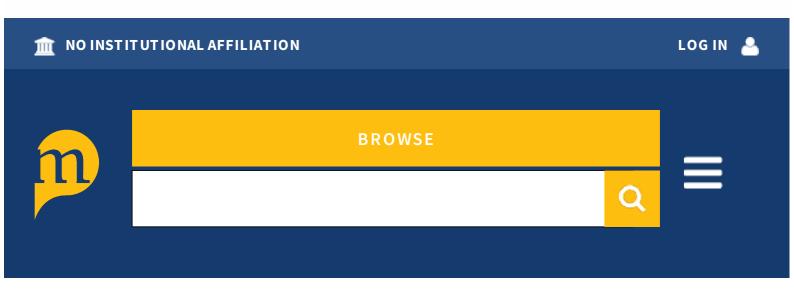
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Randall J. Stephens

Historically Speaking

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 9, Number 6, July, August 2008

pp. 38-39

10.1353/hsp.2008.0008

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

38 Historically Speaking July/August 2008 Making Sense of American Culture in the 1970s: An Interview with Thomas Hine Conducted by RandallJ. Stephens From 1973 until 1996, Thomas Hine was the architecture anddesign criticforthe Philadelphia Inquirer. His book Populuxe (Knopf, 1986) analyses America's postwarprosperity and cultural peculiarities. Hine scrutins tailfins on space-age cars, TV dinners, fads that targeted baby boomers, and the look and feel of the era. Is a ac Asimovre marked, 'No one who has lived through this decade can read this book withouts topping a hundred times to recall his own experiences." Hine turns his critical gas* on the 1970 sin the entertaining and insightful The Great Funk: Falling Apart and Coming Together (on a Shag Rug) in the Seventies (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). He

examines interior design and the trends of the age that are so memorable, and often embrarasnng, today.
Associate editorof Historically Speaking Randall Stepbens recently spoke with Hine about bis work. Randall
Stephens: Do you think of The Great Funk as a companion to Populuxe i Thomas Hine: Absolutely. Twenty
years passed between the two books. That is pardy because various people that I trust, including my literary
agent, felt that the world wasn't ready for a seventies book in 1990. The first wave of nostalgia hits about
twenty years after the fact. People become adults and get no stalgic for the clothes and pop music of their
youth. And dienthirty years after the fact people start to crave a sense of the culture as a whole. Stephens: It
seems that during die seventies there was a particular interest in history—not only fifties revivalism (Happy
Days, Grease, Sha Na Na), but also turn-of-the-century-style pizza parlors, movies like The Sting or The
Godfather, and the hooplasurrounding the Bicentennial. Hine: I agree. Even though people have never
been without nostalgia, nostalgia didn't become a powerful cultural force until the 1970s. As I detail in die
book, one of the prevailing activities was salvage: garbage picking, flea markets, the number of old styles
that got revived in die seventies ranging from Victorian to Art Deco. Stephens: You contrast the sleek
interiors of the sixties with the earth tones, layers and textures, and the wall-to-wall and wall-to-ceiling
carpeting of the seventies. What does that contrast tell us about the culture of the seventies? Hine: It was
about finding a place. The rhetoric in the decorating magazines focused on creating a retreat, a nest. It was
very personal and tactile. Your shelter was supposed to contain things that were idiosyncratic; things that
you'd found; tilings that you loved. It was about expressing yourself, but also about separating yourself from
the world and taking refuge. Mario Praz, who wrote a famous book on the history of interior decoration, said
diat diere are two ways to think about interior decoration: one is to think stylistically and the odier is simply
to weighthe materials, what he called density. Density was very in during the seventies. Album cover of the
soundtrack for Grease (1978). Stephens: Where are we now? Are we closer to minimal modernism? Hine: I
think we are beginning to nest again. Early in this decade diere was an attempt to revive the supercool
1960s look. This is still very much with us. But I think on a popular level it's being supplanted by nesting.
There is a lot more texture. We are now getting back to earth tones. In the last couple of months, two
$exhibitions \ on the \ mid-century \ period \ that \ I've \ been \ working \ on \ have \ opened. \ One \ is \ about \ post-World \ War \ II$
Florida, and die odier is a show called Birth of the Cool, which was organized by the Orange County Museum
in Newport Beach, California. I realize now that in the midst of writing die seventies book, I wrote my essay
for the Birth of the Cool exhibit. The 1960s were defined by an understated metallic look, a cool look. And
then Vietnam killed cool, just like Bush's Mission Accomplished seemed to kill die revival of cool earlier in
this decade. Stephens: Do you think that your designation for the seventies as the Great Funk effectively
$sums \ up \ the \ decade? \ Hine: Well \ that \ was \ my \ hope. Actually, I \ was \ under \ a \ certain \ amount \ of \ pressure \ from \ my$
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Suphera: Do you think that your desig-nation for the seventies as the Great Funk effectively sums up the decade?

Hine: Well that was my hope. Actually, I was under a certain amount of pressure from my publisher to come up with a word that ortold work like populate. But a wordlike that is wrong for the seventres. What was being celebrated in the fifties was aconcthing antificial and therefore the decade needs an artificial word. The seventies needs s word that evokes a wasky flea market. Hence, The Great Funk. Fin not over it will work as well, though. Pspelow was really a success from the day it was published; it flew out of the stores

Stephens: Historians like Philip Jenkins and Andress Killen have looked at the more depressing elde of the ecventies, the "decade of nightmures" and "1973; nervous breakdown." While you seknowledge that side, you also see the decade as characterized by a flourishing of individualism and resilience.

Filme: Maybe my mismiss is to try and look at both at once. But what I wanted to do was talk about the links between the two and specifically about this idea that the failure of the whole postwar mentality gave people a licerue to try all sorts of other things. Some of them were very excising.

Stophene: What were the most remarkable deagments that took place in the seventies?

Hine: I think they would full into two entegories. First, it was the first really serious era of environmonesikm. We made substantial process in creating more energy-efficient houses, curs, and so forth. Even though we make jokes today about Jimmy Curter writing his cardigan sweater, people worked very hard to conserve energy and use it more effi-





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