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For Judith G. Hibbard,
who got me through it,
and Tony Ward,
who helped me remember.

Series Editor's Introduction

The vivid, subjective vignettes of the counterculture collected here have for me a greater force than any official history. Part anthropological artifact and part spiritual autobiography, these pieces—culled mostly from Goldstein's articles and columns in *The Village Voice*—trace a passage from hopeful expectation to disillusionment that some will read as a reluctant and overdue maturing and others as a tragic or at least melancholy adjustment to historical reality.

The young author of these pieces has a keen sense of the absurd, and he understands the corrupt, extensive power exerted by those he calls (in a fine phrase from his witty essay on Antoine, the ersatz French Bob Dylan) the "merchants of novelty." He is armed not with a fully developed politics but with an aesthetic of defiance and nonconformity grounded in the culture of rock music. The limits (though also the attractions) of such an aestheticized politics are a recurring subtext or lesson in these accounts of musicians, promoters, hippies, and political protestors. Implicit in nearly every essay, this theme emerges explicitly in the final sections of Part II and in the more overtly political chapters of Part III.

"There isn't going to be any revolution," Country Joe MacDonald tells a shocked Goldstein in the troubled fall of 1968. Goldstein has come "to rap about the revolution" with the rock group that represents for him the essence of political commitment. Instead he encounters a powerful cynicism and candor. I don't know any authentic guerrillas, Country Joe remarks wearily, only "a lot of people wearing Che Guevara tee shirts . . . what a bunch of tripped-out freaks." Later in the same interview Country Joe strikes at the heart of our narrator's already vulnerable politics: "Music's nothing to believe in. I mean . . . it's just sound."

Goldstein's writing during the 1960s both reported on and participated in the distinctive forms of aesthetic experimen-

tation that helped to define that volatile period. His book will have a double interest: as an account—an engaged, attentive portrait—of some of the characteristic figures and events of the 1960s; *and* as an artifact itself, a significant instance of the "New Journalism" to which he refers in his introduction. The more violently subjective and "fictionizing" strains of this movement—such as the work of Tom Wolfe or Hunter Thompson—are no doubt better known, but I believe Goldstein's more restrained (and less self-regarding) work has equal interest for us now. Fragmentary and intuitive, the pieces gathered here offer not a systematic but a richly evocative chronicle of a crucial moment in our recent past. They speak to us simultaneously as a commentary on that time and as an expression of it.

—David Thorburn

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Among the many editors who made these pieces possible, I am especially grateful to Dan Wolfe, cofounder of the *Village Voice*. He gave me my first job in journalism, and encouraged my growth without directing it. Clay Felker was an unwavering supporter, first as the editor of *New York Magazine*, and later, when he purchased the *Voice*. Sy Peck nurtured my criticism in the *New York Times*, and Mary Cantwell was a generous friend at Conde Nast.

In addition, I want to thank David Thorburn for his exacting editing of the introductory essay, and Lisa Freeman for her faith in this unusual project. David Marc and Daniel Czitrom helped me to realize that my early work could have a life beyond its origins. My parents, Jack and Mollye Goldstein, held their breath until the sixties ended: perhaps this book will convince them that risk can sometimes bring reward.

"The Lizard King" is reprinted from *New York*, where it appeared as "The Shaman as Superstar." (Copyright © 1989 by the *New York* Magazine company. All rights reserved.) "The Head Freak Awaits a New Son" and "A Quiet Evening at the Balloon Farm" first appeared in the *New York World Journal Tribune*. "Harlequin in Neon" first appeared in *Eye*. The remaining pieces are reprinted by permission of the author and courtesy of the *Village Voice*.

Introduction: First Person, Past Tense

I had a lesson in the afterlife of artifacts recently, when I came across a torn and long neglected tie-dye. It triggered tangled memories of the sixties, when I had worn this very shirt to some auspicious interviews, dropped acid in it, went to demos, and even had sex in it. Now I wondered what to do with this sanctified shmata, much too tatty to be worn but impossible to throw away. I thought about turning it into a wall hanging, but decided instead to dispose of it the way one might part with a childhood teddy bear, by stuffing it into the recesses of a bureau drawer. But later that night, watching *Married . . . with Children*—which is to sitcoms what *Pink Flamingos* is to cinéma vérité—I noticed that Al Bundy's teenage daughter was wearing a similar tie-dye. Hers was bolder and more lurid, a slam-dancing swirl across her bosom. Whatever tie-dyes once meant to me, they'd come to signify something much more ambiguous to the producers of this kinky sitcom. I'm too tied to the original to guess what it might mean today, except to observe that, in this culture of endless recuperation, those who do not understand history are forced to wear it.

And so we see the return of the peace sign as an emblem of the embattled liberal arts major, and the paisley vest worn under a business suit to suggest that even yuppies can harbor an expressive interior. This couture is part of what is known, in the lexicon of tabloid and tube, as the sixties revival. The phrase does not refer to renewal or restoration, but to a recycling of the recent past as raw material for a brand new mythology. In this remake, the sixties are imagined as an arcadian interlude between rigidity and chaos—what the poet Geoffrey O'Brien calls "dream time." To revisit this Magic Kingdom we need only wish upon an artifact, and there is much to choose from:

the Smothers Brothers are back; the Monkees are back; there's even a new psychedelic drug, Ecstasy, to be dropped while dancing to the crypto-disco known as Acid House. Meanwhile, in the cineplex, JFK has become the patron saint of romantic comedies and earnest dramas set in that "one brief shining moment" when it was possible to conflate sex, struggle, and stereo. Of course, this image of the dream time is aimed at middle-class white Americans; for blacks, the sixties is presented as an era of purposeful solidarity, and for blue-collar whites, it is summoned up as a cautionary tale of social chaos, in which the only heroes are tormented soldiers, rogue cops, and reverent astronauts.

This is the central contradiction of the sixties revival: it is happening within a political culture overtly hostile to the sixties. Our politics are antithetical to its agenda; our response to sex and drugs (if not rock 'n' roll) is as punitive as the sixties was permissive; our dissent is as defensive as the sixties was expansive. We are, in every sense, a culture drawing in the wagons on itself—and somewhere out there, we're told, lies the very chaos engendered by the dream time, threatening to overwhelm our fragile enterprise. Yet the artifacts of that forbidden era continue to resonate with a mysterious energy: naive, yet daring; primitive, yet futuristic; exotic, yet achingly familiar. Sixties style has a tantalizing expressiveness next to the depersonalized contours of mass culture now. But what we notice most is its cogency. Within the sanctioned parameters of sensibility, the most radical aspirations achieved a form and function they were denied in politics. In art and style, the sixties worked. The remarkable consistency that runs through sixties culture contradicts our image of that decade. How could such a chaotic time have produced such coherent art? One possibility is that, though the chaos was real (and eventually overwhelming), the culture harbored a hidden logic—to use a sixties word, a vision.

Given the menace and allure the sixties still hold for us, it is no wonder the sixties revival is being staged like the masque in *Marat/Sade*. In that formative piece of sixties theater, the inmates of an asylum are trotted out before an audience of newly resurgent aristocrats to act out the excesses of the recent revolutionary past. The audience is horrified but riven by the