

Review

Whiteley, S., and M. J. Sklower, eds. 2014. *Countercultures and Popular Music*. Abingdon: Ashgate. ISBN 978-1-47242-1-067 (hbk). 316 pp.

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The 1960s counterculture represents an outstanding period of authentic democratic creativity—its music being one of its more fruitful legacies (p. xix).

Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower's *Countercultures and Popular Music* brings together a collection of fourteen essays from scholars working across the fields of popular culture, film studies, music studies, critical theory, philosophy and sociology. The collection, which emerged from a special edition of *Volume!*, presents a wide-ranging exploration of countercultural movements and how they relate to music practice since the late 1960s. Broadly, these essays examine a combination of the artistic practices and political goals of a range of musicians, artists and genre-specific musical movements. Cutting across all essays are the ways in which the countering of culture has been achieved and the ways in which it continues to permeate cultural activities and outputs today.

Andy Bennett's introductory essay examines the foundations of counterculture, and provides an anchor for the book's subsequent content. The collection then presents the remaining essays grouped within four themes: theorizing countercultures; utopias, dystopias and the apocalyptic; sonic anarchy and freaks; and countercultural scenes—music and place. In this way, the collection provides us with a strong, multi-faceted way of understanding how culture has been, and is, countered, as well as approaches to analysing such movements. The structure and flow of the overall collection also aid with its ease of engagement. The collection tackles counterculture in relation to the ways in which it acts as:

- 1) aesthetic vanguardism as an individual attack on formal tradition; 2) the belief in the capacity of art to change society and individual consciousness; 3) a specific relationship to modern life, whereby art either 1) flees from modern life to find aesthetic absolute in the absurd, madness, the unconscious, abstraction, other civilisations, or 2) on the contrary, in the postmodern phase beginning in the 1950s (p. xvi).

Ultimately this collection demonstrates the ways in which culture can be reimagined, reinterpreted, experimented and explored. It achieves this, by not only including a range of scholars working across a range of fields and varying geographical locations, but by presenting case study-based analyses of particularly critical social and political movements and through examining broader influences on countercultural activity (such as psychedelic drugs, cultural and political revolutions, religion and technological advancements).

While rock music is the prominent genre of music examined here (having been such a strong catalyst for political reactions and sound movements), a wide range of artists—both music and visual arts—are examined. These include: Andy Warhol (Simon Warner), Frank Zappa (Benjamin Halligan), the Beatles (Gerald Carlin and Mark Jones), the Grateful Dead (Stanley J. Spector), and Yoko Ono (Shelina Brown). The works also address, albeit at times briefly, the impact of artists as broad as Bob Dylan, Marilyn Manson, and John Lennon's solo work. Key countercultural movements examined include Andy Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, the emergence of fluxus, Jesus Freaks (Shawn David Young), Woodstock (Gina Arnold), and drug culture (various). Place-specific activity is analysed in relation to diverse locations including Denmark (Thorbjorg Daphne Hall), England (Chris Mueller), Germany (Heiner Stahl), Italy (Giovanni Vacca), the US (various), and the imagined spaces created in regard to genre-specific activity and subcultural movements (Christophe Den Tandt).

To this end, this collection makes a strong, wide-reaching and significant contribution to the field of subcultural studies, and would be of use and interest to scholars working within and beyond contemporary music studies. Another strength of the collection is that it takes the notion of countering culture one step further by examining alternate readings of countercultural moments (such as Gina Arnold's chapter on Woodstock and *Gimme Shelter*, and Gerald Carlin and Mark Jones's contribution examining the Beatles, 'Helter Skelter'). As a result, we are shown that all culture is in a constant state of flux, and that it is important for us to continue to question the mainstream and what is considered to be 'normal'.

While this breadth/depth is its key strength, it does feel as though the book is perhaps too wide reaching. This is further reinforced by the somewhat uniform structure and tone to the work, which makes those pieces which deviate in style and structure somewhat jarring to read—even as this may be a way of demonstrating the varying ways in which we can understand counterculture and its impact on society. Importantly, however, this is only a minor concern in what is a brilliant, and highly accessible, collection of essays.