

Groovin'

Hank Malone

I.

“Grooving,” which we’ve been doing since birth, has recently taken on some formal definition as the Kulchur Kritiks attempt to sympathetically dig the spirit of the multimedia art forms. Grooving, they say means to yield yourself to the flow of activity around you. Grooving requires a lot of personal freedom, and a lot of self assurance. It is the opposite of uptight perception, the opposite of categorizing experience, the opposite of traditional logical “understanding”. Grooving is the ability to receive several clashing stimuli simultaneously, a form of perception dictated by the new urban environments.

It is because of “grooving” that so many older people supposedly cannot participate authentically in the recent developments of art—“grooving” is difficult for the older folks because they have become accustomed to seeing art as a sensorium of correct attitudes and pragmatic philosophy. When they are confronted with “art” which must be taken as completely self-justifying, they become nervous—they find it difficult to verbalize what the experience “meant”, and in defense, they frequently come to regard such experiences as crazy, terrifying, or boring.

This schism between ‘grooving’ and ‘finding meaning’ is at the dead-center of the recent Generation Gap, and is in my estimation mostly polemical bullshit and nonsense which will serve only to create more false issues in the minds and hearts of both young and old.

II.

Recent Culture, because of several occurrences, including a new easy access to various electronic devices, has found itself busy grafting to its traditions and ramifications of a lot of relatively new technical apparatus, including the tape recorder, the movie camera, the stroboscope, and the audio amplifier. Inevitably, as more and more people begin to explore (both technically and socially) the meaning and possibilities of such equipment, a new cultural style will have come to pass. The results of this style signal inevitable change, and even revolution, but by no means guarantee any ‘higher’ quality, or level, of human experience. It is here that the significance of the Generation Gap slips into rhetoric. There are just no guarantees in life, not even in Grooving.

III.

It is my general impression that ‘grooving’ (yielding to the flow of intra-psychic activity, etc.) has been taken over by a lot of fascist-minded Culture-freaks who have turned it into a lethal, intimidating social philosophy for putting “less advanced” members of the human race very uptight.

Two recent culture events, the recently-on-Broadway off-Broadway production of the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical “Hair,” and the new Stanley Kubrick movie, “2001-A Space Odyssey,” have brought the cultural values of

the Generation Gap into sharp focus. The reason for all the controversy about these two productions in particular emerges out of a dilemma they seem to posit-how can such New Style, Underground, "revolutionary," fantastic Groovies strike so many people as being downright boring, empty, and stupid? Surely there must be an answer.

The explanation offered is something like-the older generation doesn't understand what's going on, "not really". According to one reviewer, the old folks have been reading cook books too long, and no longer understand pure poetry. The difficulty the non-groovers have with a play like Hair or a movie like 2001 is that they fail to see them as Celebrations, as vast Celebrations of the human body and the machine, as Celebrations of feelings, and shapes in motion, etc. The mainsprings of the newest art-forms do not rely upon "telling a story" or "putting across a message". For the Groovy-Romantics, the new mixed-media Groovy Celebrations supposedly render great self-contained experiences for all those who are able to concentrate on the world in a new way so as to uncover the many "messages" inherent in Things and Feelings.

IV.

Surely there is truth here. As a Culture, we are not recently accustomed to formal cultural events that lack a fairly specific built-in meaning. But it would be totally wrong to conclude that because "Marat/Sades" or "Hair" or "2001" struck many as merely strange and tedious, that the people absolutely lacked the power of Grooving. It may well be that the typical audience for such productions doesn't know how to "groove" at these kinds of events (but might otherwise groove very well at a picnic, or while traveling) and really don't want to "groove" in that ambiguous style of Celebration suggested as a criterion for these media. (Contrary to the Groovy-Romantics who idealize kids and their "natural" ability to surrender themselves to Groovies, the kids who have been seeing "2001-A Space Odyssey," are reportedly bored out of their skulls.) Perhaps most people want, or anticipate, certain kinds of experiences at certain kinds of events. It is, in fact, probable that certain kinds of culture media must always retain elements of a "message" (popular message), simply because that is what audiences demand, and need. In other words, if Art intends, as recent trends would imply to join Life as just another part of Life's "groovy" senseless plastic ambiguity, then it seems as though other media, like science, will inherit by default, the role of making more clear and more explicit the relations of men to themselves, and to their world. Personally I would rather see this role of "suggesting meaning" served by Art, than I would see it serviced by psychology, or sociology, or dispensed in the form of Pills.

In short, you can lead a man to "groovies" but you can't make him "groove" and maybe you shouldn't ought to try, for there is some "groove" we will not eat. Remember, one man's "groove" is another man's poison, so beware the stranger whose "groovy" may drag you kicking and screaming into his Brave New World.

fifth Estate

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