

# The Way They Were in Greenwich Village

**DOWN AND IN**  
**Life in the Underground**  
 by **Ronald Sukenick**  
 (Beech Tree Books/William  
 Morrow: \$17.95; 288 pp.)

**FORCED ENTRIES**  
**The Downtown Diaries**  
 1971-1973  
 by **Jim Carroll**  
 (Penguin Books: \$6.95;  
 184 pp.)

Reviewed by  
**William Hochswender**

Ginsberg, Dylan Thomas, Norman Mailer—drinking, brawling and creating with barbaric intensity. But it's about mere dropouts as well as those who made a handsome living out of dropping out. And it is very much about the bars they



*Jim Carroll*

TAMELA GLENN

dropped into: the San Remo, the Cedar Tavern, the White Horse and Max's Kansas City.

Indeed, Sukenick's tale is a real elbow-bender, a bar story—smoke-filled, sawdusty and mythic—with the kind of boozy garrulousness and emphasis on fellow-feeling that one tends to associate with first the beatnik age and later the age of Aquarius. It all goes to show that the so-called "underground" was just as violent, insecure and preening as any fraternity house scene of that period or this—but with a different set of rules and expectations.

Both a creature and an observer of this raucous milieu, Sukenick carefully traces the evolution of the underground in music, poetry and art, from the Village jazz scene of Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus et al. at the Five Spot and other venues, through the formation of the Fugs, the Velvet Underground and Andy Warhol's back-room court at Max's Kansas City, where downtown cool cats encountered uptown cash. Here the underground elite discovered that the avant-garde could be a vehicle for "making it"—the title of a well-known book by Norman Podhoretz

(a whole '60s-'80s epic in himself) and the ultimate no-no in Sukenick's moral spectrum.

Is it possible to be hip and successful at the same time? This is the question that obsesses the author. He informs us that "The myth of Bohemia . . . can be devastating for hangers-on who have no strong artistic vocation providing a purpose for that kind of life." But then he hammers away relentlessly at "middle-class values," whatever they are. An artful polemicist first makes his target formidable and worthy of attack, then tears it to pieces. Sukenick's middle class is simply a bogey, a faceless evil characterized at best by a style of dress ("seersucker") or a profession (anything other than poet, jazz musician or bar owner seems to constitute "selling out"). You begin to wonder what he's really driving at.

An interesting footnote to his larger concerns can be found in an interview with the self-described real-life model for the Jade Butterfield character in the novel "Endless Love" (played by Brooke Shields in the film). According to this woman, Jill Littlewood, the product, in the story and in real life, of an ultraliberated 1960s Chicago household, her parents abet and encourage her torrid sexual relationship with a 17-year-old boyfriend, even buying her a double bed so he can sleep over comfortably. Eventually, Littlewood revolts against the permissiveness. At 16, she buys herself an expensive briefcase and a "secretary suit" and decides she is "gonna do well in high school." As her parents were "getting kinkier and kinkier," she was "getting straighter and straighter." To make her rebellion complete, she is now married to a doctor and living in the Los Angeles area.

To a large extent, the book consists of such interviews with scenemakers from the times. You can almost see them now, salt-and-pepper beards, a bit of a belly, that burnt-out well-tripped acid look in the eyes, as they reminisce about the good old days. And romanticize. Some of these anecdotal passages, too many of them, lead nowhere. Frequently it's difficult to tell who's speaking. Between the ongoing egotism, the grimy settings and cliquish squabbles of the great talents, "Down

and In" manages to become, like a serious romance that leaves its audience in stitches, a persuasive argument for holding down a regular job.

One can relive the '60s, for example, so much more vividly simply by sitting in the middle of the park listening to a tape by The Doors. It just wasn't much of a literary experience. It was musical and tribal. As the song goes, "When the music's over, turn out the lights."

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Another denizen of the back room at Max's Kansas City was Jim Carroll, poet, rock star and heroin addict. His junk-induced dreams and downtown adventures have inspired writings—beautiful ravings, actually—that are ornate and harrowingly stark. His most recent book, "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973," picks up where "The Basketball Diaries" left off—with the author living from one fix to the next.

This time he's graduated from the uptown teen smack scene to Manhattan's chic and artsy downtown. He spends his days working for Andy Warhol at The Factory, which, he tells us, is "boring as an empty bag. . . . Even the boredom has no depth." And he spends his nights at the ballet sitting with Balanchine and the critic Edwin Denby. Carroll moves from swish to swank with ease.

On a little side trip to Times Square, "Forty-Duce," Street description, like the bathhouse scene at Grand Central Terminal from the earlier "Basketball Diaries," gives an idea of his radiant sense of depravity:

"I still recall, vividly recall, the first night I spent alone in Times Square. I followed this one who moved like a trawler through the currents of deals denied for short green. . . . She was enormous, over six feet easily, including, naturally, her four-inch heels, which I thought inviolate. . . . never to be removed. Her breasts were crawling, like some sea life from an unchartable depth, out of a black bra. . . . the bra beneath a dress which was so short that, as I faked lacing my sneakers, crouching on one knee, I could clearly see revealed the connection of her black-seamed stockings and her red garters, like two deadly circuits

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fused to activate a device of total annihilation. A vial of mascara must have been emptied on those eyes. The whole effect . . . the body . . . the dress . . . the make-up . . . was as if someone had placed a Rubens portrait at the bottom of a cesspool, and after centuries of strangeness and decay among the stillness of vile things and vile notions, some chance lightning hit . . . and out of it she was risen . . . delivered onto those streets in a pink Cadillac. And she walks and walks because there is nobody who can make her price."

This is the '70s, and Carroll's very existence turns the '80s notion of "work hard and play hard" on its ear. His theme is "play hard and take hard drugs." His memoir has some documentary value—meetings with remarkable men, everyone from Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg and Ted Berrigan to Terry Southern, W. H. Auden and the KGB, are humorous and sharply drawn. He also establishes interesting links between the "happenings" of the '60s and the performance art that remains influential today. But the real attraction of Carroll is the energy of his language, whether applied to fantastically baroque nods or to mundane urban realities, like defrosting the refrigerator or murdering a roach.

As with any diary, at times the author seems quite full of himself, and, as a consequence, full of something else. For the poet, "not dying young can be a dilemma," he tells us. And he's a frenetic name-dropper. For example, the section entitled "Hello, Dali" consists of nothing more than a chance encounter on 57th Street, where Salvador Dali commandeers his cab. But somehow Carroll has the slick slang to carry it off. He's a collector of fancy words, and at one point he makes a note to himself to use the words *serpentine* and *abat-toir* in his poetry. Sure enough, both appear inconspicuously later in the book.

When, ultimately, Carroll finds his redemption in California, detoxing in the bucolic confines of Bolinas, we sense the enormity of the underground experience, as lived, in ways a documentary history can only grope for.

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