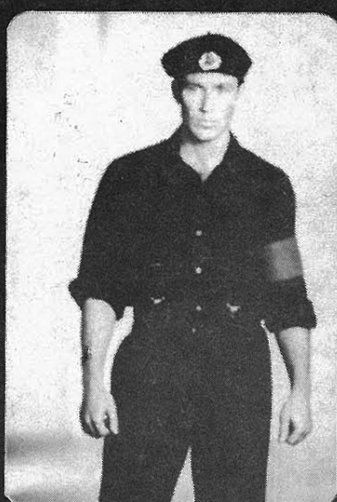
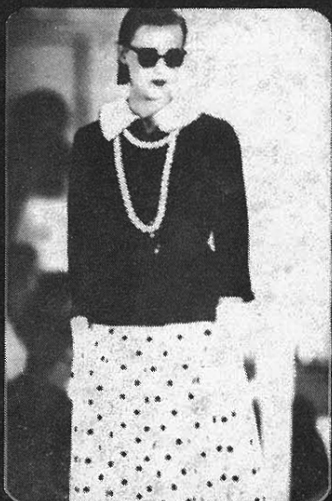


FRANK

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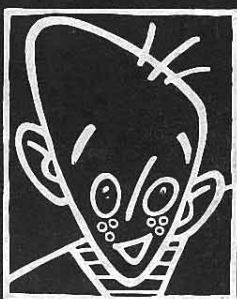
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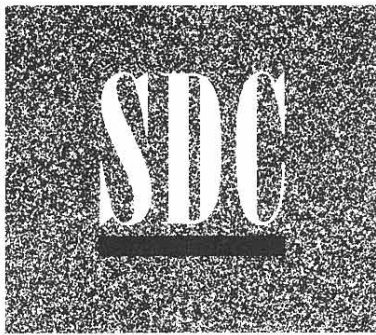
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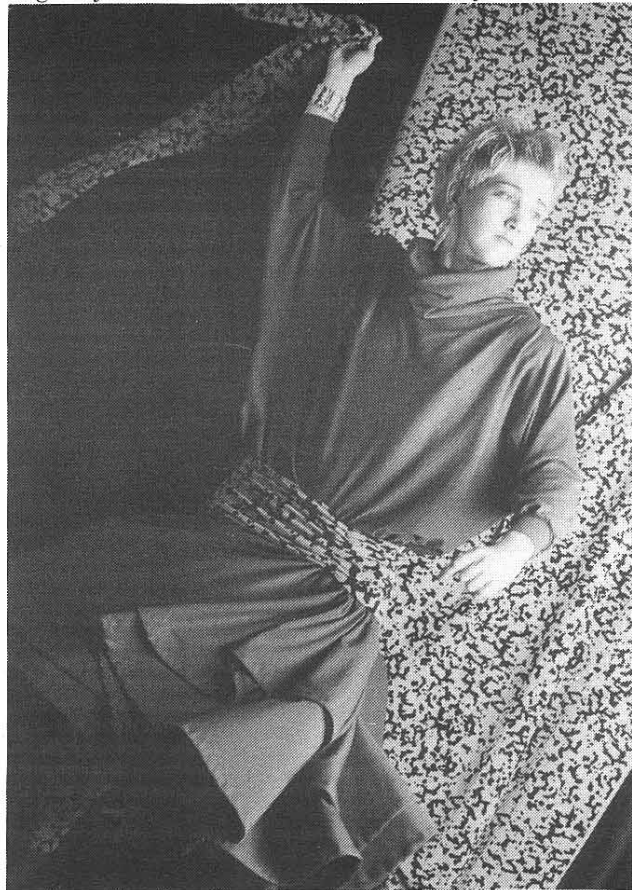
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Dear FRANK:
Well, I've just come out of my first reading in New York. I read at ABC No Rio a performance space in the lower East Village (below Houston). It was an open reading, so I actually read a

Dear FRANK:

Well, I've just come out of my first reading in New York. I read at ABC No Rio a performance space in the lower East Village (below Houston). It was an open reading — or officially an "open mike," which would be more appropriate. It was only about 50 percent poetry, the rest was folk music and performance (skits), and one guy made us dance around and yell: "The Universe is a swamp."

ABC No Rio is small and trashy. The door has holes in it and locks with a chain. The crowd was young and hip and leaned back in their chairs and smoked cigarettes and flopped on the floor. The "stage" was low-lit, and though there seemed to be no effort to create an atmosphere, an atmosphere was achieved.

Oddly, no one in the audience seemed to know who I was, which was unfortunate. I did my best through body language and voice inflection to guide them toward an understanding of how important I was. They were only slightly swayed.

They didn't laugh at me though, like they did to some of the performers. I'd never heard people snicker or comment so openly at an open mike. I guess that's just New York — still, I found it distasteful.

But all in all, it was loose and exciting and fun. I was a bit nervous and shy but did manage to chat with a few people, none of whom had heard of me. I'll just have to keep working on them.

I miss S.F., Blake Nelson

Dear FRANK:

Here in France, the fashion among youngsters is to wear sportsclothes with pseudo-American sayings on them which never quite make sense, like "Giants—Golden People of the World" and "Best Montana — 1 Class Polo!" and "National Rugby league San Francisco Giants." They don't care what it says, just as long as it's American. Reminds me of the Mexican flour-sack shirt I bought in a 70s street market in my hippie days. It had a lot of Spanish on it, which led my mother to exclaim, "You don't know what it says! Maybe it says 'My father is a fool!'"

Mark Pritchard...Paris

25 wieder bei Tag noch bei Nacht, gesehen hatte. Er schaute, konnte. Deshalb glängten ihre Augen weit geöffnet.

n in seiner allgütigsten Tracht; daher wurde hervur der Mond gerade ins Gesicht schien. den Einkommung für die erste Nacht in seinem Bett, weil sie vor Freude und Aufregung

wenn sie den kleinen Sünder mitnehmen, und daß er
 Tumpstüß wozu wurd in al zage wachst un
 da wäre, geschenkt sein solle samt seinem Leben.

correspon

From The Alps:

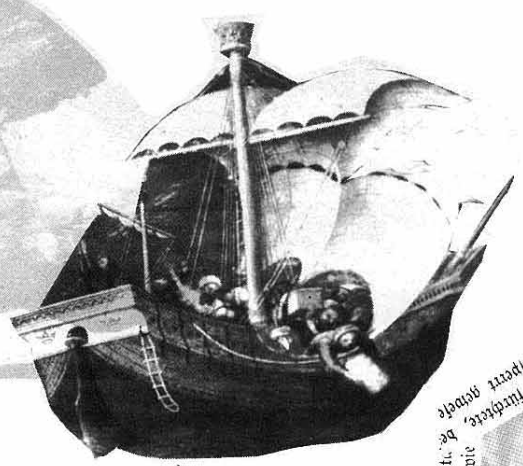
This trip really is a dream come true. For more than a year, whenever things got rough I reminded myself that I would take this trip and it did get me through. Every once in a while a dreamer has to have a dream come true. This is mine...

The people in Gimmelwald (where we are now) have very strong legs, as all the pathways are steep. There is no room for vehicles. The people wear heavy hiking boots even on hot days. They grow gardens and have goats and hens. I wonder how the children are educated. And what the people here do during the long winter months. I expect there is some business in skiing. Yes — this town is one skiers could ski up to.

In order to get here we took a cable car — 25 minutes straight up. There are towns even further north. It is enough to walk along the mountain paths and watch the mountains from sunrise to sunset. The air is very thin, nothing is separating us from the land about us — not even air.

**Love,
Billie**

nk
dence



... der Kinder voll Freude, und schreien zu erholen, zumal ihnen aus ihrer Stille, da sie sich ihm wieder zugewendet, seufzte er innerlich, auf und that einen leisen Atemzug; denn er hatte wohl gewünscht, daß das halb verlorene Kind durch den

Hey ya comrades!

What's been doing lately? Plenty busy for pronto art. Eating pinto beans and dodging ford pintos m'self.

We're gearing up for a huge and debased spectacle of unguessable depths. Sort of a carnival like atmosphere only absurd and crassly commercial and lacking in dignity and style. The whole thing will be graceless and ponderous hitting the viewer over the head with our overstated moralizing. A tiresome political diatribe after another preaching to the converted and shamelessly selling "art" for 50 cents in some pathetic bid for public approval. We will be laughed off the stage, which may well collapse if we build it because every kiosk, every exhibit will be SHODDILY constructed and crassly overcommercialized. Lacking a shred of self respect between them this fractious "collaboration" will attempt to Make Money on the most sickening gimcracks and gewgaws contrived to catch the unwary.

Okay well anyway, he's been silenced and sent to critics camp for repairs. But we have been cranking like mad on this monstrosity and the results should be catastrophic.

**Avoidupols,
Fred**

... der Kinder voll Freude, und schreien zu erholen, zumal ihnen aus ihrer Stille, da sie sich ihm wieder zugewendet, seufzte er innerlich, auf und that einen leisen Atemzug; denn er hatte wohl gewünscht, daß das halb verlorene Kind durch den

Dear FRANK:

On the train from Brighton, which had compartments with doors just like the one Alice rode, we passed through Warblington, Swanage, New Milton and Branksome, not to mention Pokedown and Hamworthy. Not to denigrate names like Santa Venetia, Eureka and Sebastopol, but most of them were named after someplace else by some adventuresome guy in the last century who was from someplace else too. These English ones, however, seem to accumulate like the opalescent patina on a dirty old bottle I just bought. No one could conceivably, even in the seventeenth century, just stand on a local promontory and say, "I dub thee Glanvilles Wooton." But in Dorset, we went to Cerne Abbas and passed through Kitt-whistle, Godmanstone, Glanvilles Wooton and Maiden Newton. Batcombe, Minsterne Magna, Alton Pancras and Holnest were just up the road a few pieces. I wish I knew how Godmanstone got its name, but we just whizzed through it on a bus.

J.Allen

Dear Frank:

In the big city, after the smoke has cleared, there are still the rabbits and boars and even pigeons and sparrows that are skinned and plucked and drained for soups and stews. Another cigarette is lit.

Outside of the big city, past the sunflower fields, the bats they fly rapid like moths near the rivers and lakes. And in the smaller, streetless city the scroungy cats who feed on fish rule the walkways. The palaces, they lean and almost tumble.

In the big city, another cigarette is lit, and the soldiers they hunt the arabs. I even learned to palka, but the proprietress with the crooked eye, she doesn't like me.

**tschuss,
kv**

... der Kinder voll Freude, und schreien zu erholen, zumal ihnen aus ihrer Stille, da sie sich ihm wieder zugewendet, seufzte er innerlich, auf und that einen leisen Atemzug; denn er hatte wohl gewünscht, daß das halb verlorene Kind durch den



Who are these Vice & Jerry?

If you'd been at the June *Frank* benefit, you'd know. They're two bald men in dark suits and white shirts and dark ties wearing some kind of hats with brims. The taller guy's Jerry and he pounds a little piano while Vice belts and struts and waves his arms and shouts out songs and stamps til you think the stage will splinter. Just two guys a piano and a mike. These guys get kind of excited when they perform.

How come Vice & Jerry don't have a band?

They used to be in a band called Hard Attack, six of them. Jerry says, "When it's just the two of you you get down to what it is, to the essence of the whole thing. A lot of musicians are good players but they don't get the concept." They did a tune called "I'm Sick and Tired of My Friends."

"First thing we did without the band was, we opened for Iggy Pop at Berkeley Square. So we showed up with no band and they said, 'You can't do this shit. Where's the band?'"

What was the deal when Vice & Jerry played the Stone?

"The night we played there with Jim Carroll it was sold out and our pay was, we had to go down there a week before and pick up 500 tickets to sell by ourselves at a certain percentage. No pay, you got 30% of the tickets you sold."

"Jerry & I are too old to be boy scouts: 'Hi my name is Vice and listen we're playing at... Oh, you're eating dinner.' I mean, this is really ridiculous so we didn't sell any tickets. We just put 'em right back together and the guy says, 'How many did you sell?' and I said, 'We didn't even bother. We didn't get a dime for the show.'"

Have Vice & Jerry opened shows for any famous bands?

You bet.

Like who?

Iggy Pop...

Vice: "He's coming back to town."

Jerry: "Want to do it again?"

Vice: "Depends what's on TV."

Frankie Goes to Hollywood...

Vice: "That was brutal. They didn't even say boo shit to us. It was like we were in their way. That's the attitude you get from most of those bands. We had occasions where we weren't allowed to go behind the curtain. We had to walk out in front of the curtain and play with just this much room. It gets to a level where they don't even look at you. It's a disgusting situation as far as humans dealing with other humans, it's a sick industry. Who in hell needs it? What fun is it to go out and perform and hate it?"

"I asked Jerry once, if a person pays 15 dollars to go to a concert does that give him a license to kill? I have a live tape of one of these shows. During one part I was getting pelted real hard and I started going over to Jerry to ask him what's going on and you can hear him on the tape going, 'Get away from me, get away.' What a business."

Cyndi Lauper...

Vice: "A disaster. Some middle-aged woman came up to me at the *Frank* benefit and said, 'Didn't you open for Cyndi Lauper? You should be absolutely ashamed of yourself. That was the most disgusting thing I've seen in my life.' And I agree. What I did was out of place. What I was singing about at that show was not to be sung in front of kids that young. Kids 9, 13 years old. They don't even have landlords. They just don't understand. This woman was appalled. And when I look back I actually get the shivers, thinking what the hell was I doing? What did I do?"

What did they do?

Vice: "We had pretty wild acts. The curtain would open and I'd have my pants down sitting on the toilet reading a paper. There was nothing I wouldn't attempt. We had a following. They just wanted to see what would happen when the curtain went up. They might leave after the curtain went up but they had to know what was going to happen first. We spent a lot of time deciding, let's see, how can we shock them this time? It was difficult but we had some good ideas. We had a song called 'You're Gonna Die' — I'd come out of a casket. We did 'The Chapel of Love' — a whole wedding procession. I wore a beautiful wedding dress. The band would come in the front door all dressed

up, bells ringing. That's what I like, something to look at. We definitely take risks."

Vice & Jerry do a song called "Cocaine Nazi." What's the story?

Jerry: "I've had people hate me for that song. I've had people walk out. In fact at the Stone, Vice and I opened for Jim Carroll and they pulled the plug on me, which surprised me because here's Jim Carroll singing about all his friends who died."

"I wrote that song — hey, I lived the coke nazi life. When I wrote that song it was coming from every... I mean I spent 30 days in rehabilitation. I was real sick for a long time. It was the most extreme message I could deliver about myself, about what I was going through."

"I thought, How extreme can I get? I wanted to shock people, I wanted to shock myself. It's a heavy statement. It was the strongest statement I thought I could make."

What do they like about performing?

Vice: "I work for my family and always have. My family has a hardware store in West Portal. I started there when I was ten years old and I'm still there. I sell nuts and bolts."

"Basically I'm looking for something exciting to do. To me performing is just the greatest thrill. There's no release like it anywhere available. It's my only outlet. When I get the opportunity to perform there's nothing in my way. It's an orgasm with notes!"

Jerry: "I want to give others the idea they can do it too. I'll give you an example. A grandmother came to me, she wanted to cut an album for her grandchildren. She used to be a singer. I rented a studio, hired a guy from Van Morrison's band, a guy from Blood Sweat & Tears, a guy from the Crusaders. Heavy studio cats. They saw the sheets and said, 'No man, we can't do this shit. "When You Wish Upon a Star"? no way.' But when they heard the love in this woman's voice in this record for her grandkids they thanked her for letting them back her up."

Do they enjoy this?

"We have to enjoy it or we won't even consider it. Now we can do it, we're not rehearsing for something else, not doing it for a living. That's the whole point. This isn't a means to an end."

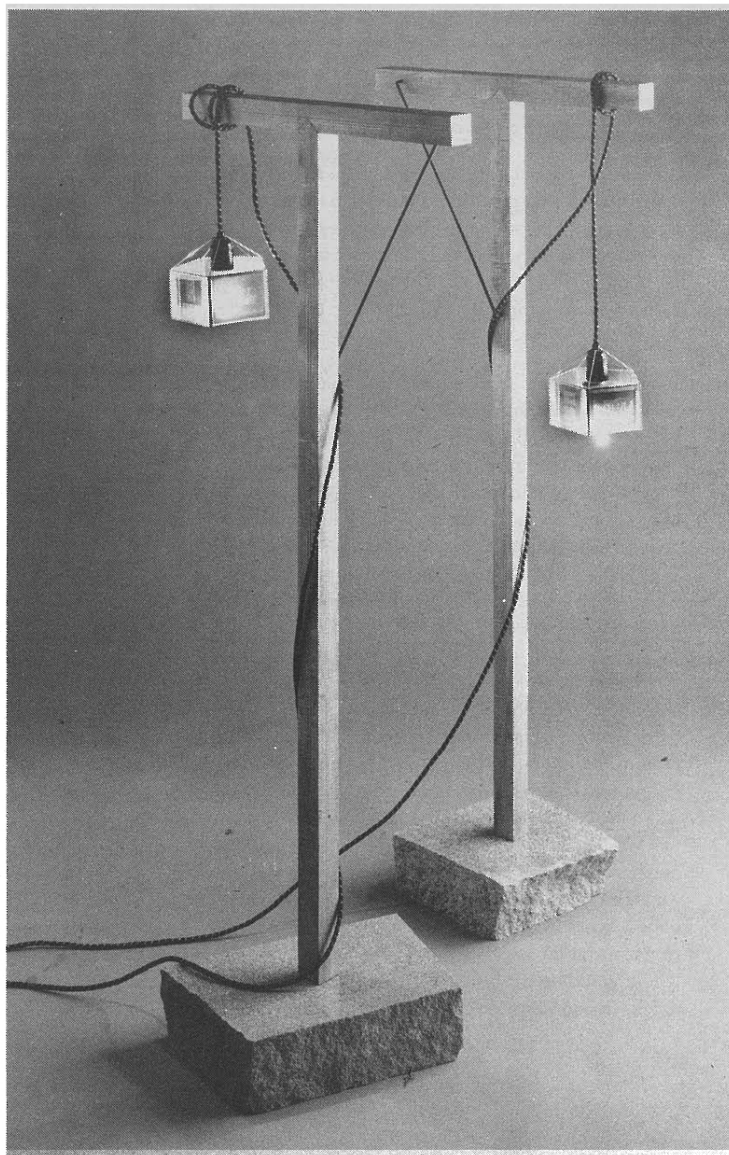


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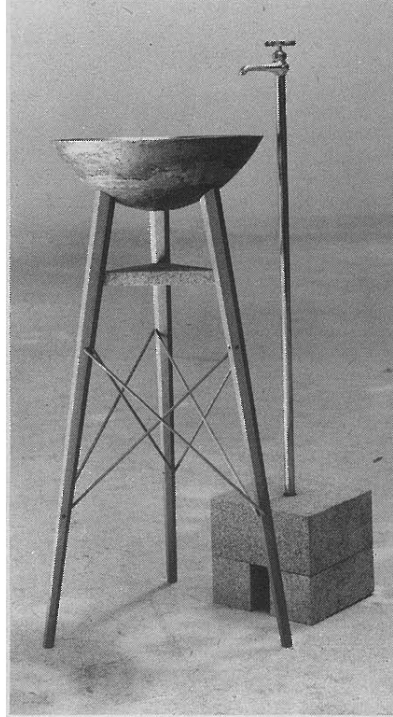
ALL BEAUTY THAT HAS NOT A FOUNDATION
IN USE SOON GROWS DISTASTEFUL, AND NEEDS
CONTINUAL REPLACEMENT WITH
SOMETHING NEW. THAT WHICH HAS IN ITSELF
THE HIGHEST USE POSSESSES THE GREATEST
BEAUTY.

THE SHAKER SOCIETY ca. 1800



"FLOOR LAMP"
BRUCE TOMB 1986
GRANITE, MAPLE, STEEL
AND OBSOLETE GLASS SLIDES OF NUBI
PHOTO STEFANO MASSEI

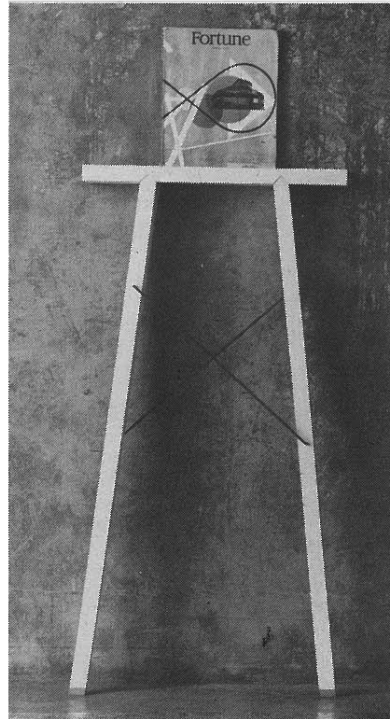
"BASIN"
BRUCE TOMB 1985
WHITE BRONZE, MAPLE,
GRANITE, STAINLESS STEEL



"TABLE FOR FOUR"
JOHN RANDOLPH 1985
CONCRETE, COPPER PLATED
STEEL & GLASS
PHOTO WILL MOSGROVE 1985



"ALUMINUM TRESTLE TABLE"
I.O.O.A. 1986
ALUMINUM & STAINLESS STEEL
PHOTO WILL MOSGROVE



"TWO-LEGGED TABLE"
I.O.O.A. 1984
MAPLE, STEEL & RUBBER
PHOTO WILL MOSGROVE

A GARLAND OF FRAGRANT FLOWERS

by Myriam Weisang



hailand is, first, a thick blanket of smog over

Bangkok, and heat like molten lead.

In the cab a garland of fragrant flowers hangs over the rear-view mirror. Drivers — in cabs,

buses, private cars — purchase them from street

vendors while stuck in Bangkok's inevitable traffic jams. For the Thai capital is one gigantic snarl of vehicles all spewing black smoke into the steaming air. It takes hours to cross the city. When traffic moves, it is with a fever heightened by anticipation.

Drivers dodge one another like mad dancers, missing cues but avoiding disaster by split-second inventiveness. We hit a truck: nothing serious, a mere fender-bender.

Both drivers emerge, bow to each other, smile and go on their way. The Thais are a gracious people.

Forever smiling ("Thailand, Land of Smiles" is the official motto), they watch the foreigners, the *farang*, spill onto their streets, their rice fields, their beaches. They even provide the *farang* with a Tourist Police, but whether it is to protect us or themselves, I'll never know. There are a few things the Thais will not tolerate, however. One must not insult, or even joke about, the Royal Family. The smiling effigy of the King and Queen, whose ancestors have ruled the country for centuries (Thailand was never colonized), hangs everywhere — stores, homes, buses and cinemas, where the national anthem sounds between the previews and the feature.

Another topic to broach with care is the monks. Buddhist monks in Thailand hold a position higher than the King: you bow three times to a monk, only once to the ruling

monarch. Every dawn the monks leave their temple, dressed in saffron robes, and go Barefoot from door to door begging for their daily meal. Poor as many Thais are, they will always feed the monks.

Women, as you might expect, are not allowed much commerce with the holy men: they're not permitted to hand something directly to a monk, and when walking together in public they must keep a few paces behind him. But then any man 20 years or older can become a monk, even for just two weeks, to bring good luck upon his family, so holiness is perhaps a matter for debate.

Thailand is a place of paradox, incongruity — 15-year-old hookers staring longingly at stuffed animals, monks carrying designer bags, and hovels with color TVs. It is impolite to point your foot in someone's direction or to hug in public, yet the Thais will not bat an eye at the spectacle of teenage boys and girls sold for the night to your average dirty old man. In Bangkok's Patpong, a stone's throw from the Christian Guest House, sits the seamiest porno district in Asia. In many clubs go-go girls perform on the bar, slithering up and down a metal pole, pelvis grinding, in hopes that you will take them home for the night. And a list of the feats performed by the showgirls, pushed at every *farang* who wanders down the block, defies the imagination: with her vagina one woman smokes a cigarette, another writes a letter, a third ejects razor blades.

But it is considered gauche to touch someone's head, the noblest part of the body. And while the Thai capital is perhaps the most permissive city in the world, the Governor of Bangkok is a vegetarian ascetic who, although married, maintains a life of celibacy. He subsidizes his own chain of vegetarian restaurants, where he can often be seen working on weekends, serving up food to the throng.

The Thais straddle the fence between a modern, high-tech world and a culture rich in centuries-old traditions. Bangkok is rife with Dunkin' Donuts, Kentucky Fried Chicken and the like, small towns provide automated teller machines, air-conditioned buses have TVs and VCRs on board. Yet nearly every home and factory has a spirit house, an ornate miniature temple filled with statuettes, flowers and incense. Before spending the night in a new place, a guest must ask the spirits for their blessing.

Some luxury hotels have fortunetellers on the premises, next to the concierge at the reception desk. At Wat Pho, the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, together with the postcards you can purchase a bird or a fish to let loose for good luck. Or for \$5 you can get a traditional Thai massage, on a sweat-soaked cot amidst dozens of people. It is a delicious torture, the masseuse kneeling on your limbs, digging her fingers between joints, bending the body in directions never before fathomed. The monks gather to watch.

Outside, the temple's golden pagodas catch a burst of sunlight. Thailand is, before all, a thing of beauty. Colors erupt, exuberant, dazzling — the silver of meandering rivers, the pale green of shimmering rice paddies against a sprinkling of palm trees, turquoise and aquamarine mingling on the Gulf of Siam, an explosion of deep purple on a wall or the sarong of a passer-by, the sudden shock of fried orange locusts (a Thai delicacy), baskets of orchids at the market, fruit that bleeds or mimics sea urchins, a sky swollen with rain clouds, sunsets of crimson and fire.

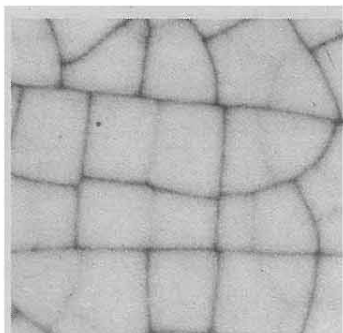
And bats. In a town near Bangkok large fruit bats took up residence some 300 years ago next to a temple and never left. The locals barely notice them hanging in furry bunches from the trees, but *farang* love to watch their flight at twilight. As the sun dips below the horizon the bats wake up, shrieking and cackling, and soon fill the sky, slowly circling overhead before winging their way to some Transylvanian midnight feast.

Thailand is not easy to grab hold of, in its myriad golden facades. You feel overwhelmed constantly by sweetness and warmth, and by the nagging doubt that you're missing the forest for the trees. What you remember most about the people, besides their striking good looks, is their graciousness, their amiability, their spontaneous smile. Yet the gentle Thais live behind high walls crowned by barbed wire and shards of glass embedded in concrete. Another tradition?



STILL LIFE WITH STANDING ROCKS AND SQUASHED HEDGEHOG

by Rebecca Solnit



Pat, our excitable blonde landlady in Marlborough, looked upon me with the indulgence of utter incomprehension. She flew from England to Tampa every year, then drove up to Memphis to pay her respects to Graceland and the King. This year she was thinking of going to Las Vegas for a change, and she thrilled to my lurid descriptions of the neon signs, the glass-sided swimming pools, the all-you-can-eat's and the impersonators. Going around looking at piles of old rocks in pastures was an idea that left her cold.

California leaves me with two longings: for lush greenery and for the relics of history. So I was there in southwestern England for country walks and traces of the distant past, though my Loved One was just along for the ride. When we hit the British Tourist Authority offices I browsed through the brochures on poets' graves and ruins and hedges, and he seized upon the literature about modern boyish attractions — motorcycle races and tank museums, for example. World War II tanks, he asserted, were his idea of ancient relics. Marlborough, however, where we were staying in Pat's pink and modern house, was far from the tank museums and very near Avebury, so he ate my bacon and eggs and I drank his tea and to Avebury we went.

Avebury, I told him as our bus barreled over the downs, may well have been the very heart of Stoneaged Britain, and its vicinity is the richest in ruins in Wiltshire, itself the most archeologically well-endowed county in England. "Wiltshire," says novelist William Golding, who lives there and ought to know, "has a particularly ancient and mysterious history that has left its mark in every corner." The heart of this complex of sites is Avebury stone circle, the largest one known: a quarter of a mile across, with the small village of the same name sprawling through it. The remains of a stone avenue lead to the Sanctuary, a nearly eradicated smaller stone circle near the West Kennet Long Barrow, the largest chambered tomb in the country. There are enough biggies here to satisfy any tourist, including the biggest prehistoric earthwork in Europe, just up the road from the barrow: Silbury Hill, a truncated cone of chalk built for a now utterly forgotten ritual purpose. One theory is that the four sites (built between 3200 and 2600 B.C.) are four stations in an earth-goddess worship cycle corresponding to the seasons and the stages of life from conception to death.

The ladies next to us on the top of the double-decker bus talked eagerly of a cowgirl program they'd seen on television the night before. One described with tender yearning, all the way from Marlborough to Beckhampton, every outfit the cowgirl star had worn. As she recalled holsters and fringes, the landscape went by — low rolling hills that resembled waves far out at sea, with houses adrift on them and clusters of trees in silhouette atop the swells. It had a feeling of altitude and expanse we found nowhere else in the cozy English countryside.

The first we saw of Avebury, as the bus pulled into the Red Lion Inn, was a curving line of big stones in a sheep pasture. The sheep seemed quite oblivious to the massive upright stones but took exception to our approach, trotting off and turning their heads back to bleat resentfully. We bothered a lot of sheep, because each looming sarsen stone demanded close scrutiny. I love the wild gray boulders that poke through the hills in California and the shaped stones in works like Stonehenge, but the former are without repercussion because wholly natural, the latter utterly tamed by the people who shaped them — their power is in their configuration. The great rearing stones at Avebury, however, are neither without repercussion nor tame; they are full of a mysterious presence, as though awakened but not domesticated by the process of their installation. They are ambiguous entities, chthonic, terrifying and beautiful, their warped and buckled forms riddled with narrow holes and cracks and spotted with a lichen that grows in small rings resembling eyes. Much still remains of the bank and ditches that once surrounded the Avebury ring, sealing the site off from the rest of the world like a time capsule with a lid of sky.

Sheep harassment and re-creation of things past being demanding work, we set off for midmorning refreshments. This venture brought us to the little village church, within whose stony walls the current inhabitants celebrate most of the same things that once required ten square miles. Still, it was old, and I looked. Its floor was paved with graves, and at its center was a thousand-year-old baptismal font crudely carved with a holy man battling serpents — sex/fertility symbols associated with the older local religion. Christianity and the stones have had a mixed relationship; medieval inhabitants of Avebury tried to escape the stones' power by burying them, as though they were people — until one stone top-

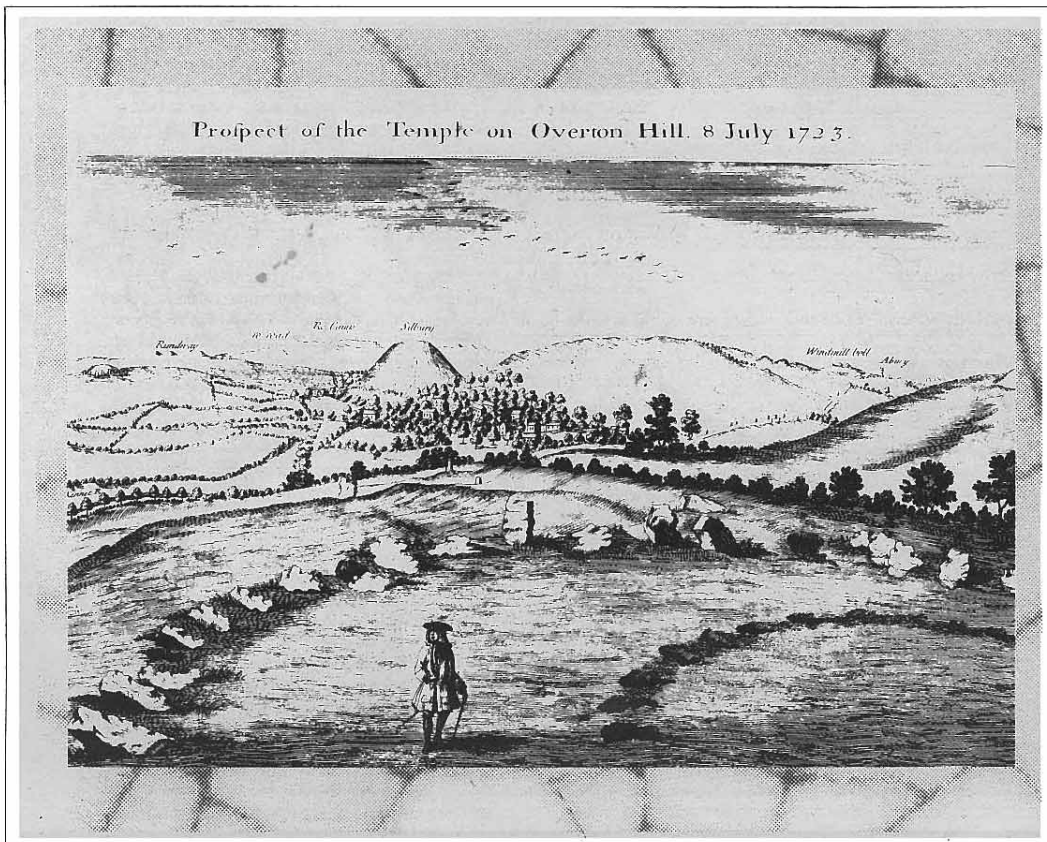
pled onto a member of a burial party, who remained under it for 600 years. Aside from this ill-fated endeavor and a spate of stone-breaking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, little has disturbed Avebury and the other monuments in the four or five millennia since they were built. The remains of the double row of stones leading from Avebury to the Sanctuary are in a hayfield, but the farmer sows and reaps around them. When we were there in late summer the stone rows marched up the slope with curving lines of mown golden hay running parallel to them: two patterns of time passing.


The British have an admirable populist law to the effect that any footpath hallowed by long use must remain perpetually open to walkers, no matter whose land it crosses; so sheep, tourists, monoliths and farmers all coexist more or less peacefully on the same lands. We walked everywhere on these paths, which allowed us to see things that otherwise would have remained hidden. When it rained we sat under a tree, practiced bleating like sheep and got stung by nettles. Anticipation had time to properly ripen during our slow procession through beanfields and wheatfields, down roads and over stiles. As we approached Silbury Hill it gradually rose out of the surrounding land, immense, awe-inspiring and vaguely preposterous, like a giant breast or something cast in a huge jello mold. When we arrived at its base the clouds parted, just as they do in Biblical epics, and the hill received a halo of blue. We began to feel peculiarly blessed as we sloshed back along the little river Winterbourne and saw a whole treeful of rooks erupt into a flying black cloud. We wished to see a hedgehog and not five minutes later saw one, horribly squashed in the middle of the road, a little pile of spines with a halo of gore. Contrite, we returned to the village to restore our spirits with tea and scones and butter and preserves and three or four kinds of odd salads and

a small pie in a cafe that had once been a coachhouse.

Much of the current state of preservation is a result of the tourist trade, but the region has remained remarkably undamaged over the millennia. Humans seem to be quite a mild, benign species in these parts, and the past survives as a powerful presence. Times and beliefs that are immeasurably distant elsewhere seem to linger here just out of grasp, around a corner, on the edge of visibility, and the urge to reach out to them is all but overwhelming. In these old, out-of-the-way places there is a sense of very real continuity — the curator of the local museum, lecturing to a flock of pale, noisy local children, chummily described the Neolithic makers of the local stone circles, pots and arrowheads as "our ancestors."


We did see one small alteration to the stones: a tall plinth in the stone avenue had a pair of black feathers stuck in its sides, looking like ears or antennae. I wanted to make some sort of offering to them and wondered all the way back from Silbury Hill and through tea what could possibly be appropriate. Finally, on our last promenade on our way to the bus stop, I remembered the bottle of water I'd been carrying all day and dodged behind a big, looming stone with a deep channel in one of its faces. When the other visitors were well past, I emptied the bottle into the hole. The water filled it up in a glittering rush with a dusting of grit, seemed to hang poised for a moment, then gently overflowed in long drips, splattering and sinking into the earth without touching the rest of the tilted stone. The rim of the channel, darkened and drooling, suddenly seemed like a mouth, making the rock slightly terrifying, for who knows what results from stirring up an unknown entity? I turned away and it began to rain huge splattering hard drops, so we ran for the bus back to Marlborough. ■





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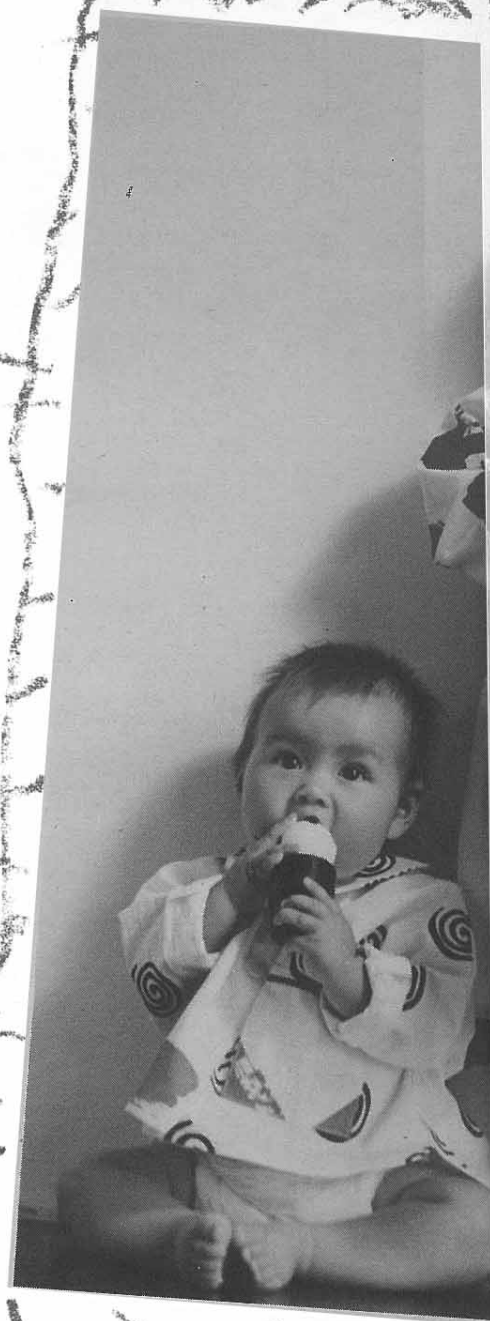
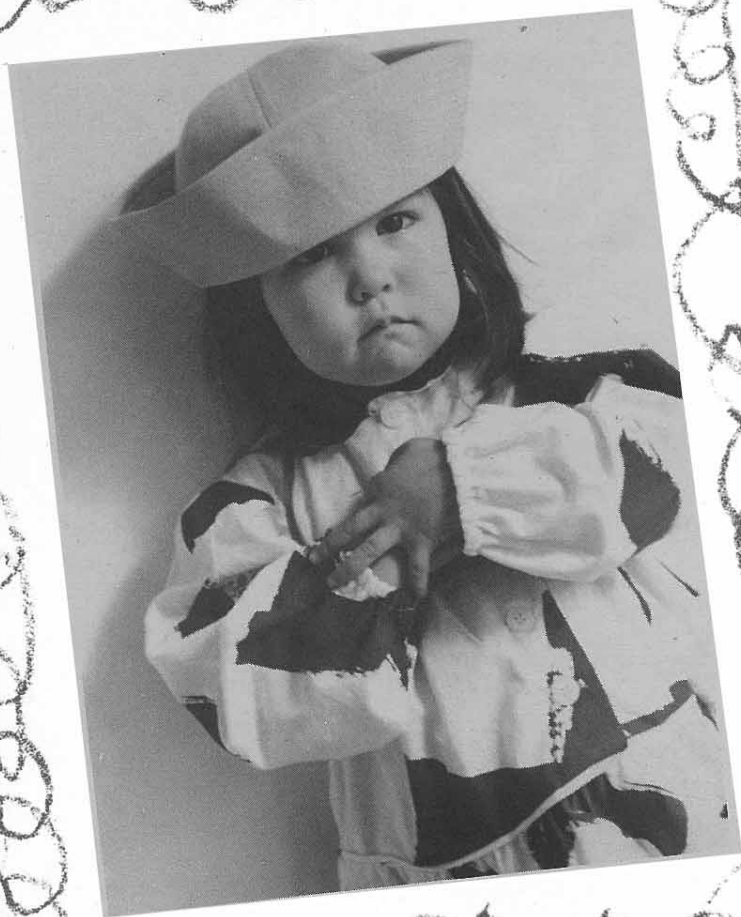
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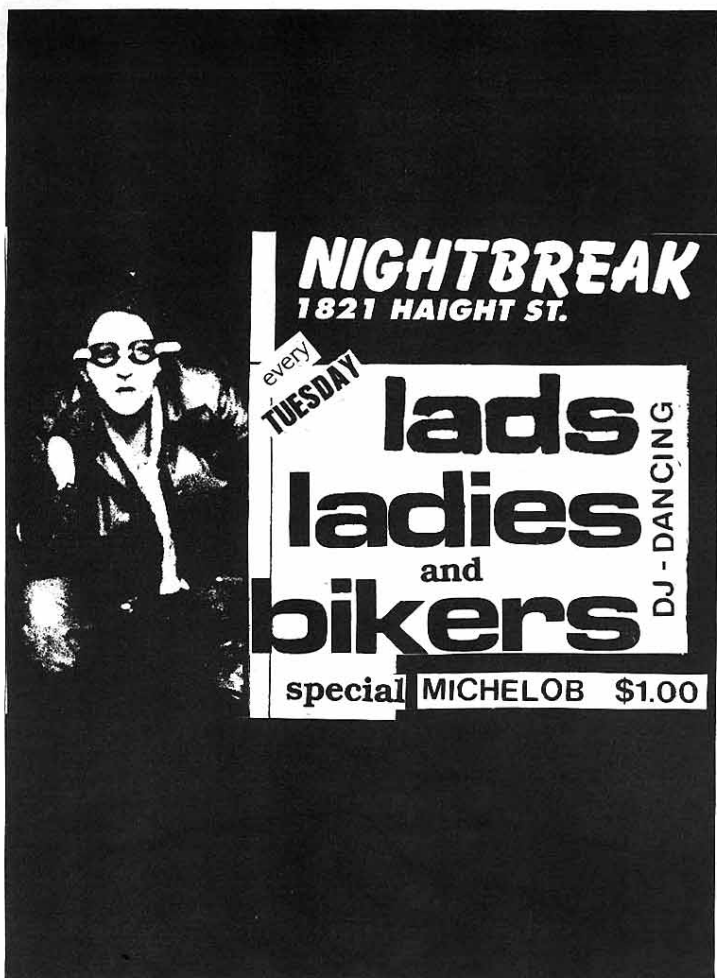
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Reviews

Outer Sunset

There's something fungal about gentrification. One day you have a tiny grocery store, and overnight it turns into another purveyor of pesto. Usually this means that the laundry next door will become a dispensary of expensive designer lamps and the store next to that will start selling ridiculously overpriced second hand clothes. The spread is inevitable, like dry rot. As the end result, every street in San Francisco will look like every other street in San Francisco and the smell of pesto will rise above the city like smog.

For a woman who uses shopping as an active form of meditation, this bodes ill. The serene reflective feeling that comes over me during a good session is directly connected to the sense of personal discovery that I feel when I realize that I will never feel like shelling out \$200 for a Black & Decker chainsaw. Shopping helps me define my life, and that definition demands variety. There is no possibility of enlightenment on Union Street.

These concerns have driven me deep into the only part of the city that has resisted this insidious spread: The Sunset. My search for a healthy ungentrified place to shop has found me strolling around lower Noriega and upper Judah, with a certain determined gleam in my eye. And my efforts have paid off; I have found the shopper's Mecca: Taraval between 14th and 20th Avenues.

This unprepossessing stretch has all the potential for a truly satisfying spree. Armed with only a checkbook and a pocketful of change, a person can spend a wonderful time sampling what this Rodeo Drive of the Sunset has to offer. It would certainly be less expensive than an afternoon with the American Express Gold Card at Gump's. And infinitely more entertaining: the merchants of Taraval apparently use eccentricity to keep the chi-chi at bay.

You would do well to start your expedition at The Balloon Store, where \$11.90 will get you a dozen Care Bears balloons. The proprietor is a dour Filipino gentleman with a remarkable scowl. At the end of the counter his jaunty assistant, a full-length gorilla suit, wears a top hat. In addition to the wide variety of balloons, there is a selection of rubber masks on a rack near the door. You may try on Frankenstein or the Wolfman with impunity — the owner will be contemplating the gorilla with distaste.

Buoyed up by your twelve balloons, you fare forth. You may be tempted by the arresting display of plungers at Clausen Patten Inc., but you should resist the urge to duck in and lay in a supply of faucets. While you're still feeling fresh, head to the Avenues Ballroom. If you have \$35.00 and "a good command of the basic passes and the whip," you can attend the Intermediate West Coast Workshop led by a man who calls himself Oz. In a brief five-hour session Oz claims he can teach: "The Outside whip with Flwrs neckwrap, Tummy whip inside and outside turns for Ldr and ripple for Flwr, Reverse throwout with cold shoulder, Inside whip with back to back crossovers, Side pass with tuck to hammerlock and exit, Underarm pass to hook and snap with freeze option, Whip with

underarm and free spin for both, Sweetheart whip with Ldr's underarm and free spin and the Ldr's spinning flatback."

If this cross between the Kama Sutra and a 49ers game plan has worn you out, consider taking a breather at International Hair Design. While your hair is being sculpted into a unisex do, you can brush up on your Tagalog or Swahili, or even more esoteric tongues: a sign in the window assures, "Universal Languages Spoken." Or you can stop off at Original Dino's Produce and fortify yourself with some Kentucky Beans at 69 cents a pound.

Non sequiturs abound on Taraval. A barber pole spins at the front of Jack's TV Service. A banner reading "Grand Opening" hangs in an otherwise empty window that looks into a totally bare room. The window of Dittler, Notary Public, filled with matchbox cars and wooden storks frozenly dipping their beaks towards a dusty glass, also displays two curious trophies. Shaped like silos and decorated with sketchy drawings of a American soldier and flag, they read, "Potentate Islam Temple." Right up the street you can stand at the door of the Golden Gate Masonic Temple and absorb the emanations from within. Three of the mailboxes have been reserved for Paul Revere, King Solomon, and N. Research. Whether the "N" stands for nuclear, or nim, or noctambulation is anyone's guess.

Next to the Masonic Temple, Grayce's Antiques, Gifts and Jewelry offers an array of gewgaws, knick-knacks and objets d'art. For your dining table she has a set of cruciform ceramic candlesticks painted with the legend "And of his kingdom shall be no end. Luke 1:33." Grayce is also parting with a three-foot-

Adolescence and the body of Mae West. Perfect for the corner of your bedroom.

At Al's Tackle Shop you can pick up a pair of stocking foot waders by Seal-Dri for a paltry \$58.00. While you're there you might want to take advantage of Al's reasonably priced frozen squid. For the fashion-conscious, some of Al's larger lures would make striking earrings. I was particularly taken with the massive fluorescent insects.

The New Viking Barber Shop (two merrily spinning poles) advertises a revolutionary hair-growth elixir for men that has been approved by the Health Ministries of France, Italy, Spain and England. Before-and-after photographs witness the startling progress of a man from total baldness to having a healthy head of what appears to be vermicelli. In only 13 weeks.

At the end of your day you can dine, rather expensively, on the "Icelandic Scampi" at the Gold Mirror Italian Restaurant and then rest your bones at the Sunset Motel, with its color TV and pretty windowboxes. Or, if you're not too exhausted, you can stroll down the rest of Taraval, past the Amity Market, the Eight Immortals Restaurant and Lost Weekend Cocktails. If your timing is right, you can bask in the sunset's glow as you watch the waves come in.

The last time I treated myself to an afternoon on Taraval, I was wandering happily when a sinister sight stopped me in my tracks. A pale green building sported a stylish neon sign: The Chartreuse Cafe. As I peered in, ceiling fans, bent-wood chairs and an espresso machine confirmed my worst fears. I withdrew in alarm to the pavement, then cautiously sniffed. Sure enough, there drifted in the air the ominous aroma of pesto.

Alix Pitcher

Performance

Photo by Marion Gray



In the logic of street babble, a damaged person's heart is bleeding so loudly as to elicit embarrassed stares from an uncomfortable public. . . he's shouting wicked blasphemies in a voice shrill or deep, wrenched from the very fabric of pain and torment — worse, he's shouting at you. Casting futile side-glances of avoidance, you get just far enough past to resume your gallant purpose when something, some combination of his words, perhaps the movie-visuals of sight, perhaps, or the evangelistic fervor of his voice or the twisted elegance of his insistence, sears your scalp and forehead and you

hear him, really hear him, and your gait will never be the same again.

The Karen Finley experience is akin to such a trek through an urban Purgatory, peopled with writhing, smarmy characters out of a Boschian fever dream. These vile bastards speak through her, and she in turn mouths their descriptions of belching, rape, anal penetration, yams-up-the-can-cramming, yuppies as psychic vampires, and other sordid pseudo-sexual acts. Finley is about the use and abuse of power, both as a performer and as an underlying theme of her characterizations. This is a woman up there on

stage, surrounded by a party-set vaguely Oriental-nymph-in-the-wood-like, using language and performance territory usually reserved for the male of the species.

We've seen male performers, from Bruce to Pryor to the Kippers to Burden, revel in either shock tactics, tales of conquest or abstinence, or just plain questionable material. But it's a recent development to witness women as the power source in the creation of performance works out of their observations about their sexuality. Moms Mabley is a possible antecedent to the movement, with Gypsy Rose Lee, Mae West, Lily Tomlin, Pat Oleszko, Cosi Fanni Tutti and Finley fitting into a chronology rooted in the women's arts of burlesque, striptease and belly dance — influences that Finley acknowledges.

At Media, a benefit for the new Generic Video and *Unsound* magazine, the crowd spilled out into the street in two directions. The space was close, hot, full of expectation. After a brief set by the experimental group EX I, who seemed like baby Velvets, Finley casually took the stage and immediately announced that she was "a San Francisco artist," and that she had a *hocker* up her nose. She followed the trance-like, self-

effacing warmup by launching into tales of a paraplegic boy who experienced the sensation of touch for the first time by being raped, of snot-sucking, cocaine-smoking, face-sitting, "Black-talk" in a poetry cadence of meaty thighs, face-sitting and an impactful indictment of Nancy Reagan's "silent but deadly farts." She sweated and spat on the stage, part housewife, part Aunt Jemima, head wrapped, body sheathed in a common dress.

The numbness induced by Finley's bombardment of foul language and ideas exorcises feelings of sexual-psychological abuse by putting these acts into a larger context: it is not the material that is "sick," "blue" or "obscene," but the culture that gives rise to the acts. For me, the moment she abandoned the voices of the Texas radio huckster, the whiner, the inverted male personas, and said with her own voice, "What ever happened to human kindness, or even human meanness?" she seared my scalp and I heard her. The collection of humans-as-damaged-goods obscures abuser and victim, male and female. Ours is a universe so sick that the rapist may be at once villain and practitioner of a healing art.

Carl Heyward

Toy Store

Toy stores? We're talking toy stores? Well: I got two names for you. Mr. Mopp's and Kindel & Graham's.

I tell ya why. OK, first off, a toy store has gotta be big. And it's gotta be packed, packed to the rafters. It's gotta incite wild-eyed, childish desire. And a toy store, a good toy store has to be magnanimous. After all, it's 100% about wish fulfillment. A toy store that thwarts or frustrates is not a real toy store. Probably just a boutique or something.

But Mr. Mopp's and Kindel & Graham's are for real. And real toy stores like them are big deals, wheeling and dealing in a Disney wonderful world of wants and gets. As toy stores they fill the bill, have everything to show for the desire they instill. They're big. Huge. Multiplicitous. I'm talking variety, service, luck and love. Toys, ya know, toys.

So look these two places up. And go ahead in. But: you gotta go in on all fours. You gotta be knocking your kneecaps on the floorboards, or slithering along on your shinbones. Maximize damage to the toes of your shoes. But the primo importance is: you gotta have your eyes at about crotch level, or seat level. That's the level of (in)sight that blesses the quote-unquote innocent with the barest and basest instances of honesty. It's the level that gives the glimpse of fingertips sneaking to thigh beneath the table. The level that tells us what Uncle Arthur really has under his fingernails. Tells us if Mrs. Coyle wears

underwear, and what's on the underside of the telephone stand. This is the visionary level: giving it all away, laying it all out for the taking. The sweet eyebrow highbrow of wide-eyed childhood. And this level of insight brings all those multifarious, multitudinous toy store delights closer than life, closer than wow. So go in on your kneecaps.

And: use your hands. Not your fingers. Your whole stickysweet paw. And in all directions, all at once, high low up down, all at once, in a mad whirl, a dizzy tizzy, an escapade of grabbing.

The highest-yield gratifier, the area where the true, stone-cold conceptual essence of "toy store" resides, is: the trinkets quarter. Mr. Mopp's in Berkeley and Kindel & Graham's in San Francisco have, top to bottom, the best trinket bins in the Bay Area. Aisles upon aisles of low shelves, densely layered with bitty bins of bitty bitty things. I mean, tops and whistles, jacks, superballs, zots, bubbles, transformers, windups, caps, cars, marbles, inkspots, partypoppers, space blasters, eraser lightbulbs. All in these innocuous cardboard boxes or plastic baskets, even glass bowls, and everything so wide open and tilted welcomingly forward.

So you long-arm it over each little rim, make a feisty grab and open your little paw right up close to your face. Gotta look at a toy straight on and up close. Nose-close. Color? Shape? Smell? You determine what all it could possibly be (exclude only those things which it definitely could not be). Then bring it onto the floor. Hands on. Spins? Bounces? Squeaks? Whistles? Jumps? Groans? Metamorphoses? Is it good? Good. Throw it back. Next grab.

Of course, there are other sections of these toy stores. Notably, the disguise section. Here, Kindel & Graham's surpasses Mr. Mopp's. The latter is too demure, too educational or convenient, and the masks are tacked up on a far wall. Too far for even a long long-arm, especially from seat-high. Kindel & Graham's gives you danger in that department, gives you morbidity. Masks that cover your whole head and shoulders. Gorilla gloves and Morticia fingernail extenders. Claws or clown shoes bigger than Uncle Arthur's wingtips. Positively frightening, even in broad daylight.

While I'm firing the criticisms: Mr. Mopp's has these silly glass cases. A toy store should have nothing behind glass, nohow, nowhere. If it's breakable, it oughta be out there for the breaking. But Mr. Mopp's does have a slightly refined, educational bent. Puts them slightly out of the stickypaw, shinbone ballpark. Kindel & Graham's lays it all out, flat out and strewn out.

However, Kindel & Graham's has a design flaw. They had their aisles done on Safeway consultation and laid them too straight and wide. An adult-high eye can scan the place from the door and snag you. It's too hard to lose the sillybody who's keeping time for the parking meter or the rush hour. You can't have grabber's peace of

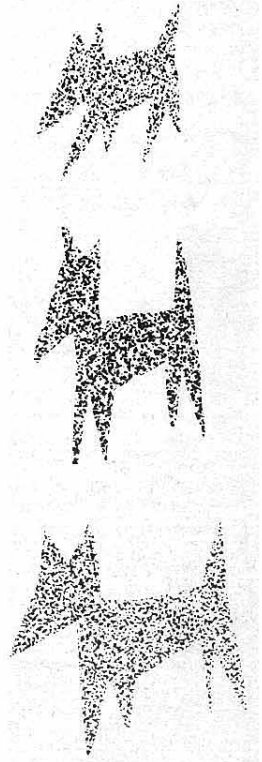
mind; somebody's gonna see you're in earshot and say, Time to go, baby.

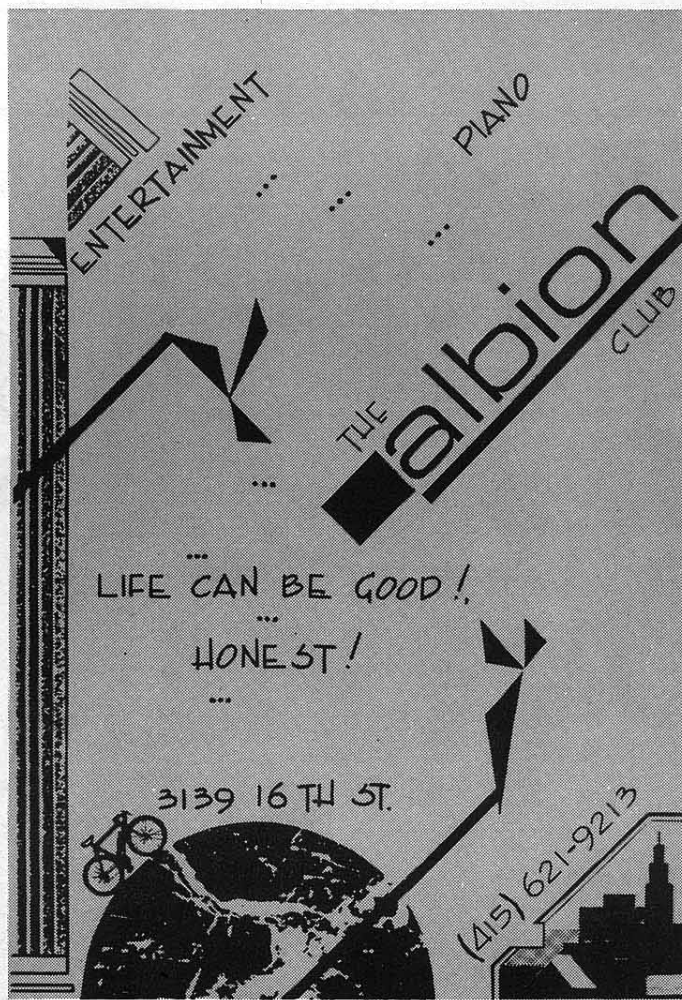
Mr. Mopp's, though, is a thicket of short, low, intricate and overstocked toy shelves. The aisles are narrow, labyrinthine, punctuated by metal trees hung with jokes or puzzles or even candy. At seat level you'd never be snagged. But Berkeley kids do come when called.

Mr. Mopp's is also somewhat more pricy. But the trinket bins in both retail entertainment establishments run price tags at two to four bits only. The best things in life are cheap; magic comes in small doses. And a true toy store's trinket bins are magical, mythical. You can get all you want with your change.

And powerful, we're talking very, very powerful here. A toy store is a powerful, powerful thing. Because a toy store is the only living thing that always fills the bill. Because, in those cramped and charming environs, a toy store produces the very desire it exists to fulfill. Nobody goes to a toy store looking for a particular something, unless they're a new aunt or uncle. Toy store visits are ooh-oooh sudden, spontaneous as popcorn or cereal box prizes. You know you're gonna get it, you know it's gonna be nifty, but you don't know exactly what it is yet. Needs are already anticipated, wishes produced and fulfilled, rapid fire, on the spot. What you see is not just what you get, it's what you want. And there you have it. Nose-close. And ain't life sweet.

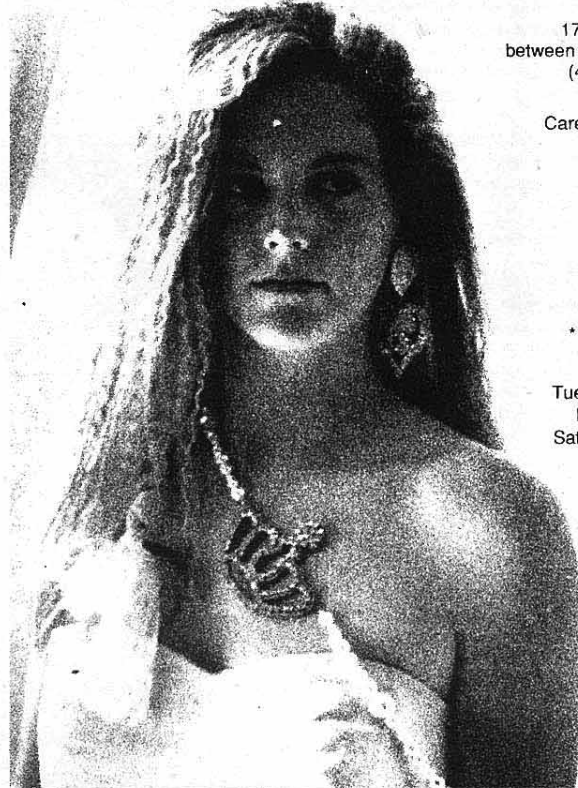
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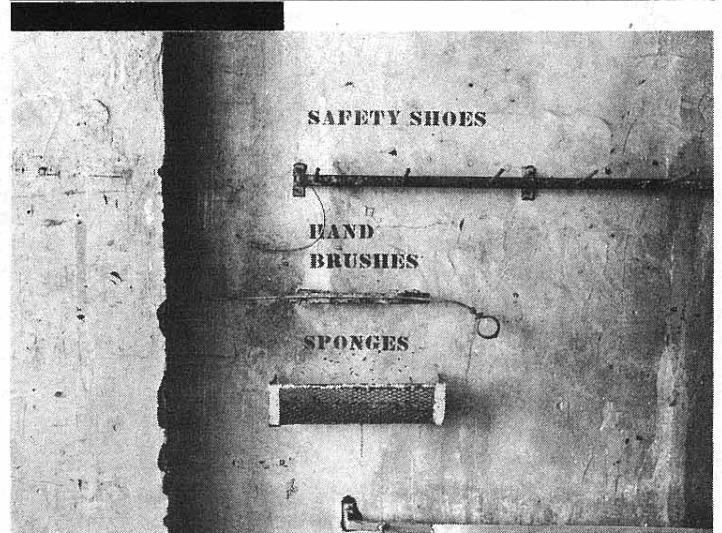
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Alon Di Marco 1986

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At first glance there's an odd sense of déjà-vu about the Longshoremen, a kind of post-WWII feeling, visions of smoky basement clubs in Paris with their leather-clad retinue of gaunt Marxists, existentialists, bohemians, instant philosophers and the occasional poet. Dressed in black, staring intently into space like beatniks on Quaaludes, moving in terse mechanical gestures, these three Longshoremen are not about to unload anybody's cargo. Instead, they've brought their own brand of urban poetry—part performance art, part punk aesthetics—to this here city.

As Dog sees it, the Longshoremen are providing a service, fulfilling a function. In the age of Reaganomics the underground is dead, so you might as well do something practical that crosses over into theatre, rock, comedy and political dogma. That way there's a better chance to reach a wider audience, says Dog. Dog is the group's resident poet cum vocalist. He is flanked by acolytes Judy Gittelsohn and Carol Detweiler. Dog is also a cabdriver and a filmmaker. He's been working on the same film, *Weekend Hippie*, since 1979. The women are two of the three partners in a maternity clothing company, Japanese Weekend.

The Longshoremen's current "obsessions" run as follows: "Horny truck drivers, horny mechanics, greasy mechanics, convicts, prison, shacks, shacks, orphans, ragamuffins, lady pirates, bums, more shacks, accidents, getting dirty, getting drunk." One can certainly see why this would appeal to the public at large. Lyrics like "A greasy mechanic like me/Could sure have a good time with your tire" are such stuff as dreams are made on.

And it is definitely a step forward, believes Dog, from their first effort, showcased on the album *Grr Huh Yeah*, which dealt with caveman concerns—you know, rocks, bones, beatniks, '50s jazz, voodoo, anything basic and primitive. Not to mention their brief forays into Russian punk rock ("Really bad, really awful, it lasted one show," recalls a gleeful Dog) and their covers of '50s "tacky, tinny, cheap-sounding, double-entendre, sexually oriented black rhythm-and-blues songs."

The masses didn't take to any of the Longshoremen's previous genres. "I had an album people didn't like, I had three types of shows people didn't like, and really I should have given up," admits Dog. But he didn't, and forged ahead with the two women. A musician was supposed to be part of the act as well, but when he called in sick the three decided to appear sans backup at Wolfgang's "Beatnik Series."

Lo and behold, the crowd went wild! "I just about fainted," recalls Dog, adding that the group immediately rushed into the Voice Farm studio, where they recorded their second album, *Mechanical Shack* to be released any day now. It is, Dog says, "brilliant." The album has only incidental music sampled off records and fed through Voice Farm's emulator—a cheap guitar lick here, a touch of the old accordion and drums there, with some harpsicord and harmonica thrown in.

Why Voice Farm? Because they've been friends for eons, in a hippie-steeped, extended-family-type network that includes Club Foot, Altar Boys, Boy Clams, Pink Section, Japanese Weekend, local celebs like Matthew Heckert of the infamous Survival Research Lab, musicians Louis Olds, Norbert Stachel, Carlos Gomez, and other assorted folks.



One has to witness a spectacle, however, to really comprehend the Longshoremen's antics. Dog's poetry, for want of a better word, is declaimed by him in a pattern-drill reminiscent of some of Peter Handke's relentless "Sprechstuecke" or "speaking." It is atonal, repetitive in places, at times monotonous, at times relieved by a sudden inflection. It takes on its own rhythm, occasionally gleaned off a Coltrane album or a Cajun song. There is a hypnotic resonance to the delivery. There is also a quality of detachment, a nonchalant demeanor that works well in this context.

The two women dancers/vocalists have concocted a choreography one might label "minimalist" but for its offbeat weirdness. From gestures taken off a slightly catatonic David Byrne to a robust polka facsimile, one minute they're bending over with their derrieres in the air, the next raising themselves up like mad Moslems in prayer. Crawling, swinging on imaginary ropes or talking gibberish—it's all part of the group's theatrics. "Dog is our inspiration," stresses Gittelsohn. "Also, we're inspired by goofiness, simplicity." The three have been friends since the late '70s.

The songs themselves wander all over the landscape. There are familiar references to Spec's and "North Beach ale, savage scurvy, moaning lust," and more intellectual pursuits, with the Zarathustra song punctuated with Germanic "Ach!" and allusions to the death of God. "Canning Factory" has, appropriately, an accompaniment of clattering cans. "I'm gonna get me some of that free love," proclaims "State Line," about a horny truck driver. Dog creates helter-skelter, surrounded by the "million books" he keeps at this house. Studs Terkel's *Working*, is a frequent source.

Grr Huh Yeah

W O R D S O F W I S D O M

The Pit

Check the transmission, rotate the tires
I get awful greasy in the pit
when I change the oil
then I rotate the tires

I'm a greasy mechanic
and I'm in the back of your car
I'm a real big man
and I'm lookin' for your tire
a greasy mechanic like me
could sure have a good time with your tire

I could see you while I adjusted your clutch
I could feel you breathing
and I adjusted your clutch
I get awful greasy in the pit when I change the clutch
then I rotate the tires

I'm a greasy mechanic
and I'm in the back of your car
I'm a real big man
and I'm lookin' for your tire
a greasy mechanic like me
could sure have a good time with your tire

Performance Updates



Photos by S. Lee Hagenhorse

As far as politics is concerned, the Longshoremen have a closer affinity with the ILWU, one of the country's more progressive unions. But Dog's vision takes him a step further. This is a "horrible era" we live in, he says, concluding, "I'm not an American, whatever that means."

Their biggest beef is with the return of what Dog calls "LA-type nouveau riche white trash" into San Francisco and the destruction of old buildings to make way for yet another cookie shop. While he has often thought of declaring North Beach (what's left of it) and South of Market "yuppie death zones," a less sanguinary plan of his calls for urinating in the great outdoors: "If everyone who lives South of Market would just piss outside, eventually it would smell so bad, the elite people would stay away." Makes sense. All in favor... Dog, who grew up in "the boring state of Washington," hitchhiked to California right out of high school. Gittelsohn hails from Oregon, Detweiler from Chicago. As the Longshoremen see it, "Manifest Destiny stops at San Francisco." Caveat emptor. ■

You pulled in the station like you owned the place
I was watching behind the glass
You were oblivious but I've got your address
and I'm going to drive by

I'm a greasy mechanic
and I'm in the back of your car
I'm a real big man
and I'm lookin' for your tire
a greasy mechanic like me
could sure have a good time with your tire

Check the oil, check the tires
cut the fanbelt, you're running on your battery
we've got some fanbelts, they're not cheap
leave it here, I'll bring it by

I'm a greasy mechanic
and I'm in the back of your car
I'm a real big man
and I'm lookin' for your tire
a greasy mechanic like me
could sure have a good time with your tire

Words by Dog

In the early part of 1985 my friend and I stood in front of a storefront half a block from the Billboard Cafe and we said, "This would be an ideal location for a small theater." One and a half years later, I am in that space sitting across the table from Joegh Bullock and Marcia Crosby two of the founders of Climate Gallery (unfortunately, the third partner, Jim Palmer, is away in New York). Joegh is a photographer and videographer who formerly ran the 20x20 Gallery and Off The Wall Cinema, which showcased Super 8 films. Marcia, who comes from a textile/design background, collaborates with Ermanno Di Febo and Mary Podgurski (of Extreme Exposure) on the Glas-Haus events.

Climate opened its doors in June 1985 with Nina Wise's *Walking Home*, following this with Bill Talen and Ellen Sebastian's *Shape*. Winston Tong, John Woodall and many others have since performed. But it was Helen Shumaker in the late Philip-Dimitri Galas's *Mona Rogers Live* that really put this new space on the map, according to Joegh. Climate serves as a bridge for so-called "cutting-edge" performers to move into bigger venues. Now, thanks to American Inroads, who originally brought *Mona Rogers* to San Francisco, and to David Hyry, who did a superb job as publicist, *Mona Rogers* is at the Marines Memorial Theater.

Recently Climate presented *Personality*, a piece written by Gina Wendkos and Ellen Ratner. A one-woman show. Like *Mona Rogers*, it features a superb dual performance by Ellen Ratner as a confused daughter and her dominating mother. Climate, with its feeling of intimacy, is the perfect space for terse, electrifying shows like *Personality*. Sitting in the audience was like being holed up in a parlor somewhere with Ratner's obsessive and riveting characters.

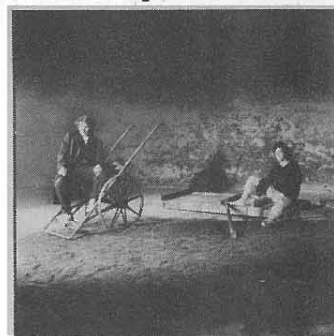
With the scarcity of theaters having fewer than 100 seats, Climate is a much-needed showcase for Bay Area talent.

On the other side of town, The Lab, run by Allan Millar, John Distefano, Michael Cavello and others, has been presenting experimental music, dance and theatre since May 1984. Though run on a volunteer basis and in need of a major facelift, The Lab manages to present exciting new works. Its current shows include Elliot Sharp from New York (who was recently featured in a *New York Times* article with Peter Gordon); *Freshly Wrapped Candy*, from Los Angeles; and Charles Dennis, also from New York, who collaborated with Robert Wilson on the original production of *Einstein on the Beach*. The Lab will showcase Charles Dennis's new solo performance, *City Animal*, on October 25.

"Thus the sight of a flower reveals, it is true, the presence of this well-defined part of a plant, but it is impossible to stop at this superficial observation; in fact, the sight of the flower provokes in the mind much more significant reactions, because the flower expresses an obscure vegetal resolution. What the configuration and color of the corolla reveal, what the dirty traces of pollen or the freshness of the pistil betray doubtless cannot be adequately expressed by language; it is, however, useless to ignore (as is generally done) this inexpressible real presence and to reject as puerile absurdities certain attempts at symbolic interpretation."

from *The Language of Flowers*
by Georges Bataille

French novelist-philosopher Georges Bataille. Presented by Intersection for the Arts, *Eclaboussures* has elements of Grotowski, Artaud, Beckett and the Living Theater. Five performers (four males and one female) under three rows of lights hung slightly above their heads, their faces contorted as if wearing masks, sustained dynamic expression through a series of vignettes. Using a violin, a trumpet, their voices and different parts of their bodies (often pounded against the wooden floor), the performers produced a wide range of very disturbing sounds that punctuated and strengthened their emotion.



Eclaboussures, a production of Theatre de Banlieue, is based on the erotic writings of Their movements were not illustrations of a dramatic text but rather a poetic language of gestures such as we feel in our dreams (or nightmares), accompanied by fragments of Bataille's poetry babbled as Gregorian chant.

From scene to scene, the cast of *Eclaboussures* demonstrates a view of human desire inspired perhaps by Bataille's *The Language of Flowers* — observed not as an ideal valued for its external beauty but as the hairy sexual organs at the center of most flowers, like a bouquet of different kinds of flowers trying to mate and never succeeding, with a kind of ecstasy once in a while before moving apart again. On a floor covered with dirt (or perhaps manure), Banlieue presented their tragicomic oppositions in the course of their death-dramas. A very funny scene (which our Italian companion said reminded her of a high mass in Naples) was performed by Baba Merirouk in gibberish-Italian as he circled the stage and jiggled little bells in his hands.

Bataille's writing has many references to the works of Dali and Bunuel. Bataille was part of the surrealist movement even though he and Breton never really got along. And *Eclaboussures*, like the slit-open-eye scene in *Andalusian Dog*, penetrates the viewer's subconscious and transforms it into one big dialytic seeing eye, an eye of "cannibal delicacy."

Film buffs should watch for the second annual Film Arts Festival at the Roxie Cinema on November 7-9. Some of the highlights of the festival are Eric Marin's documentary on Lou Harrison, *Cherish, Conserve, Consider, Create*; Victor Fridman's *Argentinian: The Broken Silence*; Niccolò Caldarara and Yuri Kageyama's *A Back Alley Asian-American Love Story*; Tina DiFelicianantonio's *Living With Atos*; and a peek into the mind of the most depressed man on earth in Mikel B. Anderson's *Alone in the T-Shirt Zone*. For further information on the Film Arts Festival, call (415) 552-8760.

Paul Kwan

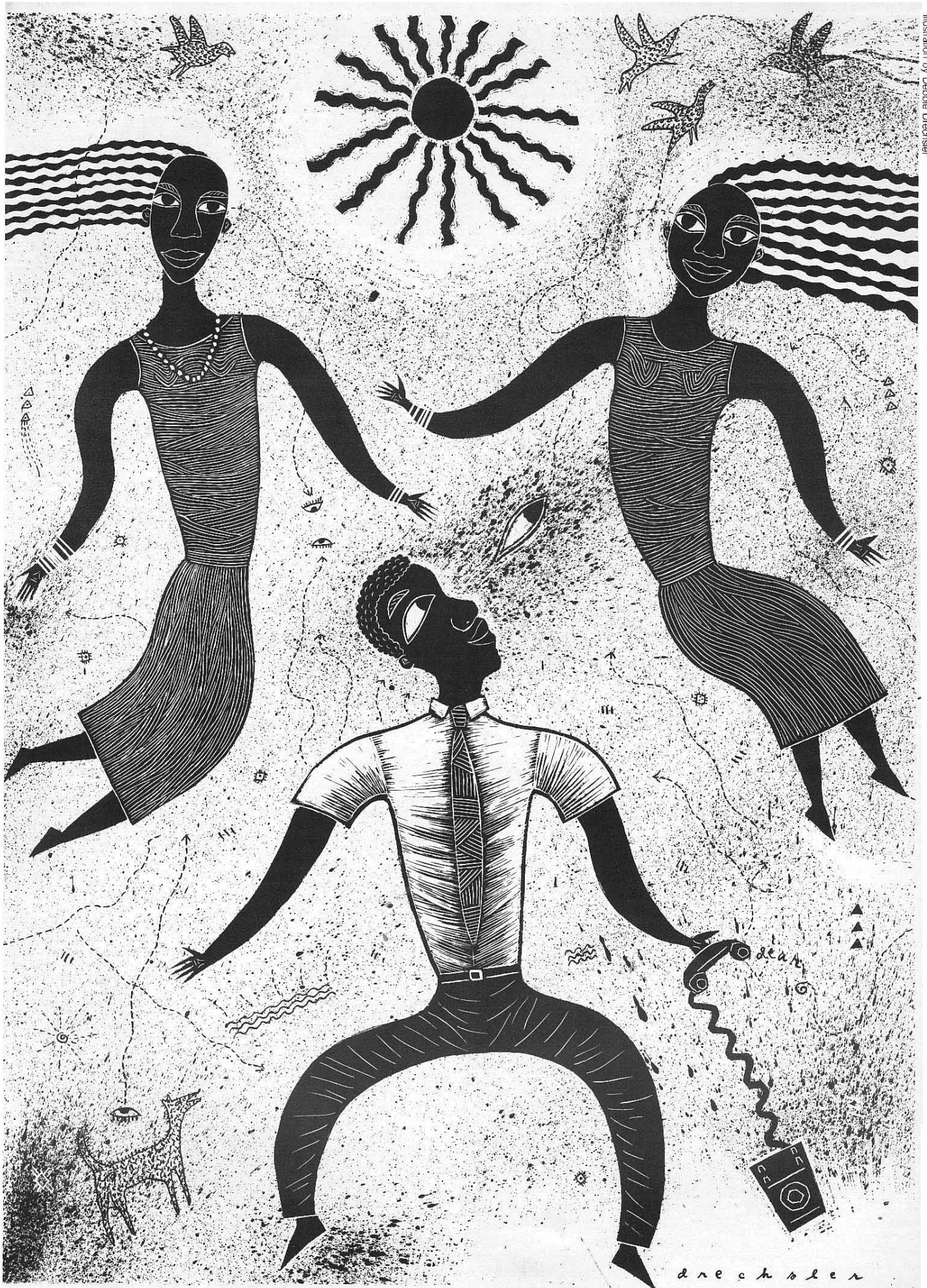
POST NOTE

A new store with a very continental air has opened in Hayes Gulch. Carnival, 1883 Hayes Street, feels more like a countess' boudoir than a clothing store. Owner Caitlin Maynard has eschewed the current trend of high-tech/lo-tech interiors and instead created a very personal and eclectic store. "I got my ideas from traveling around Europe," said Caitlin. "The shops are set up there with more individuality with each designer having a store with entirely its own look."

Carnival's look combines a feeling of travel, old suitcases are stacked as shelves for leather stilettoes, with an ageless sense of style. Here retro fashions are given a very modern twist. 60s satin pumps are hand painted and decorated with sequins, antique glass beads are added to woven neckpieces that double as belts and hats handmade by Caitlin are sewn with jet beads.

It's refreshing to find a store infused with so much personality. Carnival is a bit off the beaten track but that seems to fit with the store's "hidden treasure" style.

R.B.



drechsler

The Lunch

by Julian Maka'a

When I told my friends that I was going to the Solomon Islands last July, the general response was, "Where???"

Like most of them — like most of us, in fact, who are too young to remember the bloody WWII battles on Guadalcanal — I had never heard of the Solomons either, until I was asked to travel there and write about them for Islands magazine.

The Solomons are a South Pacific nation some 2,000 kilometres northeast of Australia, in between Vanuatu and Papua, New Guinea. The people are Melanesian, an attractive race with skin hues ranging from mocha to jet black. Some also have naturally blond hair, which makes for a startling contrast. The islands themselves — there are over 900 in all — are uplifted coral atolls covered with dense jungle. Wild orchids, giant butterflies and man-eating crocodiles thrive in the bush.

The Solomons are not exactly the place where one would expect to find a haven for contemporary writing. Imagine my surprise when, en route to my destination, I stopped over at the University of the South Pacific's bookshop in Fiji and discovered a dozen collections of poetry, plays and short fiction — all by young Melanesian authors.

One emerging voice of particular eloquence belongs to a brilliant and introspective young man named Julian Maka'a. His first collection of stories, *The Confession and Other Stories*, was published in Fiji in 1985. Julian is currently working as a disc jockey and social commentator for the SIBC — "Radio Happy Isles." Julian Maka'a wrote *The Lunch*, along with the rest of *The Confession*, in the early 1980s. He is currently devoting his literary skills to recording "custom stories" — traditional legends of the Solomon Islands — as told by his mother, his uncle and other spiritually knowledgeable relatives.

Jeff Greenwald

Akama heard the number he had dialled ringing at the other end. He held the mouthpiece of his phone closer to his mouth and pressed the receiver to his ear, listening intently and anxiously. The number rang again twice. Then:

"Hello, one-three-one," a female voice answered a few minutes later.

He suddenly felt his pulse beat faster. He was not used to talking with girls. His jaw trembled as he held on to the phone. Temporarily he was struck dumb and couldn't say a word. But he persuaded himself to say something. "Come on. Say something or she'll drop the phone," he thought. But still he couldn't say anything.

"Can I help you?" the soft voice asked after a few moments. But still Akama was unsure of what to say and pressed the receiver tightly to his ear, hesitating. He had expected a boy to answer. The high voice on the line made him nervous and uneasy.

"Oh-oh," he began, "Nga-Ngade, please," he eventually stammered, mispronouncing the name.

"Ngade? Hold on, please," the girl replied softly. Akama felt more confident when he heard the girl's tone of voice.

"Thanks — dear!" he replied, his nervousness now gone. He suddenly felt certain that he could strike up a conversation with the girl. He was excited by the thought.

"Ngade's a naes bola, don't you agree?" he quickly added while the girl was still trying to put the line through.

"Oh, yes! He's lovely," she replied with a giggle.

Now that he had overcome his uneasiness, a different kind of feeling took hold of him.

"Um..."

"Hello," a deep voice interrupted just as he wanted to add something else to the girl.

"Damn it," Akama thought, "she's not listening any more." He smiled scornfully to himself.

"Oh, hello, Ngade!" he said, pretending not to be annoyed. He wished the girl were still on the line.

"How're you? It's me, Akama. Doing anything this afternoon?"

he continued, not giving Ngade time to answer. He was trying to cover up his uneasiness — or rather the excitement he felt from the brief discussion with the girl. As he talked with Ngade his feelings subsided. But in his mind he could still hear the echo of the voice that had answered the phone. He wished he hadn't asked for Ngade straight away but the girl, he knew, had put him through to Ngade and wasn't listening any more. He gave up thinking about her and concentrated on what Ngade was saying. He felt a little embarrassed.

"Oh, hello, Akama. I'm fine, thanks, and you?"

"Fine," Akama replied.

"Good," Ngade said. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Just asking whether you're going out for lunch with anybody, that's all," Akama replied.

"Well... I'm going for lunch with 'Mom'. You can come with us," Ngade said. Akama was silent for a minute and then said, "I'll come."

"Good," Ngade replied. "Then I'll see you at twelve o'clock sharp. Right?" he concluded.

"Ia... I'll be there," Akama replied. Then he hung up.

After putting down the phone Akama smiled. It was, he knew, going to be the second time for him to have lunch with Ngade — his only very good friend. But rippling still at the back of his mind was the sound of the girl who had answered the phone. He wondered whether he would ever get a chance to talk to her in person. He wished that he would!

Anticipation and the thoughts he was lost in made him forget about the information he had been asked to find.

"Hey! Found it yet?" his senior officer asked after waiting without getting a response from Akama for some time.

The officer, a stocky, clean-shaven man in his 60s, usually had a pair of spectacles hanging around his neck on a piece of black string. When he wanted to read he would lift them up to his eyes. He had them on his fat nose now and was staring through them at Akama at that very moment. He held the file he had been leafing through.

"Er..." Akama began with a start, trying to find an excuse. "No. Not yet, Sir. I've got a stomach-ache. I can't concentrate. Give me a few more minutes, please. I'm sorry," he replied, rubbing his stomach with both hands and pretending to be in great pain.

"Agghh," he groaned.

"Don't bother, Akama. That's all right. You'd better try and get something for it," the man advised.

Akama glanced at the clock, 12:05.

"Ei! Five minutes late. Better hurry!" he thought to himself as he got up from his chair.

"OK, Sir. I'll see you later," he said, quickly walking towards the door as though he was still in great pain.

"OK, Akama," the man replied, "see you."

Akama, closing the door, smiled and hurried down the stairs. When he reached the ground floor he dashed out into the burning heat of the midday sun.

"Dammit. The sun's always hot these days," he muttered to himself, rushing along the road on foot, looking here and there for any signs of Ngade.

Reaching the end of the footpath, he stopped to let cars pass before he crossed the road. Ngade called to him from outside his office and they stopped a taxi to take them to where Ngade's "steady" worked.

When they reached the office Ngade got out while Akama remained in the car. After a few minutes inside the office, Ngade came out followed by a girl. She was shorter and much fairer than him. Akama smiled at the girl when she glanced at him as she and Ngade approached the car. It was not the first time he had seen her. Her name was Arisi. He had met her with Ngade several times before.

"Hello, Arisi. Been working hard?" Akama greeted her as she settled into the seat beside him in the back of the taxi.

"Not really..."

"She never works," Ngade interrupted before she could finish speaking.

"That's him. He's talking about himself!" Arisi snapped back, joking.

"Shhh! No harm meant, dear," Ngade replied and laughed. Akama found it very amusing. He had never been out with a girl before. He had never known what it was like, arguing with a girl. He laughed, however, when Ngade glanced back at him and winked.

They had been negotiating the lunch-hour traffic for about ten minutes before they were held up in the long queue at the one-way bridge which separated the centre of the town from the restaurant they wanted to go to. They were stopped for nearly another ten minutes because of the traffic.

"Oh, come on. Wave us on. When will they build a new bridge to stop these hold-ups on this rotten one?" Akama, very impatient, muttered.

"There's not going to be a new bridge. There's no money. Maybe in a hundred years' time," Ngade jokingly replied. The four of them laughed.

The policeman on duty finally motioned to them to cross the bridge. They followed the long queue ahead of them over the narrow bridge. As they drove through the Chinese shopping centre, they saw people rushing in and out of the shops looking for food to buy for lunch. They soon reached the restaurant and Ngade asked Akama to go in with him.

"What about Arisi?" Akama asked.

"No. We're not having lunch in there. Too hot. We'll just fetch some food and go back to her hostel," Ngade said.

As soon as it was handed to them they quickly left because the place was too hot and crowded. All the wooden seats around the restaurant were occupied. But still more people were going in as the two boys came out.

Once more in the taxi, they drove off towards Arisi's hostel. As they sped along, Ngade slowly glanced back over his shoulder and winked at Arisi who was always staring at his back. Akama thought that she seemed to be expecting that to happen. Arisi smiled. Akama smiled too but he looked away quickly. He didn't want Ngade to see him do that.

Akama marvelled quietly. He also pined himself. Why hadn't he had any girl friends? "Am I ugly?" he wondered. Or was he lacking whatever it was that girls looked for in boys? He was too hungry to think too long about it. Such matters were

to be considered when he had his own time.

After they had driven for some time along the road, Ngade indicated to the driver that they should turn off and follow an unsealed road to Arisi's hostel.

"Turn up there," Ngade said, pointing. The driver turned off as soon as they reached the road Ngade indicated.

The small road they followed was one-way, and the dust blew up as they drove along, flying into the many houses along the street. People walking on the street protected their eyes and noses from the dust. After half a mile they turned off the road and stopped outside a house.

"This is where we stop," Ngade glanced back and told Akama. They paid the taxi fare and approached the house slowly.

When they were near the house, a girl hailed them and they answered her.

"Take a seat, boys," Arisi said, producing two chairs as they were inside the house. "Wait while Apikosi helps me out with the food."

"Thanks, madam. That's very kind of you," Ngade replied.

Akama nodded in agreement and smiled when Arisi glanced at him. Apikosi and Arisi, to Akama, nearly looked the same: they both had long hair, were short and very pretty. But Apikosi was a little fatter and thicker in the waist than Arisi. Arisi's face was round while Apikosi's seemed oval, and when she smiled Akama noticed a space between her front top teeth. She was also a little taller than Arisi. Both girls were much fairer than Ngade and Akama, but nevertheless there they were, together for lunch.

"Right, boys," Apikosi announced. "Food's ready, times's moving, so better eat."

The food was chicken, pineapples, cucumbers and green tomatoes, divided on four plates.

"I'll have a piece of chicken," Akama said and extended his hands to pull a piece of chicken off a plate.

"Mmmm... nice," Akama heard Ngade say and glanced in time to see him strip the meat off a chicken breast and begin to chew quickly. Arisi and Apikosi both glanced at Ngade, glanced at each other, and smiled between mouthfuls. They too seemed to be enjoying the food. Akama took two pieces of cucumber. He ate them after he had taken some chicken.

"The food's very nice," Ngade said after they had finished eating. Akama and the two girls acknowledged this.

The afternoon breeze was cool and the four sat back in their chairs and chatted for some time, listening to the popular tune "I'm Nobody's Child" on the radio. The words of the tune were clear and they all liked it. Later, while they talked, a dog and her young fought over the bones of the chicken thrown into a bin outside the house. After they had talked a little about their jobs it was time to go back to work.

Ngade ordered the girls to dash ahead of him and Akama to try and stop a taxi. The radio had announced that the time was five minutes to one. They had to hurry. While the girls ran ahead, the two boys strode along behind.

"You know, I've just been reading a book. A very funny one," Ngade said. "But the only phrase I can still remember is one by the main character in the story. A black man."

"What's the phrase?" Akama asked.

"I reached down and felt the valley of moist where men live and die and live again," Ngade said and began to laugh.

"What does that mean?" Akama asked, looking puzzled.

But the girls were calling them to the taxi they had stopped and Ngade promised to tell Akama the meaning some time later. ■

the NEXT STAGE

Modern Theater has pierced the boundary of the proscenium pillars blurring the distinction between actor and audience and fusing technology, art and performance. The result is a new brand of theater rich in visual imagery with little obligation to traditional narrative. Sculpture, film, puppetry, walkmans and the occasional actor are blended to illustrate social conditions and to entertain. An epoch of performance art that began in 1909 with the Italian Futurists has come to maturity. The four writer-directors featured here are continuously developing their unique interart, multimedia performances. Their sphere of influence has reached an international level as they explore and expand the area between performance art and inveterate stage drama.

By Katherine Brown

Alan Finneran, a pioneer of "visual theater," founded Soon 3 in 1972. He writes, directs and designs the props for his performance landscapes.

Frank: You've been working in theater since 1967. Would you describe your progression?

AF: I started as a sculptor. I began making animated sculpture with motors and at one point projected movies onto the sculpture to give it a sense of animation. From that I went on to make other sculpture that contained movie projectors and that had a landscape feel to it. These were the origins of cinema sculpture. Finally the emphasis changed from the kinetic sculpture to the performance. That's where it became theatrical.

Frank: The large size of your props is impressive. What are you trying to convey?

AF: I've gone through periods where I've deliberately used very large-scale stuff to make a surrounding, architectural landscape that includes the audience within. The first piece we did in San Francisco was at the Museum of Modern Art, in the rotunda; it was called *Desire Circus*. The audience was in the center, and they were surrounded by eight tons of steel and mechanical equipment. It was an attempt to integrate sculpture, film, painting and performance in a hybrid way, rather than in a simultaneous way. In those

days I used the scale because I felt that in order for people in our culture to notice something it had to be very active and large because that's the way our world is. That's what is normal.

Frank: *Iguana Hotel* was a departure for you in some ways.

AF: It was, in some ways; it was sort of an installation, a kinetic tableau.

Frank: You invite audience participation?

AF: Oh, absolutely! That's one thing that appeals to me about theater — it's alive and it invites the audience to participate very directly.

Frank: Do you feel any obligation to your audience?

AF: I don't feel obligated to the audience. I feel obligated to lead a good life and to use any intelligence that I have. I don't feel that artists have anything to say to the audience that isn't already clearly understood — I don't feel that is the true function of art.

Frank: What is the true function of art?

AF: The true function of art is to celebrate human existence in its most powerful and positive manifestations.

Frank: How does Soon 3 do that?

AF: We do it primarily by presenting a combination of intellectual and romantic aspects of life that celebrate these things. Someone who wrote a review of us in Italy called it "roman-

tic technology."

Frank: Would you explain that further?

AF: I think they were implying that Soon 3 was primarily offering a celebration of romance and technology, rather than one or the other.

Frank: Where would you place Soon 3? What niche does it fill?

AF: It's a bridge between theatre and performance art. That's what it has become. We are very involved with a narrative structure in our work — A narrative of images. I call it a pictorial narrative. In Soon 3 we don't illustrate concepts, we create concepts with our stage language.

Frank: I hear your son wants to be an actor.

AF: Yeah, he wants to be Michael J. Fox. I told him that my interest in exploratory theater, looking for new ways to do it, doesn't mean that I don't appreciate other ways. There are some other types of theater that I do like.

Frank: Such as?

AF: Ancient Indian dance theater, comic stuff like the Kipper Kids. I like sports. The drama of certain sports, like football, is great physical theater.

Soon 3 will present the "The MAGI" from December 5 through December 21 at Theatre Artaud.



Chris Hardman is the principal writer, director and designer of Antenna Theater. His use of "walkmanology" has redefined the role of the audience in theater.

Frank: You worked on the boardwalk at Coney Island. What did you do there?

CH: I was a fireater, a juggler and sign painter for the "carnies."

Frank: Why fire eating?

CH: It was something that I had an affinity for, something that I was able to do.

Frank: Your way of involving the audience in your performances is unique.

CH: Well, I suppose you could trace it back to Coney Island. I built the funhouse there, and the audience went through on carts. They were involved in a more visceral way. They would go smashing through doors and would have monsters jumping down on them. That triggered a lot of interest in environmental art, where the audience find themselves inside the show as opposed to being objective observers.

Frank: Are you inviting or forcing them to participate?

CH: They're free to walk out; the exit is

always well marked. But I think that people really would like to walk into a show. Recently there has been more of an attempt to break down the "fourth wall" in some very physical way. The only thing we're doing that's different is working with new media, new technologies that exist.

Frank: Speaking of new technology, a new science has been attributed to Antenna Theater: "walkmanology." What is it?

CH: It's the application of a walkman in a theatrical setting. When we were touring *Vacuum* in Europe, I brought a walkman because I hate airplane music. I had Die Walküre playing as the airplane took off, and there was amazing synchronicity there. It got me thinking that the walkman had been used as a tool to bring sound to people, but because it was ambulatory it had this possibility of synchronizing what you saw and what you heard.

Frank: Does Antenna Theater have a particular philosophy?

CH: It's always been looking for ways to engage its audience in a broader sense than traditional theater. It's always looking for different formats to engage audiences more

thoroughly.

Frank: Tell us about your new piece.

CH: It's called "Dracula in the Desert."

Technically, we're working with some crazy new gear: infrared audio transmission and 3-D. This way we're more able to manipulate the visual environment and the sound.

Dracula is awakened by his sidekick Renfield and given a pair of sunglasses that enable him to see his first sunrise. With this gift of technology, Dracula sets out to find a doctor who can cure him cold-turkey, while Renfield wants to conquer the world and create an insidious cult of vampire women.

Frank: Have you felt any added pressure since *Esquire* magazine named you one of the "Men and Women Under Forty Who Are Changing the Nation?"

CH: Those honors give me the chance to keep doing theater, but the fame aspect was very funny. Now I'm a family man and that's what makes me happy: doing theater and having a family. The fame came about two steps too late.



Antenna Theatre presents *Dracula in the Desert* from November 13 to December 14 at Gerhardt Warehouse, 2340 Marinship Dr., Sausalito.



Kevin O'Hare is one member of the collective known as Nightletter Theater. The other principal members are Arthur Carson, Sydney Carson and Vola Ruben.

Frank: What is Nightletter Theater?

KO: Nightletter is a cooperative. There is no director, no artistic director, no actors and no designers: everybody does everything.

Frank: What does working cooperatively offer?

KO: It offers us an opportunity to come into a group with a small vision and build on it, image by image. It's like a tennis game. You can toss out an idea and it bounces back as something else. A lot of directors work this way, but here no one has the final say. Also, I find it exciting to work on the same level with people whose skills equal mine.

Frank: What do you do if there is conflict?

KO: Oh, we fight. It is constant conflict and constant resolution to that conflict — so eventually it works out.

Frank: A main visual component of Nightletter Theater is "sculptural performance." What

is that?

KO: "Sculptural performance" is a term we use to keep people from coming and thinking they will be seeing Shakespeare or opera. It is a term we use to warn people that what they are going to see is not narrative theater with a traditional plot line. The orientation is visual, and the visual element is stronger than the language element. The three-dimensional objects that you see are going to be the bulk of what you go away with.

Frank: What about the surreal and psychological bent that Nightletter Theater takes?

KO: The system that we use to develop the pieces becomes psychological drama. We start off with visual images — we feed off the first image and go to something else. Eventually they'll tie together in a way that we don't even realize until after we've performed it many times.

Frank: Tell me about your current performance.

KO: It is different from our other performances in that for the first time in many years

we have several performers on stage who are not in full costume. There are bare faces showing, which is radical for us, but there are lots of costumes and monsters.

Frank: How would you distinguish what Nightletter Theater does from other interarts performance?

KO: We probably have more humor and take ourselves a little less seriously than some of our contemporaries. All of our performances have been about the inside of people. Our messages are very personal and very interior — therefore, very universal.

Frank: How did Nightletter Theater get its name?

KO: "Nightletter" is the old word for overnight express mail. But my reference to it is different. Dreams are like nightletters, messages that you receive when you are asleep.

Nightletter is currently performing *Uterior Rooms* at Addison Stage Theatre, 1111 Addison St., Berkeley, through October 26.

Arnold Iger and his partner Paul Kwan formed Persona Grata Productions three and a half years ago. They conceive, design and perform their cross-cultural works together.

Frank: Would you describe your creative and performance background?

AI: I started doing art at a young age. Performance art is something new for me and for Paul. We took a trip to Asia a few years ago and there was a lot of street performance there. In India they have itinerant artists who sing, dance, tell stories and give puppet shows — that experience was a direct link to our getting involved in performance. Paul is a Chinese from Vietnam. And as far as the collaboration goes, it adds another dimension; it's not just a Western view. So, not only is our work multimedia, it has a multicultural aspect.

Frank: Tell us about your performance *Real Estate*.

AI: *Real Estate* is the outgrowth of a few things: our perceptions of society, the way in which people interrelate and the way people

relate to themselves as people having property. A lot of ideas came from Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. He talks about how space affects our psyche and how "the house" in particular is a place that affects the dreamer.

Frank: Who is the dreamer?

AI: The dreamer is this personal reality that each of us has. It is how we perceive ourselves in reality and in society — not how things appear to be, but how they are on an inner plane.

Frank: How do you assemble and integrate the many visual elements in your performances?

AI: That's where the work comes in. We try to go deep into what makes up society, the society of man. Man is about his symbols and has been creating and building his mind by making those images. We feel we're part of that evolution, that process. So it's constant experimentation to come up with combinations to produce some sort of meaning.

Frank: What is your next project about?

AI: Our next project is called *Equity*. It deals

with the nature of man and will be a further development of some ideas we started in *Real Estate*. We've grown tremendously since we did *Real Estate*. Performance is also a discovery for ourselves as artists and a means of growth. We're trying to develop a language which is particular to Persona Grata as a performance medium.

Frank: What's your long-term goal?

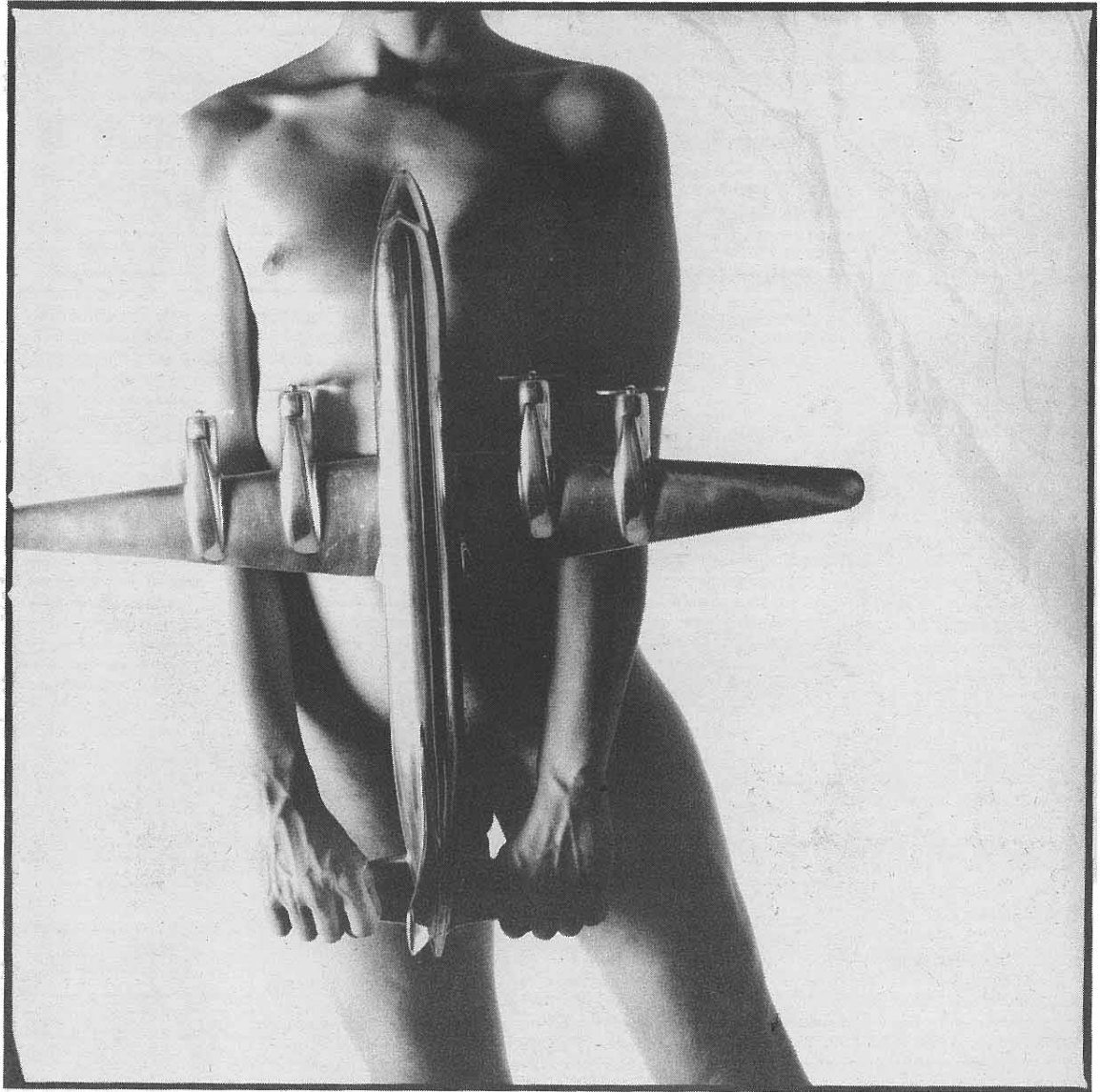
AI: To keep growing and learning. I think it is analogous to the goal of life: to keep expanding one's personal and artistic horizons. Art is not a thing, it's a way. We feel that art is very much like yoga for us. "Yoga" means to yoke, to bring together. This is a way for us to see the world, our response to that world and the links that join all of us. We hope to grow within that, to act our part and make the world better. That's what I feel art should be.

Persona Grata plans to perform *Equity* in the spring.



Photographs by Taryn Fling

J Ö R G F I



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S C H E R



P O R T F O L I O

Belle

Alix Pitcher

I was named for a woman who was capable of throwing furniture out of a window. Great-aunt Belle was dying when I was born, and although I have no living memory of her I grew up surrounded by her painted image. Her husband, Randall Davey, was a gifted artist who painted best what he loved best. He would return to these beloved subjects constantly, and portraits of Belle poured from his studio.

There were small, elegant oils of Belle in a stylish dress and hat, and larger encaustics of her contemplating a riot of flowers. There were charcoal sketches and pastel impressions and watercolors. Best of all, there were the nudes.

These contained no static ideal beauty. They seemed to be living things that not only reflected Belle's particular loveliness, but Randall's passion for her as well. He painted her skin in peaches and rose and cream of such translucence that it seemed to be lit up from within. Her breasts were defined with caressing strokes, as though he was actually touching them. Randall had once declared that painting was "hot thought," and the nudes made it easy to see what he meant.

Belle was more voluptuous than is considered fashionable today, but she was also small, almost petite. Her face was delicate, with something around her mouth and chin betraying a capacity for stubbornness. She had a mass of auburn hair which she kept cut just above her shoulders. In some of the nudes she looks pensive, and in others she appears to be listening to something far away. From all of the paintings her large gray-blue eyes regard the world with ineffable calm.

She was almost 30 when she met Randall at a polo match in Colorado Springs. He too was small, a quick intense man of many talents. In addition to his artistic genius, he was a fine cellist and a superb horseman. He loved to tell a joke, off-color if at all possible, acting out every character with great vigor. He was also elegantly handsome, and from all accounts it was love at first sight. He brought her to his house in Santa Fe, a renovated sawmill at the end of a canyon. They were to share it for the next 30 years.

In the way of all children, I could never imagine Belle and Randall except as the elderly couple who entertained my parents in old snapshots. In these pictures, Belle would be sitting almost primly on a Victorian couch while Randall told some outrageous tale from the chair beside her. I remember being fascinated by the garters that held up his socks; my father and brothers wore heavy ski socks, a different color for each foot. I admired the single strand of pearls Belle wore, and the amused way she smiled at her husband. Surely they must always have been just so.

I also imagined I saw Belle and her two sisters, Lizzie and Kate, both of whom outlived her. As they steadily grew more wrinkled, I unconsciously added years to my impression of Belle, until I reached my own adulthood with a mental image of her as a tiny sedate old lady. The sensually vibrant woman of the paintings was consumed by this erroneous conception.

Great-aunt Kate lived the last 20 years of her life in the house that had been Belle and Randall's. Her husband had been dead for years and she was not a social woman. When she died in 1982, my mother and I became engaged in the sad task of cleaning out the old place. After years of occupation by a lonely widow, the house had lost its sparkle and charm. Rooms that had seen dazzling parties were silent and full of ghosts. Kate's poodle had buried bones in the cushions of the sofas, so that the stuffing fell in chunks to the floor. The robustly naked woman Randall had painted in Belle's dressing room still danced, but with an air of bewilderment. Even the omnipresent geraniums were dying.

As though to dispel the gloom that settled upon us, my mother began to tell me stories about the young Belle. I listened with bemusement as we carted out boxes of old *New Republics* and threw

away what seemed like hundreds of half-empty tubes of anchovy paste. The staid old Belle of my imagination was being replaced by a very different character. There was, for example, the tablecloth story.

Shortly after Belle and Randall were married, they received an invitation to dine with Randall's ex-wife. I don't know what compelled Belle to accept; perhaps she felt that she had to rise to the occasion. They arrived at the party dressed to the nines and were greeted at the door by their hostess, very gotten up and redolent with perfume. Belle smiled imperturbably as Randall was drawn away by her predecessor. She smiled a trifle icily when they were seated at dinner with Belle at one end of the table and her husband in the seat of honor at the other end. As the dinner wore on, and Randall and his ex-wife grew more hilarious, Belle stopped smiling altogether. Randall's companion would whisper something with a naughty simper and he would roar with laughter, slamming his hand down and making the silverware jump.

I wonder if Randall happened to glance down the long table at his wife, and if he did why he didn't notice the determined expression on her face. Perhaps he was simply too wrapped up in his animated conversation, or there may have been a touch of bravado in his behavior. The fact remains that he was as astonished as the rest of the party when the plates started to move.

When Belle felt that she had simply had enough, she rose slowly, like a queen, took hold of the corner of the tablecloth and made her exit. The entire contents of the table followed her: twenty place settings, wine, candles, flowers and all. Apparently the assemblage was too stunned at the majesty of the spectacle to grab the cloth and stop it. Belle pulled the whole thing out of the house, got in the car and drove home.

She had her share of post-nuptial suitors as well. One admirer pursued her for years, growing more amorous and more annoying with every encounter. His tremendous wealth didn't impress Belle, and though he was not unattractive, he was too unctuous to be amusing. Randall found his would-be rival laughable, and blithely ignored him. Belle tried to do the same.

The proclamations of love finally became too much to bear during a cocktail party held at the suitor's ostentatious home. While the shouts and shrieks of laughter that always signalled Randall's presence at a party echoed through the hacienda, he managed to corner Belle in a room tastefully dotted with Chinese porcelain. Taking advantage of their solitude and the opulence of the setting, he let loose an unprecedented flood of pleas.

He told Belle that he couldn't live without her. He assured her that he loved her a hundred times more than Randall knew how. The thought of her in someone else's bed made him want to die. He let his lower lip tremble and said that he loved her more than anything else in the world.

Belle gazed at him. "Better than anything in the world?"

"Oh yes," he murmured, sensing that his moment had come.

Belle turned to the exquisite Chinese bowl on the table next to her and serenely pushed it off. As her host stared at his exploded investment, she repeated the question. There was no further trouble from that gentleman.

But she had met her match in Randall, who did love her a hundred times more than anyone else. The first years of their marriage were peppered with tremendous fights; some springing from jealousy. These were two stars bound together in a tight constellation. Each had become used to being the center of attention, and each was used to getting their own way.

At the very climax of these battles, Belle had a way of seizing hold of some small table or chair and hurling it through the window. This usually brought about negotiations and a general end to the hostilities. It was, however, an expensive way to end an argument.

One afternoon, Randall and an old friend were sitting in the living room with a couple of his ubiquitous martinis. They were outdoing each other with wild tales when the friend suddenly commented that some of the furniture seemed to be missing. Randall laughed and explained that when Belle got very angry, she had this tendency to toss things out the window.

The friend looked at Randall thoughtfully. "She seems to be rather exclusive about what she throws," he observed.

Randall, looking around the room, realized that this was perfectly true. Belle had been disposing of all the furniture he had purchased for his first wife.

The next time they argued, Randall waited until Belle's temper was at its height. He could see her eyeing a small chest in the corner and even making her way towards it. Just as she was about to make her move, he calmly picked up one of her prized Queen Anne chairs and launched it through the open French doors. A moment later, there was the unmistakable sound of splintering wood. Belle was absolutely furious, but this brought a permanent end to the furniture throwing.

As my mother told me these stories, the sound of laughter returned to that sad house. Belle and Randall had no children; Belle's first baby was stillborn and she was either unwilling or unable to try again. She was very ill for the last years of her life: a total mastectomy had left one arm swollen and useless. She felt, in the end, that she had become grotesque, which must have distressed Randall very much. When she died, he buried her at the edge of their apple orchard, under two huge willows.

Randall lived and painted alone for a few

years, surrounded by his dogs. He made frequent pilgrimages to his favorite race tracks, fascinated by the figures of the horses and the colors of the jockey's silks. It was on one of these trips that he flipped one of his beloved Jaguars and died in flames. Our laughter was not enough to dispel all these old ghosts, but it sounded fine.

I thought of Belle the other night as I watched myself throwing wet kleenex across the room. Wrapped in the mixture of grief and worry that comes of late night misunderstandings, I lay weeping in bed with my lover and hurled countless damp wads at the wastebasket. Some bounced moistly off the wall, some plopped onto my desk, some actually dropped in. I found part of my mind actually keeping score.

I wondered what Belle would have thought of this. Had she been in my position, wouldn't she have tossed her lover's clothes out the window? Or stalked out of the house wearing only a pair of red high-heeled shoes and a gold chain? Or smashed something that would produce a gratifying noise?

I worry that I am not living up to her name. Considering the paralysis that afflicts me in moments of high dudgeon, I have resolved that the next time the opportunity presents itself, I too will allow myself some extravagant expression of how I feel. I admire the freedom of Belle's performances, and would welcome some in my own life. I can't imagine what it is I will do; these things obviously shouldn't be planned. Whatever it is, I would like it to be something that in many years will make my great-niece laugh and shake her head in disbelief.

"Auntie Alix," she will say, "Auntie Alix did THAT?"

Untitled

Melinda Falk

then the wind uttered fancies to the very skin
the very thin skin of white as white as wind
as smooth as air is smooth
still and chill
dearest
i've seen your sullen motion as i've seen air cramped
i've watched your sullen ache as air deprived aches
i detached that forceless hand and masked that sinful face
to stare unrestrained into reality
lovely, lovely watching your soulful mouth close
lovely, lovely watching your demon eyes close
the past hidden swell in head
stood breathing the virtual event
passing pressure along finest rippled skin
i've seen those haunted times
stream at overripped joyless decay
dearest
i've watched your lovely, lovely souflled mouth
closing shut
the air tiptouched air blew your finest hair
over the pinched point eager expression you kept
demon eyes of mine watched
and i'd seen clear your quiet movement
calculation careful, careful conscious clearly
my dear i've watched your sullen motion shut
with demon eyes
shut as the still wind
caped as caped thin white skin breathing life
at the chill i've watched
from atop hills the island
the chill of your dearest souflled mouth shutting
as your eyes shut
breathing as the very wind i have watched you

"Good Eats!"

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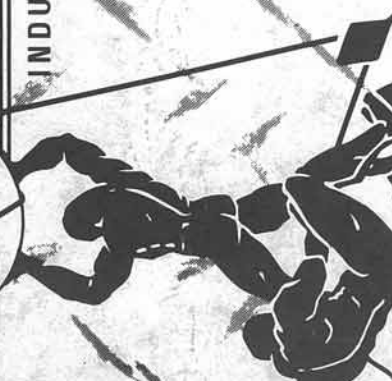
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