FRANK

MAGAZINE

7

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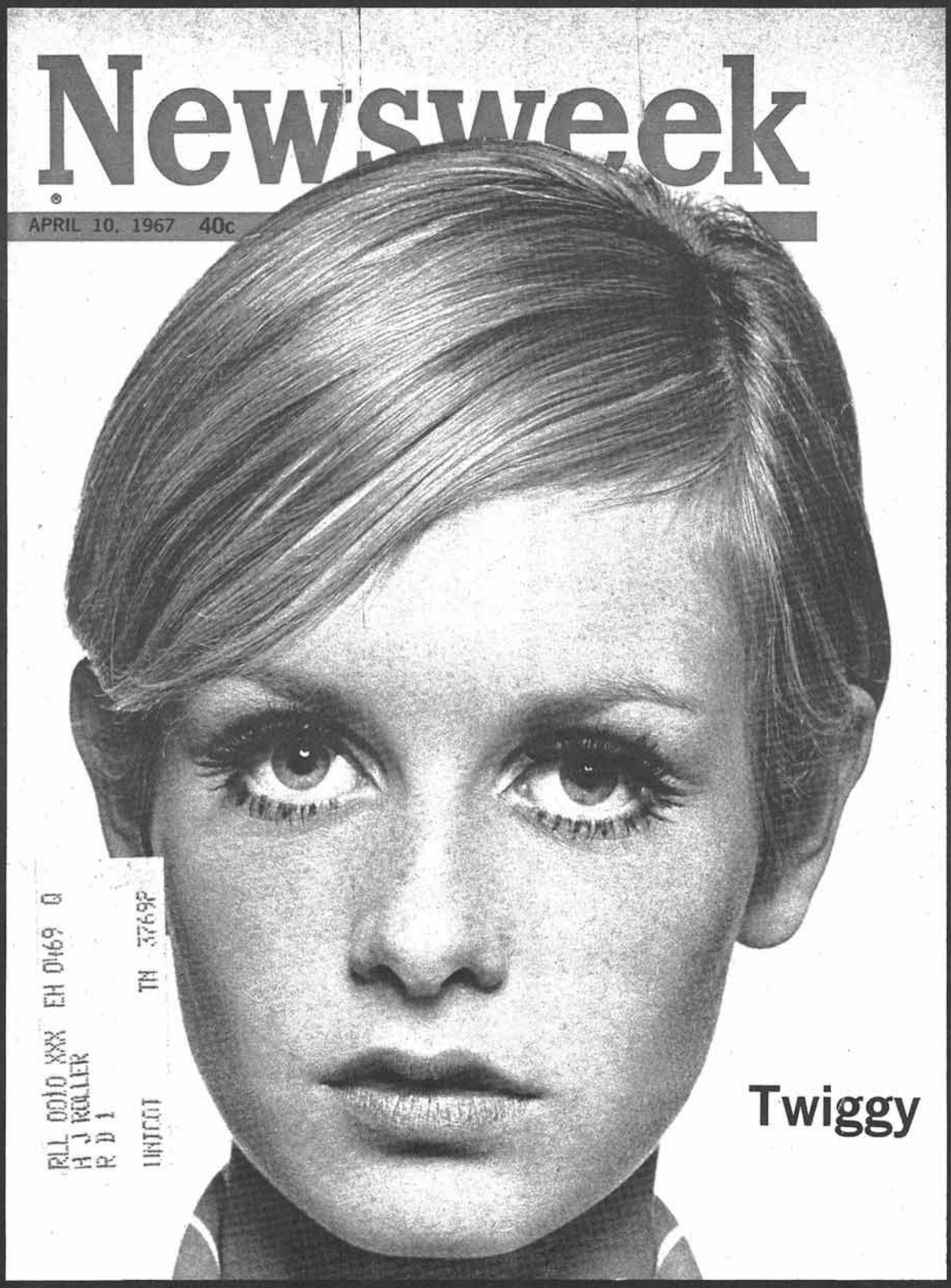

FRANK 7

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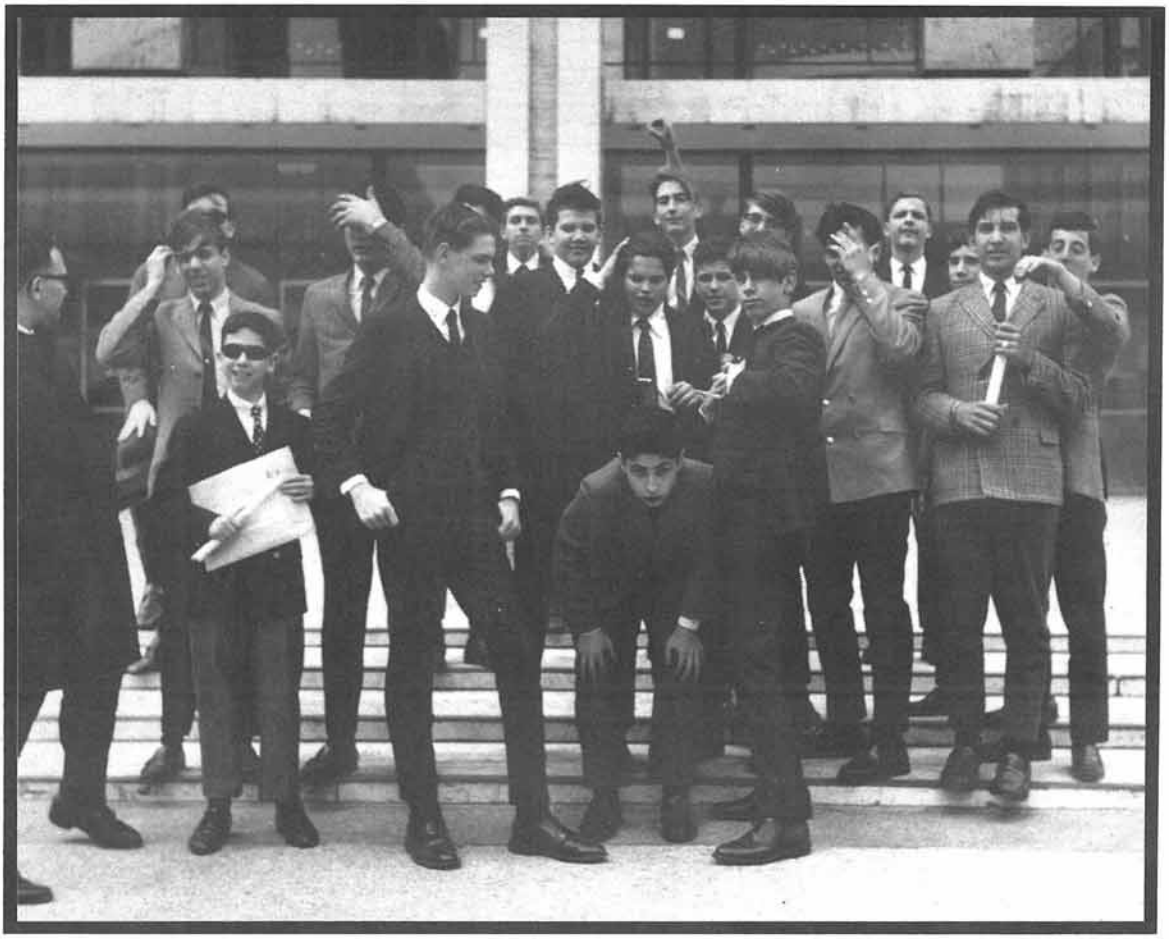
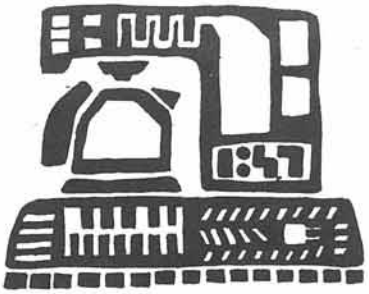


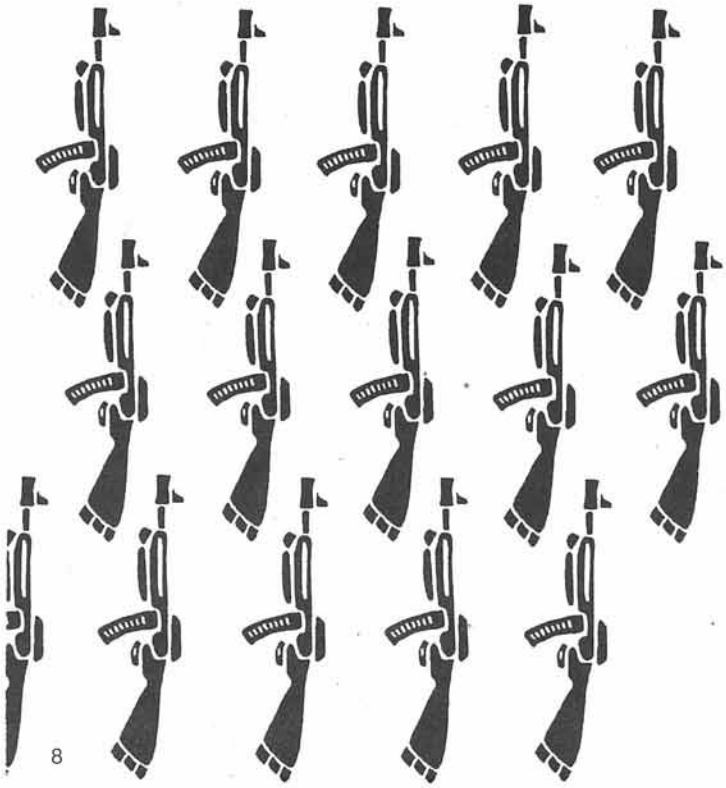
Woodrow Band at Lincoln Center, 1968 *Photo by Steven L. Rosenberg*

FRANK

correspondence



Dear FRANK:
I've been working on a new story concerned with the life of objects . . . with that moment in the kitchen, all quiet late at night, when the shiny coffepot begins to speak . . . (''Veg. Motto'' inspired by that Dutch 15th century still-life painter — a woman — who said: With One Great Eye, Things Look Back At Me.'') Academia's new word for this phenomenon is ''reification'' — when a thing in advertising or suburbia, a gleaming convertible or a power lawnmower, becomes more human and alive than the human who regards it, than the model who caresses it than the husband who holds its handle. The *thing* develops a spirit and is this not the *essence* of America? I think my story ''Vegetable Motto'' has its own Boschian bubble libido logic you guys might dig.
Salut, Berry



Dear FRANK:
We flew into Berlin early one evening in late June. Drizzling rain welcomed us. Berlin that I returned to like a homing pigeon. It was different from that coldest winter in '79 when I thought the ice age had begun — and I was content. Then the island offered us the remnants of a decadent sensuality that pervaded the nightlife and inspired the drifting bodies to keep living. Dark restaurants, Club X-il and the Metropol were refuge. Other clubs offered asylum to teenage alcoholics dancing to original leatherette music.

We were in Germany, in Berlin. I was in love with that idea.That first night back I lay in a dark mahogany bed feeling Berlin.

The next morning we woke early for a thorough examination of the city. On the street past the Indian Restaurant, past the Woolworth's, I found Der Jungle where I had years before taken my first steps into Berlin nightlife. We kept walking. Later we came upon the Metropol. I think the most striking thing about the place was the woman behind the bar. Beautiful and utterly self-conscious of her beauty almost to embarrassment. Tall with dark hair.

Across from our pensione a new bar had opened. It was 4 a.m. and the place was packed. In we wandered. I sat down and looked directly at my old friend Annette who I had not seen in six years. Annette, then a struggling musician, now the toast of German pop music. We made a date for the weekend flea market.

Saturday came and Annette and I headed off in the direction of the flea market. Soon we came across a huge crowd of people lining the streets. A parade was about to happen. A show of military force by the Americans, British and French. Barricades blocked the way of those who were suspect. We were told to wait in line to be felt up by the German Matron. We declined and turned togo home. By then the parade had begun and they were bringing out the tanks. I stopped counting at 50. ''Do you want to hang around for the bombs?'' ''What?'' ''You mean you don't have parades like this to see what your tax dollars are paying for?'' Men were parachuting from helicoptors and planes. We kept walking.

One area we wanted to see was Kreuzberg where we were told about 450 houses were occupied by squatters. They had been teargassed but some squatters remained. Kreuzburg is the old Turkish quarters near the wall. There are a few cafes, some art galleries and X-il is hidden there. Punks line the street. We spent the day. Expressionist paintings were cheap. We walked the wall.

Then came the day to cross over to East Berlin. It was so hot, the thick, clean concrete sidewalks and morbid faces so heavy and still in the noonday sun. We walked along feeling that weight upon us. People stared. Of course we were a spectacle. I in leather pants and purple hair — my companion only had to be himself — Oriental. Finally we came to what looked to be some sort of bazaar. Ahah — people do enjoy themselves here — let's go. We got close enough to see in — an exhibition of building materials — the latest in concrete blocks and bulldozers. We kept walking.

Next we found a farmers' market with the infamous long lines and morose faces. I purchased the coarsest, heaviest bread I could find. I was looking to make purchases as everyone crossing over into East Berlin is required to change their money into plastic East German Marks which can not be changed back. Therefore, I was an impassioned shopper searching furiously for merchandise and since I already had enough to carry back to the states, my quest was for items that could be consumed.

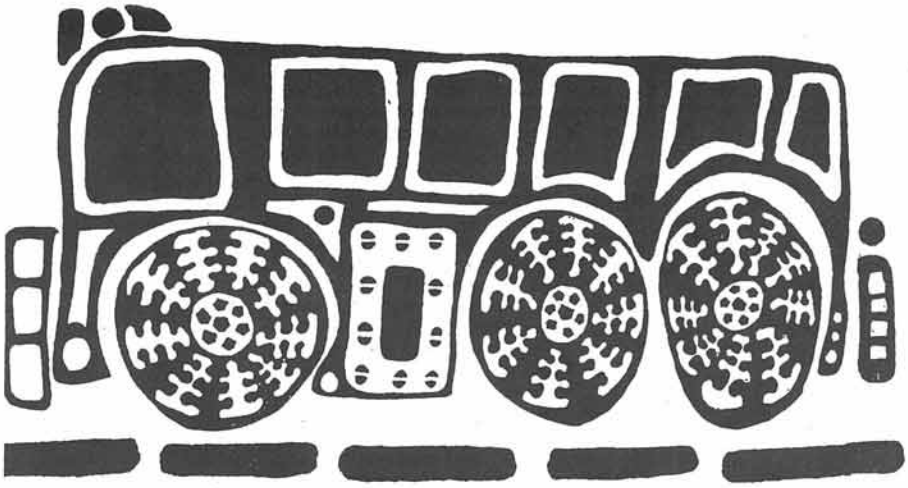
We found caviar and beautiful bottled sour cherries, exotic liquors made from fruits and nuts and the traditional smoked fishes. Now my money was gone and we really wanted to get the hell out of there.

Berlin does have much to offer besides international tension and injustices. Culture seems to thrive there — The National Gallery, Berlin Philharmonic, Brecht was being performed, San Francisco's Soon 3 was performing at Cafe Einstein. It also has a similar reputation to San Francisco — that all the artists, nuts and non-conformists are drawn there. It's like a magnet. A magnet that I'll return to again.

Carol Alter

Dear FRANK:
Fetus Not Into Temptation and Delirious From Evil . . .
Nat. Neo.

P.S. Be Normal Be Rich Be Strong



Dear FRANK:

I am a little worried about how passive I have become. My two favorite activities are: riding as a passenger in a car (even on routine city errands) and being in the house as night comes on but not turning on any lights or noise — just watching night fill the rooms. Unlike any of the people on those testimonial commercials, I am not obsessive about eating, drinking or smoking but I do read to excess and feel it is just as dangerous. I become detached from reality, have almost hallucinatory experiences and often read until I'm sick. And yes, I sometimes lie about how much I've been reading. I'll tell friends that I've been exercising or "making contacts" when in fact, I've been laying on the sunny spot of the sofa reading all afternoon until it's time to watch the darkness grow. Frank, I worry that there is no place for me in our aerobicize/weightlifting/networking/flag-waving/coke-crazed society.

I think it's going to be a long, wet winter.

with reservations
B

Dear FRANK,

A recent journey I took:

It should have been a mode of travel seized upon in a moment of desperation but in fact it seemed to be a very rational, measured decision. Inexpensive, lots of landscape, time to think abut things. It was however: *BUS HELL*. I started to get nervous when the driver opened the two small square air vents in the roof of the packed bus that unusually warm autumn night. Then a woman jammed herself and luggage for at least three into the thin seat beside me, pulled a small TV onto her lap and exclaimed "Just in time for Dynasty!" 30 hours of heat stroke and bad television - elements of a modern day 'Inferno.' Was it the temperature that made me sweat or demons whispering in my ear.

PUMPERNICKEL VALLEY, NEVADA

Air conditioning fixed but the seat seemed to have narrowed in the last 12 hours. The party section of the bus has become quiet, revealing the essentially nocturnal nature of its inhabitants. The landscape is flat, we seem to stop at every commercial structure that has a casinoesque quality, which is every structure. On top of that, I lose.

SALT LAKE CITY

On the phone before I left, they said a 30 hour trip. Now in person they tell me it is really 54 hours, which at the moment seems to approach eternity.

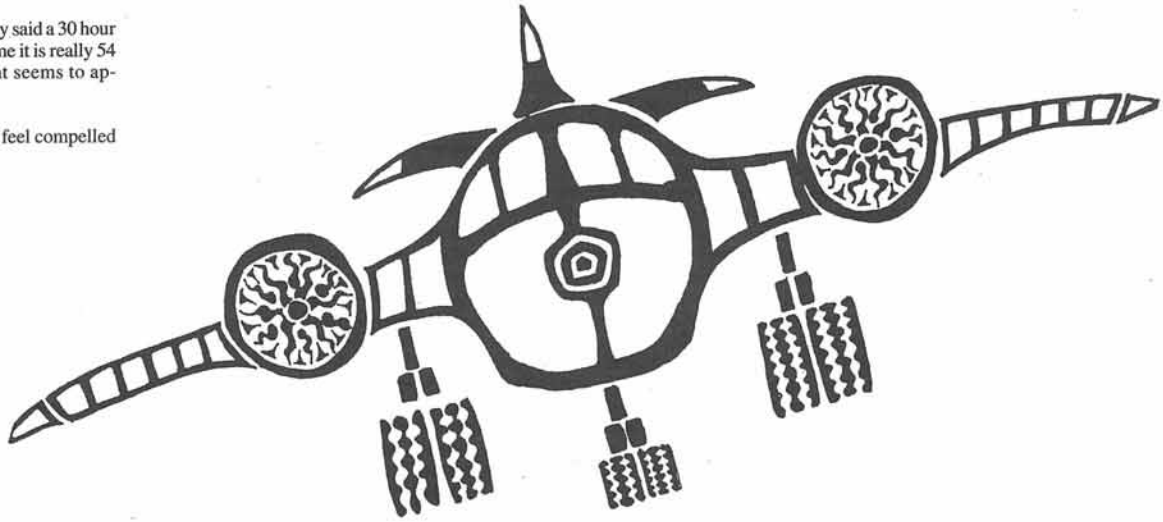
WYOMING

Although the coffee is bad, I feel compelled to patronize each of the small dusty cafes that we stop at. I feel like a thread that holds these places just above some financial abyss. Constant searching for odd postcards keeps my spirits up.

BILLINGS, MONTANA

Is that a chorus of celestial voices I hear? It is the end of the line for this way of the trails bus. I tell myself that even the grey dog would have been more luxurious. I think these red buses exist for the sake of novelists in search of characters, hardship, and the flavor of strange odyssey. Suddenly it hits me, *I got the round trip ticket.*

Regards from a latter day Dante,
R. Bang



Page design & illustration by Marc Delaney

FRANK:

Circumstances Somewhat

Early fall climbs up a bridge of soft fire. There is an impatient humidity about my flesh. From the ground to the sky is evening.

Maybe I should write a letter to someone dear. Letters are such necessary threads. I hope you are fine. How art things?

You have to say something coherent, something tangible in a letter. Certain types of blue fall outside these touch of life's leaves.

I can see little Moses in his papyrus boat floating outside my window. The tea kettle is talking like I haven't heard for this long while.

Everything is peaceful. The cool breeze of the evening comes as a reward. Changes. Letters are notes on life's changes.

When are you coming next to visit. Do not speak of exigencies and mitigating circumstances. We have argued the differences between needs and wants too many times already.

The main reason I write and not call is because I could not fathom what it might mean to have the postal services become an anachronism within my lifetime.

I always meet the mailman. He helps me to transcend circumstances somewhat.
Missing...

A plane drones eastward against grey clouds. The seas are flying.

Love always.

THE ART

Barron Storey

By Richard Halstead

According to a recent article in The New York Times Magazine, "A Different Bohemia," penned by Maureen Dowd, it is no longer chic to be a starving artist. Dowd's article chronicled the commercial success of numerous New York artists and the panache with which they have accepted financial security. "Business art is the step that comes after art. And good business is the best art," Dowd quoted Andy Warhol and aptly named him the spiritual father of this Marketing Movement.

Rather than attempting to expose the naivete of today's money-based political environment, some artists do seem to have been co-opted by it. The obvious question is: Do artists bear any special responsibility in a repressive society (of the right or left) to stimulate revolt? And, if so, does political art make sense?

The most damaging criticism of political art has always been the legitimate concern that it restricts creative freedom and thereby results in ersatz, second-rate art. Nazi art and communist social realism immediately comes to mind as examples. But often this argument is used in bad faith simply as a means to repress art that, though political, springs from purely personal inspiration.

A recent exhibit at Project Artaud's Southern Exposure Gallery entitled "Content Art: Contemporary Issues," provided numerous examples of artists who are interested in more than the art market. The exhibit included Robert Arneson's "A Nuclear War Head," Judy Chicago's "Creation Drawing," Jack Matsuoka's World War II camp-art cartoons and panels from Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury." Frank asked five emerging artists, who exhibited their work at the show, their opinions on the importance of political art. Their comments were as diverse as the work they presented.

Barron Storey has had his illustrations on the cover of Time. He also paints and does performance art. He moved to San Francisco from New York City two years ago.

STOREY: We live in an environment saturated with lies. Most people, including many artists have accepted this pervasive reality and learned to cope, learning the various subtle codes of good lies and bad lies. The good lies are considered those which "work" — a vague term meaning everything from basic survival to Warhol's cynical "Whatever you can get away with."

A minority of people cannot cope with the lies . They suffer. Many are like Ernest Becker's definition of neurotics: those who see the shame behind appearances but are only made helpless by their insight. Becker points out in Denial of Death that artists have these same perceptions, but can turn them to fruitful purpose by "concretizing" them in works of art. This benefits society, he goes on to say, and hence the artist repays a debt owed since the initial repudiation of conventional roles expected of him by culture.

Some artists are fascinated by all this lying. They study it, play with it and sometimes challenge it. Other feel compassion for the victims of false values and covert behaviour. They support the struggles of those too naive or too truth-obsessed to play the world-upside-down game. Some, too, just have a gut-level dislike for deceit.

As Orwell pointed out so well in a book aimed at our times, those who control the truth have the power. Focusing discussion, publicity or art on the contradictions in the version of truth that pervades our lives amounts to a confrontation with power. It is therefore political.

FRANK: Do you consider yourself a political artist?

STOREY: I dislike commodity culture. I think this country is fucked and I love art so I'm interested in art and making art that doesn't contribute to the commodity game. I think it is appalling, disgusting. I don't know, it just makes me want to vomit when I see artists who are using the disposition of our society to sell, sell, sell for their own advantage. I just detest it. It is more interesting to me to take jabs at it, make fun of it, try to expose it.

FRANK: What about the argument that political artists erect boundaries around their own self-expression?

STOREY: It depends on my respect for the person who makes that statement. Then, you have to get into specifics. In general, I don't recognize any political party who holds that up as a platform. Who do you have in mind?

FRANK: There is a conflict and it has been the source of some pretty good writing. Somerset Maugham's "The Moon and Sixpence" is about that. About a famous artist who is so revered in a culture that he can be a significant force for progressive government or if he stands out of the government he will be a significant deterrent to the government. What should that artist do?

STOREY: I do see the conflict and I'm not trying to avoid that. And, when it comes from somebody like Maugham, you have to say it is a dilemma. You cannot take a pragmatic approach to it. Everybody is stuck with existential reality. They have to do what they think. There is no way to sign on to the right way of going. But for the most part when you're confronted with that question it comes from a real lightweight assumption of what is at stake.

Kent Mathieu has been producing his figurative oil paintings in the Bay Area for 10 years.

FRANK: Is your work political?

MATHIEU: Political or socially conscious. Anything that everybody does is actually a political or socially conscious thing. In other words, it could just as well be called offensive. A lot of my work is political to the extent that it is considered offensive. Political art means you deal with things that people don't like to see or be reminded of, but as a painter you do it as a political statement to expose things that bother you.

FRANK: Does that mean that all of your painting is offensive?

MATHIEU: The majority of the galleries don't want it. They can't sell it to rich people because it says rich people are fucked.

Not all of my stuff is offensive or aggressive. Some of the things I have done are utopian, showing only the good things about our world. Usually my paintings go one way or the other. However, in one piece I mixed the two together. So there is something very positive in the midst of Hiroshima: a scene of devastation with one person having an outlook of hope coming from his inner mind.

The majority of stuff I do now is political because I'm so pissed off about so many things. I have no time to paint utopian paintings. It is the pushing to the edge of the nuclear thing that is one of the major motivations for my work.

FRANK: How has your work been received?

OF CONVICTION

Photographs by Sharon Camhi

Kent Mathieu The Face of South Africa

ART IS NOT A MIRROR HELD UP TO REALITY, BUT A HAMMER WITH WHICH TO SHAPE IT.
BERTOLT BRECHT

Doug Minkler

MATHIEU: I started out on the street in 1981 in front of Cody's with my paintings on easels and went on to attend Ground Zero and Educators for Social Responsibility, Peace Quake, Spring Action Committee, the Livermore Blockade and Art in the Park — things like that where people enjoyed political art. But galleries can't sell that kind of work.

Stacia Sanderson studied at the Museum of Fine Art School in Boston and the San Francisco Art Institute. She paints large oil paintings.

FRANK: You don't consider your work to be overtly political even though it has appeared in several political exhibitions?
SANDERSON: No, because I don't think that it is. I have done four paintings that are pretty obviously political because it was a personal statement about something that I felt strongly and it ended up being a political thing. But I've done many, many paintings and only four of them have been so strongly political.

One of them was nuclear because it is something that is relatively universal and felt by all people. A couple have been in Art Against Apartheid and Art Against U.S. intervention in Central America. But those paintings were not made for those shows. They demonstrated a general feeling of anti-war so they were selected. But I'm not trying to convey a particular message about a political view.
FRANK: If you set out to express such a message, would it limit your creativity?
SANDERSON: Yeah. If I just wanted to do political art it would be limiting. Because I think there are a lot of different methods and levels of visual communication.
FRANK: So the fact that the paintings you mentioned turned out to be political...
SANDERSON: They were turned into political paintings because they were in those shows. When I finished them and when I was doing them, I thought...I'm thinking specifically of a painting that was in the Against U.S. Intervention in Central America exhibit. They accepted a painting which, strangely enough, I called the "Evolution of Women." It is about feeling certain ways about being a woman. They took it and labeled it as representing the feminist movement in Central America. This happens to me a lot. That's why I don't like it.
FRANK: Why does this keep happening?
SANDERSON: I think it is a need to gather all of these things together and make sense of it. People for some strange reason can't interpret everything individually. You can see it as being multifaceted in its meaning. But they want to put it into one lump and define it. That bothers me.

If the feeling that I'm trying to convey visually needs to be said in a political image I do it. But if it doesn't have to, I don't.

For some odd reason, it is the political paintings that seem to get picked for exhibits because people feel they're very strong. But I think it is the way people interpret politics. They can understand what is happening in politics, whereas, they might not understand something that is more personal.

Doug Minkler is a poster artist whose illustrations have appeared in such local magazines as Beef and Another Room in addition to a number of communist newspapers. He became interested in politics in 1968 when he narrowly avoided being drafted to serve in Vietnam.

MINKLER: I consider all art being done today as functioning in a political sense in one way or another. If an artist takes all his ability to articulate and express and chooses to talk about flowers while people are suffering then in a sense, that person has chosen a political direction since that person has chosen not to use their expressive abilities to address the issues of the times. I see it as a responsibilty of artists to use their skills to help remedy the injustices of the day.
FRANK: Must artists limit their creative potential to make political art?
MINKLER: I put on a presentation to art classes entitled "Be All You Can Be." It is a plea to art students to not self-censor themselves, not to eliminate the political aspects of their lives or from their art works. So, I view it in a completely opposite sense from a lot of the universities. I believe that when you leave off that political dimension you've come up with a lesser product.
FRANK: Are the artists who aren't producing political art living up to their responsibilities?
MINKLER: Well, I hate to make riffs between artists. I'd rather say there are a lot of sleeping artists who have very valuable skills who should turn those skills to the benefit of those people out there who put food on their table. Of course, every artist is starving and doesn't feel like anyone is looking out after their interests. But somebody picked the fruit and vegetables that they eat and they have a responsibility to look at those people's needs as well as their own. I don't know how to say that without sounding self-righteous.
FRANK: What is the purpose of political art? Should it produce action?
MINKLER: That is the next phase for the artistic community to look at. We're starting to see more artists concern themselves with social issues. That is a step forward. A few years ago that was not the case. Now the issue for those socially conscious artists out there is how to make their artwork function to create the changes they would like to see.

You cannot make a change in the war in El Salvador by showing your anti-war imagery in a small gallery on Union Street. So, at this time one of the questions we have to ask ourselves when we do a statement is how can we get the maximum number of people to view it. We're trying to communicate something. Now, how can we get these statements out?

The distribution networks are set up to stop us from getting them out. They stop us by charging high prices for prime exhibiting area — billboards, television time, there are lots of stumbling blocks in getting the message out.
FRANK: Must political art be representational then?
MINKLER: I don't think any genre or method of expression from cubism to the most abstract constructivist statement, nothing should be excluded from our expressive dictionary.
FRANK: But non-representational art doesn't usually stir people to act in any particular way?
MINKLER: I think that is a commonly felt misconception in our midst because of the stereotype of social realism, the stereotype of socialist art. There is a misconception that working people can only comprehend realistic or folk imagery. That is a very inaccurate and elitist point of view. If you look at the Russian revolution you'll find the most abstract modern imagery, sculpture and graphics emerging.
FRANK: Of course, as soon as the revolutionary government took power that art was labeled decadent and immediately repressed.
MINKLER: Yeah, that is accurate. Around 1920 or a little after culminating in 1930 when Stalin took the reins they established state art. State art was social realism. At that point, there was a real deadening effect on art in that country.

Eleanor K. Prager has recently produced assemblages entitled "It's Tough Being A Woman" and "Her Highness Chained to a Golden Screw."

FRANK: To what degree do you consider your work political?
PRAGER: I don't think of myself as a feminist. However, it is the government that makes it tough to be a woman. Just think it wasn't too long ago that women weren't allowed to vote. I believe in equality among the sexes and the freedom for both men and women to express both sides of their nature. We all have both feminine and masculine qualities to different degrees. I believe in integrating both sides, balancing both Ying and Yang.

Speaking only for myself, sex can be a spiritual experience and I am grateful to the man who provides me with it. It is easy to become chained to a golden screw.
FRANK: Is the political content in your work intentional?
PRAGER: I never thought about it one way or another, having such a strong ego. I was very much into expressing myself.

What I set out to do is express myself and actually, I have no idea what is going to come out. I have fun afterwards interpreting what I do. In a way, what I've done is a psychoanalaysis but I have no idea when I'm doing it. It is only later, after I've done a piece, when I look at. I did one piece, I didn't have a title for it. A month or so later, I looked at it while reading this book by a Swiss author called Prisoner of Childhood and thought, "Oh my god, that is what that is."

It is almost two different things. My work comes from the unconscious, and then later on, I title it and that comes from the conscious part of me. ■

MORE STATELY MANSIONS

Photograph by Rebecca Solnit

By Rebecca Solnit

The maps of the past show a world very different from the present state of things. What were once main roads are now dusty and quiet, the community centers of years gone by are now in the middle of nowhere or they are altogether gone, marked only by a cemetary. To me, stumbling on these cemetaries is great good luck. Country cemetaries, the older ones half overgrown but not neglected, are the finest, most beautiful and cooperative interactions between people and nature to be found in these parts. A perfect blending of history, melancholy, mystery, sculpture and nature. They provide the living with sites for remembrance and idle reflection, and the dead with a place to be commemorated, then gracefully forgotten and taken back by the earth. The architecture people build on the land for death is nowhere near as imposing or damaging as the monuments they build to accomodate their lifestyles. It is, like the surrounding Northern California landscape, gentle, mild and hospitable.

One of the first things the grave memorabilia is likely to remind you of is that, although the outer Bay Area looks new and wild, people began drifting out here — and living and dying — more than a century ago. Many seem to have never really settled; their stones read "A Native of France," "Born County Donegal, 1839," and so forth, as though their decades here were interim arrangements — or postscripts (most of these recalcitrant immigrants have been buried here far longer than they lived, they are posthumous natives). But many more of those whose lives are summed up by a piece of granite, a name and two dates, took to this land.

There are two kinds of graves and therefore two kinds of dead and buried — the forgotten and the remembered. The remembered established families who stayed in the area, tended the family plot and then eventually joined it. Cemetaries, like relics and monuments, provide a tangible site for remembrance by the survivors and, as the scattering of tended plots and flowers make clear, a site for expressing an attachment that survives death.

Melancholics relish the vanity of human wishes, the "look on, ye mighty and despair" of futile strivings at temporal immortality. Graves, everyone's ultimate destination, crumble; even the fact of one's death and life fade. On a tiny fenced hilltop cemetary in a landscape of steep golden hills, back ten miles in any direction from the nearest house, I saw a plot surrounded by sturdy iron railings with a single dark tombstone within — if you pushed aside the enshrouding foliage you could see the mossy epitaph — "gone but not forgotten."

One of the most impressive demonstrations of long-lived affection I've ever seen was in a beautiful coastal cemetary about half a day north of here, lined with blackish cypresses that sheltered it from the cold ocean winds, strewn with vivid pink naked ladies, a fleshy lily that grows wild, and with bracken fern and vetch. Many of the graves were ancient, half-lost in lush foliage, but others marked recent burials and were lovingly tended. In one modest family plot back in the shadow of the trees was buried a woman who died at a very advanced age several years before; next to her grave was the tombstone of a baby she'd given birth to in the 1920s that had died a few weeks later. Someone was still putting flowers on the grave of that infant who'd lived so briefly and been dead for sixty-odd years, someone who cared about the grief of a dead mother for her long-dead child. This kind of intimate relationship with people no longer living was utterly new to me, and it seemed that the presence of a physical site identified with the dead was an important part of this ability to carry on after death. I realized the psychological, as well as aesthetic, beauties of cemetaries. Cemetaries connect.

Perhaps Americans' celebrated mobility is really a quest for immortality; the rootless leave their dead behind. I talked about country cemetaries to a friend of mine from an old Catholic country, and she was appalled at my blithe attraction. In the small village she grew up in, the cemetary was a real presence in her life; people she knew died when she was a child and the names on the graves were all familiar ones. In the new-built suburb I grew up in, I told her by way of explanation, no one was born, no one was old, no one died, and no one talked about dying. No one close to me or my family died until I was almost twenty, and even then it was hard to separate death from any other kind of departure. There were memorial services, but no funerals, coffins or graves, no tangible evidence, no sites for remembrance. And in that town I grew up in, there were no functioning cemetaries at all, only a neglected one at the far end, full of beer cans and early settlers. I don't know where the dead were put — someplace where the land was less valuable. But cemetaries should be an integral part of urban design; they counterbalance secular intimations of immortality.

San Francisco has only two cemetaries: a hideous military one in which the dead soldiers are even more regimented and depersonalized than when they were living and an old, exquisite, tiny one in the enclosure of Mission Dolores (Kim Novak paid her respects there in Vertigo). The stretch of territory east of St. Dominic's and the University of San Francisco, where I live, long ago had been an immense cemetary, but it was exhumed, desanctified and built on once space grew scarce. Mendecino still has a small graveyard in the center of town, as do many undamaged older towns. Graveyards used to be in the land surrounding the church, serving the double purpose of keeping death and the great hereafter in the minds of the living and giving the dead sacred ground to rest in. Being buried near sacred relics was once thought to give one better odds of resurrection; as a result, the relic-endowed churches of England are solidly paved and walled with graves. And until the advent of twentieth-century American urban planning, death — in the form of graves — was an imposing part of daily life. Pip in the opening passages of *Great Expectations*, related: "As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape and the letters on my father's gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, 'Also Georgiana, wife of the Above,' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly."

Although the ornate tombstones of the later nineteenth century were frequently mass-manufactured, the wide array of styles do seem capable of expressing the rudiments of individual personality. Unlike the inscrutable slabs of modern protestantism, these sentimental sculptures are eloquent; small arches crowned by a seated lamb for the innocent and the young (but tiny blank stones for babies, who are, after all of an unknown quantity), clasped hands in a little wreath on the front of a stone to signify friendship, angels for the graves of the devout, large, upright slabs with lengthy inscriptions for adults — and for patriarchs, wonderful phallic plinths or monoliths that mark the whole family plot from a distance. These protrusions sometimes taper into pyramids or are crowned by spheres or beautifully silly classical urns. One white marble plinth in the Tait plot in the coastal cemetary had an urn preposterously draped in a toga that spilled down over the base to frame an open book; the inscription read, "Gilbert Tait Died March 30, 1902 aged 68 years — an honest worthy upright man. TAIT." In this cemetary the family plots were square and evenly spaced, like the squares of a chessboard, some paved, some planted, some covered in white crystalline rocks, some left to the most beautiful decoration of fern and wildflower. The black granite and white marble markers were scattered about like playing pieces, though they themselves did not move. The changes on this huge grassy board were made in the outside world. Men died, monuments were erected, the pattern changed.

Husbands and wives occupy double graves like marriage beds; maidens are walled in by low borders that, with headboards and footboards of marble, are even more bedlike. For example, according to the headstone a slender little grave of "Alice S., Daughter of S.A. and W.A. (illegible) born Feb. 22, 1865, died (obscured by white plastic lilies)" — "Our Daughter" according to the footstone. Another woman was memorialized by a tasseled marble pillow on a pillar. Death was seen as "eternal rest," "heavenly slumber" — tantalizing ideas in the era of the seventy-two-hour work week; it's no wonder graves resembled beds. The tranquility they sought in death I find in the contemplation of cemetaries. The sensibility of cemetaries — monuments to memory, resurrection, immortality, love and faith in a feral garden setting — disarms death. These cemetaries are essentially nineteenth century, and the nineteenth century was essentially, enthusiastically morbid. "The king of terrors is the prince of peace," wrote Edmund Young in the late eighteenth century. And the tubercular Keats confessed, "I have been half in love with easeful death."

In fact, the sentiments that make cemetaries so appealing to me were pretty much invented by the English poets of the romantic era, the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Retreating from the vulgar, bustling, forward-looking bourgeoise culture that arose in the wake of the industrial revolution, these poets cultivated their sensibilities, particularly their senses of melancholy and mortality. They were the great literary idlers. They meandered in the countryside and cultivated a taste for ruins. Coleridge wrote "Dejection, An Ode," and Wordsworth titled a poem after a ruined abbey. Lone leech gatherers, dead cottager's children, accursed ancient mariners, drowned shepherds, isolated reapers and "Lucy Gray . . . the solitary child" populated the poems, but mostly the first person singular "wandered lonely as a cloud" through the sublime ruins and dim vistas of their poetry, listening to "the still, sad music of humanity" and mourning the decline of high-spirited youth.

"And in the very temple of Delight/Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine," murmered Keats in his "Ode to Melancholy." This delicate emotional state, halfway between wistfulness and gloom, is really remarkably enjoyable, as Keats knew; it is the proper state of mind for meditation on one's own mortality, on the unfamiliar names on gravestones, on the untimely but apt death of Keats himself. Melancholy is the calm after the storm, the enjoyable sentiment of having reconciled oneself to the sadly inevitable. Or maybe melancholy is depression at a tranquilizing distance, sadness with a watered-silk lining of detachment. It is the right frame of mind for cemetaries.

Living spaces are a dead giveaway. From Des Esseintes's house in Fontenay to Bessie Glass's medicine cabinet, the interior of a house has always been a revelation about the interior of its inhabitant. FRANK photographed some artists who have turned their spaces into artworks — layered, papered, bedecked illustrations of their creative impulses. On the whole, they seem to find it comfortable to live within these life-sized works. The unending nature of the decorating process, which would drive most people to madness, seems to be necessary to these artists. We asked them how they felt about their habitats . . .

LOST IN SPACE

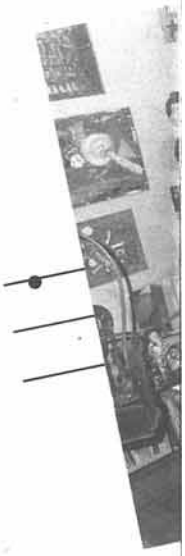
Text By Annie Barrows

Photographs by Steven Rosenberg

GAIL ALIEN

It doesn't bother me, living inside my artwork — when you're living with the stuff every day, you start not to notice. You only notice when you come back after being away. I was in jail for 11 days (for civil disobedience) and when I came back, it really seemed crowded in here. I'm an obsessive decorator; I decorated the jail — I made a little lounge and put up postcards. I'm running out of room in here, but the rules are that if something falls off the wall then that space becomes free and I can put more stuff there, so I'm kind of waiting for something to fall off the wall. I've started dusting too. I move a few things and then I dust where they were. It's an on-going project because my room alone could take ten years. Sometimes my decorating can be a disaster; awhile ago I saw some things in the living room that could be moved, so I moved them, but they were propping up some other stuff, which fell on a board, which fell on my fishbowl and broke it — there was water all over the place and the fish were gasping. It was terrible. Mostly I decorate when the mood strikes me. I'll be working and see an open spot and throw something into it.

LARRY STRONG
My space is my artwork. I started with the walls and filled those up and then I started on the open space. It took me two years to fill that up. I use plastics, cigarette filters — I do strange things with cigarette filters; I like to think I could circumscribe the world once with my cigarette filters. There are hundreds of thousands of pieces of individual art in my space. I don't find it oppressive, but I have a roommate who's finding it oppressive and a cat who's finding it very oppressive. I haven't always done this — I think it started when I was an archivist; I liked being completely surrounded by stuff.



CARA CRASH PROGRAM

I always redo everything in all the spaces I've been in. This place is like being inside one of my paintings — I have a tendency to paint everything. I used to be in the American Can Company building and when I was kicked out of there, I took my floor with me. What I'm trying to do by painting everything is make my space an insulation from the world. I'm a tremendous collector. I collect dolls and trash and other people's artwork — I need to have all that stuff around me because it evokes memories and helps me move back and forth between the past and the present. It's necessary to have art around to help me survive. There are lots of contradictions to a live/work space — I painted a floor for an author and when I came back I looked at my floor and thought 'My God, how can I live here? What a mess.' There's never enough space — less is not more, more is more. Work spaces are hard to find; eventually you always get kicked out, but whatever you're in, you have to work the shit out of it.

In 1981...they had between them only 10 sentences of English, six dollars in cash and a desire to become part of the modern wild west.


Pavel 1968


Vladimir 1968

A Checkered Past

By Rebecca Biggs

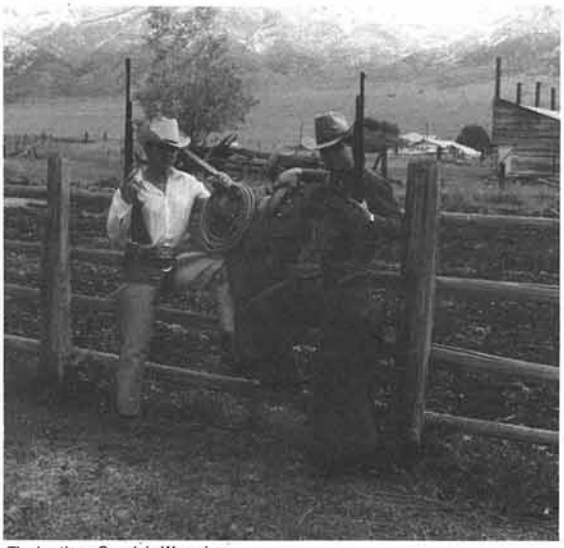
This is the story of immigration 80s style. Forget Ellis Island, huddled masses and any televison miniseries involving sagas, dynasties or family honor. Think instead of two Czech brothers dressed to the nines, smooth talking their way across an Eastern bloc border to land, ultimately, in New York. On their first night in the United States they spent most of their relief money on take-out food which they ate sitting on a corner. An act not allowed in Czechoslovakia. They did it because, as Vladimir says in a perfect imitation of an American hood, 'it's a free country isn't it?'

The first time I saw the brothers Czech was in fashion photographs two friends had taken. I was entranced by their faces. It signalled, I hoped, an end of an era of thin, wan looking male models with faces of altar boys. Here were men chiseled out of rock. They both have wide, strong faces with chins that make Kirk Douglas look like Woody Allen. "Who," I asked with wonder, "are they?"

I soon had the opportunity to meet Vladimir and Pavel Martiska at a cocktail party they gave. I wandered about their apartment and began to get a sense of the odyssey they have been on. Their walls are covered with framed photographs. One large photograph is a wedding portrait of their parents. Plain but beautiful slavic faces smiling out across 50 years. Just above that is a recent fashion photograph of Vladimir and Pavel. Their faces are stern. They're wearing wrap-around sunglasses and clothes designed by Vladimir.

I had in tow that evening a girlfriend who thought the whole night I was saying "check brothers." A misunderstanding carried further since they were both wearing checkered clothing designed by Vladimir. All of Vladimir's designs are wonderfully odd. The pants are made of pleated wool and the shirts are thick printed cotton with wide open collars instead of buttons. The clothes have a post-modern slavic feel; it is the look a wardrobe consultant on StarTrek would give to aliens beamed aboard the Enterprise from a planet of futuristic peasants.

The other photographs are older pictures of family holidays, wrestling teams and Vladimir's army days mixed with more recent pictures of the brothers in cowboy garb, in bikinis on vacation in Acapulco and with their first American car, a 1968 white mustang.


The brothers Czech in Wyoming

I met that evening a man who had been the brothers' boss on an oil field in Wyoming when they first arrived in the United States in 1981. He talked of meeting them when they had between them only 10 sentences of English, six dollars in cash and a desire to become part of the modern wild west. Their heads were filled with cowboy dreams from years of watching American westerns.

In Prague, in the years before they left, Pavel was a student at the Czechoslovakian film institute. There they were able to see American films that weren't shown in the public theatres. When asked to name favorite films they had seen in Czechoslovakia, their extensive list included Classic westerns but, among others, also Robert Altman's Nashville. This makes sense and seems like a good film to recommend to anyone immigrating to the United States. It captures not the flavor of America but the flavor of americana, that trashy underside of the states that often defies cross-cultural definitions. It is perhaps in having this reservoir of legends, lore and myths that the brothers were able to adjust, trauma-free, to life here; they knew what they were getting into.

That's not to say their first two years in the oilfields were easy. They worked in the kitchen cooking for the 800 employees. In the evening they gave free haircuts in exchange for English lessons. There are pictures, of course, of the brothers with groups of young men in various stages of glee and drunkeness. It is apparent that they were very well liked.

Soon they were promoted to outdoor construction work. They saved money, bought three used cars, including the white mustang, and took a vacation to Acapulco. Here

Photograph by Synapse Productions, Will Cloughley & Sondra Schlade

there are pictures of the brothers in scant bikinis with tan, blonde girls. It was a well-deserved vacation. On the oilfield they worked six days a week, 12 hours a day. I ask Vladimir if all that hard work made him change his mind about the United States. He answers simply, "We made a lot of money. I bought a white mustang."

But what seems to have helped the brothers most in adjusting to becoming Americans(they are residents now and hope to be citizens by next year) is their good humor and good sense in ignoring almost all advice they've been given. When they first entered a relief camp in Austria they could choose to go to any, as they put it, "capitalist country." It was 1981, the American economy was not at its best and they were soundly advised to immigrate to another country. But they just smiled their big goofy grins and looked around for the relief organization with the shortest line.

When their plane landed in New York they were met by three grim Americanized-Czechs who told them they would never find work in the West, especially not in California where everyone wanted to be; they were going to have to work very hard and as a last bit of advice — If you see a black man on the street, don't ask him for directions because he will ask you for five dollars.

"We stayed up all night walking around on Broadway," said Vladimir. "We didn't have much money because we had spent most of our relief money on new clothes in Austria. But I said 'I don't want to be hungry.' So, we spent our money on food. It was great. Then we were lost and I saw a black man and I asked how I could get to this place and he said 'Yea, it's right over there.' He was so nice he didn't ask for five dollars. After that we didn't listen to what anyone had to say."

It was more than romantic notions of the wild west or dreams of California and cool cars that prompted the Martiska brothers to leave Czechoslavakia. In 1980, Pavel had finished his schooling and was up for compulsory army duty. Both Pavel and Vladimir knew that without joining the Communist Party they would have no chance of getting into careers in film or fashion. For Vladimir the future looked especially grim since, even if he joined and got a government job as a designer, he would be creating proletarian wear that no one with any fashion sense would touch. There was no real alternative because there is no place to sell his own designs. Vladimir said, "There are no designers in Czechoslovakia. It is impossible to have your own label on something. You don't see any good clothes in the store. So, at 16 for the first time I went to the tailor for a pair of pants. After a while the tailor couldn't satisfy me, so I learned to 'sew and started making my own clothes.'

Pavel, in the meantime, was looking at the decisions made by Czechoslavakian artists and writers, such as Milan Kundera and Josef Skvorecky, who had chosen a life of exile. The brothers soon hatched a plan for their escape. Their use of the word escape is jarring in what is overall a tale of lighthearted adventure. It is a heavy phrase but it reflects the seriousness of their move. They trusted their plans to no one, not even their family, although their mother caught on when they started giving away their much sought after wardrobes.

On their first night in the United States they spent most of their relief money on take-out food...

The plan was actually quite simple. A rambling car trip through Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, then the crucial smooth talking at the border of Yugoslavia to gain entry without the required visa. From Yugoslavia they were able to purchase a two-day visa to Austria where they asked for political asylum.

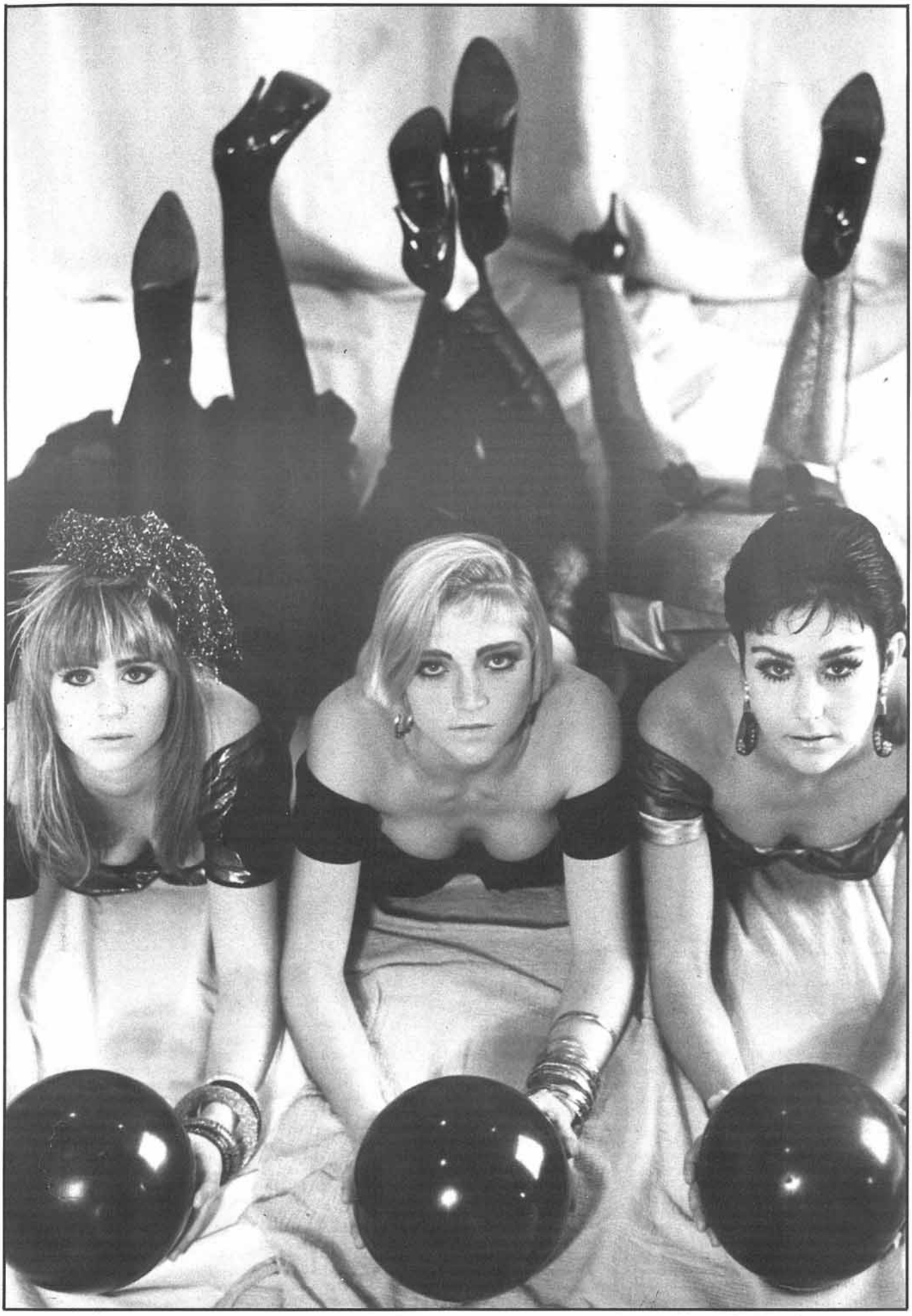
Now that she's gotten used to it their mother says, as is the custom of good mothers everywhere, "As long as you're happy, I'm happy." Once they get their U.S. citizenship, they plan to return for a visit. In the meantime, Pavel gestures to a programmed phone and says, "I just push a button and talk to her. The trouble is it usually costs $100."

Immigration and a life apart from one's home land is a serious contemplation. There are many immigrants who have bought into the whole " land of opportunities" package only to find themselves homesick and alienated. I recently met in Las Vegas a Hungarian Jew who had immigrated to the United States. He began telling me of his plight in English that was, after two years, minimal. He had been an engineer in Hungary and was now working as a busboy at a casino. His was a bitter tale.

What makes the Martiska brothers different is the "Wonderland" quality that colors their travels even though their dreams haven't unfolded in a Hollywood scenario. They both work on construction projects while Vladimir studies design and Pavel assists him while studying English — but there has been progress. They've been in recent fashion shows and Vladimir has his designs in the North Beach boutique Florence.

The other thing that marks Vladimir and Pavel as different is the way they've picked up on American ways while still retaining a foreign charm. After our interview is completed, I put on my coat and go down the stairs. I hear some Czeckoslovakian chatter behind me. Valdimir follows me out and I realize he is walking me to my car. But when we get out it is raining hard so he takes his coat off to hold like a canopy over my head. I make a couple of half-hearted attempts to get him to stop and then figure — what the heck, contemporary, old world gents are few and far between. ■

Photographs by Synapse Productions



Fashion: Preceding Page, left to right, Evening top in tissue lamé with English net, net skirt with a dozen cloth roses enclosed/Evening top in satin, black lam
skirt/English net hip skirt and English net top. ● Poiret top and sheared skirt. Design by Lissa Rovetch and Kendall Nishimine. Photographs Lissa Rovetch. Fashions

►

●

hip huggers/Evening top in satin with black organza, silver garter set/ ■ Evening top, silver garter set/ ► Poiret top and sheared skirt/Satin tank top and pleated
HolCam. Hair by Victor. Makeup by Susan Pollyea. Sculpture by Kendall Nishimine. Studio courtesy of New Performance Gallery. Models: Gabriella, Carol, Cissel

THE REVIEWS

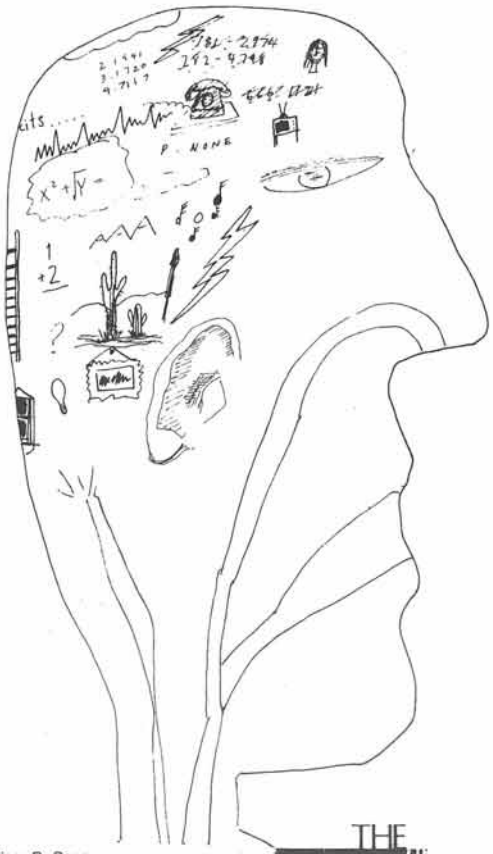


Illustration: R. Bang

THE VACANT LOTS REVIEWS

In all the complexities of the urban landscape, nothing appeals to me more than the vacant lot. Perhaps this is merely another obsession left over from childhood, like Oreos and Saturday morning cartoons (sometimes together.) But there is also something mysterious about a piece of land with nothing on it, as the rest of the city falls prey to the hordes of warlike developers. It's a clean slate for the imagination. Why does it remain empty? Who owns it? Some crazy Uncle Edgar, determined to block the progress of civilization in his own small way? A multinational corporaton that uses it to dispose of toxic waste in the dead of night? A coven of witches? A forgotten tribe of Indians?

The reasons why any given lot lies empty are surely more prosaic. There are other questions that are equally intriguing. Why does one of these overgrown places appear to be benign where another is sinister? Why does one fill up with empty quart bottles of Night Train Express? Why does another fill up with fennel and nasturtiums? It seems that they express the nature of their neighborhood as eyes do on a human face. How they are treated can tell you much about the people who live around them.

My neighborhood lot is clearly visible from one of my windows, and I watch it with the same intense curiosity with which others watch whales or birds or the stars. Surrounded by chain-link fence and full of garbage, one day the fence was torn down, either in preparation for some construction or by the sheer weight of the drunks leaning against it at night. Within 12 hours, someone had written "PEOPLE'S PARK" on the side of the building next to it. How optimistic and sad. Perhaps one of the remaining Haight Flower Children woke from a 15-year drug induced sleep and saw it as a place where we might join to dance and clap our hands. A few shreds of tie-dyed velvet appeared on the ground, and some hopeful demonstrators met there with banners calling for world peace. But the skin-heads were there too, and the Apocalypse Kids with blackened lips and chalk faces, and a few swastikas joined the wall. Sometimes living in the Haight is like watching James Dean grow old and fat.

Another of my lots is downtown, where a perfectly hideous building was leveled one day in a cloud of dust. For months, executives in pale yellow ties gazed openmouthed at the huge pile-drivers and back-hoes, mesmerized by the display of so much raw power. Each day I expected to see some construction, some single girder which would reverse the downward process of the project. Each day, the workers sank deeper and the rich smell of cold wet earth spread. One morning, as I paused to watch, I realized what was going on. They were building a hole! Oddly elated, I grinned at others gathered on the sidewalk. They haven't stopped yet, and the sounds of their labors waft up to those who stand peering down for a glimpse of their machinery. By my estimate, a quarter of a mile down and sinking fast.

The award for the most politically volatile vacant lot goes to the corner of Valencia and 16th, where graffiti cries out in outrage against corporate arson. Elaborate skeletons also dance across the wall. A ghost of the Mexican celebration — The Day of the Dead. Oddly, the words Fenway Park are also present. Some desperately homesick Sox fan driven to distraction by the antics of the Giants must have stopped there one night with a few beers inside him, and cried out his loneliness for everyone to see. What an expression of our complexities.

My favorite, though, has an odd personal history. When I first moved to the city, I found myself missing the landscapes and wildlife of the Rockies with what amounted to despair. Living in a tiny apartment too near the Tenderloin, the fog and rain of that first lonely winter oppressed me, and I greedily watched the antics of the pigeons in Huntington park as though they could replace the hawks and jays in my memory. One morning, while I was on one of my frenzied walks to the Bay, a filthy white rabbit hopped out of a lot on Malvina and twitched his nose at me. I stared at him as Alice must have at her white rabbit. Further investigation revealed a whole warren of equally dirty bunnies, grazing in complete serenity on a steep hillside between Nob Hill and Chinatown. "I could live here," I suddenly realized, "I could be happy in this place."

I went by this lot today, and a pair of pinkish ears waved to me in the brush. After all the lovers and forgotten friends in the last five years, they haven't left.

Alix Pitcher

THE MUSIC REVIEWS

Why have famous composers always lived hundreds of years ago in small foreign countries? Think of all the beloved operas, symphonies and chamber pieces that come from Europe before the World Wars. There are dozens of composers in the Bay Area working seriously in the tradition of Beethoven, finding a voice for their deepest concerns, spending years to develop their exquisite craft, and never thinking about the rewards. But almost no one listens.

Music lovers listen to pop, rock, jazz, folk and classical music. The classical audience is probably the smallest, and the new concert music listeners are a tiny fraction of that. Do you know anyone who puts on a tape of Gyorgy Ligeti after coming home from work? I don't. And he would be a superstar among composers, if there were such a thing; he writes stunning music and is widely respected. Most new concert musicians I know play bluegrass or Third World music at home — fun stuff. Why? Because real hardcore New Music can drive you crazy. I'm a composer, and I'm hooked on it, but I have to say that it often has all the peace and satisfaction of random noise in a 7-11 parking lot. Composers brilliantly capture the anomie of society by making the music shriek or whine or bore. There are many exceptions to this hostile aesthetic, especially in the Bay Area, but generally new music has alienated audiences, despite its compelling beauty and meaning for musicians.

There was a revolution in music in the first part of the century. It may be hard for some classical music lovers to believe, but standard-practice harmony, melody and rhythm went out the window. Everything was questioned, including the existence of music itself (as opposed to noise) sense of time, beginnings and endings, the concert setting, virtuoso playing, Western traditions — everything that before had been taken for granted. This questioning was a great thing, and cleared the way for a potentially powerful new music. There is a wonderful moment in a piece by John Cage, which vividly shows the necessity of this questioning. Dvorak's symphony, *From the New World*, is playing intermittently on a lo-fi record player, alternating with Cage's unpretentiously beautiful music for prepared piano. The piano music is at once simple, exotic, and fresh as the devil. In comparison, the Dvorak seems to be inexplicably ranting about some forgotten Victorian idea, as relevant to us as a corset. No matter how timeless a great classic is, it can never speak to us in the same fresh way that a new piece can.

I find it frustrating and sad that audiences are missing the excitement that new music has to offer and that composers write with so little audience support. Hearing Phillip Glass' score to the film *Mishima* gave me a twinge, because it had subtlety and magic that are usually absent in commercial sound. It made me think of all the local composers that are even more subtle and magical who audiences should be paying more attention to. The Bay Area is an amazingly fertile spot for new music, and it doesn't seem right that much of this activity is unknown. We are a center here for World Music, electronic and computer music, Minimalism, sound-text music, performance art, women composers, the "New Tonality" and the "New Romanticism." Bay Area residents have a right to be proud.

We composers are partly to blame for our small audiences. I think we have left behind some common sense in our pursuit of new ideas and independence. For instance, every child knows that harmony is sweet and good. And a rhythm that sets bodies shivering and dancing is clearly a gift from heaven. I don't know whether it's the voice-like inflections of melodies, or the intimations of natural laws we hear in the harmonic series, or the sympathetic vibrations that rhythms set up in us, but we do have a response to music besides the purely intellectual. I can understand the intelligent composer's fear of commercialism and sentimentality, but I think it's only natural for audiences to want more than partial satisfaction from music.

There are composers here in the Bay Area writing music that combines the energy of pop, the sensual beauty and polish of classical music, and the intellectual honesty and experimentation of new music. New music concerts are often produced, and it pays to ask around because they can occur at unpredictable times and places. I know, though, that it's only a matter of time before audiences and composers find out about each other.

Here is a brief list of places to hear new music:

KPFA Radio . . . The Center for Contemporary Music (C.C.M.) at Mills College, and the Mills College Music Department . . . The San Francisco Conservatory — a group called Composers Inc. sponsors a new music series . . . New Langton Arts . . . New and Unusual Music Series — sponsored by the S.F. Symphony . . . Advance Arts — a series produced by UBU Inc. in San Francisco (call 387-4087 for information) . . . The Berkeley Symphony Orchestra . . . The Bay Area Women's Philharmonic . . . The S.F. Contemporary Music Players . . . Bay Area New Gamelan (B.A.N.G.) in Oakland/Berkeley (call 530-4553) . . . The Kronos Quartet.

This list is just a beginning. I would also recommend hearing anything by Terry Riley or Lou Harrison, two well-known local masters.

Alexis Alrich

THE BOOK REVIEWS

At some point in my early academic career I either volunteered (which seems unlikely) or was forced to stand in front of my class and deliver a report on Custer's Last Stand. Being of the Draw-Lots-Of-Maps-and-Extemporize school of report giving, I loaded up with colored pencils and poster board and struck off for the public library, confident that an hour with the Encyclopedia Britannica would yield enough information to get me by. Names and numbers, I thought, a couple of military terms, an anecdote--then the rest of the afternoon would be mine. I d n't know that I was headed for one of the great intellectual shocks of my life (the first of which was discovering that I had toes.)

Heavily sedated by years before the educational mast, I believed that there had to be one simple and definitive account of the battle at the Little Big Horn. The encyclopedia's version was sketchy and quite unsatisfactory. Scanning others, I noticed that significant details varied. One book would suggest that Custer had been a dangerous madman. The next would paint him as a military genius with spectacularly bad luck. Some accounts could only agree on the names of the leading characters. One particularly vivid report would be dismissed by another as apocrypha. Smoke began to come out of my youthful ears. The report I ended up giving was remarkably garbled, my maps didn't make much sense, and I got a "D" for the whole endeavor. I washed my hands of Custer on the spot, and my interest died with my report card.

Only to be resurrected last year by the appearance of a book called *Son of the Morning Star*, by Evan S. Connell. I read it first in one great gulp, ensconced in a hammock on my parents' porch in New Mexico. Brothers and sisters would walk by, extending invitations to go back-packing, swimming, flying. "Nnhh" I would grunt back, sounding a bit like an Unkpapa squaw. Those foolish enough to linger would be forced to listen to outbursts beginning with "Listen to this!" And when I was finished, I went back and read it again.

This is history at its best. If I say that this book will change you, it sounds like grossest hyperbole. But Connell shatters whatever misconceptions you might have about life on the American frontier and replaces them with an understanding of how weird and difficult it must really have been. Listen to this!

"Then there was Mrs. Nash, who joined the Seventh in Kentucky and followed the regiment north to Fort Lincoln. Invariably she wore a veil, or a shawl pinned beneath her chin, and she is described as being rather peculiar looking. John Burkman, Custer's orderly, said she was a good laundress, a good nurse, and a good midwife, always in demand to "chase the rabbit" when a woman was expecting. Her next-to-last husband, a quartermaster clerk named Clifton, was known as a jolly fellow until he got married. After the ceremony, however, Clifton seldom laughed and a few days before the term of his enlistment expired he deserted.

Her last husband was a private named Noonan. They lived together in obvious bliss on Suds Row east of the Fort Lincoln parade grounds, but while he was away on a scouting expedition she sickened and died. Just before graduating to a better world, she asked her friends to bury her without the usual cleaning and dressing. They refused. They would not hear of such a thing. Lo and behold, when two of them set about this mournful task they perceived that the much-married laundress, seamstress, nurse, baker of delicious pies, and popular midwife was not female. Burkman and several other troopers were gathering flowers on the prairie for the funeral wreath when a laundress hurried out of the Noonan quarters with this extraordinary bit of information. Said Burkman: 'We was flabbergasted.' "

Connell also uses his talents as a novelist and poet to flesh out the caricatures we have come to accept as George Armstrong Custer, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and those lesser but equally crucial figures Majors Benteen and Reno, Rain, Gall, Black Elk and yes, even someone named Little Big Man. He makes nothing up. Instead he weaves a rich fabric of diaries, military inquiries, letters, and reminiscences to bring these diverse men to life. He makes you understand that at their worst, they were only men. Sitting Bull--something of a ladies man. Major Reno--an unhappy alcoholic who chafed under the command of the exuberant and occasionally obnoxious Custer. Crazy Horse-- the mystic. Major Benteen--Captain Kangaroo with a taste for blood.

This is a bloody tale, and one worth contemplating. The American cavalry was frequently responsible for the same monstrosities as the Indians. Some of the incidents recorded in this book might remind you of Vietnam, and there are some striking similarities. When a man is removed from what he understands as being the civilized world, and realizes that he will probably die, he seems to become capable of anything. Most of the men in the 7th cavalry were Irish immigrants who were attracted to the Army only because working for the railroad was much worse. Listen to this! The suicide rate in the army at that time was 8 percent. Three times that of the British Army, who were up to their ears with other infuriated natives in countries they couldn't begin to call their own. The American cavalry took scalps, ears, sexual organs both male and female, and despised the Indians because they did the same. Nothing changes.

And in the center of all this rides that most enigmatic and flamboyant figure, George Armstrong Custer. The darling of the American public at the time of his death, his image has changed completely over the years. We have come to accept the idea that he was a pompous, sadistic ass who deserved what he got. Connell exposes the man behind these disparate myths with humor and kindness, mixing criticism and admiration in equal doses. The story has it that when Custer first looked down on the largest gathering of hostile Plains warriors ever assembled in this country (by conservative estimate, 2000 of them and all hopping mad), he waved his hat and yelled, "Yahoo! We got 'em boys!" His scraggly troop of 230 men must have thought he was mad, and it certainly does seem the act of a lunatic. But Connell points out that this had always been the way Custer fought, especially during the Civil War, and had been encouraged to do so by his superiors. He was, as we all are, a product of his time and a victim of his character.

Son of the Morning Star is greater than the sum of any of its parts. Stylistically, it has a plasticity that is unusual in historical writing. It's fun to read, even when what you are reading is harsh and tragic. It's also available in a paperback edition at $8.95, which seems to me to be a small price to pay for something that will change the way you think.

Alix Pitcher

THE FOOD REVIEWS

Meals after murder. In Jim Thompson's novel POP. 1280, after committing a murder the night before, the agreeably evil protagonist eats a breakfast of approximately six fried eggs over easy, five pieces of breakfast meat, an entire pot of coffee and ten bisquits with jam.To him this is a modest meal.He has committed worse crimes than murder. This guy is BAD, but loveable. To ease his inflated guilt, he eats with gusto. This may seem strange, but is is something that occurs yearly for all of us.

We must eat with gusto from the end of November until the beginning of January. For this two-month period, gluttony becomes legal and insisted upon. Buffet tables bow with the weight of giant meals, and you are obligated to eat. You never asked for the red and green M&Ms, but, of couse, you must eat them when they sit in front of you on the coffee table in that santa-shaped dish. And the chex mix, and the turkey, and the stuffing, and the two or three kinds of potatoes in the same meal, and a bit of each of the five desserts, and the four liqueurs, and. . .Even if you cannot afford such extravagances, you are impelled to by cultural forces unseen.

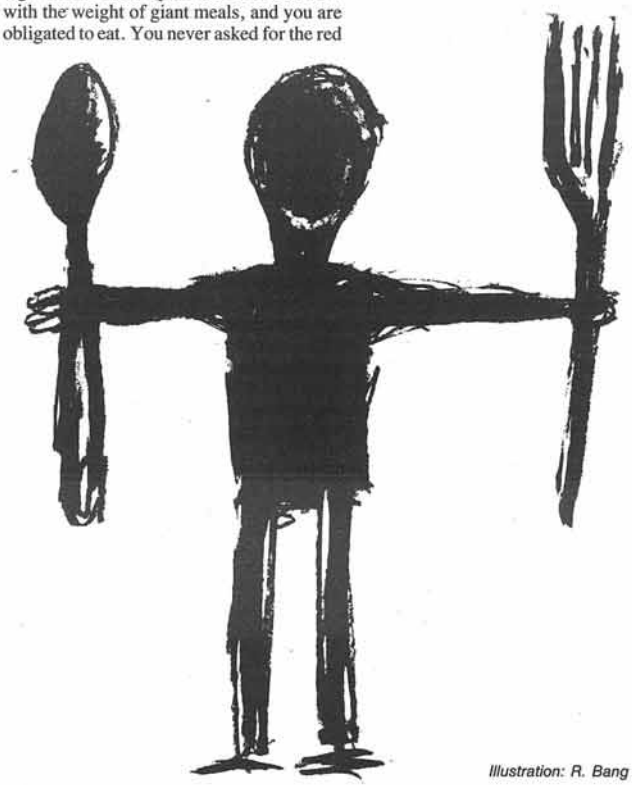


Illustration: R. Bang

It is a cultural, religious obligation — a feverish ritual that cannot be avoided. For those two months we are thrust into a test of the spirit. The divinity of your physical presence is determined by your ability to survive this period of gluttonous hibernation. Those who are truly blessed show no external signs of their participation in every feasting ritual and remain svelte. Those who are thin and sinful begin to slip slightly and show modest signs of their ways.The true test falls upon those who rest on a line between health and divinity, they either remain strong and unchanged or cross the line and fall into the porky post-zoftig stage. It is a weakness that is cast forth as an example to us all. They must bear their weight like a cross. Santa gave them ten pounds for Christmas.

If there is not a weight gain there are always hangovers and indigestion. That horrible feeling that your stomach has inflated to a point it cannot accommodate. You wiggle and squirm like a sausage inside of pants. What began as a relaxed quest for pleasure ends up causing pain that makes you writhe in your bed and wish you'd never done it. Bromides from god are the immediate repentance. You swear your loyalty and truly wonder how it ever happened in the first place. The odds are against you that you'll be compelled to have your head at the foot of the toilet by the end of the next party — worshipping in the home altar.

To further the abnormality of this eating period are bizarre quantities of leftovers. At what other time of year can breakfast turn into two pieces of pumkin pie, corn casserole, and eggnog? Or an entire day's sustenance the box of cookies and See's candies you got as a Christmas bonus? These are days that see blood sugar levels and moods fluctuate like the mountain range of mashed potatoes you consumed over the past two months. You antagonize your friends and loved ones only because the thought of buying more food makes you just as sick as eating what you just have.

There are no alternatives to this ritual, there is no escape. Good cheer invariably turns into a raging Bacchanal. You eat and drink shamelessly for two months in the name of friendship, goodwill, and religion — and end up fat, sick penniless, and feeling guilty. For ten months you pray no one notices the mark the holidays have left upon your flesh, while you repent by paying bills, dieting, exercising, and feeling morose.

Brace yourselves.

Glen Helfand

SCULPTURE

BOBBI COOK-BEDELL

I found my bicycle (I didn't know I had one) in the same place I must have left it. Which enables me to remark that, crippled though I was, I was no mean cyclist, at that period. This is how I went about it. I fastened my crutches to the cross-bar, one on either side, I propped the foot of my stiff leg (I forget which, now they're both stiff) on the projecting front axle, and I pedalled with the other. It was a chainless bicycle, with a free-wheel, if such a bicycle exists. Dear bicycle, I shall not call you bike, you were green, like so many of your generation. I don't know why. It is a pleasure to meet it again. To describe it at length would be a pleasure. It had a little red horn instead of the bell fashionable in your days. To blow this horn was for me a real pleasure, almost a vice. I will go further and declare that if I were obliged to record, in a roll of honour, those activities which in the course of my interminable existence have given me only a mild pain in the balls, the blowing of a rubber horn — toot! — would figure among the first. And when I had to part from my bicycle I took off the horn and kept it about me. I believe I have it still, somewhere, and if I blow it no more it is because it has gone dumb . . . What a rest to speak of bicycles and horns.

From the Novel *Molloy* by Samuel Beckett

All photographs by Stefano Massei

A NIGHT ON THE HIGH TIDE

Photographs by Heather McCollom

As many of us know, a "night on the town" in San Francisco isn't what it used to be. The days when a thriving live music scene united and sparked people to create and rebel against the rigid and beauracratic social, political and artistic institutions have long since gone. Today's generation needs a different kind of fuel to function. As we all know, that fuel is money.

As the conservative tide of politics and culture rolls through America, those with new money and saleable commodities leap like lemmings into the endless neon nights in the ever present "urge to merge." One of the social institutions that propagates this primal and cultural existentialism is the all-night-multi-storied-adult-entertainment-complex, or nightclub.

Fueled by money earned in downtown offices, the gentrified remains of the Haight, North Beach, Union Street and in the endless suburban sprawls of the Bay Area, today's hep swinger thrives in this complex of high-tech interiors, with "modern" music, static art and multi-screen video monitors projecting rapid-fire images of collective pop cultural absurdities.

San Francisco, long a city where "anything goes," is encouraging the development of a South of Market entertainment district by zoning it as a playground for up and coming executives and media moguls to be housed in the now proposed China Basin area. Using artists as the primary drawing card, this area is rapidly becoming a place where capitalism will replace conceptualism, where fashion will replace style and where artiness will replace art. The Manhattanization of San Francisco has brought us many of these multi-storied-adult-entertainment-complexes and with them all the worst elements of New York's corporate nightclub scene.

High cover charges, selective door policies, separate entrances for the privileged, V.I.P. Lounges (drug rooms), and all the other trappings of a modern day social caste system are all combined to form a society within a society.

There are several ways this is done. The first is by the intimidation of waiting and standing in line to be "picked-over" by a doorman hired to bring in "the right crowd" based on dress, physical attractiveness and social position. Once inside, he separates the have's from the have nots, giving the impression that we should all have money to burn and if not, we shouldn't be out.

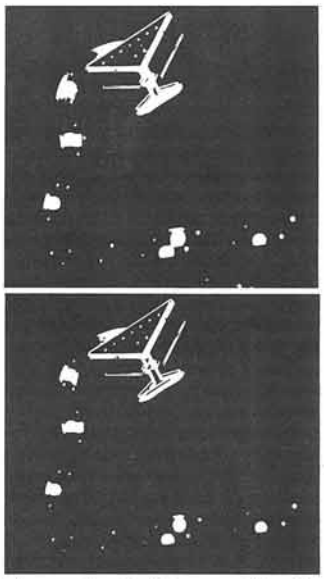
Inside, patrons are subjugated to an all out assault on visual and audio senses by film, video, fashion and art. Clubowners oftentimes import actual artists into the complex to give us the feeling that we're all part of a very "special" environment.

Once the club goer has passed through the initial stages of entrance and initiation, a formulated and totally controlled environment reinforces the image of the individual as a wealthy, cultured, fashion conscious social swinger and part time art patron. The ideal patron sees himself as a youthful entrepeneur, well aware of the latest trends in fashion, music, video and art.

The all-night-multi-storied-adult-entertainment-complex is an exercize in social fascism and cultural existentialism. In it the patron is reduced to an observer, a specimen in a truly non-participatory environment where everything, including the ambience, is provided for. What the nightclub creates is a place where money, fashion, art and technology are used not as tools to create, educate, entertain and interact but as ends in themselves designed to reinforce the illusion of attractive, well attired, self assured cultural debutantes who've made it to that safe secure world of middle America.

THE TOWN

By Steve Parr



One of the truly pathetic illusions that has been created is the idea that without a "playground," without a giant multi-storied entertainment complex, we will all starve for companionship and entertainment.

There are however, places where people can meet, interact and actually have fun. Places where the ambience is created not by technology or social Darwinism but by the patrons themselves. San Francisco, once known for its Barbary Coast, Newspaper Row, and Tenderloin nightlife still has dozens and dozens of bars, lounges and neighborhood hangouts where locals can drink, rendezvous and interact. While many places are being replaced by fast food outlets and video stores, many still thrive and play an active role in providing a meeting place for local friends and neighbors to relax and enjoy a good drink and good conversation. Many lounges once provided entertainment in the form of lounge singers, piano players or exotic dancers. A few still do.

While such places still exist, they are fast becoming scarce and financially impractical. One of the few great places left was The Lost Weekend on Taraval. Its recent remodeling included tearing out the booths, removing the live organist and even going so far as to take down the picture of Ray Milland (star alcoholic from the film "Lost Weekend"), replacing all this with formica tables, video games-and — you guessed it — big screen TV for 49ers games.

While places like The Lost Weekend have gone the route of the Pago Pago, The Carnival Club, The Luck Spot and the Kit-Kat Cocktail Lounge of yesteryear, Jerry and Johnny's, McCarthy's, Tide Inn, Li Po, the Buddha and the Persian Aub Zam Zam still exist as remnants of an era when everyone had their favorite neighborhood bar.

Jerry and Johnny's is one of the few still existing South of Market Street bars from an era when there were dozens of hangouts for newspaper men. Having recently relocated, Jerry and Johnny's still has an all-American atmosphere with cheap drinks, straight talk and an all hit jukebox that probably hasn't changed since the 40s. Photographs of patrons and old time celebrities line the wall. The thing that makes Jerry and Johnny's so great is its primal funkiness — a place to drink, swap lies and listen to the greats like Frank, Bing and Ella.

McCarthy's, located in the Mission, has perhaps one of the biggest bars in the city. Hardly ever full, (except on St. Patricks Day) this is an Irish bar through and through and along with the Dovre Club on 18th St. is one of the last surviving remnants of the Irish presence in the now heavily Latino and Asian Mission District.

McCarthy's is a roomy, flourescent lit bar with an assortment of locals, elders and drop-in friends. While in there several years ago drinking Irish whiskey, my date and I realized we were low on money. Resigned to drinking the cheap stuff we began ordering bar whiskey. The bartender, being a man of culture and refinement, insisted we drink the good stuff — for the price of the cheap.

The High Tide, like many of the old lounges still left in San Francisco, is a gériatric bar replete with kitsch ornamentation from another age — a neon-lit marquee featuring a bubbling cocktail glass, side-slit cylindrical spots over each booth and a life-preserver with the words "High Tide" near the bar. The High Tide is typical of the many small intimate lounges which once filled the Tenderloin. Filled with locals, drifters and the occasional drunkard, this place has the feel of an era when everyone knew the bartender by name and credit was readily extended.

Li Po in Chinatown is an incredibly ornate spot long since past its prime but holding up quite well considering the contemporary alternatives. The cave-like entrance leads into a dimly lit room with a curving bar, balconies (off limits) and a huge faded paper lantern. The bar is heavily stocked with a half dozen cognacs; and features strong tropical drinks like Passion Highballs, Singapore Slings and Shanghai Loves.

The jukebox, next to an ancient Triple Play pinball game (all girl baseball), has Don Ho, Shirley Bassey, Peggy Lee, Judy Garland, Sam Cooke, the Isley Brothers, and other offbeat gems from who knows when. Since the Li Po is empty most of the time, it's a great place to meet friends and take in the comfortable surroundings of another world. The last time I was there the owner offered to sell me the place.

The Buddha, across the street from Li Po, is another small, dimly lit bar with a bamboo awning and blue and orange lighting. A simple drinking place for local Chinese, the Buddha is a fairly low-key bar. The basement, where the bathrooms are located, sports a maze of tunnels and the occasional shadowy figure bringing to mind sinister tales of gambling and opium dens in the San Francisico of the past.

The Blue Lamp on Geary goes on promptly at 5:00 p.m. everyday. The bar, once a sleek lounge and piano bar, has fallen on hard times. The piano is still there but the fake fireplace, hideous sofas and chairs and the array of trophies, pennants and pinups makes one realize the Blue Lamp has seen many owners since its early days as a classy piano bar and lounge. Here there is an incongruous amalgamation of misfits, alcoholics and senior citizens and a jukebox that features the likes of Hank Snow, Big Joe Turner, Bobby Darin, Benny Goodman, Tina Marie, Jimi Hendrix and Romeo Void. All of this gives the place an upbeat sloppy feel — like drinking beer and listening to old records in your parents tackily decorated basement bar.

The Persian Aub Zam Zam is one of the best kept secrets around. Known primarily to those in the Haight, this place has been around for a long, long time and is a perfect example of the low key ambiance and intimacy a place can afford. Zam Zam, with its dimly red lit interior and ancient mural behind the bar has not changed a bit since its inception. The owner, however, neither desires nor encourages new patrons. A trip here could mean a long wait at the bar without a nod of recognition or service from the owner. But he makes a remarkable martini, and if he takes an interest in you this Turkish oasis can provide a smooth aura of tranquility and serenity.

All of the places mentioned above have their own clientele. Since most of these bars and lounges are primarily small owner operated, many of the patrons are on a first name basis. While a newcomer can oftentimes be considered an intruder, after repeated visits (or even after a few drinks) many people open up and the camaraderie of old friends from many cultures begins to develop.

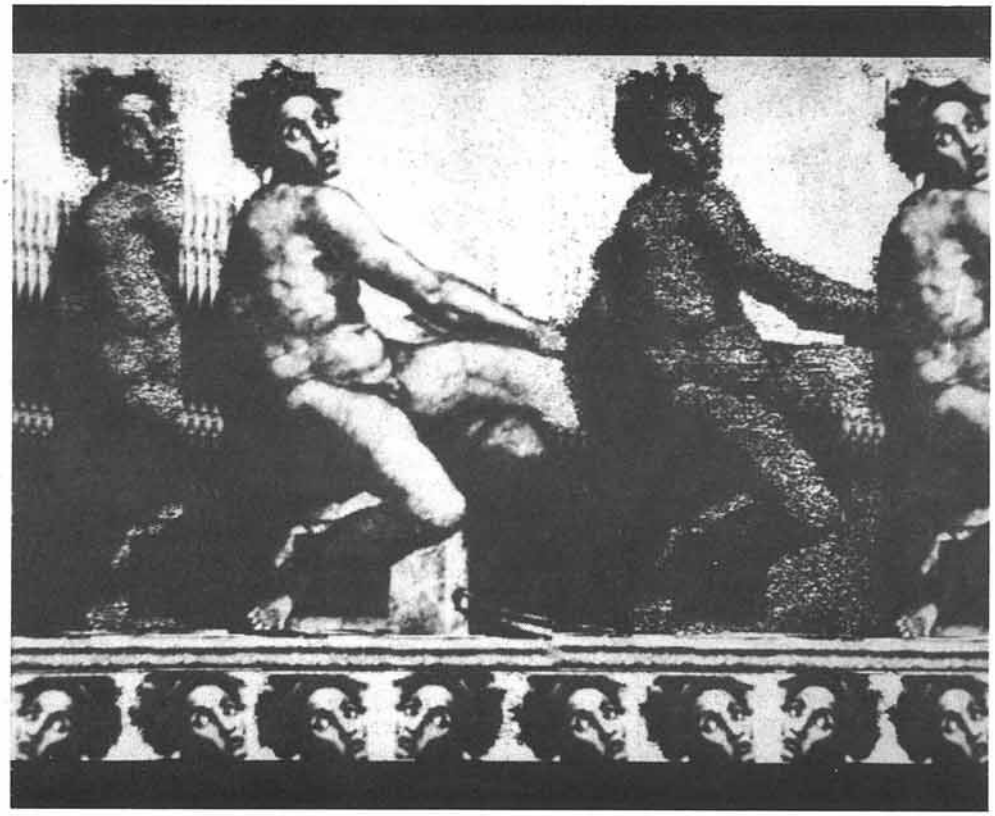
A few years back I took a "Reno Fun Trip" with some patrons of a now defunct Market Street geriatric bar. Despite the differences in age, cultures and socio-economic factors, I managed to not only enjoy myself but to appreciate the diversity and complexity of other people many of whom have long since given up the parading and performances of self-affirmation and have simply learned to enjoy and accept their lives for what they are.

While many people may not feel comfortable in these time worn bars because of age, culture etc., we should realize that these places were once patronized by people very much like ourselves in an era when intimacy, conversation and entertainment were sought after and provided for.

There are, however, places where people can meet, interact and actually have fun.

The list of these places is endless: the 500 Club, the Starlight Room, Trad'r Sam, the M&M, the Nite Capp, the Hotel Utah and more. We don't need more high-priced socially-exclusive clubs — we need a place where we can get a drink, good conversation and a new outlook.

We can expect many new nightclubs to open in the next few years and as the saying goes "The more things change, the more they remain the same." The cutting edge of culture does not lie in the fern bars, so called "art bars" or the corporate dance palaces but in the places where people can think, converse and exchange ideas whether it's at a sleazy bar, a house party or a trip through the lounges of yesterday. ■



Carlos Arguello began as a silkscreen artist dreaming of his silkscreens in motion. He says, "technology seemed like a fast-moving train, and I felt like I had to jump on before I was left behind." Carlos now creates video animation and still images using computers.

He works at Synthetic Video, a commercial animation studio, using their computers and software for his own artwork. His work has been shown at the Mill Valley Film Festival, the SIGGRAPH conference in San Francisco, The FRANK video show at ATA gallery, and his own show in Guatemala City. He will show new work next year in exhibitions on technology and art, in Germany and at the University of Santa Clara.

Arguello combines abstraction with images from disparate cultures and centuries, and avoids the geometric images of animation illustrating technical processes. Classical Greek sculpture, angels, nature, tribal life, and modern faces all appear in his work.

AG: How do you choose the images in your work?

CA: It starts with a feeling, just a feeling that's not verbal or formal. Then I

ON SCREEN DREAMS

By Ann Garrison

Computer generated photographs by Carlos Arguello

look for images which are visually pleasing and emotionally powerful for me.

AG: Why do you use such an eclectic collection of images?

CA: Sometimes we joke around here (at Synthetic Video) that because the world is coming to an end, all the best images from all the apexes of human culture are being recycled.

AG: A sort of ritual artistic signing off?

CA: That's the joke. But I don't really want to be a pessimist. What I really think is that this is a period of confusion because technology is advancing so fast that whole cultures and people live in radically different worlds . . . technological and nontechnological. I come from Nicaragua which is a poor country, and the images of that world are strong in my mind. We had one culture and one religion. My own family was atheist, so I always had some detachment, in spite of all the ritual I went through in Catholic school. Still I was shocked when I came to San Francisco and found such a mix of religions and cultures. People here don't grow up with really powerful religious symbols. They grow up with corporate logos — McDonald's, IBM — and industrial design. Now I'm here working with high technology, and I like to work with the contrast between the two worlds. I also like to use classical imagery created centuries before the technology I'm using.

AG: What the critics are calling postmodernism seems to be a return to representation, a combination of representation and abstraction, and a ransacking of other artistic traditions for symbols and images.

CA: It's true we're not creating many new symbols. The artists called postmodern all seem to be looking back. The same thing seems to be happening in fashion.

AG: Why do you avoid using images of technology itself?

CA: I like to use images which would catch anyone's attention, not just images illustrating technological breakthroughs. A lot of computer generated imagery looks like conversation between engineers. Lots of less technical people aren't interested because that's all they've seen.

AG: Who do you think of as your audience?

CA: I have no idea. Its still to early to say. The only places showing computer art now are universities, conferences, a few museums, and a few galleries. Sometimes I get depressed because the audience is so small.

Working commercially, I created the first computer-generated wine label — one small historical moment.

AG: What do you think of the future of the medium?

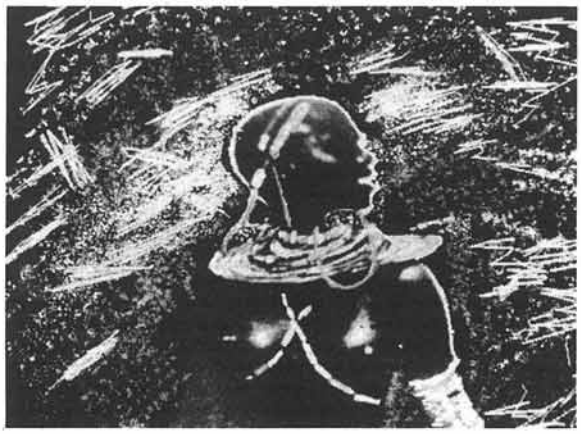
CA: I think there's a whole generation coming up that's not willing to wait for two months to get a final image. With electronics, you can see an image in seconds. But its still a very early period, sort of like the first days of photography. Who knows? As we get more sophisticated and technology becomes less expensive — say 50 years from now — people may have multiple video screens on their walls instead of paintings. ■

Traditional animators draw and photograph each frame of film or videotape. Computer animators compose key frames and program their computers to create frames between them.

Computer programs may include object sizes, object colors, types of motions, durations of motions, changes in lighting, changes in the viewer's vantage point, and object transformations (boxes rounding into spheres, horizontal lines rising as script, or Ronald Reagan's face becomeing Mikhail Gorbachev's).

Two dimensional computer animation can be created by an artist using a "paint system." The artist draws on a paint system's tablet and animates drawings with a built-in package of programs. The computer, however, can recreate only the side of the object the artist has drawn.

In three dimensional animation, the object is mathematically modeled in computer memory. The computer "conceives" the object in ideal space and recreates all its sides as the object moves. Some paint systems now offer elementary 3-D effects, but complex 3-D work still requires an artist-programmer or collaboration between an artist and a programmer. New technology will make 3-D techniques more and more accessible to artists working alone.



Immaculate Conception

five thousand years ago
my young and beautiful face
i am lovely with erosion
i have a head full of earth and whispers
heaven where a bed is cheap

i have slept on rocks
i have slept on ocean

where these things are concerned i have no opinion

my mother is the phantom
in a dream full of lies
i answer calmly with no emotion
these hands full of earth

i who have rarely existed
in a state of relaxed euphoria

i who am detached
i who am weak

five thousand years ago
my young and beautiful face
i am charming and delightful
and fun at parties
i have a head full of grass and sand
i have slept on a bed of moss

my mother is the queen of estrangement
my mother is the dirt of oblivion

where these things are concerned i have no emotion

i who am oblivious
i who am eternal

Andrew Jackson

ROVA

SAXOPHONE DIPLOMACY

IV

ROBERTO BARAZZUOL

By Steve Cassal

ROVA goes to forbidden places. That's true of the saxophone quartet's innovative musical style, and also true of the locations the San Francisco-based group has visited.

Musically, the quartet is as far from the beaten path as you can get. Although their sound is jazz-like, it doesn't fit the popular conception of jazz, and individuals who bring traditional jazz expectations to their concerts are sometimes confused.

Unable to capture a large domestic audience, ROVA has toured abroad extensively. They traveled to Eastern Bloc nations Hungary and Czechoslovakia for a "musical summit" this past summer, and two years ago they brought their own brand of "saxophone diplomacy" to Moscow, Leningrad and Riga in the Soviet Union. On two separate occasions, they proved that the Iron Curtain can indeed be penetrated — by music.

As you might expect, ROVA is an unusual aggregate of individuals. The group's name is an acronym derived from the surnames of members John Raskin (baritone), Larry Ochs (tenor), Andrew Voight (alto) and Bruce Ackley (soprano). They are similar: all are white males in their 30s, of almost exactly the same height, and all came out of the 60s listening to a lot of jazz, rock and blues. They are also different: all were born in separate quadrants of the zodiac, and their personalities range from friendly to thorny.

To understand ROVA's origins, you must go back to the heyday of the "free music" scene in San Francisco in the 60s and early 70s. During this period many Bay Area musicians were looking to express themselves in alternative forms, and there was a great deal of freedom and experimentation. But, as Ochs observes: "As time went on, the whole scene became just too loose and undisciplined. Sometimes you went to a concert and it felt like the musicians were just being exhibitionistic. It was, 'OK, we're playing, look at us.' There was no message, nothing to learn from it . . . you felt that if they weren't playing, they'd be in the nuthouse. I was looking for something more formal, more critical."

So was Bruce Ackley. "I was hearing jazz performers who would get high, then just blow. But most audiences weren't getting much out of this. They would get bored. I was particularly sensitive to that." Ackley wanted a group that could be disciplined without sacrificing abandon. He also wanted musicians who "weren't square" — who weren't so caught up in technique they couldn't be expressive. He made the necessary phone calls, and in 1977, ROVA was born.

Recognition has not come easily. While the quartet's 10 albums (several on their own label, Metalanguage) have been critically hailed, they haven't exactly gone platinum. Numerous awards have been received, but two have been in the "Groups Deserving Wider Recognition" category from Downbeat Magazine. Although they boast a core of enthusiastic supporters, it's fairly common for a few impatient drum-heads to walk out at the beginning of their concerts. They've struggled for recognition since they don't play familiar music, and their style is acoustic. But Rankin suggests a more subtle reason for the group's slow rise: "Our music is demanding. You have to listen, *really* listen. You have to be *active*. We move the forms around. There's not a simple melody you can hum. There's not a simple rhythm. You have to engage your mind and your ear at the same time."

The Music

It's no accident that ROVA's label is called Metalanguage. ROVA has developed their own language on the saxophone. That language includes atonalities, a substitution of "pulse" for meter and beat, and the exploration of new sonorities. The first time I heard it, it certainly sounded like a foreign language. I felt I needed an interpreter. But, just as an alien tongue can be understood by inflection, or by the emotion behind the words, so can you grasp ROVA's meaning. The more I heard, the more I understood. The group's eclectic style has been influenced by the rhythmic complexity of African drumming, the beauty of Indian classical improvisation and the economy of Japanese court music, in addition to American jazz greats like Duke Ellington and John Coltrane. But what's most striking about ROVA's music is its originality; much familiar metal may have been thrown into their forge, but they have hammered it into something entirely of their own making.

Though the music is jazz-like, it's probably different from any jazz you've ever heard. When most of us think of jazz, we tend to think of one guy who stands up with his horn, blows out a brutal series of hot licks, and then sits down so another fellow can do the same thing. ROVA is capable of such individual virtuousity, but they are more concerned with creating a single group voice. Moreover, the wild improvisation that is so much a part of the jazz mystique is balanced in ROVA by equal attention to composition.

Their music defies labels. According to Ochs, the quartet has been turned down by jazz organizations that consider their style "new music" and by "new music" organizations that classify them as a jazz ensemble. Now the foursome laugh at attempts to categorize them. "We don't play jazz, we don't even play music," says a smiling Ackley, "we play blueprints." That's an inside joke that requires explanation. After ROVA had gone through all the music reviewers at the Chronicle, they half-seriously talked about inviting the paper's other critics — food, fashion and architecture. Thus the "blueprint" comment. Ochs believes it would be best if people stopped trying to pigeonhole the group. "Let's just call it ROVA music," he says.

Because ROVA was designed to produce "serious" music, it's probably not surprising that some critics have complained that their music is too "intellectual" or "elitist." Ackley answers this charge, "We have an 'intellectual' way of putting things together. But we are very emotional about our ideas." Adds Ochs: "It's been argued that only "educated" people who know where our music is coming from can appreciate it. But we like to think our music can be appreciated on a variety of levels."

One of the most interesting of ROVA's many aspects is its use of extra-musical sources. The group draws on dance, poetry, film, literature and politics for inspiration. For example, a forthcoming album, "The Crowd," is based on the non-fiction book "Crowds and Power" by Nobel Prize-winning author Elias Canetti, probably best known for the novel "Auto Da Fe." Ochs describes how "The Crowd" was created and its relation to the Canetti text:

"We had been working on a piece for a long time, but it hadn't come together yet. It was just an encyclopedia of ROVA ideas at that point. Well, I had been reading "Crowds and Power" and so had the other group members. And the terms Canetti used in his book set off all kinds of images that related very closely to what we were trying to do in the piece. For example, he has a term, 'crowd crystals,' which refers to small groups of people who mill about and then come together to form a large crowd. By coincidence, we had a section in our composition where that's exactly what was happening *musically*. We started thinking about all of these ideas for crowds: slow crowds, fast crowds, etc. — and that led us to slow bands of sound that well up and disappear."

Ochs, an activist who marched on the Pentagon in 1968, also modeled his compositions on political situations. One piece, "That's How Strong," is a result of "the frustration and anger I felt at the Watergate hearings. Here was a leader, Nixon, who had changed the course of history through his flagrant disregard of our country's laws. That sent a disastrous message: That it's OK to say 'Fuck you' to everybody else." Another Ochs' piece, titled "Exiles," was inspired by an article he had read about a banished Russian.

Little did Ochs dream that ROVA would sojourn in that same Russia.

Were ROVA's motives for going to Russia political or musical? Probably a combination. "At the time Reagan was really playing the evangelist on the 'Russian menace,'" says Ochs. "He was cultivating all sorts of misunderstandings about the U.S.S.R.; that they're all bad, that we're all good. Well, we saw the trip as a chance for people to understand each other a little better . . . and also a chance to play in the 'other' place, the place few Americans ever reach."

Two years in the making, ROVA's U.S.S.R. visit was a victory over bureaucratic red tape and a victory of sorts over Cold War-type relations that had largely prevented cultural exchanges between the two superpowers. Because an officially sanctioned visit might have taken months to arrange, ROVA came to the Soviet Union as tourists. There was no delegation from the Kremlin waiting to meet them at Moscow International, no announcement in "Pravda." But ROVA did have the sponsorship of Sputnik, a student group which organized their concerts. They also had the support of Alexander Kan, one of the top Russian music critics, who invited the group to play in his country, and to bring their friends. That they did. The ROVA contingent included the 4 performing musicians, family, a video crew, a reporter from the Oakland Tribune, an art critic, a music composer and a couple of poets. Ochs termed it "a Noah's Ark of Artists."

Many ironies surrounded the tour. Perhaps the most glaring was that ROVA's invitation was based on a poll of Soviet music critics which named ROVA the top musical combo in the United States, ROVA had never been cited for such an award. Another irony: audiences *never* walk away from *any* kind of public gathering in the U.S.S.R., which meant that ROVA had finally found an audience that would hear them out.

Ochs calls the tour "the most emotionally packed 10 days of my life . . . There's just something in the air there. Something's going on. You know that feeling you get when you read a book by Dostoyevsky or Tolstoi? That's the feeling we got."

Moscow was the first stop. They played two concerts in a "Mechanics Building" (Union Hall), with audiences ranging from 600 to 900. Says Ochs: "It was packed. They'd open the doors two minutes before the show was supposed to start, and they'd just rush in."

Ochs says the response of the Russian spectators was "terrific. Which you could sort of expect. If there was only one jazz concert in San Francisco every six years, there'd be a pretty explosive reaction there, too."

Still, this was the Soviet Union. At the "first night" party for the group, they were taken to the back of a house with a crumbling driveway. "It was all very secretive, like something out of a John LeCarre novel," recall Ochs. "Inside, they were showing a British rock video." Such videos of course are "black market" items in Russia.

In Moscow the foursome heard an assortment of Russian jazz. There were "traditional" as well as "free" jazz groups. Says Ochs: "Some were very good, some were just derivative. Just like here. But we got a very strong sense that jazz was "underground" in the Soviet Union. The authorities are aware of it, but as long as it's not too popular, they permit it." How far this permission extends, it's hard to say. "If you were a young Russian and you picked up an instrument and said, 'I'm going to be a musician,' officials would probably look at you with distrust," suggests Rankin. "They'd say, 'We trained you to be a plumber or a tradesman or whatever.' In Russia you can't just play in a club or make a tape, then go to the local Aquarius Records and try to sell it. You have to go underground. They're not in your home telling you you can't practice. The pressure is exerted in other, more subtle ways."

ROVA members agreed that the most pressure they encountered was in Leningrad. There, it was learned that the group which had invited them, the Leningrad Contemporary Music Club, had been banned. Uh-oh. Says Ochs: "I think the authorities discovered what kind of music we'd be playing — which wasn't 'Midnight in Moscow.'

"It was tense," says Ochs. "We were warned by one of our guides that if we did our concert the people in the audience could be arrested. We were told that our video equipment could be seized. But, when we got to the site, we found that that was a false alarm. The authorities said they *wanted* the video equipment. So we went back and got it."

continued on next page

Continued from previous page

The final tour-stop was Riga (part of Latvia, which was annexed by the U.S.S.R. after W.W. II). ROVA put on two concerts, one for 1,000 people and the other in a small jazz-type "club" that seated about 120. They also performed aboard a boat for a small gathering.

Through Hat Art records, ROVA has released an album detailing their Soviet excursion: "Saxophone Diplomacy." The album cover is designed like a diplomat's portfolio, has a picture of Nixon meeting with Khrushchev and features such pointedly political songs as "Detente or Detroit."

ROVA also has produced a "Saxophone Diplomacy" videotape. When it was shown on PBS, it apparently surprised those people who hadn't suspected that Russians could laugh, or that the Soviet Union could be photographed in anything besides black and white.

Although the album and tape draw an obvious parallel to the famous U.S.-China "ping pong diplomacy," ROVA members downplay the comparison. "That was government diplomacy," says Rankin. "This was grass-roots diplomacy."

And how did "grass roots diplomacy" fare? Handsomely, by all accounts. Because ROVA was able to "get off the bus" and roam about with relative freedom, they got to talk with Soviet citizens, many of whom spoke English. Lasting friendships developed. ROVA found much in common with the Soviet people, who seemed as distrustful of their leaders as we are of ours. Perhaps the "other" place isn't so different, after all.

Eastern Bloc Countries

At times the visitors thought they were still in Moscow. "There were Russian soldiers on the street everywhere. And tanks and communist banners and red stars," says Esmerelda, Bruce's girlfriend, who accompanied ROVA on their tour of Soviet satellite nations in mid-June. "There were so many border guards we lost count. When you crossed into another country, the authorities would check your passport 10 times and look you over every time they did it."

How do Eastern Bloc citizens react to such pressure? Esmerelda says "There are people who buy into the paranoia and there are people who just say 'Fuck it' and do whatever they want. Those people are really admired over there."

And how did the people of Hungary and Czechoslovakia respond to the presence of four jazz musicians from the States? "The girls there reacted as if these guys were the Beatles," says Esmerelda. "They would line up after a concert and pick them off one by one."

ROVA's Iron Curtain tour was set up with the help of British promoter Nick Hobbs, whose organization, Rock In Opposition, specializes in sending avante-garde rock groups to Soviet satellites. Although ROVA obviously isn't a rock band, they *are* avante-garde, and Hobbs liked their music, so the trip was arranged. Unlike the Soviet tour, however, ROVA was not sponsored by a local organization, a fact the quartet would come to regret.

The itinerary featured three nights in Budapest, Hungary, and one-night stands in the Czechoslovakian cities of Brno and Prague. Of all the Eastern Bloc cities ROVA visited, Budapest solicited the widest range of comment. Says Ochs, "It was much freer than other Soviet satellite cities. Very loose. Almost like Western Europe." Esmerelda acknowledges all that, but adds: "That place was the Land of the Addams Family. All those incredible ancient mansions that are disintegrating."

In Bucharest Rova presented three concerts at a building Ochs describes as "characterless, Brick and glass. Like a modern U.S. elementary school." About 250 "enthusiastic" Hungarians attended each show, Ochs says. The highlight, says Ochs, was a jam session with two "fantastic" Hungarian saxophonists. Amazingly, the newly formed sextet improvised smoothly together and developed some "very interesting" joint products. Politicians, take note: true East-West collaborations *are* possible.

After the wonderful feelings of good will generated in Bucharest, ROVA traveled to Czechoslovakia, where jazz is illegal, according to Ochs. "We were outside the law. Officially we didn't exist. We were afraid they'd take our instruments away and throw us out of the country. There were no explicit threats on us, but we were traveling in a place where we didn't speak the language and didn't really understand the situation. We didn't know *what* would happen."

What happened, according to Ochs, was that "our concerts in Czechoslovakia were absolutely brutal. In Brno (pronounced Burrno; located in the central part of the country) the organizers didn't want to register us in a hotel. So they put us up in a rooming house for students. There was no food, and no sleep. It was very noisy and we were up all night. Finally we fell asleep at 6 a.m. But at 6:45 a.m. there was a loud buzz — it's a school, you know — and there were all sorts of announcements. We did the concert. But we were all pretty fried when we did it."

"After the concert," says Esmerelda, "They took us out to dinner at this ancient restaurant. It was like a dungeon. There were old oak tables and high-back chairs. They had a disco band. In the restaurant, when people got drunk they'd sing songs to the kind of alcohol they were drinking — The Vodka Song, The Red Wine Song, etc."

In Prague things were "unusual," too. "We took a bus to Prague, and there was a last-minute change of location," says Ochs. "We had to ride the subway 1½ miles outside of town, where there were just high-rises. It looked like the Bronx. 'Where the fuck are we?' we thought. Then we had to take another bus — even further. We were near a cornfield surrounded by high-rises. We were finally taken to a rec-room. It was 6 p.m. I asked one of the organizers, 'When's the concert.' He said: 6:05. And at exactly 6:05 the entire audience showed up en masse. They had met at a restaurant and come over to the show together.

"It wasn't our best concert. We hadn't showered in two days. We hadn't eaten. We weren't sure where we were, and we were exhausted. At 7:30 the show was over. I turned around to put my horn away — it took 5 minutes — and the entire audience had disappeared. Just like that. They didn't want it on their record that they were involved in activities 'inherently bad' for the people. There's just so much pressure on them..."

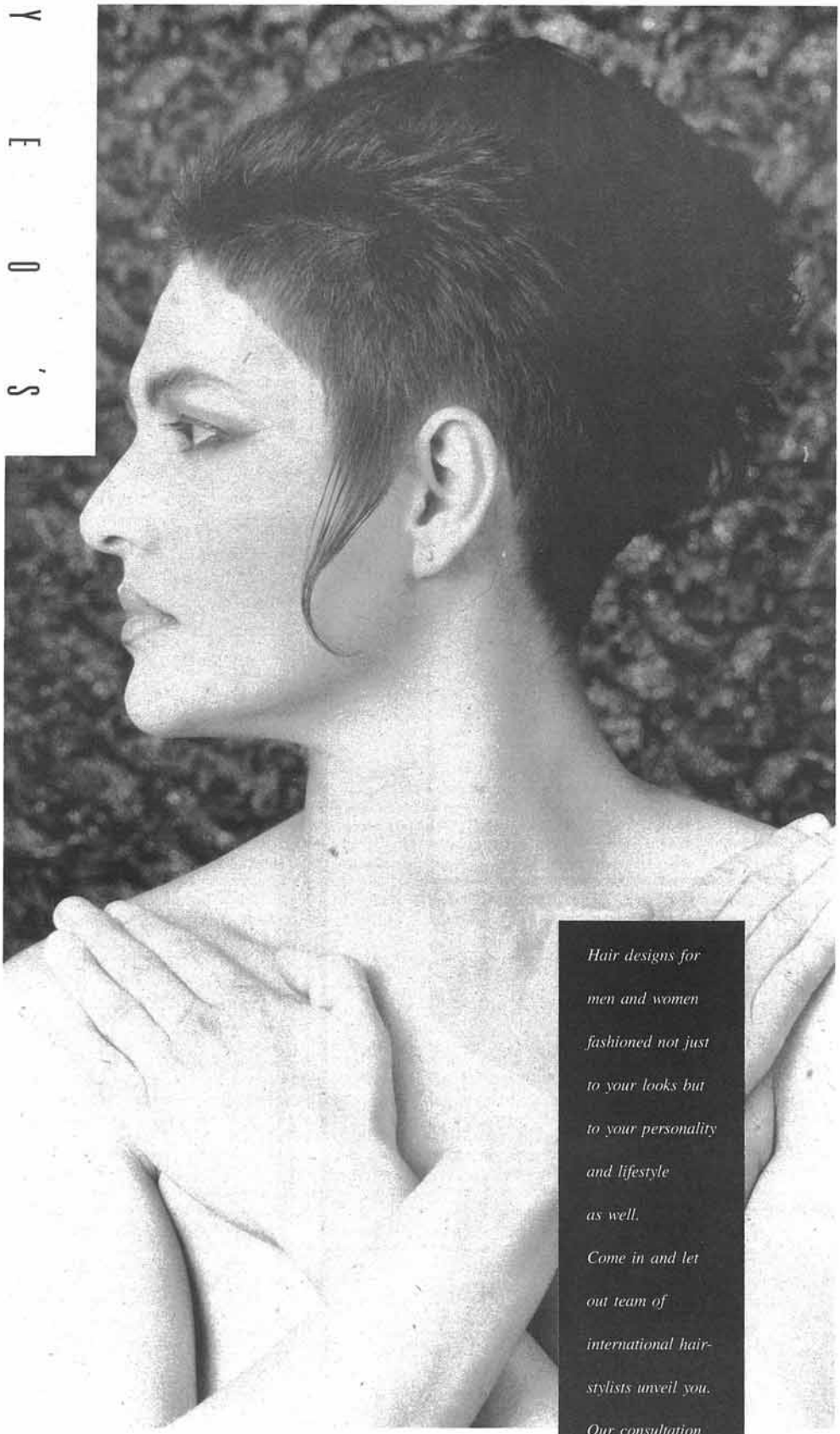
Nevertheless, ROVA found that the Hungarians and Czechs, like the Russians they had encountered on the "Saxophone Diplomacy" tour, were hungry for contact with the West. ROVA has mixed feelings about this. On the one hand they feel that cultural exchanges lead to mutual understanding. On the other hand, says Ochs, "I wonder if what ROVA's tour really did was hurry along the Westernization of the Soviet Union. The Soviets really want American culture, and not just ROVA, either. They want McDonalds, Coke, Levis... the whole goods. And if the doors open, what they'll get won't be ROVA. It'll be all those other things. I have to wonder if that's really positive."

Still, ROVA's overall view of both trips is positive. It was in Moscow, they say, that the group "jelled" and began to play as one. Not only did they find their identity behind the Iron Curtain; they also came to realize how truly 'American' that identity is. Observes Ackley: "One of the most revealing things we learned about ourselves is how American our music is. It's a blend of different voices. Four different things are always happening, but there's enough agreement so that it works — kind of like a democracy. Odd that it would take a couple of visits to Communist countries for us to realize that, isn't it?" ■

Their next concert is tentatively scheduled for June 27 at the Great American Music Hall.

YEO'S

HAIR DESIGN



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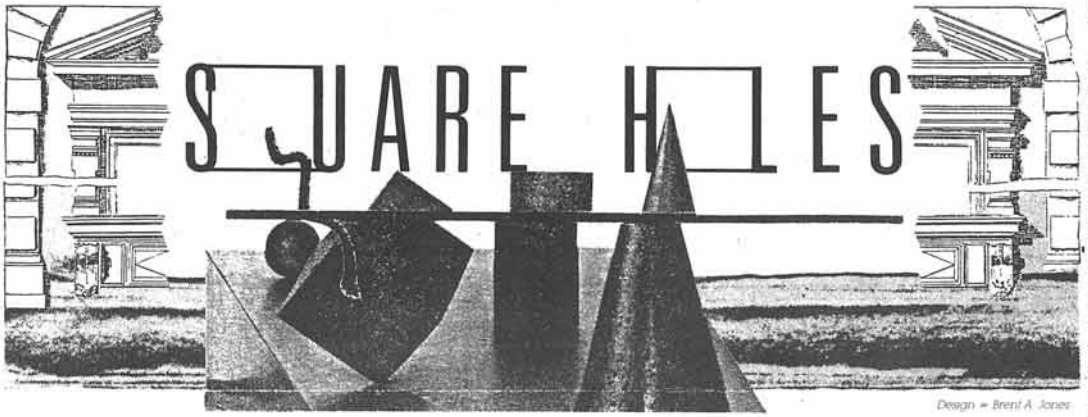

Design = Brent A. Jones

John Cage will lecture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on Jan. 14. He is the first speaker in the 1986 "Articulation" series. Can we save humanity and fulfill Buckminster Fuller's dream by marrying the computer age with the creative world? Go see Cage and find out! He is the chancemaster of composition.

Maryanne Amacher, another computer whiz who has collaborated with Cage in the past, is currently artist in residence at the Capp Street Project where she has created "Sound House/A Mini Sound Series" featuring six FREE Saturday evening concert performances. You can still catch the last two, "A Step Into It" Dec. 14 and "Jetsono" Dec. 21. Amacher has staged her dramatic sound environment throughout the house at 65 Capp Street, where one is consumed by huge projected images and larger than life sounds or seduced by electonic moans that sound as though they come from under the earth or beneath the sea.

Art professor **Joe Hawley** has spent the past year organizing "Sculpture on Campus," an art in public places program at San Francisco State University. The School of Creative Arts is undergoing a renaissance under the direction of the new dean August Coppola, who is in support of Hawley's project. The gallery committee has selected 10 sculptors to install large scale outdoor works at appropriate sites on the campus. All pieces will be installed by the opening of the 1986 Spring Semester and remain on view through June. This is an ongoing project, so proposals will be reviewed again in the Spring for Summer 86 installations.

Multi-media artist and new music composer **Terry Allen** has collaborated with the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company in the 1985 premier of "The Pedal Steal" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The piece will be shown in San Francisco at Theatre Artaud April 16-19 and 23-26. With 40s style costumes and neon lights, projected images and silhouettes, suitcases and beer cans, slapstick dance and the lazy languid movement of drugs and old motels — Terry tells his story: the fantasy and reality of an old pedal steal guitar players life on the road. The spectacular soundtrack was recorded in Santa Fe. Portions of it were heard in two concerts at Dance Theatre Workshop in New York, and resulted in rave review of the trio — Terry Allen on grand piano, Lloyd Maine on violin and Richard Bowden on guitar, bass, and pedal steal.

Filmaker-photographer **Chris Felver** has been taking portraits of America's contemporary poets for five years. The photos, along with holographs prepared by each poet, will be published as *The Poet Exposed* by Van der Marck Editions in April 1986. The riveting 20 x 24 inch portraits can be seen at the opening exhibition and publishing party at Gotham Books in New York. Felver also produced and directed the documentaries, "West Coast Beat and Beyond." which was recently aired on PBS Network WGBH in Boston, and "California Clay in the Rockies," aired locally last summer on KQED.

Photographers **Bob Dawson** and **Steve Johnson** have been observing the influences of agriculture and social change on the Central Valley. In July 86 the California Academy of Sciences will sponsor an exhibition of "The Central Valley Project," including photographs by Dawson and Johnson along with historic photos of the Central Valley. A book is forthcoming with writer Gerald Haslam, Professor of Literature at Sonoma State University, writing the text on the people of the Valley and their relationship to the landscape. Mervyn's and Skaggs have provided some of the funding needed for field work and a traveling exhibition throughout the Central Valley including the Fresno Metropolitan Art Museum.

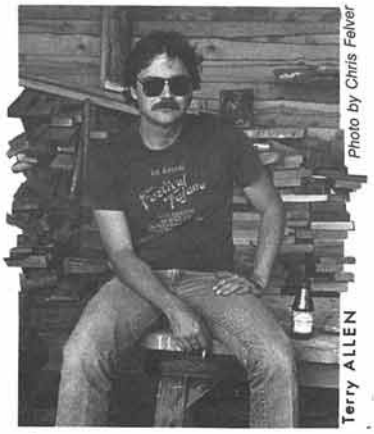
Photo by Chris Felver
Terry ALLEN

The City of San Francisco has finally challenged **Michael S. Bell's** potential on a couple of local projects. Aside from the successful plan he developed to clean the city's 63 pigeon-plagued monuments, Bell is also the first in-house director of the 40th San Francisco Arts Festival. He has been promised the chance to do it his way, forcing the outdated festival to catch up to a changing world. There will be no paintings on panels and no food or craft booths. The Civic Center Plaza will become a 30 piece sculpture garden and one major stage covered by a huge white geodesic unistructure which will accomodate the performing arts — featuring dance and mime on Friday, poetry and dramatic arts on Saturday and music on Sunday. Bell feels that the Arts Commission has never done much for San Francisco's poets in the 50 years of its existence, therefore he plans to pay special tribute to them on Saturday, Sept. 20, 1986. Dramatic readings for actors and playwrights are also being reviewed. Anyone interested in performing or reading, please send a sample of your work to Michael S. Bell at the San Francisco Arts Commission.

Linda Fleming is currently teaching a class in outdoor sculpture at the San Francisco Art Institute. She began sculpting in the mountains of Colorado where the environment became an integral part of her structures — sky, wind and horizon affecting the energy of form, color and motion in matter and space. Fleming will be exhibiting "Grove" a 20 foot-tall moving sculpture constructed of painted and gouged redwood logs and braised steel on view on the terrace outside the cafe at SFAI. The sculpture will eventually be moved to a park in the Bay Area.

Robert Arneson may have strayed from the contemporary art scene at one time but today his show at Fuller Goldeen Gallery reveals his profoundly moving obsession with the threat of nuclear annihilation. Many are calling this work as timely and powerful as Picasso's "Guernica."

Don't forget to mail or pick up a copy of **David Levi Strauss's** magazine "Acts, A Journal of New Writing" which evolved from the Poetics Program at New College in San Francisco and encourages traditional as opposed to conventional writing. Write DLS at 329 Bartlett St., #9, San Francisco, 94110.

A **graduate art student** can pick up $1,000 if he or she wins the poster design competition for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce 1986 business arts award. For information call Jackie Nemerovski at 392-1202. Designs due Jan. 8.

Roy DeForest had a sold out show at Alan Frumpkin Gallery in New York.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is going to the American Academy in Italy to translate Pasolini's last poems.

Dana Chodzko

In Reply

I want to send some commentary in response to the most recent "Crawling Eye," *Frank #6,* which had to do with the supposed deficiencies of the SF art scene. In the main it was a case of perpetual Bay Area self-doubt. Phrases such as "San Francisco remains timid, unwilling to explore beyond its boundaries," are typical not only of self-doubtophobia of the author but also of other authors and other publications.

Far from having "one tenth" the activity, as suggested in the piece, we suffer from overload.

San Francisco has over 300 galleries listed in the phone book. Even if, as is true, only 30 or so are top-of-the-line "fine arts" galleries, we still have more in that category than LA, Houston, Chicago or Dallas. And, as they manage to remain in business, somebody somewhere must be buying what they have to sell. Add to the commercial galleries the substantial number of non-profit galleries and other presenting institutions and, well, there is no lack of possibilities here for anyone patient, inventive and creative enough to seek them out. The San Francisco Foundation's first ARTS FAX book claimed that our non-profit agencies generated about 80 million dollars into the economy in 1981. That figure is much larger today. Even places like Club Nine are now exhibiting art as a featured activity, and other entrepreneurs get in line to follow suit. I see very little alienation or indifference among artists. What I do see is that they are very involved in the community or else they leave it. Nobody shoves them out. That involvment may be missing from those who doubt the scene here.

Essentially, this area is like any other. Those who commit to it and stay through good and bad times have the best chance of finding something meaningful. Every art scene is, like it or not, "...a city of factions." It takes all kinds and we certainly have that in abundance. Our problem is making sure everyone knows the full range of possibilities. If everybody lines up at the front door at SFMMA, then about 99 percent of them will have missed the Art Institute and the new Mills College Art Center, not to mention the Richmond Art Center, Interarts of Marin, the SF Arts Commission Gallery, Southern Exposure, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, Euphrat Gallery at De Anza College, Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery and a host of other places. As far as getting the word out, we have Expo-See, Metier, Frank, Beef, Photo Metro, SF Bay Guardian, and Artweek, not to mention journals devoted to performance art. Even the slow and cold old Chronicle has a competent art critic aboard now, and Al Morch does his share for the Examiner. Generally, if there is anything close to a fad coming out of our area, we tend to minimize it rather than promote it; this is to our credit because it means that we temper our judgments and maintain some sense of humility in the face of art history. My interpretation of our history is that we let others take the early lead, and then about halfway through the race we pass them by. They are spent, desperately gasping for air, and we are plunging on to the finish.

Generally, if there is anything close to a fad coming out of our area, we tend to minimize it rather than promote it.

It is plainly false to assert that, "...Everyone who was doing anything interesting just left." In point of fact, we have talent here that has yet to be fully acknowledged. I am thinking of old timers like Irving Norman, and newcomers like Lee Roy Champagne or Sha Sha Higby. Many people do not know that the first American

exhibition of the Blue Four occurred at the Oakland Museum, or that the Richmond Art Center has been showing contemporary art for longer than most of the complainers have been alive. Very few people realize how much the SF Arts Commission and all the local municipal arts agencies are doing behind the scenes to ensure productive artistic environments. It is not an issue of these organizations "...barely recognizing the existence of other," but rather an overdose of programs and places that demand recognition, and an ever-changing profile of names and purposes.

Our success or failure as an art scene cannot and will not have a suitable comparison in any other city or time.

Our success or failure as an art scene cannot and will not have a suitable comparison in any other city or time. We must remember that in this century New York was as defensive about Paris as some of us (to the everlasting boredom of all) are about New York. We are a constantly evolving community of artists, patrons and arts professionals. This in itself is what an art scene actually is. We have got to stop this self abuse, this petty and really uninformed self pity before its having been said makes it true. There is no excuse for failure, and personal failure cannot rightly be blamed on a system that in fact produces and promotes so much more than we can possibly comprehend. This response is not meant to lull people into social sleep; all I am trying to say is that we are getting what we need, and maybe not what we exactly want. It's a safe bet though that in order to get what we want, we first have to understand and appreciate that which we have achieved.

Michael S. Bell

Crawling Eye

Good news and bad as we approach the short end of the year. While there are some hot happenings, the only thing some galleries have going for them is the fact that they are out of of the rain. Here's a subjective guide to what's new and on view.

Robert Arneson *Fuller Goldeen, Grant Street*

One of S.F.'s monarchs of whimsy tackles the big issues: death and war, specifically nuclear war. Unfortunately, most of the large ceramics and drawings here succumb to a shrill cartoonishness. This approach has served Arneson well in other places, but it turns against the subject here. Only the bronzes manage to assert an evocative power, most notably in "Forge," where the fragile and organic nature of a human head is played off against the rigid brutality of the anvil it rests on. The pieces portraying various military figures simply miss the point; those who advocate war are not scary because they are monsters, but because they are like you and me.

Deborah Butterfield *Fuller Goldeen, Grant Street*

Butterfield has been working with the basic forms of horses for so long that her new sculptures have the look of having assembled themselves into that familiar configuration. Each is a study in understatement that instantly feels right. By shifting materials from sticks and mud to industrial debris, she has shifted her message from forgotten ritual and fetish to a sense of organic form underlying even that most civilized of products: the junkpile.

John Casado *Stephen Wirtz, Sutter Street*

Pieces of Memphis Designed furniture wander into interiors painted by Ed Ruscha. I suppose one is meant to admire the amount of control exerted in the production of these big watercolors. But their content and approach are so vapid that one wonders why he took the trouble.

Joseph Cornell *Acme Art, Sutter Street*

Did you ever wonder how they shipped Cornells? In all the assemblages, the sand and loose objects look like they have been placed once and then left to enjoy perfection for eternity. Cornell was able not only to invent his own medium, the collage or assemblage box, but also was able to bring it to its apex. None of his thousands of misguided followers have ever been able to approach his intelligence and grace. This show of less than 10 objects vibrates with more ideas and excitement than the rest of the city combined.

Group Show *Eaton Shoen, Sutter Street.*

An enjoyable show by a varied batch of West and East Coast people. Highlights: Miriam Smith's aggressive drawing from the "Walking Bush" series; Kate Delos' mythopoetic drawings, tuned to nuance and recalling Twombly; David Wojnarowicz's conflation of the story of Romulus and Remus with important information about Domino Sugar; and Bruce Lipsky's collection of tiny altered things, mounted on the gallery wall with pins, like a mutant butterfly collection.

Tom Holland *John Berggruen, Grant Street*

A batch of forgettable geometric abstractions that tries to flog the last drops of interest from the dry corpse of cubism. Still lifes discretely dissolve into their underlying geometries. In order to call attention to the picture plane, sections are cut away and curled into relief. The pieces are done in wispy color to compliment any couch. They are coated with a noxious varnish that instantly brings to mind decoupage wall plaques. Prices start at $9,000.

REICHMAN

Brett Reichman *Martin Weber, 8th Street*

More like individual frames of a comic strip than separate works, these paintings depict an endless allegorical conflict between birds, worms and the artist in guise of both: a bird holds a worm with the face of the artist hostage. On the television, Woody Woodpecker confronts another worm and so on. These dramas are set in claustrophobic interiors, and painted in a way that suggests they are assembled out of separately colored sections. While the ambition of this work seems right, its angst is a little too fashionably applied. Articulate, but too worried about being a grownup.

Retablos — works on tin *Mexican Museum, Fort Mason*

This small show of homemade 19th century icons reveals how the work of hundreds of anonymous hands put a streamlining effect on certain overinflated images in European religious painting. This art was made for the household, and was sold by peddlars. The paintings contain inflections so far removed from religious pomposity that the recurrance of religious imagery takes on the qualities of a dream. Highpoint is a beautiful series on the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Section Eight Mural *Section Eight Screenprinting, 24th & San Bruno*

Forget Zephyr's name tag on the back of the Arts Commission Gallery. This mug is the reason the best grafitti is known as "the Wild Style." Jumping color, fashion flesh, this wall transforms a bunch of words into an eye-bending celebration. This is the latest addition to 24th street's suite of great murals.

Chris Sullivan *New Langton Arts, Folsom Street*

Most performers who build their pieces around the actions of an eccentric character doom themselves to terminal cutesyness. Sullivan's work is saved by the extremely convoluted machinery through which he pushes his loony-tune ideas. Sullivan's character is Loren Loud, a voluntary shut-in, who introduces us to his life and world. A video presentation of startling evidence about the "Witch of Milwaukee" interrupts him. By the end of the piece, Loud wrestles with his silent doppleganger, smokes too much, and presents a fractured version of "It's Christmas, Charlie Brown." Images and thoughts rebound, and Loud finds himself literally haunted. Great sets, props and costumes.

By The Crawling Eye

Girl Talk

En Los Bocas Abiertas, Entras Las Moscas

A new column for FRANK, "In Open Mouths, Flies Enter," a first for me..here goes nothing guys and gals.

Some say that the old days of the scene are long gone or at least lived few and far between. This is certainly born-out by the departure from San Francisco of J.C. Garrett, a founder of Club Foot and a member of the former Altar Boys. Richard Edson of the band left town a number of years ago and has achieved notoriety in his "Stranger than Paradise" portrayal of Eddie. Edson was last seen here in town at an M.A.C. opening sporting long locks and a characteristically untrendy dark green jogging suit, but none could miss that distinguished profile.

Points for the best fashion show of the season go to Momento for their "British Fashion Show in a Church" made all that more memorable by the shocking display of skin via see-through clothing and in a religious setting, no less! Momento, which opened six months ago, plans to be one step ahead by featuring the latest designers from London. Maryam and Shahla Ettefagh's Momento (located above Sassoon's at 26 Post Street) has a beautifully designed interior (Maryam and Shahla take credit; see their ad in Sept. issue of FRANK). It is well worth a visit when next in the neighborhood. If you missed the fashion show ask to see it on the store's video player.

Another European-style boutique, complete with a bar and cafe, snuck onto the scene recently and adds yet another notch to the gentrification of the Haight/Fillmore neighborhood. Back Bay opened its doors with a fancy Grand Opening Gala. People without proper invite and/or (heaven forbid) appropriate attire were turned away at the door. But what can be expected of a store that would write on its invitation "Come complete with attitude." Attitude and champagne were prevalent and ever-flowing.

Photograph by Heather McCollom

Patsy Cline and the Memphis G Spots, (Hank, Hank and Hank) out of retirement after a year break, played A.R.E.'s reception for open studios. Patsy, as charming as ever in a tight gold lame pants suit, responded to a call from the audience "What do you think of the new Patsy Cline movie starring Jessica Lange?" by saying in her usual spirited form "Sorry dear, but you must have me confused with someone who gives a damn." It is hard to believe that this Patsy is the same person who did that clever performance on top of M.A.C.'s doorway with Hell Kitty. Nothing less could be said of Kitty's Todd Oldham designed dress, except it was a sensuous treat, and I'm a woman, but Patsy...well isn't.

Sure wish M.A.C. would throw more fashion events. They are always some of the best attended parties, full of a fabulous array of fashion fantasies. Maybe we attend in great numbers because we like the people who run M.A.C. Ben, Chris and Mom sure give the place a warm feeling and their interiors, a cross between the excavation of an old Chinese laundry and a pseudo-shrine, are marvelous.

Olga Gerard, publicist extraordinaire threw herself a birthday party, her 25th, at 181 and provided some rare tap dancing entertainment. Olga's husband Jerry, I hear, is a well-established music promoter who got his start booking bands into the Savoy's backroom. Olga's party was by far one of the largest Monday night crowds seen in months. Another well-attended 181 show was the Encore Fashion Show of 60s vintage wear. American Rag, The Black Cat, Matinee and La Rosa were all represented. The set, provided by Par-Interval, was the best part of the show.

Jim English ended Science Club with a big bang by throwing a "Fall Ball." His new club, D.N.A, is located where the old Chaps bar was. The "Fall Ball" featured the latest lines of Roberto Robeldo, Hol/Cam, California, Japanese Weekend, Luis DiPalma and A.A. Concepts. Voice Farm and Oblong Rhonda were cute (makes me want to sport a

goatee and a long black turtleneck) and great as always. Lory Spencer, who provided accessories for some of the designers, and who endearingly refers to her creations as decorative trashcan lids, tells me that the next trend in jewelry will be giant fruits and vegetables "cause that's what's hot in Europe now." Make mine chiles, eggplants or maraschino cherries por favor. I still like Holly's (of Hol/Cam) latest earring finds the best. Hers are curls of real hair. But does she have to hair spray them each time she goes out?

Upcoming events are an A.R.E. party titled "they wore black before it was back," a possible formal wear fashion show, prexmas, at Club Nine.

Check out the best theme grafitti to hit S.O.M. in awhile — Strange Wolf complete with body worms.

Martine E. Blase

An Encounter With...

George Coates' "RareArea" is a performance work almost entirely without words. It uses projected images, music, optical illusions and pantomime — but very little cognitive language.

In person, however, Coates is a chatty, articulate fellow. When we met for lunch recently at a Berkeley restaurant, a scheduled one-hour interview lasted twice that long.

In his 30's with a close-cropped beard and sunglasses that he wears even indoors, the avant-garde director laughs easily — at his own jokes as well as others'. He is extremely playful.

"I hate that phrase, 'the play's the thing,'" Coates said. "Let's take out the article 'the' and we'll be much closer to the truth."

But don't think this guy is all play and no work. In October he had shows booked on both coasts, an unusual distinction. "SeeHear" was playing in Philadelphia at the American Music Theatre Festival while "RareArea" was being readied for a performance in Los Angeles.

The Philadelphia show was a homecoming of sorts for Coates, who was born there. For the last 15 years the director has lived in Berkeley, where his company, George Coates' Performance Works, is based. In Berkeley, Coates dines regularly at Thai restaurants, iceskates whenever he can at Ice Land ("I love to spin in circles for two hours a day") and produces some of the most exciting and original performance works in America.

Coates has been creating such works since 1976, when he started collaborating with artists in a wide variety of disciplines. His coworkers have included, among others, the mime Leonard Pitt and the opera singer John Duykers. The artistic mix has produced a series of highly honored shows: "The Way of How", "SeeHear", and "are are" to name but a few.

Generally, people leave his shows asking: How did he do that? Coates is a special effects wizard. In "RareArea," for example, an ordinary-looking plastic wrap metamorphoses into a shimmering gold dress; gelatinous eggs reminiscent of the old "Prisoner" TV show miraculously appear; and, in a grand finale worthy of the term, flagsticks are changed into beams of laser light.

How *does* he do that?

"The stuff is so simple, you wouldn't believe it," says he. "It's all been around for years. I don't even have expensive hi-tech equipment. It just looks like I do."

Interestingly, an illusionist recently visited him backstage--and told him that he had 'discovered,' via his own route, a number of classic techniques.

But how *does* he do all that?

"When people ask me how I do it, I routinely lie," says Coates. "I say it is all done with lasers. But it isn't"

Understandably, Coates doesn't want his tricks ripped off. In fact, as his reputation has grown, the entertainment industry has become increasingly *curious* about his illusions.

"I'm not trying to make people think logically or rationally or lineally. People do enough of that already."

"In Philadelphia, a couple of directors came snooping around. They wanted to put some of the "SeeHear" techniques into the standard repertory. But why should I reveal my secrets? In this business the name of the game isn't who does it first; it's who does it first on Broadway. I don't want to show somebody how to do something, then have it wind up in a New York production.

"In Los Angeles, people from rock and roll were coming backstage to see how we did it. People from "New Genesis." There were also emissaries from Warner Brothers. But those folks are just going to have to figure things out for themselves."

That's what Coates did; he claims to be largely self-taught. But he does acknowledge *some* influences: a New York production of "Hair" he snuck in to see at age 16 ("I was just there to catch a glimpse of the nude scenes, but I got excited instead by the show's inventive approach") and Frank Oppenheimer's Exploratorium, a hands-on museum in San Francisco ("I like the way it synthesizes technology and art").

"There are qualities of existence that verbal activity not only cannot articulate — but actually encumbers."

But Coates appears to be his own major influence. He takes things that are important to him and works them into his productions. One of these things is the defiance of laws. When I pointed out to him that the characters in "RareArea" appeared to defy gravity, he said: "I try to defy laws across the board — not just gravity." The information he subsequently disclosed is confidential, but let's just say the artist proved his point.

Coates calls the goal of his shows to "make new dreams." He doesn't literally put his own dreams into his shows, but he does try to suggest the sort of images and unusual associations that are found in dreams. "I want to fuse the awareness of a wakened state with the body of infinite possibilities of a dream," said Coates. "I want to trigger brain activity that is otherwise lying dormant. I'm not trying to make people think logically or rationally or lineally. People do enough of that already."

He also feels strongly about how words are used. "If you can do it, why say it?" he asks. "There are qualities of existence that verbal activity not only cannot articulate — but actually encumbers." That explains why his shows may be non-verbal. It doesn't explain why Coates and I have been talking for so long.

When we had finished our lunch, he pulled out a papier mache strawberry sundae he had bought at a novelty store. "Why don't we have this for dessert?" he suggested. Actually, the sundae is a prop the director is thinking of using for "RareArea."

Coates stared at the sundae. It was obvious he was concocting something, that he was improvising, and after a moment he said: "I think the rich have a weakness for sweets. Whenever they take over a neighborhood, for example, you'll suddenly find more ice-cream parlors." Then he smiled. Playfully. ■

Steve Cassal

"Mr. Nightlife"

dear readers:

To prepare myself for the week of Helloween I took myself to Manhattan for a week of R&R and ended up at NY's biggest club, Palladium. This club features everything I like. Galleries connected by lots of hallways, private rooms with private parties (which I had invites to) and an enormous dance floor under a gilded rococco domed ceiling that makes SF's biggest look like a postage stamp. There are also 50 video monitors synchronized to be raised or lowered, or to be on or off.

Saw the movie Sweet Dreams while I was in NY and gave it a B+ for its sensitive handling of the subject matter and its great performance by Jessica Lange as country singer Patsy Cline, and pleased to see when I returned to SF that her music lives on, thanks to Arturo Galster who dresses and sings as if Patsy herself were somehow reincarnated. I attended three performances of Patsy Cline and the Memphis G Spots.

Recently went to the opening of DNA Club on 11th St. Was quite happy to see so many familiar faces. Like the NY import doorman, Joe Brese, and my favorite bartendress Claire, however I still maintain that the club needs some genetic engineering when it comes to music selection, lighting and the dance floor. I tend to rate SF clubs rather low if they are inadequate in these areas.

I'm looking forward to the many upcoming parties and events. One that I won't miss is The Fish Ford Happy Hour Show at the 181 Club on Dec. 13th nd 14th. This will be a special nite featuring the happy hour TV dancers, Charo, Jane Mansfield, Priscilla Presley and an Elvis impersonator. It promsies to be "fabulous and hilarious." Deborah Iyall tells me she has created a soon-to-be-released solo album. Also going solo from Romeo Void — Ben Bossi and his sax. Look out for other big names coming our way...Ringg...rring...hello...Nancy Reagan...party tomorrow nite...cocktails at five...at Oakland Hyatt...see you there.

Well, the holidays are here and this year I'm busy as ever and I look forward to all the events coming up. Keep the news and invites coming...

"strawberry fields forever"
...Raoul Thomas

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