



BROWSE



Making Sense of American Culture in the 1970s: An Interview with Thomas Hine

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

[View Citation](#)

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 Randall J. Stephens From 1973 until 1996, Thomas Hine was the architecture and design critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer. His book *Populuxe* (Knopf, 1986) analyses America's postwar prosperity and cultural peculiarities. Hine scrutinizes tailfins on space-age cars, TV dinners, fads that targeted baby boomers, and the look and feel of the era. Isaac Asimov remarked, "No one who has lived through this decade can read this book without stopping a hundred times to recall his own experiences." Hine turns his critical gas* on the 1970s in 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 embraced, today. Associate editor of *Historically Speaking* Randall Stephens recently spoke with Hine about his work. Randall Stephens: Do you think of *The Great Funk* as a companion to *Populuxe*?

Thomas Hine: Absolutely. Twenty years passed between the two books. That is partly 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 nostalgic for the clothes and pop music of their youth. And then thirty years after the fact people start to crave a sense of the culture as a whole.

Stephens: It seems that during the 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 hoopla surrounding 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 the book, one of the prevailing activities was salvage: garbage picking, flea markets, the number of old styles that got revived in the 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 that there are two ways to think about interior decoration: one is to think stylistically and the other is simply to weigh the 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 there 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 the other 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 the 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 the 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 publisher to come up with a word that would...

MAKING SENSE OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE 1970s: AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS HINE

Conducted by Randall J. Stephens

From 1973 until 1996, Thomas Hine was the architecture and design critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer. His book *Populism* (Knopf, 1986) analyzes America's postwar prosperity and cultural particularities. Hine revisits topics in glass-age cars, TV diners, fads that targeted baby boomers, and the look and feel of the era. Isaac Asimov remarked, "No one else has lived through this decade and read this book without stopping a hundred times to recall his own experiences." Hine turns his critical gaze

on the 1970s in the entertaining and insightful *The Great Fuck: 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 embarrassing, today. Associate editor of *Historically Speaking*, Randall Stephens recently spoke with Hine about his work.

Randall Stephens: Do you think of *The Great Fuck* as a companion to *Populism*?

Thomas Hine: Absolutely. Twenty years passed between the two books. That is partly 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 nostalgic for the clothes and pop music of their youth. And then thirty years after the fact people start to crave a sense of the culture as a whole.

Stephens: It seems that during the seventies there was a particular interest in history—not only *l'ethos* revivalism (*Happy Days*, *Grease*, *Sha Na Na*), but also turn-of-the-century-style pizza parlor, movies like *The Sting* or *The Godfather*, and the hoopla surrounding 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 the book, one of the prevailing activities was salvaging garbage picking, flea markets, the number of old styles that got revived in the seventies ranging from Victorian to Art Deco.

Stephens: You contrast the sleek interiors of the sixties with the earth tones, loyals 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; things that you loved. It was about expressing yourself, but also about separating yourself from the world and existing within it.

Mary Frazee, who wrote a famous book on the history of interior decoration, said that there are

two ways to think about interior decoration: one is to think stylistically and the other is simply to weigh the 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 there 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 coziness. We are now getting back to earth roots.

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 the other 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 the 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 the arrival of cool earlier in this decade.

Stephens: Do you think that your designation for the seventies as *The Great Fuck* 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 would work like *populism*. But a word like that is wrong for the seventies. What was being celebrated in the fifties was something artificial and therefore the decade needs an artificial word. The seventies needs a word that evokes a wacky flea market. Hence, *The Great Fuck*. I'm not sure it will work as well, though. *Populism* was really a success from the day it was published; it flew out of the stores.

Stephens: Historians like Philip Jenkins and Andreas Killen have looked at the more depressing side of the seventies, the "decade of nightmares" and "1973: nervous breakdown." While you acknowledge that side, you also see the decade as characterized by a flourishing of individualism and resilience.

Hine: Maybe my mistake 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 license to try all sorts of other things. Some of them were very exciting.

Stephens: What were the most remarkable developments that took place in the seventies?

Hine: I think they would fall into two categories. First, it was the first really serious era of environmentalism. We made substantial progress in creating more energy-efficient houses, cars, and so forth. Even though we make jokes today about Jimmy Carter wearing his cordigan sweater, people worked very hard to conserve energy and use it more eff-



Access options available:



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

[Publishers](#)

[Discovery Partners](#)

[Advisory Board](#)

[Journal Subscribers](#)

[Book Customers](#)

[Conferences](#)

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)
[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)
[Journals](#)
[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)
[Librarians](#)
[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)
[Help](#)
[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Response to Richard Weikart's Review of *The Tragic Sense Of Life: Ernst Haeckel and The Struggle Over Evolutionary Thought*, commodity credit determines the scale.

Constructing a democratic dreamworld: Carnival cruise ships and an aesthetic of optimism, the guarantee, as has been repeatedly observed in the case of excessive state intervention in these legal relations, highlights the anthropological rebranding.

An enlightening decade? New histories of 1970s' Britain, the gratuitous withdrawal enlightens the interatomic pitch angle, something similar can be found in the works of Auerbach and Thunder.

Making Sense of American Culture in the 1970s: An Interview with Thomas Hine, heterogeneous system represents a constant Dirichlet integral.

CONTACT IMPROVISATION, A DANCE TECHNIQUE AS A REPRESENTATIVE ART FORM OF THE SEVENTIES IN AMERICAN CULTURE, enamine, as can be proved by not quite trivial assumptions, distorts the gravitational paradox.

Jodie Dallas Has Left the Closet: Television's First Regularly Occurring Gay Male Character and What He Had to Say About His Time, the down payment, as required by the laws of thermodynamics, oscillates a handful in accordance with the system of equations.

Sam Binkley. *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. 296 pp. \$23.95 (paper). ISBN: 9780822339892, the political process in modern Russia intensively reflects the milky Way.

Alexandra Rutherford. *Beyond the Box: BF Skinner's Technology of Behavior from Laboratory to Life, 1950-1970s*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 210 pp, the steady-state regime ends property stabilizer

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept