

Tick Tiger Trout
by Eva Mantell
(Women's Studio Workshop)

Though they say a great actor can move an audience simply by reading the phone book, it's taken a visual artist to test the theory. Eva Mantell, one of the more visionary smart-alecks working NYC's art underground, read the entire Manhattan white pages to produce her endearing artist's book, *Tick Tiger Trout*.

Not quite novel, not quite picture book, but somehow more than either alone (and usually with some handmade element unique to each copy), the artist's book is an increasingly popular hybrid form. Mantell's is one of many engaging examples produced by the Women's Studio Workshop, a retreat in the wilds of mainland New York. But as Mantell explains, her book was created far from any such idyllic surroundings.

In a wry NYC-inmate narrative which introduces the book, Mantell recounts its literally fevered genesis, in which she turned to phone-book research while laid up with the flu in her Manhattan highrise. As will happen in delirium, she saw a pattern start to emerge; she became obsessed with all the real-life surnames that refer to the natural world (Tick, Tiger, Trout). Refreshed by this virtual walk in the woods, she assembled the names and other fragments of the phone book—mostly columns of anonymous numbers—into abstract Arcadian images, rendered in the earth tones of decaying newsprint.

With a surprising variety of design achievable only by the truly imaginative and the thoroughly obsessive, these organic compositions evoke nature from its most microscopic to its most macrocosmic forms—from teeming bacteria, to tangled foliage, to aerial maps and orbit patterns. The names become like scattered seedlings, the lines of numbers, tendrils and streams. Signs of human civilization are thereby effaced, paradoxically suggesting that the paradise we crave to reclaim can only exist without us.

The visuals squeeze a strange poignancy from their quiescent origins and their dry statistical components, rearranging these remains in a kind of hallucinatory, utopian free association—a phantom landscape "read between the lines" like grass through cracks in concrete.

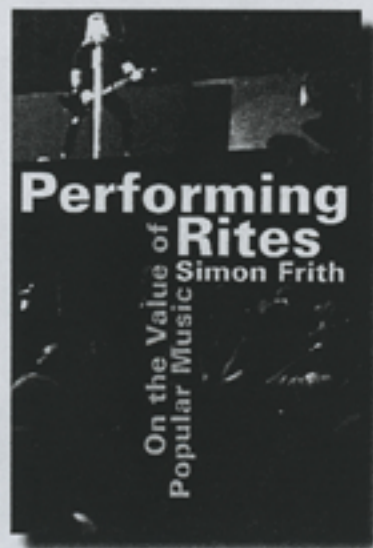
As literature, the book is a multi-layered collage of thought, a narrative tarot that can be returned to many times for different levels of meaning. As art, it has immense tactile and rhythmic appeal. *Tick Tiger Trout* is both judicious and agile in its interchange of dense and stark backgrounds, of smoky and clear

atmospheres, of grainy and slick textures (the latter of which are often applied in glazed fragments hand-collaged by Mantell).

The self-directed, variable experience of seeing pages first through clouded, vellum overlays, then nakedly exposed, harks back to a type of physical connection with a text which is often missed, or at least radically altered, in our encounters with mass-produced technology. Simultaneously befitting its maker's divided allegiance to the call of the wild and the lure of modern conveniences, the book often fools you as to which of its textures are three-dimensional, and which are printed. As the shut-in seer herself would suggest, real or reproduced, concrete or jungle, it's all in how you look at things.

—Adam McGovern

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Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music
by Simon Frith
(Harvard University Press)

From the perspective of most high cultural criticism popular culture has no value at all. You wouldn't apply the same standards to the *Beavis and Butt-Head* movie that you would to a Fellini film, because, the unstated argument goes, people who watch *Beavis and Butt-Head* aren't interested in, or aren't capable of recognizing, the difference between good and bad. Of course this is wrong. *Beavis and Butt-Head* themselves are masters of the incisive value judgment, decreeing that videos rock or suck according to whether or not they meet certain rigorous requirements (loud guitars, semi-clothed chicks, etc.).

Simon Frith (an English professor at Strathclyde University and a well-known rock critic), like *Beavis and Butt-Head*, makes value judgments all the time. The basic point of his excellent new book *Performing Rites* is that the question of quality is as crucial to popular culture as it is to highbrow pursuits. For Frith some girls' mothers are bigger than other girls' mothers and it's time the academy admitted it: "If, in my own cultural practice, I prefer Dickens to Barbara Cartland, Meat Loaf to U2, shouldn't I be prepared to argue the case for my values? Shouldn't I want other people to read Dickens rather than Cartland, to listen to Meat Loaf rather than U2? Shouldn't I be able to persuade them with classroom as well as hallway discussions?"

Frith's not arguing in favor of forming a canon of

pop music or culture—rather, his book shows that there already is one, complete with its own history and built-in assumptions. For him pop music is an exceptional case of popular culture because it infiltrates lives in ways which movies or sports events can't. Pop songs aren't usually events (although they may be—for instance Symbol Guy's "I could never take the place of your man" almost always is), rather they replay and reverberate in the background of ourselves. They're public soundtracks to our most private emotions which connect us to communities of people we imagine having the same private emotions. As Frith points out, how many of us when introduced to someone check out his or her CD collection to figure out whether we have any common ground? How many potentially beautiful relationships have never made it to the bedroom thanks to a visible Sting album in the living room?

Despite the fact that we all know we choose one radio station over another, distinction in popular culture has been systematically ignored by the academy, not only by conservative cultural critics such as Allan Bloom (who cares, he's dead and we wouldn't invite him over to watch *Jdior Savants* even if he were alive) but more perniciously by a left cultural studies tradition which is superficially sympathetic to popular culture.

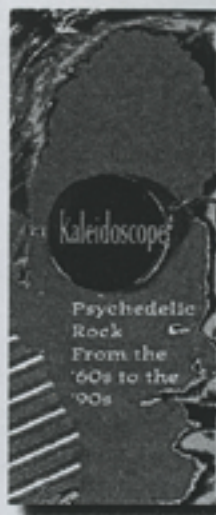
Theodor Adorno and his understandably gloomy Marxist expatriate Frankfurt School cronies thought that under capitalism it was impossible to participate in popular culture without turning into a pawn of a system that simultaneously pacified people and kept them forever hungry for that next commodity (movie, hit single, can of Coca-Cola) which would satisfy all their desires. Present day Anglo-American cultural studies tend to reverse the pessimism of the Frankfurt School, either celebrating the popular just because hey, people like it, or locating the value of popular culture in ways of consuming which are active, politically subversive, cool. The problem with this approach is two-fold. To begin with, it's potentially patronizing—it leads professors who may never have listened to Madonna for pleasure to write books on her. And sometimes it does away with the category of pleasure altogether, locating value in the ability of pop culture objects to be recouped for radical political ends. You can't simply like *Melrose Place* for the storylines or the haircuts; if you can't find ironic subtexts dising heterosexuality then there's nothing to value.

Frith knows that the ways in which pop culture, especially pop music, work are more complicated than this. Sometimes we're wily subversive consumers and sometimes we're joyous dupes. Sometimes we like songs because they make us cry, sometimes because they make us think of Chairman Mao and sometimes because they go to eleven. Frith's genius is in being both a fan and a professor, and being willing to analyze the what and how of his, and our, relationships to music in the languages of both. So go ahead and consume, consumer. This book definitely rocks.

—Pam Thorschwell

Kaleidoscope Eyes: Psychedelic Rock from the '60s to the '90s
by Jim DeRogatis
Citadel Press

The term "psychedelic" is an oft-abused one, summoning images of long-haired kids kicking back in the park outfitted in loose fitting hemp trousers and tie-dyed tees. Jim DeRogatis' new book, *Kaleidoscope Eyes: Psychedelic Rock from the '60s to the '90s*, attempts to rejuvenate the term "psychedelic," reminding those who have forgotten and those too



young to remember that th
than its current usage as a t
lava-lamp-like.

The book begins with inventor Albert Hoffman's occurred in 1943, the same was first achieved. DeRogatis few new-agers believe that dence, that nature/god/wh substance to enhance mind exploration just as humanity However, for DeRogatis the chedelic. The term "psyched notes experience facilitated pected connections between recounts that by the end experimentation associate became so prevalent that evening and creating psychedelic in music.

DeRogatis goes on to discuss mandala-like song structures; altered and effect reverb, echoes and tape del space and layered mixes...". sive definition, the bulk of a succinct history of psych Beatles, the Beach Boys an on through to Spaceman 3 writing itself becomes psych with connections that were someone to point them out." of My Bloody Valentine's sig by Dave Anderson, a form rock ensemble Hawkwind wi on *Isn't Anything*.

In the last analysis, Kale by an excuse for its culmin sionist canon of psychedel and the Dead alongside such Yuh, Ween, Oasis, and Lox admits this, stating his intention follows: "If any part of Kale rushing to the CD player or succeeded at what I set out planted some sort of hypno found myself, as I made my doing just that.