Francisco, rock music generated what Robbins
describes as, "a concept of the public that would not be shielded from the unauthentic taint of
publicity...a concept of the public that might respond to the irreducible diversity (and the
new connectedness) of identity politics...a concept of the public that would be adequate to
the connectedness of power, the politically unpromising consumer of global capitalism."\textsuperscript{12}

Conceiving of rock music performances in San Francisco as, simultaneously, a
"counterpublic" and a "phantom public sphere" begins to clarify the nature of the
counterculture in the 1960s as manifested around rock music. The strange appearance of a
sound that was also a scene in San Francisco casts the counterculture in a new light.
Observers have tended either to celebrate the counterculture as a radical break with the
mainstream mass culture of the Cold War era or they have critiqued it as a manifestation of
false consciousness that neither transcended mass consumerism, nor provided a sustainable
program for social change.\textsuperscript{13} What these opposing positions miss are the ways in which the


\textsuperscript{12} Bruce Robbins, "Introduction" to \textit{The Phantom Public Sphere}, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis:

\textsuperscript{13} For the foundational book of the pro-countercultural interpretation, see Theodore Roszak, \textit{The
Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition} (1968;
counterculture marked an *en*-counter with the processes and technologies of mass society. In San Francisco, participants faced the possibilities and the problems of what Michael Warner calls "the mass public and the mass subject." In doing so, they constituted a counterculture that was not a monolithic entity unified by one ideological position; instead, the radical swirl of musical sounds, light show projections, dancing bodies, and a dizzying iconography of historical, natural, and mystical symbols generated a fleeting public sphere.

In this ambiguous space at the edge of family, state, and market, a multiplicity of perspectives arose. Not only in language, but in appropriations of electronics, religion, psychoactive drugs, the rediscovered spaces of the deindustrializing city, the ephemera of popular culture, poster-art iconography, and perhaps most importantly, in the erotics of dancing bodies, participants engaged many issues key to public life: intimacy and collectivity, immediacy and distance, community and otherness, the supposedly mundane and the grand-historical. Their activities helped constitute a public sphere that seemed to flicker in and out of existence, much like they themselves did in the strobe lights of the psychedelic dance floor. This public sphere acquired a "phantom" quality, affected as it was by the etherealization of mass-cultural, electronic technologies such as light shows, psychoactive drugs, and the amplified music at the heart of the performance spaces. The flickering public of the counterculture -- as created in and around San Francisco's sound and scene -- became oddly secret and accessible all at once, a phenomenon that offered a special reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For a more recent example of the critique of the counterculture, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

kind of membership, easily acquired (especially in its more commodified forms) but always capable at any moment of penetrating deep to the core of individual identity and shared affiliation.

Photographs of San Francisco psychedelia hint at the public sphere that erupted within the amplified sound waves of rock music: dancing bodies are simultaneously illuminated and obscured as they move through the lights, colors, and sounds of the psychedelic ballroom (see figure 1.2). Embodiment and mediation in San Francisco's performance spaces created a liminal space that fostered a counterpublic. But this counterpublic was also, in the Cold War era of mass culture, a phantasmagoric public. Arising both in the interstices of family, market, and state and in the cross-currents of electronic circulation, this public manifested the civics of rock: a process through which participants utilized musical performance to raise and address questions of individual identity and social interaction in their mass-mediated, mass consumer context.

The efforts of participants to forge a sense of engagement and interaction in the San Francisco sound are worth reconsidering. They were neither the creation of a utopian, face-to-face, monolithic community, nor a ruse of corporately-manipulated, mass-mediated alienation. The lifeworld that gave rise to rock music and received its reverberations must be studied outside of these distorting dichotomies. Behind the historical smoke screen of "you-had-to-be-there" jokes about marijuana use, hiding within a tiresome kaleidoscope of fading tie-dye, past the era's resultant casualties and failures that now, with hindsight, seem so obviously avoidable, lurks the appearance of a new sort of public sphere worth understanding better.
Happy Halloween, 1966

Around dinnertime on Monday, October 31, 1966 -- Halloween -- the San Francisco Diggers began their "Full Moon Public Celebration" with a gathering at the corner of Haight and Masonic Streets in San Francisco's burgeoning new Haight-Ashbury hippie district.

Taking the name of a group of seventeenth-century anti-property English radicals, the Diggers had broken off from the already radical San Francisco Mime Troupe to pursue even more edgy guerilla street theater and political activism. The Diggers, however, were not the only ones up to something that Halloween night. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were to hold their "Acid Test Graduation" at the Calliope Company Warehouse in a seedy downtown warehouse in the skid row South of Market neighborhood. Meanwhile, the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and Mimi Fariña were to perform at a
costume party that the Calliope Company itself had organized: the "Dance of Death" at California Hall, one of San Francisco's moribund vaudeville era ballrooms recently revived by rock dances. It was to be a busy night for hippies eager to dance, take drugs, mingle, and explore what a number of commentators were calling a revolutionary new culture.\footnote{Perry, \textit{The Haight-Ashbury}, 102-105.}

At 5:30 p.m., following directions on leaflets handed out by the Diggers, "Public Nonsense Nuisance Public Essence Newsense Public News," participants played the "intersection game." They interrupted car traffic in what Haight-Ashbury resident and historian Charles Perry called a "translation of the civil rights sit-in technique directed against automobiles, and at the same time a terrific goof."\footnote{Perry, \textit{The Haight-Ashbury}, 104.} When a police man approached to break up the event, threatening arrest for creating a public nuisance, he chose to address one of the Diggers' giant puppets, since noone else seemed to be in charge of the event. "I declare myself the public," the puppet responded. "I am the public. The streets are public, the streets are free." Thrown in a paddy wagon along with their puppet, the Diggers and various participants in the "Full Moon Public Celebration" chanted "public, public" and sang the Italian anarchist song "Avanti Populi" on their way to the police station house.\footnote{Perry, \textit{The Haight-Ashbury}, 104-105.}

Raising questions about property, ownership, and the rules of public space, the Diggers moved ideas taken from avant-garde theater and art happenings to the streets, practicing what the New York artist Allan Kaprow called "the blurring of art and life."\footnote{Allan Kaprow, \textit{Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life}, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).} Like the Diggers, Ken Kesey, the leader of the Merry Pranksters, drew upon a past in theater
at the University of Oregon. Before he wrote his bestselling novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and before he and his friends took their private experiments with LSD public in various "Acid Test" parties during 1965 and 1966, Kesey had traveled to Hollywood with the idea of becoming an actor and movie star. He was also influenced by the happenings staged in the early 1960s by George Stern, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, and others in the North Beach bohemian neighborhood of San Francisco. The "Acid Test Graduation" on Halloween night in 1966, which attracted plenty of mass media attention but only an audience of roughly 200 participants, took on a theatrical air as Neal Cassady, Beat Generation hero of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and driver of the Merry Pranksters' psychedelic bus, known as Fuurther, transformed the age-old Commencement Exercise -- a kind of civic event in of itself -- into a strange, absurd, psychedelic environment.

We know more about these two events -- the Diggers' street theater and the Pranksters' Acid Graduation -- than we do about the Calliope Company's Dance of Death costume party, which also had an air of the theatrical according to participant and historian Charles Perry. The dance advertised "six authentic witches," and during the Quicksilver Messenger Service's performance of the song "Bo Diddley," a Giant Pumpkin wheeled a character known as Death, dressed in a Louis XIV red brocade jacket, around California Hall. But what is likely is that the Dance of Death wound up drawing the largest audience among the Halloween events. If avant-garde theater and notions of the theatrical fostered by

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psychedelic drugs formed a foundational role in the formation of the "San Francisco Scene," the Dance of Death suggests that music concerts increasingly seemed to motor the scene's growth.

Figure 1.3. Poster for the "Dance of Death" Costume Ball, California Hall, October 31, 1966 (artist: unknown, courtesy: www.wolfgangsvault.com)

The imagery of the "Dance of Death" hints at why rock music became a central generator of the San Francisco sound that was also a scene. Musical performance helped power and sustain a public sphere that arose from the ability to combine a dizzying range of references into a single event. The rhythms of "Bo Diddley" -- a song of male braggadocio and swampland mojo-mysticism set to an ancient African-American hambone rhythm but channeled through a raw, electrified, 1950s clang, made famous by a rock and roll icon and now played by a young, white group of musicians in the Quicksilver Messenger Service -- pulled participants into and out of the moment of the concert. The song was at once a cover
version of the past even as it cycled endlessly -- boom boom boom bomp-bomp! boom boom boom bomp-bomp! -- toward the future.

Dressed in costumes to celebrate Halloween, a two-thousand year old pagan holiday that had also become increasingly commodified by American mass culture, participants created a festive atmosphere in which imagery from Mexican religious folklore mingled with costuming from the height of the French monarchy. A gag as artificial yet joyous as the presence of "six authentic witches" and the parade of the character "Death" in a Louis XIV red brocade jacket seemed to signify the emergence of a new life in San Francisco. The death of death, enacted symbolically at the "Dance of Death," was yet another symbolic announcement by participants that San Francisco was becoming the locus and focus for the publicizing of a new life.

Staged by the Calliope Company, a theatrical group named for a steam pipe organ and referencing the Greek Muse of Eloquence, the "Dance of Death" transformed California Hall into a temporary public sphere in which participants could experience the back-and-forth between embodiment and disembodiment. The atmosphere of such dances emphasized immediacy of time and place, but they also referenced a dizzying range of historical and geographical narratives, symbols, and allegories. They provided a chance to enter into a dance that dramatized the very real prospects for life and death in an era when the growing violence of the Civil Rights movement and the emerging shadow of the Vietnam War were increasingly and directly affecting the lives of young Americans. Simultaneously, rock


24 For investigations of the urge to experience "real" life in the 1960s, see Alice Echols, "Hope and Hype in Sixties Haight-Ashbury," in *Shaky Ground: The '60s and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia
dance-concerts such as the "Dance of Death" distanced participants from "real" life, generating moments of self-alienation through loud music, surreal rites, extensive watching and being watched in public, psychoactive drug-taking, and an artsy version of the erotically-charged gatherings that had become traditions among American teenagers since the 1920s.\textsuperscript{25}

This collapsing dialectic of embodiment and disembodiment echoes Michael Warner's theory of the mass public sphere, where, because of the continual interplay between actual engagement and mediated interaction, "a fundamental feature...is this double movement of identification and alienation."\textsuperscript{26} Writing about more recent phenomena, Warner roots this "double movement" in the unresolved contradictions of the bourgeois class's uneasy place between egalitarian politics and status-driven market processes; he notes the ways in which the public sphere has the ability to exclude as well as include people in a social body. At the center of a countercultural public sphere in San Francisco, rock music presaged many of Warner's observations. To understand what was at stake in the public life generated at events such as the "Dance of Death" requires a deeper contextualization of the locale and the music.


\textsuperscript{26} Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," 252.
Staging the Dance: Background on San Francisco and the Bay Area

The history of San Francisco made it a particularly potent location in which to experience the electronic age's dissonances. As a port city and the terminus for cross-continental railroad travel, San Francisco was at once linked to a worldwide circuit of people and culture, yet many also perceived it as the end of the line. Both linked into global networks and conceptualizing itself as a frontier outpost on the margins, San Francisco had, since the nineteenth-century, been alternatively tolerant of Americans with experimental, bohemian, eccentric leanings and a violent place of conflict and tension. In either mode, the city had amassed a vibrant cross-section of cultures, ethnicities, and religions.\(^\text{27}\)

By the mid-twentieth century, progressive labor unions were active, but often with strongly anarchist, libertarian emphases.\(^\text{28}\) The Beat Generation of the 1950s had strong roots in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, and the famous Six Galleries poets reading of 1956 -- which featured Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, and others, with longtime Bay Area bohemian Kenneth Rexroth officiating the event and Jack Kerouac cheering on the poets over a jug of red wine -- had taken place in San Francisco.\(^\text{29}\) Students


politics centered around the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans and issues of free speech exploded in the Bay Area during the early 1960s in protests against hearings of the House on Un-American Activities (HUAC) held in San Francisco in 1962, efforts to desegregate the Sheraton Palace Hotel in 1964, and the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at Berkeley in 1964.30

Equally significant, by the mid-1960s, was that the bohemian, progressive cultural side of San Francisco had been lifted up and transformed by a massive economic infusion of jobs, industry, and research into the Bay Area -- most of which was supported by the federal government's Cold War expansions. A place of stunning beauty, with a Mediterranean climate and a tradition of easy-going, tolerant attitudes among portions of its populace, the Bay Area retained a well-honed anti-East Coast-Establishment mood, but it had increasingly become a powerful node in the modern network of the Cold War's military-industrial and military-academic complexes emanating from Washington, D.C.31

Popular music had its place in the San Francisco area too. Disc Jockey Tom Donahue, who would go on to organize the first "underground" FM rock radio station, organized large concerts at the Cow Palace. The Beatles, Rolling Stones, and countless other groups performed. The folk music revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s had an active

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outpost in the college towns of Berkeley and Palo Alto and in the bohemian San Francisco neighborhood of North Beach -- coffeehouses brought musicians and listeners together; Berkeley held an annual folk festival beginning in the mid-1950s; Joan Baez, first lady of sorts in the folk revival, grew up in Palo Alto.

A network of bars and live music venues stretched across the Bay Area as well. Musicians who would eventually become central figures in the psychedelic ballroom scene, such as Jerry Garcia, floated through all of these worlds. Garcia's Grateful Dead was, in earlier incarnations, a folksy jug band called Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, then a raw blues bar band known as the Warlocks. Donahue went on to open a proto-psychedelic club in the seedy strip club strip of North Beach called Mothers in 1965. Marty Balin of the Jefferson Airplane opened a similar club called the Matrix in the Marina District that same year.\(^{32}\)

**Staging the Music: The Sound of Acid-Rock**

The music that arose in San Francisco would ultimately be labeled psychedelic-rock or acid-rock. As musicologists Sheila Whiteley and Michael Hicks have noted, this style of music did encompass certain common elements, which Whiteley outlines as manipulation of timbres (blurred/bright/overlapping), upward movement (connoting "psychedelic flight"), harmonies (oscillating/lurching), rhythms (regular/irregular), relationships

(foreground/background), and collages (compared to "normal" treatments). The sounds of San Francisco bands actually varied quite widely: the lazy, strumming, jangling country-rock of the Charlatans; the loopy folk of Country Joe and the Fish; Jefferson Airplane's loud, rocket-like but well-crafted songs; Santana's Latin-inflected rock; Sly and the Family Stone's hyperactive soul and funk; the Grateful Dead's rhythm and blues combined with flights of improvisational strangeness. One might also include the many area bands that never gained as much popularity: the Loading Zone, the Sopwith Camel, the Great Society, the Daily Flash, the Anonymous Artists of America, to name a few.

What much of the music shared was a certain sonic quality shaped, in large part, by the interaction of psychoactive drug use, improvisation rooted in the blues, country music, and bluegrass, and experiments with electronic amplification. The music was for dancing, but not for the precise, virtuosic movements of couple swing dancing; rather the music meandered, full of dynamics that increased in intensity, then subsided, offering a setting for new forms of dancing. Loud, exploratory, often producing surprising, strange electronic sounds that hinted at either Arabic or Indian scales on the guitar or at space-age jet-engines, but tending to return to the steady, insistent rock and roll beat in the rhythm sections, psychedelic rock seemed to ask participants to reconsider relationships of the external and internal, the foreign and the familiar, the transcendent and the bodily, the other and the self.

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Rock critic Sandy Darlington, listening to the Grateful Dead at the Santa Clara Fairgrounds in 1968, articulated the experience of psychedelic music in San Francisco quite well: "Most bands hit a song fast, then stretch out for a while, ending up with a bang. The Dead go into a song slowly, tentatively, and build up an atmosphere until everyone is inside the music. Then they take off, exploring the figures over and over again with that super rhythm section." Darlington noted that, "If you're outside it, it can be boring. But when they get to you, it's incredible and hypnotic, as if the music was happening inside you."  

What is important to note about Darlington's comments is that they suggest the ways in which the experience of psychedelic music in the San Francisco scene opened up a channel between internal constructions of the self and perceptions of the external world: especially the social world of other people. "When they get to you, it's incredible and hypnotic, as if the music was happening inside you," Darlington declared. Darlington was aware of how the music was "getting to him," yet he also felt it was "happening inside." Darby Slick, guitarist for the Great Society, articulated a similar sense of psychedelic rock. "When music is really happening, it creates a new world, or even a new universe. Time, in the normal sense, seems to disappear, and the 'now' opens up and becomes all-pervasive. Notes, riffs, chords, and rhythms become elements that make up the world."  

This sonic world felt like it had transformative powers. Remembering a jam with guitarist Jerry Garcia and drummer Bill Kreutzman of the Grateful Dead, Slick recalled that, "When it built to its

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huge crescendo, and then it was over, I felt like a different person than when I started; inner, soul, values became more important, and outer, nervous matters, less.\textsuperscript{36}

This transformative quality in psychedelic music -- the way it seemed to construct or reveal a whole other mode of social experience, a new space or world or universe at once external and internal, interacting with other people yet affecting deeply-rooted senses of the self -- echoed the turn by avant-garde theater groups such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe or experimental gangs such as Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters toward critiquing and reworking both individual identity and collective affiliation. But as the 1960s progressed, the music seemed increasingly to define a larger social world -- the sound was also a scene, as \textit{Time} put it -- while theater receded into the background. Why was this so?

\textbf{Immersion and Aloneness: The Mass Public and the Mass Subject In the Psychedelic Dance}

As William Michael Doyle, Bradford Martin, and Charles Perry have noted, avant-garde theater played a crucial underlying role in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{37} But music diverged from the theatrical innovations of the Mime Troupe, Kesey, and others, even as it retained residues of ideas first put forth in theatrical form. Popular music, as compared to avant-garde theater, had a different relationship to the countercultural public sphere. While avant-garde theater could mount aesthetic-political acts in particular spaces, popular music -- even when

\textsuperscript{36} Slick, \textit{Don't You Want Somebody}, 62.

performed in a particular place -- tended to summon up larger aesthetic and political questions of intimacy and publicness in mass society as a whole. Theatrical groups such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Living Theater, the Diggers, and others moved off the stage and into audience interaction in attempts to recover -- or better said create -- a sense of lost community; avant-garde theater sought to return audiences to small scale, face-to-face interactions. Rock music retained the residue of this aesthetic politics, but its performance spaces did not seek to recover face-to-face encounters; rather the music in performance tended to turn toward aesthetic meditations on and encounters with the technological, the mass, the new, the futuristic.

In short, if avant-garde theater in performance sought to recover a sense of the lost idyllic village, then rock music in performance sought to confront and reimagine the modern city. Theater brought participants into their bodies in particular places; rock music transformed performance spaces into arenas that seemed to transcend place. Theater insisted on the direct; rock music could be direct, but also was mediated by amplification and the non-linguistic. If theater sought to transform passive audiences into a community, rock music tended to foster situations in which audiences became hypersensitized strangers. This is what made rock music's performance spaces peculiar sites of the civic in which individuals and groups negotiated issues of the public and the intimate in an aesthetic microcosm of mass society as a whole.

Rock's dance halls, often in deindustrialized lofts and factories or decaying vaudeville theaters, marked the loss of the older forms of city life and the attempt to understand, grapple with, confront, and even constitute new, postindustrial, postmodern modes of mass interaction. So, too, the contested appearance of music in outdoor spaces --
parks, streets, and, ultimately, the large festivals such as Monterey, Woodstock, and Altamont -- marked a confrontation of new forms of electronic social interaction with massive public gatherings in ostensibly shared, common environments. Both these indoor and outdoor spaces were shaped by the negotiations of publicness, intimacy, and electronic mediation surrounding musical performance.

Beyond their constitution as a passive audience or a crowd, then, participants in rock music performances became a counterpublic. In mass society, a counterpublic, as the theorist Michael Warner argues, is marked by, "dependence on the co-presence of strangers in our innermost activity." To Warner, "we continue to think of strangerhood and intimacy as opposites," however, this "has at least some latent contradictions, many of which come to the fore...in counterpublic forms that make expressive corporeality the material for the elaboration of intimate life among publics of strangers."\(^{38}\) In rock music performances, the discursive forms and technological tools of electricity, loud music, light shows, strobe lights, costumes, poster art, and psychoactive drugs interacted with the "expressive corporeality" of dancing bodies to emphasize the strange, the anonymous, the liminal, the temporary, the impermanent, the deterritorialized, among participants in public.\(^{39}\) These participants brought questions of intimacy and strangeness, selfhood and publicness, isolation and togetherness, independence and relationship, citizen and mass society, to the "fore" around

\(^{38}\) Warner, \textit{Publics and Counterpublics}, 76.

musical performance.

After attending rock music performances at the Electric Circus, a club in New York City that borrowed from the San Francisco ballrooms, the critic Albert Goldman described his experiences in terms that resonate with Warner's theoretical descriptions. "Magnetized by the crowd, impelled by the relentless pounding beat of the music, you are drawn out on the floor. Here there is a feeling of total immersion: you are inside the mob, inside the skull, inside the music.... Strangest of all, in the midst of this frantic activity, you soon feel supremely alone; and this aloneness produces a giddy sense of freedom, even of exultation." Goldman understood this experience as a tantalizing, mysterious mixture of intimacy and publicness erupting in a new sort of social space: "At last you are free to move and act and mime the secret motions of your mind. Everywhere about you are people focused deep within themselves, working to bring to the surfaces of their bodies deep-seated erotic fantasies."40

Like Goldman, San Francisco Chronicle columnist and music critic Ralph Gleason, Jr., a slightly older participant and writer who defended the new rock gatherings in the face of opposition by city governments, argued that events such as the Family Dog dances at Longshoreman's Hall in the fall of 1965 and the Appeal Benefits for the San Francisco Mime Troupe, first at the group's loft rehearsal space and then at the Fillmore Auditorium, were important components of civic life. "If this city was run for the citizens," Gleason claimed of these early rock shows in San Francisco, "such affairs would be commonplace and conducted, say, once a month at the civic auditorium, where there used to be numerous

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dances during the swing era.” To Gleason, the central element of the rock shows was dancing. For others, such as Ken Kesey, the central element was the use of psychoactive drugs such as LSD. Both dancing and drug-taking hinted at the ways in which rock music performance affected individual bodies placed in the hyper-electrified spaces of what many, following the communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, called, a “total environment” in which the senses were overloaded with stimuli.

What is crucial here is to catch the ways in which civic dimensions and mass consumer processes were always intertwined to varying degrees in San Francisco's rock performance spaces. Civics and consumerism were not opposites, though they were also not one and the same. They were continuously intersecting elements pulsating through the formation of a San Francisco sound that was also a scene. The civic component in San Francisco's musical performance spaces had arisen from three main groups, each of which operated at the interstices of the marketplace, the state, and the intimate, private sphere of the family. To examine these three groups is to further reveal the civics of rock in San Francisco, the ways in which a public arose around musical performance.

The first focus is on the series of benefits organized for the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Second, we can investigate the Family Dog dances organized by students at San Francisco State College (now California State University - San Francisco). And third, we can explore the Acid Tests of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. From these groups and their events of 1965 and 1966, we can go on to explore the roles of dancing, drug use, light shows, poster art, and labor disputes in the growing San Francisco music scene of the late

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42 McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*. 
"Instant Cousin-Ship": The Appeal Benefits

The Appeal Benefits to raise legal funds for the San Francisco Mime Troupe left a legacy of questioning the nature of publicness at the inception of rock's psychedelic ballrooms. The Mime Troupe, rooted in San Francisco's bohemian-political social world, had its offices in the same skid row loft building as the San Francisco branch of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) -- the very same building, in fact, that the Calliope Company would ultimately give to Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters for their Acid Test Graduation. The group, led by actor R. G. (Ronny) Davis, and including future members of the Diggers such as Emmett Grogan, Peter Cohan (Coyote), and Peter Berg, among others, had been arrested for performing in the public space of Golden Gate Park without a permit. Managed by Bill Graham, a Holocaust survivor who had arrived in San Francisco after toying with acting in New York City and working as a waiter in the resorts of the upstate New York's Catskills Mountains, three benefit concerts took place for the Mime Troupe: the first in the Mime Troupe's loft, the second and third in the Fillmore Auditorium. These events led Bill Graham to eventually become a commercial music promoter.43

The first Appeal Benefit was held on Saturday, November 6th, 1965. A press release for the event explained its purpose: "S.F. Mime Troupe Will Hold an 'Appeal' Party, 924 Howard Street (between 5th and 6th Sts.) Sat. Night - November 6 From 8 p.m. till

43 For more on the San Francisco Mime Troupe, see Doyle, "Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-1968"; Martin, The Theater Is In the Street; and Perry, The Haight-Ashbury.
As Chet Helms pointed out to the historian Alice Echols, the idea of an "appeal party" had roots in the leisure gatherings that San Francisco's leftist political organizers would sponsor in the evenings after day-long marches and rallies. But the Mime Troupe's "Appeal" had a different edge to it than previous events. Mingling mass-mediated publicity with the event's focus on public expression, Graham and members of the Mime Troupe, in costumes, distributed fliers for the event in downtown San Francisco the Friday afternoon before it was to take place, getting on the evening television news for riding around in a Cadillac decorated with advertisements for the party. The press release brought the issue of public space to the fore of the Appeal's purpose: "WHO OWNS THE PARKS? The people of San Francisco. The parks are very large and there is room for us all -- room for any expression of any idea." Referring to the Parks Commissioner, the press release argued, "Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly do not stop where Mr. Haas's good taste begins."

This orientation toward freedom of expression, which echoed the Free Speech Movement at University of California at Berkeley the previous year, carried into the event itself. Bill Graham recalls inviting all to participate in the event: "We also put the word out. Anything you want to bring, bring. Any statement or artistic expression you want to make, fine....People brought things to us and we hung them in the loft." Liquid projectionists -- drawing upon new techniques developed by a teacher at San Francisco State University --

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44 Appeal Party Promo, Box 17, Folder 10, SF Mime Troupe Collection, Shields Library Department of Special Collections, University of California - Davis.


46 Bill Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 121.

47 Appeal Party Promo.
brought bed sheets and projectors. People brought film footage to project and bed sheets for screens. About fifteen hundred people showed up, by Graham's account, "people who never were interested before and didn't know what we were doing. Who were nonpolitical. A lot of clean-cut kids from Marin County.... It was this cross section of people who had never come together before. A mixed group."  

Then there was the music and the powerful sense of connection it generated through dance. Two folksy groups, The Fugs from New York City and the guitarist Sandy Bull, as well as a jazz group led by John Handy and the Jefferson Airplane, performed. The music

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seemed to foster a feeling of sudden affiliation among strangers. "I saw things that were
firsts all night long," Graham remembered. "I saw people come in and instantly start dancing
with other people and only then did I realize that they didn't know each other. They just
started dancing." To Graham, the dancing transformed the loft into a coherent social body, a
place of fictive kinship among previously disconnected individuals, a space of heightened
theatrical intensity. "It was like instant cousin-ship. They became a one. It was like when
you look under a microscope at protoplasm. All the cells were touching and bubbling at
once. That night, they were all in the play. It was theater-in-the-round." 49

This description demonstrates the heritage of avant-garde theater in the new rock
performance spaces. But something else was going on in those spaces too, something that
echoes architect and public theorist Vito Acconci's notion of "cluster-groups" that comprise a
non-authoritarian public space. "The words public space are deceptive," Acconci argues.
"When I hear the words, when I say the words, I'm forced to have an image of a physical
place I can point to and be in. I should be thinking only of a condition; but, instead, I
imagine an architectural type, and I think of a piazza, or a town square, or a city commons.
Public space, I assume, without thinking about it, a place where the public gathers." But,
Acconci notes, "To become a public arena, the piazza -- the model of an open public space --
gives up any claims of being a democratic space: it resigns itself and becomes an
authoritarian space." 50

The public sphere, which Acconci wonderfully suggests we should think of not as a

49 Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 123-124.

50 Vito Acconci, "Public Space in a Private Time," in Art and the Public Sphere, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 159, 163, 166.
particular place but as a condition, only "remains democratic when people break up into clusters....The cluster is small enough that it doesn't need a leader....Each cluster acts as if (at least for the moment) the rest of the space isn't there; each cluster acts as if it doesn't need the rest of the space. In fact, it doesn't want the rest of the space; the cluster-space exists as democratic only as long as it keeps the rest of the space out." If it grows bigger, the cluster becomes an organization; if it is to survive, according to Acconci, the cluster moves to transient spaces. Music offers an ideal form for a public "on the run" from authoritarian organization because, Acconci posits, music has "no place, so it doesn't keep its place, it fills the air, and doesn't take up space. Its mode of existence is to be in the middle of things."51

Acconci's sense of music offering a new form of public life reminds one of Sandy Darlington's comments about hearing the Grateful Dead's music as both external and internal, outside the self and somehow emanating within. More powerfully, Acconci's notion of the placelessness of the musical public echoes Darby Slick's sense of music evoking a "new world," a new space, a new outside world in which, magically, interaction was altered toward "inner, soul, values." Indeed, Slick's memory of these feelings came from jamming with Jerry Garcia and Bill Kreutzman of the Grateful Dead during the first and second Appeal Benefits.

The first Appeal Benefit was not only a charitable affair; it was also an entrepreneurial event. This combination hinted at the ways in which its "cluster space" began to turn toward a less anarchic, more organized mode of organization. But rock music was also still "on the run," to continue with Acconci's language, in Graham's move to the

Fillmore Auditorium. As Graham prepared for the second and third Appeal Benefits at the larger venue of the Fillmore Auditorium, which took place on December 10, 1965 and January 14, 1966 respectively, the promoter turned increasingly toward the business of putting on dance-rock performances as commercial gatherings of what he termed "public assemblage." He did not want to lose the larger civic dimensions of the Appeal Benefits, but he also wanted to make money from them.

This led to conflict with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the group that Graham had been working for as business manager. Troupe member Peter Berg remembered a tempestuous meeting at which Graham declared that the protest-art of the Mime Troupe was misguided; plays did not work as social weapons. A more promising avenue, Graham argued, was to provide a venue for what seemed like an emergent new culture, one that was more hierarchically-ordered, safer, and more predictable. Though concerts would lose their spontaneity, Graham's position was that a market-based business of rock concerts could not only generate revenue, but also propel the civic dimensions of the nascent San Francisco scene more successfully than the charged political performances of the Mime Troupe.

Whether he was right or wrong on this count, Graham's second and third Appeal Benefits continued to foster a sound that was also a scene in San Francisco. The second Appeal was given much publicity when Graham managed to get Bob Dylan to hold a flier for the event and speak about it on the Bay Area's public television station, KQED, during an interview. This generated the sort of mass-mediated affirmation of importance that would


ultimately shape the formation of the San Francisco scene. But the actual space of the Fillmore Auditorium itself fostered a different sense of publicness than the smaller loft of the first Mime Troupe Appeal.

Figure 1.5. Poster for the Second S.F. Mime Troupe Appeal Benefit Concert, December 10, 1965 (courtesy: www.wolfgangsvault.com)

A photograph of the Fillmore Auditorium just before the start of the second Appeal Benefit shows the new space in which this scene could take shape. The room looks both historical and transformed, somehow beckoning from the legendary past while simultaneously hinting at new possible futures. Officially holding roughly seven hundred patrons, but often containing many more, the space was big enough to be grand but small
enough to seem manageable. "The first party, last month at the troupe's South of Market loft studio, was so successful that hundreds of the troupe's friends were turned away because there was no space for them," the flier for Appeal II explained. "This time, there is a larger hall, dancing, and many of the same artists and entertainers will be there, as well as some new ones. The place is huge and, like, it's there."

Beneath the high ceiling, two balconies hang over a large dance floor and a raised stage. On each side of the drum kit and amplifiers on the stage, two posters that read "Love" in large letters hang beside two large Kandinsky-like abstract paintings. Balloons stand at the ready. As a newspaper article by Ralph Gleason, a great supporter of the emergent new scene in San Francisco, noticed, "At each end of the huge hall was a three foot high sign saying LOVE. Over the bar was another saying 'No Booze,' while the volunteer bartenders served soft drinks. Alongside the regular bar was a series of tables selling apples! The only dance (outside of Halloween) I've ever been at where they sold apples. Craaaaazy!" What neither this, nor any other article mention is the unspoken dimension of the Appeal dances: the use of LSD and marijuana. What Gleason and others did pay attention to was the more overt and available manifestation of new kinds of civic interactions in the display of bodies through dancing and costume.

Drugs, dance, and costume converged to offer a zone of experimentation in which expressions of the self also affirmed communal bonds and commitments. Gleason made note

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55 Appeal II photograph, 1965, Box 8, Folder 30, R. G. Davis Papers, Shields Library Department of Special Collections, University of California - Davis.

56 Appeal II Flier, Box 8, Folder 30, R. G. Davis Papers, Shields Library Department of Special Collections, University of California - Davis.

of both the individualistic and the communal nature of the event. "Inside a most remarkable assemblage of humanity was leaping, jumping, dancing, frigging, fragging, and fruffling on the dance floor to the music of the half dozen rock bands -- The Mystery Trend, the Great Society, the Jefferson Airplane, the VIPs, the Gentleman's Band, the Warlocks, and others."

Individual expression was valued at the dance: "The costumes were freedom Goodwill-cum-Sherwood Forest. Slim young ladies with their faces painted a la Harper's Bazaar in cats-and-dogs lines, granny dresses topped with huge feathers, white levis with decals of mystic design; bell-bottoms split up the side! The combinations were seemingly limitless." At the same time, Gleason portrayed the event as a self-regulated affair among equals. "There were no guards inside. There was an absence of uniforms and there was no trouble. It was the kind of crowd where over a dozen people stopped dancing, got down on their hands and knees to help a girl find a contact lens that had popped out during a particularly dramatic movement. They scrambled on the dance floor for a few minutes and found it. She cleaned it in her mouth, popped it back in and the dancing continued."

The police actually were there, outside at these events, applying continual pressure on Bill Graham to cancel them, reduce the number of people admitted inside the Fillmore, and alter the space to make it safe. But by turning from the Mime Troupe's direct confrontations with state power to an entrepreneurial, market-based strategy that fit with the sorts of economic practices of leisure and money-making that city governments traditionally did not interfere in extensively, Graham was able to open up the temporary, liminal, but powerful public space of what he and others were calling the "new culture" -- what Gleason's

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article about the Appeal Benefit called the "rock revolution." Despite all its fame for tolerance, the city government of San Francisco often tried to block events such as the Appeal Benefits. According to Gleason's review of the second Appeal, the police seemed to, "regard mass proximity of the sexes to the sound of music as a hazard equal to a time bomb." But, he argued, "the actual demand for dances is going to increase. The whole rock revolution points to dancing, the music ineluctably moves one to move."\(^59\)

Rooted in the San Francisco Mime Troupe's direct aesthetic-political confrontations with the city government over utilizing the public space of the parks, the increasingly commercial activities of promoter Bill Graham opened up a new sort of civic space by abandoning head-on confrontation. In the more commodified arena of the rock concert and dance, though still at this point a benefit show, participants were able to engage each other outside of gathering in overt opposition to the state. They asked questions of individual self-expression and collective responsibility using tools of style, fashion, and -- most significantly -- bodily responses to music in dance.

The Appeal Benefits demonstrated how a counterpublic of rock music manifested itself in the interstices of marketplace and state. The family also lurked on the margins of the event. Ralph Gleason's review described how, "In a corner past the apple table was a baby in a carriage, sound asleep with a bottle and a teddy bear clutched in his (her?) mouth."\(^60\) This brief appearance of a child signals questions raised by rock music's counterpublic in San Francisco. The allure of the innocent child appealed to many participants who, leaving adolescence and entering young adulthood, drew upon their experiences with drugs and their


\(^{60}\) Gleason, "On the Town: Lesson for S.F. in The Mime Benefit."
perception of an adult world rotten to the core in order to idealize a child's freedom and possibility to escape the limitations of the electronic age. This articulation of childhood manifested itself in a number of moments when rock music helped propel a public into existence.

Perhaps more tantalizingly, and significantly, the baby in the carriage also hints at a rejection of the limitations placed on women in the post-World War II cult of domesticity. Though the hyper-masculinization and misogyny of the counterculture is well-documented, what is less understood are the ways in which young women utilized the ambiguities of this new social space to bring questions of women's isolation from the public sphere into view. Many women who were crucial participants in the countercultural public simply refused to stay at home with their children. They brought children into the public assemblage of the rock concert.

Though many might view the presence of children in these environments as problematic, they mark an important raising of the question of women's gendered labor and roles in the private sphere as constructed in the post-World War II years. Though the counterculture struggled to shape satisfactory answers or alternatives, the insistence on bringing the politics of the family into the public sphere formed another important dimension.

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62 Alice Echols begins to explore this topic in her biography of Janis Joplin, *Scars of Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin* (New York: Metropolitan, 1999) and in her essay collection, *Shaky Ground*.

of the civics of rock.\textsuperscript{64} At a time when participants were attempting to reconstitute and rearrange themselves into new social arrangements and commitments that they often referred to as families, tribes, bands, or communes, rock music provided places of gathering in which the dilemmas of kinship -- even fictive kinship -- became visible.

Decked out in costumes, their babies asleep past the apple table, women and other participants in the Appeal Benefits danced to the music. The phenomenology of their dancing is worth returning to, but the intriguing redirection of mass consumer culture toward new ends was also at issue in the emergence of the San Francisco scene. The Family Dog "Tribute" dances that occurred at Longshoreman's Hall in 1965 -- almost simultaneously to the Appeal Benefits -- offer an opportunity to consider this reclamation and reuse of popular culture more closely. Along with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' Acid Tests, which were the other formative events in the making of a San Francisco scene in 1965 and 1966, the Family Dog dances also raised problems and possibilities for a public sphere in which embodiment and representation fluctuated into and out of each other at the interstices of the state, family, and especially the marketplace.

"Caught Up In the Energy": The Family Dog Tribute Dances

When Bill Graham heard about Family Dog, he thought they were a dog show performance group.\textsuperscript{65} In fact, the group had acquired its name from its communal house in the Haight-Ashbury district, where a number of students at San Francisco State University

\textsuperscript{64} Children and families appear often in accounts of Bay Area rock music performances, at times with women, at times with men, and at times with couples. For other examples, see, for instance, Gleason, Jr., \textit{The Jefferson Airplane}, 50, 58.

\textsuperscript{65} Graham, \textit{Bill Graham Presents}, 124.
and drop-out bohemians lived communally with several pet dogs. Unbeknownst to Graham, members of the Family Dog had spent the summer of 1965 taking acid, listening to rock music, and pretending to be living in a Wild West film at the Red Dog Saloon, a venue created by a group of San Franciscan beatnik-folkie hipsters in the Gold Rush ghost town of Virginia City, Nevada. Drawing upon their experiences at the Red Dog, they now turned to promoting new sorts of rock dance concerts in San Francisco.66

The Family Dog "Tribute" dances at Longshoreman's Hall in the fall of 1965 transformed mid-twentieth-century American popular culture into folklore in a way that paralleled (one might dare say was part of) the Pop Art movement. They turned the commodified, mass-disseminated culture of comic books, radio, film, and television shows back into embodied performance, emphasizing the ability to reshape individual identity through liminal, collective engagement with music, dancing, costumes, lights, and LSD and to seek out new modes of collectivity through these activities. These dances, like the Appeal Benefits, were fun events that also contained more serious dimensions. As gently satirical "tributes" to comic book characters such as Dr. Strange, Sparkle Plenty, and Ming the Merciless, the dances possessed a sense of the retrospective, consolidating new source materials from popular culture for confronting the problems of the public in an electronic, mass-mediated world as well as attempting to establish a counterpublic through rock music performance. So, too, the "tribute" lent religious overtones, sacralizing the space and activities in which this counterpublic might arise. The possibilities and limits of this counterpublic appear in closer investigations of the Family Dog's tribute dance concerts.

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66 Selvin, Summer of Love, 3-22; See also, The Life and Times of the Red Dog Saloon, a documentary directed by Mary Works (Red Dog Enterprises, 1996).
Organized by three students at San Francisco State University -- Luria Castell, Ellen Harmon, and Alton Kelley -- the Family Dog dances were similar to Bill Graham's Appeal Benefits: commerce and civics overlapped while new notions of the family took shape under the uneasy, surveilling eye of the state. The name of the promoters' collective organization -- the Family Dog -- itself hinted at the communal arrangement in which they lived, reconstituting a peer group as a new family unit. Their dances took place until the San Francisco police intervened because the promoters did not possess the proper licenses. But until that happened, the Family Dog events mingled commerce and civic interaction in intriguing ways.

Ralph Gleason explained that the Family Dog promoters had grasped a new arrangement of marketplace activity: "They believed in free enterprise, only they wanted to define the style." Family Dog dances marked the appropriation and refashioning of popular culture's commodified goods into resources for a new civic life. Luria Castell told Gleason: "Basically we want to meet people and have a good time and not be dishonest and have a profitable thing going on." Adding to this in retrospect, she added, "Not only did we want to have a good time, we felt a potential, a positive change in the human condition." The dances, to Castell and others, seemed capable of producing a new social order in which pent-up energies were unleashed in positive ways and participants danced new modes of social

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67 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 3.

68 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 3.

affiliation and self-expression into existence. As Castell put it: "We're going to be ourselves and project as many aspects of our reactions on the public as we can."  

Unfortunately, the city government of San Francisco made the efforts of the Family Dog to promote a dance concert difficult. As participant Elliot Sazer noticed at the first concert, "When people tried to start dancing, the police would stop them. You're not allowed to dance in San Francisco, unless you're in a hotel or the place has a special dance permit. And for a very liberal town, this was the craziest law I'd ever heard of in my life."  
The Family Dog Tribute dances occurred at the interstices of market ("a profitable thing going on"), family (the communal "Family Dog" and the feeling of family that participants described at the dances), and state (as Family Dog promoter Alton Kelley remembered, "We threw six or seven dances before we even knew we had to have a permit. The city tried to shut it down but once it was happening there was no shutting it down").

In this civic space of the dance, a public among strangers emerged through the embodiment of dance that took place in the disembodied, amplified roar of rock music. As individuals and a collectivity, participants sought out both freedom of self-expression and social connections with others in this space. Jefferson Airplane manager Bill Thompson recalled the first Tribute dance: "I remember long lines of people, holding hands, dancing to the music. I mean, 20, 30 people sometimes, going around in a circle. They'd get caught up

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70 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 3.


in the energy of the music, and the excitement. There was so much freedom. This was not like school dances -- that was a whole different story, everything was regulated."\textsuperscript{73}

Bob Harvey, who would leave Jefferson Airplane soon after this performance, also remembered, "Longshoreman's was the foreshadowing of the psychedelic dance concerts. But it was more than just music and dance. It felt like belonging, like family."\textsuperscript{74} So, too, Darby Slick, guitarist for the Great Society and brother-in-law of Great Society and then Jefferson Airplane singer Grace Slick, remembered the festivity of wearing a costume to the event as much more than just the fun of disguise: "The joy wasn't in the costumes we wore, per say, but in the community that we built with them. It was as if we established a new race, and ourselves as members of it."\textsuperscript{75} These comments, which reach for the right words to describe the feeling that arose at the dances -- belonging, family, community, race, members -- might be understood as efforts to describe the public that arose among strangers at the Family Dog's rock and roll dance concerts.

As John Cipollina, guitarist for the Quicksilver Messenger Service, remembered, the Tribute to Dr. Strange brought together "a roomful of freaks. More than a thousand strangely-garbed, wild-eyed, like-minded malefactors who had crawled out of God knows what woodwork." The Family Dog dances provided the venue in which "a subterranean community was meeting itself for the first time. These people had been holed up, growing their hair, getting dosed good and strange in the privacy of their own meager cells, without


\textsuperscript{75} Slick, \textit{Don't You Want Somebody}, 56-57.
knowing that across the city, hundreds upon hundreds of others were doing the same thing under the cover of their rooms.\textsuperscript{76}

As with Bill Graham's Appeal Benefits, the interaction between a market orientation and a civic impulse was especially crucial to fostering this new sort of public sphere. Though he called Castell and Harmon "the first hippie entrepreneurs," guitarist Darby Slick noticed that the first Tribute possessed an energy quite removed from the preexisting rock dance concerts. At the "Tribute to Dr. Strange," according to Slick, "The atmosphere was so completely different than at the commercial concerts put on by Big Daddy Tom Donahue at the Cow Palace."\textsuperscript{77} The gathering transformed the detritus of popular culture, the disembodied junk of mass consumerism, into half-sardonic icons and idols for a new civic religion.

The idea of ritualistic "tributes" to comic book heroes and villains stood at the center of this inventive use of popular culture as the seedbed for a new civics. A public emerged by paying tribute to new legends and gods, by suggesting new myths and allegories. The names of the cartoon characters were rich enough in themselves -- Dr. Strange, Sparkle Plenty, Ming the Merciless all fit with the new spirit of costume-wearing, psychedelic drug hallucinations, and a heightened sense of the larger world as full of life-and-death struggles that were at once real (as in the growing conflict in Vietnam or the racial tensions erupting in the urban United States during the mid-1960s) and -- especially for the young-adult students, mostly white and middle-class -- fantastical, comical, distant, and mediated (thanks to the booming consumer economy).

\textsuperscript{76} Selvin, \textit{Summer of Love}, 27.

\textsuperscript{77} Slick, \textit{Don't You Want Somebody}, 51, 56.
Dr. Strange, Sparkle Plenty, and Ming the Merciless had more intriguing allegorical meanings buried within their cartoonish figures. As comic book historian Bradford Wright has pointed out in a history of comic books, Dr. Strange, a surgeon who loses his ability to practice medicine in a car accident, descends into alcoholism, travels to the Orient, trains with a guru named the Ancient One, then returns to Greenwich Village in New York to become an aloof, mysterious superhero, "remarkably predicted the youth counterculture's fascination with Eastern Mysticism and psychedelia." Appearing in the early 1960s with some of Steve Ditko's "most surrealistic work" creating a "disorienting, hallucinogenic quality," the comic drew upon the "mystical spells, trances, astral travel, and occult lore" of "pulp-fiction magicians" as well as material from 1950s Beat culture.  

Figure 1.6. Handbill for The Family Dog's first rock dance and concert, "A Tribute to Dr. Strange," October 16, 1965 (artist: Ami Magill, courtesy: www.chickenonaunicycle.com)

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Sparkle Plenty, a female character, was the mysteriously beautiful baby boomer offspring of two noir-ish Dick Tracy characters: the rowdy, smelly, crooked, but faithful-to-Tracy B. O. Plenty and the reclusive gravel pit owner Gertie Gravel. A tribute to Sparkle Plenty seemed implicitly to celebrate the arrival of the baby boomers themselves in the public sphere -- Sparkle Plenty was the modernized, beautified girl arising from the stinking pits (quite literally) of the hardscrabble Great Depression and World War II years. Ming the Merciless offered a more mysterious flirtation with evil -- this Marvel comics villain, an Oriental caricature who fought Flash Gordon, at times sprinkling the earth with a plague dust that cast an LSD-like spell -- was exiled from Mongo when Flash Gordon becomes leader there after defeating him.

The iconography of the handbills for the Family Dog Tributes moved these comic book characters from popular culture to a vernacular setting. Unlike the super-stylized dance concert posters and handbills that would follow in their wake, the Family Dog Tribute fliers created by Ami Magill, who would go on to become a staff artist at the San Francisco Oracle, look most of all like doodles on a high school notebook. But so, too, they presage the more adventurous and advanced graphic developments of the later posters in that they are rejections of the standard show flier. The "Tribute to Dr. Strange" handbill is far different even from Bill Graham's Appeal Benefit announcements. In the place of clear lines, organized boxes and evenly-spaced, standardized fonts are line drawings that spiral and swirl, grow denser and more sparse in unpredictable, uneven ways, gather like moss around the unbalanced bubble letters tumbling over each other to spell "The Family Dog Presents," then open up in blankness around the script that reads "Tribute."
Magill replaced symbols and signifiers of professional distance and authority with amateurish immediacy and intimacy, even with a kind of alluring beckoning to membership in a new, secret society. The letters themselves are invaded by doodles and lines as abstract flames, enlarging dots, and reptilian spires engulf the words. The handbill conveys a sense of homemade intrigue and mystery. It is off the cuff and insistent all at once. As if the drawing might have become utterly illegible and inscrutable if left in the hands of its maker any longer, Magill's announcement seems to be in the process of disappearing -- or is it peeking out alluringly from -- behind the tangled web of doodled iconography.

Part of the message is clear and familiar: the handbill announces a return to the teen-age form of the "Rock n Roll Dance and Concert," hosted by a famous local radio disc jockey, in this case Russ "The Moose" Syracuse, whose surreal nighttime show on the station KYA featured bomb sound effects for bad songs and attracted a cult following among Bay Area music fans. So, too, the venue, the Longshoreman's Hall at Fisherman's Wharf, had housed dances for teenagers before, as well as jazz concerts. But, except to the initiated, the bands were mostly unfamiliar. Moreover, their names were particularly odd and surreal, quite different from the sensible names of most rock and roll groups: the Jefferson Airplane, the Charlatans, the Marbles, and even a band named, bizarrely, perhaps sarcastically, after President Lyndon Johnson's ambitious new governmental program to wipe out poverty, the Great Society.

Finally, to add to the oddness of the handbill, the entire event was a tribute -- not to a musician or even to a political or social cause -- but to a comic book character with a particularly evocative moniker, Dr. Strange. The handbill seemed to herald some sort of secret new order beckoning just beyond a familiar door. Fashioned in part out of the
economic necessity of constructing a cheap poster with a limited budget, the announcement for the Family Dog Tribute to Dr. Strange also manifested the relocation of material from mass-produced culture into a new vernacular, civic realm.

Figure 1.7. Handbill for The Family Dog's second rock dance and concert, "A Tribute to Sparkle Plenty," October 24, 1965 (artist: Ami Magill, courtesy: www.chickenonaunicycle.com)

As the handbill suggested, the Family Dog events were not just tributes to comic book characters; they were also tributes to the rock and roll dance concert itself. Rock and roll dance-concerts themselves were rooted in an existing teen culture dating back to the 1950s, and before that to the jazz and swing dances of the 1920s and 1930s. Ralph Gleason made the linkage explicit, explaining that the Family Dog Tributes were, "founded, of
course, on the basic teen-age dances." Continuing in the tradition of radio personality Big Daddy Tom Donahue's concerts at the Cow Palace, the Family Dog events even had the requisite commercial radio disc jockey in attendance: DJ Russ "The Moose" Syracuse. But the Family Dog Tributes transformed the typical teen dance into something else.

In place of the awkward adolescent couple dancing, according to Gleason, something more liberatory, ritualistic, and erotically-charged took place. "There were people who simply leaped like campfire girls skipping 'round the maypole, all night long," Gleason noticed. The open-ended combination of drug experimentation, music, dancing, and costumes led to a festival atmosphere in which, observers such as Gleason believed, a new morality was emerging. Centered around new modes of self-expression and group interaction, it challenged dominant structures of self, family, marketplace, and even government. To Gleason, the music and the dance drew upon the existing popular culture, but transformed it to presage larger social transformations.

Luria Castell shared this hopeful, utopian interpretation. "There'll be no trouble when they [the kids] can dance," she told Gleason. "Music is the most beautiful way to communicate. It's the way we're going to change things," she decided. Light-hearted, humorous farce and serious feelings of making history mingled at the Family Dog Tributes. Luria Castell remembered it as, "Almost a religious kind of thing, but not dogma, unlocking that tension and letting it come out in a positive way with the simple health of dancing and

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79 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 7.
80 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 7.
81 Gleason, Jr., The Jefferson Airplane, 3.
getting crazy once a month or so.\textsuperscript{82}

Key to the religious impulse that Castell described was the unleashing of erotic energy among gatherings of strangers.\textsuperscript{83} As Vito Acconci writes about urban public spheres: "The public space of the city is the presence of other bodies: public space is an analogue for sex." If "public space lives up to its name," according to Acconci, it "functions to bring sex out into the open: you liberate yourself into public space.... Public space is the refusal of monogamous relationships and the acceptance of sex that has no bonds and knows no bounds."\textsuperscript{84} Describing the tradition of Family Dog dances that began with the Tributes and continued at the Avalon Ballroom and other venues under the auspices of Chet Helms, one observer commented that, "The people who have been forming the mass audience for the Family Dog presentations are the psychedelic generation -- humans who have begun to wake up, to seek release from the bonds of ego, to express their latent sensuality."\textsuperscript{85}

Providing a space that, through the mediation of electronic music, transmuted the trashy commodities of mass and popular culture -- comic book characters, cheap vintage thrift-store costumes, high school teen-age rock and roll dance concerts -- into a new public sphere, the Family Dog Tribute dances unleashed powerful erotic energies from previously intimate spheres into a shared setting. As with the posting of the words "Love" in large letters at each side of the stage at Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium Appeal Benefits, the

\textsuperscript{82} McNally, \textit{Long Strange Trip}, 96.


\textsuperscript{84} Acconci, 168.

Family Dog Tributes began to tease out the multiple meanings of this word -- from the ways in which it signified more overt displays of sexuality to the manner in which it might provide the emotional groundwork for the participants in a new civitas.

Figure 1.8. Handbill for The Family Dog's third rock dance and concert, "A Tribute to Ming the Merciless," November 6, 1965 (artist: Ami Magill, courtesy: www.chickenonaunicycle.com)

Love was in the air at the Family Dog Tributes, but so were other emotions that the concert's wild, electronic romps brought to the surface. The third Family Dog dance -- a "Tribute to Ming the Merciless," a villain in the Marvel Comic book series who opposed Flash Gordon and other superheroes -- summoned into existence a public sphere that manifested the strange interaction between embodiment and mass-mediation that marked the civics of rock in the 1960s. So, too, this event demonstrated that the idealistic vision of this
public sphere could be interrupted by ignored and unconfronted problems of class and race, exclusion and inclusion.

Taking place the same night as the first San Francisco Mime Troupe Appeal Benefit, the Tribute to Ming the Merciless demonstrated vividly how the emerging form of the rock music performance in San Francisco brought embodiment and mass-mediated representation into a complex relationship with each other. A poster for the event explained that the tribute was to be "in the form of a wham-bang wide open stoned dance flicking on at dusk." The notion that the event would "flick on at dusk" like a television set hinted at a consciousness of the ways in which the new spaces of this public sphere were at once embodied and mediated.

Figure 1.9. A poster announcing the third Family Dog event, "A Tribute to Ming the Merciless! in the form of a wham-bang wide open stoned dance flicking on at dusk," November 6, 1965 (artist: unknown, courtesy: www.chickenonaunicycle.com)

Chet Helms, a participant who had become increasingly active in the Family Dog since his arrival from Texas with friend Janis Joplin, articulated to Ralph Gleason the ways in which he and others envisioned the civics of rock that could arise through events such as the Family Dog dances: "We want to make our lives as rich and colorful as we can, like a permanent color TV show going on all the time." The effort Helms conveyed involved an attempt by the Family Dog to transform the forms of popular mass entertainment into new modes of living. Through creative dancing, costume-wearing, electronic music, and intensive interaction, participants could form the basis for a new order, a new *civitas*.

This was the dream. But it was rudely interrupted by the specter of violence at the Tribute to Ming the Merciless. As if to fulfill the tribute to a villain eager to attract followers for his evil plots of destruction, the dance, according to participant and historian Charles Perry, attracted a huge quotient of hostile, curious teenagers. Grateful Dead historian Dennis McNally notes that many of these newcomers to the Family Dog dance might have been members of San Francisco teenage gangs. Fistfights broke out in the parking lot and on the dance floor. One of the plate-glass doors that led into the hall was smashed. On stage, Frank Zappa's Los Angeles group, the Mothers, performed improvised, sardonic songs about the violence around them. Music historian Joel Selvin describes Luria Castell leaping in to break up a fight by punching out one of the teenagers herself.

The dance demonstrated that utopia was not so easily generated. Resentment, anger, and conflict -- perhaps some of it the result of class tensions between working-class San Francisco and Bay Area teenagers whose lived revolved around gangs, drinking, and turf

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battles and more affluent, slightly older college students, who had embraced flamboyant public displays of weird costumes and free-form dancing as well as open expressions of intimacy and personal identity sparked by hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD. This violence, erupting in the "wham-bang wide open stoned" spaces generated and sustained by the new forms of rock music performance in San Francisco, would continue to plague the oddly embodied, yet unincorporated, public sphere that seemed to arise at the interstices of new, tentative family formations, the expansion of new forms of commerce, and the ever-watchful, concerned, potentially-repressive eye of the state. The reconstituted public sphere made possible by events such as the Family Dog Tributes also raised the problems of deciding how the contours and dimensions of this public sphere were to be filled, and who could assert themselves as citizens in the new civics of rock.

The question, as Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters so playfully and profoundly raised it, was whether participants could "pass the Acid Test" in order to sustain the public sphere that "flicked on at dusk." Would participants be able to broadcast utopia in the collapsing dialectic of embodiment and representation, or would they, just as often, air a violence that reached out as cruelly as Ming the Merciless, punching out participants who thought they were just appropriating the innocuous fodder of lowbrow mass culture?

"Can You Pass the Acid Test?": The Questioning Public Sphere of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters

Sayings from the Merry Pranksters: "Be in your own movie." "Leave no turn unstoned." "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" Like the Appeal Benefit and the Family Dog Tributes, the Acid Tests of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters evolved into a public sphere
that arose in spaces that combined embodiment and mass-mediation at the interstices of family, market, and state. With Kesey's literal family, and the Prankster's extended sense of private gang at their center, with the profits from Kesey's novel *The Cuckoo's Nest* supporting their massive expenditures on electronic, film, and audio-visual equipment, and with the state's continual pressure on Kesey for his drug use, which forced him to flee to Mexico and eventually serve a term in a work-farm jail, the Acid Tests most of all illuminated the relationship between this new public sphere in the San Francisco area and the presence of psycho-active drugs, especially LSD.89

The Acid Tests only gradually emerged from the private realm of Ken Kesey's parties, which took place in the early 1960s, first among the bohemian writers and artists connected to Stanford University and living on Perry Lane in Palo Alto, then in his house in the more rural town of La Honda further south on the peninsula below San Francisco. The first official Acid Test, in fact, was held in a private house outside Santa Cruz on November 27, 1965. On December 4th, another private house in San Jose served as the setting for a larger Acid Test for four hundred people the night after a Rolling Stones concert at the Cow Palace. On December 17, an Acid Test took place at a lodge by Muir Beach in Marin County, north of San Francisco, when a similar event fell through at close-by Stinson Beach. By January 8th, 1966, the Acid Test traveled to the Fillmore Auditorium, where over two thousand four hundred participants attended. Various Acid Tests with audiences followed in 1966 at the Trips Festival at Longshoreman's Hall, San Francisco State University, and up

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89 See Wolfe, *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. 
and down the West Coast in Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles.  

A handbill created for the Muir Beach Acid Test hinted at this drive to rearrange self and group, identity and collectivity through the onslaught of electricity -- with rock music as a central component. The handbill is cluttered with information, including the famous phrase "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" emerging from the drawings of various artsy looking characters and (as with the Family Dog Tributes) comic book superheroes. At the center of the handbill, a dotted line invites the recipient to rearrange the artwork as a long rectangular strip that could be rolled up into a scroll rather than as a normal-sized piece of paper. Instructions for this appear in miniscule, sideways type. "Happeners are likely to include," the drawing explains, groups such as The Fugs, Allen Ginsberg, the Grateful Dead, the Merry Pranksters, a light show by Roy's Audioptics, and "huge rumbly" movies. Though a small bubble at the bottom of the handbill offers "comfort," what the poster most represents is the chaos that the event promises to unleash: the "huge rumbly" sights and sounds of the Acid Test. "Bring heroes," the drawing warns. 

Most prominently, on the right side of the handbill, a giant thumbprint interrupts the flow of color and lettering. "Now you can tell which one is us," a strip of writing explains about the thumbprint. This thumbprint hints at the effort to renegotiate individual identity and collective affiliation among strangers gathering at the Acid Tests. If part of passing the test referred to taking LSD and surviving the experience, the other part of passing the test seemed to involve this effort -- a detective story of sorts -- to measure the relationship

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between individuality and collectivity by tracing out fingerprints, measurements of the absolute uniqueness of each person, in relation to notions of "us," or collectivity. There is the possibility of discovery here, of solving the mystery, but the isolated thumbprint more powerfully suggests the loss of sure-handed identity. "Now you can tell which one is us," seems ironic; the point is that you cannot solve the mystery unless you enter into the process: the securing of a kind of true, heroic individuality only lurks within a journey through the swirls of identity and collectivity that the Acid Test promises to unleash. And even then the answer might not make itself manifest.

Figure 1.10. "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" handbill, Muir Beach Acid Test, December 17, 1965 (artist: Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, courtesy: www.pranksterweb.org)
Drug use and electricity formed a powerful combination at the Acid Tests. As famously portrayed by the journalist Tom Wolfe, the Acid Tests featured the handing out of cups of Kool Aid "dosed" with LSD. But Acid Tests were more than just drug parties. As Kesey told Wolfe, they were, "forms of expression in which there would be no separation between himself and the audience. It would be all one experience, with all the senses opened wide, words, music, lights, sounds, touch -- lightning."\(^9\) The Merry Pranksters utilized enormous amounts of electronic equipment to shape and enhance the use of LSD, often stressing the disorientation that manipulations of sound and light could produce for individual identity and collective affiliation.

The Pranksters joined forces with the Grateful Dead for the sound component; at times, both groups would perform on electronic guitars and sound equipment simultaneously at opposite ends of the performance spaces. Between them, strobe lights flashed, blue lights emphasized the Day-Glo colors painted on the electronic machines and on individual faces and bodies. According to Kesey, the Acid Tests resulted from the fact that Saturday night parties at his house in La Honda, "got bigger and bigger until finally La Honda couldn't hold them and we started branching out with the Dead.... We would set it up with the Dead at one end and the Pranksters at the other end and kind of rally back and forth with the sound. Each of the scenes got bigger."\(^9\)

Reminding us of how San Francisco's "sound is also a scene," the scenes of the Acid Tests continually expanded to include more participants. The private affairs and parties among friends and acquaintances grew into increasingly complex configurations of music,


drugs, and electronics as they went public. To return to Vito Acconci's language, the Acid Tests went from "clusters" to "organization." However, by combining hallucinogenic drug use with seizures of mass mediation and mass communication, the Acid Tests also produced a public sphere in which new forms of social engagement and interaction might come into being "on the run," as Acconci puts it. "After we started doing the Acid Tests in La Honda," Ken Kesey remembered, "the thing that made them exciting was the fact that they were entertaining but it wasn't a closed circle. We hadn't planned our entertainment to the point that everybody knew for sure how it was going to end up."94

Electricity was a crucial component at the Acid Tests. Charles Perry remembered how at the Fillmore event, "the Pranksters were able to wire the place up with microphones and speakers in unexpected places, so you might be downstairs watching somebody make a fool of himself on the closed-circuit TV and suddenly hear something you'd said upstairs a few minutes ago broadcast all over the hall. The floor was littered with electronic boxes and skeins of electrical cable. They had packed in so much electronic equipment the whole hall had a low, dull buzzing sound."95 But, the focus on the public use of LSD was what most distinguished the Acid Tests from similar multimedia affairs. "It had that acid edge to it," Ken Kesey claimed. "Which is, 'There is something that might count.' We might conjure up some eighty-foot demon that roars around. As Stewart Brand said, there was always a whiff of danger to it."96 Phil Lesh, bassist for the Grateful Dead, recalled that, "Nobody could have

94 Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 138.

95 Perry, The Haight-Ashbury, 42.

96 Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 138. Stewart Brand was a Bay Area cultural activist, artist, and sometime Merry Prankster who organized the Trips Festival at Longshoreman's Hall in January 1967.
guessed that you could give thousands of people acid in one room and not have it blow up from the psychic energy. My main visual image was the sea of people, with waves rippling through it." In this space, as Lesh remembers it, "The energy and light of it, people became light, the light solidified into people." What had begun as a private ritual with Kesey and his friends grew increasingly public, bringing strangers together in a space that moved individual identities between embodiment and mass-mediation, what Lesh saw as "people" becoming "light" and "light" becoming "people," back and forth in a flow of energy, constituting a "sea of people, with waves rippling through it."

Film footage made by the Pranksters of various Acid Tests hints at the powerful public sphere that the events constituted out of people and light, embodiment and mass-mediation. We see dancers frantically moving around the dance floor. Dressed in everything from angel's wings to demonic face-painting to casual Beatnik attire to straight-laced button-up shirts and pants, the dancers are loosely in couples, interactive pairs not much different from the piston-pumping mechanical parts of swing-era jitterbuggers. But the dancers increasingly break apart into a more ambiguous arrangement of group and individuals, nuclei with electrons splitting off. It is as if they have moved from representing the piston engines of the mechanical age to the nuclear power of the Cold War space age.

The music mirrors this passage from one technological era to another. The Grateful Dead perform electrified rhythm-and-blues songs such as "I'm a King Bee," with leather-jacketed lead singer Ron McKernan, known as Pigpen, singing and playing harmonica as

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98 *The Acid Test* (Key-Z Productions, 1992).
Jerry Garcia provides classic blues licks on the guitar. As it did with the Quicksilver Messenger Service at the Calliope Company's Dance of Death, the Grateful Dead's music actually manages to root the strange proceedings in a semblance of order -- the steady pulsations of the twelve-bar blues form. But, as Jerry Garcia noted years later in a television documentary about rock music, "What we did was R&B plus a large amount of weirdness inserted into it." Playing for extended periods of time, the band could quickly leave one of the most familiar and steady forms of American popular music -- the rhythm and harmonies breaking down into more free-form explorations that only turned the dancing in new, less insistently repetitive directions.

As the Grateful Dead played or rested along with the dancers, Merry Pranksters such as Neal Cassady, Ken Babbs, and Ken Kesey provided an ongoing, spontaneous narrative for the event, combining references to LSD with the metaphor of the electronic age, space travel, to give some shape to the questioning public sphere of the Acid Tests. "Did you know that the inner space race is supposedly being raged furiously between other nations and us although it's supposedly kept hush hush." "Soon this vast spaceship will be off the pad and well on its way."

LSD appears in cups, the "rocket fuel needed to enter this new configuration." "The engine room coming in loud and clear." "We've lost all power" ("power, power, power," echoes in the public address system). "I see that the electrician is running down now trying to get things reestablished. We're into emergency power now, having to rely on the energy which the passengers are able to create by donating everything they have." "Ain't no power

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on the stage. No electricity on the stage. Fix it." "There are wires all around here plugged into electricity, all around here." "Hey man, stop your babbling and fix these microphones." "Power, power, Power." "We need the power." "Our best technicians are now on the problem." "You got the power?" Pigpen sings. The crowd chants, "Power! Power!"

"Cassidy however will remain in his post in the projection booth in order to keep driving this ship through whatever electrical and meteor shower we encounter. We'll keep all the stations alive on the line and the old pointed-head will continue to monitor from his post." The police arrive. "The cops seem to be turning everything off. And they have asked everybody to be turned off. That's impossible. You know as well as I do that nobody is going to be turned off. We're not machines after all. We're human beings." "He can try to turn me off, but all my switches have been short-circuited."

Suddenly everyone is manically singing the "Star-Spangled Banner" as if it were the most profound, yet the funniest, song ever created. Kesey or Cassady's voice appears on the microphone: "Just as we have feared we are in a decaying orbit. But according to our latest report from our chief engineer, we will achieve a soft, safe landing, so there's no cause for alarm. The legal beagle has given the chief security officer the necessary power to take command of the ship. And at any time he may shut down all electrical operation. Until then, the captain assures me, we'll keep all lines open."

A voice in the Prankster film footage jokingly refers to the Acid Test activities as "orderly chaos." As the inventive, punning slogan, "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" implied, these events were both trials of drug experimentation and attempts at social alchemy,

\hspace{1cm}^{100} \textit{The Acid Test.}
transmuting the lead of everyday life into grand-historical, utopian gold. At their center was a question about the kinds of selfhood and collectivity that might be possible in the Vietnam-era United States. In imagery created by the Merry Pranksters, the question mark holds a place of prominence and honor. As Ken Kesey would later say, "The answer is never the answer. What's really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you'll always be seeking. I've never seen anybody really find the answer-- they think they have, so they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery.... The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer."\textsuperscript{101}

![Can You Pass the Acid Test?](image)

Figure 1.11. "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" Uncle Sam Handbill (date and artist: unknown, courtesy: www.pranksterweb.org)

At the Acid Tests themselves, the Pranksters often adopted the iconography of American nationhood. Uncle Sam asked if you could pass the acid test on handbills. The Pranksters utilized the American flag as decoration or cut-up into costumes, as if to raise the question of the nation's true possibilities for individual and collective freedom, purpose, and

social and political order. Rarely did the Acid Tests provide answers. But in an era when Civil Rights, generational tensions, and especially the Vietnam War were propelling questions and conflicts about the nature and meaning of the United States as a nation into full view -- particularly through mass-mediated representations on television -- the Acid Tests created a microcosmic space in which the stakes of Americanness might be explored more fully. Recalling seeing the Grateful Dead perform during an Acid Test at San Francisco State University, the artist Dan Wilson recollected, "The music they played was so full of fun -- life! And I was worried already about the Army and the Vietnam War, and that was so dreary -- it's death. And here was the Grateful Dead, just the opposite."

Overall, through performances engaging LSD and electricity, the Acid Tests produced a questioning public sphere whose central inquiries into the nature of individual identity and collective organization invited participants to enter into a process of discovery. "With the Acid Test," Chester Anderson wrote in a 1966 article, "where Ken Kesey played an integral part, came strobe lights and fluid projections, the possibility of creating a total environment with lights and sounds, amplified, electronic, guaranteed to blow your mind....People who never danced before were cutting loose, making and wearing their own costumes." By "blowing your mind," an ambiguous but key phrase that appears often, one that combined the excitement of new possibilities with a hint of violence and destruction, the Acid Tests fostered a questioning public sphere from which new modes and structures of

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102 Carol Brightman, *Sweet Chaos: The Grateful Dead's American Adventure* (New York: Crown, 1998), 167. If Wilson saw the Grateful Dead at a San Francisco State University Acid Test and not elsewhere, it was probably the Sound City Acid Test, 29 January 1966, or the Whatever It Is Festival, 2 October 1966. It is also possible Wilson saw the band at another Acid Test around San Francisco.

individuality and collectivity might emerge. Based on his experiences at the Acid Tests, for instance, Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia decided to have faith in the notion that, "Formlessness and chaos leads to new forms. And new order. Closer to, probably, what the real order is."\textsuperscript{104} He decided to follow the question mark wherever it led.

This question mark at the center of the Acid Tests, a symbol of the "formlessness and chaos" that might lead to "new forms" and "new order," seems linked to what the art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, borrowing from the political philosopher Claude Lefort, has called, "the question that gives rise to public space."\textsuperscript{105} Deutsche writes about public art in contemporary America, but we might apply her theories of the public sphere to the Acid Tests as performative public art from the 1960s. Out of the explosive combination of psychoactive drugs, a theatrical orientation, and massive amounts of electronically-produced sound and imagery, the Acid Tests sought to open up new spaces for social interaction.

This focus on opening up new spaces resonates with Deutsche's conceptualizations of


the democratic public sphere that public art might be able to foster by continually asking questions rather than providing answers. "Linked to the image of an empty place," Deutsche argues, "democracy is a concept capable of interrupting the dominant language of democracy that engulfs us today. But democracy retains the capacity continually to question power and put existing social orders into question only if we do not flee from the question -- the unknowability of the social -- that generates the public space at democracy's heart.…But when the question of democracy is replaced with a positive identity, when critics speak in the name of absolute rather than contingent -- which is to say, political -- meanings of the social, democracy can be mobilized to compel acquiescence in new forms of subordination."\(^\text{106}\)

The centrality of the question mark indicates the radical democratic impulses of the Merry Pranksters, but their increased reliance on Kesey as guru points to the ways in which hierarchical, authoritarian power always threatened to flood into the open spaces that this radical democracy made available. The push and pull at the Acid Tests was between the critical inquiry of the question mark and the chants of "power, power, power," echoing through the mass-mediated technology of the "total environment." As Tom Wolfe chronicled in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, the Pranksters depended on Kesey, who they called "Chief," for guidance and direction. The Pranksters often shifted from open, democratic interaction into a more hierarchical, almost militaristic organization. Part of this came from the presence of Ken Babbs, a helicopter pilot just back from Vietnam, as a kind of second-in-command to Kesey. But other participants in the San Francisco counterculture noticed an

\(^{106}\) Deutsche, 275.
authoritarianism interrupting the potentially more democratic public assemblage of the Acid Tests.

As Family Dog promoter Chet Helms recollected, part of this authoritarian creep resulted from Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' willingness to engage groups and people, such as the Hell's Angels, who tended to be automatically disqualified or excluded from any sort of public sphere. "In fairness to Ken," Helms explained, "I think he had a lot of faith in his abilities to transform people and in the ability of acid to transform them. He had some illusions that he was going to transform them. He had some illusions that he was going to transform the Hell's Angels. Which to some extent he did." But Helms also noticed that, "there was a very military tone to Kesey's trips....It even extended over to their affection for
the Angels and wearing of colors and uniforms. A kind of militancy in collective action.”

The Acid Tests posed such a radical alternative, such a wide-open question mark, for the public sphere that it faced enormous pressure, both externally from the state apparatus chasing Kesey on various marijuana charges, and internally, as other participants in the San Francisco counterculture felt threatened by Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' unpredictable slide from radically-open democracy into authoritarian power. In seeking to explore how far the questioning public sphere might extend, the Acid Tests could only thunder mightily but briefly. The "lightning" that Kesey hoped would occur in his conversation with Tom Wolfe, flashed quickly, suddenly, powerfully -- but briefly. The final Acid Test was an "Acid Test Graduation," held on Halloween, 1966. Pressured by the state to make public his opposition to LSD use in return for a plea bargain on his marijuana possession charges, Kesey at first planned to hold the event at Bill Graham's Winterland Ballroom. But Graham canceled the event because he did not trust that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters would not prevent the affair from turning dangerous. "Never trust a Prankster," Graham had learned from a Kesey-coined aphorism.

The "Acid Test Graduation" took place instead at the Calliope Company's warehouse in San Francisco's skid row district. The Graduation utilized civic symbols to signify the closing up of the liminal, temporary spaces -- the questioning public sphere -- it had created out of electronics and LSD. Wearing flag costumes, Kesey and the Pranksters all received diplomas handed out by Neal Cassady. As the poster for the event announced, "You passed,

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you passed, you passed. Kesey remembered a feeling that the questioning public sphere of the Acid Tests had lost its power. "By the time I came back to San Francisco in October for the Acid Test at San Francisco State, things had changed," Kesey explained. "People had begun to sum it up just the way the Mafia would divide parts of Chicago. It happened that fast. We were planning to do this Acid Test Graduation with the Dead but people I had never heard of were in charge of the large halls. I had no intention of being a rock and roll entrepreneur, ever...."

Figure 1.14. Acid Test Graduation poster, October 31, 1966, planned for Winterland Ballroom, the event took place at the Calliope Company's Warehouse (artist: unknown, courtesy: www.pranksterweb.org)

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110 Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 169.
But even after Kesey removed himself and the Pranksters from promoting rock shows in the San Francisco scene, rock music ballrooms, as well as rock concerts in the outdoor spaces of San Francisco's parks and streets, retained something of the questioning public sphere. As Kesey himself recognized when asked in a television interview in October 1966 what could replace acid after the Acid Test Graduation: "Jerry Garcia with his music knows pieces of it." The pieces that Garcia's music contained were fragments of the Acid Tests' original impulse toward fostering a radically democratic space through LSD and electronics.

Figure 1.15. Acid Test Graduation Diploma, October 31, 1966 (artist: unknown, courtesy: www.pranksterweb.org)

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Though Kesey rejected an active role in this new world of rock promoters and entrepreneurs, a world Garcia would ambivalently embrace, the novelist always sought to preserve the spirit of the Acid Tests, where participants sought out the unknown in a space both embodied and mediated, where public experimentation allowed participants to investigate the possibilities and limits of individual freedom and collective transformation. As he later revealed, Kesey had consulted the *I Ching* before the Acid Test Graduation; following the coin toss verdict of the hexagram Fu, the lead Merry Prankster, according to historian Charles Perry, noted that, "the commentary chapters of the book declared there would be change, but not brought about by force, societies of people sharing the same views would form publicly and in harmony with the time, so there would be neither separatism nor any mistakes."\(^{112}\)

**Dancing in the Ballrooms, Dancing in the Streets, Dancing in the Public Sphere**

The Appeal Benefits, Family Dog Tribute Dances, and Acid Tests left a legacy of public life in San Francisco that continued throughout the late 1960s. Through rock music especially, the sound that was also a scene expanded, established links to other locales, incorporated a mass audience as participants flocked to the city, and acquired a mass-mediated representation as the central site of the countercultural public sphere. Dancing inside the psychedelic ballrooms and outside in the parks and streets of San Francisco sustained this countercultural public sphere.

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\(^{112}\) Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 103.
The dance -- in both its embodied forms and as represented on posters and in photographs -- became a central mode of public interaction. Dancers sought to reimagine and reestablish individual identity and collective affiliation in the new context of the mass public and the mass subject. They did so in spaces that were at once immediate and distant, materially-rooted in the interacting bodies yet mediated by floods of light shows and the noise of amplified music. As participant and historian Charles Perry put it, "The dancers were everything: creative but selfless, serious but high-spirited, exalted but down to earth. ...the dances were like religious rituals. There was a sense of confronting ultimate reality, moving toward a breakthrough -- even perhaps on the political level, as when the musicians sang songs touching on the prospect of nuclear war (Quicksilver's 'Pride of Man' or the Grateful Dead's 'Morning Dew')."

Drugs remained a crucial factor in the dances, but they increasingly fit into the larger performative spaces of the psychedelic ballrooms such as Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium, Chet Helms' Family Dog at the Avalon Ballroom, and other venues such as the band-owned Carousel Ballroom, California Hall, and the Straight Theater. "The mere fact of being immersed in a sea of hundreds of like-minded heads produced an intoxication of its own," Charles Perry explained. "San Francisco LSD users developed a special confidence about what they were doing and a freedom from that reflex of trying to conceal one's association with mind drugs that was typical of other psychedelic enthusiasts. They were publicly outrageous. Nothing terrible happened when the public gatherings began, and the proceedings had taken on an aura of destiny."

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113 Perry, The Haight-Ashbury, 56.

114 Perry, The Haight-Ashbury, 55.
Bands sang about drug experiences, of course. Poster art grew wilder in an effort to represent the psychedelic life. The light shows became more complex, inventive, and daring. But drugs increasingly became a means to sustaining a public, not an end for this countercultural public sphere. "We usually went to the Fillmore both Friday and Saturday nights," photographer Suki King remembered, "to photograph, dance, listen to the fabulous bands and just be where it was 'happening.' ...To dance in the midst of the light shows, created by artists like Ben Van Meter, was a new and exciting experience. Our particular group of chums was not particularly into drugs, we were thrilled with the whole new ambiance."¹¹⁵

Though Bill Graham's events at the Fillmore Auditorium and Winterland Ballroom grew increasingly into shows, moving from Family Dog-inspired tributes to cartoon characters such as the Great Blondin' and Batman and Robin to presentations of emerging international rock music stars such as the Butterfield Blues Band, Otis Redding, Cream, the Who, and Jimi Hendrix, they retained a sense of participation by the audience. The looser gatherings put together by Chet Helms at the Avalon Ballroom and by various bands at the Carousel Ballroom particularly maintained this sprit. "The audience made its own contribution to the event," Charles Perry noted of the dance hall scene in 1966 and 1967. "Many individuals came in costume, painting their faces and carrying on more like a running Beaux Arts Ball than a spectator show." Perry chronicled how, "People brought things to share, such as food or Day-Glo paints with which to decorate each other's bodies or paint designs on the floor (the dance halls soon set up ultraviolet lights at various places to make

the Day-Glo patterns fluoresce more brilliantly). Or little toys: soap bubble blowers, bells, convex mirrors.\textsuperscript{116}

These imaginative acts of engagement in the civics of rock took place in an environment that continually brought embodiment and mass-mediation into an ongoing dialectical relationship with each other. Carole Brightman noticed that many participants remembered the halls most of all "via the senses." Quoting Joel Selvin, a San Francisco Chronicle copy boy who went on after the 1960s to become the newspaper's chief pop music critic, Brightman explained how the liquid light shows "weren't projected into screens; they 'covered the end of the room,' along with flashing strobes. The smell of incense was mixed with pot, and with the odors of bodies twisting and bobbing to music that seemed very loud at the time, and was. It was a case of 'sensory envelopment,' Selvin says, 'an overload.'\textsuperscript{117}

The dances continued to sustain a public sphere that, in miniature, engaged the problems and possibilities of the mass public and the mass subject. Still confronting state interference from San Francisco's city governments, participants made creative use of seemingly civic associational activities to battle restrictions. Led by modern dancer Caitlin Huggins and jazz dancer Annette Rice of the Straight Theater Dance Workshop, The Straight held dance lessons in September of 1967 when the theater could not obtain a nightclub license. Handing out 2000 "student body cards," the lessons featured a bit of calisthenics, then Huggins and Rice invited their students to engage in improvisational dance to the music

\textsuperscript{116} Perry, The Haight-Ashbury, 55.

\textsuperscript{117} Brightman, Sweet Chaos, 91.
and words of additional instructors such as Jerry Garcia and Ron "Pig Pen" McKernan of the Grateful Dead, along with Neal Cassady.

Figure 1.16. Poster for a Straight Theater "Dance Class," registration fee: $2.50, September 29-30, 1967 (artist: unknown, courtesy: www.chickenonaunicycle.com)

The poster for the event explained: "The Board of Permit Appeals presents...Dance Your Misery Away. Professional dance lessons -- 5 hours for only $2.50. Instructors include Jerome Garcia, Dr. P. Pen." Later, "environmental dance classes" were held, and Ann Halprin of the San Francisco Dancer's Workshop and an originator of avant-garde art happenings led still other variations on the dance lesson concerts. As with the Acid Test

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119 See the "Straight from the Haight" website, run by Reg. E. Gaines, who helped run the Straight Theater, for more details on the dance lesson concerts: http://www.thestraight.com/dance.html.
graduation, an old civic activity was appropriated for purposes of sustaining the new public sphere of the counterculture at the edge just beyond state intervention.

Charged with the erotics of bodies interacting, the dance halls also carried on a spirit of civic religion that first appeared at the Family Dog Tribute dances and elsewhere. The dances mingled embodiment with electronic mediation among strangers gathered together in a public space. One dancer, Elizabeth Gips, recalled an event at the Avalon Ballroom: "For me there was the ordinary-extraordinary light show and music and the extraordinary-ordinary men and women flickering on and off under the strobes. The Grateful Dead were playing. Suddenly some man, obviously having a weird trip on something, flipped out, jumped on the stage and commandeered the microphone. After a shouting harangue, he stripped off his clothes, yelling all the time, extremely disturbed."

With the event threatening to disintegrate into a dangerous chaos, the Haight-Ashbury activist Stephen Gaskin, "got up on the podium in front of the Dead and started to aum. Within seconds the entire room was auming. It began low, but these were seasoned Haight Ashbury aum-ers. The sound expanded, expanded until it took over the room and filled every synapse in every brain. People closed in together. Body was pressed against body. The Dead played behind the aum. Minutes went by. The aum grew and grew. Hands held, arms raised to heaven, it was ecstatic music of the angels. The room left the earth…. We were individuals melded in a great cosmic embrace. For that evening, we knew ourselves for Who We Truly Are."120

Gips speaks in mystical, religious terms, but her comments point toward the ways in which rock dances fostered a public space. The chanting, breathing, and dancing of bodies interacted with the electric amplification of the Grateful Dead to produce a powerful arena for grappling with the intimate, immediate roles of individuals and communities in the new context of a mass culture. Even a "bad trip" on LSD might be overcome, or at least confronted. To Gips, "individuals melded in a great cosmic embrace" and the possibilities of the electronic age seemed to point toward a way to discover true selfhood, paradoxically, in the temporary loss of selfhood, an experience not unlike Michael Warner's description of the experience of subjectivity and identity in the mass public.

Rock dances continually raised questions of power, control, and freedom that arose in the psychedelic ballroom dialectic between embodiment and mass-mediation. These were not merely easy-going, utopian events; nor were they manipulative, distopian affairs. They were complex engagements with the possibilities and problems of public life in mass culture. An announcement written by countercultural activist Chester Anderson for a series of 1967 concerts at California Hall indicated how the urge to produce a profound transformation of the self and the social through the engagement of electronic stimuli could veer between the liberatory and the authoritarian. After listing various problems and disappointments with the current performance styles, Anderson declared that he was helping to organize three concerts: Bedrock One, Two, and Three. He explained that, "the first will be better than sex, the second will be better than the first, and we expect to have to flee the city after the third."¹²¹

Anderson emphasized how the concerts, as a "genuine Art Form," could produce a space for new forms of individual and collective transformation. "We feel that a rock dance should change your life, & we intend to see that it does." Yet, he was unwilling to settle for the possibility that participants might take responsibility for this transformation themselves. The promoters had to direct and control the process. "We intend to evolve the art of the rock dance to the point that we can get any audience HIGH, any kind of high we choose, without the aid of narcotics or other chemical copouts." Referencing Marshall McLuhan and seeking to make use of the electronic technologies so central to the dialectic of embodiment and mass-mediation that defined the San Francisco rock performance space, Anderson argued that the promoters would be able to shape the concert experience through a process of feedback, by monitoring and responding to events on the dance floor. "During each dance, we'll have crew members go on the floor with walkie-talkies to coordinate activities. We'll be able to tune the audience like a guitar. In fact, we intend to play the audience like a guitar. An electric guitar. Hard."

This startling comparison, in which the audience has become an electric guitar, points to the potential for new forms of subjectivity and collectivity that countercultural activists sensed in the civics of rock. The self might be reconstituted in the space of the rock concert as audience members simultaneously lost and found themselves in the dance. Like Elizabeth Gips, Anderson turned to religion as a means of trying to describe what sorts of transformations might be possible: "Any rock dance that isn't a religious event is a stone drag," he declared.

But with the potential for positive transformation through the assault of electricity
came the problems of authoritarian control. Anderson's description of the Bedrock concerts also revealed an urge -- similar to Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters -- to play the outlaw figure, the vigilante who wields control of people outside the law, often through the threat of danger or even violence. The promoters might have to flee after the concert and, "once we've fled the city -- pursued by angry parents & officials -- we'll write a handbook for anyone else who wants to throw a REAL rock dance. We may call it RAPE IS AN ACT OF LOVE."

This phrase, "RAPE IS AN ACT OF LOVE," hints at the toying with violence that Anderson and other counterculturists explored through rock music performances. It certainly revealed the masculinist and misogynist desires at work in rock music and the counterculture.

But, the phrase was not merely a sign of misogyny; other meanings lurked in the collapse of rape and love in the imagining of Anderson's Bedrock concerts. This phrase, after all, came from a person who, later in the spring of 1967, bemoaned that, "Rape is as common as bullshit on Haight Street," in a bitterly self-critical broadsheet about the many failures of the counterculture. "RAPE IS AN ACT OF LOVE" might be understood in this context as a metaphor that encapsulated the frustrations as well as the dreams of countercultural uses of multimedia rock performance. Anderson was not interested in literally raping anyone; what he desired was the ability to insist that and force people to experience the religious-like subjectivity and collectivity that Elizabeth Gips described when she felt that she and others had become "individuals melded in a great cosmic embrace."

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123 To add another layer of complexity to the use of language that was sexually violent and ostensibly misogynist, Anderson's own sexuality tilted toward the homosexual, as documents in the Chester Anderson papers at the Bancroft Library at the University of California - Berkeley suggest. See the manuscript "Puppies," written under the pseudonym John Valentine.
As metaphor, "RAPE IS AN ACT OF LOVE" raised central ethical dilemmas for the public sphere that hyper-electrified, multimedia rock performances made possible: Who was to control them and how? Who had agency and who did not? What was the balance between assault and agency? Could the energies of the rock dance be generated and directed? Anderson was not interested in destruction; he wanted to "tune the audience & make it receptive to what's about to happen, make it spiritually ready to love, and then, at the close, to prepare it for the outside world again." But his urge to force the audience in particular directions, even with noble intentions, revealed the difficult stakes of public life in the psychedelic dance. The use of a metaphor referring to sexual violence made visible the powerful gender dynamics lurking in the charged erotic spaces of the dance halls and performance spaces in San Francisco.

Anderson's document was, of course, a prediction for the experiences that might take place within the psychedelic dance hall. Bob Chamberlain, a photographer and artist, offered a rich description of what the dance actually was like when he published a stream-of-consciousness account of a night at the Avalon Ballroom in the experimental magazine, Aspen. Chamberlain's essay emphasized the erotic energies that emerged as strangers gathered together in the dialectic of embodiment and electronic mediation; the space of the dance floor that Chamberlain moved across was one in which an air of Chester Anderson's "RAPE IS AN ACT OF LOVE" lurked. But it also could become a beneficent space in which individual identities and group formations seemed to mutate temporarily, offering possibilities for new senses of the self and society.
Most intriguingly for a space in which someone might, even metaphorically, suggest that rape could be an act of love, women were able to assert themselves in new ways, using their bodies to assert their visibility and agency in public outside of older forms of leisure interaction. While the psychedelic dance halls were not sites of a full-blown women's liberation movement, the liminality of these spaces with respect to constructions of the self and society perhaps provided one channel that fed into increased awareness about gender.\textsuperscript{124}

Chamberlain's description emphasized the erotics among strangers gathered together in the electronically-mediated space of the dance. The experimental form of Chamberlain's essay, which resembles a similar prose style to Tom Wolfe in \textit{The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test}, helps establish a mood of liminality and uncertainty, a mixture of hope and doubt, utopian possibility for achieving true selfhood and also the lurking possibility of losing hold on the self. The narrative circles between tentative observation and absorption into the dance, back and forth between perceptions of others and gauging of how the stimuli of the ballroom is affecting Chamberlain himself. As narrator caught between embodiment and mediation, Chamberlain feels the dance reaching into him even as he looks out on it.

Approaching the dance hall, Chamberlain notices, "groovy little girls bouncing up and down without really knowing bursting out with short little motions of sensual impatience as waveless of electronic sound teasingly spill rolling down the stairs promising everything." Then, entering the room, he declared, "this is it, this is San Francisco's Avalon Ballroom where they used to come dance to 1930's swing bands... mirrors, carpeted lounges,

chandeliers, draperies on the ceilings, and a dance floor on springs... buzzing buzzing buzzing buzzing electric music buzzing through the airwaves, flickflickflickflickflickflick strobe light flicking energy quanta into the dancers and bouncing back out of the mirrors, ultraviolet tubes floating in space overhead making fuzzy double images when you look into them, finally coming down to a focus somewhere back inside behind the retina, somewhere you don't ordinarily see from, and at the far end the transistorized band of electric speakers swimming in a protoplasmic swirling bath of colors that rolls and surges with the music and spills over onto the floor and the spongelike listenwatchers...."

In Chamberlain's account, the electricity of light and sound, the "buzzing buzzing buzzing buzzing electric music buzzing through the airwaves" and the "flickflickflickflickflickflick strobe light flicking energy quanta," merged in and diverged out of the dancers and "spongelike listenwatchers." He finds himself able to "weave molecularly through the dancers." "As long as I keep moving with the music and the lights there is no collision-danger, only a soft touching and rolling...because we are a part of what's going on as much as the lights and dancing, just as we feel what is happening, so we are felt by those above us and around us... just as we feel, so we are felt...."

The band urges the audience on, and suddenly Chamberlain finds himself joining hands with those around him, as if to represent the joining of strangers into a public assemblage in the presence of the loud electric sounds and the strobe lights. They create the groundwork for a public sphere of equals who are vulnerable in the blare and flash of the electronic age, but able to symbolically enact a recognition of collectivity and individuality

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through the dance. "The band starts out quiet and slow, '...it's so easy, all you have to do is
just reach out, just reach out in any direction, it doesn't make any difference...', people are
doing it, the band is picking it up, '...all you've gotta do is just re-e-a-ch o-u-t and t-a-k-e t-h-
e h-a-n-d t-h-a-t's c-l-o-s-e-s t o y-o-u-rs, it doesn't make any difference whose it is, it
doesn't make a-n-y difference...""

Figure 1.17. From couple to group dancing at the Straight Theater on Haight Street, probably
1968 (photograph: unknown, courtesy: www.thestraight.com)

Chamberlain realizes, "it's happening, people are doing it, other people are doing it,
joining up slowly, hesitating, long chains stretch out a hand to the uncertain as the sound
becomes music, 'just reach out and take that hand...', and it really is happening, the chains are
linking up everyone, everyone in the whole place into one giant skipping leaping dancing
snake whirling in and out through itself, surging, rushing, contracting, stretching, faster and
faster but never breaking, never colliding, hundreds of people together in an ecstatic
crescendo of whooping laughter..." The dance floor, now a space of "one giant skipping
leaping snake whirling in and out through itself" has become a bodily enactment of people
"never breaking, never colliding, hundreds of people together in an ecstatic crescendo of whooping laughter."

Within this public sphere fostered out of the interaction between embodiment and mass-mediation, Chamberlain becomes particularly aware of other dancers, particularly the women on the dance floor. His comments represent the male gaze, but they also suggest the ways in which women utilized the shift from older forms of couple dancing to the newer, psychedelic openness of individual and group dancing to assert themselves in a public realm. Entering the dance floor, Chamberlain notices how a "Mod teenie-bopper is just wailing away in the typical basic adolescent sex-machine mode but you can see that she's beginning to feel herself, beginning to feel herself move and getting fascinated, fascinated by the fact that she feels good to herself just moving, rolling a little at the end of the mechanical movements, and the deep ache coming on from somewhere...."

Figure 1.18. A woman dancing at the Straight Theater, probably 1967 (photograph: unknown, courtesy: www.thestraight.com)
Chamberlain wanders deeper into the crowd, "and a little further in a thin blonde is just pumping away as fast as she can, harder and harder, backbone arching, grit your teeth, it's ok, squint your eyes, it's ok, shake your head, it's ok, scratch, bite, it's ok, it's all right, it's all right, it's all right!... and a girl with long black hair from modern dance class working through all the movements, pushing up against the limits of each one, testing, testing, what will my body do, how will it move, where can it go that it has not yet been, how can it get outside the control of learned movements...."

Figure 1.19. Another woman dancing at the Straight Theater, probably 1967 (photograph: unknown, courtesy: www.thestraight.com)

These descriptions reveal the charged erotic space of the public sphere that was created in the psychedelic dance hall, a space that easily led to gendered power for men
eager to gaze at women. But, Chamberlain's observations also hint at the power women countered with when liberated from the couple formation of dancing. In the cacophonous roar of the electronic music and the blinding lights, a kind of microcosm of larger urban spaces of anonymity and estrangement, they could better ignore men who bothered them and tend to issues of self-discovery and creation, utilizing their bodies to, as Chamberlain put it, "get outside the control of learned movements."

Figure 1.20 and Figure 1.21. Redefining gender and the public sphere on the psychedelic dance floor, at the Trips Festival (left, photograph: Rod Mann) and Fillmore Auditorium, 1966 (right, photograph: Gene Anthony)

Like Bob Chamberlain, journalist Ralph Gleason noticed how the dancing had moved from the formal couple dancing of earlier decades to a new form of individual and group dancing that was less directly linked to earlier, more formalized modes of heterosexual courtship. Gleason recognized the lineage and genealogy of the dancing: "To begin with, though this dancing is free-form in the sense that you do whatever you are inspired to do, its basic step stems from the so-called 'bop' dancing of the mid-fifties, which in turn evolved
into the 'swim,' the 'twist,' the 'jerk,' and the rest of the teenage (or adult versions of teen-age) dances.\textsuperscript{126} But the codes of partner dancing were giving way to new modes of interaction.

These new forms of dancing were less driven by courtship. Instead, they emphasized erotic interactions among strangers improvising and projecting their subjectivity through bodily movement while moving through the enveloping electronic mediation of light and sound that the ballrooms contained. Though the dance floor had often allowed women to assert their subjectivities in public in the past, in the San Francisco rock performance spaces, women were able to assert themselves in public outside of the previous codes of heterosexual leisure activity.\textsuperscript{127} For instance, Gleason described an encounter between a young woman and man at the Fillmore Auditorium one night: "The young man...moves directly in front of her line-of-sight and about three feet away and as soon as their eyes lock and he is right in front of her, they both break into a wild rhythmic dancing, exactly as if the current has been turned on. They continue throughout the number and at its end turn away from one another and go their separate ways. They never spoke." To Gleason, young people such as this temporarily connected couple were "dancing in a wild, free-form, abandoned manner.... Urban America is producing an increasing body of people who want to dance. The bomb and the pill and the New Youth combine (and intertwine) to motivate people to dance. That's all."\textsuperscript{128}

Gleason's argument was that the technologies of mass society had opened the dance

\textsuperscript{126} Gleason, Jr., \textit{The Jefferson Airplane}, 50.

\textsuperscript{127} Among others, Lewis Erenberg argues that swing dancing, by placing men and women on equal footing helped create new gender relations in the 1930s and 1940s; see Erenberg, 251.

\textsuperscript{128} Gleason, Jr., \textit{The Jefferson Airplane}, 22, 51.
floor to alternative possibilities. The strange combination of nuclear age anxiety and birth-control pill pleasure -- both new realities in the Cold War years -- rendered the dance floor a space to let loose and discover new paths to self-expression. By stepping into and helping to create the new conditions of the psychedelic dance floor, women were able to make use of this space. Between embodiment and electronic mediation, women danced their way toward new roles in public. While their dancing linked them to subjectivities and identities that remained firmly gendered and unequal, they did present new opportunities as well.

Poster art represented the significance of women in the dance of the psychedelic ballrooms. As with Chamberlain's essay, these representations were by male artists, and involved male desire, to be sure. But they also contained a kind of amazement and respect for the efforts by women to explore new formations of the self -- and by extension to reconstitute new versions of the collective public sphere produced at psychedelic rock dances. Wes Wilson's poster for concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium on the weekend of September 2-5, 1966 present the back of a naked woman whose strands of hair extend to surround the names of the bands -- the Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, the Quicksilver Messenger Service, Country Joe and the Fish, and, importantly, the Motown act Martha and the Vandellas -- as if to suggest that the meaning and significance, the very making, of the dance is contained in the outstretched braids of the woman's head.\textsuperscript{129}

Graphically, she assembles the concert within the grasp of her tresses. Her body turns in a kind of discovery of the dance, tilted, her buttocks and one breast shaded to suggest movement, one foot kicking up, her palm lifted as if to press against the limits of the poster,

\textsuperscript{129} Wes Wilson, BG 26-1, 2-5 September 1966, Poster/Handbill/Postcard, in Lemke, \textit{Art of the Fillmore}, 48.
her head tilted down in intense focus and self-concentration. The woman on the poster seems to represent the embodied dancers that Bob Chamberlain describes. Once published, of course, the poster also served to create a model for women. Out of the interaction of embodiment and representation, female participants in the dance, of course, had to confront the growing stereotypes of females in the hippie movement: -- the "wild chick," the "hippie chick," the "Earth Mother." But they also were able to assert themselves as strangers in the mass-mediated public sphere of the ballrooms in new, potentially liberatory ways.

Figure 1.22. Poster for Fillmore Auditorium Concert, September 2-5, 1966 (artist: Wes Wilson, courtesy: www.wolfgangsvault.com)
On a poster in September of 1966, Wes Wilson went so far as to equate women with "the sound," suggesting that if the San Francisco "sound was also a scene," the women liberated from the private realm but able to retain a charged sexuality and eroticism as a stranger in public, were at the center of this new social world. Wilson presented a naked woman, now facing the viewer with her body ecstatically moving beneath the words "The Sound." The names of various bands are gathered around her hips. Her arms are raised up, her hair waves back. Among the increasingly iconic rock stars, she is another cartoonish
archetype -- a new superhero to join Dr. Strange, the Great Blondin', Batman and Robin, Ming the Merciless, and especially Sparkle Plenty. She represents how much "the sound" of San Francisco, the "sound that is also a scene," the sound that sustained a public sphere between embodiment and electronic mass-mediation, relied upon and was created by women dancing in the psychedelic ballroom.\textsuperscript{130}

But how inclusive could this public sphere be? The questions of race and ethnicity were especially never far from the minds of many participants in the San Francisco counterculture. As Chester Anderson wrote in a "Two Page Racial Rap": "Dear all by brethren: we have a race problem. Along with all the other things we're developing, we have developed new patterns of prejudice."\textsuperscript{131} The Fillmore Auditorium and the Haight-Ashbury district were, after all, in San Francisco's mostly African-American neighborhoods. Conflicts did arise, especially in the aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968.\textsuperscript{132} But though the psychedelic ballrooms were part of a counterculture often dominated by white, middle-class college students and post-college hipsters, this public also presented opportunities for African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latino-Americans, and others to participate in a tentative, confusing, cross-cultural social space.

In tentative ways, the sounds and the scene sustained by the psychedelic ballrooms provided possibilities for cross-racial connection and interaction. They never transcended the larger problems of race in the United States during the 1960s. There were many conflicts and

\textsuperscript{130} Wes Wilson, BG 29-1b, 23 September-2 October 1966, Poster/Handbill/Postcard, in Lemke, \textit{Art of the Fillmore}, 50-51.


\textsuperscript{132} Graham, \textit{Bill Graham Presents}, 239-240.
sometimes violence between African-Americans and white hippies for instance. But in San Francisco's sound that was also a scene, new cross-racial affiliations seemed potentially possible, on the brink of coming into being. In somewhat stereotypical but appreciative language, Bob Chamberlain mentions the presence of African-Americans and even an African student dancing at the Avalon Ballroom. A CBS television news documentary from 1967 focused on the dangers of LSD, but its images unwittingly directed the viewer's attention repeatedly to the mixing of races going on in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, as if this was really the thing mainstream America had to fear. Darby Slick remembered how in the Fillmore District, "Many black people seemed somewhat bemused to see the hippie hairstyles and clothes, although, there were, of course, many black hippies."

The ballrooms provided a new market for African-American musicians who had increasingly lost their market to the British Invasion of the mid-1960s. Promoters such as Bill Graham made an effort to present creative bills that matched up young new psychedelic bands with existing African-American artists: Miles Davis, Muddy Waters, Albert King, Martha and the Vandellas, Bo Diddley, and Chuck Berry performed, among many others. Black hippies appeared on stage too: Love's Arthur Lee, Jimi Hendrix, and San Francisco's own integrated band, Sly and the Family Stone.

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133 Chamberlain, "The View from the Dance Floor."


135 Slick, Don't You Want Somebody, 65.

136 Graham, Bill Graham Presents; Lemke, Art of the Fillmore.
Two posters for the Fillmore Auditorium performances by Otis Redding suggest the lengths that promoters went to appeal to the different audiences of African-Americans and hippies in order to assemble them together in the performance spaces. Of course, these efforts were driven by market forces to draw as large an audience as possible, but they had civic effects as well. One poster was in the style of most concerts presented for African-American audiences. The type was clearly presented, announcing a "dance concert." A publicity photograph of Otis Redding appeared at the center of the poster, with plenty of blank space around it. The other poster, created by Wes Wilson, placed a photograph of Redding performing, microphone in hand, on an aqua-blue background, with his name in bubbling red letters. Below the photograph, the letters, dates, place and price of the concerts seemed to form the backs of women's heads watching Redding perform. Together, the
straight-ahead poster, aimed at the African-American audience for Redding's soul music, and
the psychedelic poster, directed toward the hippie crowd not only promised to bring these
audiences together in the name of commercial profit, but also in terms of new civic
associations. A consequence of Graham's economic calculations was that the dance of the
psychedelic ballroom might overcome racial divides.\footnote{Tilghman Press, BG 43 alternate, and Wes Wilson, 43-1, 20-22 December 1966, Poster/Handbill/Postcard, in Lemke, Art of the Fillmore, 58.}

San Francisco's Secret Public, Out in the Open: Conclusion

Rock music in San Francisco stood at the center of a new sort of public sphere -- a
countercultural phantom public that crackled into existence in the flow between particular
and mass-mediated senses of self and collectivity. In the hyper-electronic spaces of the
psychedelic ballrooms, where dancers embodied participation in a landscape of sound and
light, a negotiation of the possibilities and problems of the mass public and the mass subject
took place. This experiment spilled into the streets of San Francisco as bands performed in
the Golden Gate Panhandle, on Haight Street itself, and in other outdoor locations.

In October 1966, at the "Love Pageant Rally" (and later at the news conference for
the Human Be-In to take place in January of 1967), Michael Bowen and Allen Cohen, two
editors at the Haight-Ashbury's Oracle newspaper, issued a decree that hinted at the sense of
a new civic life that rock music had helped foster in San Francisco. Called a "Prophesy of a
Declaration of Independence," the statement consciously echoed the founding document of
the United States. The document reflected the combination of embodiment in a particular
community in San Francisco, but continually stressed the openness to affiliation to others
around the world. "When in the flow of human events it becomes necessary for the people to cease to recognize the obsolete social patterns which had isolated man from his consciousness and to create with the youthful energies of the world revolutionary communities to which the two-billion-year-old life process entitles them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind should declare the causes which impel them to this creation," Bowen and Cohen wrote.

They continued: "We hold these experiences to be self-evident, that all is equal, that the creation endows us with certain inalienable rights, that among these are: the freedom of the body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness, and that to secure these rights, we the citizens of the earth declare our love and compassion for all conflicting hate-carrying men and women of the world." The statement was a declaration of independence, but it reaffirmed dependence as well. As "citizens of the earth," countercultural participants could not merely turn their backs on a larger mass public; they had to, somehow, share their sense of newfound subjectivity and collectivity while simultaneously declaring independence. This mixture of spreading their ideas while also emphasizing their separation from a larger system is what made San Francisco so crucial as a symbol of a countercultural phantom public flickering into existence within larger mass structures and technologies. San Francisco, and the Haight-Ashbury in particular, became a kind of strobe light beacon from the city on a hill.

A Communications Company broadsheet from April 1967, titled "Hippies in Haight-Ashbury," continued the linkage of the San Francisco scene to historically symbolic and significant issues of civic life in the United States: "American society has been in motion since the inception of the country, changing its structure for the benefit of all its citizens,
adapting to new personal and world responsibilities....The young people in Haight-Ashbury are taking part in these sociological changes, not necessarily conforming to the mainstream of the society, and individually rediscovering the concepts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.\textsuperscript{138} Recognizing new structural factors of mass-mediation and global interconnection but trying to explain how participants in the counterculture were joining long-running historical traditions of civic engagement in the United States, this author (possibly Chester Anderson, or a member of the Diggers) seconded the "Prophesy of a Declaration of Independence" first put forth by Michael Bowen and Allen Cohen.

One way in which the spirit of this declaration continued to spread to a mass public was through the psychedelic ballrooms, even as these venues faded in significance to their original participants. By 1967, visiting rock critic Paul Williams could write that the ballrooms themselves had "been turned into induction centers -- the teenyboppers, the college students, the curious adults come down to the Fillmore to see what's going on, and they do see, and pretty soon they're part of it."\textsuperscript{139} This curious phrasing -- induction center -- hinted at the impact of the Vietnam War on the San Francisco sound that was also a scene, an impact we can explore further in chapter three. The counterculture had grown increasingly separatist by 1967 and 1968, because as much what Detroit activist John Sinclair called a "guitar army" as a public sphere.\textsuperscript{140} Yet, it retained a sense of openness, of


civic rather than militaristic life. "Pretty soon they're part of it," Williams noted of the curiosity seekers attending concerts at the Fillmore and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the ongoing public experiment powered by rock music had spread into the streets. "The Panhandle is the San Francisco Sound today; the music of the street, the music of the people who live there," Williams claimed. But even as it expanding into the open, into the air outside, away from the contained hyper-electronic and mass-mediated spaces of the ballrooms, the music continued to gather people together around its amplified sounds. As Eileen Law, part of the Grateful Dead's extended world put it, "When you saw each other it was like you had this secret over everybody else."

Journalist Michael Lydon explored the nature of this "secret" in a 1969 article about the Grateful Dead. "San Francisco's secret was not the dancing, the light shows, the posters, the long sets, or the complete lack of stage act," he argued, "but the idea that all of them together were the creation and recreation of a community." To Lydon, "San Francisco said that rock and roll could be making your own music for your friends -- folk music in a special sense." But, in fact, "it didn't really work....The central reason is that rock is not folk music in that special sense. The machine, with all its flashy fraudulences, is not a foreign growth on rock, but its very essence."

Realizing the ways in which rock sustained the tensions between embodiment and mass-mediation, a vernacular "folk" culture of community and a mass-mediated popular culture of electricity and space-age technology, Lydon explained that in San Francisco, "Rock and roll, rather some other art, became the prime expression of that community

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142 Brightman, *Sweet Chaos*, 156.
because it was rock, machine and all, the miracle beauty of American mass production, a
mythic past, a global fantasy, an instantaneous communications network, and a maker of
super-heroes. There's no way to combine wanting that and wanting 'just folks' too. The
excitement of San Francisco was the attempt to synthesize these two contradictory
positions."

As the late 1960s progressed, San Francisco's version of the rock music contradiction
spread worldwide, sending its civic negotiations and phantom public sphere into the Vietnam
war zone and into youth movements in many nations. Back in San Francisco, its growth as
an industry raised all sorts of conundrums about who should profit from the music, and
whether the music should produce profit at all. Despite great efforts by Chet Helms to
mediate through a kind of communal town meeting and open forum, labor disputes broke out
at the 1969 Wild West Festival, for instance, when light show artists demanded higher
wages. The Festival was eventually cancelled. The Diggers urged San Francisco's hippies
to transform the town into a "free city," where music was to be liberated from the
marketplace. The violence-free gatherings in the Panhandle, some sponsored by the Hell's
Angels, gave way to the killing of an African-American by the Hell's Angels, paid in beer to
provide security at the Altamont concert in December of 1969.

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144 Graham, Bill Graham Presents, 276-280.

145 The Digger Papers, August 1968, Reprint from The Realist, Diggers 3/67-69 and n.d. Folder,

146 The Hell's Angels sponsored and participated many events in the Golden Gate Park Panhandle,
including the "Love Pageant Rally," 6 October 1966 and a "New Year's Day Whale/Wail," 1 January 1967. See
Perry, The Haight-Ashbury, 96, 118. For more on Altamont, see the film Gimme Shelter, directed by Albert and
David Maysles (Maysles Films, 1970), and Stanley Booth, The True Adventures of the Rolling Stones (1985;
The strange secret of San Francisco's countercultural public nonetheless lingered, creating a massive amount of nostalgia almost instantaneously, even by the end of the 1960s, and certainly far into the next decades. The public interaction that the San Francisco scene generated always threatened to reestablish itself in the interplay between embodiment and mass-mediation. As Michael Lydon wrote of the San Francisco attempt to sustain the contradiction of folk music face-to-face community and rock music's mass-elecricity, "To pull it off would have been a revolution; at best San Francisco made a reform. In the long haul its creators, tired of fighting the paradox, chose modified rock over folk music....All except the Grateful Dead, who've been battling it out with that mother of a paradox for years. Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose."

Figure 1.26. The Grateful Dead performing at the Love Pageant Rally in the Golden Gate Park Panhandle. October 6, 1966 (photograph: Gene Anthony)
Which brings us to footage of the Grateful Dead performing one sunny afternoon in Golden Gate Park's Panhandle during 1967's Summer of Love. "Come alive around the world," the young, long-haired singer Bob Weir declared from the back of a flatbed truck, instead of the original opening lyrics -- "calling out around the world" -- to Martha and the Vandellas' hit song, "Dancing in the Streets." Looking out over the Panhandle section of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, perhaps Weir and his bandmates noticed the gazes of an audience of young people, mostly white, with a few people of color here and there. Most of the audience was relaxing in the sun, a few members were dancing. All of them seem swept up in the secret feelings they were sharing together in public -- a sense of joy and possibility that they could be part of a public "coming alive around the world," but also, perhaps, an awareness of the challenge that faced them in figuring out a way somehow to extend and sustain their sound that was also a scene in a meaningful way.\(^\text{147}\)

\(^{147}\) "The Hippie Temptation."
What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible. - Hannah Arendt

Two men sit at a table. One leans back, his cigarette (or is it a manrijuana joint?) sending up wisps of smoke from an ashtray. The other stoops over a piece of paper, scribbling away madly, crossing out words as fast as he can write them. "Shit...I can't put it into words," the writer declares in the next panel of the comic strip. He gazes up at the viewer, hands pressed on the table in exasperation, his mouth curled up in an upside-down

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question mark. In the next panel, his friend leans in toward him, shoulders hunched over. Smoke curls up between the two men at the table. "Must be a good album," the friend quips.²

Perhaps the two men in the comic strip knew of Hannah Arendt, if not of her ideas about mass culture and public life. Though we can assume she was no fan of rock music (so far as we know), Hannah Arendt herself might have agreed with the rock writer in the comic strip who had such trouble finding a way to describe rock music. The political philosopher and cultural critic continually bemoaned the difficulties of articulating precise, direct meaning in mass society. Writing about individuals such as these two men, Arendt believed that mass culture had, "lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them."³ Yet the two men oddly resemble her metaphor for mass society, in which, "the weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst." Though the table never disappears, these men do seem to embody Arendt's vision of, "two persons sitting opposite each other…no longer separated but also…entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible." The two men are able to establish a communicative link through the very inability to communicative effectively about the power of music. They are, to borrow from Arendt, brought together by a kind of magic trick: the effort to articulate the ineffable, to render linguistically the intangible effects of music, creates a spirit of humorous connection and perhaps even existential fellow-feeling and comradeship.

² Bob Wilson, "Must Be a Good Album" cartoon, Creem 4, 4 (September 1972): 52.

³ Arendt, The Human Condition, 52-53.
Appearing in a 1972 issue of Creem magazine, this comic by Bob Wilson compresses into three panels a larger story about print publications and music criticism in the 1960s. Harkening back to the coffeehouse newspapers of Jürgen Habermas's eighteenth-century Europe, but also responding to the new situation of a globalizing, mass-mediated culture, magazines and newspapers became crucial components in the civics of rock. Sparked by increased access to technologies such as mimeograph machines and buoyed along by the flood of money invested into any venture related to youth culture, music publications linked participants together around the intangibility of music and the séance table of connection that a genre such as rock could sustain in the crackling currents of its sound waves.

Although most historical investigations of rock music print culture concentrate on Jann Wenner's Rolling Stone magazine, the sole focus on Wenner's creation has obscured the wider context of music publications in the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. In this chapter, I focus on two magazines, Crawdaddy! and Creem, to broaden the story of music criticism's role in fostering the public life of the counterculture. Crawdaddy! was perhaps the first rock magazine. Founded in 1965, it preceded Rolling Stone by two years. Crawdaddy! provided a far more wide-ranging, experimental approach to rock than Rolling Stone. Founded in 1969, two years after Rolling Stone's inception, Creem emerged as one of Rolling Stone's main competitors in covering music during the early 1970s. The magazine provided an alternative space for grappling with the meaning of rock music and the counterculture as the 1960s faded and Rolling Stone consolidated journalistic control over the collective memory of the era.
Other rock magazines and underground newspapers complicated assumptions about the division between a "mainstream" and an "underground" press. From the direction of the mainstream, more conventional publications such as *Hit Parader*, *Cheetah*, and even Ellen Willis writing in the *New Yorker* actually circulated countercultural discussion as much as a *Rolling Stone*, *Crawdaddy!*, or *Creem* did. From the other direction -- the supposed countercurrent of the underground press, more marginal entities such as the *San Francisco Express Times*, *Seed*, *East Village Other*, and the fanzine *Who Put the Bomp?* were not monolithic mouthpieces for revolution, but rather provided sharp critiques of the counterculture and psychedelic rock. Those who were writing deep within the counterculture movement were often, in fact, its harshest critics.

In the music press, then, the civics of rock defied simplistic categorizations of authentic or inauthentic, underground or mainstream. Instead, countercultural energies and modes of engagement migrated between the overtly oppositional and the seemingly commodified. In search of the elusive meaning of music, the producers and consumers of rock publications gathered around Arendt's metaphorical séance table, discussing and debating rock music, confronting the challenges of mass culture she identified. They not only tried to put into words what made a good album, but also what might make a good life. The stories of *Crawdaddy!*, *Creem*, and other rock music publications, then, suggest how the creators and the readers of rock magazines pioneered a "new beat" by forging an innovative form of cultural criticism. In this new form, a deliberative critical-public arose around the possibilities and the problems of music as a generator of a more egalitarian, democratic, and potentially libratory public life. Old forms of media in a new world of expanding mass-media and communications, *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* provide a glimpse into how responses
to rock registered a transformation of the relationship between the public sphere and mass media.

The rock critic emerged as a crucial new persona -- a model citizen in this new public sphere of rock music deliberation. Attempting to communicate rock's significance, critics were not just once-removed commentators on music, but active shapers of its meaning; sometimes they even acquired the status of prophets unveiling rock's glowing core of power, inspiring others to "see the light" of rock's flashes and blasts of energy. Perceiving rock as a vital generator and transmitter of cultural energy in a national (and global) setting increasingly interconnected by the electronic pulses, images, sounds, and sensations of mass media, rock critics attempted to map out in language how rock's intangible sound waves were fostering a new, portable civic life. Rock critics took on the task of rendering popular music's civic potential in explicit discursive form. The critic persona also became available to readers, many of whom responded not only to the music itself, but to the ongoing conversation that the rock music press sustained.

Completing a circuit between the private world of individual musical experience and the shared realm of commercial, political, and -- most importantly -- civil interaction, rock publications allowed rock listeners to generate what Jürgen Habermas famously described as a "critical-public." Attempting to explain rock music's power and significance to themselves and to others, the participants in the rock press sought out what the sociologist Craig Calhoun calls, "the social conditions…for a rational-critical debate about public issues

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conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions."\textsuperscript{5}

Using rock star celebrities and the commodities they produced as fodder for larger debates, publications displayed a special interest in music's complicated relationship to issues of individual autonomy and social connection in a mass consumer society. Diverging from Habermas and Hannah Arendt, who bemoaned the loss of an authentic civics in this setting, rock critics heard in rock music ways to grapple with both the realities and the potentially transformative elements of their situation.\textsuperscript{6} Writers, illustrators, photographers, editors, even readers who responded in letters, all became critics of a sort who explored how rock might provide the means for reconfiguring the commodified, mass-mediated world in which they lived.

To Paul Williams, the founding editor of \textit{Crawdaddy!}, rock music provided the seeds for conversations to bloom among listeners and fans. "The idea was 'Here's something that a whole lot of people have in common that they're really passionate about," he reminisced in 1992. "By talking about what we have in common, we really form a link here.'\textsuperscript{7} To Williams, rock magazines such as \textit{Crawdaddy!} were not meant to inscribe final judgment on rock and its significance, but to provide forums for inky voices to converse across the pressed pulp of mimeograph paper. As Steve Jones observes in a skillful survey of the


\textsuperscript{6} Habermas locates the civic sphere in a particular historical moment and place, during the bourgeois ascendance of late-Enlightenment European society, in salons, coffeehouses, pamphlets, and newspapers; he bemoans the loss of this sphere in modern, electronic, mass-consumer society. Reach further back to antiquity, Hannah Arendt also views 20th-century mass society as bereft of the civic; see Hannah Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}.

origins of rock criticism, "Popular music criticism can be understood as meaning-making, a way of continuing the discourse of popular music on a non-musical plane."8

Joining a long history of jazz, folk, and popular arts criticism in the United States, the rock press distinguished itself from its progenitors through its exploration of the social dimensions of the emotions. Rock publications did not solely provide aesthetic criticism, culture industry updates, or political advocacy.9 Rather, they housed responses to rock that often examined the emotional experiences that linked art, commerce, and politics. In doing so, they joined the New Journalism emerging during the 1960s.10 They also represented efforts to enact the sort of critical response to art and culture that Susan Sontag called for in her influential early-1960s essays: a sensitivity to sensation and emotion as well as, if not in place of, interpretation and ideology.11 What the rock press reveals is an ongoing sphere of debate about the relationship between individual and collective emotional lives as mediated by music.

Of course, publications such as Crawdaddy! and Creem did not only provide spaces for civic debate and deliberation about rock music. These magazines were also, of course, economic products in their own right. Both magazines sought to succeed as commercial

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entities in the mass marketplace. Like *Rolling Stone*, they came to depend on advertising revenue that came almost exclusively from record companies and other music-related corporations. So, too, they faced the difficult managerial problems of production and distribution. These economic concerns intersected with the editorial shape of the publications. But the intersection was not simply a process of cooption or "selling out."

Instead, these publications place us in this strange new, mass-mediated neighborhood of countercultural civics, a placeless place whose architecture often consisted of little more than evanescent feelings and emotions transmitted through sound. "The rock 'community' refers not to an institution, to a set of people, but to a sensation," the sociologist (and rock critic) Simon Frith argues. Yet these sensations paradoxically generated a sense of locality, belonging, connection, and subtle civic bonds that flickered into existence through the channels of mass culture. The rock music press provided discursive pathways for exploring the nature of a counterculture that was not only literally embodied, but also mediated and disembodied.

As the historian David Farber puts it, to many in the 1960s, the counterculture often felt, "everywhere and nowhere, hard to define and thus difficult to stop." For the counterculture's more active members, Farber claims, the phenomenon "was about space, about taking over a few city blocks or a few acres of countryside and trying to make a world out of it, a place where all the old rules were up for grabs and where, as the saying went, you could take a trip without a ticket." But for many more members of the postwar youth generation (and for some older Americans as well) the counterculture was not so much about

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literal places as it was about the shared imaginary landscape of the mass-media. What Arjun Appadurai has called the "mediascape" raised new civic possibilities -- and raised new civic problems.\(^\text{13}\)

As Farber himself describes the relationship between mass culture and counterculture in the 1960s: "Millions of kids, charmed by the pictures and the sounds flashed at them from TV screens and concert halls...played with the possibilities."\(^\text{14}\) Rock publications such as *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* provided a critical-public in which these dual participants in the counterculture and mass culture were able to contend with life among the wires and beams, the vast power grids and global satellite broadcasts, the televisions, radios, and phonograph hi-fis. Here, in the "mediascape," old-fashioned ink and paper provided one way to come together -- not in agreement, but in exploration, critique, and engagement. Publications such as *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* reveal how the civics of rock not only echoed thunderously in sound, but also silently in print.

**Crawdaddy! Magazine's "Geography of Rock"**

"I'm getting a little bored, at times, pretending to tell you about music," Paul Williams wrote in the September 1968 issue of *Crawdaddy!*, the rock magazine he had started in 1966 as a seventeen-year-old freshman at Swarthmore College, "and I'd like very


much to advance toward the stage where we all sort of tell each other." From the its first, mimeographed issue in the winter of 1966 to Paul Williams's departure as editor in the fall of 1968, *Crawdaddy!* , the first publication devoted to serious discussion of rock music, struggled to house a kind of civic interaction based on bringing the aesthetic experience of rock and popular music into the form of printed communication among critical fans.

Attempting to create a community of fandom and consumption in which each voice, each self, could flourish fully and yet cohere into a larger entity, *Crawdaddy!* revealed the problems and the possibilities of a countercultural civics that sought to redirect the power of mass consumerism toward the end of realizing private and public belonging for the young. "Music is just a form of something, writing about music is just another form of that same thing," Williams claimed. Chasing after this "something" -- "sensations, concepts, forms and feelings…things to exchange with each other" -- Williams and his cohorts at *Crawdaddy!* oscillated wildly between numerous contradictions. They wrote in a gap between art and commerce, amateurism and professionalism, self and other, control and freedom, radical humanism and apocalyptic nihilism, seeking to discover (or invent) new forms of selfhood and community in the context of postwar American mass society.

Most of all, as a magazine that migrated in its first two years from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, to Boston, Massachusetts, to New York City as its young editor himself hitchhiked and resettled, *Crawdaddy!* lacked a place in which to situate a collective identity save for the ambiguous sense of imagined place created via mass-distributed popular music.

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For instance, in an article on the new "San Francisco Sound" of 1967 (a sound to which *Rolling Stone* would harness its identity), Williams was deeply impressed by the "geography of rock," the way that "San Francisco is different from New York musically." Yet, Williams was inclined to broaden the sense of place created through rock beyond an "obvious geographical limitation," connecting the "San Francisco" sound to "a feeling, an attitude" more broadly.\(^{17}\)

![Figure 2.2. Fan as editor: Paul Williams, 1967 (photograph: James D. Wilson)](image)

"Above all," Williams wrote, "the San Francisco Sound is the musical expression of what's going down, a new attitude toward the world…which could…accurately be laid at the feet of a non-subculture called People, earth people, all persons who have managed to

transcend the superstructures they live in."\(^{18}\) Seeking to constitute and sustain a "place" for this attitude as expressed by "all persons," Williams and Crawdaddy! veered all over the map of civic orientations concerning art, culture, commerce, race, gender, class, and a whole host of categories; at times, writers in the magazine burst through in flashes of brilliance to express the possibilities for a radically new utopian existence within the placeless "geography of rock," but ultimately, Crawdaddy! proved unable to sustain a civic vision outside of a sense of real place.

Though Crawdaddy! reemerged after 1968 as a Rolling Stone-like journalistic publication unaffiliated with Paul Williams, its first two years of existence, occurring during the first flush of countercultural activity in America, were inextricably entwined with the life of its founding editor.\(^{19}\) Raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he had grown involved with the world of science-fiction clubs, conventions, and "fanzines," Williams started Crawdaddy! during the winter of 1966. He was only seventeen years old, a freshman at Swarthmore College, the liberal arts college located in a suburb outside Philadelphia.\(^{20}\) Crawdaddy! was the first magazine devoted entirely to discussing rock and roll music as a serious (though not an elitist) art form.\(^{21}\) The magazine began as a brief, mimeographed

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\(^{18}\) Williams, "The Golden Road," 5, 14.

\(^{19}\) Historians of rock music, and the 1960s in general, trace the emergence of a "counterculture" to figures and events in 1965 and 66, from Bob Dylan "going electric" to the "Acid Trips" of Ken Kesey and the acid philosophizing of Timothy Leary to the growing sophistication of the Beatles's music on albums such as Rubber Soul and Revolver.

collection of album reviews just by Williams, which he mailed for free to 500 friends and record business contacts; by the time Williams left *Crawdaddy!* in the fall of 1968, the "fanzine" had become something close to a professional publication, a photographed, off-set magazine with a circulation of roughly 20,000 and a newsstand price of 60 cents. More significantly, its reputation as a site of heated countercultural activity had grown through profiles in mainstream magazines such as *Newsweek.*

*Crawdaddy!*, as Williams originally conceived it, was to be neither a "trade paper" directed toward reporting on the commercial success of the music, nor a "teen magazine" filled with pin-up photographs and a focus on the persona of performers. Instead it was to be "a magazine of rock and roll criticism" produced in the hopes that "someone in the United States might be interested in what others have to say about the music they like." The very title of Williams's magazine suggested his focus on discovering the self and forming community via the world of exchange around rock 'n' roll: the listening, talking, gossiping, dancing, looking, and thinking that seems to have been as important to him as the music itself. The Crawdaddy Club was the London venue where British rock bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds first gained fame. The invocation of an actual space, particularly a space connected to the emergence of a rock 'n' roll scene from the underground

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21 Writers in the "underground press" had begun exploring rock music by 1966 (in the *Los Angeles Free Press* for instance); Kenneth Goldstein's columns on rock and popular music had appeared in *Esquire* in 1965; and *Hit Parader*, a commercial teen magazine under the editorship of Jim Delehant (who later published in *Crawdaddy!*), had shifted toward a more serious perspective to some extent as well.


to a mass audience, presaged the kind of vision Williams had for *Crawdaddy!* magazine. Despite the fact that *Crawdaddy!* began as a uni-directional print publication featuring only Williams's voice, the young publisher soon wanted *Crawdaddy!* to be "for anyone with an interest in discussing the most exciting and alive music in the world today."  

The British influence appeared not only in the magazine's title, but also in a quotation from a British music magazine that appeared as the sole item on the first *Crawdaddy!* cover (see figure 2.3): "There is no musical paper scene out there like there is in England. The trades are strictly for the business side of the business and the only things left are the fan magazines that do mostly the 'what colour socks my idol wears' bit."  

In an imaginative act

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26 The quotation was taken from the band the Fortunes in the 29 January 1966 issue of the British magazine *Music Echo, Crawdaddy!* 1 (7 February 1966): cover. The relationship between the "British Invasion" and American rock music in the mid-1960s seems ripe for further study; *Crawdaddy!*'s emergence of Beatles-imitating garage bands in the United States, suggests that some kind of transatlantic dialogue occurred between British and American youths.
suggestive of larger countercultural impulses, Williams seems to have envisioned *Crawdaddy!* as a merging of rock-as-business with rock-as-fan-subject. There was no illusion for Williams that his magazine was a commercial venture. "Most of all, naturally, we need money," he wrote in the first issue. But, from its beginning, *Crawdaddy!* aspired to something more. "If we could predict the exact amount of sales of each record we heard, it would not interest us to do so," Williams noted in the same article.\(^\text{27}\)

As a commercial entity, focused on a genre of music that was fundamentally commercial, *Crawdaddy!* was no anti-capitalist propaganda pamphlet. It existed thoroughly within the assumptions and worldview of a postwar, post-scarcity, capitalist "affluent society."\(^\text{28}\) Yet from the magazine's inception, Paul Williams did imagine creating a kind of alternative community-in-print out of the informal talk of fans discussing rock 'n' roll music and its place in their lives. Furthermore, as the tumultuous events of the late 1960s unfolded, *Crawdaddy!* increasingly promoted this alternative community as potentially oppositional to postwar mass society even though the magazine and its subject of rock music existed thoroughly within the tentacles of an economic culture based in mass consumption. This quest for alternative visions lurking within mainstream society itself perhaps had its direct origins in the science-fiction world of utopias, distopias, mysteries, and revelations that Williams soaked up as a child.\(^\text{29}\) Reflecting on *Crawdaddy!*-, Williams wrote, "The reason I was so crazy as to think I could start a magazine by myself was that I had…discovered the private world of amateur science fiction magazines, published in editions of 50 to 200

\(^{27}\) Paul Williams, "Get Off Of My Cloud," 2.


\(^{29}\) Paul Williams, phone interview, 27 February 2001.
copies, by science fiction fans for other science fiction fans." Williams himself published a science fiction "fanzine" as a high school student.

His immersion in science fiction overlapped with a growing interest in folk music. Surrounded by the vibrant early-60s folk music scene in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Williams grew fascinated by its sense of alternative community. Toward the end of his high school years, Williams even wrote columns for a Cambridge folk music magazine called *Folkin' Around*. In starting *Crawdaddy!*, he felt especially inspired by the folk music magazine *Boston Broadside*, which he remembered as, "the weekly journal of the folk music scene in the community where I lived, a lively, witty, intelligent publication that made me feel like a part of something when I read it."

His appreciation of folk music's communal impetus surfaced in early issues of *Crawdaddy!* But Williams was also growing interested in the similarities and differences between folk and pop as musical and commercial categories. Crucially, he was less concerned about the commercialization, or "absorption," of folk music by the music business then he was intrigued by the possible overlaps between the music "non-professionals" were creating and the "national taste." This interest in the power for social messages delivered through commercial music rather than against it remained a dominant part of *Crawdaddy!* under Williams's editorship; indeed, it was a crucial aspect of rock criticism and rock magazines in general, as the story of *Creem* in the early 1970s bears out.

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30 Williams, "A Brief History," 1.

31 Williams published 3-5 issues of a science-fiction fanzine called "Within" in 1962, phone interview, 27 February 2001; Paul Williams, "A Brief History," 1.

32 Paul Williams, "A Brief History," 1.

There were, of course, many tensions and contradictions in *Crawdaddy!*'s attempt to locate a kind of civic community within mass commercial culture. Most significantly, *Crawdaddy!* sought to imagine a place were there wasn't any place, a "geography of rock" whose terrain flowed *in*, but was not *of*, the larger mass culture. So, too, *Crawdaddy!* attempted to embody a kind of modern, civic "folklife" for the age of mass society via rock music. Also, *Crawdaddy!* sought to overcome the dominant postwar dichotomies between professionalism and amateurism, work and play, labor and leisure, formal roles and casual interaction. Finally, *Crawdaddy!* made an effort to negotiate an avant-garde approach to mass culture. These tensions and contradictions were not simply present at *Crawdaddy!*, they were central to the magazine's approach.

Sorting out musical genres at *Crawdaddy!* was a way of negotiating the presence of oppositional forces within mass culture rather than against it. In one of his first extended essays in *Crawdaddy!*, "Folk, Rock, and Other Four-Letter Words," Williams described folk and rock as a contrast between the production and consumption of music. "The difference between pop music (rock 'n' roll if you will) and folk music," he wrote, "if there is a difference, is that folk music is what the folk feel like writing at a given time, and pop music is what the folk (in general) feel like listening to." Williams declared that "if the two should influence each other, rejoice at the occasion." But, he believed, the "American press" should not "speak of folk and rock as though folk were something filed in the Library of Congress or sleeping in Bob Dylan's breast, and rock a beast that cannot borrow from something without devouring it. Folk is folk, rock is rock, and if the twain should meet and exchange
notes, fine." To Williams, the accidental collision of pop (rock 'n' roll) and folk was exciting, though not necessarily permanent. Rock 'n' roll may have been a commercial music, but it could also articulate, "what the folk feel like writing at a given time" without becoming folk music; the happy overlap of commercial musical production and everyday musical consumption was not troublesome. It was perhaps a meaningful accident, but not cooptation or "selling out."

Here the perceived difference between "rock 'n' roll" and "rock" eventually became crucial at *Crawdaddy!* and in the emerging counterculture as a whole. As *Crawdaddy!* developed from Williams's voice alone to a range of critical voices, the belief in an accidental but not compromising blending of "pop" and "folk" provided a launching ground for an ideology of "rock" as an alternative civic order, an alternative community to mass society's alienating structures, lurking paradoxically within mass culture itself. This shift surfaced most prominently in a change in *Crawdaddy!*'s slogan. The magazine had been called, "The magazine of rock 'n' roll" beginning with issue two (see figure 2.4), but in March of 1967, it changed its slogan to "The magazine of rock" (see figure 2.5). What was involved in this change? Paul Williams offered an explanation in his March, 1967 "What Goes On?" column, which ostensibly began as a music news column but often mutated into a venue for pontification on the sociological meaning of popular music. Williams wrote that while a pop music audience of "subteens and housewives" simply wanted pop music "for pleasure, not interaction…meanwhile rock has, through its growing goodness and through the graces of the generation that stayed with it, built up a huge audience for quality rock,

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34 Paul Williams, "Folk, Rock, & Other Four-Letter Words," 3.

35 *Crawdaddy!* 2 (14 February 1966): cover; *Crawdaddy!* 8 (March 1967): cover.
creative rock, people who'd rather hear a good ten-minute rock track than an easy-to-listen-to, dull, catchy 2-minute thing."

To Williams, "We are moving towards mass market creativity and interaction, and we're doing it in a context of media flexibility and a new awareness of man...if you find out from the friendly record man that the Monkees have sold over five million albums, you just buy the Doors lp anyway, and play it with a couple of friends in a dimly lit room, and turn the transistor radio off...."36 Williams believed that "rock" as a genre seized upon the possibilities of mass communications and mass markets, importing from within an artistically and politically avant-garde understanding of "creativity and interaction" to foster a new kind of music and consciousness of existence. His was an anarchist-like utopian vision -- a "science fiction" perspective, as Crawdaddy! writers referred to this kind of idealism -- in which the self and its community "must interact as smoothly as possible." "Rock," to Williams, criss-crossed the musical genres and ideologies of "folk" and "pop" to create a new mode of being in which, "people have responded to the reality of the industrial revolution by requiring that they run the system and benefit from it rather than be made part of it.... Everything else -- concepts, objects, systems, machines -- must only be tools for me and mankind to employ. If I or Man respect a system or a pattern more than ourselves, we are in the wrong and must be set free."37


37 Paul Williams, ""The Golden Road," 14. References to science fiction appear in Sandy Pearman, "Saucer Lands in Virginia," Crawdaddy! 11 (September-October 1967): 24; Wayne McGuire, "The Boston Sound," Crawdaddy! 17 (August 1968): 44; and Chester Anderson, "Folk Rock is Coming" Crawdaddy! 19 (October 1968): 19. This "science fiction" perspective also resonates with thinkers and documents seemingly far from "science fiction," including the work of C. Wright Mills and S.D.S.'s "Port Huron Statement," which states, "we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in he twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated...we oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things";
Other *Crawdaddy!* writers contributed to this new perspective of "mass market creativity and interaction" and "media flexibility," all perhaps influenced by Marshall McLuhan's writings on media. These phrases were suggestive of a countercultural impulse to imagine new notions of freedom for the individual "citizen" and for social relations between "citizens" lurking within, and quite possibly amassing enough momentum ultimately to supercede, corporate-liberalism and mass consumerism. This civic impulse could traverse geographic boundaries via records. It could also find a "place" in the pages of a magazine such as *Crawdaddy!* But even before other writers began to join in this collective imagining of a countercultural "civic sphere," Williams's casual friendships and developing professional connections fostered the notion of a "rock" musical genre and cultural sensibility at once popular and subterranean, existing betwixt and between the folk and pop ("rock 'n' roll, if you will" as Williams put it) arenas of music.

Williams was always influenced by conversations with those around him, beginning with high school friends and fellow science fiction fans in Cambridge, and continuing through his involvement with the college radio station at Swarthmore. But crucially, the initial positive response to *Crawdaddy!* magazine itself came from within the music industry. "For the most part response to the new magazine was sparse and discouraging,"


39 Paul Williams, phone interview, 27 February 2001; "A Brief History," 3.
Williams reflected twenty-five years later. However, there had been words of encouragement from Jac Holzman, the owner of Elektra Records, ever since Williams had appeared in the company's offices asking for promotional records and soliciting advertising in the winter of 1966. So, too, Dick Starr of WFUN, Miami, wrote, "Sheet is a gas! Keep it coming!" Paul Simon called him to thank Williams for his energetic review of the Simon and Garfunkel album, "Sounds of Silence," in the first issue. Bob Dylan requested that Williams visit him before a performance in Philadelphia.

Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5. From the "Magazine of Rock and Roll": Crawdaddy!, 14 February 1966, to the "Magazine of Rock": Crawdaddy!, March 1967 (courtesy: Paul Williams)

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40 Paul Williams, "A Brief History," 3.

41 Paul Williams, phone interview, 27 February 2001.


43 Paul Williams, "A Brief History," 3.
But soon thereafter, new voices began to join Williams's in *Crawdaddy!* In issue three, the musician and novelist Richard Fariña wrote of the shift from folk to rock when he commented, "Just about every time you were learning to draw the classifying lines there began a shift away from the open-road-protest-flatpick style into more Motown-Nashville-Thameside, with the strong implication that some of us have been listening to the A.M. radio for a number of years. And perhaps become so peculiarly irreverent as to carry a little Sony transistor model on the march to Selma in order to catch the Supremes and Solomon Burke before dealing with a sheriff called Clarke." By issue fifteen in May of 1968, this notion of the energy of a more egalitarian and free civic order lurking within and surging through mass-consumed, mass-mediated music dominated *Crawdaddy!*

The graphics of Sandy Pearlman's lead article, "Change Is Now," in the May 1968 issue are indicative of this new understanding of "rock" as an oppositional form produced within mass culture. The article's layout consists of photographs of transistor circuitry flow charts -- diagrams of the very knobs and coils and capacitors of mass culture through which *Crawdaddy!*'s and rock's sense of community traveled, indeed where it seems to have been generated (see figure 2.6). Similarly, the cover of issue fifteen hinted at *Crawdaddy!*'s sense of rock as a civic alternative secretly created and conveyed via mass culture: the magazine front simply consisted of the name of the band Pearlman reviewed, the "Byrds," in white typeface against a black background, repeated over and over again like an Andy Warhol silkscreen of a hundred Campbell's soup cans (see figure 2.7). The idea seemed to be that the

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reader might discern, indeed might even create, new forms, new meanings, fluctuating like
electric currents across the dizzying repetition of letters.

Repeating himself from a previous review of the Byrds in the August, 1967,
*Crawdaddy!* Pearlman wrote in an asterisked footnote, "When the Byrds got started
somebody (in *Hit Parader*, I think) said that their first album was very nice, but it all
sounded the same. Now we are up to taking that. It's become a virtue. What started out as a
folk-rock style on the first album has been turned, via repetition, into a form." Concluding
his review with an attempt to describe the leap from mass-mediated music to an alternative
borne from within mass culture itself, Pearlman declared that the segue from the penultimate
to the final song on the Byrds's new album, had its "own a-mechanical energy, aborting the
preceding weary mechanics, starting up 'Wasn't Born to Follow,' distorting the whole energy

Figure 2.6. Civics in the circuitry: "Change Is Now," *Crawdaddy!,* May 1968 (courtesy: Paul
Williams)
flow chart. And a surge's born. For Pearlman, the Byrds harnessed the powers of mass culture to generate an alternative from within its very circuitry. Indeed, the very title of his article, "Change Is Now," suggested some kind of transformation in the works.

The distance from Fariña's Supremes-blaring transistor radio, irreverently smuggled into the folk-inspired Civil Rights movement, to Pearlman's strange ideas about repetition, form, surges and transformation was vast. How did Crawdaddy! itself change so much in such a short time? The answer lies in part in the successes and failures of what might be called Crawdaddy!'s lived civics, its actual as well as its imaginative existence as a commercial and professional entity. This existence was significantly colored by the

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magazine's stance as a venue for more than simple commerce and labor, but for art and leisure as well. *Crawdaddy!* was fast becoming a professional magazine, but it maintained a sense of amateurism, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

If issue three in the spring of 1966 marked *Crawdaddy!*'s maturation beyond featuring Williams's solitary voice, issue four marked the magazine's acceleration toward more widespread notice. With an offset-photo of Bob Dylan stolen from an advertisement on the cover to aid them, Williams and two friends rapidly hawked 400 copies for 25 cents each at the 1966 Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. By the fall of 1966 Williams was back in Cambridge, where he befriended Jon Landau, a Boston native and amateur rock musician who split his time between college at Brandeis and work as a record store clerk in Cambridge's Briggs & Briggs.

While others had begun to contribute to *Crawdaddy!*, among them Peter Garulnick (who would go on to a successful career as a rock and blues scholar-journalist), Landau quickly became the second dominant voice in *Crawdaddy!*, writing in a common-sense tone that stressed the development of artistic self-expression and creativity within rock. "At the most elementary level," Landau claimed in a review of the Blues Project, "we can say that any musical performance is trying to express a certain type of feeling. We call the communication of that feeling the aesthetic basis for the piece: it constitutes the essence of the music." Unlike Paul Williams, who turned to the social experience of rock, Jon Landau concerned himself more with the way music was produced in the recording studio. But even

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46 Williams, "A Brief History," 3.

47 Goodman, *Mansion*, 12; Landau would go on to edit *Rolling Stone*'s record reviews section and eventually manage Bruce Springsteen.
Landau sought to describe how rock focused on the music's communicative dimensions. The "aesthetic basis" for a song had to do with how it communicated feeling.  

By issue four, *Crawdaddy!* still consisted primarily of record reviews. But this began to change. Issues five and six featured the magazine's first interviews, with Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker, two famous electrified blues performers who had been performing since the 1940s, as well as the Butterfield Blues Band, a second-generation Chicago blues group of whites and blacks, and Eric Burdon, a British disciple of the blues who led the group The Animals. Later issues would include interviews with personalities in rock music and the counterculture, such as Paul Rothschild, producer for the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, and Richard Meltzer's mock interview of himself by Andy Warhol.

Richard Meltzer and his friend Sandy Pearlman, who had both studied with Allan Kaprow, a peer of Warhol's and the Pop Art theorist of "happenings" that blurred art and the everyday experience of life, brought a more postmodern, absurdist tone to *Crawdaddy!* issues seven and eight. Meltzer's piece, "The Aesthetics of Rock," for instance, became a cult classic. Rock fans debated whether its obscurant language was serious or a satire. Even editor Paul Williams was not sure, introducing the article with a note that read, "I have hopes that in *Crawdaddy!* where the presentation of new ways of thinking really is part of our daily work, [Meltzer] will find an audience receptive to his roundabout, highly amusing, brilliantly perceptive presentation of the past and the present of rock."

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Issue seven, published in January 1967, marked Williams's relocation to New York City, where \textit{Crawdaddy!} would finally settle for good.\footnote{\textit{Crawdaddy!} 7 (January 1967): 2.} Already having abandoned his attempt to publish the magazine weekly or biweekly, \textit{Crawdaddy!} now came out roughly every other month and cost thirty-five cents.\footnote{\textit{Crawdaddy!} increased its price in issue five.} First in an office at 319 Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village, and later at 383 Canal Street, Williams also began to assemble a staff.\footnote{Issues seven through fifteen (January 1967-May 1968) were published from the Sixth Avenue office; issues sixteen through nineteen (June-October 1968) were published from Canal Street.} Here was a chance for \textit{Crawdaddy!} to put its more egalitarian civic focus, articulated via mass culture, into practice. Yet in the difficulties of balancing professionalism with amateurism (the staff members, like Williams, were very young, around twenty years-old in general) proved too much. Sexual affairs took place, part of an emerging ethic of "free love,"
but also causing disruptions and tensions to work on the magazine. One staff member, Ed Ward, reportedly left a farewell note staked to an office door by a knife; it complained of shabby treatment by Williams. For all its writerly idealism about a new civic sensibility emerging from mass culture moorings, Crawdaddy! simply could not realize a more just and harmonious civil order.

The inability of rock -- thought of as Williams's "mass market creativity and interaction," Fariña's "shift away from the open-road-protest-flatpick style into more Motown-Nashville-Thameside," and Pearlman's "a-mechanical energy, aborting the preceding weary mechanics" -- to supercede the limiting structures of mass culture and mass society can be discerned in the similar, though not precisely replicated, tone of the advertisements in Crawdaddy! These advertisements did not, as Thomas Frank argues in his insightful though sometimes oversimplified history of the 1960s advertising industry, seize upon resistance as a selling technique. Rather, they tapped into the same interest in overcoming the boundaries between mass culture and its opposition as articulated through mass-consumed music. They sought to sell Paul Williams's concept of "media flexibility" communicated through the sound and feeling of rock music. An advertisement from Columbia Records in the August 1968 issue declared, "Underground...Overground. All that matters is that you dig the sound….The sound. On Columbia Records" (see figure 2.8). Also locating their product within the countercultural rhetoric about the feeling, energy, and

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55 Robert Draper, Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 89. Ward went on to edit the record reviews section of Rolling Stone, which operated more professionally.

sensations of rock music, another advertisement, this one from a music equipment company, asked, "Ever felt the sound of the Who?" (see figure 2.9).\textsuperscript{57}

Figure 2.8. Commerce and community in the "sound": Columbia Records advertisement, Crawdaddy!, August 1968 (courtesy: Paul Williams)

Williams himself saw nothing particularly wrong with the overlap between the commercial and editorial in Crawdaddy! In an article on "the responsibilities of mass media," he pointed out that sometimes it was hard to tell the copy from the ads in his magazine but "what's important is that our readers enjoyed this stuff. Maybe even got something out of it, on a personal level."\textsuperscript{58} Significantly however, there were differences between the advertisements and the copy. Because the advertisements sought to sell material

\textsuperscript{57} Columbia Records advertisement, Crawdaddy! 17 (August 1968): 2-3; "Ever felt the sound of the Who?" Sunn advertisement, Crawdaddy! 18 (September 1968): 16.

\textsuperscript{58} Paul Williams, "Outlaw Blues," Crawdaddy! 13 (February 1968): 5.
objects, they tended to simplify the notions put forth by Williams and other Crawdaddy!'s critics of more egalitarian civic connections emerging from within mass culture's circulation. The ironies here were many, and not even Williams seemed to have been fully aware of them. The advertisements, part of the mass culture that inspired the rock critics at Crawdaddy!, only imitated, but did not manage to duplicate, the full sense of freedom that the critics reached in flashes of more analytic and expressive exploration of mass consumer's lurking possibilities for new civic interaction.

For instance, another advertisement from the music equipment company Sunn in the March-April 1968 issue featured a "psychedelic" kaleidoscope graphic (see figure 2.10). This ad echoed a Crawdaddy! drawing of the spiraling grooves of an amplifier speaker (see figure 2.11). It also resonated with Paul Williams's comments about a Country Joe and the Fish album from the previous year, in which Williams compared the recording by Country Joe and his band to a kaleidoscope. "Like a kaleidoscope," Williams wrote, "it's easy not to appreciate -- all you have to do is stare at the toy instead of into it."59 The Crawdaddy! drawing appeared on the page as a form of communication instead of statement or assertion. If you stared into the images in Crawdaddy! -- or stared into the recording by Country Joe and the Fish -- it could begin to take on an interactive dimension. It could foster inquiry and exploration rather than forcing the rock listener -- or the rock critic reader -- into only a passive stance of reception.

Unlike the advertisement for Sunn amplifiers, the graphic that accompanied Williams's article in *Crawdaddy!* was not explicitly linked to a product. Rather its meaning resonated with the iconography of the ad, but pushed this iconography toward something more amorphous, mysterious, and magical. To what text or message is it connected? What are the hands at its bottom counting with their fingers? So, too, Williams writing, in the first person, stressed the strange agency of the consumer. But, Williams was not simply trying to sell a particular product through expressing a countercultural comprehension of oppositional "surges" within mass consumerism's circulation. Instead, in a far richer manner more
suggestive of an alternative sensibility than Sunn's advertisement, Williams wanted to spark the reader into an imaginary conversation, one in which fluid selves might connect, merge, entangle, and disentangle in social interaction via the invisible, space-defying, all-surrounding ether of electrified sound.

Williams continued in his 1967 article, "If you do dig [Country Joe and the Fish's album], you may suddenly find it very hard to decide which of the sliding multicolorous worlds all around you is your own." The Sunn advertisement, slightly campy, overlapping with Williams's sensibility, did not portray what Williams sought to articulate more fully as rock music's profound challenges to accepted identities and social relations. Unlike the Sunn ad, Williams sought to harness rock music's power to stir a listener out of assumed norms. His writing sought to articulate and share new perceptions of rock's transformative powers. These lurked within -- and burst forth from -- the electrified, commodified sounds of Sunn amplifiers. And it resonated iconographically with advertisements for these electronic devices. Yet, Williams's own writing took that economic, consumer energy in new directions. His article was concerned with far more than selling a product.

As Williams's comments suggested, *Crawdaddy!*'s writers were concerned with civic arrangements. The *Crawdaddy!* writers joined a larger intellectual migration after World War II from analyzing economic conflict as the key element in American life to investigating questions of civil society. This ideological shift in focus allowed *Crawdaddy!* to exist in an

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60 Williams, "The Golden Road," 11.

61 Howard Brick makes the argument that postwar social critics, beginning with Talcott Parsons, and including Kenneth Keniston, Erik Erikson, Paul Goodman, Jane Jacobs, Betty Friedman, Norman O. Brown, and Herbert Marcuse, shifted from economic to civic questions divorced from market concerns; Howard Brick, "Talcott Parsons 'Shift Away From Economics,' 1937-1946," *Journal of American History* 87, 2 (September 2000): 490-514.
ambiguous interstice between amateur, informal site of interaction and professional, commercial entity. As *Crawdaddy!* rapidly grew between 1966 to 1968 from Williams's original vision, it sought to transform his imagined rock-fan community into a kind of alternative institution for a countercultural movement that was embedded within the larger institutionalization of consumerism in postwar America.\(^6\)

![Psychedelic commerce in a Sunn amplifier kaleidoscope advertisement in *Crawdaddy!*, March 1968 (left) and psychedelic covic in a *Crawdaddy!* graphic, September 1968 (right) (courtesy: Paul Williams)](image)

The odd, difficult task of forging a countercultural civics within commercial processes revolved around the shift of *Crawdaddy!*’s identity from a "fanzine," a homemade project for dedicated fans that covertly circulated, to a "prozine," a professional magazine distributed commercially to a mass audience. It also centered on *Crawdaddy!*’s attempt to

complete this shift while resisting a place-based identity, but rather seeking to root itself in the chase after a rootless imagined place floating in the fragments and scraps left behind by rock music's sonic blasts. As Ed Ward (who departed Crawdaddy! unhappily in 1967) noted in a 1970 Rolling Stone article, "Probably the first rock fanzine was Crawdaddy! magazine." But "By Crawdaddy! No. 4," Ward continued, "Crawdaddy! was on its way towards becoming one of the first rock prozines." Yet, while Crawdaddy! moved from "fanzine" to "prozine," Williams clung to his original interest in the informal exchange of ideas about rock music and the community it seemed to constitute. He faced the problem of professionalizing, in a sense formalizing, this casual community. While at Crawdaddy!, Williams never resolved this tension between amateurism and professionalism, the conflict between writing about music as a leisurely "fan" activity or as a job.

From its very inception, Crawdaddy! was, for Williams, "trying to appeal to people interested in rock and roll, both professionally and casually." The magazine's attempt to negotiate between these two poles of the professional and the casual resulted in the effort to articulate a mode of social interaction and organization in which the magazine might operate as a kind of rock-club-in-print, a dance hall, a meeting hall, a rock festival in the park, constructed from words, drawings, paper, and staples. Within Crawdaddy!'s pages, individual critics pontificated on personal experiences and political opinions like soapbox preachers in a public square shadowed by billboard signs and poster advertisements. The magazine as a whole sought to exist in a kind of liminal zone, commercial but not bound to articulate a coherent market identity, professional but filled with the freedom and casualness

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of a fan publication. In this way, *Crawdaddy!* echoed its subject of rock music, which itself oscillated between professional and leisure activity, producing sounds that spread ambiguously through spaces from the record store to the bedroom, the car radio to the garage practice space.

By resisting full professionalization, *Crawdaddy!* in some fashion resisted entering the economic marketplace on its existing terms. How was this partial resistance to the market articulated via commentary about rock, the incarnation of a commercialized and mass-consumed commodity? Perhaps the answer lay in part with the quality of music to escape its bounded market confines via its aesthetic powers.  

Certainly, the aesthetic experience of music meant a tremendous deal to *Crawdaddy!* writers. But Williams's effort to create a magazine that could capture the emotional textures of communal existence as they floated along the wires of mass culture itself, his yearning to create a community in which individuals would be free to express themselves fully, share their views, and imaginatively interact by writing about their responses to rock, also seems linked to larger impulses we might deem countercultural.

The myriad voices echoing through *Crawdaddy!* might even be viewed as a response to a crisis in actual public space, from the stultifying strip malls and housing tracts developing in the suburbs to the decay of vibrant urban districts. At a time when African-American riots and "white flight" dominated the experience of public space, *Crawdaddy!* sought to function as an imaginative civic zone for the young rock fan. *Crawdaddy!* seems to

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64 This is a quality of rock music Lawrence Grossberg notes in "Another Boring Day in Paradise," 226.
have attached itself to the promise for new, imagined forms of community and self-exploration in mass society in response to the loss of tangible public spaces.⁶⁵

This attempt at constituting a new, imaginative zone for community was not easy. "We will need responses from you in the form of letters and publishable material in order to believe that there is a purpose in continuing this project," Williams wrote in the first issue.⁶⁶ "If you haven't responded (and chances are you haven't) we desperately need kind words, material, new records, and money for advertisements and subscriptions," he wrote in the second installment of Crawdaddy!⁶⁷ "But apathetic participation was the least of the problems that arose as Crawdaddy! expanded as a publication. Crawdaddy!'s exploration of fluid senses of selfhood and community, spawned in thinking closely about consumer activities, created profound unease as well as joyful potential: civic chaos as well as civic possibilities.

For instance, Crawdaddy! writers, including the African-American poet David Henderson and the female rock critic Kris Weintraub, sought to convene a civic order that simultaneous sly celebrated and overcame race, gender, and class differences. At times they succeeded, suggesting that these sources of crisis in postwar life could be overcome through music and musical culture. But the stubborn markings of identity based on race, gender, and class all too often reasserted themselves in Crawdaddy!, either as absurdly essentialized or

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⁶⁶ Williams, "Get Off My Cloud!" 2.

too-easily dismissed elements. In terms of race, for example, Ken Greenberg wrote in an article entitled "Mocha Blues" that, "I know I'm a white boy, and I know that traditionally the blues is black music. But I also know that blues get right into my guts and heart. I know I've felt sad and confused, and the blues tells me other people have too." Wrapped up in the mass-culture possibilities for true civic community based on membership and affiliation beyond race, Greenberg then asked, "And tradition, what is that? Things that happened twenty years ago are ancient history these days. Something that began five years ago that has continued this long, now that might be called a tradition."^68

Greenberg effaced the long tradition of blues as an African-American expressive form and brilliant aesthetic survival technique. Instead he poised the blues between its ability to articulate universal themes and its authenticity as an African-American sound. "The awakening of the black spirit is ever so desirable, and wanting to somehow be a part of it seems to me beautiful and natural," Greenberg wrote, essentializing "blackness" in his effort to explain why whites wanted to play the blues. At the same time, Greenberg was sincere in his effort to overcome this essentialization of the blues as solely a black music. "Just as it's too easy to put black down for not being a part of white," Greenberg wrote, "it's too easy to put white down for not being a part of black. Instead let's get into the freedom of grasping at some beginning point and developing from there."^69

A similar process of essentializing gender while also seeking to overcome it through the new mass-society civics of the counterculture occurred in *Crawdaddy!* Paul Williams wrote of the female singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell that her "particular triumph is that girl

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singers or girl artists of any kind who have really gotten at what it is to be a woman can be counted on the fingers of one hand...and this record is a profound expression of I, a woman." In thinking about Mitchell, he further commented that she was able to express how, "most girls think and speak on a fairly simple level, but feel on a deeply complex one...."  

Williams's critique demonstrates *Crawdaddy!*'s essentialization of femininity, and yet so, too, his grappling with Mitchell's songs suggests the beginnings of an attempt to break through traditional gender roles by listening closely and responding to powerful artistic statements about gender by Mitchell and others. Critically engaged with mass-produced musical expression, Williams and others wound up raising questions about gender even as they clumsily reinforced old stereotypes.

Class figured even more complexly in *Crawdaddy!* Most of the magazine's writers came from middle-class backgrounds, and during boom times, they often simply effaced differences in class background as articulated through music. When class did surface, it did so in terms of race. Peter Knobler's 1968 article, "The Young Rascals," revealed this complicated interaction.  

Reflecting on music during the past two years, Knobler noted that during "Malcolm's heyday and the direction of thought...toward black universal superiority...the Young Rascals were the white proletariat's answer to the cultural challenge of rhythm and blues."

Yet the influence of rock's high-art-tinged "mass market creativity and interaction," as Paul Williams had put it, changed what Knobler termed "prole rock." Knobler wrote, "There's a good chance that some of the nice things which were starting to go on in rock had

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a sizeable effect on the proletariat which bore the Rascals, and so there was more room in the
Rascals' audience for better sounds and finer sentiments." To Knobler, in a rather remarkable
phrase, "Kids were growing up as flower children rather than grease monkeys and there was
all of a sudden the opportunity to disregard formulas and do what you wanted with your
music."

This description of white working-class culture at once patronized "prole rock" and
pointed out the porousness of identity in the context of mass culture. So, too, it essentialized
race even as it strove to describe white working-class agency in achieving authentic
expressive selfhood. Writing of the Rascals's song, "Groovin'," which projected a different
sound than the band's covers of black soul classics, Knobler commented that the band "no
longer strained for notes which were not theirs, and the futile screaming invocations sort of
slipped away, replaced by a kind of soft, easy wail and light chorus of sun-worshipping 'ahs!'
Their's became a different kind of soul." Mixing his analysis of class with race, Knobler
dismissed the white and black working-class musical exchange and imitation that served as
the rock 'n' roll setting for the Rascals's innovations. Instead, he was more excited about the
fluidity of class identity and individuality within the new structures of mass culture. The
Rascals' "position as leaders of the pack of prole-rock has been snatched up" by other bands,
according to Knobler, but "the Rascals now are on their own."

As Greenberg, Williams, and Knobler suggested in their attempts to grapple with
race, gender, and class in Crawdaddy!'s pages, the free-floating countercultural civics of the
magazine, borne upon mass consumer circulation, proved too ephemeral, too evanescent, to
address successfully the intractable dilemmas of sameness and difference that race, class,
and gender provoked. Even when Crawdaddy!' writers dealt with them, they seemed not to
deal with them. But, crucially, the rock critics in *Crawdaddy!* did begin to address the complicated nature of identity as it appeared in popular music during the magazine's first two years.

More alarmingly, by *Crawdaddy!*'s last issues under Williams's editorship, a number of writers, faced with the diffuseness of *Crawdaddy!*'s civic terms, flirted with nihilism and violence rather than communal communication and a sense of togetherness. This dark turn must be viewed within the context of the assassinations, Vietnam War escalation, and increasingly violent domestic anti-War protests that took place in 1968. An eschatological attitude was in some sense a reasonable one to possess. Nonetheless, there remains something disturbing about a number of *Crawdaddy!* articles that seemed to abandon the pursuit of a countercultural civics for something more radically violent and destructive. One writer, Wayne McGuire, adopted an anti-humanist, apocalyptic stance in direct opposition to *Crawdaddy!*'s feel-good civic dimension. Spouting edgy nonsense, McGuire favored the creation of a "universal electric theocracy" in which each young American would become, "a child of the post-nihilistic era, a part of the emerging crystalline-like growth of humanity, in short, a Crystal Person, faceless and rootless." In one of his articles, McGuire claimed, "this is a review of the Velvet Underground, this is a review of the end of the world, this is a

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review of the Antichrist and Christ, this is a review of Life and Death, this is a review of tomorrow and of ever and ever.\textsuperscript{73} McGuire was affiliated with the Boston folk singer and cult leader Mel Lyman, under whose violent rhetoric and creepy spell Williams himself later fell, supposedly at one point hitting Raeanne Rubenstein, an editor of \textit{Crawdaddy!}, when she refused to publish an interview Williams had conducted with Lyman.\textsuperscript{74}

But even in \textit{Crawdaddy!}'s last issues under Williams editorship, there were sane voices brimming with ideas about the possibilities for a kind of countercultural civics -- new forms of the self and society -- lurking within mass consumerism's circulation of goods and images, sensations and feelings. Writers continued to explore the meaning of rock music, seeking in its sounds new modes of hearing, feeling, and being. They followed Sandy Pearlman's notion from the fall of 1967 that, "Rock's great world systems are sets of alternative arrangements -- or at least visions -- of the world," he wrote. Pearlman heard rock not as the imposition of a new domination, as Wayne McGuire did. Rather he emphasized, with a bit of humor intended, that if rock had "great world systems," these were only "alternative arrangements" and "visions." They were "sort of perfect," Pearlman insisted, undercutting the notion that rock could in fact generate systems of any sort, "because they don't matter."\textsuperscript{75} This tone, which can be called \textit{irreverent sincerity}, would emerge fully at \textit{Creem} a few years later. The tone only appeared at times in \textit{Crawdaddy!}, but when it did, the style of writing posed a model for navigating rock's alternative civic interactions. One


\textsuperscript{75} Pearlman, "Saucers Land in Virginia," 23.
could, as Pearlman did, circulate large philosophical ideas surreptitiously, through the seemingly inconsequential commercial recordings of rock. New notions of public life -- Pearlman's "great world systems" -- arrived through, of all things, record reviews.

Moreover, the collision of what Paul Williams called an "avant garde" with a music of "mass appeal" left a legacy of taking rock seriously -- but not too seriously. In this ambiguity of sincerity and irreverence, a mode of subversive discourse began to take shape. A critical sensibility of alternative identity emerged. It served multiple purposes. For individual writers and readers, this tone provided a way to differentiate oneself through virtuosic performances of a style of writing. Irreverent sincerity also circulated double meanings -- at once countercultural and mass cultural -- through the commercial processes of the marketplace. One could seize upon secret meanings in rock, adopting the music to struggle with the difficulties of attaining a meaningful sense of freedom and autonomy in mass culture. *Crawdaddy!* critics endeavored to harness the possibilities of the new structures of mass consumerism to emphasize the utopian and oppositional potential -- the avant-garde energies -- lurking paradoxically within mass culture.

*Crawdaddy!*'s first incarnation stumbled to an end in 1968 and 1969. However, the magazine's turn toward irreverent sincerity would burst forth fully at *Creem* magazine, which adopted *Crawdaddy!*'s earnest appreciation of rock, but drew upon the magazine's roots in Detroit to hone an even more sharply satirical edge. By mixing a sincere appreciation for rock's countercultural possibilities with an ironic perspective on the shortcomings of a countercultural civic life, *Creem* was able to sustain a spirit of

\[76\] Lydon, "Crawdaddy!," 114.
countercultural inquiry and engagement beyond the heyday of the counterculture in the late 1960s. Long after the tie-dyes and flowing robes of hippies had turned into punk's torn t-shirts and leather jackets, Creem was able to carry the civics of rock onward.

"Can't Forget the Motor City": Creem Magazine, Detroit Identity, and Irreverent Sincerity

"It only could have come from Detroit," the rock critic Dave Marsh declared. He was talking about the band the MC5, a controversial white rock group that emerged from the Detroit area. But Marsh could also have been talking about the publication in which his words appeared: Creem. Marsh made this observation to fellow Creem writer Nathaniel "Deday" LaRene in a conversation published as a review in the February, 1970, issue. At this date, Creem was still a local underground tabloid distributed solely in the Motor City. Marsh described the MC5 as possessing a tough, working-class identity shaped by the group's experiences growing up and performing in the Detroit metropolitan area. LaRene agreed, and referred to Jon Landau, the Crawdaddy! writer who had produced the latest album by the band, in order to express his excitement about the way in which the MC5 represented a local Detroit countercultural scene. "Even when it meets with the Crawdaddy! intellectual," LaRene claimed, "that kind of consciousness has a certain…organic vitality."

If the MC5 came to stand for a certain Detroit style of rock, Creem eventually symbolized a certain Detroit style of rock criticism. First published in March of 1969, Creem eventually transformed itself into a national music magazine and one of the main competitors with Rolling Stone in the 1970s. But even as Creem became a national entity, the publication forged a style of writing grounded in a local perspective. The association with Detroit allowed Creem to serve as a vehicle for a critical countercultural civics long after the heyday of the counterculture had faded.

Founded by Barry Kramer, who had grown up in a working-class Detroit family before becoming the owner in 1967 of a number of Michigan "head shop" stores in which hippies could purchase psychedelic gear, Creem appeared on the scene just as Rolling Stone was gaining national success.78 Rolling Stone had started in 1967. Jann Wenner, a student at the University of California - Berkeley, began the magazine with the help of San Francisco Chronicle music critic Ralph Gleason, Jr. Rolling Stone positioned itself as the exact opposite of Crawdaddy! Instead of attempting to constitute a disembodied countercultural civic community within its pages, Rolling Stone developed as a journalistic enterprise, concentrating on straightforward record reviews, the news of the rock industry, and investigative reports.79

The differences between Crawdaddy!'s legacy and Rolling Stone's dominance of rock criticism would inform Creem from its inception. Crawdaddy!, according to Chet Flippo,
who wrote a 1974 Master's Thesis on rock criticism, was, "the first true peer-group rock publication." But Paul Williams's creation, "was a fanzine-inspired magazine of personal essays with little lasting impact." By contrast, Flippo claimed that, "The most successful rock publication...was Rolling Stone, which concerned itself mainly with competent reportage." As Creem itself struggled to move from a local Detroit to a national market, the magazine found itself betwixt and between, on the one hand, Crawdaddy!'s "fanzine" approach and, on the other hand, Rolling Stone's "competent reportage."  

Based literally and symbolically in Detroit, Creem sought to confront what seemed like an increasingly desperate time in the United States. As the 1970s progressed, the optimism of the counterculture's late-1960s heyday faded. The disorder, chaos, and murder at the Altamont rock concert in December, 1969, signaled how the counterculture could easily be ripped asunder in its attempt to posit alternative civic assemblies from within the mechanisms of mass culture. The murders committed by Charles Manson and his followers emphasized the chillingly nihilistic side of the counterculture, especially when Manson's relationship to the Los Angeles rock counterculture became known to the public. Less directly terrifying, but just as frustrating, was the growing seriousness of the counterculture - a seriousness which, to Creem writers, seemed linked to its nihilistic turn. This serious turn transformed rock into an "art." Musicians were now artists. They became royalty removed

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from the rabble of rock's fans. Rock had become antidemocratic, more about rising above vulnerable encounters with other participants than joining in to a critical rock public life.

*Creem*’s writers objected to this transformation of rock into serious art. But, they did not insist that the opposite was true -- that the music was trash. Instead, *Creem* performed a more complicated operation in response.³ Drawing upon a humorous, cartoonish skepticism about any and all pretensions, *Creem*’s staff wielded a sensibility of wit, satire, and exaggeration. Crucially, they associated this stance with their Detroitness. Evoking a tone that might be deemed *irreverent sincerity*, *Creem* harnessed its Detroit identity to balance earnest feelings about rock's civic potential against suspicions about the growing elitism in rock and the darker turn of the counterculture as a whole.

Detroit provided plenty of fodder out of which to fashion an identity of irreverent sincerity. After World War II, as the historian Thomas Sugrue argues, Detroit and other Midwestern cities served as "bellweathers of economic change."⁴ For the *Creem* writers, Detroit also positioned its residents at the forefront of cultural transformations. The city's rise and fall as an industrial center for automobiles and other goods made it a symbolic national city, America's "arsenal of democracy" ultimately turned to rust. Detroit was also riven by tensions of class and race. The long history of union-company conflicts informed *Creem* writers' awareness of class identities. So, too, the protests by African-Americans in the summer of 1967 (tellingly called a "race riot" by most outsiders, but known to many

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within Detroit's African-American community as "the Great Rebellion") left a lasting impression on Creem's staff and critics.

Creem also drew upon a rich Detroit tradition of alternative publishing. During the late 1960s, Detroit not only featured the white-owned, liberal-socialist underground weekly The Fifth Estate, but also an African-American paper that sprung up in the aftermath of the Great Rebellion, Inner City Voice, and the transformation of Wayne State University's student newspaper, The South End, into a "worker's" paper edited by the black labor activist John Watson, in 1969. There was even, earlier in the 1960s, an African-American-owned, interrallagically-staffed paper, On The Town, that mixed entertainment listings with humor and writing on music, theater, the arts, and politics and maintained a circulation of roughly 10,000 copies within Detroit's city center. African-Americans in Detroit had also managed to sustain a range of arts activities, such as poet Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, which published Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Gwendolyn Brooks, and others. Beyond publishing, there was also, of course, Motown Records, whose wild success in popular music was rooted in its Detroit identity, right down to its very name.

Not only did Detroit boast Motown, it included an active jazz scene, as well as an interracial, Beat-inflected arts movement located in John Sinclair's Artists' Workshop, which

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87 For more on Motown's ambivalent oscillations between its commercial success and the African-American activist community in Detroit, see Suzanne Smith, Dancing In the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
began in a loft in the Wayne State University neighborhood during the fall of 1964.\textsuperscript{88} Sinclair, born to a middle-class family in Davidson, Michigan, went on to forge a radical countercultural politics as the manager of the MC5, music journalist, activist, and mentor to many of the \textit{Creem} writers from Michigan. Through his writings in \textit{The Fifth Estate}, national magazines such as \textit{Jazz & Pop}, and occasionally in \textit{Creem} itself, Sinclair was the first to develop an extended critique of the national counterculture from a distinctly Detroit perspective, and a sense of Detroit's music scene in the context of the larger countercultural movement. His ideas were tinged at times with a hyper-masculinized distortion of African-American political activism and cultural expression. But Sinclair also picked up where \textit{Crawdaddy!} left off in its 1968 explorations of mass media.

In some ways, Sinclair developed a more sophisticated apparatus in which to examine race, gender, and class identity by fusing political theories of Fanon, Mao, and Lenin with hunches about the power of electronic rock music. But even as he surpassed the \textit{Crawdaddy!} critics in his ability to sermonize about the possibilities for a revolutionary countercultural civics, he could not overcome the twin problem of either essentializing race, gender, and class identities or dismissing too easily the distances and friction between people based on these categories.\textsuperscript{89}

By the early 1970s, as \textit{Creem} moved to a national stage, Sinclair had faded in influence since he was in prison on a trumped-up marijuana possession conviction. However, the cunning but possibly compromising Detroit milieu that had been created by

\textsuperscript{88} See Cary, "The Rise and Fall of the MC5," 51.

Sinclair and others -- with its radical possibilities for a countercultural civics on the local level despite the city's rapidly decaying economic and social condition -- made irreverent sincerity seem like a sane yoking of opposing attitudes at Creem. This tonal approach allowed the magazine to critique, even savage, rock music's inability to convey a more egalitarian civic order without abandoning the possibility that the music might actually do so one day.

Creem critics could maintain some hope in the counterculture's potential for social renewal while acknowledging the movement's location in mass consumer culture and its failure to become a coherent positive political force. Creem continued Crawdaddy!'s linking of politics and art within, and not outside, mass commercial culture. Ultimately, irreverent sincerity provided a key combination of distant irony and persistent optimism. It not only provided Creem with a different commercial identity to Rolling Stone, it gave the magazine's staff a way to shield a longing for a better world within an armor of droll sarcasm.

The details of Creem's founding suggest that the magazine only gradually grew into a position of irreverent sincerity. Though publisher Barry Kramer later explained that the magazine's title was, "just a meaningless, irreverent name" and "came from the attitude of those of us who started it," at first, Creem was as earnest as most other countercultural publications.90 Like Crawdaddy! and Rolling Stone, the magazine's title was probably inspired by a fannish appreciation for British blues bands, in this case Eric Clapton's Cream. Indeed, the man who supposedly chose the name was not even from Detroit; he was a British

native named Tony Reay, Creem's original editor-in-chief.\textsuperscript{91} Thus, Creem did not begin at all as an irreverently sincere alternative. At first, the magazine possessed a tone that resembled Paul Williams's earnestness in its straightforward hopes for the counterculture and rock music. Only later did its full-blown irreverence develop. Nonetheless, Creem's transformation from its optimistic origins in 1969 shows how it ultimately preserved countercultural civics beyond the counterculture's late-1960s heyday.

![Figure 2.12. Countercultural sincerity: "The Fool at Zero," Creem, March 1969 (courtesy: Creem Media, Inc.)](image)

The first cover of Creem, dated March 1-14, 1969, and the connected article inside, captured the publication's sincere countercultural origins (see figure 2.12). From the gaping mouth of a long-haired, androgynous, black-and-white figure, the word "Creem" curled upward like a prayer or an unholy utterance, one could not quite tell. Empty space occupied most of the newsprint tabloid cover. The issue number, "1," floated in the upper left corner.

\textsuperscript{91}For this telling of how Creem got its name, see Richard C. Walls, "Twenty-Five Years of Creem, Part Two," 40.
The price, "25¢," sat in the upper right. The mysterious cover figure appeared again inside the magazine, next to an article that identified it as a Tarot-card drawing of "The Fool at Zero."

In a quintessentially earnest counterculture maneuver, this anonymous article connected the "Fool" with notions of spirituality, artistic creativity, and the possibility for a utopian post-scarcity society. "We have come to a spiritual awakening," the article claimed, "that makes us not only aware of the science and technology at our disposal but the ability and innate wisdom to use them through creative energy and beauty for a brotherhood of light through universal love." The cover figure, according to the article, "symbolizes the warm, colorful creative energy of universal cultural activities."92

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Figure 2.13. Barry Kramer, Dave Marsh, Lester Bangs, and peering through the window, Roberta "Robbie" Cruger, in front of Creem's Cass Avenue Loft, 1971 (photograph: Charlie Auringer)

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92 *Creem* 1, 1 (1-14 March 1969): cover, 6. *Creem* editor Tony Reay explained that this figure and the accompanying text were both lifted from a project organized by the Beatles' label, Apple Records. Email correspondence with author, 24 January 2003.
Like this cover figure, *Creem* magazine at first sought to express the creative energy that a youth counterculture, revolving around rock music, might both harness and unleash. Published from a loft on Cass Avenue (see figure 2.13), the magazine sought to embody a sincere commitment to art in general. *Creem* featured original poetry, writing on jazz by Richard C. Walls, and even a classical music column by Judy Adams. The local dominated *Creem's* agenda. "Detroit is home to many creative artists," Barry Kramer wrote in an editorial. "There are those who would like to exploit this market. Sell its soul. We won't let this happen. *Creem* will help build a more cohesive community." Believing that other vibrant local countercultural scenes such as San Francisco had been ruined by commercialization by outside corporations, Kramer ostensibly sought to create a magazine about Detroit without overexposing the city's counterculture.93

*Creem* even featured a map of countercultural Detroit, emphasizing the city's sense of constituting a local scene (see figure 2.14).95 Nonetheless, Kramer also insisted that the magazine was primarily about new forms of mediated creative expression. "This paper is devoted to media with the emphasis on music and the people that live it -- you," he wrote.96 Detroiter were not isolated creators, but embedded in a larger mass culture of media, especially rock music.

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94 Dave Marsh claims that from the very beginning, Kramer was interested in expanding *Creem* into a mass commercial entity like many "hip capitalists" were doing at the time; Dave Marsh, phone interview with author, 21 July 2000 and email correspondence with author, 21 February 2001.


Even by the second issue, *Creem* was honing a cartoonish, irreverent demeanor heavily influenced by non-Detroit visitors. In the place of the first issue's androgynous Tarot-card "Fool at Zero" cover figure was a cartoon rendering by the underground comic artist, Robert Crumb, who had been visiting Detroit in March of 1969 (see figure 2.15). This figure presented a sense of rock and the counterculture that was far from earnest. It was far more in the satirical spirit of *Mad* magazine than the psychedelia of the *San Francisco Oracle*. While associated with the San Francisco counterculture, Crumb in fact had already developed a strong sense of the counterculture's vast failings. This second cover was full of male-fantasized sexual innuendo. It featured a "Mr. Dream Whip" aerosol can smiling at the viewer as he pleasured young ladies with "gloops" of whip cream. "Wow!," "Me Next, Mr.

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97 Robert Crumb "Mr. Dream Whip" cartoon, *Creem* 1, 2 (15-31 March 1969): cover; this cover also featured the first rendering of the *Creem* icon, a bottle of milk drawn by Crumb and declaring, "Boy Howdy!" - - later it would appear in *Creem* as a beer can.

Dream Whip!" and "Whew!" they cried out as horrified parents looked on in disgust in the background, save for one man lurking close to the ground, who giggled, "Tee hee." As silly as it was offensive, the cover suggested that Creem might tap into a reservoir of satire, both in relation to Detroit and to the larger counterculture movement.

Indeed, a year later, Creem's identity and outlook were changing, influenced by new members of the magazine's staff, including the politically-minded Dave Marsh (who came to Creem from the milieu of John Sinclair and The Fifth Estate, and before that from a working-class family in Michigan) and the aesthetically-oriented "Deday" LaRene (Kramer's cousin, and a beatnik-inspired law student from Toronto). Creem was moving toward addressing a statewide and even a national audience with irreverent sincerity, even as it narrowed its scope from the arts of the counterculture more broadly to rock music in particular.

Figure 2.15. The dawn of irreverence: R. Crumb's "Mr. Dream Whip" cover, Creem, March 1969 (courtesy: Creem Media, Inc.)

99 Nathaniel "Deday" LaRene's nickname came from his birth date, 6 June 1944.
By 1970, *Creem* had developed a clearer sense of what it meant for the magazine to be from Detroit. "We're one of only five or six national magazines of the alternative culture," Barry Kramer, Marsh, and LaRene wrote in "The Michigan Scene Today," a March 1970 editorial, "and as such we have something to say about more than just what goes on in our own neighborhood. Still, even within this broader framework we're a Detroit artifact. The style of the Detroit scene is our style." To the triumvirate of editors who had come to shape *Creem*'s identity in its second year, the magazine's style came definitively from the Detroit metropolitan region's rock-dominated youth culture of adventurous, anti-intellectual teenagers.

Kramer, Marsh, and LaRene argued that, "It was rock and roll music which first drew us out of out intellectual covens and suburban shells" because "life in Detroit is profoundly anti-intellectual" since its "institutions are industrial and businesslike." But despite being far from cultural centers, the editors claimed much for a Detroit counterculture that consisted of rock-oriented youth: "What we've made ourselves is as real as the foul breath of the Ford plant or the scum in the Detroit River," they insisted. Kramer, Marsh, and LaRene associated the "rock and roll culture" from which *Creem* emerged with Detroit. They assumed that the city and its environs gave shape to a "lifestyle" that "like the music, is naïve, crude, adolescent, simple and simplistic."\(^{100}\)

The issues of 1970 and 1971 honed this Detroit-inspired tone; *Creem* was on its way toward its fully-fledged, distinctive merging of irreverence and sincerity. Dave Marsh, in particular, developed *Creem*'s tone and approach. In sharp-edged articles, reviews, and

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columns, Marsh repeatedly circled back to the political failures -- and to the lingering, unfulfilled mission -- of the youth counterculture of the 1960s by investigating his own experiences as a local Detroit youth. "Maybe it's that I cut my teeth on the MC5," he wrote in a 1971 article on the MC5, "or that I am possessed by the peculiar Motor City aesthetic, but I'd go see that [mid-1960s] brand of the MC5 even if the Rolling Stones were across the street. Nothing I've ever experienced has been nearly comparable and it may be a long time coming before we all have the collective spirit to do it again."\(^{101}\)

Writing in 1985, Marsh explained how important the MC5 -- the quintessential Detroit band for him -- were in shaping his sense of the utopian possibilities of the counterculture locally. "So powerfully did the MC5's music unite its listeners that leaving those 1968 and 1969 shows, one literally felt that anything, even that implausible set of White Panther slogans, could come to pass," he noted. For Marsh:

> In that sense, the MC5, with their Baccanalian orgy of high energy sound, was a truer reflection of the positive spirit of the counterculture than the laid-back Apollonians of Haight-Ashbury ever could have been. And from the glimmerings of that confused babble, from the evidence of its hints of success, one could begin to construct an aesthetic and perhaps even a program that proposed how rock culture could fit into society as something more significant than a diversion. You could say that the very idea is crazy, but not if you were a part of those shows -- which weren't concerts or dances but something more spectacular and fulfilling.\(^{102}\)

In this quotation, Marsh placed Detroit and the MC5 against San Francisco's countercultural scene. Marsh's own hometown, not the Bay Area, developed a "truer spirit of the counterculture than the laid-back Apollonians of the Haight-Ashbury." As this view of the


San Francisco scene suggests, Marsh drew upon his intense local experiences of rock music to examine the counterculture as a national phenomenon. In doing so, Marsh critiqued the counterculture far more than he praised it.

He became especially intrigued and troubled by what *Rolling Stone* writer David Felton had termed the "psychedelic fascism" of religious cults and political ideologues such as Charles Manson and Mel Lyman. In a 1972 column, Marsh wrote that the "human principles on which [the counterculture] began are being avoided and shirked." As the 1970s dawned, suddenly "everyone was aware that the alternative culture we had been building was as sick as the culture it was supposedly an alternative to" [italics in original]. But while Felton and other writers associated with *Rolling Stone* rejected the counterculture in the name of an older tradition of journalistic muckraking and investigative reporting, Marsh clung to the idea that countercultural dreams were worthy, if compromised, ones.

Marsh argued that the absurdities of Detroit provided an especially provocative place from which to gaze at the strengths and weaknesses of building an alternative youth culture. As with the MC5, other bands of the area presented examples of this to Marsh. "To understand and truly appreciate The Frut," he wrote in a 1971 article on one such group, "as with any highly localized phenomenon, you've got to understand the nature of the region from which they come -- Detroit and Ann Arbor and their environs." Having grown up there, Marsh insisted, "It's all filthy. I grew up as far from Detroit (though due north) as the Frut, and the foundry grit on the windowsills is my earliest memory. That foundry dust, vile as it

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103 David Felton, ed., *Mindfuckers.*

is, eats away at not only aluminum siding and automobile finishes but also at the very heart of those who must live in it."

To Marsh, surviving the Detroit-area's polluted and desperate environment paradoxically liberated one to grasp hold and ride the energy of adopting an absurdist point of view, a way of perceiving the world as capable of being turned upside down and hence always up for grabs. In December 1970, writing in his column called "Looney Toons," Marsh articulated this view in terms of his own magazine, asking: "What if somebody asked you what CREEM was?" Emphasizing the topsy-turvy sensibility Detroit could foster for him, Marsh answered himself: "CREEM is the magazine of rock as high comedy and low art, of bizarre as normalcy." But to Marsh, this approach "may not make much sense unless you live up in Motown too."

Writing whimsically -- but also seriously -- of bands such as The Frut, Marsh claimed that they possessed a "Rockicrucian Spirit." This spirit, "had the power to liberate the entire mental/physical complex (being) into a pinnacle of transcendent and quintessentially aboriginal energy." Marsh felt that Detroit was an especially potent site of this powerful force. This was because in Detroit, the music, "had to be hard and high energy, too, because the very nature of the city was, and is, dead-set against the Rockicrucian Spirit, and all its implications." For Marsh, the Motor City "was as anti-metaphysical as the cars that are so aptly its symbol," but because of this gritty setting, it produced a sensibility that

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moved in a powerful manner between realism and idealism in the search for both countercultural and commercial success.\textsuperscript{107}

The rock music that resulted, then, was especially meaningful for considerations of the successes and the shortcomings of the counterculture. "The Frut are a dream band."

Marsh believed, "and their dream is in many ways our dream -- to cure it all by just rockin' on out." But -- and this was a pivotal move on Marsh's part -- The Frut represented not just the hopes of the counterculture, but the problems as well. There were "deficiencies of that attitude, one that we've all held at one time or another," Marsh noted of The Frut's "Rockicrucian" impulses. Marsh only began to outline how "rockin' on out" could "cure it all," and what the precise "deficiencies of that attitude" were. Nonetheless, he did help to position \textit{Creem} as a publication that was not a cheerleader for simple countercultural solutions to mainstream American social ills. Instead, \textit{Creem} took shape as a self-critical journal acutely cognizant of the tricky intertwining of countercultural desires and mass-consumer experiences.\textsuperscript{108}

By 1971, two years into its existence, \textit{Creem} had transformed itself from a local, newsprint tabloid to a prominent national, glossy magazine that soon claimed a circulation of 100,000.\textsuperscript{109} So, too, the publication shifted its identity. In its first issue, Barry Kramer declared that "\textit{Creem} Magazine is Detroit" (see figure 2.16). By the tenth issue, \textit{Creem} was

\textsuperscript{107} Dave Marsh, "Will Success Spoil the Frut?", 31, 33.

\textsuperscript{108} Marsh, "Will Success Spoil the Frut?", 31-32.

\textsuperscript{109} The first glossy magazine version was \textit{Creem} 3, 1 (March 1971); \textit{Creem} circulation figure for 1973 in Flippo, "Rock Journalism and \textit{Rolling Stone}," 40; Marco Trbovich quotes Barry Kramer as claiming \textit{Creem}'s subscriber circulation was only 8,000 in 1972; Marco Trbovich "Where \textit{Creem} Is At: Who Woulda Believed America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine Is Out There in Walled Lake?" \textit{Detroit Free Press}, 18 February 1973, 8. While newsstand copies would substantially increase the magazine's exact circulation figures, one must grant that the extent of the magazine's readership cannot be precisely gauged.
"Michigan's Music Paper" (see figure 2.17). In its second year, *Creem* became "The Midwest's Music Magazine" (see figure 2.18). Finally, in August of 1972, *Creem* declared itself "America's Only Rock and Roll Magazine" (see figure 2.19). As its transformed slogan suggested, *Creem* had become a publication with a much less direct local link by 1972. Yet its exaggeration of claiming to be "America's Only Rock and Roll Magazine," when *Rolling Stone* and so many others existed, transferred its sense of Detroitness to a tone of irreverent sincerity.

110 As its transformed slogan suggested, *Creem* had become a publication with a much less direct local link by 1972. Yet its exaggeration of claiming to be "America's Only Rock and Roll Magazine," when *Rolling Stone* and so many others existed, transferred its sense of Detroitness to a tone of irreverent sincerity.

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Creem's strong local identity was now a portable, transmittable energy that could be commodified on a national level. Yet because it could fluidly move from irreverence to sincerity, Creem could operate flexibly within America mass consumerism, critiquing the current state of cultural and political affairs and smuggling in a sense of alternative countercultural civic impulses rooted in its Detroitness. As Roberta "Robbie" Cruger, at first Barry Kramer's secretary, and soon a columnist for the magazine, asked twenty-five years later, "Were we selling out?" For Cruger, the answer was no: "Just because we went glossy didn't mean we weren't irreverent anymore."111

Creem's editors viewed its maturation from local tabloid to national glossy not only as a necessary economic step, but also as an effort to bring an irreverently sincere perspective from Detroit to the national youth culture. "What would you do if you had to compete with the two largest Rock Publications?" an editorial questioned potential advertisers and record industry personnel in a sample issue mailed out during the winter of 1971, referring most of all to the leading rock journal, Rolling Stone, as well as another rock magazine, probably Circus. Yet, economic concerns were not the only issue for going glossy and national. Creem also had an important message to contribute. "Most of all," the editorial declared, "we think that people read CREEM...because we have a sense of humor, because we relate to serious things seriously but we still haven't lost our sense of proportion."112 A sense of irreverence allowed Creem to sustain its "sense of proportion." But sincerity also


enabled the magazine to cling to the dream of a free, egalitarian countercultural civics -- one that might be realized through the circulation of rock music in mass culture.

As Creem transformed itself into a national "slick," changes were afoot at the publication, including a significant change of address. In the summer of 1971, publisher Barry Kramer moved the offices of Creem to two old farmhouses in Walled Lake, Michigan, roughly thirty miles north of its downtown location on Cass Avenue. As many participants in the counterculture did, Kramer and his staff sought to enact a countercultural civics through communal living in a more rural setting.\footnote{113} Just as he had at the magazine's Cass Avenue loft, Kramer gave each Creem staff member a stipend and free room and board.

The racial aspect of the move to the countryside, however, was troubling. The migration to the countryside may have been caused in part by conflicts between a band Kramer was managing (singer Mitch Ryder's group called, tellingly, Detroit) and African-American gangs in the Wayne State neighborhood. Indeed, by moving from downtown Detroit, Creem followed the auto industry, Motown, and countless other businesses in severing its connections -- always tense but previously fruitful -- with Detroit's culturally-rich but economically-deprived African-American culture. Dave Marsh, in fact, opposed the move for this reason.\footnote{114} Geoffrey Jacques, a young African-American writer at the time who published in Creem, recalls Barry Kramer telling him that the magazine was moving to a less


urban location because "that's where the kids are," a comment that disarmed the teenage Jacques.\footnote{Geoffrey Jacques, conversation with author, American Studies Association conference, Detroit, MI, 12 November 2000.}

As with Crawdaddy!'s informal workplace in New York, conflicts arose at Creem's isolated location. Kramer and Marsh continued to battle over editorial decisions. Soon new staff member Lester Bangs joined the fray. With staff members living and working in the same place, the civics of Creem's communal setting often grew quite uncivil.\footnote{Jim DeRogatis relates a number of tales of Marsh and Bangs's personal and professional (and sometimes literal) sparring matches; DeRogatis, Let It Blurt, 71-75.} But despite the magazine's office tensions, Creem continued to develop a rich space of opinion, reportage, and communication in print.\footnote{Cruger, "Twenty-Five Years of Creem, Part One," 40; DeRogatis, Let It Blurt, 71-75.} In particular, keeping its Detroit-inspired tone of irreverent sincerity but freed from its local context by its move out of Detroit and its switch to national distribution, Creem was able to incorporate voices from outside Detroit.

The arrival from the San Diego-area of Bangs as editor and writer in 1971, as well as the additions of correspondents from both coasts, including Greil Marcus from San Francisco, and Vince Aletti, Robert Christgau, Lisa Robinson, and others from New York, connected Creem's Detroit-based irreverent sincerity to a wider range of talented writers and editors. These rock critics were already sympathetic to Creem's emerging approach to rock music and the counterculture. A number of them, Bangs and Marcus in particular, had indeed left Rolling Stone because it would no longer publish their styles of criticism. With a
critical irreverence, these writers smuggled their hopes in the persistence of the countercultural civics that rock might inspire.\textsuperscript{118}

By expanding beyond Detroit's literal borders while persisting in a Detroit-derived tone, \textit{Creem} had become, within three years of its birth, both a literal and an imagined space for encounters between an irreverently sincere critical outlook and the idea of a national counterculture that still might be circulating through mass consumerism in the early 1970s. Most obviously, more overt political activities on the left informed \textit{Creem}. For instance, the Winter Soldier Investigation, sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, took place in Detroit in the winter of 1971. The conference, reported on by Ken Kelley in \textit{Creem}, featured testimony about war atrocities and crimes committed by the United States in the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{119} Dave Marsh reflected that this event further sharpened his sense of political outrage and his need to shape some kind of response in his music criticism.\textsuperscript{120} But \textit{Creem} not only responded to these direct interactions with countercultural political activism; the magazine also struggled with the countercultural effort to seek out the potential for civic transformation \textit{within mass culture}.

\textit{Creem} sought to develop a sophisticated awareness of the counterculture's existence within mass consumerism without giving up on the counterculture entirely. For instance, in the first national, glossy issue, Craig Karpel wrote an article, "Das Hip Capital," that carefully explored the relationship between the counterculture and mass culture. "A growing

\textsuperscript{118} See DeRogatis, \textit{Let It Blurt}, 61-62.

\textsuperscript{119} For the transcript of the Winter Soldier Investigation, see http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_entry.html.

\textsuperscript{120} Marsh, email correspondence, 21 February 2001.
number of freaks are coming to understand that commercialization of the life-style erodes it," Karpel explained. "But their analysis of the process is simplistic: Hip capitalists are 'ripoff artists' who 'steal our culture.' They talk with the animosity of a host for its parasite. But freaks should understand that…the hip capitalists are symbiotes: the freaks supply the life-style, the hip capitalist the life-accoutrement." 121 Yet, like *Crawdaddy!, Creem* did not seek to deny mass culture; instead, it worked against what Karpel identified as the dominant ideology that rock music and the counterculture could somehow exist completely outside mass consumerism.

Just as *Crawdaddy!* had, *Creem* searched for a countercultural civics that moved within mass consumerism's electronic circulation. Once again, as with *Crawdaddy!*, advertisements and actual copy shared certain themes, but the writing in *Creem* was able to deepen notions of countercultural civic possibilities. As with the advertisement for Sunn amplifiers in *Crawdaddy!* (see figure 2.10), an advertisement for the Electro-Harmonix portable amplifier in *Creem* declared, "Free yourself from the bureaucratically dominated sources of electricity!" (see figure 2.20). 122

In the same issue, Dave Marsh reviewed an album called "Survival" by the band Grand Funk Railroad, writing, "Rock 'n' roll is not ready to give us great technicians, for that would surely stultify its incompetent spirit. It is willing to give us great technology, for that can amplify its resounding power." 123 While the advertisement suggested counterculturists

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could free themselves from mass culture and mass consumerism's entangling wires and sources of electricity by buying an Electro-Harmonix portable amplifier, Marsh's review examined a far more complex phenomenon: the way in which rock 'n' roll had clarified what the counterculture was looking for in 1971 -- a way to survive while dealing "with the city."

Figure 2.20. Electrified irreverence: Electro-Harmonix advertisement, Creem, June 1971 (courtesy: Creem Media, Inc.)

For Marsh, writing about the city during the last days of Creem's time in Detroit, "city" seems to have symbolized the struggles to articulate a countercultural alternative within American mass culture and consumerism. Writing about the Grand Funk Railroad song "Country Road" and perhaps thinking about Creem's impending move, Marsh decided that the band, "can talk about going to the country, to look for sanctuary, to look for comradeship and all those elusive, naïve, and intrinsically innocent virtues that, in the end, rock is based upon" because it did so from the "city" perspective. Confronting mass-
mediated events such as the Kent State University murder of American youth by the National Guard, rock music provided a way, according to Marsh, to explore alternative civic situations that contained better ways of relating to each other: "comradeship and all those elusive, naïve, and intrinsically innocent virtues that, in the end, rock is based upon." Thus, while Marsh's review shared with the Electro-Harmonix advertisement a general attitude toward seizing the electricity of mass culture in pursuit of liberation from that culture, his review developed a more nuanced interpretation of the possibilities and limitations for a countercultural civics to emerge from this effort.

Marsh based his interpretation on rock music as a placeless phenomenon. But he also pointed out in his review that Grand Funk was "Midwestern, AMERICAN rock 'n' roll." The band emerged from the same context as Creem -- the crisis of the decaying Rust Belt. Indeed, to the Creem critics, Detroit's economic troubles, and the Detroit adolescent's response of seeking community and self-fulfillment within a landscape of dimming horizons, seemed to herald larger problems, and the possible responses to those problems, for America as a whole. Because of this, the Creem critics were able to position their magazine at the vanguard of a persistent national counterculture that might be able to sustain -- through irreverent sincerity -- a countercultural civics.

One embodiment of Creem's irreverent sincerity was a "Sex and Violence!" subscription advertisement that ran in the autumn of 1973 (see figure 2.21). The ad's title, particularly the idea of violence, resonated with the identity of a magazine associated with Detroit, now known as "Murder City, U.S.A." But above all, the ad was a joke that

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124 The Kent State killings took place on 4 May 1970; Creem moved from Detroit to Walled Lake later in the summer of 1971.
positioned *Creem* in a national market as a magazine that was neither pretentious nor living in fantasy, but rather possessed a refreshing, irreverent attitude even toward itself. Beneath the over-enthusiastic title of the ad, a column of promotional copy announced, "That's what *CREEM* offers with a subscription this month, along with sweet country pickin', sweeter balladry, reborn rebop, and a plenitude of insanely bracing laughter." These descriptions referred to record albums given away with a subscription, but they also can be read as rather comical glosses on *Creem* itself. Adding to the sense of self-parody, the ad deemed *Creem*, "the magazine of vex and silence."\(^{125}\)

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\(^{125}\)"Sex and Violence" subscription advertisement, *Creem* 5, 6 (November 1973): 81; Dave Marsh is fairly certain that Lester Bangs wrote the copy for this subscription advertisement; Dave Marsh, email correspondence, 21 February 2001.
Lester Bangs, who perhaps wrote the copy for this advertisement, emerged as the best practitioner of irreverent sincerity.\footnote{Roberta Cruger, phone conversation with author, 17 January 2002.} He conducted an exclusive interview from heaven with a deceased Jimi Hendrix, confronted Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground in numerous highly comical yet searching, serious interviews, and wrote many record reviews and features in a rushing, bittersweet, Kerouac-inspired tone that mingled wisdom with wisecracks and tenderness with vitriol.\footnote{Lester Bangs, "Death May Be Your Santa Claus: An Exclusive Up-To-Date Interview with Jimi Hendrix," by "Mort A. Credit as told to Lester Bangs," Creem 7, 2 (April 1976): 13-15. Among Bangs's many Reed interviews are "Deaf Mute in a Phonebooth: A Perfect Day with Lou Reed," Creem 5, 3 (July 1972): 10-13.} Though not a Detroit native, Bangs also understood irreverent sincerity to be grounded in a Detroit identity.

Just as he joined Creem in 1971, Bangs published a piece in the rock fanzine Who Put the Bomp? that gave a sense of his belief in the strange promise of Detroit. "The only real hope is Detroit," Bangs wrote, "because it takes the intolerableness of Detroit life and channels it into a form of strength and survival with humor and much of the energy claimed."\footnote{Lester Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," in Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic -- Rock 'n' Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock 'n' Roll, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 69. Originally published in Who Put the Bomp? (Winter/Spring 1971).} Indeed, irreverent sincerity did not mean surrendering completely the notion that rock music could provoke a countercultural transformation in American life. Instead, even Bangs -- especially Bangs -- who came to Detroit to work at Creem, drew upon his sense of the city in order to argue that rock music, functioning within mass consumerism, might possess revolutionary political energies.

For Bangs, this was because Detroit offered the best example of a musical culture that had struggled with countercultural ambitions from within mass consumerism. In the
Motor City, Bangs believed that, "the fatuity rate is incredibly low…as is the cosmic vibration rate; people tend to have horse sense, which is refreshing, and know what's important; even more than that they know what's absolutely crucial and what's a gaudy ball of gauze." Building on this Detroit-derived vision of *Creem* as a magazine realistic about contemporary American life, but unwilling to give up on "what's absolutely crucial," Bangs unfolded his vision of a countercultural ethos that could arise out of rock music. His vision positioned rock not as Art with a capital A, nor Politics with a capital P, but as a trashy consumer commodity whose impermanent and derivative sounds could -- out of a seeming superficiality -- make the kinetic, life-affirming, and joyful energies of creative expression widely available for both individual and communal use.

Above all else, Bangs urged his readers to hear rock as a music with a serious message: resist seriousness. Responding both to political radicals who dismissed all of rock as utterly tainted by the workings of capitalism and to a consolidating record industry that increasingly marketed certain rock musicians as high-brow artists and artistic geniuses, Bangs argued that within the most shallow and seemingly foolish levels of mass consumer culture a deep, enlivening sense of personal and collective power lurked. However, this power for self and group liberation could only be grasped and enacted if appraised on the sly, wrapped in a joke, with a cultural stance of irreverence. In articles and reviews, Bangs laid out *Creem's* aesthetics and politics of trash, examining how within mass consumerism, what seemed most foolish in fact held the key to social transformation while what seemed

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129 Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 69.
most serious wound up passifying listeners, preventing them from grasping the tools consumerism made available for their own countercultural transformations.

As a cultural critic, Bangs set out to explain how the trashiest corners of mass-consumer culture -- rather than straightforward politics or serious-minded rock "art" -- could yield important insights and revelations about the state of American life. First, he turned away entirely from politics in the traditional sense. Punning, Bangs wrote of a "Party" that most deserved his generation's membership not because it was the best political organization but because it was a special kind of festive gathering. This "Party"'s "collective ambition was simple," Bangs mused. "Jive and rave and kick 'em out cross the decades and only stop for the final Bomb or some technological maelstrom of sonic bliss sucking the cities away at last." For Bangs, this sort of "Party" provided the most meaningful program during a time of bankrupt public institutions and the ongoing threat of annihilation by the technologies of the Cold War, from the bomb to the massive amounts of electricity motoring the consumer system.\(^{130}\)

In his breathless, swerving, funny sentences that seemed to sweep a reader up in their propulsive energy, Bangs explained how his "Party" presented the most viable politics for young Americans coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, "because the Party was the one thing we had in our lives to grab onto." This "Party"'s platform -- to "jive and rave and kick 'em out cross the decades" -- was "the one thing we could truly believe in and depend on, a loony tune fountain of youth and vitality that was keeping us alive as much as any medicine we'd ever take or all the fresh air in Big Sur." Without breaking stride, Bangs theorized why

\(^{130}\) Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 64-65.
his "Party" offered the superior agenda to the "medicine" of mind-altering drugs or the back-
to-nature countercultural ideas associated with a location such as Big Sur. The "Party," for
Bangs, "sustained us without engulfing us and gave us a nexus of metaphor through which
we could refract less infinitely extensible concerns and learn a little bit about ourselves and
what was going on without even, incredibly enough, getting pretentious about it."\(^{131}\)

This growing pretentiousness of the counterculture increasingly troubled Bangs. He
not only viewed more conventional forms of elective politics -- or even other kinds of anti-
consumerist countercultural politics put forth in the 1960s -- as flawed, he felt the sobriety
with which rock fans were taking the music was problematic. In the late 1960s, Bangs noted,
"American kids began in progressively larger numbers to take themselves with the utmost
seriousness, both as individuals and as a vaguely and mystically defined mass \textit{class}" and in
the process began to make rock "the soundtrack for our personal and collective narcissistic
psychodramas."\(^{132}\) What had begun as rock's ability to spark revelations out of the tawdry
revelry of popular music had, for Bangs, become bogged down in attempts to treat rock as
high-minded philosophy, as a music bearing a serious message, as attempts to ignore the
music's existence as the fodder and detritus of everyday life in mass consumerism.

A central problem for Bangs was that a consolidating record industry was
increasingly marketing the seriousness of rock to America's youth culture. As a critic, Bangs
sought to counter this mass-marketing of the counterculture with irreverent, razor-sharp
observations whose barbs and jabs gave way, ultimately, to a sustained, sincere commitment
to the radical ethos of the counterculture itself. A 1973 review of an album by the Rowan

\(^{131}\) Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 65.

\(^{132}\) Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 65.
Brothers used one recording to make a larger point about the marketing of the counterculture as a serious, but alarmingly passive way of living. "This record scares me," Bangs declared. "What [the Rowan Brothers] do, by some means unknown to me, is to project a lifestyle. And some lifestyle it is, too. Vegetarian, disengaged, 'spiritual,' and -- most importantly -- easy. It's a lifestyle that takes no effort to live, that contains no pain, demands nothing, and returns everything. …Even death doesn't matter." For Bangs, the Rowan Brothers reflected the larger threat of countercultural disengagement with everyday life in mass consumerism.\(^{133}\)

Bangs' goal as a critic was to suggest the alternative ways in which rock music in fact engaged, enlivened, and even empowered the typical young American. Writing of the Rowan Brothers' message of rock as "vegetarian, disengaged, 'spiritual,' and -- most importantly -- easy," Bangs pointed out, "Of course it's a lie." To Bangs, it was, "the same kind of lie -- adapted to the times, of course -- that brought…sixteen-year-olds to Haight Street in 1967." Finally, Bangs concluded in his irreverent way, "Do an old codger a favor, kids, and don't buy the Rowan Brothers' record. And do yourself a favor and don't buy what the Rowan Brothers are selling." This was because, to Bangs, turning more sincere, "They want you to think that they can sell it, when in fact they can't because it's free. You just have to pay a little more for it than they did, but that's okay too, because you'll get to keep it long after the Rowan Brothers have been forgotten."\(^{134}\)

In this review, Bangs stressed that the utopian politics of the counterculture -- the idea of revivifying American society based on more liberating, just, egalitarian, energizing

\(^{133}\) Lester Bangs, Review of *The Rowan Brothers*, *Creem* 4, 8 (January 1973): 74-75.

\(^{134}\) Bangs, Review of *The Rowan Brothers*, 75.
principles than what currently existed -- was not inherently bad. In fact, he suggested it was quite worthwhile. But, for Bangs this was only so if young Americans grasped the energy of rock as a "Party" happening in the belly of mass consumerism, not as a disengagement from the dominant economic and social system of American life. Fortunately for Bangs, there were rock bands whose music propelled this countercultural "Party" onward -- with all its irreverent foolishness intact. In an extended 1970 essay with the tellingly absurd title, "Of Pop and Pies and Fun, A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, Or, Who's the Fool?," Bangs explored the ways in which The Stooges -- a Detroit band dismissed by many in the national counterculture for their seeming incompetence as musicians and their wild, desperate, often self-destructive stage antics -- were the truth-tellers the Rowan Brothers were not.

Bangs admired The Stooges, among other bands, as fools who leveled the difference between rock stars and everyday rock fans, puncturing the manufactured myths of rock as serious art-making and rock performers as artistic geniuses. The Stooges' lead singer Iggy Pop (born James Osterberg) was simply, "a nice sensitive American boy growing up amid a thicket of some of the worst personal, interpersonal, and national confusion we've seen." Bangs did not precisely define this "thicket" of "confusion" in more detail, but he seems to have viewed Iggy Pop as an individual caught up in the alienating desperation and absurdity of a postwar America defined increasingly by a mass-consumer system that proffered mostly meaningless goods and images to citizens stranded in suburban wastelands. Iggy was, Bangs explained, "a pre-eminently American kid, singing songs about growing up in America,
about being hung up lotsa the time (as who hasn't been?), about confusion and doubt and
uncertainty, about inertia and boredom and suburban pubescent darkness.\textsuperscript{135}

But responding in this mass-consumer context not to some great artistic calling or to
any fully-developed political agenda, but rather simply to the urge to feel alive and to matter,
Iggy Pop and The Stooges made a music that, for Bangs, took the energy and electricity that
powered the trashy, shallow, low sectors of mass-consumer life and transformed them into a
joyous, vital force. In doing so, the group represented to the \textit{Creem} critic all the
countercultural problems -- and perhaps also the true countercultural solution -- to what
Bangs, writing in his irreverent tone, deemed the "absurdity and desperation of the times":

> Well, a lot of changes have gone down since Hip first hit the heartland. There's a new culture shaping up, and while it's certainly an improvement on the repressive society now nervously aging, there is a strong element of sickness in our new, amorphous institutions. The cure bears viruses of its own. The Stooges carry a strong element of sickness in their music, a crazed, quaking uncertainty, an errant foolishness that effectively mirrors the absurdity and desperation of the times, but I believe that they also carry a strong element of cure, a post-derangement sanity. And I also believe that their music is as important as the product of any rock group working today, although you better never call it art or you may wind up with a deluxe pie in the face. What it is, instead, is what rock and roll at hear is and always has been, beneath the stylistic distortions the last few years have wrought. The Stooges are not for the ages -- nothing created now is -- but they are most implicitly for today and tomorrow and the traditions of two decades of beautifully bopping, manic, simplistic jive.\textsuperscript{136}

Bangs reference to these "traditions of two decades" requires some explanation: as
with Dave Marsh's notion of a "Rockicrucian Spirit," Bangs treated The Stooges as a band
carrying on a tradition of rock-and-roll music forged in response to the desperations of the


\textsuperscript{136} Bangs, "Of Pops and Pies," 33.
post-World War II era. Bangs included The Stooges in the rock phenomenon he and others termed "Third Generation," which included bands coming of age after the first roar of rock and roll with Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and others in the 1950s, and the second wave of British Invasion and American garage-rock bands in the 1960s. For Bangs, these "Third Generation" groups raised the specter of young Americans combining parody and appreciation in one joyous fell swoop that resuscitated the counterculture's utopian dreams from within the circuitry of mass-consumer society.

For rock's power, Bangs wrote, had "to do with growing up, perhaps absurd but with all the pop and pap and creature comforts, in white suburbia, and responding to this situation with as much frustration and vigor as our idiomatic ancestors got out of being physically, visibly repressed." Rock bands of the "Third Generation" might be "about as original as a Detroit compact car, but it makes no difference at all," Bangs declared, linking their experiences metaphorically to Creem's Detroit locale.137

For Bangs, the music of bands such as The Stooges parlayed the trashy din of rock's mass-consumable form at its most base into an insistence that lives embedded in the deepest layers of America's commodity culture were worthwhile. In doing so, the group was a truer incarnation of a 1960s countercultural movement than "the new social systems the Panthers and Yips are cookin' up" or "the fact that I took acid four days ago and everything is smooth with no hang-ups."138 In Bangs' writing, Creem echoed and amplified what he heard in The Stooges' music. With telltale irreverent zeal, Bangs summed up this approach to the counterculture's relationship with mass consumption, declaring that rock music was:

138 Bangs, "Of Pop and Pies," 34.
nothing but a Wham-O toy to bash around as you please in the nursery, it's nothing but a goddam Bonusburger so just gobble the stupid thing and burp and go for the next one tomorrow; and don't worry about the fact that it's a joke and a mistake and a bunch of foolishness...because it's the strongest, most resilient, most *invincible* Superjoke in history, nothing could possibly destroy it ever, and the reason for that is precisely that it *is* a joke, mistake, foolishness....What's truest is that you cannot enslave a fool.\(^{139}\)

Lester Bangs played the fool himself through an exaggerated writing style that combined spastic wit with heartfelt commitment. While doing so, he alerted readers to particular examples of rock music that, to him, functioned like "Bonusburgers" burped up from the depths of mass-consumer society. Rock songs were *invincible Superjokes* able to overcome any and all efforts to depersonalize individuals or communities. These were the musicians and songs of "The Party," which to Bangs provided, "one answer [for] how to manage leisure in a society cannibalized by it."\(^ {140}\)

By both embodying and emphasizing rock as an irreverent force capable of conveying countercultural dreams from the bottom of mass consumerism's garbage heap, Bangs built on the self-fashioned Detroit identity writers such as Dave Marsh had created for *Creem*, leading the magazine to what we might call a refined vision of unrefinement -- a critique of both mass consumerism's alienations, and the rest of the counterculture's failure to address them honestly and effectively. With his editorial encouragement to find their own voices, many other *Creem* contributors followed Bangs' lead in seeking out meaning and making things matter from within the experiences of rock as part of everyday life in mass consumerism. Nowhere did Bangs' and *Creem's* peculiar countercultural vision emerge more fully than in the magazine's letters column.

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\(^{139}\) Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 74.

\(^{140}\) Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 74.
This magazine's letters column became a place for readers either to affirm or refuse Creem's position that rock music's status as disposable teenage pap was precisely what made it a site for the pursuit of rock's countercultural civic possibilities. Creem suggested that the inauthentic pop pap of teen culture, of which rock turned out to be a central example, might perhaps serve as fodder for a critical-public. Indeed, we might think of Creem's letters column as a kind of mass-consumer public sphere in which established critics and commonplace readers interacted as equal citizens communicating about the problems and possibilities that the trashiest kinds of rock music posed. In the depths of mass culture, something resembling Habermas's literary public sphere appeared.\textsuperscript{141}

Many readers wrote in to thank Creem for providing them with a magazine that captured -- or helped them discover -- the secret power of rock-as-trash. "My brother found a copy of Creem at the dump," wrote William Bridges of New Orleans, in an enthusiastic 1973 missive that Creem editors titled "Found Art." Perhaps joking about how Creem reached him, but also quite appreciative of its trashy origins, Bridges continued: "So he brought it home and gave it to me, and I read it, Man it was the groovest [sic] magazine I read in years. Keep up the good work."\textsuperscript{142}

Another letter-writer, Mike Corbett of Salinas, California, adopted Lester Bangs' mixture of light-hearted mockery and earnest appreciation in a spoof of the famous tagline for Playboy magazine, writing: "To Alan Niester, regarding his review of the Moody Blues: What kind of man writes record reviews for CREEM? The kind that gets his education from comic books, his bell-bottoms from Woolworth's, and his religion from Black Sabbath."

\textsuperscript{141} Habermas, \textit{Structural Transformation}, 51-56.

Even as he poked fun at Neister, Corbett seemed to playfully recognize the funny sort of insight the critic had gleaned from the lowbrow world of unsophisticated, mass-consumed products.\(^{143}\)

If these two letters teased Creem and its writers even while explicitly or implicitly acknowledging the magazine's value, a letter from Battiste Everett-Wells of Tumbleweed Connection, Michigan, adopted Lester Bangs' exaggerated style to distinguish Creem from other rock publications. Everett-Wells declared, somewhat facetiously but also quite seriously: "In the end, someone said 'Let there be CREEM' and low and above, there wallowing in the muck and ire of Crawdaddy, Rolling Stone and aforementioned charlatans of yore, there appeared CREEM, brilliant as a new born hermaphrodite and without shame to rule the land that was without and the places that were within each of us a little flower grows." Both a satirical spoof and an earnest compliment, Everett-Wells' letter sought to join with Bangs and others at Creem in relishing the silly but sincere joys of playing the fool.\(^{144}\)

Other letters recognized the ways rock music could be vital, but raised questions about the music's relationship both to countercultural ideals of egalitarianism and the evils of mass consumerism as a whole. One remarkable letter examined rock by thinking about its relationship to women and its implications for gender politics. That a letter like this could appear alongside sillier comments and missives is a testament to the complex ways in which Creem became a site for a public sphere that had room for both the humorous and the serious. In her letter, Laura Liben of New York City commented:


The words and aspects of the music are forever "putting women in their place," and that very energy is the power behind the message, sucking us in as it oppresses us, much more completely than, say a Chanel perfume ad in Vogue magazine would. How many times have I happily snapped my fingers and danced along with hundreds of other women and men to "Look At That Stupid Girl" or "You Better Shop Around?" Not that the Stones and Miracles don't create beautiful music (they are two of my favorite groups, which is a flip-out in a way) but who can deny how the put-downs to women have affected us all? ...Even as the music brings us in touch with our own vitality and life energy, at the same time it oppresses us...[with] a disease so deeply imbedded in our society that rock music is going to have to go through many changes before it can act as a truly revolutionary force to help change rather than perpetuate this system.145

Liben's connection of gender in rock music to both a countercultural aim of putting listeners "in touch with our own vitality and life energy" as well as the music's complicity with a larger commercial "system" represented by Chanel perfume ads in Vogue was an example of Creem's ability -- despite its own increasingly compromised position as a national magazine vying for success in the economic marketplace -- to provide an imaginative space for explorations of this thorny relationship between the counterculture and mass consumerism. Neither Liben, nor Lester Bangs, nor Creem as a whole, had any definitive answers, but they were eager to tackle this difficult problem.146

Still other letters criticized Creem outright, while recognizing its attempt to forge an irreverent counter-countercultural aesthetic and politics. "Your October & November issues showed up here in LA awhile ago and I found them a gassy contrast to some of the stuff which has been going down in That Other magazine of late," wrote Len Bailes, referring to

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146 In terms of gender, Creem could be as intimidating and sexist an organization as any in the rock world, but it did offer professional opportunities to a number of female writers and editors: Jaan Uhelszki, Roberta Cruger, Pam Brent, and Debbie Burr, among them.
"You guys seem to be mildly hung up on the r&z critic as artiste trip too, but at least you've got a sense of humor about it." Another letter writer, David M. Lewark, from San Francisco, but previously a "resident of Mishawka, Ind., 1949-1971," sarcastically dismissed Creem for its Detroit-fashioned distrust of more idealistic, less-guarded wings of the counterculture. "I feel you should be commended for the excellent way you portray and promote the typically cynical, unenlightened attitude toward life that is so widespread in the people of the Midwest," Lewark sneered.

With comments ranging from the sympathetic to the jeering, Creem's letters section offered a glimpse of the magazine's vision of a countercultural politics that made everyday life matter even at the trashiest levels of mass-consumer society. For even before a reader got to the profiles of preening rock stars, photographs of scantily-clad groupies, columns of manufactured entertainment news items, silly cartoons, or flashy advertisements, they encountered at the front of Creem a spirited, flourishing debate that used the detritus and trash of popular culture for powerful ends: to present a wide range of self identities; to affirm or contest various communal boundaries and definitions; to struggle with the problems of equality; and to seek out meaningful senses of what it meant to live in the contemporary world of 1960s and 1970s America.

Even as Creem developed a national audience, the magazine maintained both literal and imaginative links to Detroit. In the fall of 1974, the publication started an insert called "Extra Creem," which appeared in Detroit-area copies and focused on local bands and the local rock scene. Two years later, "Extra Creem" featured a travel-magazine satire. It began,

"When's the last time you said, Let's Go To Detroit. It's not too late." Around photographs of Detroit's urban blight, the parody included droll captions. "Sunny Detroit, the grapefruit of the Midwest," one announced, "where you can bask in the sun and sulfur dioxide til your heart's content." Another caption read, "In the 60s, 260,295 people died in Wayne County. That means that somewhere in the county there's a funeral every 15 minutes. And you complain there's nothing to do" (see figure 2.22).\(^1\) The piece was a literary form of the blues, and it was perhaps the saddest, most bitter incarnation of Dave Marsh, Lester Bangs, and Creem's irreverent cultural stance. The article desperately sought to cling to the original idealistic goals of social transformation articulated by the counterculture in Detroit/ But it was perched at the edge of despair. Irreverently celebrating -- and sincerely bemoaning -- the misery of Detroit's horrible decline, the article smuggled a message of persistence within its satire.

![Figure 2.22. Bittersweet hometown blues: "Let's Go To Detroit" spoof, Creem, February 1976 (courtesy: Creem Media, Inc.)](image)

But as the 1980s loomed, *Creem* tilt toward sarcasm and satire alone, increasingly abandoning any interest in rescuing the transformative and utopian dimensions of the 1960s counterculture. Yet for much of the 1970s, *Creem* mediated between the extremes of bitter humor and over-earnest sincerity in an effort to sustain the counterculture's mass cultural civic ethos. In 1973, the Detroit journalist Marco Trbovich wrote an article that captured *Creem's* sense of purpose: "What the magazine does with jerky starts and stops of success is to deal with the aesthetics of the rock/pop culture in a way that both informs and entertains in language that communicates to the urban teen," Trbovich explained.\(^{150}\) *Creem* remained committed to delivering a serious countercultural message. But the key was that the magazine would do so by parodying the serious message itself, lampooning it by pointing out how it circulated through the frivolous delights of mass-consumed "pop" music, and how this remarkably strengthened rather than weakened its deepest messages of potential countercultural transformation.

Detroit continued to figure in the magazine's efforts to preserve the counterculture's original impulses on the national level. Dave Marsh made a point of noting to Trbovich *Creem's* "barbarically provincial" sensibility, which had emerged "because we were in Detroit." But Lester Bangs explained what *Creem* was trying to do nationally: "All the political things in the Sixties were like an inside joke. But now the whole world knows about the inside joke. But those people who knew about it in the Sixties are still acting like it's a big secret. What we want to do is just let it all lay out there." *Creem* writers such as Bangs seemed to abandon the counterculture by not taking it seriously. But by rooting their

\(^{150}\) Marco Trbovich "Where Creem Is At," 7.
irreverence in the magazine's Detroit origins, *Creem*'s staff in fact committed itself to preserving the countercultural creation of an alternative public life.¹⁵¹

By paradoxically seeming to reject the counterculture of the 1960s while in fact making the "big secret" of the counterculture's "inside joke" obvious and available to all who would listen, *Creem* sought to just "lay it all out there," as Bangs put it. The magazine would, Bangs hoped, expand a countercultural critical public. It would, he suggested, make painfully obvious the naiveté, innocence, and shortcomings of the counterculture's effort to create a liberated society. But at the same time, to "lay it all out there" also meant bringing the rebellious, utopian energy of rock music up to its lampooned surface. "Rock and roll is an attitude, not an art," Lester Bangs explained. "It's a stance, a ruse. And maybe that's what we are in a sense, a ruse." For *Creem*, though, as Barry Kramer claimed to Trbovich, there was "truth in jive"; there was an essential, serious message conveyed within the magazine's rock-and-roll "ruse."¹⁵²

Barry Kramer described this attempt at *Creem* to balance hope with despair as "having an identity crisis every other day."¹⁵³ This was a publication, after all, that absurdly declared itself, "America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine," despite the presence of *Rolling Stone* and a half-dozen other rock journals. The slogan represented *Creem*'s feeling that while *Rolling Stone* and other magazines treated rock as a kind of art, *Creem* retained the sense of rock as an utterly corrupted -- and yet possibly revolutionary --commodity. Critics in magazines as lofty as the *New Yorker* noticed *Creem*'s innovative perspective. "Unlike


¹⁵² Trbovich "Where Creem Is At," 8-9.

¹⁵³ Trbovich "Where Creem Is At," 7.
Rolling Stone, which is a bastion of San Francisco counter-culture rock-as-art orthodoxy,"
the critic Ellen Willis argued in her New Yorker column on rock music, "Creem is committed
to a pop aesthetic; it speaks to fans who consciously value rock as an expression of urban
teenage culture and identify with a tradition whose first law is novelty…"154

Figure 2.23. A new folk of pop: "Woody" cartoon, Creem, November 1973 (artist: Dave
Hereth, courtesy: Creem Media, Inc.)

154 Ellen Willis, "My Grand Funk Problem – And Ours," New Yorker, 26 February 1972, 79; also
quoted in Trbovich, "Where Creem Is At," 8; and DeRogatis, Let It Blurt, 75.
Indeed, *Creem* articulated deep ironies about rock's authenticity and artifice, the music's ambiguous definition as art, folk, or pop culture.\textsuperscript{155} A cartoon from the November 1973 issue of *Creem* indicated an acute awareness of these complexities (see figure 2.23). The cartoon featured a man, possibly a musician, informing a woman that he was "greatly influenced by Woody." The woman excitedly assumed that he was referring to Woody Guthrie, the great folk icon and inspiration to many rock artists. However, the reader learned, the man actually meant the cartoon character Woody Woodpecker. There are a number of ways to interpret this cartoon, but in light of *Creem's* story itself, one might be that the man was identifying himself not in the modes of folk authenticity, artistic seriousness, or even the political dedication represented by Woody Guthrie, but by the gaffawing, light-hearted, commercialized, pop, trickster figure of Woody Woodpecker.\textsuperscript{156}

In this reading of the cartoon, one catches a glimpse of *Creem's* attempt to identify and provide a space for an authentic culture carved out from the lowbrow pop detritus of mass consumption. In the cartoon's silly delight lingered a serious proposition: Woody Woodpecker could perhaps be a hero as much as Woody Guthrie. One might even picture the man in this cartoon as Lester Bangs himself, caught up between sheepishness and sarcasm in an aesthetic of rock's beautiful commercial trashiness and the lurking politics of heightened self-awareness and surprising vitality that could be found within the music. Indeed, later in his career, Bangs would crystallize this view on America's system of mass


\textsuperscript{156} The cartoon was signed by Dave Hereth and appeared in *Creem* 5, 6 (November 1973), 73.
consumerism. Among previously unpublished notes that appeared in a collection after the critic's death in 1981, Bangs wrote: "The whole point of American culture is to pick up any old piece of trash and make it shine with more facets than the Hope Diamond."157 However commercialized rock had become, and in fact had always been, in the *Creem* view the music might still unleash transformative forces. It might still develop a countercultural civics -- a meaningful public life -- even at, or perhaps especially from, the lowest depths of mass culture.

In what we might then call *Creem's* uncompromising compromise with mass consumerism, the magazine explored the countercultural possibilities that noisily reverberated in rock without ignoring the music's commercial milieu. Rather than think of the critics at *Creem* -- whether it be the magazine's writers, artists, or even its readers -- either as, on the one hand, utter "sell-outs" or, on the other, unrealistic countercultural dreamers, we might conceive of *Creem's* community of participants as mass-consumer versions of the "connected critics" that Michael Walzer identifies throughout twentieth-century history. As "connected critics," the writers and artists at *Creem* did not ignore the dominant systems and beliefs of America, but engaged them.158

As the rock critic Jim DeRogatis has written, at least for a time, "*Creem* fostered a spirited dialogue with anyone who shared its enthusiasms, and for all its snotty attitude, it never talked down to anyone. It could be *stoopid*, but it was always smart, and just because

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An article was a gas to read didn't mean that it lacked ideas." A consideration of Creem suggests that the magazine -- from its imagined Detroit perspective -- attempted to develop a viable and vital critical position that was countercultural in that it encountered the social and cultural context of the day rather than simply countering it with a wholesale alternative. That is, rather than "drop out" of society, to cite Timothy Leary's famous 1960s adage, Creem attempted to let readers "tune in" and "turn on" to a critical public. With a stance of irreverent sincerity that allowed young Americans to participate in critical inquiry, Creem provided a means for a larger public collective to pursue a new society by wrestling with the silly-putty inside the plastic shell of the old.

**Conclusion: Etch-A-Sketching the "Critical-Public"**

Crawdaddy! and Creem magazine, when placed in historical context, indicate not a turning away from politics but the effort to organize a new sense of the public. This new sense could exist translocally, glued together by viscous potions of affect, offering both a fluid medium for varied articulations of the "self," that is the citizen, and a sense of connection through social relations conveyed via the goods and images of economic culture. The ironies of the counterculture and its related movements during the 1960s are oft-cited, especially the ways in which the counterculture sought to become at once revolutionary and commercial, anti-American and essentialized in new incarnations of American exceptionalism. But perhaps Crawdaddy! and Creem should be read in a different light: as

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159 DeRogatis, *Let It Blurt*, 75.

160 Thomas Frank makes the point about the counterculture's mixture of revolution and commerce, calling it a "commodification of dissent" and presenting a version of its history in *The Conquest of Cool*. Both Maurice Isserman and Mark Mazullo explore the contradictions of the counterculture's revolutionary
examples of the counterculture's attempt to address both the possibilities and the problems of the strange new structures of mass consumerism and mass society.

Like other countercultural participants, the *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* critics brought to this new situation timeworn American concerns and questions -- about democracy, citizenship, the self, community, the market -- that had assumed grave import due to the Civil Rights movement, the War in Vietnam, the hydrogen bomb, and the memory of fascism's atrocities in World War II. The rock critics explored the possibilities of forging new, surprising, at times more inclusive forms of community in which the modern self could flourish amid both the upheaval and repression occurring in mass society, where even as the "global village" grew smaller and more connected, its intricate geography expanded in a dizzying density. But problems emerged too, especially in the silences and lacunae found in *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem*. While the rock critics and magazines occasionally and significantly transcended, or at least confronted, stubborn problems of race, gender, and class division by analyzing civic feeling via rock music, they were unable to solve these seemingly intractable problems. Moreover, in the larger context of social turmoil and contestation concerning inequity, the critics at *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* sometimes unintentionally reasserted power relations and hierarchies even as they struggled to overcome them.

Nonetheless, endeavoring to negotiate the problems and possibilities of postwar mass society, the *Crawdaddy!* and *Creem* critics turned to rock music to explore issues of freedom and stability in both the public life and the private lives of a supposedly democratic nation.

Listening to the alluring rhythm of what Mark Crispin Miller deemed rock music's "ungovernable beat," they awkwardly felt their way toward possible answers to fundamental questions of self and society. They clumsily but earnestly danced across the page, crafting aesthetic responses to the crises and the opportunities posed by the governmental and commercial structures of postwar mass society. Their situation seemed new, and yet, from a broader perspective, its core issues of individual independence and communal connection -- of the civics of a democratic republic -- were eerily familiar, having haunted Americans for two centuries.¹⁶¹

Could these "rags" of music criticism really do all that? "This album is just rock and roll," the scribbler in Bob Wilson's Creem comic wrote. Yet, this cartoon rock critic crossed out the phrase again and again. The implication of Wilson's comic strip was that rock was "just" a genre of popular music and, at the same time, much more than that. Rock was so significant, in fact, that language could not adequately convey how powerfully the music affected a person. As a closer investigation of the rock press music indicates, rock music mattered tremendously, even as it roared invisibly. In Wilson's comic, rock was able to assemble two of its listeners together into a life of exchange that was more than just commercial in nature. The circulation of words, images, ideas, and emotions through the rock music press brought people into relation with one another so that they no longer felt

separated, though, as Hannah Arendt noticed, what connected them was a form of culture that circulated intangibly, on sound waves. The negotiation between ineffable music and the printed efforts to communicate its importance not only served commercial purposes, but also generated a strange, new zone of mass-mediated civic engagement and interaction.

*Crawdaddy!*, *Creem*, and other publications do not present clear distinctions between the counterculture as hedonistic consumer feast or a concerted attempt to oppose mass consumerism. Instead, the rock press situated creators and consumers at the central twist of an intertwined knot of consumer pleasures and ideological commitments. The rock critic became a persona that countercultural participants might adopt in order to explore the contradictions that comprised this complex crossroads of commercial and political experience. The rock critic was an easy persona to condemn. An early historian of the underground press, Laurence Leamer, wrote that, "The central intellectual personage of the rock-culture magazines and of commercialized counter culture is the male rock critic -- the interpreter, the noncreator…a male groupie, spinning theories out of such thin stuff as lyrics and crowd reaction and nonverbal signs and symbols…he is the high prince of the alienated."162 But the rock critics might be better understood as "connected critics." Those who adopted the rock critic persona did not ignore the dominant systems and beliefs of America, but, rather, engaged them.163

The civics of rock that critics helped to shape, articulate, and embody remained a slippery, half-articulated set of impulses, hunches, and desires that arose in seizures rather than structures of feeling. Perhaps this civics might be best understood through a metaphor,

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one that emerges from mass culture itself. Just as postwar adolescents created a kind of homemade Pop Art by wielding the knobs of "Etch-A-Sketch" toys, so, too, rock critics at publications such as Crawdaddy! and Creem circulated a countercultural civics that burst forth from commodity forms deep within mass consumerism. Attempting to grapple with the politics of culture from within the dominant society, the rock critics pulled and tugged magnetized vectors -- the cultural and the political, the commercial and the critical, the popular and the avant-garde, folk and pop, leisure and labor, consumption and production. Participants in rock magazines attempted to draw a new kind of social order through critical inquiry. This new organization of society, however, only emerged in imperfect moments -- seizures of feeling, brief flourishes of connection. It was fragile, impermanent, traced across the transmission waves of mass culture. When shaken, the vectors fractured and vanished. Even though the printed pages of rock magazines remained, the screen again returned to blank.

Yet, before they disappeared into the ether, the vectors of rock's critical-public intersected with strange, new spaces. Rock's participants wound up etch-a-sketching unusual, surprising possibilities for countercultural civic life. As we shall see in the next section, halfway around the world, the civics of rock turned up in the war zone of Southeast Asia during the prolonged conflict between the United States and Vietnam.
Part Three - Fighting With Rock: Representing Countercultural Civics in Vietnam

What was hardly noticed at the time was that the music, the festivals and even the love-ins were as much dependent on high technology as were the weapons which were at that time being used in Vietnam. - Christopher Small

One can review what was 'popular' -- the Top 100, Top 40, Top 10, number one hits, gold and platinum records and albums, Top Country, and Top R&B -- but to ask what affected whom and how is a much more complex question.
- Ray Pratt

Guns and Guitars: Rock in Vietnam

"Burning monks, stacked Viet Cong dead, wounded Marines screaming and weeping…Ronald Reagan, his face halved and separated by a stalk of cannabis; pictures of John Lennon peering through wire-rimmed glasses, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, Dylan…." According to the journalist Michael Herr, these were among the images juxtaposed in a collage made by a United States airman, who pasted them on the wall in his Saigon apartment during the Vietnam War. The presence of rock music stars in this striking collage suggests the importance of music in the Vietnam conflict.

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But what could and what did rock represent in Vietnam more precisely? What kinds of social forces could music embody or even produce? How did rock connect to concepts of race, youth, dissent, peace, and violence? How did the music relate to the home front, to American capitalism, even to notions of global identity? Did it provide for alternative or oppositional social and political imaginaries against dominant American models, or was it merely part of an expanding *Pax Americana* during the Cold War? In "a war where a lot of people talked about Aretha's 'Satisfaction' the way other people speak of Brahms' Fourth," As Michael Herr put it, what were the relationships of rock to other musical genres, such as
soul music? To begin to address these difficult questions, I would like to add two additional images to the airman's apartment wall.

Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3. MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer, Detroit, U.S.A., 1969 (photograph: Leni Sinclair); soldier in Khe Sanh, Vietnam, 1968 (photograph: Tim Page)

These two photographs, one from the home front and one from the war zone, suggest iconographic linkages between the domestic counterculture and Vietnam. On the left is countercultural activist Leni Sinclair's 1969 portrait of the MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer. On the right is photojournalist Tim Page's 1968 snapshot of a soldier in Khe Sanh, Vietnam. As with the collision of home front and war zone images in Herr's airman collage, the photographs by Sinclair and Page suggest that war and rock -- guns and guitars -- were symbolically connected, both in the U.S. and in Vietnam. Yet, if we look more closely, the ambiguities of the photographs raise many questions: Are the guns and guitars of each photograph meant to be in collusion or opposition? Are they both instruments of assault or is the gun a weapon for violence while the guitar represents an expressive tool for peace? Is

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4 Herr, Dispatches, 181.
Wayne Kramer, the countercultural rocker on the left, assaulting the flag or saluting it? Is the soldier on the right representing two sides of America -- peaceful and warlike -- or parallel U.S. imperial incursions -- one cultural, the other violent -- into Southeast Asia? Does it matter that the rocker's guitar is an electric and the soldier's an acoustic, or do the instruments possess the same symbolic meaning? In their ambiguities, the photographs wind up only whispering about what should be the loud topic of popular music and society. Taken together, what they perhaps most suggest is that in the 1960s, American popular music became a meaning-making and feeling-making sonic phenomena that resonated on the interactive wavelengths between domestic American popular culture and the Vietnam War experience.5

Both the official military and fighters themselves helped complete the circuit between home front and war zone. Musical groups, such as Jimmy and the Everyday People, were comprised of servicemen put together into performing bands by the Entertainment Branch of the Army's Special Services division. Rock also arrived in Vietnam through the official channels of Armed Forces Radio. Simultaneously, the music traveled through a vast black market in pirated recordings, underground radio broadcasts, audio equipment, musical instruments, and informal venues for musical consumption. Associated with drug experimentation, the social upheavals and new styles of young Americans, and the anti-war movement itself, rock resonated uneasily along mass-mediated wavelengths between home

5 I include soul as a separate but overlapping category to emphasize the ways in which these genres were unstable in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at times diverging along strongly-articulated racial lines (rock for white hippies; soul for African-Americans), but just as often interacting through musical "crossovers" of sound, style, and sensibility. The popularity of musicians such as Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone, Otis Redding, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Temptations, Janis Joplin, Marvin Gaye, and others created a space in which rock and soul, "hippies" and "brothers," came together -- never entirely cohesively but nonetheless in substantive ways that require recognition.
front and war zone. To stay with Michael Herr's evocative understanding of the matter, when he returned to the United States from Vietnam, he believed that, in his words, "the Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn't even have to fuse. …What I'd thought of as two obsessions were really only one."6

Figure 3.4. Rock in Vietnam: Jimmy and the Everyday People publicity poster, 1971 (courtesy: National Archives)

Herr sensed that rock and the Vietnam War somehow went together as part of what defined "the Sixties." But how? Though linked to the domestic counterculture of hippies, psychedelic drugs, youth culture, and antiwar sentiment, the music in fact rarely explicitly

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6 Herr, Dispatches, 258.
articulated protest against the war.\(^7\) Rock was not frozen into any particular ideological or even emotional position with regard to Vietnam. Rather, the music was a profoundly ambiguous mode of representation, ill suited for simplistic interpretation. In Vietnam, after all, "rocking and rolling" meant locking and loading one's automatic rifle as one prepared to fight. Simultaneously, rock remained associated with dissent among the ranks of American troops in Vietnam. Moreover, as a new and unstable genre of popular music, rock overlapped with soul. As their publicity poster announces, Jimmy and the Everyday People, an integrated band, performed "Rock 'n' Soul." The interaction of these two genres, both significant musical forms of the 1960s, suggests that a complex story about race and vernacular troop culture in Vietnam.

The photographs of MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer and the soldier in Khe Sanh, Vietnam, link guitar and gun in a dueling symbolic dialogue. Though polysemic in meaning, comprised of multifaceted emotional forces, and used for a range of activities by different participants, rock's sounds continuously echoed between gun and guitar. At this criss-cross of battle and musical instruments, we can begin to make some sense of the place of rock and soul in the Vietnam conflict. As the chart (see figure 3.5) illustrates, rock served as a dynamic emotional and ideological conduit between the United States home front and the Vietnam war zone. In three broad, overlapping, sometimes contradictory dimensions of the war -- official military culture, vernacular troop culture, and the decolonizing cultures of Vietnam and Southeast Asia -- rock music reinforced an imperial American identity even as glimpses of an alternative global electronic civics appeared on the horizon of possibility.

Rock served as a resource for questioning what it meant to be American, especially an American fighter. Simultaneously, rock seemed to blast beyond questions of American identity alone, summoning into being from the depths of war a fleeting but palpable civic life, a civitas or republic of rock for a globalizing society borne through -- but not entirely of -- American consumer capitalism and military might. By considering how rock circulated through the structures of the official military, resonated in a vernacular troop culture, and even made its way to decolonizing Vietnamese and Southeast Asians, we can explore how rock both affirmed and raised questions about American identity. So, too, we begin to grasp the glimmer of alternative global configurations that were forged by sonically-inspired social affiliations that challenged nation-state boundaries.

Both in its heyday, and even more so in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, rock has become perhaps the sonic signifier of the war -- and all the ferment it generated. One need
only listen to the soundtrack of Hollywood films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Platoon*, and *Good Morning, Vietnam* to grasp how the music has been used to evoke feelings about the war. Although these are fictional accounts of the Vietnam conflict, they convey the ways in which rock has served as a memory device to unleash, re-live, and grapple with past experiences. For those who lived through the war, the music and Vietnam became almost synonymous. After Vietnam, Michael Herr describes Tim Page, who took the famous photograph of the soldier with gun and guitar at Khe Sanh, "listening to the Mothers [of Invention, Frank Zappa's group] and Jimi Hendrix, remembering compulsively, telling war stories." 

Studies of the relationship between music and the Vietnam conflict have tended to obsess as compulsively as Tim Page over the twin topics of music and memory. While this inquiry examines the terrain of memory, it seeks out (and obsesses over) a different dimension of the story. Rather than examine the cultural artifacts (films, novels, poetry) that grew out of Vietnam, this chapter focuses on the crucial historical issues at stake in rock music's role in Vietnam. It concentrates on questions of cultural and political representation.

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9 Herr, 245.

in the war zone. Could rock represent the cultural experiences of war accurately for participants? And through musical participation, could rock generate modes of coherent collectivity that might lead to new forms of political representation? The first place in which to explore these questions of rock and representation is official military culture.

"Welcome to Entertainment Vietnam!": Official Military Culture

"Welcome to Entertainment Vietnam," the frontispiece for a U.S. Army Special Services Entertainment Branch scrapbook declared, accompanied by a very different collage than Michael Herr's description of the United States airman's violent juxtaposition of images. In the lower left of this collage, rock appeared as one among many forms of entertainment. On the right, soul appears. Jazz, drama, and other forms of entertainment are also present. As this "official" collage indicates, for the most part, the military accepted rock music, identifying it as but one part of a domestic popular culture that could bring respite to bored and stressed troops. Morale was the paramount issue, and if rock helped maintain it, then the music was permissible.

We might say that if antiwar protesters in the States sought to "Bring the war home," as a famous slogan put it, then the military tried to, "Bring home to the war." Attempting to maintain troop morale, the United States military made a concerted effort to give soldiers a taste of domestic American popular culture. By the late 1960s, this meant importing rock music to Vietnam -- even when the music might be overtly or implicitly anti-war in content, feeling, or symbolic association. The Entertainment Branch's Command Military Touring

Service (CMTS) and the Armed Forces Vietnam Radio Network (AFVN) exemplify the processes by which rock traveled from the United States domestic consumer culture to the war zone of Vietnam through official channels. CMTS and AFVN help illuminate the ways in which rock was part of a larger flow of domestic American consumer culture around the world. As the United States military expanded its reach during the Cold War, so, too American culture spread its tentacles globally.

Figure 3.6. "Welcome to Entertainment Vietnam": Entertainment Branch scrapbook (courtesy: National Archives)

"WELCOME TO ENTERTAINMENT VIETNAM!" the Special Services Entertainment Branch scrapbook announced, echoing its title page in all capital letters.

"Within the compound pictured below can be found the nerve center of one of the most complex and important programs in Vietnam -- Entertainment. During the past three years this program has endured a great growth. Turn the pages and view that which is the greatest
The photograph of the Entertainment Branch compound in Saigon reveals how entertainment was given its due, perhaps not necessarily as "one of the most complex and important programs in Vietnam," but as a part of the larger bureaucratic structures of the United States military.

Figure 3.7. Entrance to U.S. Army Entertainment Branch Headquarters, Saigon (courtesy: National Archives)

Within this compound were the offices of the Entertainment Branch, as well as rehearsal space for bands. The headquarters also included offices for an Arts and Crafts program that the Special Services ran, which eventually included over thirty field shops around Vietnam for metal enameling, model building, lapidary, photography, and painting.\(^\text{13}\)


\(^\text{13}\) Diagram of 1st Logistical Division, Special Services Division, Entertainment Branch headquarters, General Historical Records Relating to the Entertainment Branch, 1970-1972 Folder, Records of the United
In addition to music and arts and crafts, the Entertainment Branch coordinated a drama program and other recreational activities. But music seems to have been a large part of the operation. The U.S.O. continued to organize professional performers from the United States to tour Vietnam, and beginning in 1966, the Entertainment Branch helped coordinate traveling shows of performers drawn from troops themselves. The first such shows, in the autumn of 1966, consisted of Air Force and Army personnel, and were known as the "Black Patches."

Bands first rehearsed for ten days, determining their own material. Most played cover versions of popular songs, ranging from rock to soul to country and western. Using equipment purchased by Special Services, they then traveled to a range of venues around South Vietnam, from clubs at bases well in the rear to remote firebases. The groups journeyed primarily by helicopter, though they often faced difficulty requisitioning the space for themselves and their equipment. After their return, the participating musicians would complete after-action reports, take part in exit interviews and return to their original positions within the military. A number of musicians would be asked to join new bands headed out to entertain other troops.¹⁴

The after-action reports of CMTS bands primarily chronicle the travails of traveling around South Vietnam with eight-hundred or more pounds of electronic music equipment in tow.\footnote{Army Times Cartoon, "Entertainment Vietnam," V. 2, Jan-March 1969 Folder, Records of the United States Army in Vietnam (USARV), Special Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, History Files, General Historical Records, 1970-1972 through “Entertainment Vietnam” V.2 (March-April 1969) (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II), College Park, Maryland.} An Army Times cartoon portrayed the dry humor with which troops went at this task. A logistics soldier, loaded down with electronic music equipment, says, "And my sergeant will be in the lead ship. He makes the final decision to land or not, okay?," Band members mentioned the difficulty of obtaining helicopters despite possessing "Priority II" travel privileges, which were supposed to grant them convenient transit. They also wrote often of being denied access to the appropriate dining halls and "billeting" or lodging arrangements. Though perhaps glamorous to a young military man compared to other tasks, life in a CMTS
band was not easy. Unlike rock music celebrity in the domestic United States, there were no limousines to the shows, fancy meals backstage, or swank hotel rooms to trash afterward.

Figure 3.9. Cartoon, Army Times, 1969: "And my sergeant will be in the lead ship. He makes the final decision to land or not, okay?" (courtesy: National Archives)

Nonetheless, the reports contain many comments of pride and excitement. These comments suggest that, at the official level, rock music did maintain, and sometimes even improved, troop morale. Bands wrote of audiences enthralled by their performances. When the Electric Grunts played at Fire Station Base Jamie in April 1970, one-hundred-fifty troops attended. "They seem to like our acid-rock numbers the best," the Electric Grunts reported.16

When the Inside Story performed at the Camp McDermott Officers' Club in November 1970, they noted that it "was without reservation the best audience we had on the trip. They really hung on the music and wouldn't let us leave. The screaming and yelling sent our egos soaring and we played everything we knew twice."\textsuperscript{17} Even across the generations, rock music could bring a sense of camaraderie. In its after-action report from December 1969, the group The Local Board wrote of a performance in Danang: "After the show, LTC Shakleton presented souvenir pens to the troupe, stating, …'They are great representatives of the present young generation. People like all of you are that generation and because of that, I deeply believe that the United States has nothing to worry about.' Back to the billets with swelled heads, very proud."\textsuperscript{18}

In an effort to continue to fine-tune their CMTS program, the Entertainment Branch also collected evaluation forms from audiences and coordinators out in the field. Although the comments on these vary widely, with many merely filled out with cursory information, a number of them further indicate the ways in which rock music contributed to troop morale.

When the group Fixed Water performed at Chu Lai on September 27, 1969 for 150 attendees, SP4 WM Smith Jr., wrote on his evaluation form: "This performance was one of


their best here in Chu Lai and the type of music these men were producing was what the men on this compound really enjoyed. The troops as well as the Staff Officers and NCO asked that they come back again…. There are thousands of young men fighting over here that like this type of music would give anything to be able to hear it played by four outstanding young men who know it and how to play it." One respondent claimed that, "Personally, the numbers used by the entertainers were more for the rock element, and too loud," but when the Soul Patrol performed at an Enlisted Men's Club for the Navy, Thomas S. Barta in Special Services wrote that it was a "full house" and that, "Overall I think it is a great morale booster." A CMTS band completed its sixty-day tour with an exit interview and "a certificate acknowledging the value of the performers' contribution to high morale." When bands performed in the field, they often shed their official military uniforms. A number of groups wore costumes. Others stripped down to t-shirts or no shirts at all, hinting at the vernacular troop culture that lurked within official military channels. But when all CMTS bands


21 Correspondence and Memoranda Pertaining to Command Military Touring Shows, 4 Jan 1970-12 Jan 1972 Folder, Records of the United States Army in Vietnam (USARV), Special Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, General Administrative Records, April 1966-April 1972 (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II) - College Park, Maryland.
returned for their exit interviews, the Entertainment Branch photographed each their members in uniform. These photographs demonstrate how rock music flowed through the official channels of the United States military. The Entertainment Branch reasoned that if rock was a part of domestic American popular culture, the music might raise troop morale by bringing the sounds of the home front to the war zone. As such, rock was accepted as part of the waging of the Vietnam War.

Figure 3.10. In costume: The Highland Sounds, December 1968 (courtesy: National Archives)

Figure 3.11. Out of uniform: Page Six drummer, summer 1970 (courtesy: National Archives)
One of the ways in which rock circulated through official military culture was in publicity press releases written for each band. "CMTS is proud to present 'BUZZ','" one announcement declared, "a rock group with 3 outstanding musicians who get it together in a distinctive bag. …When 'Buzz' comes on stage and begins to play hard rock music, the walls will shake, feet will stomp, and hands will clap!'" When Fixed Water was sent out on tour, their itinerary read: "USARV Special Services Entertainment Branch is proud to present the mind-bending psychedelic sounds of the 'Fixed Water.'"

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22 Buzz Master Itinerary, CMTS TOURS - Buzz (111) - December 2, 1971 Folder, Records of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV), Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam Special Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, After Action Reports re: CMTS Tours In Vietnam April – December 1971, Box 10 (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II) - College Park, Maryland.

23 Itinerary, Fixed Water, 23 August 1969, CMTS Tours - Fixed Water (52) – August 29, 1969 Folder, Records of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV), Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam Special Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, After Action Reports re: CMTS Tours In Vietnam March – August 1969, Box 4 (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II) - College Park, Maryland.
When the group reunited for a second tour, the Entertainment Branch announced:

"USARV Special Services is happy to announce the return of the 'Fixed Water.' The mind-bending sounds come from the souls of SP4 Hugh Reid Smith III, SP4 John Desautels, SP4 Mike Hood, SP4 Kevin Kelly, and SP5 Chris Judge. Strong and heavy, the 'Fixed Water' is the ultimate in psychedelic now-sounds. Prepare yourself!"²⁴ Posters for bands such as Fixed Water imitated the psychedelic iconography of posters advertising rock and soul performers appearing at new venues such as the Fillmore Auditorium (see figure 3.13). Trying, and most probably failing, to sound stylish and hip, the Entertainment Branch did demonstrate that they were willing to encounter rock music as a new, possibly rebellious form. You would have to "prepare yourself" for the "ultimate in psychedelic now-sounds," but that did not mean that CMTS was going to ban rock music.

![Fixed Water Poster](image)

Figure 3.13. Fixed Water, psychedelic band: A CMTS publicity poster (courtesy: National Archives)

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Banning music is something for which AFVN, the Armed Forces Vietnam Radio Network, remains famous. In films such as *Good Morning, Vietnam*, a fictional account based on the life of DJ Adrian Cronauer, rock music symbolizes a forbidden culture of dissent that bursts through from the vernacular level of troop culture into the official level. Though veterans and historians debate the degree of censorship, what is clear is that rock made its way onto the supervised, official airwaves. Both AFVN and the Los Angeles-based Armed Forces Radio and Television Services (AFRTS) sent rock out to American military bases around the world. Songs with intonations of Vietnam protest in their lyrics and sound, such as Jimi Hendrix's version of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower," were heard on shows such as the October 1968 Stateside Top Thirty countdown.

On worldwide AFRTS broadcasts produced and distributed by the military in Los Angeles, even overtly antiwar music such as Country Joe and the Fish's "Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag" made it on to broadcasts. A number of veterans, such as Paul Kero, who served as a disc jockey at Radio Saigon, remember that, "We could compare the music on the discs we received with the 'Billboard Hot 100' and some were missing. There may have been a pattern to it. They tended to stay away from the harder rock." However, it

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26 "Stateside Top Thirty Countdown - October 1968," hosted by SP4 Scott Manning, www.geocities.com/afvn (because of copyright issues for the music, this broadcast is currently unavailable on the internet).


28 Andreson, *Battle Notes*, 150.
seems clear from evidence that, especially as the war continued through the late 1960s and early 1970s, the official military bureaucracy made an effort to include rock in order to buoy troop morale.

Similarly to CMTS, AFVN emphasized that entertainment such as music played a crucial role in morale. To explain how important music was, an Armed Forces Radio news release put it this way in 1969: "After the wounded have been evacuated and the perimeter of defense set up, there is nothing to do but grab a smoke, maybe clean your weapon or just stretch out in the mud or dust and catch a few winks. Boredom plays a larger part in frontline Army life than most of us think." Eager to demonstrate how crucial Armed Forces Radio could be to the war effort, the report painted a scene of transistor radios by soldiers' sides, right alongside their canteens, food rations, and guns: "Someone remembers his transistor radio, neatly wrapped in waterproof material and stuck into one of the big pockets of his combat fatigues. He takes it out, turns it on and immediately is soothed by the aura of relaxation and fine entertainment usually associated with life in the States." Emphasizing their division's difficult but significant contribution, the report concluded: "The monumental task of providing this daily contact with American culture falls to Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN)."

Although the writer of this report may not have included rock music in the "aura of relaxation and fine entertainment," AFVN did make an ongoing effort to be sure that it was

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transmitting whatever entertainment troops "associated with life in the States." The mission was to bring domestic American popular culture to the troops, whatever that culture might be. Started in 1962 with a small station in Saigon run by a five men crew and volunteers using borrowed equipment, the Armed Forces Vietnam Network had grown much larger by 1970. Eight stations broadcast across South Vietnam on both the AM and FM bands. In addition to radio, AFVN had begun a television station broadcasting local and domestic programming for much of the country; but radio remained the more popular medium, received by almost all troops. In 1968, forty-two percent of troops deemed radio their best source of entertainment; by 1970, the percentage increased to fifty-eight percent; and in 1971, it grew to sixty-eight percent. In 1970, stations received all AM programming from the Saigon detachment, save for three hours of local programming. With the exception of three hours of live broadcasting and six hours of simultaneous broadcasting of the AM signal, the FM stations at Saigon and Da Nang broadcast prerecorded shows from the Armed Forces Radio and Television Services (AFRTS), which were produced in Los Angeles. These were broadcast using computer-controlled tape machines. Pleiku, Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon were not equipped with these devices, and broadcast transcriptions of AFRTS shows as well as their own shows. Quang Tri, Toy Hun, and Chu Lai only possessed AM capabilities. Whatever the details of each station's capacities, they represent the stretch of


America's electronic mass media over the war zone, from "the delta to the DMZ," as an AFVN slogan put it.

Concerned with measuring troop opinion in order to serve them best, and most probably also to justify the military expenditure on AFVN, the network conducted audience surveys in 1968, 1970, and 1971. These surveys are rich with information about the official military stance on music brought to the war zone. They indicate a willingness to bring any music on the airwaves in the domestic United States to Vietnam. James Wentz wrote in the 1968 report, which was issued at the beginning of 1969, "The exclusion of any music from military broadcasting outlets can be damaging to the credibility and reputation of the network. This is not to say that absolutely no restrictions should be placed on music forwarded to field activities. However, exceptional care must be taken when the matter of exclusion is considered." To be sure, as Wentz's comments suggest, the military did not ignore the antiwar dimensions of popular music on the home front. As Wentz himself noted, somewhat vaguely, "The matter of music selection has become a more delicate issue in today's environment of social and moral conflict." Overall, however, Wentz took the position that since most of this music made it to Vietnam in other forms -- tapes and phonograph records sent from home or pirated recordings purchased by servicemen and women on R&R, "rest and relaxation," in various Southeast Asian cities -- the military was better off including music save for the most ardently subversive.

In 1968, programming on AFVN included a special soul show, but rock only appeared on the air as part of pop music broadcasts. By the 1970 AFVN survey, however,

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AFVN programming had grown to include "Acid Rock." An in-country show featuring rock was called the "Sgt. Pepper Show." Additionally, AFRTS shipped transcriptions of programs from Los Angeles to Vietnam, including Barbara Randolph's rock and soul show; Gene Weed's increasingly rock-oriented pop music program; and a rock-oriented, hippie-flavored program, licensed from ABC radio and called "Love." Even Chris Noel, the most famous radio host on Armed Forces Radio, began to include rock-oriented music on her light, easy-going show "Date With Chris."

Figure 3.14. In-country radio program popularity, including "Sgt. Pepper Show," from AFVN survey, 1970 (courtesy: National Archives)


36 A perusal of AFRTS newsletters sent out weekly with transcriptions of shows (recorded on 33 1/3 phonograph records) reveals the increase of rock on shows such as Chris Noel's "Date with Chris." See issues of *Radio Roundup*, 1967-1971, Armed Forces Radio and Television Services Archive, Division of Recorded Sound, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
The AFVN surveys mark the shift from a broad "pop" category to niche genres such as "rock" and "soul" as the military responded to shifts in taste among troops. By 1970, "acid rock" and "soul" had become niche market genres with a small but substantive presence on AFVN airwaves. In 1968 and 1970, soul had consistently been approved of by roughly ten percent of survey respondents, with a bit higher ranking among younger servicemen; by 1971, twenty two percent deemed soul their "most listened to" form of music. Acid Rock grew from not existing as a category in 1968 to being the first or second choice of roughly twenty percent of respondents in 1970 to thirty one percent deeming it their "most listened to" form of music in 1971. The growth of these genres hints at the disproportionate effects of the draft on the population that served in Vietnam. But, since musical taste and identity do not always align perfectly, the increased presence of "rock" and "soul" on AFVN most of all suggests the willingness of the military to import domestic American culture to the war zone, regardless of the music's associations.\(^{37}\)

Whether the inclusion of rock actually improved morale -- or, in some fashion, undercut the war effort with antiwar messages and moods -- remains up for debate. What is perhaps more intriguing is the manner in which rock was simultaneously "above ground" and "underground" music in Vietnam. In his official 1971 AFVN survey, Gunar Grubaums literally referred to Acid Rock as "underground" music, noting that the military had decided, based on its survey, to increase the broadcast time of this music over the Armed Forces radio network in Vietnam for a prime time hour on Saturday nights.\(^{38}\)


Heard one way, rock was mere entertainment from the home front intended to raise troop morale. But, other messages lurked in the grooves as well. Perhaps this is why James
Wentz, writing the conclusion to the AFVN survey of 1968, had difficulty determining precisely what "restrictions should be placed on music forwarded to field activities." At the official level, knowing what crossed the line into subversion was next to impossible. This was because rock broadcast alternative messages not from outside, but from within, the structures and channels of the official military. Rather than a message from some utopian, exterior culture, rock provided immanent critique from inside the circuitry of a globalizing American consumer culture. The music's vernacular dimensions were complicit, but not entirely absorbed into official culture. Not from outside or beneath the behemoth of a globalizing United States military, but along the tentacles of its outstretched reach, rock beckoned with a strange combination of entrapment and liberation, escape from the war zone and entrance into it, a reeling and rocking into the everyday experiences of terror, pleasure, engagement, and alienation in the war zone.

"Two Thousand Light Years From Home": Vernacular Troop Culture

We can return again to Michael Herr's book on Vietnam, Dispatches, to develop a sense of rock's important position at the level of vernacular troop culture. Here, the music resonated back and forth along the circuit between the domestic home front and the Vietnam war zone. As such, it became a resource for Americans in Vietnam who were trying to make sense of their experiences. Writing of life among press correspondents in Saigon during 1968, Herr remembered, "music, the Rolling Stones singing, 'It's so very lonely, You're two thousand light years from home,' or 'Please come see me in your Citadel,' that word putting a

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39 Wentz, Audience Opinion Research & Analysis, 52.
chill in the room." For Herr:

Whenever one of us came back from an R&R we'd bring records, sounds were as precious as water: Hendrix, the Airplane, Frank Zappa and the Mothers, all the things that hadn't even started when we'd left the States. Wilson Pickett, Junior Walker, John Wesley Harding, one recording worn thin and replaced within a month, the Grateful Dead (the name was enough), the Doors, with their distant, icy sound. It seemed like such wintry music; you could rest your forehead against the window where the air-conditioner had cooled the glass, close your eyes and feel the heat pressing against you from outside. Flares dropped over possible targets three blocks away, and all night long, armed jeeps and massive convoys moved down Tu Do Street toward the river.40

Though Herr writes of the experiences of press correspondents in Vietnam, other sources from American fighters themselves parallel his perspective on rock. The music of the Grateful Dead, The Doors, and Frank Zappa (not to mention the soul sounds of Wilson Pickett and Junior Walker) emphasized the vast differences between home front and war zone -- but also hinted at their linkages. These were sounds "as precious as water." Like press correspondents, fighters used music to distance themselves from the war zone. But the "heat pressing against you from the outside," the heat of war beyond the frosty, air-conditioned panes of glass of Western-style hotels and military offices, could not be avoided entirely. Even as rock served as a "wintry" escape, it increasingly also served as a way to come to terms with the war experience itself.

On the vernacular level, by which I mean the culture that developed within the structures of the official military culture in Vietnam, rock was the sonic equivalent of Herr's hotel window: it mediated between the war zone and the home front. Heightening the communicative and imaginative network between home and war, rock especially provided a

40 Herr, Dispatches, 233-234.
means to negotiate the fundamental contradictions of serving as a "citizen-soldier" in a confusing war. This was especially the case for the vast number of young draftees forced to serve in Vietnam, who cultivated a vernacular troop culture in which they used music to give expression to the discontinuities of their lives. Rock served as a resource for negotiating the identity and the civic commitments of the American fighter.\footnote{My use of the term "vernacular" owes much to the work of Lydia Fish and Les Cleveland. Fish uses the term "informal" to describe the vernacular level. See Lydia Fish, "Informal Communication Systems in the Vietnam War: A Case Study in Folklore, Technology and Popular Culture," unpublished manuscript, 2003; Les Cleveland, \textit{Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture} (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994).}

We can begin to understand the details of vernacular troop culture by first considering how the structures of the military changed as the United States escalated its participation in the Vietnam War during the late 1960s. The structural dimensions of the United States armed forces in Vietnam set the stage for a troubled military culture in which vernacular expression diverged from the official script. As the historian Ronald Spector has written, there developed a "peculiar military manpower system that fed the Vietnam War, a system that by 1968 had become a distorted mirror, a monstrous caricature of American short-sightedness, irresponsibility, phony patriotism, self-serving expediency, and political cowardice."\footnote{Ronald Spector, \textit{After Tet: The Bloodiest Year In Vietnam} (New York: Free Press, 1993), 26.} Spector, Christian Appy, and other historians have documented how, because of both political pressures from the Johnson and Nixon administrations as well as from a poorly-managed internal promotion system, the United States military in Vietnam developed an unbalanced hierarchy between a small number of high-level, older "lifers" and a large group of lower-level, younger "grunts."\footnote{Spector, \textit{After Tet}, 26-35; Christian Appy, \textit{Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).}
Because of this imbalance, Vietnam exacerbated the generational divide already present in domestic United States society. Captains were enlisted officers looking to advance their military careers, while platoon sergeants were often quickly trained Vietnam non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and the mass of soldiers were draftees. Spector notes that in 1969, eighty-eight percent of infantry riflemen in the Army were draftees, and of the remaining twelve percent, only ten percent were first-term enlistees. The hierarchy of the United States military mirrored the demography of the "generation gap" on the home front, but it did so in the midst of a war zone. Along with these age-based hierarchies, a bureaucracy-heavy military meant that a divide emerged between troops battling on the frontlines and those providing support in the rear. Often the "grunts" in the field and the support staff in the rear broke down along race and class lines, with fighters drawn disproportionately from minorities and working-class Americans. Into this troubling mix, popular music entered Vietnam.

"What was nice about that was I got pop music," Jim Peachin, a helicopter gunner in Vietnam recollected in a 1979 oral history interview about flying his daily missions in a chopper:

and that's what made it so weird sometimes. Like, we would take off in the morning and we'd be flying low level across these rice paddies, and I'd hear Diana Ross singing, 'Everybody, I Love You,' and the sky is beautiful, the sun's glistening off the waters. Rice paddies look like felt on a pool table, from a certain altitude. I mean, it looks like you could jump into it. You just

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44 Spector, After Tet, 35.
45 Spector, After Tet, 260-278.
couldn't possibly get hurt. And then you hear this music, that is enjoyable at the same time. And the whole thing is like -- I just used to sit and say, 'What a trip! How could I ever describe this to anybody?' And three minutes later, you might be shooting your gun at somebody. Or three minutes later you might be going in to pick up some wounded soldiers. Or three minutes later you might be landing in a place where people are shooting at you. And you compare that with being over those rice paddies, feeling almost, you know, like Superman, because you're moving so fast and you're flying along so well. 47

Jim Peachin's memories of music in Vietnam are particularly vivid, but they reflect a narrative pattern that repeatedly appears in Vietnam veteran's recollections of their war experiences: time and time again, music enters their stories at moments when they are trying to make sense of their confusion, when the disconcerting nature of everyday experience in Vietnam makes itself known. 48 Feeling at once invincible and at risk -- that he could do no wrong and he was doing wrong -- Peachin's memories took him to music, in this case Diana Ross and the Supremes singing, "Everybody, I Love You." The song formed part of a sonic imaginary for re-living the contradictions of leisurely bliss and battle terror in Vietnam. In doing so, it opens a window on the vernacular culture of American fighters during the conflict.

Many issues are at stake in Jim Peachin's recollections: the link between masculinity and technology in how flying in the chopper made him feel like "Superman"; the imperial "bird's-eye view" of the helicopter; the postmodern fragmentation of guerilla warfare in Vietnam when one could be in battle one moment and just going for a ride a few minutes


48 For additional examples, see, among other sources, other interviews in the Vietnam Veterans Collection, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University or recollections in Lee Andresen, Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2000).
later. Incorporating all these issues into an overall framework, we might say that Peachin used music to mediate the contradiction of escaping from the war while, simultaneously, waging it.

The "pop music" that Peachin and others continually refer to tended to be rock or soul.\(^4\) The rock songs in particular arrived through the official military culture in an effort to quell boredom and raise troop morale, but because they were linked to anti-war sensibilities, the music also wound up serving other purposes. Rock allowed American fighters to feel the tremendous and often terrifying contradictions of the "citizen-soldier" subject-position. We might say that though it was imported to maintain spirits, rock opened up the complexities of what constituted *morale* in a confusing war zone. The music served as a soundtrack to the waging of war. Simultaneously, it provided an escape from the war zone to an imagined space: the home front, a space of leisure, a drugged-out mindlessness, and sometimes, a global psychedelic civic alternative to dominant conceptions of American national identity.

One could easily argue that rock's anti-war protest capacities were co-opted and defused as music was incorporated into the war effort. Though mutinies, insurrections, and "fragging" (the shooting of commanders) increased as the Vietnam War dragged on, rock never directly stopped a soldier such as Jim Peachin from fighting.\(^5\) Noone simply laid

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\(^4\) Once again, genre categories were quite fluid in Vietnam, as they were in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s. "Pop," and even, as an AFVN survey notes, "Oldies But Goodies," became quite contested depending on the subject-positions of particular listeners. See Wentz, 22, and Grubaums, 18, for comments on the competing definitions of "oldies but goodies." "To the younger audience," Wentz wrote, "oldies but goodies" stood for "up-tempo music that has survived and is still popular after the passage of several years. To older audience, OBG is music in the popular standards category." Two competing generational memories were at stake in what constituted "pop" and "oldies but goodies." Country-and-western as a genre in Vietnam is worthy of a separate study, as it was associated primarily with troops from the South and often with enlisted officers who were slightly older than most draftees.

\(^5\) Debates about the amount of "fragging" in Vietnam rage. See Richard Boyle, *Flower of the Dragon - The Breakdown of the US. Army in Vietnam* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972), for an interpretation from
down his automatic rifle after hearing Country Joe and the Fish singing about Vietnam or Jimi Hendrix singing Bob Dylan's lyrics about the terrors of life "All Along the Watchtower" or Edwin Starr belting out "War, what's it good for? Absolutely nothing!" The problem here is with the entire framework of authentic resistance compared to cooptation.

Figure 3.17. Technologies of war: Chopper, guitars, and microphones, The New Society, A CMTS band, February 1970 (courtesy: National Archives)

The challenge for historians is to hear rock's place in vernacular troop culture below the level of full articulation -- where it could serve multiple, often contradictory, but quite meaningful, purposes as a mediation between home front and war zone. As John Imsdahl remembered of life in his platoon of the 101st Airborne Division, stationed near Phu Bai: "We listened to Janis Joplin and, you know home music -- you know. …So definitely, we

the time of Vietnam itself. Ron Spector and others continue to debate the extent and nature of insurrections within the United States Armed Forces in Vietnam.
were -- we were anti-war. It's odd to say that." Imsdahl recalls listening to Janis Joplin in order to examine the oddness of how he was at once anti-war but waging the war. His pauses and hesitations hint at the complexity of rock's role in vernacular troop culture.

What rock seemed to do most of all in Vietnam, then, was provide an imaginative space both for escaping from the war and fighting it. Most intriguingly, rock often went were other modes of discourse or debate could not: the music became a means for American troops to reflect upon and consider the nexus of violence, terror, boredom, and pleasure in which they were enmeshed. Music such as rock affected the subject-position of American fighters in relationship to their national identities, their experience of military life, their perspectives on Vietnam, and their glimpses -- fleetingly -- of an alternative global civic imaginary of a worldwide youth culture brought together through shared musical sounds.

Jim Peachin, John Imsdahl, and countless other veterans utilized music to manage and negotiate memories of the disconcertingly surreal quality of the war in Vietnam. This use of music opens a window on the vernacular experiences of American fighters in Vietnam. In doing so, it also raises the question of the relationship of music to memory. In Peachin's case, Diana Ross's song helped transport him back to Vietnam itself. Music became a sonic trigger for an out-of-time experience. At the same time, the song allow Peachin the distance to reflect on the meaning of his service. Imsdahl hears Janis Joplin's music in a similar dynamic. Music becomes a sonic marker -- a memorial -- through which memories could be measured against the present.

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In these dual purposes, music parallels dream experience: it launches Peachin and Imsdahl (and countless others) back in time to the immediacy of the war zone; but it also, simultaneously, let them see themselves at a remove, in the way we can do when dreaming. Perhaps we can think of music's two purposes in a dialectic relationship: music marked the subject position of the American fighter by forcing him to see himself simultaneously from within and from without. The music provided a resource for measuring the "oddness," as Imsdahl phrases it, of being an American fighter ambivalent about the Vietnam War. That the music could do so ten years after the fact is a testament to its power.

But there is evidence that music did this during the war itself: rock created instant memorializations of the war experience through its disconcerting mediation of home front and war zone. On their helmets, through nicknames for each other, by naming their guns and platoons, American fighters utilized song lyrics to express their identities. The group Jimmy and the Everyday People, for instance, posed for one of their publicity shots in front of a tombstone. The music helped these and other American fighters both enter into and escape from their roles as warriors. In this way, rock was a central mediator of confusions about the war.

The dizzying quality of hearing music from home while in a war zone halfway around the world seemed to affect many American fighters. Michael Herr writes of having a helmet tossed to him on one of his first assignments to cover a battle. The helmet came from a recently killed fighter. It read, ominously, "Time Is On My Side," the title of a Rolling Stones song. This soldier used rock music to address the terrifying experience of fighting a war. The song title pushed away the possibility of death even as it acknowledged that death might come at any time. It insisted on an individual identity: time is on my side. But, looking
at the helmet and mentioning the use of the song by the Rolling Stones, Herr expresses his own shock at the futility of the soldier’s individual touch on the army-issued helmet. In Vietnam, to Herr, time did not seem to be on this or any other soldiers' side.\textsuperscript{52}

![Figure 3.18. Memorializing war through music: Jimmy and the Everyday People, CMTS band, 1971 (courtesy: National Archives)](image)

In another example, Don Morrison, who played drums in an Australian band that toured Vietnam bases, writes of a platoon thanking him profusely for performing a cover of the Credence Clearwater Revival song, "Down on the Corner." The American fighters had literally placed a sign in front of their large firebase gun naming it "Willie," after the main character in the song. They themselves, borrowing from the lyrics to "Down on the Corner,"

\textsuperscript{52} Herr, \textit{Dispatches}, 21.
were "the poor boys."\textsuperscript{53} "Willy is the name of our gun," the soldier explained to Morrison, "and most of these guys here are the poor boys."\textsuperscript{54} Here we have a memorial created within the war itself, out of the technology used to wage the war. Troops used a rock song that described a peaceful street corner of domestic leisure and safety to rearticulate their identity. "Over on the corner there's a happy noise," John Fogerty of Credence Clearwater Revival sings over a flopping bass and guitar riff that signals goofy, amateurish, relaxing good times, "People come from all around just to watch the magic boys." Rather than professional soldiers waging a war, this platoon had become a tranquil domestic community: "four kids on the corner, trying to bring you up," as Fogerty sang.

On the one hand, in Morrison's story, the troops became a band of brothers whose togetherness and power was signaled by a collectivity drawn from idealized images of the home front in Credence Clearwater Revival's "Down on the Corner." On the other hand, they were self-deprecating "poor boys" who yielded their autonomy as citizens to their identities as soldiers. After all, the leader of the "poor boys" was not their commanding officer, but their gun, Willie, a technology that dominated their lives, endowing them with power yet the only thing that stood between them and death. For the platoon, rock music helped memorialize their gun and themselves in the war zone. Rock allowed them to give expression to the absurdity of their situation. Though the gun potentially made them powerful killers, they were, ultimately, powerless. They were mere pawns in a larger, confusing conflict. They were far from home in a war whose precise purpose remained

\textsuperscript{53} Credence Clearwater Revival, "Down on the Corner," \textit{Willy and the Poor Boys} (Fantasy Records, 1969).

\textsuperscript{54} Don Morrison, \textit{My Rock 'n' Roll War} (Bracken Ridge, Australia: Dog-Tag Books, 2001), 121-123.
muddy. And in terms of survival, as the dead soldier's helmet informed journalist Michael Herr, time was not necessarily on their side.

Rock continually marked the distance and alienation that the war produced in its fighters at the vernacular level. Music often appears in memories of the war as a measure of how far away from home fighters were. "I was totally out of touch," Drill Sergeant Steve Hassna remarked in a 1970s interview, "I was totally out of touch with news, music, any kind of culture, You know, I was -- I got back and I was like three years behind on all the rock music." Hassna felt a tremendous difference between his identity and the identity of a peer with a "Stateside nine to fiver job, that was all hip to the latest groups, you know, and was hip to what was happening in Haight Ashbury and all this other bullshit -- where I was totally alienated."55 In Hassna's memories, one senses a feeling of loss, of having missed out on the home front's changes while he was in Vietnam.

But for others, rock went along with the war seamlessly. "It was like the beginning of the whole acid rock thing, and it infiltrated the Army," nurse Betty Wilkinson remembers. "They'd have, you know, the psychedelic posters on the walls of their barracks, and their rooms."56 For still others, the music provided escape from the monotony of waging war. John Imsdahl recalls adopting a moniker from a Jefferson Airplane song, "White Rabbit," to broadcast music on unused radio frequencies that troops would use to entertain each other. "We had one radio station where our friends would broadcast music and stuff. That was 99.9 on a PRC - 25. It was a band that no one used. And we had a lot of disc jockeys at night. I

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was White Rabbit. You know, we'd find out that we were calling several miles away to
different people who had like access to electricity, like a lot of the artillery guys that were
waiting up all night, to fire, and stuff, had electricity on mortars, and they'd play music on
their tape decks, and make special requests and, you know, things like that."57

Figure 3.19. The contradictions of vernacular troop culture: bullets and peace sign, Vietnam,
1968 (photograph: Tim Page)

In all these different variations -- as symbol of missing out on the domestic scene, as
part of the everyday waging of war, or as an escape from the tedium of battle -- rock
emphasized the distance between home front and war zone. It provided means for exploring
the unstable subject-position of an individual caught up in a war beyond his or her control.
As Michael Herr evocatively wrote of this dynamic: "Maybe you couldn't love the war and
hate it inside the same instant, but sometimes those feelings alternated so rapidly that they
spun together in a strobic wheel rolling all the way up until you were literally High On War,

like it said on all the helmet covers.\(^{58}\)

We can catch a glimpse of what Herr calls the "strobic wheel" of vernacular troop culture, in which participants at once embraced and were repulsed by the war, in the amalgam of music that one CMTS band performed. The set list for the Soul Chordinators, who toured U.S. bases and clubs in the summer of 1971, contained the following songs:

Cloud Nine
These Eyes
Slip Away
Something
You Keep Me Hanging On
Soul Finger
Song of My Father
25 Miles
Hey Joe
Grazin' in the Grass
Cold Sweat
Heard It Through the Grapevine
Going Out of My Head
Get Ready
Purple Haze
Fire
Coming Home Baby
You've Made Me So Very Happy
You've Made Me So Very Happy
War

This mixture of soul and rock songs, including The Temptations' "Cloud Nine," a work of social commentary about the decaying urban black ghetto, and rock songs such as the garage band classic "Hey Joe," with its lyric about shooting someone, is remarkable for its swirl of possible lyrical allegories for the Vietnam experience. Moreover, the music itself is both

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\(^{58}\) Herr, Dispatches, 63.
violent and hopeful, a combination of electric howl and pleasurable power, as in the Jimi Hendrix songs, such as "Purple Haze" and "Fire."\(^{59}\)

More remarkable are the audience evaluation forms filled out by troops. They declare the band's cover of the Edwin Starr hit, "War," with the famous chorus, "War! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!" as the best-received song of the performances.\(^{60}\) Here we might get a sense of, at the very least, unease about the Vietnam conflict. But we might also imagine American fighters hearing the song with a kind of sublime, grizzled-warrior recognition, even glamorization, of war's calamities. Even a song as explicitly antiwar as "War," could, in the context of the war zone, take on more complex emotional and ideological capacities. Although in the domestic context, "War" was associated with the peace movement, in Vietnam, music in the spirit of "War" revealed a vernacular troop culture engaged with making meaning out of the everyday experiences of Vietnam. Not only did "War" register the dispirited views of troops, the song also perhaps provided a bit of wry pleasure that soldiers squeezed from the pain of war.

Whether emphasizing the distance from home, an escape from the war zone, or a mere soundtrack for war, rock and soul certainly went along with the consumption of drugs from alcohol to heroin, LSD, hashish, and especially marijuana. Australian drummer Don Morrison remembers visiting a "hooch," or soldier hut, at a firebase called L.Z. English; two soldiers had Jimi Hendrix and James Brown on the hi-fi stereo, John Lennon and Che


\(^{60}\) CMTS Tours - Soul Coordinators (78), Aug 10, 1971.
Guevara posters on the wall, tie dye sheets on the beds, and plenty of marijuana in the air.\textsuperscript{61}

W. D. Ehrhart also links his first use of marijuana to hearing music on an underground troop radio show broadcast by a soldier nicknamed Dancin' Jack. "The Beatles crackled over the radio: 'Yesterday, love was such an easy game to play; now it seems as though it's gone away; oh, I believe in yesterday.' I took a puff. It was harsh, and made me start coughing."

Ehrhart continues:

> The smoke had a sweet pungent taste and made me a little lightheaded. Otis Redding was sitting on the dock of the bay, and I could see the tides rolling away as the joints went around and around; the music played on into the night...the music was playing and playing, and fingers popped in time, and bodies swayed, and the laughter and the night and the smoke rolled on and on like waves against a beach on a far-off tropical island inhabited by Dancin' Jack. ...The driving beat of the Rolling Stones came thumping through the static. The whole bunker shouted in unison: '...I can't get no! Satisfaction' Clap, clap, clap-clap-clap. 'Oh, no, no, no!!!'\textsuperscript{62}

In these examples, rock and soul music -- the Beatles, the Stones, Otis Redding, and other popular musicians -- went along with casual drug use to provide the means for troop solidarity. One could say music improved morale by forging fighting units into bands of brothers linked by the erotic and emotional commitments fostered by sharing musical experiences together. But, drug use combined with rock and soul music generated other social energies as well. In particular, the mixture of psychedelic-type drugs and rock music opened up social spaces for rethinking identity and affiliation.

In a kind of alternative survey to AFVN's official study of troops' radio-listening habits, Charles Perry distributed questionnaires to American fighters in Vietnam in the fall

\textsuperscript{61} Morrison, \textit{My Rock 'n' Roll War}, 91.

of 1968. In the *Rolling Stone* magazine article he published using the responses, Perry wrote that, "incredible numbers of enlisted men are smoking grass to 'get away,' and more than that, to reinforce their feelings of solidarity with other unwilling conscripts." The responses to Perry's questionnaire indicated that marijuana and rock music were doing far more than bonding willing soldiers together. The combination was also fostering alternative orientations at the level of vernacular, even underground, troop culture. "We smoke semi-covertly," a private reported to Perry, "We work stoned. Music most of the time." This "semi-covert" culture of drugs and music seemed to reorient certain fighters away from the war and toward the possibilities of the counterculture on the home front. As a corporal in Phu Bai wrote, "Guys have mustaches and long sideburns that the average citizen would never believe they were soldiers. We are anxious to get back and grow wild hair and beards without any restrictions. Beads and Peace symbols are worn with the uniform."

By providing an emotional and reflective imaginary space for feeling and thinking through the alienation of the Vietnam conflict, rock enlivened a consciousness and consideration of the paradoxes of a war fought on the frontlines of American military and cultural expansion during the Cold War. We might even hear rock music as a cultural form that helped motivate the "citizen-soldier" identity in the Vietnam conflict. Rock helped shape

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64 Charles Perry, "Is This Any Way to Run the Army?", 8.

65 Charles Perry, "Is This Any Way to Run the Army?", 5.
feelings about an American fighter's civic responsibility. The music could spark questionings of whether the Vietnam War was morally in line with the role of the "citizen-soldier."66

Veteran John Lindquist, for example, eventually decided that it was not. He rooted his eventual involvement in the G.I. antiwar movement in his listening to rock songs with fellow soldiers, explaining in reference to the famous British rock group of the day: "We'd listen to Cream and talk about how the war was messed up…."67 Lindquist moved from rock music to overt political action. But for other fighters in Vietnam, rock existed on the level of vernacular troop culture as a means to experience, feel, and meditate on the confusing situations in which the war positioned them, and from this, to begin to confront the issue of their precise relationship to America. As veteran Michael Rodriquez remembered about a famous song of the era: "Country Joe's 'I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag' became, for many of us, the song for Vietnam. Bitter, sarcastic, angry at a government some of us felt we didn't understand, the 'Rag' became the battle standard for too many Grunts in the Bush."68

Halfway around the world, "citizen-soldiers" of the United States could use rock to separate their identities -- their subjectivities -- from the official military culture and its dictates. As veteran Jim Heiden remarked about his experiences fighting in Vietnam, "you realize that they lied to you in civics class."69 While this often led to a cultivation of a violent, hyper-masculinized ethos of warrior brothers who could kill despite deep


dissatisfaction with the official military bureaucracy around them, rock music also divorced soldiers from their assigned military roles, helping them to explore the relationship between the citizen and soldier sides of the "citizen-soldier" binary.\textsuperscript{70} Caught between polarized positions, troops turned to rock to try to make sense of their experiences.

Traveling back and forth between home front and war zone, rock music mediated struggles to come to terms with -- and to transform -- both individual responsibilities and the larger social communities in which fighters found themselves. A poster produced to advertise performances by "The Local Board" represents the attempt not only to reorient the individual identities of "citizen-soldiers" toward a new mode of citizenship, but to re-imagine the \textit{civitas} itself.\textsuperscript{71} The group's name is a sly reference to the draft boards through which so many American fighters were funneled from home to Vietnam as well as a nice pun on the "boredom" entertainment in Vietnam was supposed to alleviate.

Iconographically, the poster presents the vision of an alterative \textit{civitas} that has sprung up within the very cauldron of the war zone. With battle raging on the margins as a bomb explodes in the hills beyond the city (in the upper right of the poster), the "Cav Touring Show" places the viewer in a cosmopolitan city gone psychedelic. On the edges of a city, next to a building that seems to be selling American flags, another advertises soup. At the center of the poster, a paisley, flower, and heart decorated van has "Love" written on its


Figure 3.20. Alternative *civitas*: The Local Board publicity poster, Vietnam, 1969 (courtesy: National Archives)

On all corners, artists paint portraits, drawing on or carrying easels. A closer look reveals that they are all smoking large sticks of marijuana (one could, slyly, insist that are merely smoking tobacco cigarettes). Naked classical female statues appear throughout the streetscape. A totem pole stands on the corner. More drug-punning signs read "Speed," "Go," and "120 MPH." This poster, merely a primitive line drawing advertising musical entertainment that was meant to foster troop morale, brings us into the vernacular culture of American troops in Vietnam. Though a wide range of beliefs, feelings, ideas, and energies existed at the vernacular level, on The Local Board's poster we glimpse the effort to picture a *civitas*, a collective space. This *civitas* transforms elements of the home front and the war
zone into something new. Incorporating elements of the domestic counterculture that was burgeoning in American cities during the late 1960s while also including aspects of the war, the poster repositions troops in an alternative civic imaginary in which psychedelically-tinged art, peace, and love dominate instead of violence and battle.

Figure 3.21. Detail of The Local Board poster (courtesy: National Archives)

Figure 3.22. Detail of The Local Board poster (courtesy: National Archives)
The Local Board poster offers a dramatic reconfiguring of the civic imaginary. More often, rock music was only able to raise questions about war and civics. For instance, responding to Charles Perry, a military policeman in Vietnam took note of a "Sky Pilot," a song by Eric Burdon and the Animals that seemed to comment on the war: "For three weeks in a row, 'Sky Pilot' was number one in Bien Hoa. I keep thinking of the line, 'A young soldier so ill/Looks at the sky pilot, remembers the words, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill': Man, give me some slack, huh. Thank God for the sense of sound." Rock gave fighters such as this military policeman a means to feel their way through, to think about their ethical and moral positions in the war effort. As this quotation suggests, the music did not directly cause anyone to drop their arms, but it rendered the contradictions and pressures of the Vietnam War apparent. At the level of vernacular troop culture, rock provided a powerful force both for private, aesthetic experiences and the public consideration of the Vietnam War's troublesome politics. A fighter could indeed be thankful for the sense of sound on this count.

"Rock 'n' Soul": Race and Popular Music in Vietnam

As the ambiguous overlapping between pop, rock, and soul music in Vietnam has already suggested, the relationship between music and race in the war zone is worth closer consideration. Most historians rightfully note that racial conflicts in Vietnam often revolved around representations of soul music at military clubs and bases. Ron Spector cites a "Report of Inquiry Concerning a Petition of Redress of Grievances by a Group of Soldiers of the 71st Transportation Battalion One" to explain that, "a common cause of arguments was music,

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72 Perry, "Is This Any Way to Run the Army?", 9.
with blacks frequently demanding that the clubs provide more soul music. One club at Cam Ranh Bay that featured almost exclusively country and western music was the scene of a near riot and 'threats to burn the club down.' But music also provided the means for alliances among counterculturally-minded whites and African-American soldiers. As much as the music replicated racial divisions of the home front, it also provided the means for new connection across racial boundaries.

Integrated CMTS bands symbolized these connections at both the official and vernacular levels of military life in Vietnam. With its mix of rock and soul songs, the set list for the Soul Chordinators hinted at the possibilities of musical integration. A closer look at the poster for "Jimmy and the Everyday People" (see figure 3.4) also reveals an imaginative space opening up between the white counterculture and black soul movements in the Vietnam war zone. On the poster, we see the silhouette of a dancing woman -- her hair whipping back from her movement, her face breaking into an ecstatic smile, and her racial identity ambiguous. Below the woman, we read an announcement of the kind of music one can expect to hear from "Jimmy and the Everyday People: "Rock 'n' soul."

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74 Jimmy and The Everyday People publicity poster, CMTS Tours - Jimmy and the Everyday People (104) - 23 Aug 1971 folder, Records of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV), Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam Special Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, After Action Reports re: CMTS Tours In Vietnam April - August 1971, Box 9 (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II), College Park, Maryland.
The band performed music associated with the countercultural movement, such as Sly and the Family Stone's "(I Want to Take You) Higher." Jimmy and his group also drew praise performing songs that could be interpreted as direct or indirect critiques of the war in Vietnam, such as the Beatles "Let It Be." Bringing the sounds of home to the war, Jimmy and the Everyday People provided respite to battle-weary troops. But they brought more than just entertainment from a placid domestic American culture. Their sound transported the effects of the war on United States society back to the war zone. Jimmy and the Everyday People completed a global circuit of musical commentary, experience, and engagement. They did so through a combination of rock and soul that hinted at countercultural energies while providing appealing entertainment sanctioned by the official military bureaucracy of the Entertainment Branch.
An article in *The Delta Dragon*, a United States military newspaper, hinted at what was at stake in the band's performances: "Competing with the realities of war, Jimmy and the Everyday People brought hard hitting sounds and messages everywhere they played." Faced with "the realities of war," Jimmy and the Everyday People replicated violence in the aggressiveness of their "hard hitting sounds." But the group also generated a musical alternative as they invited audiences to participate in their performance; they were "competing with the realities of war" by delivering musical "messages" from stateside. Sparking audience involvement in songs about getting higher and letting it be, Jimmy and the Everyday People brought welcome relief from the tensions of combat, importations of "messages" from the domestic counterculture, and direct glosses on the Vietnam experience. "As the show progresses the intensity of their songs is easily felt," *The Delta Dragon* noted, suggesting that Jimmy and his band fostered temporary but powerful forms of community and identity through music.\(^7^5\)

How do we understand a mixed-race band performing rock and soul together when the genres are usually conceptualized as utterly separate, both domestically and in the Vietnam experience? Despite the ways in which music reinforced racial divisions in the military, rock and soul also provided the means for new kinds of affiliation. This is not to ignore that the music played a role in manifesting difference. As the veteran Dave Cline, who served in Delta Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 25th Division during 1967, remarked: "When you came in from the field, people generally tended to break down

culturally. It was culturally -- musically." But, music could function in the other direction, too, not only dividing, but providing forces of cohesion, or at the very least of meeting across the treacherous boundaries of race, which could be so difficult to negotiate within the racisms of the military and the home front.

Referring to the links forged through music between white hippies in the military, known as the "heads," and black troops, known as "brothers," Cline noted that rock and soul in particular fostered connections across racial lines: "We used to like try… to have a pretty good relationship between the heads and the brothers, even culturally" since at the time, "rock music incorporated soul music in that period." As Cline's phrase suggests, rock and soul were unstable musical genres during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As rock expanded commercially, it increasingly overlapped with soul. Performers ranging from Otis Redding to Sly Stone to The Temptations to Jimi Hendrix to Janis Joplin criss-crossed the genres, merging them together in new ways. Rock and soul might, at times, symbolize or serve as the motivating force for racial difference and racial tensions, but the musics were also connected, providing a way for troops to forge connections and affiliations across social boundaries.

Joel Davis, an African-American who served in Vietnam during 1967, remembered a particularly vivid example of the ways in which music linked him to fellow fighters across racial lines. On a transport ship in the South China Sea, he recollected, "Everybody was sitting around with his feet dangling off the side of the ship, you know, playing music on the

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tape recorders, getting high, you know, smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol." His platoon eventually inspired Davis to take his "R&R" in the white-dominated destination of Sydney, Australia, instead of the Southeast Asian cities more favored by African-American troops. "I went there to make my civil rights claim, as opposed to having a good time, but then I mixed it all in together," Davis remarked of his trip to music clubs such as the Whiskey A-Go-Go in the red-light and hippie district of Sydney. Rock and soul music was but one resource for a fighter such as Joel Davis to seek out a racial, political end -- his "civil rights claim" -- through the pursuit of a private, aesthetic experience in the sphere of leisure.

Figure 3.24. Soldiers performing at the Cam Ranh Bay Music Happening, 1970 (courtesy: National Archives)

Leaving aside the intriguing notion that David Cline raises of rock "incorporating" soul during the Vietnam years, we might address how rock and soul together enlivened a

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consciousness and consideration of the paradoxes -- the "strobic wheel" as Michael Herr put it -- of a war fought on the frontlines of American military and cultural expansion during the Cold War. We might even hear rock and soul music as cultural forms that motivated and shaped what Richard Moser deems the political significance of the "citizen-soldier" identity in the Vietnam conflict.\textsuperscript{80} Circulating to spaces of the war zone where other modes of civil discourse and debate usually could not, the overlapping sound waves of rock and soul provided a medium for feeling and expressing notions of an American fighter's civic responsibility in Vietnam. At the meeting point of gun and guitar, the music and the noise of war blared together, sometimes deafening those around them to alternative civic possibilities, but also fostering a space of negotiation. Within this space, not only Americans, but also non-Americans listened to rock and soul, contributing their own responses to the civic reverberations of popular music.

\textbf{"Calling Out Around the World": Global Rock Citizenship}

The confusing symbolism of gun and guitar was not only available for Americans; Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians adopted rock music for economic survival, aesthetic pleasure, and political expression. In the third space of rock in Vietnam -- the non-American cultures of the region -- music served as a harbinger of the postmodern collision of Western consumer capitalism with traditional cultures of the decolonizing world. Not merely the avant-garde of a United States neo-imperialism, rock provided a complex soundscape and

\textsuperscript{80} Moser, \textit{The New Winter Soldiers}. 
cultural milieu. Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians worked out their relationship to the
expanding web of American economic and military power through responses to rock.

Many Vietnamese and Southeast Asians listened intently to American rock music. The "Vietnamese rock scene will come as a surprise to those who imagine the Vietnamese
either in quaint foreign dress or reproachful rags," Charles Perry noted in his 1968 Rolling
Stone article. Ken Sams, publisher of the Grunt Free Press, an underground newspaper that
flourished in Vietnam for a time, recounts South Vietnamese students coming over to his
apartment in Saigon to listen and dance to the latest rock and soul records sent to Sams from
London. And at least from the perspective of American performers, audiences of Vietnamese
listeners also enjoyed hearing rock music in concert. "This was truly the greatest show I have
experienced since playing at block parties with my group in the States," a member of the

"We put on a show out in the middle of down-town Can Tho in front of over one thousand
Vietnamese people." Performing songs such as Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Who'll Stop
The Rain," this member noted in his band's After Action Report that he believed the
Vietnamese audience, "did appreciate us very much."81

Southeast Asians not only listened to American rock, they began performing the
music themselves. "Amid the confusion and concussion of the war, Vietnamese teenagers
are having a cultural revolution all their own," AFVN DJ Scott Manning wrote to Charles
Perry. "The most way-out fashions are found on the city's pop music groups, made up of

81 "After Action Report," CMTS Tours - Marshmallow Steamshovel #95 April 3, 1971 Folder,
Records of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV), Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam Special
Services Agency (Provisional), Entertainment Branch, After Action Reports re: CMTS Tours In Vietnam,
December 1970-April 1971, Box 8 (RG 472), National Archives (NARA II), College Park, Maryland.
Japanese, Filipinos, Malaysians, and draft-deferred Vietnamese. …No set at Saigon's Whiskey A-Go-Go would be complete without well-rehearsed versions of…'San Francisco (Wear Flowers in Your Hair).‟ As a striking photograph of a Vietnamese singer and dancer indicates (see figure 3.25), music functioned within the war economy alongside other booming industries such as prostitution, drinking, and drugs. Many Vietnamese, Filipino, and Korean "floor shows," as they were known, toured U.S. bases to entertain Americans. Silent film footage from a "Care for Casualties" film shows a cover band performing for recovering American troops at a Navy Hospital in 1968. The band moves in unison as they play their electric instruments. The lead singer steps forward to dance and spin the microphone, like a cross between James Brown and Mick Jagger.

More fascinatingly, rock provided a means for South Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians to grapple with the very meaning of Americanness. As a member of what was perhaps the most famous South Vietnamese rock band, the CBC Band, told a Rolling Stone reporter: "The United States must be the greatest paradox in the history of the world. It puts out the best conceivable sounds in its music and the worst conceivable sounds in its


84 Care for Casualties (1314-X), Vietnam, 1968, Motion Picture Films and Video Recordings, National Archives at College Park - Archives II.
weapons." With the CBC Band, we can hear rock resonating as part of the symbolic nexus of gun and guitar.

Figure 3.25. Mai, performer in a commercial band that toured South Vietnam, 1971 (photo: Don Morrison)

Figure 3.26. Covering rock in Vietnam: a still from Navy Hospital film footage, Care for Casualties, 1968 (courtesy: National Archives)

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For this and other young South Vietnamese, rock echoed between the sound of violent American imperialism and sonic glimpses of an alternative civic configuration. A member of the CBC explained: "Music is the only way we have of expressing ourselves. Most GIs, before they hear us play, look at us as long-haired gooks. …But after they hear us play, they don't look at us as gooks anymore. They realize that we are people." This transformation from dehumanized other to a common humanity was mediated through musical performance. When the members of the CBC sang, "Yea, we’re the CBC band, and we'd like to turn you on / We got a little peace message, like, straight from Saigon," they presented an alternative civic configuration within yet against the dominant modes of American consumer and military imperial might. Music, commodified and transmitted through the circuitry of a globalizing American mass culture, wound up opening up surprising, new possibilities within its frequencies and wavelengths.86

The CBC Band had a "peace message" from deep in the war zone itself: "straight from Saigon." Indeed, straight from Saigon -- in 1971, the alternative civics to which CBC harkened in the smaller public spaces of musical performances at military and commercial clubs appeared in a much larger fashion in the city of Saigon itself at a Woodstock-like "international rock music festival." For five hours in a muddy stadium, rock bands from Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia played. A New York Times article estimated the audience at 7,000. Journalist Gloria Emerson wrote, "About 500 G.I.'s attended, many wearing headbands and antiwar or black-power jewelry." Emerson's figure suggests that the bulk of the audience consisted of South Vietnamese youth. She

86 Marlow, "Yea, We're the CBC Band," 28.
reported that, "It seemed that many of them -- with their long sideburns, far-out sunglasses, open skirts and flared trousers -- might want to be hippies but that life in South Vietnam did not permit it." Emerson also noted that there were no conflicts between the American soldiers and the South Vietnamese youth at the festival concert.\textsuperscript{87}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{saigon_rock_festival_performer.jpg}
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With the Saigon International Rock Festival, we can hear rock music fostering an alternative civic space within the war zone itself. At least for an afternoon, the concert became a living embodiment of the Local Board's poster (see figures 3.20, 3.21, and 3.22). While not explicitly or inherently political in our usual uses of that word, the festival allowed South Vietnamese and Americans to assemble in a different stylistic and bodily formation than the war demanded. Borrowing from countercultural markers that had reached

them through a globalizing American commercial culture as well as through the American military, the performers and attendees at the Saigon festival temporarily rearranged the civic dimensions of public space in a place where violence and warfare predominated.

Perhaps most remarkably, rock and soul music seems to have even reached young North Vietnamese. Quoting a North Vietnamese party newspaper, a United States Army intelligence officer wrote in 1969: "The North Vietnamese Government seems to be worried by 'cultural and ideological sabotage' and signs of 'decadent' culture among youth.” According to the intelligence report, the party paper declared that, "Western-inspired music and literature ha[s] taken a hold of 'bad elements.'”

While it remains unclear precisely what "Western-inspired music" made its way into North Vietnam, we do know that anti-war activists in the U.S. were actually sending rock to the country at this time. Countercultural icons such as Abbie Hoffman produced programs for a mock-station called "WPAX." "The first show should go on the air in Hanoi on March 8th," DJ John Gabree told Rolling Stone reporter Peter McCabe, "We'll be starting with Jimi Hendrix's version of 'The Star Spangled Banner': don't you think that's appropriate?"

The North Vietnamese themselves broadcast rock on a propaganda station known to American troops as "Hanoi Hannah" for its female announcers. One soldier recalled, "Three nights after I got there, Hanoi Hannah…dedicated 'Tonight's the Night' by the Shirelles to us. 'Will you still love me tomorrow?' that's the one. The little cunt face. But I liked listening to

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her. She put on some good jams." Here, as with the CBC Band's observations of how American G.I.'s treated them, we get a sense of the mixed feelings that rock music generated -- on the one hand, it could inspire angry, sexist insults; on the other, it provided an entry into the possibility of different relationships between Americans and their ostensible enemies in North Vietnam.

Perhaps the American fighter and the North Vietnamese youth alike found in rock music access to an alternative public zone in which both had a chance to refashion their self-identities and larger social affiliations. Rock neither "defeated" globalizing American consumer capitalism, nor overpowered the state-sponsored violence of American military might. But it did provide other fleeting but palpable configurations of a global society besides one dominated by the American nation-state. Traversing the world on electronic wavelengths, carrying within the vessels of musical commodities a third way beyond communist or capitalist ideologies, rock provided the wavelengths and wiring for a possible cultural pathway out of war. The CBC band's "little peace message, yeah, straight from Saigon" helped complete the circuit of a globalizing civics of rock.

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"Bringing It All Back Home": The "Battlespace" of Electronic Warfare and Electronic Civics

In a lecture on "War in the Filigree of Peace," Michel Foucault emphasized the importance of war to the defining of the civitas.\(^9\) Picking up on this insight, Chris Hables Gray has written that the Vietnam War's "battlefield" is really a battlespace. It is...three-dimensional and ranges beyond the atmosphere. It is on thousands of electronic wavelengths. It is on the 'homefront' as much as the battlefront.\(^9\) Gray's description of the "battlespace" of Vietnam emerging on "thousands of electronic wavelengths," on the "'homefront' as much as the battlefront," suggests that civics even lurked in musical experiences deep in the war zone. So, too, as Gray points out, the war zone could penetrate deep into the civic life of the home front. Back in the United States, rock carried the emotional and ideological experiences of war back to the civics of the counterculture.

References to Vietnam in places such as San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, with its burgeoning rock music scene, registered the circuit completed between war zone and home front. For instance, inspired by the mystical mass-media theories of Marshall McLuhan, a writer named Stephen Jensen circulated a flier in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in 1967, insisting that, "McLuhan believes that the war in Vietnam will end because people are getting sick of seeing dead bodies while eating dinner in front of

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Though he did not mention music, Jensen focused on the electronic media that, drawing on McLuhan, he believed was giving birth to an anti-war, countercultural civic life. In an entirely different locale, in a different cultural domain, Jensen seemed able to hear echoes of the CBC Band's "little peace message, yeah, straight from Saigon."

Chester Anderson, who owned the machine on which Jensen's flier was printed, explicitly made the link between McLuhan, music, and war. Anderson thought that key components of McLuhan's "covertly projected spherical society" (which might be another way of describing an alternative global electronic civics) were beginning to appear in entities such as, "the Haight/Ashbury community, and especially what we'll keep on calling rock & roll until we can find some more appropriate name for it." Informed by the ever-present media representations of the Vietnam War, Anderson was hardly utopian about what he heard and saw. The violence of Vietnam intruded too much.

In a flier on the decay of Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, Anderson observed that while countercultural leaders such as "Hip Merchants" (including rock musicians) profited, too many young people were being hurt by a runaway culture dominated by abusive drug dealers and deceitful aggressors. In the Haight-Ashbury, Anderson decided, "Minds & bodies are being maimed as we watch, a scale model of Vietnam." As Anderson's despair suggested, Vietnam's energies returned to the home front with a vengeance, linking the war

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to domestic life in the United States through what Chris Hables Grey describes as an electronic "battlespace."

**Conclusion: Guns and Guitars Today**

Whether in relation to morale, boredom, terror, pleasure, or politics, rock music provided sonic forms both for reasserting and challenging established definitions of self-identity and public belonging associated with the United States. Rock influenced notions of the American warrior, but also the American "citizen-soldier." It served as a tool in the official military's attempts to foster an inclusive, integrationist fighting community, but it also provided modes of expressing dissent and rebellion against military identity. In addition to its evocations of, and challenges to, Americanness, rock also summoned into being the possibility of an alternative global civics. Participants used rock to pursue more suitable and meaningful modes of belonging in a world that mass communications systems increasingly linked. Social membership in this emerging *civitas* increasingly trespassed the traditional boundaries of the nation-state. As the harbinger of an alternative global civics, rock's sounds were neither utopian fantasies, nor merely imperial tools. Rather, they emerged *in and through* American mass culture, mediating its contradictions and providing means for engagement and critique. In the pulsations of rock, everyone from hippies in the Haight to Vietnam grunts in the jungle to a South Vietnamese guitar player, sought to make sense of the impossible problems and provocative possibilities of the world around them.

"What are you going to do with all that energy?" the Vietnam veteran Peter Cameron asked about the potentially destructive forces that would accumulate during a night of rock,
beer, boredom, and shell-shock in a military club. We might extend Cameron's question to the Vietnam conflict as a whole. In its massive expenditures of humanity, technology, intellect, and violence, Vietnam generated an enormous amount of energy. Rock music helped channel some of this energy -- this electricity -- into sonic representation and social production. Between gun and guitar, rock provided a space of expressivity to render the war's energies intelligible emotionally and ideologically.

Perhaps if we better understand this energy of rock and Vietnam, we can not only grapple with the legacy of that tragic affair, but confront the contemporary context, in which American culture continues to expand to other parts of the world by both military and commercial means, generating tremendous energies both terrifying and promising in the process. Two photographs from 2003 raise the questions that Leni Sinclair and Tim Page's portraits from the late 1960s raised thirty-odd years earlier.

In one photograph (see figure 3.28), we see the First Infantry Division rock band performing in Baghdad on July 25, 2003. They stand onstage, in what look like the casual version of army fatigues, playing guitars, horns, and drums instead of handling guns, tanks, and bombs. In the other (see figure 3.29), the Iranian rock group Shanti rehearses in Tehran, Iran. Within a nation strongly opposed to American imperial power, this rock group, too, wields electric guitars. One member of Shanti even, incongruously, wears a Che Guevara t-shirt.

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96 Peter Cameron, "Reminiscences of Peter Cameron" (1976), Vietnam Veterans Collection, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, 34.

Figure 3.28 and Figure 3.29. The continuing sound of guns and guitars: The First Army Infantry Division rock band, performing at the "Summer Jam," Baghdad, Iraq, July 2003 (photograph: Spc. Ryan Smith); Shanti, an Iranian rock band, rehearsing in Tehran, 2003 (photograph: Scott Peterson/Getty Images)

Just as the Vietnam photographs of Leni Sinclair and Tim Page seemed suggested thirty years ago, these photographs from the Middle East ask now: Will the technologies of a
global electronic society merely serve as the infrastructure for American imperialism, or can
the circuitry of mass culture foster more egalitarian global formations of society, culture,
identity, belonging, and human interaction? The possibilities and problems of music's role in
this quandary resonate silently in these photographs. The images suggest, above all else, that
we need to keep listening to the guitars as well as the guns to seek out answers.
Epilogue -
Circulating Through Rock: The Global Electronic Civics of Countercultural Music

The new types of publicity that have been proliferating over the past decade or two, especially with the electronic media...force us to redefine the spatial, territorial, and geopolitical parameters of the public sphere. - Miriam Hansen

Long histories of avant-garde art and vanguard politics demonstrate the overwhelming failure of efforts to transform society by imagining that we can stand outside it, by seeking transcendent critiques untainted by dominant ideologies and interests. The strategies that emerge from today's global realities point to another path...to produce an imminent critique of contemporary social relations, to work through the conduits of commercial culture in order to illumine affinities, resemblances, and potentials for alliances among a world population that now must be as dynamic and as mobile as the forces of capital. - George Lipsitz

People everywhere just got to be free. - The Rascals

The band, called Os Mutantes (The Mutants), wore silver science-fiction tunics straight from a B-grade space-fantasy film. Over their atonal eruption of electric guitars, organ, and drums, a slender man with a mop of black hair stepped to the microphone. It was the 1968 International Song Festival, broadcast on Globo television across the nation of Brazil. The singer, Caetano Veloso, looked like an American hippie, a psychedelic rocker

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imported from the United States, or perhaps from "swinging London." "My hair was very long," Veloso would later explain, "and, left to its own rebellious curliness, seemed like a cross between Hendrix and his British accompanists from the Experience." But Veloso was very much a Brazilian, a popular *bossa nova* singer from Bahia who had, after his first album, begun to experiment with merging the musical traditions of Brazil with the electrified sounds of rock music.

Because of his use of American (and American-influenced British) mass culture, a growing cloud of suspicion hovered above Veloso's rebellious curls. The conservative government of Brazil saw him as a deviant, a "communist," a protest singer whipping up his audiences into a revolutionary frenzy. The regime of Costa e Silva eventually threw Veloso and fellow musician Gilberto Gil in prison because, as a military interrogator told Veloso, his music's irreverence "undermined the structures" of Brazilian society. Veloso's audiences, meanwhile, many of them students sympathetic to the left and opposed to Silva's regime, saw the singer as a pawn of United States mass culture, an abandoner of Brazil's indigenous, anti-imperialist, nationalist "folk" traditions. Indeed, as his critics perceived, Veloso forged a new aesthetic in response to the globalizing culture of United States consumerism during the Cold War. But to his mind, Veloso did so from a distinctly Brazilian perspective. This fusion of Brazilian and U.S. popular culture was called the *Tropicália* movement, and Veloso was one of its leaders. As the spotlight shone on Veloso at the 1968 festival, he began to sing his entry into the song contest, a composition titled "É proibido proibir" (Prohibiting is prohibited).

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The song was inspired by the slogan, 'Forbidding is forbidden," graffiti written around Paris during the student-worker uprising of 1968 in France. But Veloso's outfit was neither that of a student, nor that of a worker. Nor was his appearance, in any clear sense, precisely that of a citizen of the United States, or of Brazil. The place that Veloso seemed to arrive from, the country he seemed to represent, was something new and strange, yet old and archaic. His costume was even more outlandish than the science-fiction outfits of Os Mutantes. "I wore plastic clothing in green and black," Veloso explained in his memoir, "my chest covered with thick necklaces made of electrical wires with the plugs hanging at the ends, and thick chains with animal teeth."{5}

Covered in plastic, with a necklace of electrical wires and thick chains, Veloso signaled his entanglement in an electronically-circulated mass culture dominated by products and images from the United States. Yet those animal teeth -- residual clichés of Amazonian tribes as well as references to the ecological ideas of the counterculture and perhaps also to the war-jewelry that United States fighters in Vietnam wore around their necks -- suggested something else. They hinted that even if Veloso's body and his celebrity image were complicit in larger, possibly destructive systems of cultural imperialism, Veloso also retained a fierce sense of otherness. He was inside the wires of American mass culture, but not in any simple, passive manner.

When the audience threw garbage at Veloso and Os Mutantes, the singer was ready. He turned the performance into a Tropicalist happening. Veloso signaled an American hippie who was living in Brazil, John Danduran, who was a tall, albino musician, to run

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onstage in a hippie poncho and start screaming and yelling (see figure 4.1). Then Veloso read a statement in which he lambasted the audience for its limited view of the political and aesthetic possibilities of incorporating the mass culture of the United States and elsewhere into Brazilian life. Like the 1920s Brazilian modernist writer, Oswald de Andrade, Veloso wanted to "cannibalize" foreign cultures to create a powerful aesthetic statement within the context of Brazil. "The idea of cultural cannibalism fits us, the tropicalists, like a glove," Veloso later explained. "We were 'eating' the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix." Those animal teeth seemed ridiculous. They were even insulting. And yet they were a potent symbol of how a figure such as Veloso, responding to rock music, might also be nourished by it. He might even be able to rip right into the dangling electrical wires of American mass culture and sever the thick chains around his neck.

As a leading member of the *Tropicália* movement in Brazil, Caetano Veloso fashioned a response to rock music from the periphery of the United States's Cold War mass culture. As the historian Christopher Dunn argues, "Tropicália was an exemplary instance of cultural hybridity that dismantled binaries that maintained neat distinctions between high and low, traditional and modern, national and international cultural production." To Dunn, "The tropicalists proposed a far-reaching critique of Brazilian modernity that challenged dominant constructions of national culture."

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6 Dunn, 74.
In place of an abstract celebration of the "masses," the tropicalists concentrated on the incongruous details of living in a "Third World" country where indigenous, premodern practices mingled with the banal products and images of a First World consumer culture. By accentuating this strange interaction, Dunn believes that, "the tropicalists would give impetus to emerging countercultural attitudes, styles, and discourses concerning race, gender, sexuality, and personal freedom." Though these, "were becoming increasingly salient in countercultural movements in the United States and Europe," Dunn contends that they, "were manifested in distinct ways in Brazil during the period of military rule."\(^7\)

Dunn is correct to focus on the particularities of *Tropicália* in Brazil, yet the dynamic he describes -- the youthful, quasi-political appropriation of Anglo-American rock -- was part of a larger story. Around the world, young rock fans seized a form of mass culture emanating from the United States, but they did not merely acquiesce to U.S. cultural...
imperialism. Instead, they refashioned sounds from afar for their own purposes. Though historians have focused extensively on the transatlantic, Anglo-American exchange of rock, only in recent years has a secondary literature emerged in which scholars have explored rock's circulation to places as disparate as Brazil, Mexico, Mali, Nigeria, and even behind the Iron Curtain in the communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe.8 This epilogue will briefly survey examples from this growing secondary literature in order to suggest that the civics of rock took on a global character in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Rock not only represented a form of cultural imperialism originating in the United States, but also a counterflow of ideas, practices, and exchanges that can be thought of as a global electronic civics. Not only within the United States, nor only in the circulation of people and culture between the U.S. and the Southeast Asian war zone, but also worldwide, rock sparked a mass-mediated atmosphere of democracy within the web of U.S. mass culture. A psychedelic public sphere burst into existence in multiple locations. This public made possible confrontations with issues of justice, freedom, democracy, and modernity.

8 See, for example, Reebee Garofalo, ed., Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992). Approaching music as subculture, Mark Slobin makes the point that non-Americans have adopted rock into their own cultures as much as joining a circulating global culture. "Even the little that we know indicates that despite the homogeneity of the product, the diversity of its reception is striking. The local domestication of Anglo-American rock music by European regions, from Slovenia (Barber-Kersovan 1989) and Italy (Fabbri 1989) and the German-speaking lands (Larkey 1989) to the former Eastern bloc (Ryback 1990; Troitsky 1987) is an eye-opening, if uneven and disorganized, field of research. A quick survey shows how localized the impact of the presumed rock juggernaut has been, as it changes course to fit the local musical roadways and the traffic conditions of each society, including such widely varied factors as the presence of well-entrenched regional styles that refuse to give way; the typecasting of rock as the property of a certain subculture, political group, or generation; and the benign or hostile effects of governmental interference, intervention, and control." See Mark Slobin, Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England/Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 62.
From the totalizing perspective of certain schools of Marxist thinking, this psychedelic public sphere merely masked the expansion of capitalism in the world. But, another, non-totalizing interpretation might posit that rock music circulated a transformed public sphere within the networks of global capitalism. Rather than picture rock as a sonic mask of false consciousness, we can think of it as a resource -- like oxygen, wind, fuel -- that enabled participants to mount critiques of, and explore alternatives to, the dominant modes of economic, political, and social organization in the 1960s and thereafter. Rock served as a resource for reimagining the world. It also provided an aesthetic and communicative link between participants. Responders to rock around the world assembled -- though never all in the same place, or at the same time -- in a nascent, alternative global citizenry.

The ways in which global uses of rock music enabled a global public indicate that we must draw upon, but also update, the explosion of community studies in histories of the 1960s. This scholarship has sought to correct a top-down tendency in the first wave of research on the social movements of the 1960s. In powerful ways, recent community studies reveal that many wrinkles exist in the once smooth and simplistic narrative of the 1960s. Community studies illuminate the particularities of local struggles in the civil rights movement, the New Left, and the counterculture. They show how the local is a crucial --

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9 See, for example, Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); and David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). Christopher Dunn traces interpretations about the Tropicáli movement in Brazil divided between those who used the theories of Gregor Lukacs to argue that the music masked capitalist class relations and those who, drawing upon the ideas of Walter Benjamin, understood Tropicáli as immanent, allegorical critique; see Dunn, 98-100.

perhaps the most crucial -- site of history. However, rock music's global circulation suggests that the relationship between the local, the national, and the global must always be kept in mind. In the context of a globalizing mass culture during the late 1960s and early 1970s, rock music forces us to update Tip O'Neill's famous dictum (reportedly said by his father) that all politics is local. With mass culture, all politics is not only local, but also mass-mediated and, therefore, circulatory.11

Because it was embedded within American mass culture, rock was deeply problematic if conceptualized as an authentic, ideologically pure cultural form. But if understood as impure and immanent, the music can be heard in a different manner. Rock was very much part of American systems of capitalism and consumerism, but its circulation also allowed listeners around the world to fashion alternative civic identities. Rock posed possibilities for social organizations different than those offered by national governments, the traditions passed down through families, or even the commercial marketing and

advertising of international corporations. Often borrowing from these powerful social institutions without entirely giving in to any one one of their logics and structures, responders to rock around the world established a dispersed pattern of civic engagement. Although quite diverse in their responses to local situations, these responses to rock can also be taken together as the manifestation of a transformed public sphere -- a kind of global electronic civil society sustained by the sounds of rock music.

Just south of the United States, rock became a dramatic symbol of modernization in Mexico, as Eric Zolov powerfully documents in *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. As in the Brazilian context of *Tropicália*, rock was interpreted in two ways in Mexico. On the one hand, the music was rejected, Zolov explains, as an "imperialist import from the United States." On the other hand, rock "appealed to...perceptions of what it meant to be modern, to have access to global culture." As early as the 1950s, rock 'n' roll became what Zolov calls, "an epitome of postwar consumerism." The music, "introduced a questioning of the social order that reverberated throughout Mexican society in the so-called *rebeldes sin causa*, a catch-all phrase lifted from the James Dean film (shown and later banned) that heralded the new youth culture."12

This "questioning of the social order" hints at rock's circulation of a transformed public sphere around the world. Both imported from the United States and Britain as well as taken up by Mexican musicians, rock, "was associated with challenges to parental authority and wanton individualism." This was no small matter in a one-party state whose rulers employed the "Revolutionary Family" as its metaphor of patriarchal political organization.

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At both the level of private life in families and public life in the Mexican nation-state, rock interrupted dominant constructions of identity and collectivity -- and the music helped participants to pose alternatives.\(^{13}\)

In September 1971, for example, some two-hundred thousand participants gathered for the Avándaro rock festival. Closely modeled after the 1969 Woodstock festival in Bethel, New York, Avándaro was not merely imitative of the United States counterculture. The festival drew youth from all class levels of Mexican society. It also drew women to the event. A number of these female participants experienced the festival as a liberation from gender constraints; others saw it as a difficult site for women to be comfortable. For almost all who attended, according to Zolov, Avándaro became a space of inquiry. "It was in this liberated space that Mexicans from all classes took stock of their numbers, exchanged histories, encountered other histories similar and dissimilar to their own."\(^{14}\)

In the aftermath of violent reprisals by the Mexican government against a growing radical student movement, Avándaro's rock music was not so much an extension of an overtly leftist (or rightist) politics as it was a reimagining of identity and collectivity. Rock music and Avándaro, Zolov claims, "suggested the possibility of reorganizing national consciousness among youth in such a way that the state was not only mocked but left out of the picture altogether." In a quintessential counterculture turn toward the civic realm rather than toward state power, the participants at Avándaro adopted an implicitly anarchistic rather than a Marxist or socialist approach to problems of social organization.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Zolov, 8.

\(^{14}\) Zolov, 204-206.

\(^{15}\) Zolov, 218.
The festival was permitted by the government of Luis Echeverría, but it was met with criticism by both the Mexican left and right, who bemoaned the influence of the United States on Mexico's youth. What both sides seemed to miss was how responders to rock music at Avándaro, and in the larger *La Onda Chicana* (the Mexican counterculture), took up the possibilities of a global civics of rock. As Zolov explains, "Through a free association of symbols and signs of the nation -- and of a universalized countercultural movement, generally -- the youth culture actively sought to forge a new collective identity that rejected a static nationalism while inventing a new national consciousness on its own terms."

Grounding their activities in the new transnational concept of Chicano identity, participants in Avándaro distinguished nationalist culture from state power, according to Zolov. They sought to rearticulate what it meant to be a citizen of Mexico and the world simultaneously.\(^{16}\)

Zolov documents this rearticulation in both the memories of participants and the use of flags at the festival itself. As one attendee at Avándaro, José Enrique Pérez Cruz, told Zolov: "I think, in a certain sense, we could say that [rock] fit the communist slogan, 'Workers of the world unite!' That is, 'Rockers of the world unite!'...Above all, [rock represented] a repudiation of borders. That was the real function of the music, for even when you didn't understand the lyrics, you still enjoyed the music. And that linked us [as Mexicans] to England, Spain, Latin America. Yes, that's the function I see in the music."\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) Zolov, 207.

\(^{17}\) Zolov, 207.
Other participants supported Cruz's position. Humberto Rubalcaba, a member of the rock band Tinta Blanca, wrote that he and others went to Avándaro, "to see what we are like and how we act.... We went to get to know ourselves better, to know ourselves as being a part of the others, as well as [to support] the others.... [At Avándaro], [w]e mutually discovered that we exist." As in the United States, rock generated a kind of "invisible republic" in which participants explored issues of freedom, sameness, and difference. An American who attended the festival articulated this sense of rock's civic capacities to generate a transformed public sphere that created surreptitious communicative links. "I remember the next day or so wandering around Mexico City, flashing the peace sign at others who were coated in mud," this participant told Eric Zolov. "'Avan-daró' you said, like it was a secret signal that you had been there. Like it was something really important. Somehow, because of the mud, you could just tell who had been there."\(^{18}\)

The appropriation of national flags at Avándaro confirms this sense of civic reimagining that the festival entailed. Both Mexican and United States flags were pervasive at Avándaro. In a film of the concert, participants replaced the eagle and serpent at the center of Mexico's flag with a peace symbol (see figure 4.2). In another sequence from the concert film, participants danced around and with an American flag (see figure 4.3). Zolov explains that, "Reinventions of one's national flag and the discovery of new symbolic value through such reappropriation were common in countercultural movements worldwide. For example, incorporating the flag as an article of clothing became a statement of freedom from the state or the official meanings assigned to the flag (such as militarism in the United States)."\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\) Zolov, 207, 206.

\(^{19}\) Zolov, 207-208.
The powerful expressions of a nascent new identity and collectivity at Avándaro did not last in Mexico. Viewed by conservatives as a possible political tool of revolutionaries, and by revolutionary intellectuals as an imperialist agent from the United States, rock wound up on the margins of Mexican society. The music only resurfaced later in the 1970s as the punk rock in the lower-middle class and poor barrios of Mexico City.\textsuperscript{20} Though the memory of Avándaro was suppressed in Mexico, the festival finds resonances with the experience of rock in other nations around the world. In the newly decolonized nations of West Africa, for instance, one discovers a similar use of rock music by a young generation balancing its newfound national identity with the possibilities of a place in a modern, global network of musical and countercultural participation.

\textsuperscript{20} See Zolov, 249-259.
Avándaro was not the only location were youth around the world staged their own Woodstock rock festivals. When Manthia Diawara's friend Addy returned from Switzerland to Mali with an album by the American rock supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, in the early 1970s, he and his friends began to organize a Woodstock in Bamako, the capital of Mali. Looking over Malick Sidibé's famous photographs of Malians from the 1960s in an essay he wrote some thirty years later, Diawara noticed that the new nationalist government of Mali, which won its independence from France in 1960, could not grasp the adoption of imperialist music from the United States by its youth (see figure 4.4). "Malick Sidibé's photographs enable us to revisit the youth culture of the 1960s and our teenage years in Bamako," Diawara writes. "They show exactly how the young people in Bamako had embraced rock and roll as a liberation movement, adopted the consumer habits of an international youth culture, and developed a rebellious attitude toward all forms of
established authority. The black-and-white photographs reflect how far the youth in Bamako had gone in their imitation of the worldview and dress style of popular music stars.\(^{21}\)

As Diawara describes his teenage experiences in Mali, refracted through Sidibé's photographs, he identifies a similar process to the kind of negotiations of identity and collectivity that Zolov chronicles in Mexico. One noticeable difference, however, can be found in the prominence of soul as well as rock music in the Malian context. Yet, Diawara does not distinguish strongly between these two genres of American music. As in Vietnam, soul and rock overlapped with each other without becoming indistinct. At times, the soul music of James Brown and other African-American performers had strong salience as the racialized sound of an international Black Power movement.

But, at other times, as Diawara remembers life in Bamako, soul and rock formed part of the same international youth culture of rock, which provided a way for younger Malians to break with their parental generation's insistence on establishing a national, anti-colonial culture. To Diawara, "The photographs show that, in attempting to be like James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones," young music listeners in Bamako, "were also revealing their impatience with the political teachings of the nationalist state and the spirit of decolonization." Instead, "what the youth in Bamako wanted most in those days was James Brown and the freedom and existential subjectivity that linked independence to the universal youth movement of the 1960s."\(^{22}\)

The photographs also hint at an invisible sonic circuit that linked Malians to a global


\(^{22}\) Diawara, 166.
public of responders to rock. Not only does Sidibé's work show Diawara how, "the desires of youth are inscribed in most of the photos as a determined break with tradition," but the photographs also illuminate how, "the youth had quickly internalized African culture, collapsed the walls of binary opposition between colonizer and colonized, and made connections beyond national frontiers with the Diaspora and international youth movements." Bamako's students named their informal school clubs or *Grins*, after rock groups. *Grins* were named the Rockers, the Temptations, the Rolling Stones, the Soul Brothers, and the Beatles. These clubs became civic entities informed by mass culture. They were semi-secret associational spaces for listening to records, dancing, tuning in shortwave radio, and talking about popular culture -- all done under the eyes of Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, and James Brown, whose posters hung on the walls.23

What did Bamako's youth do in these associational spaces that linked them to a larger global *civitas*? Diawara uses Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* to describe how Bamako's attendees at the *Grins* developed their sense of social being.24 These young Malians, "acquired their *habitus* by carefully watching images of James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, James Dean, Angela Davis, Aretha Franklin, and Mick Jagger in glossy magazines and movies and on album covers." The youth also took advantage of the freeing spaces of civil society that arose in the *Grins*. They did not merely imitate Western stars, but also took stock of their own lives in relation to the celebrities of music, movie, and radio. As Diawara explains,

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23 Diawara, 166, 173.

"They debated the rock stars' stances against the war in Vietnam, racial discrimination in America, the peace movement associated with Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, and Muhammad Ali as the world's heavyweight boxing champion."²⁵

Figure 4.4. Malick Sidibé, *Fou de disque*, 1973 (courtesy: www.epo.de)

As with their peers in Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere, the rockers of Bamako sought to balance the possibilities of a global youth culture, especially a Diasporic Pan-Africanism, against their new national identity as Malians. James Brown figured prominently in the civic negotiations that went on in the *Grins*. Certain dancers even posed for Sibidé with James Brown's album *Live at the Apollo*. According to Diawara, "James Brown's music and other rock and roll sounds of the sixties were...prefiguring the secular language that the youth of

²⁵ Diawara, 186, 174.
Bamako was adapting as their new *habitus* and as expression of their independence." To Diawara, "That the theory of decolonization could not recognize this at the time as anything but mimicry and assimilation is an indication of its failure to grasp the full complexity of the energies unleashed by independence."\(^{26}\)

Instead, he claims, we need to grasp what young listeners in Mali were struggling toward in the late 1960s and into the 1970s in Mali. They were engaged in, "a transformation of the meaning of the decolonization movements of the 1960s into a rock and roll revolution." This was a movement toward a global civic network of rock music that was most often about the pleasures of experiencing modern conceptions of leisure. But it was not only that. At times, it was a way of affirming transnational commitments to justice. Just as in Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere, it even became a political act in the local and national setting of Mali. As Diawara points out, "Not only did the youth in Bamako organize their own Woodstock to listen to music in a public sphere and protest against apartheid in South Africa, Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia, and the imprisonment of George Jackson and Hurricane Carter in the United States, but they also continued to resist the military dictatorship in Mali until its overthrow by a mass movement in 1992."\(^{27}\)

This interaction between American countercultural music such as rock and soul and African political resistance was not restricted to Mali. In Nigeria, for instance, the musician Fela Ransome-Kuti forged a style that merged James Brown's soul with colorations of psychedelic rock, the West African popular music known as highlife, and his own understandings of Yoruban musical traditions. Advocating a Pan-Africanism, Fela developed

\(^{26}\) Diawara, 166, 184, 171.

\(^{27}\) Diawara, 176, 174.
a sound that challenged the increasingly authoritarian and corrupt governments of his nation. As Sola Olorunyomi argues in *Afrobeat! Fela and the Imagined Continent*, Fela's music took on crucial political significance as the public sphere shrank in the face of coercive state power in Nigeria.

Fela became a "bard of the public sphere," Olorunyomi explains, calling out citizens of Nigeria to question the political and social order in which they lived through music. He even went so far as to declare his home compound in Nigeria an independent republic from the state of Nigeria, calling it the Kalakuta Republic. While formative experiences in Los Angeles and London during the 1960s shaped Fela's music, he ultimately traveled away from the global civics of rock to a position of Pan-African political and cultural essentialism. Nonetheless, that Fela too participated in the nexus of countercultural music such as rock and soul as it circulated through the channels of American mass culture points to the reach of this dispersed network of civic energy.  

The transformed public sphere not only penetrated the so-called "Third World," but it even reached countries behind the Iron Curtain. As in the newly decolonized countries of South America and Africa, the state dominated social life in the nations of the Soviet Bloc. Civil society -- that space of associational life between the marketplace and the government - - was quite weak in nations such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States. Rock music, when it circulated to the Warsaw Pact countries on American propaganda radio or through records and reel-to-reel tapes smuggled across the border or even, at times, through state-sanctioned channels, was not associated with American mass culture.

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culture so much as with the freedom of civil society outside the reach of state control.

Figure 4.5. A poster for one of Prague's late 1960s psychedelic bands, The Primitives (courtesy: Paul Wilson)

Illegal rock clubs, hippie fashion styles, long hair, drug use, veiled references to politics in lyrics -- these all formed efforts not to overthrow communist governments, but rather to create a hidden civic realm of expression and interaction. As Goran Bregovic, leader of the Sarajevo rock group White Button, told the historian Sabrina Petra Ramet in 1989, "Rock 'n' roll in communist countries has much more importance than rock 'n' roll in the West. We can't have any alternative parties or any alternative organized politics. So there are not too many places where you can gather large groups of people and communicate ideas that are not official." For Bregovic, rock music helped generate two dimensions of civic life that it also fostered in the West: it assembled participants together and it circulated ideas for further inquiry and engagement. In doing so, Bregovic claims, "Rock 'n' roll is one of the
most important vehicles for helping people in communist countries to think in a different way."\(^{29}\)

Just as with Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil's eventual confrontation with the authoritarian regime of Brazil, responders to rock music in the Soviet Bloc could, at times, run headlong into state repression. Rock's circulating sounds did play a role in outright political resistance. For instance, according to journalist Ladislav Mnacko, in Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring movement of 1968, hippies were, "in the forefront of the passive resistance to the flood of steel" when Soviet tanks rolled in to control the reforms of Czech leader Alexander Dubcek.\(^{30}\) Later in the 1970s, after this crackdown, an underground culture of concerts by bands influenced by the American rock of the Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa, and the Fugs continued. When members of the group the Plastic People of the Universe were arrested, dissident writer (and later president) Vaclav Havel helped formed the organization Charter 77, which emerged from the network of listeners who supported the arrested rock musicians.\(^{31}\) Rock served as a resource for outright political activism through the way that Czechs utilized the music. They did not draw upon rock as a political tool, but rather as a sonic creator of associational spaces that continually slipped from the reach of state power.


This slippery circulation of rock music even made its way to the Soviet Union itself. After the publication of an article about hippie culture in 1968, Soviet youth adopted many of the styles and practices of Western hippies. They grew their hair long, adopted hippie fashion styles, and experimented with drugs. The *hippi* as they were called, gathered in Moscow at the Hippodrome near Moscow University, and at the Nevsky Prospekt near the Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad (Petersburg). In the summer, *hippi* traveled to rural areas of the Soviet Union, where they, "bartered clothing, records, and other accoutrements of Western-style youth culture." As Timothy Ryback explains in *Rock Around the Bloc*, "The Soviet system, equipped to combat political dissent and ideological deviation, offered few mechanisms for confronting the emerging Soviet hippie culture." Local level militias and the *druzhinniki* (volunteer police) sometimes dragged in male *hippi* and cut their hair off, but other than strong penalties for drug use, the rock culture of Soviet youth circulated as a semi-
secret civics rather than a fully-developed political movement.\textsuperscript{32}

Long after the heyday of the 1960s counterculture passed in the United States and Western Europe, it continued in the Soviet Union. "Thousands of hippi continued to litter Soviet society long after their counterparts in the West had disappeared," Ryback notes. "As late as 1978, Andrea Lee, an American living in Leningrad, reported that hundreds of Soviet hippi still gathered to share experiences and wander the length and breadth of the Soviet Union." As she wrote in her book \textit{Russian Journal}, "It was strange for me to see and hear all around me vestiges of the American drug culture of a decade ago -- the psychedelic drawings, the fantastic clothes, Grace Slick wailing on a tape player."\textsuperscript{33}

Grace Slick's "wail on a tape player," consigned to the memory chambers of nostalgia in the United States by 1978, continued to echo around the world as a circulator of civic possibilities in the face of state power. First resonating in the San Francisco "sound that is also a scene" in the 1960s, when Slick performed with Jefferson Airplane, it now -- many dubbed copies later -- kept civil society alive in the Soviet Union. What John Ehrenberg calls the "intermediate zone" of civil society lived on in that recorded cry. Channeled through the corporate consumer processes of American mass culture, broadcast on radio frequencies, recorded surreptitiously on tape players and smuggled into diverse local situations, rock allowed its listeners to enliven civic energies in dispersed environments.

John Ehrenberg posits that Eastern Europeans (we might add rock's listeners in "Third World" nations such as Brazil, Mexico, Mali, and Nigeria as well) developed a theory of the public sphere, "that would be independent of central authority." This alternative

\textsuperscript{32} Ryback, 111-113.

domain to state power, which rock music played a crucial role in sustaining, became a site in which participants could investigate issues of freedom, possibilities for individual identity, arrangements of collectivity, and dilemmas of democratic justice. But, Ehrenberg counters that because entities such as rock music circulated through commodity capitalism, they left former socialist and underdeveloped nations vulnerable to colonization by market relations. They could not fend off the "danger that unrestrained market relations pose to intermediate formations."\textsuperscript{34} The civics of rock, following Ehrenberg, might have been able to oppose state power, but the music lacked effective means to resist capitalism.

The "corporatization" of rock in the 1970s certainly suggests that this is the case.\textsuperscript{35} However, we should not forget that participants in the transformed public sphere of the counterculture were already keenly aware of precisely the conundrum that Ehrenberg described. They realized that they were embedded within market forces. However, responses to rock suggest that even within highly developed modes of commodity capitalism and mass culture, aesthetic experiences possess the capacity for engendering the civil sphere. Responses to rock kept alive a civics that did not disappear because of the character of the commodity, indicating that popular music need not only serve as a decoy for capitalist expansion. The space in which a non-coercive freedom might somehow be realized through the processes of individual and collective inquiry survived. The associational spirit of civics continued to resonate in a transformed public sphere.


Flowing around the world, moving within unpredictable channels, rock circulated an ethos of immanent critique and inquiry. Though manipulated and bullied by state power, eroded by capitalist incursions, and undermined by authoritarian family relations, the civics of rock still whispered in the music's roar. Rock intimated that self and collective liberation could emerge through the critical engagement of aesthetic experience. Through rock music and its atmosphere of responses, listeners were able to examine underlying assumptions and logics. The music allowed them to investigate what Habermas calls the "questions concerning the grammar of forms of life." Listeners sought to distinguish the good from the bad, the possible from the impossible, the meaningful from the nonsensical, the pleasurable from the deadly. Asking questions, trying to speak new languages of living, seeking to develop new codes for individual and collective existence, participants in rock music and the counterculture did not change the world, but they did leave the imprint of their question marks for others to notice and follow.

Today, even as "Woodstock Nation" fades from memory into history, we remain static in the currents of a hegemonic American mass culture. But, we should not forget that, under certain conditions, static interferes with the signals. Like Caetano Veloso in his 1968 performance, plastic uniforms now cover our bodies more than ever. Electrical cords and thick chains dangle around our necks. Yet, like Veloso, we still have our animal teeth. The possibility of a democratic, humanistic, and just civic order remains. And aesthetic experience can still help illuminate its pathways, entrances, blockages, and pitfalls. Rockers of the world, freedom beckons -- you have nothing left to lose.

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