This bulletin is set in a small town in upstate New York, the name of which was given to a music festival and cultural pivot-point intended to occur there, but which was offset to a farm 42 miles outside of town instead.

Cover image: Mark Leckey's "dead hippy" from the series *Dead Ted, Dead Skin, Dead Hippy, Dead Rocker*, that accompanied Jack Too Jack's single "You Were Young Once," 2006

PEOPLE TOGETHER IN A FIELD

Woodstock hit middle age a couple of years back. A high psychedelic tide-mark of the 1960s pop-o-cultural revolution, it was the festival of festivals, attracting half a million freaks who, when forced to park in a ditch a few miles away, happily walked the remaining miles. But what happened that summer didn't just stay on Max Yasgur's farm where the "three days of peace and music" were staged. It percolated as fact, as myth, as film, and in 1984, as a VHS tape passed around by kids at a British high school in the post-industrial Black Country in the British Midlands (that's north-west of Birmingham and southeast of Wolverhampton).

The key sounds and images: Pete Townsend's opening chords to "My Generation;" the curious sing-a-long bouncing ball that accompanied Country Joe and the Fish's anti-war song "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die;" Hendrix's incendiary wailing of the "Star-Spangled Banner;" (and most keenly) the endless procession of hippies, beaming with vibrant youth, invariably naked, sliding down muddied banks, romping in their newfound liberation. If the soundtrack was out of phase with the music of our time—in 1984, British music for teens ranged from the outré pop of Frankie's "Relax," through the smooth smooch of Lionel's "Hello," to the elegant gloom of The Smiths—the spectacle still caught our attention. A sea of denim-clad acid-raddled revelers, 500,000 people together in a field, a pastoral myth from another time and place that

somehow fit seamlessly with the urban and suburban folklore of low-rent Midlands psychedelia 25 years on.

We came of age with post-punk, our musical world a grab-bag of overlapping realities. In Stourbridge town, even, our local heroes Pop Will Eat Itself toured with Public Enemy and appeared on the BBC's *Top of the Pops*, Grindcore and Crust-punk were fermenting a short bus-ride away, Black Sabbath was in the blood, and elder statesman Robert Plant drank at our pub. Meanwhile Duran Duran, Dexy's Midnight Runners and The Specials topped the charts of Thatcher's England. We were both party to and within reach of our musical times, and in this sense the kids at Woodstock seemed just like us, only somewhere else, under blue skies and with better skin—a decidedly earthy and handcrafted spectacle in relief to the faux power-dressing and New Romantic squall we knew first-hand.

In every British city and town there exists at least one bead-curtained doorway to the subcultural past, a low-lit room whose contents from records to joss-sticks span the psych years from Woodstock and Sergeant Pepper, through Hawkwind and the Stonehenge Free Festivals, to Nirvana and grunge. This is your local Head Shop, and as well as the drug paraphenalia, it also carries subcultural messages from the past hidden in the pattern of a t-shirt, the placement of a zipper, the margin notes of a beat-up paperback, the message inscribed in the run-out groove of a piece of vinyl, and the vivid freezeframes from a videotaped festival.

For many, Woodstock is the absolute zero of hippie ventures. By 1967, San Francisco's Haight Street brigade had all but shipped out for the country and Humboldt County, and the movement's formative DNA disbanded. Yet, the fallout synthesis of all that peace and love hit its peak on the farm two years later, a stutter in the cultural time-line mirrored in Punk Rock and Acid House. All of these came of age in the public imagination just as the devout moved on, and that Woodstock figures at all is largely due to the enduring appeal of the movie. Word of mouth alone reaches only so far; a body is preferable, and even a corpse will do.

Director Michael Wadleigh managed to record not only what happened on stage, but also the thousands who danced, staggered and sat before it. Martin Scorsese, one of the editors, attests that

without the film, the concert would not be more than a footnote to the social and cultural history of the 1960s—represented by a still photo in a picture book, a line or two in the history books. What the movie did, and continues to do, is distill the Woodstock experience, and, more important, keep it vibrant and alive.

More pertinent perhaps are the words of arch-druid and hippie chief Jerry Garcia: "Woodstock … it's a Biblical epical unbelievable kind of thing!"

The quasi-celebrity status of Woodstock—the town, not the event—rests on the compelling myth of sacred ground which ignores the inconvenient truth that the festival actually happened elsewhere. Since moving to New York City in 2006, I have become a frequent visitor to Woodstock. Something draws me there. It is simultaneously compelling and repellent; in a word, *uncanny,* as the relations between "self" and "it" become charged. Or, as the late artist, writer and musician Mike Kelley noted back in 1993, "something happens to us in the 'real' world that seems to support our old, discarded psychic world." An example: recall the first time you experienced the Manhattan skyline in the back of a cab bouncing along the expressway from JFK. It felt, as Freud would have the uncanny, "familiar yet foreign," an unsettling vibration between self and place, the psychic space of a city previously experienced through film and television; a half-remembrance. To be in Woodstock is to experience a form of the uncanny, or faux *déjà-vu* (an oxymoron?) first through the film, then through its geography. Another example: when you met that celebrity, someone who first arrived in your consciousness via the screen, live and in the "familiar yet foreign" flesh. Woodstock: that uncanny, celebrity town with its living dead hippie in tie-dye rags. With glazed eyes and muddied fingernails he reminds us what might have been. "Come back … rethink … be here NOW …"

THE TOWN THAT LENT ITS NAME

During the late 1800s, Woodstock was home to many of the Hudson River School painters; the Arts and Crafts movement followed in 1902; the Woodstock Guild for Artists in 1939; and 30 years later, the Woodstock Music Festival. Originally slated to happen in the town itself, excessive

demand bumped the festival 42 miles down the road to Max Yasgur's dairy farm in the Sullivan County town of Bethel. Yasgur's decision to stage the festival on his farm led to local protest and a public poster campaign that read STOP MAX'S HIPPIE MUSIC FESTIVAL. NO 150,000 HIPPIES HERE. BUY NO MILK! (Incidentally, glass milk bottles from the time and period of the festival now fetch hundreds of dollars.) The popular version of the story has it that festival organizers Michael Lang, Artie Kornfeld, John Roberts, and Joel Rosenman had settled upon the original site because Woodstock was the home of Bob Dylan, therefore surely he'd consent to play. Dylan, however, had other ideas: by this time wary of the messianic stature he'd attained—a bunch of hippies had already tunneled through his thatched roof to drop Lazarus-like onto his bed—he booked a flight out of the U.S. to avoid the festival altogether. But what Dylan wouldn't do, many others did. The concert hosted one of the greatest musical line-ups of its time and documented the tail end of an American youth movement grappling simultaneously with peace, love, each other, Vietnam, the draft, and the violence at the Democratic National Convention one year before.

As flower-power withered, its roots sunk deep, curling through the town and its inhabitants. The Woodstock of today thrives on association, its shared name, and the tourist dollar. To some degree, this is authentic to the original aims of the festival: above all, the festival was conceived as a moneymaking venture. Lang and Kornfeld responded to Roberts and Rosenman's advert placed in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* that read: "Young men with unlimited capital looking for interesting, legitimate investment opportunities and business propositions." The many gift-cum-head-shops that line Woodstock's main street are exegetic shrines, museums to the spirit of a festival that took place elsewhere. At one such store called Legends ("helping bring Woodstock back to Woodstock"), customers are greeted by cardboard cut-outs of Hendrix and Dylan. To their right, a bright red London telephone box is watched over by the fiberglass figures of the retrofitted Blues Brothers, a late Seventies blues and soul revivalist band born on *Saturday Night Live* that aped the sounds of the Fifties and Sixties.

Photography in the shop is expressly forbidden. No freebie sentiment here—this museum of the near past is strictly cash-and-carry.

A bookshelf of vivid and colorful spines is obscurely classified "Anti-this establishment," but the establishment most clearly in question is The Here and Now. The entire stock of Legends could be labeled "yesteryear"—the present is strictly not to be trusted. Whether devout Head or browsing tourist, there are many choice artifacts here: Woodstock festival tie-dye hoodies, Bob Marley micro-fleece blankets, a stash-safe designed to look like a plug socket, a Sgt. Pepper's lunch box. The combination in a glass-fronted cabinet of a six-foot lung-gasping bong and a 3,000-piece jigsaw of Woodstock's main stage suggests the shopkeeper retains a sense of humor. Diverse musical icons are forced into close contact as band t-shirts are stacked, hung and pinned like banners throughout. T-shirts are the DNA of the festival groupie, and anyone with some degree of rock'n'roll chutzpah and iconic valance makes it onto a shirt and into the Woodstock extended family, from Roy Orbison and Little Richard to The Clash and Nirvana.

Municipal street architecture in Woodstock mixes the hippies' back-to-nature stance with the William Morris-inspired ambitions of the original arts colony. Low rails mimic the petal curves of the plants they protect. Those puzzling fiberglass cows painted by local artists that first showed up on the streets of Zurich in 1998 have been supplanted by painted guitars that, like figures in ascension, float at waist height around the town. The ruling motif is a white dove lifting skyward with an olive branch in its beak and a peace symbol in its talons. There are also shifts in mineral values: the same bottle of wine I buy at my local store in Brooklyn is captioned in Woodstock as "cosmic," "deep," and "memory-drenched." Storefronts and doors are plastered with hippie posters and verbiage, their owners continue to speak the histrionic vernacular of the psychedelic movement, and kids and adults alike sit out front, acoustic guitars on their tie-dyed laps.

But wait. Hold on. It's too easy to make fun of such a place, to apply mordant clichés about the age-old demise of the hippie generation. For any subcultural tripper who ingested Tom Wolfe's acid portrait of Ken Kesey's Pranksters, saw Haight Street through Joan Didion's critical glare, or read any of the other myriad texts on the death of the Sixties, the ideology was fully deconstructed many moons ago. And yet Woodstock continues to thrive. Why? As branding goes, peace and love is an easier sell than the

apparent nihilism of other youth movements. Is it simply the call of a celebrity town, that to be in Woodstock is to be in the company of history? Or is it that to feel truly alive one has to be in the presence of the dead?

THE LIVING MUSEUM

... there's something that happens over the period of time when someone dies, the fats in the body liquify, they are so powerful that they can permeate the subflooring and the joists beneath, Richard had done that, so when they took him away he'd left the shadow of himself on the floor of his house, he'd etched himself into the wood and in the end they had to rent a belt sander and sand away his deathshadow.

So recounts William Yorksberg in his biography of writer Richard Brautigan, *Jubilee Hitchhiker*. Brautigan had arranged his suicide so that he wouldn't be found for many weeks. During this time his body became infested with thousands of larvae and flies that ate away his stomach and intestines. His suicide note supposedly read: "Messy, isn't it?"

Ken Kesey once proclaimed that "when the rest of us are gone, they'll still be reading Brautigan." This prophecy seems true enough today, considering such as film-maker Adam Curtis's far-reaching BBC documentary series *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, which was titled in both homage and response to a 1967 collection of Brautigan's poetry; or unlikely Lancaster punk band The Lovely Eggs, who recently based an entire album on his writings.

It took a while, though. With his floppy brimmed hat, wild hair and droopy mustache, Brautigan was crown prince of the hippies in the late 1960s, but as times changed he was beached on the shores of passing trend, subjected to an unfavorable diagnosis of "the hippie condition"—a fact that, according to Yorksberg, almost certainly contributed to his passing.

The story brings to mind another image of a decomposing relic.

Thek Working on The Tomb Figure, 1967, Peter Hujar © 1987 The Peter Hujar Archive LLC
Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, NY, and Fraenkel Gallery, CA

My first introduction to Paul Thek's *The Tomb—Death of a Hippie* was via Mike Kelley's 1992 essay on "Death and Transfiguration," in which he writes that Thek's *Tomb* consists of "a wax effigy of himself: a stinking hippie in permanent fixed decay—a pink raspberry shitsicle in answer to Walt's [Disney] porcelain-white vanilla bar." If the Warholification of the Sixties, all clean lines and graphic surface, is the straight story, Thek's effigy is a reminder of the dark, unresolved and curious matter of the psychedelic mission. It carries the germ of decay, and like Brautigan's leaking body, it seeps into our minds still. For Kelley, the psych-aesthetic was uncouth and uncontainable—both very useful properties. Patterns, shapes, swirls, and colors are difficult to control; they don't fit the essentialist mode. In another essay, "Foul Perfection," Kelley goes up against a controlling decoro-phobic culture that seeks to minimize ornamentation, citing Alfred Loos's seminal 1913 essay "Ornament and Crime" as a starting point. Loos's high-modernist diatribe pronounces decoration "primitive," using the intense tattoos of the Papuan people as (dubious) support for his claim. The hippies saw things otherwise: for them, surface decoration in the form of tie-dye was the new skin.

For a brief time in the mid-1990s, with neither job nor money, I lived in a friend's apartment in a tower block in Handsworth, Birmingham. The residents had some complicated (i.e., strictly off-the record) deal with the local housing council as to who lived there. On the fifth floor there were first-wave British Skinheads, the grown-up and now middle-aged younger sisters and brothers of Mods and Rude Boys. First-wave skins were into Jamaican ska and reggae and, unlike the later "Oi!" generation, were actually the first of the working class tribes to integrate black and white music and culture. On the third floor were the Creepers, the rockabilly Cramps lot, named after their footwear—black or leopard-print brothel-creepers. Their idea of interior décor involved red wipe-down vinyl settees, black-painted walls, green lampshades and more leopard-print on scattered cushions. On the lower floor, Philthy Phil the hippie lived next to the launderette. For five quid he'd do your washing, which he supplemented by writing readers' letters for gentlemen's magazines. Philthy's mother, Patti Bell, was a local celebrity who in the late 1970s and early 1980s ran a fashion label and clothes store that was credited with spearheading the New Romantic look, outfitting Duran Duran and the like. Finally, our floor housed the refugees of all styles, both past and present, from dreadlocked Crust-punks to flourescent Techno kids. Like all the other artifacts in this Living Museum, though, their bottom line was always strict adherence to the code of whichever tribe they'd attached themselves to.

At the time I rejected it, as lively as it was, because it also felt somehow stuck. Over time in my mind, though, that 12-story coral reef of British subcultures has only grown in stature, helping me appreciate and understand the subtleties of pop-cultural history, and I now realize it served its purpose as a route map for those tribes to come. Their righteous adherence to the code, their holding the line, their faithful restaging of some other time and place … The Living Museum, tribe stacked upon tribe, dwelling together in parallel.

In late Eighties' Britain, alongside the "football casuals" garbed in their luxury knitwear, another more virulent and politicized subculture emerged: the "Crustie," perhaps Britain's final secret underground. A stinking wandervogel, part "brew crew" (council estate) part "haute hippie" (landed gentry), their dress code consisted of a mash up thrift-store boots,

re-stitched Crust-punk black jeans, dreadlocks, muddied fingers and pinched roll-ups. They were the time-displaced legacy of Woodstock, the dark mirror: Thek's shitsicle, his mannequin corpse reborn.

Shifting to the present, it seems to me that the recent Occupy movement at Zuccotti Park was marked by an uncannily consistent aesthetics of Western counterculture that recycled all the above: dirty tarps, tie-dye, the drum circle, kids selling roll-ups for a buck, and Bob Marley on repeat. To the extent that this is (was?) a protest born of the digital revolution, on the ground it remained the same as before: dirty bodies dressed in rainbows clamoring to be heard. Could the movement's failure to rethink its look, its art, its music—its tribal form—be a contributing factor to its (apparent) demise? Make no mistake, the hippies understood the power of *renegotiated form,* and in a way their dress codes were as concrete and contrived as punk's. Framed by Malcolm McLaren, dressed by Vivienne Westwood, and modeled by John Lydon, punk's delinquent silhouette contributed to the legitimacy of its stance. Then, roughly a decade-and-a-half later, Acid House took the "light, sound and pharmacy" of the hippies and twisted it just enough to contrive a new sound, look, and attitude. If it doesn't have a cohesive and disruptive aesthetic, then it isn't a movement.

And what of Woodstock town? Its inhabitants, its meandering hippies, like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, are in thrall to the past. Don Quixote: the earnest nobleman who devours the romance of earlier novels and, finding his own life lacking, sets out with donkey and lance to rekindle the chivalric feats of Knights of old. He seeks authenticity through the pursuit of an earlier, more chivalrous time, while the hippie who wanders Woodstock's main street is in search of a life lived psychedelically, Mission Control 1969. Both deal with deception. *Don Quixote* was the first of the modern novels that captured a life lived as affirmative artifice, and it is precisely the same artifice of Woodstock town that so beguiles. Its uncanny quality is experienced as a physical and psychological sensation, one inherently hard to define, not unlike the feeling we associate with an "art" experience: a culmination of known yet curiously reshuffled matter, reorganized in the mind and body through the act of remembrance via an absolute commitment to form.

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