



**Timothy Hodgdon.** *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. e-book. ISBN 978-0-231-50952-7.

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## How To Be A Manly Longhair

In *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, Timothy Hodgdon aims to explode popular images of the counterculture, especially those entwined with masculinity. Though the title itself evokes the very images Hodgdon problematizes, the Flower Child, Drug Fiend, and Longhair lose much of their media-manufactured luster in his hands. Focusing the study on the activities of two radical counterculture groups over the course of more than one decade, the anarchist Diggers and mystically inclined Farmies, the author examines the political, social, and cultural philosophies that guided these men in their individual manhood and life practices. Firm in his conclusion that one generalized “hippie manhood” does a disservice to those who lived the radical “life,” Hodgdon works to deconstruct preconceived notions of a homogeneous counterculture and, as such, presents a fairly nuanced narrative about cultural radicalism in the sixties and late twentieth-century American manhood.

Applying an admittedly narrow definition of the counterculture to only those Euro-American youth radicals who rejected the New Left’s instrumentalism, Hodgdon’s “hippies” were attuned completely to what they called “liberation,” and were forces for what he describes as “derepression” (pp. 5-6). With nods to Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault, derepression denotes the counterculturalist push to overturn the sublimation of nature to culture in order to reverse society’s decline. The term also alludes to the influence Freudianism had

on American bohemians, as seen in the privileging of altering individual consciousness over the New Left’s mass protests. Having articulated these qualifiers, it makes sense that Hodgdon would choose the Diggers and Farmies as subjects of his case study. Clearly occupying opposite ends of the countercultural spectrum, these groups represented extremes of radical life. While the decision partly rests with the wealth of documents left in their wake, these radicals have countercultural credibility. Deemed “exemplars of commitment” by other countercultural associations, the Diggers and Farmies generated much criticism and controversy within the movement (p. 15).

Emerging from San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury District in the mid-sixties, the Diggers and Farmies represented vastly different approaches to achieving their mutual goals of transforming American consciousness, and in their conceptions of manliness. As anarchists, the Diggers cast off all hierarchical institutions grounded in the ownership of private property, demanding unfettered freedom. As vociferous critics of the New Left, the Diggers, under the leadership of Peter Berg, perfected the art of guerilla theater as a vehicle for political subversion and actively worked to denounce the “sell-out” activities of fellow hippies. Placing themselves at the top of the countercultural hierarchy, the Diggers, in Hodgdon’s view, ascribed to themselves an “outlaw virility” that effectively feminized those hippie men who preached non-

violence (p. 69). For Berg and his brethren, only those men willing to physically fight for freedom were worthy to lead the revolution. Hodgdon underscores this openness to violence in his discussion of the Diggers' alliances with the Black Panthers and Hell's Angels, and in the group's highly romanticized belief (shared by the pacifist Farmies) that Native American men possessed the most authentic masculinity because of their closer relationship to nature.

Stephen Gaskin, spiritual leader of the Farm (named for their commune in Tennessee), epitomized what the Diggers saw as the effeminate hippie male steeped in flower power. Social problems, for the Farmies, were not based in materialism, but in faltering human consciousness. Espousing the Buddhist "third way" of nonconfrontation and nature as the ultimate provider, Gaskin believed that nonviolence was neither weak nor effeminate, but that pacifism was the highest plane of manliness. Achieving this chivalrous manhood meant refusing to accept redemptive violence as a man's birthright. Separating Gaskin from ascetic mystics by highlighting his thoughts on sex and drugs as portals to liberation, Hodgdon highlights the importance of LSD trips in the leader's articulation of his "tantric" manhood ideal, reached through the disciplined manipulation of psychic energy for magical ends (p. 139). Once able to access his metaphysical self via Gaskin's tutelage, a Farmie could unleash his capacity for unconditional love, compassion, and devotion for the good of all people, and do spiritual combat with what former marine Gaskin labeled "hyper-John Wayne" masculinity (p. 124).

The core of Hodgdon's inquiry engages the question of how countercultural men from heterogeneous groups deciphered manhood and defined themselves in opposition to each other and men in the mainstream. This avenue of discussion invariably calls forth interactions with women, the women's liberation movement, and the post-war "crisis" of masculinity. One of Hodgdon's few missteps, and this one is very slight, is the lack of space allocated to his interpretation of the breakdown of the "New Deal order" and the crisis of masculinity (p. 23). A more detailed examination of these phenomena, which had an impact on fathers, sons, and their relationships with each other and the women in their lives, would have produced a more rounded portrait of "hip" masculinity.

The author's background in feminist theory and women's history serves him well in his navigation of the battle of the sexes, which played out on the Diggers' "farm" and the Farm, both communes. Hodgdon

argues that the visions of manhood that emerged from the Diggers and Farmies reflected their deeply held commitments to anarchism and mysticism, respectively. Far from gender radicals, both groups assumed that equality between the sexes would naturally flow from a resumption of the sex roles prescribed by nature, meaning neither devoted much of their philosophizing to gender relations. For the "Earth mother" ensconced in the Digger way of life, free sex equaled open relationships as marriage was considered tantamount to bondage; and for women on the Farm (revered as nurturers), Gaskin's pronatalism proclaimed childbirth a woman's ultimate fulfillment. Maintaining what can now be deemed clearly sexist mindsets, the Diggers and Farmies reproduced mainstream society's deeply ingrained gender assumptions even as they pushed to erase the boundaries of "straight" society's hegemonic ideals of decency and morality. Pulling back from offering an apologia on behalf of his subjects, Hodgdon, perhaps risking rebuke, offers the inability of the Diggers and Farmies to get "beyond" the mainstream in this case, as an opportunity for scholars to study the expression of gender conceptions unencumbered by the caution now encouraged by radical feminists. Indeed, Hodgdon points out that the hippie men's celebration of their supposedly repressed "natural" manhood troubled countercultural women to such an extent that it provided a vehicle for the late sixties radical feminist critique of masculinity as a political construct.

From the start, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius* aims to portray its subjects as flesh-and-blood, thinking, feeling men who radicalized the counterculture. To do this successfully, Hodgdon acknowledges that he must present the Diggers and Farmies accurately, and thus, their sexism, homophobia, and racism (often implicit in romanticized notions of people of color and couched in antiracist terms) must be included. Hodgdon makes great use of abundant primary documents that give voice to the Diggers and Farmies. He freely points out contradictions in these works, and openly admits that some of his conclusions are generalized because the sources are incomplete. Hodgdon's commentary is never intrusive and is welcome, as when he guides readers through Gaskin's musings on mysticism and magic. However, to someone who resides wholly on the earthly plane, Gaskin's position on the Farm strays close to that of cult leader. Hodgdon manages to pull Gaskin back from the brink in his analysis of the guru's beliefs, but questions of motivation linger.

Configured for electronic consumption, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius* presents readers with access to

the multimedia documents Hodgdon utilizes in his case study, the Web site created by Stephen Gaskin and the Diggers' online archive. Innovative as e-books may be, a real concern is that this absorbing study will not reach the audience it so richly deserves. Highly detailed and packed with primary research, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius* is not for those unacquainted with the counterculture and its inhabitants; however, these qualities make the book a must for scholars looking to get beyond superficial stereotypes. While Hodgdon acknowledges that his conclusions cannot be extended to include the countercultural groups occupying the space on the spectrum between the Diggers and the Farmies, a more extensive summation of his findings would confirm his subjects' legacy as cultural radicals and cement the groundwork he has laid for the continued probing of hip masculinity as an integral facet in late twentieth-century American manhood.

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