

CURATED BY

ROBERT

CARRITHERS

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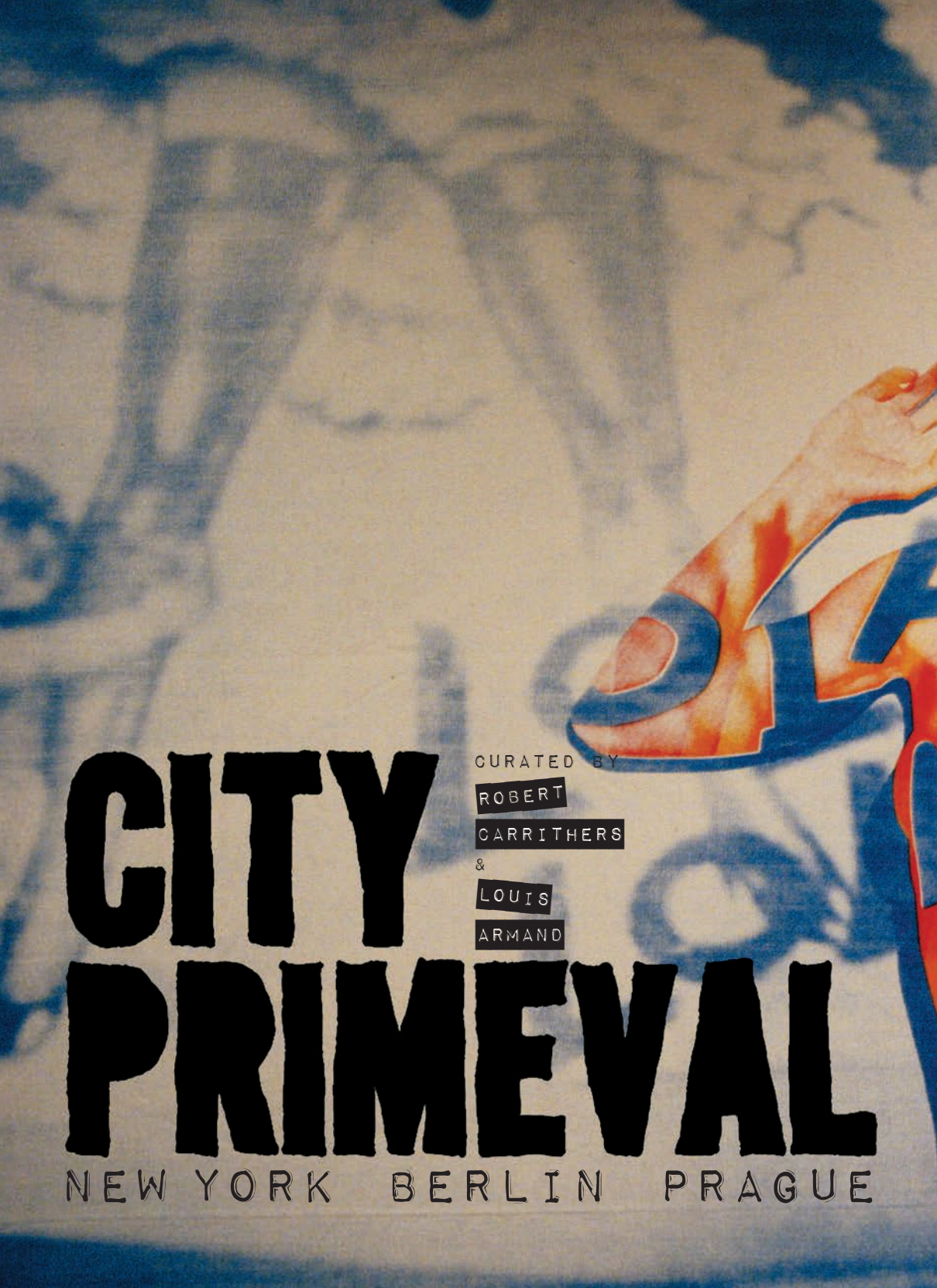
LOUIS

ARMAND

CITY GROWN

NEW YORK BERLIN PRAGUE





**CITY
PRIMEVAL**

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ROBERT

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NEW YORK BERLIN PRAGUE



PRAGUE 2017

Selection © Robert Carrithers & Louis Armand, 2017

Introduction © Louis Armand, 2017

"City Primeval" song lyrics © Marcia Shofield & Phil Shoenfelt, 1982.

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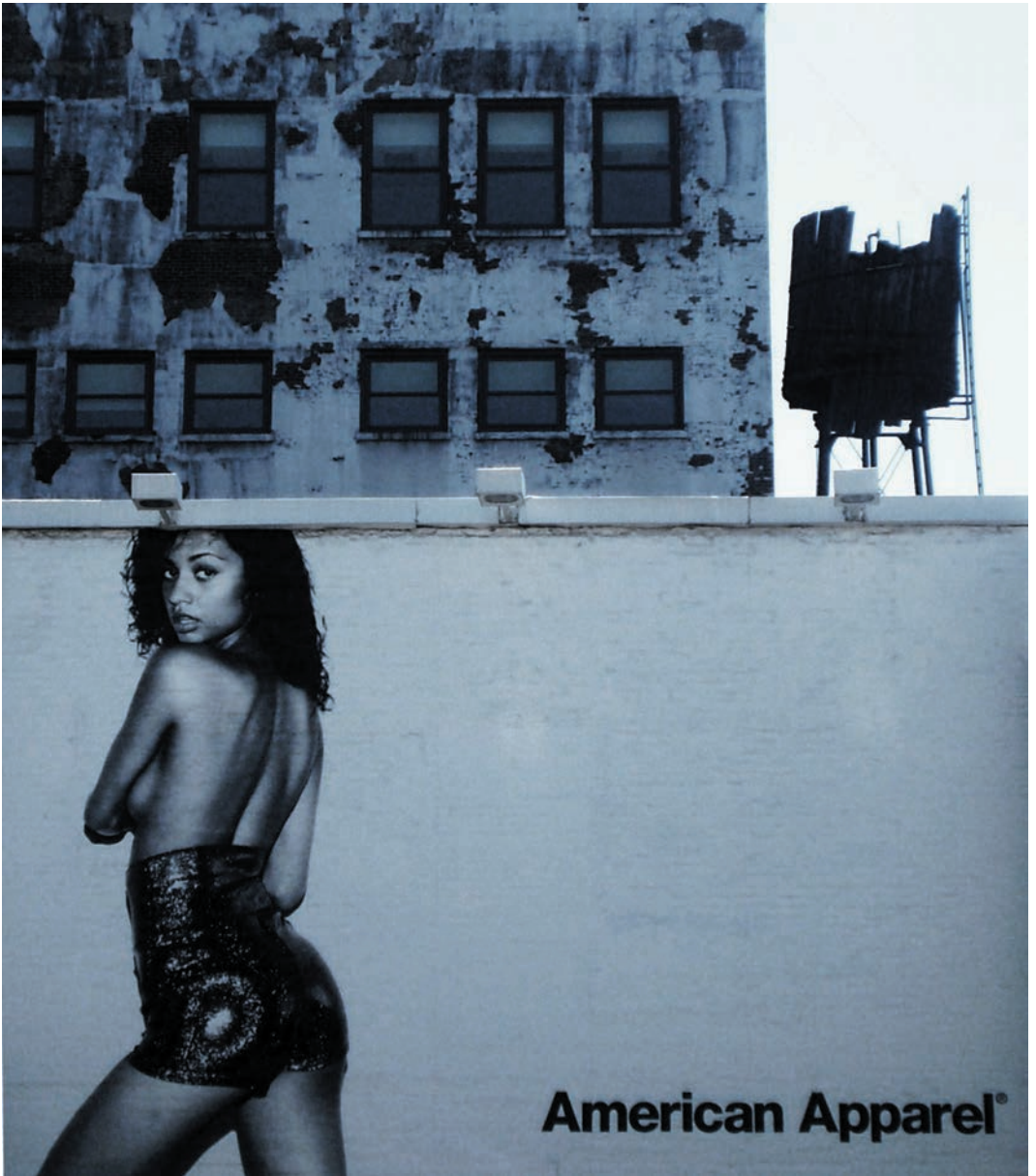
Endpage: John Sex & Wendy Wild for *Screw* magazine, 1982, by Robert Carrithers

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American Apparel®

"American Apparel," 125th Street, New York, 2009, by Louis Armand.

REACTIONARY SENTIMENTALISM:
NEW YORK, BERLIN, PRAGUE
LOUIS ARMAND

*Metal city
sunrise is grey
coal dust in the air
smudges of people...*

– Khmer Rouge, "City Primeval"

*He walked back into the living room, looking again at the illuminated
photo of the man with the brown beard & long hair.*

"Who's that, a friend of yours?"

*Mr Sweety glanced over. He said, "This picture here?" & sounded
surprised. "It's Jesus. Who you think it was?"*

"It's a photograph," Raymond said.

Mr Sweety said, "Yeah, it's a good likeness, ain't it?"

– Elmore Leonard, *City Primeval: High Noon in Detroit*

Few cities in the world exercise such influence over the mind as to manifest that rebellious spirit, that *genius loci*, through which the intellectual vitalism of a given epoch is channelled. These places, galvanized in their very substance by a vortex of subcultural electricity, possess by their names alone powers of conjuration. Yet such are the enervations of contemporary Culture Industry nihilism that beyond the "No Future" wrought by instant branding, there is only this mystique of the mind's geography, laid out like the pilgrimage sites of a dead imagination – whose museumed "transcendence" instructs us as to what's already lost in any struggle to invent our present condition if we allow it to be divorced from an act of sabotage of all that is thus Holy. Equally, there's a question of something crucial being at stake the instant we attach a coordinate to what William Blake called the "poetic genius": this rebellious spirit, whenever & wherever it is conspicuous, exists by a wilful delinquency, like a political crime.

NEW YORK

There are forms of obscurantism deliberately perpetrated by the forces of Tradition, by which even those facts that violently contradict it can be expropriated at will to its discourse. In such circumstances Tradition reserves the right to proclaim itself "under attack," imbuing its adversaries on the political & cultural fringes with the most frightening capacity to reduce all of civilisation to ruins unless (& always "against the odds" & with "great effort") they are held in check if not outright negated. This more than merely rhetorical manoeuvre has always assumed the paradoxical form of a "siege mentality" combined with a will-to-pre-emptive-declaration-of-"war": war on terror, war on drugs, war on poverty, war on unemployment, war on culture...

Before invading Iraq in 1990, the US & its 33 allies circulated among the media long & detailed inventories of military hardware said to be in the

possession of Saddam Hussein's régime at the time of its invasion of Kuwait – including 47 infantry divisions augmented by 9 armoured & mechanised divisions, numbering anywhere up to 600,000 men. The point of this was arguably to whitewash the fact that the ensuing retaliatory "war" was, in reality, a turkey shoot (the infamous "highway of death" of retreating conscripts). In 2003, by a logic of incrementation, imaginary "weapons of mass destruction" were likewise evoked to give the impression that Iraq, despite a decade of economic blockades, continued to pose an imminent threat to world peace, necessitating a second "war." While in 1989, by a regression of the same logic, all that was required was the *handle of a bullwhip*, inserted into the rectum of artist Robert Mapplethorpe & photographed in black & white, to cause US senators to envisage such clear & present danger to the moral fibre of the nation as to justify, on the home front, a declaration of all-out "war" against



the National Endowment for the Arts (effectively deemed, in all but name, a terrorist organisation). For the “moral reprehensibility” of Mapplethorpe’s photograph was such as to draw down upon any organisation or institution associated with it the charge of being a public menace. Protestors at an ensuing obscenity trial articulated one of the more sinister ironies involved in all this: IF YOU GIVE ARTISTS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, their banner mocked, SOON EVERY AMERICAN WILL WANT IT!

These acts of “war” & “zero tolerance” have, without exception, served to reinforce those “mechanisms of oppression” of which André Breton spoke,¹ “based on the family, religion & the fatherland, the recognition of a necessity of man to enslave man, the careful underhanded exploitation of the urgent need to transform society for the sole profit of a financial & industrial oligarchy, the need also to silence the great isolated appeals” intended to arouse the mass of humanity from its “apathy”; the whole “mechanism of stagnation, of regression & of wearing down” directed at all manifestations of “non-conformity.” Yet it is precisely such “mechanisms of oppression,” speaking in the voice of Tradition-Under-Threat, that at every turn expropriates the language & appeal to “non-conformity,” in the guise of what the poet Blake (a lifelong adversary of institutional authoritarianism) called “honest indignation.”

Such obscurantism is clearly nothing new, yet within the historical timeframe of modernity, from the birth of the avantgarde through the emergence & disappearance of successive “underground,” “sub” & “counter” cultures, the acceleration & reach of its expropriative force has achieved unprecedented dimensions. No longer do we speak of a mere “aestheticisation of politics” as delimiting the systemic

creep of fascism, or even of the all-pervasiveness of the “spectacle”: the “false choices” represented by the Tradition & its discontents mean that alienation is the only possibility, so to speak, on offer. How then, other than by an act of conscience, to live, as Breton says, “in open conflict with the immediate world that surrounds us”? An “ultrasophisticated world, a world which, no matter what aspect of it is put to the question, proves in the face of free thought to be *without an alibi*. In whatever direction I turn, there is in the function of this world the same appearance of cold & hostile irrationality, the same outer ceremony beneath which it is immediately obvious that the *sign survives the thing signified*.”

A certain reactionary sentimentalism attaches itself to appropriations of this kind: we see it not only in the jingoism of justified “war,” but in the progressive gentrifications & commodifications of “underground” culture; in the cynical reason of a world “without alibi” that suffuses the image of every possible critique with its own (disavowed) irrationality. A paradigm case is 1970s New York, whose market-driven political institutions exhibited such blatant “irrationalism” as to bring the city wilfully to the verge of bankruptcy & infrastructural meltdown, while pointing the finger at those “urban primitives,” the socially marginalised, as the true subversives. Symptomatised over subsequent decades into a living museum of counter-cultural “artefacts” (of a city collapsed back into a *re-evolutionary moment*, as if made to crawl once again from some primeval swamp of endemic corruption & social decay) it has been since cashed in on by a heritage industry driven by a reactionary sentimentalism of unprecedented cynicism & scale: from CBGB’s merchandising outlets among the sushi bars of a gentrified East Village, to the endless retrospectives of domesticated Punk, No Wave, Graffiti, Hip Hop, Transgression, etc., etc., in institutional gulags like the Museum of Modern Art.

“Reactionary sentimentalism” was the epithet coined by film critic Richard Brody in response to Wim Wenders’ 1977 film *Der Amerikanische Freund*. In his retrospective overview – “Where Wim Wenders Went Wrong” – published in the *New Yorker* (a “journal of record” that wears umlauts on its diphthongs like culture police Waffenfärbung) almost four decades after the fact, Brody claimed that Wenders’ film suffered from a “yearning for a mythic America that no longer existed.”² Did it ever? *Der Amerikanische Freund*, a loosely neo-noir adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s (at that time unpublished) novel, *Ripley’s Game*, begins on a Lower West Side Manhattan street – outside 388 West Broadway, to be exact, between Spring

¹ In his 1935 Prague lecture on the “Political Position of Today’s Art,” trans. Richard Seaver & Helen R. Lane (*Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972) 212–217.

² Richard Brody, “Where Wim Wenders Went Wrong,” *The New Yorker* (3 September, 2015).

& Broome – in full view of the recently completed Twin Towers of the now-disappeared World Trade Center. Dennis Hopper’s “Ripley,” a kind of Marlboro cowboy transplanted to Hamburg, steps from a cab on his way to the SoHo studio of a blind-in-one-eye art forger played by Nicolas Ray, who provides Ripley with bogus Old World masters to peddle via European auction houses back to cachet-hungry US galleries. Everything about this rendezvous speaks to the fallacy that was, & is, the contemporary Culture Industry.

The rest of Wenders’ film expounds on this basic trope of fakery, blindness & the imaginary “fetish economy” of the American Idea. It pegs Brody’s “reactionary sentimentalism” from the very start as precisely that seductive naïveté at the locus both of commodity fetishism & of critical pseudo-emancipation: the Janus-like spectre haunting the American Century & its post-WW2 European franchise. Brody might just as well’ve called the Statue of Liberty a study in European “reactionary sentimentalism,” since that’s what his complaint amounts to – a sort of “misguided” New Wave *Kulturkritik*-as-cinephilia that induces a German director like Wenders to “venerate” (however ironically) James Rosenquist-style kitsch & local “outsider” products like Nick Ray & Sam Fuller (Brody goes so far as to call Wenders “the exemplary arthouse filmmaker of the Age of Reagan”). While to speak of the neighbouring Twin Towers in this way, of course, would be merely a case of the “sign surviving the thing signified.” Yet the paradox of the Twin Towers is not so much in the long shadow they cast over New York, as over the consciousness of Wenders’ “Amerika,” but that they themselves are shadows, cast by a duplicitous “liberal economic” irrationality: that malign fake Amerika at the heart of the “Dream” – that paralytic nightmare that repeats first as Art then as real-estate dollars.

Between the opening of the World Trade Center in 1973 & the release of Wenders’ film the year of Ed Koch’s election as New York mayor, nearly a million people fled the city in the face of rocketing crime rates, social disorder, collapsing infrastructure, economic stagnation, rampant corruption & an almost continuous state of emergency. At the height of New York’s fiscal crisis in 1975, the US president no less declined the opportunity to provide assistance. *Daily News* headlines read FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD, before the White House finally relented, in the end bailing New York out to the tune of \$1.3 billion in federal loans. This still wasn’t enough to repair the drastic cuts already made to municipal services such as hospitals, libraries, fire stations & the subway system – which was notoriously plagued by violent crime & frequent breakdowns. So much so, that the Council for Public Safety (representing

FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD

Vows He'll Veto Any Bail-Out



Gerald R. Ford gives his message at Washington's National Press Club yesterday.

**Abe, Carey
Rip Stand**

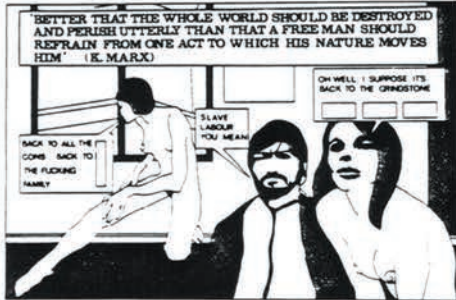
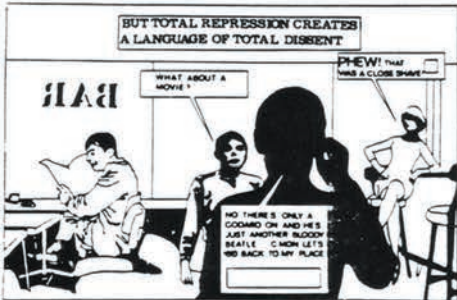
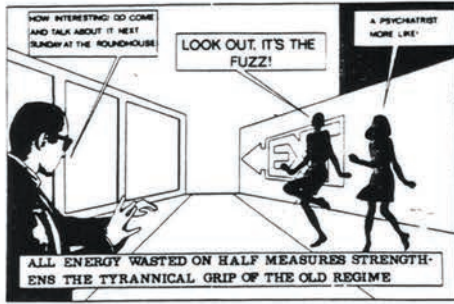
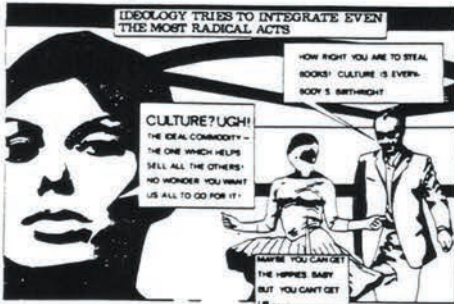
**Stocks Skid,
Dow Down 12**

Three pages of stories
begin on page 3; full text
of Ford's speech on page 26

police, fire-fighters & other public-safety workers) – in response to administration plans to lay-off a further 10,962 uniformed officers – published a brochure adorned with a skull & cross-bones aimed at deterring tourists, entitled WELCOME TO FEAR CITY: A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR VISITORS TO NEW YORK. The brochure included such advice such as: “Stay off the streets after 6pm”; “Do not walk”; “Avoid public transportation”; “Remain in Manhattan” (“If you remain in midtown areas & restrict your travel to daylight hours, emergency service personnel are best able to provide protection”). The media, meanwhile, indulged unrestrained schadenfreude in depicting Times Square as a haven of pimps, prostitutes, drug addicts & homosexuals, while Central Park became universally synonymous with mugging & rape. As Lydia Lunch recounts in her introduction to Miron Zownir’s *NYC RIP*, “New York City during the 1970s & early ‘80s was a beautifully ravaged slag, impoverished & neglected after suffering from decades of abuse & battery. She stank of sex, drugs & aerosol paint.”³

When the city experienced a 25-hour blackout on July 13, 1977, widespread looting resulted in over 3000 arrests, held up as proof of the degeneracy of the urban sub-classes – but as numerous accounts (such as Jonathan Mahler’s *The Bronx is Burning*)

³ Lydia Lunch, “New York City R.I.P.: An Introduction,” *NYC RIP* (Berlin: Pogo Books, 2015).



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**C.B.G.B. 5^{PM}
SUN. FEB. 7TH (MATINEE)**

point out, the true culprits were opportunistic slumlords & the real-estate lobby, occupied for a decade in the systematic erasure of large tracts of New York tenement housing, aided & abetted by tacit City Hall collusion & Rand Corporation-guided mismanagement. Construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, combined with rent control policies that abetted insurance fraud & arson, turned the South Bronx into a no-man's land of burnt-out tenements & rubble-strewn vacant lots. In the ten years between 1970 & 1980, seven census districts lost more than 97 percent of their buildings to fire & abandonment. Christopher Meele's *Selling the Lower East Side*, recounts how a similar fate befell Manhattan's underprivileged downtown: "Sandwiched between the corporate skyscrapers of Wall Street & Midtown, the East Village landscape, particularly in sections of Loaisida [Alphabet City], resembled the bombed-out centres of some European cities at the close of World War II."⁴ It was no accident that the area east of Avenue B in the East Village, once called "Little Germany" (for its turn-of-the-century German-speaking inhabitants), was referred to in the early '80s as "Little Dresden."

The descent of the Lower East Side of Manhattan & the South Bronx into a war zone of gangs, drugs & prostitution was an oft-decried late '70s "urban tragedy," out of which – & directly related to which – Punk, Street Art, Hip Hop & a diverse squatting scene were all born, documented in films like Amos Poe & Ivan Král's *Blank Generation* (1976) & Gary Weis's *80 Blocks from Tiffany's* (1979). It also produced the new genre of "Bronxploitation," like Enzo Castellari's *Escape from the Bronx* (1983) & *Bronx Warriors* (1982) – in which a biker vigilante called "Trash" (played by Mark Gregory & modelled with unrestrained camp on Stallone's "Rambo") defends the newly-created wastelands from further incursion by unscrupulous developers – self-consciously borrowing from recent gangploitation & dystopia flicks like John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981) & *The Warriors*, directed by Walter Hill (1979), while also making passing nods to earlier Harlem "Blaxploitation" reels like Melvin Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song* (1971) & *Across 110th Street* by Barry Shear (1972). Meanwhile, as the city reeled from shellshock to existential ennui, the Punk "revolution" took on momentum, spilling out from the East Village in the wake of bands like the Velvet Underground, MC5, the Stooges & the New York Dolls, with its epicentre around CBGB's on the Bowery.

Lydia Lunch relates the broader cultural impact of the moment: "I wasn't expecting the toilets at

CBGB's to be the bookends of Duchamp's urinal, but then again maybe 1977 had more in common with 1917 than anyone at the time could've imagined. The anti-art invasion of Dada... & the Surrealist pranksters who shadowed them had a blast pissing all over everybody's expectations. The anti-everything of No Wave was a collective caterwaul that defied categorisation, defiled the audience, despised convention."⁵ Phil Shoefelt, frontman for the "post-Situationist" band Khmer Rouge which emerged from the local art-noise scene & was managed by Warhol Factory photographer Nat Finkelstein (their "liberation through militant rhythms" parodying the idea of Punk as vanguard of world revolution), summed up the general ethos: "New York was a wild place at the end of the '70s & in the early '80s. Nobody ever seemed to sleep, & we'd go from club to club in a non-stop blur of frenetic activity checking out bands, taking drugs, making low-budget movies & generally living like there was no tomorrow."

The scene that emerged in the late '70s was unusually heterogeneous & starkly remote from any form of industrial entertainment, & was for the most part "so transient," as *Village Voice* columnist Michael Musto wrote in his 1986 book on the subject, *Downtown*, "that just as you discover a club, you find it's been turned into a pizzeria, but that's okay; wait fifteen minutes & it'll be a club again." More enduring venues – like CBGB's on the Bowery (opened in 1973 by Hilly Kristal), Max's Kansas City on 18th & Park (opened in 1965 by Micky Ruskin), the Mudd Club in TriBeCa (opened in 1978 by Steve Mass, Diego Cortez & Anya Phillips), Club 57 on St Mark's (founded by Stanley Strychacki), Danceteria at West 34th (& later, home to the "voodoo lounge," at West 21st, founded by Rudolf Piper & Jim Fourat), Tier 3 on West Broadway, 8BC (on 8th between Aves B & C), the Pyramid Club on Avenue A (established in 1979), the Cavern, Studio 54 (on West 54th), Tunnel, Palladium, Area Club (on Hudson, founded in 1983 by Eric & Christopher Goode), & later the Knitting Factory (from 1987) – variously featured underground film screenings, exhibitions, design shows, readings, as well as live music performance: everything from Keith Harings "Erotic Day-Glo" art shows & Tom Scully & Susan Hannaford's "New Wave Vaudeville" at Club 57, to landmark events like the April 1981 "Beyond Words" show at the Mudd Club featuring Alan Vega, Fab 5 Freddy, Iggy Pop, Futura 2000, Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring & John Sex (the downtown's answer to PS1's "New York/New Wave" show).

The scene at Max's, successively associated

⁴ Christopher Meele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate & Renaissance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 212.

⁵ Lydia Lunch, forward to Thurston Moore & Byron Conley, *No Wave: Post-Punk: Underground New York 1976-1980* (New York: Abrams, 2008).

with Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground & the New York Dolls, has been widely documented. In her memoir of Robert Mapplethorpe, *Just Kids*, Patti Smith, living at the Chelsea Hotel at the time (1969), lushly describes navigating the fraught & “darkly glamorous” route into Max’s backroom & the famed “round table” where Warhol had once held court: “The ladies in waiting were beautiful, & the circulating knights were the likes of Ondine, Donald Lyons, Rauschenberg, Dalí, Billy Name, Lichtenstein, Gerard Malanga, & John Chamberlain. In recent memory the round table had seated such royalty as Bob Dylan, Bob Neuwirth, Nico, Tim Buckley, Janis Joplin, Viva, & the Velvet Underground.”⁶ As photographer Anton Perich recounts, at Max’s “there was cross-pollination: I saw Chamberlain talking with Gregory Corso. Tiger Morse talking with Taylor Mead. Lou Reed talking with Michael Pollard. Grace Jones talking with Glenn O’Brien. Divine talking with Charles Ludlam. David Johansen talking with David Bowie. The full list would be hours long.” Like Club 57, Area Club & the Mudd Club, Max’s also prominently displayed contemporary art, including work by Warhol & Donald Judd, “a hovering sculpture by Forest Myers,” a window by Michael Heiser, “a crashed car by John Chamberlain,” “the legendary bloody neon cross by Dan Flavin,” as well as Myers’s *Laser End* (“probably the most immaterial sculpture ever made”).

In 1974 Max’s closed, then reopened a year later for a final 6-year stint, captured in all its decadence in Marcia Resnick’s *Punks, Poets & Provocateurs: NYC Bad Boys 1977-1982*. During that time, alongside the scene-makers known as the Downtown 500 who’d previously defined the club circuit, there emerged a curious mix of the new categorically elusive “urban primitives” – graffiti & “street artists” like SAMO© & Keith Haring, unclassifiable “performance artists” like Joey Arias, Klaus Nomi, Diamanda Galás, Annie Sprinkle & Kembra Pfahler, “writers” like Kathy Acker, Tom Clark, Eileen Myles, Peter Smith, “musicians” as varied as Arto Lindsay, Thurston Moore, Rammellzee, Debbie Harry & John Zorn, “filmmakers” like John Lurie, Richard Kern, Sara Driver, Jim Jarmusch & Tim Burns, hybrid “avantgardists” such as Lindzee Smith, “photographers” like Marcia Resnick, William Coupon, Robert Carrithers, Lina Bertucci, Richard Sandler, Bethany Jacobson, Nan Goldin, “actors” like Patti Astor & Lung Leg, dragqueen “performers” like Lipsinka, Lady Bunny & RuPaul, & so on, & so on.

In 1966 the Poetry Project had been established at St Mark’s Church in-the-Bowery, by among others Paul Blackburn, who lived upstairs from McSorley’s on East 7th. There was frequent “crossover” between the scenes, with the likes of Clark Coolidge, Ron

Padgett, Anne Waldman, Ted Berrigan, Lewis Warsh, Bernadette Mayer, Ed Sanders, Vitto Acconci, Steve Dalachinsky, Tuli Kupferberg, Ron Kolm, Thurston Moore, Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Abigail Child, Henry Hills, effecting an on-going “revolution” in word, visual art, performance, music, film & mimeography – including a swathe of downtown guerrilla poetry publications such as *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts, C, Angel Hair, 0 to 9, United Artists, Roof, & L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. In 1973 Miguel Algarín founded the Nuyorican Poets Café in his East Village apartment & later in premises on East 6th & East 3rd, serving as a locus of the city’s Hispanic literary scene, around writers like Miguel Piñero, Lucky Cienfuegos, El Coco que Habla, Binbo Rivas & Sandra Maria Esteves. Meanwhile “Off Broadway” theatre spawned Richard Schechner’s Performance Group (1967), Richard Foreman’s Ontological-Hysterical Theatre (1968), & the Wooster Group (Elizabeth LeCompte, Spalding Grey, Willem Defoe; 1975). While all of the major clubs of the period have since closed down, the Wooster Group, Poetry Project & Nuyorican Poets Café have become “institutions,” lone figures in a landscape from which all previously recognizable indigenous life, so to speak, has been eradicated (including virtually all the bookstores⁷), & instead of which there is (on Ave C) the Museum of *Reclaimed Urban Space* – reminding that the “margins” remain & have always been creatures of Tradition, & that their own “traditions” don’t in fact belong to them, but to the expropriative domain of Capital.⁸

Perhaps nothing embodies this idea more than the figure of Andy Warhol who, like the World Trade Center “Twins,” cast such a long shadow over the New York scene up till his death in 1987. It is in this shadow, of the prophet of inauthenticity & “business art,” that the politics of authenticity surrounding the broader social identifications of the late ‘70s & early ‘80s (hinged around the shooting of John Lennon outside the Dakota on 72nd Street), & not only the Punk & No Wave scenes, articulates its key paradox – which is that of the asymmetrical relation of the “powerless,” as Czechoslovak dissident Václav Havel wrote in 1978, to “Power.” Punk & No Wave, having since retreated to the museums, accomplished their own auto-critical destinies as “appropriation of appropriation,” while the institutionalisation of

⁷ Two exceptions being East Village Books, on St Mark’s Place, with its ANTI-THIS-ESTABLISHMENT collection, & the Strand on Broadway.

⁸ Types like Donald Trump always get away without a scratch, which is something that should be on top of everyone’s fix-it list. Add Cooper Union & the Bowery Mission to the mix, & what chance does anyone else stand? The sign in the sky says REAL ESTATE OR BUST, all the rest’s just sentimental blackmail.

⁶ Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 117.



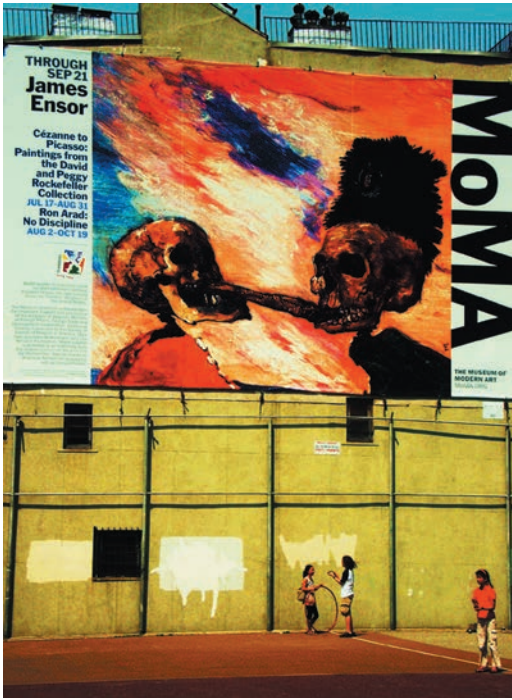
Wooster Street, 2010, by Louis Armand.

poetry merely served to further affirm its socio-economic marginality as a Culture Industry sub-genre – having become its own museum, in situ. The career of Warhol's most brilliant acolyte, whose poem-paintings exceptionally attracted record prices during his brief lifetime (& continue to do so thirty years after), Jean-Michel Basquiat a.k.a. SAMO©, described precisely this arc – from the cardboard-box-on-Tompkins-Square-dwelling subject of Edo Bertoglio's *Downtown 81* to the "Lonesome Flyboy in the Buttermilk of the '80s Art Boom" of Greg Tate's 1989 *Village Voice* article, "Nobody Loves a Genius Child" (dead at the age of 27 a year & three months before the article was published, Basquiat had become that ideal commodity: a cash corpse©).

It's this vision of the city & of America in general

that comes through most clearly in the early work of Jim Jarmusch – like Wenders, a poetic anatomist of "reactionary sentimentalism." His first feature film, *Permanent Vacation* (1980), recalls a comment by Richard Sandler, the "unsung street photographer of 1980s New York": if there's "nothing more mysterious than a fact clearly described," then a photograph "that doesn't try to do anything than show you exactly the way something looks... is absolutely different from life."⁹ It becomes a cenotaph, an advertisement not of some *thing* that has passed on from this world, of its remainder, nor even of its disappearance, but the *disappearance*

⁹ Alexandra Genova, "Meet the Unsung Street Photographer of 1980s New York," *Time* (October 11, 2016).



MoMA over West Houston, 2010 (left); 7th Ave, 2010 (right), by Louis Armand.

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of its disappearance reconstituted as an image, an artefact, a fetish, a commodity. We can look at Jarmusch's scenes in the abandoned smallpox hospital on Roosevelt Island (which reappears in both of Enzo Castellari's Bronxploitation flicks) – just as we can look at Sandler's DOCUMENTA photographs of graffiti-bombed subway trains & dead-eyed commuters – & grasp nothing of the "city primeval" they seek to record, beyond its *phantasmatic disappearance* into the eminent domains of the Culture Industry & Real Estate. For the blankness of every "blank generation" there's inevitably an image of regeneration: what failed or refused to work once, is forever being put back to work, like those outcasts in the wilderness turned into imitation Caravaggios. And while this process of renewal & degradation has been one of the endless fascinations of New York, there's been a dawning sense since the mid-'90s that gentrification (since transformed into *hypergentrification*) has become a one-way street – giving rise to the open-ended litany of disappearances & high-rent blight chronicled in projects like Jeremiah Ross' *Vanishing New York, a.k.a. The Book of Lamentations: a bitterly nostalgic look at a city in the process of going extinct.*

Closing out a special edition (#37) of the *East Village Eye* – produced for a retrospective at Howl

Gallery in September 2016 (the first issue of the magazine to appear since 1987) – David H. Katz spoke to this "bitter nostalgia" with a Swiftian satire on "Degentrification: A Modest Proposal to Un-Improve Our City," which advocated, among other novelties, "Tax breaks & abatements for areas to be meticulously restored to their original 1975-1985 condition as public art works, providing tourists with a simulacrum of urban decay, a Disneyland of dystopia, featuring burned-out buildings, brick-strewn lots, ubiquitous drug dealers, bargain-basement prostitutes & corrupt, indifferent cops." Katz's ambivalent proposal to restore New York's "grandeur of decrepitude, returning it to a forbidding, grungy hellhole," politely chides the likes of the Trump-Kushner real estate mafias without disturbing a single pane of glass (menial work left to immigrants in passenger jets). It's a moot point, in any case. But in the narrative arc from war zone to corporatist cryogenics, from skid row to New Museum, something has happened to that widely parroted assertion that the only successful revolutionary class in history is the "bourgeoisie." Because the hypergentrification of New York isn't a middle class revolution – if anything it's an advertisement for the *abolition* of the middle "commuter" classes (a.k.a. mortgaged lifestyle consumers) & of the *irrelevance*

(other than as picturesque museum fodder: the memorial of a “repressed” that only ever returns as an image) of a resident proletkult who’d come to believe it was *they* who’d built the city up from its ruins but have been apparently content to subscribe to the remake. This newest revolution belongs to the pure accumulation of capital itself: the apotheosis of what Guy Debord called “spectacle,” which – in the aftermath of a spurious postmodernism (“capitalism’s masterstroke” in the words of Fukuyama) – has itself become the dominant *revolutionary force of our time*. The transformation of New York is merely its least concealable symptom, but only on the margins of living memory, which as everyone knows doesn’t live forever.

Like all things, this project for a revolution in New York (to thief Robbe-Grillet’s 1972 book title) didn’t, of course, come out of nowhere. But one thing’s certain: its momentum had nothing to do with the provocations & subversions of homegrown “anarchist revolutionary” aspirationists wielding Krylon & Fender Mustangs, yet it had everything to do with the tenacity of their seemingly embodied “nihilism” & the apartheid mentality it duly incited beyond the five boroughs. The ghetto history of the city is a long one, but by the mid-’70s the view of Middle America was that New York as a whole should have a wall thrown up around it, so that every reprobate in the nation could be quarantined there (dèjà vu?). There’s a barely disguised appeal to wish-fulfilment of this kind in countless films of the period, from the de-evolutionary oblivion evoked in Franklin Schaffner’s *Planet of the Apes* (1968) & the public service disaster melodrama of *Towering Inferno* (1974), to the self-fulfilling prophecies of Castellari & Carpenter’s early-’80s “escape” movies. But while out-of-town producers cashed in on this new vision of the Frontier, the narrative of class & race war that’d been evolving throughout the preceding decades entered a new & even more cataclysmic phase with the arrival of the AIDS “plague” in the summer of 1981.

Since the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the gay & lesbian communities in New York had become increasingly visible in its push for civil rights, but still constituted one of the city’s marginal “sub-cultures,” centred around Christopher Street & the dilapidated port area between the Westside Highway & the Hudson River (the legendary “Sex Piers”), as well as the porno cinemas & peepshows (like the Deuce) around Times Square & the transgender & gay leather clubs (the Hellfire, the Vault, the Anvil, etc.) in the Meatpacking District. If Larry Mitchell’s *The Terminal Bar* (1982) is considered the first novel to address the subject of AIDS, the conspiratorial intersection of ideology, capital & virally-mediated genocide had already found expression in the

writings of William Burroughs, from *Naked Lunch* (1959) & *Queer* (written 1951, published 1995) to *The Place of Dead Roads* (written at the “Bunker,” 222 Bowery, around ’79/’80). And while films like Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising*, Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures* (both 1964), Carolee Schneeman’s *Fuses* (1965) & Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls* (1966) set the tone of earlier underground art cinema’s “crossover” (with *Flaming Creatures* provoking an obscenity case against Jonas Mekas’s Film-Maker’s Cinematheque), the deeply sinister ambivalence that accompanied the AIDS, heroin & lawlessness “epidemics” at the turn of the decade (street heroin becoming suddenly cheap & plentiful in 1979) was most fully evoked in the emergence of No Wave &, a few years later, Cinema of Transgression (both movements explored in close detail in Céline Danhier’s 2010 *Blank City*, the first documentary of its kind).

No Wave, a self-conscious rejection of both commercial & institutional avantgarde “art” cinema, was a loose collective of downtown filmmakers working in a guerrilla no-budget style centred around themes of crime, mind control, sexual repression & violence – including Amos Poe, Eric Mitchell, Vivienne Dick, James Nares, Tim Burns, John Lurie, & Scott & Beth B – whose films sometimes screened at the Mudd Club, Club 57 & Max’s. The movement “came of age” with the appearance of Poe’s 1978 film, *The Foreigner* (featuring Eric Mitchell, with Anya Phillips & Debbie Harry) – described by Emma Hacking in *No Ripcord* magazine as an “existential search & destroy mission”¹⁰ – & Nares’s *Rome 78*, staged amid the city’s pseudo-Roman architecture (Grant’s Tomb & the American Thread Building; featuring Mitchell, David McDermott, Lydia Lunch & Patti Astor), which was first screened in 1979 at the short-lived New Cinema, & was described by Colleen Fitzgibbon in the *East Village Eye* as “the great political opus of New Wave cinema.” The short-lived New Cinema at 12 St Mark’s Place had been established by Mitchell & Nares to provide a showcase for new work: “We thought it’d be good to have a venue to show our work outside the standard venue, which was Anthology Film Archive, because they’d decided that independent filmmaking had ended in ’72 or something like that.”¹¹ Censorship by omission was among the motivating factors that prompted Nick Zedd to found the “Cinema of Transgression” in 1985 – an anti-movement that grew out of No Wave, influenced by the Wiener Aktionismus of Kurt Kren & Otto Muehl, as well as the films of John Waters & the Kuchar brothers. A manifesto appeared under

¹⁰ Emma Hacking, “The Foreigner,” *No Ripcord* (17 October 2010).

¹¹ Eric Mitchell, qtd in Zack Carlson & Bryan Connolly, *Destroy All Movies!!! The Complete Guide to Punks on Film* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2010) 410.



Beth & Scott B, 1981, by Robert Carrithers.

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the nom-de-guerre “Orion Jeriko” in Zedd’s self-published “crudzine,” *The Underground Film Bulletin*: “We propose transformation through transgression – to convert, transfigure & transmute into a higher plane of existence in order to approach freedom in a world full of unknowing slaves.”

Zedd’s “dirt-cheap atrocities in Super-8 & 16mm” set out to savage Reaganite “reactionary sentimentality” through a mix of grindhouse-terrorist & un-American-kitsch, in a filmic equivalent of the Weather Underground. Subcultural in the full sense of the term, Zedd appropriated the tabloid nihilism of mainstream TV news & fused it with both a Lower East Side counter-realism & détourned Peep-O-Rama “porno consumerism,” in a rebuke to the political & aesthetic hypocrisies of institutional “art” at that time. In comparison, for example, to the “subversive” art cinema presented by Amos Vogel’s Cinema 16 a decade previous, the viewing booths at Peep-O-Rama on 42nd Street, a.k.a. The Deuce, “were showcases for the wildest & most extreme films in cinematic history.”¹² As a sign of art’s increasing marginalisation by an industry of endlessly appropriative potential *as subversion* (not what

Harvey Wheeler intended by “the institutionalisation of revolution,” but amounting to the same thing), the cinemas that extended around Times Square (mixing “heady doses of sex & raw violence... from bloody horror movies to post-mondo shockumentaries & every subgenre of exploitation movies imaginable”¹³) were paradigms of a contemporary social critique that outside No Wave & Transgression had failed to recognise itself, retreating instead into MTV post-Punk anaestheticism & “entertainment.”

Along with Richard Kern, Vivienne Dick & David Wojnarowicz, Zedd’s films proclaimed themselves “politically against the grain of generic America & its homogenized artistic bourgeoisisms,” “employing derision & satire” to produce “unrelenting attacks on dominant culture using the cheapest available tools.” In tune with the emerging scene around CBGB’s (bands like Suicide, The Ramones, The Cramps, Richard Hell & the Voidoids) Club 57 & Pyramid Club (with their “drag queens, old TV cartoons, Japanese animation, fake rappers, lady wrestling tournaments... & a succession of pre-sellout weirdos like John Sex, Wendy Wild, Klaus Nomi, Ann Magnuson, & an endless list of

¹² Bill Landis & Michelle Clifford, *Sleazoid Express* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 3.

¹³ Jack Sargeant, *Flesh & Excess: On Underground Film* (Los Angeles: Amok, 2015) 58.



Khmer Rouge: Phil Shoenfelt (left) & Barry "Scratchy" Myers (right) at CBGB's, 1982, unknown photographer.

shitfaced lowlife in the days before gentrification ruined the neighbourhood" ¹⁴), these films pursued a "para-punk" strategy of sexual dissidence aimed at audiences "fatally lulled," as Wojnarowicz put it, "into society's deep sleep." ("Sex in America long ago slid into a small set of generic symbols; mention the word 'sex' & the general public appears to only imagine a couple of heterosexual positions on a bed – there are actual laws in parts of the country forbidding anything else even between consenting adults."¹⁵)

At a time when "one in every four people in the Bronx is HIV positive," Wojnarowicz argued, the suppression of sexuality & its representation in public vied only with commodity hysteria in the arena of domestic "extremism," systematically championed by the same political forces responsible for orchestrating the '80s "culture wars" & attacks on artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano & Karen Finley (foremost being North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, "one of the most dangerous homophobes in the continental United States"). Indeed, throughout their tenures, both New York mayor Ed Koch & US

president Ronald Reagan steadfastly refused to deal with the AIDS crisis – thereby appeasing the religious right on the one hand & the real-estate lobby on the other, for whom AIDS served as a convenient method of "slum clearance." Playwright Holly Hughes recounts collective guerrilla action against New York advertising spaces as late as the early '90s to expose official inaction: "In Sheridan Square in the West Village, right across from a big Marlboro billboard, we put up a billboard of a cowboy with Bush's face superimposed on it, & in the same typeface as 'Marlboro' it said, 'AIDS CRISIS!' & in the 'Surgeon-General's Warning' box it read, 'WARNING: WHILE BUSH PLAYS COWBOY THERE'S ONE DEATH FROM AIDS EVERY EIGHT MINUTES IN THE UNITED STATES, & 37 MILLION AMERICANS CAN'T AFFORD HEALTHCARE.'¹⁶

A disaster that could've been averted once again assumed the connived form of historical inevitability, of "divine retribution" as the counter-culture's "manifest destiny." As Hughes reflected in 1991: "I feel angry that we could effortlessly come up with a billion dollars a day to spend on the [Gulf] War, yet nothing, ever, for education. And that a \$5000 NEA grant to

¹⁴ Nick Zedd, *Totem of the Depraved* (Los Angeles: 2.13.61, 1996).

¹⁵ David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

¹⁶ Holly Hughes, interviewed in *Dangerous Women* (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1991) 101-2.



Klaus Nomi silk screen collaboration by John Sex & Kenny Scharf, 1980.

20 | a lesbian performance artist is a threat to National Security. Congress passed the AIDS-Care bill, but there are no funds to implement it. The homeless & the environment are completely neglected. Obviously we have the money to *kill* people, but we don't have the money to do anything else."¹⁷ *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, was the line they used back in the day to sell the glories of war to the same (soon to be "blank") generation they were busy turning into canon fodder. And when there were no foreign "defensive" wars to wage, they waged generational war instead. The war on "troubled youth," gender war, war on sexuality: homegrown Amerikan Jihad. As one of the speakers in Wojnarowicz's "Postcards from America X-Rays from Hell" observes, "There are no more people in their thirties. We're all dying out."¹⁸ To which Wojnarowicz himself adds, WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I'D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I'D CONTRACTED A DISEASED SOCIETY AS WELL. By 1991, during the "Dinkins Deluge" (the significant rise

in NYC shelter populations at the onset of the 1990-91 recession, during the Dinkins mayoralty) New York had an estimated 10,000 PWAs ("People With AIDS") living homeless on the streets, while at the same time the NYPD narcotics squad was undergoing a 137% expansion (taking over the public crack & heroin bazaars in Alphabet City, while somehow maintaining an unchanged level of hard drug use): the two statistics went hand-in-hand with the systemic creep of eminent domain & general real-estate development throughout the Lower East Side.

Lying "in the shadow of the American Dream," all this, Wojnarowicz wrote shortly before his own AIDS-related death in 1992, would soon "be picturesque ruins only the initiated can see." The unsubtle irony being that, with the eventual normalisation of the HIV crisis, those acts of dissidence, resistance & survival it gave rise to in combination with other "transgressive," "sub-cultural" manifestations, would in turn also become commodified: "picturesque ruins" money could freely buy. As Nick Zedd wryly acknowledged, if the "Cinema of Transgression" could be said to have "emerged in a vacuum" & been "quickly buried by the gatekeepers of

¹⁷ Hughes, *Dangerous Women*, 101.

¹⁸ Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, 112.



Westside Fuck Piers, New York, 1981, by Miron Zownir.

consensus reality, to be exhumed decades later by reactionaries conveniently exploiting authenticity for their own self-aggrandisement," this can equally be said of what increasingly has come to resemble a kind of Last Flowering of the New York "underground scene" before the terminal aftershock of the new millennium turned everything retro, like Aranofsky's *Requiem for a Dream*.

The template is already there in Stuart Shapiro & Harvey Keith's piece of pseudo urban anthropology, *Mondo New York*, which appeared in 1988, the year of the Tompkins Square riot, & paraded its subject matter like a Coney Island freakshow for the out-of-towners in the manner of *Snuff* meets *Midnight Cowboy*. The film openly panders to (or parodies, depending on your POV) the expectations of an audience that would generously be described as credulous, & – tour-guided through the Lower East Side by a clueless blonde (played by Shannah Laumeister) – features such *de rigueur* New York attractions as a Chinatown white-slave auction, a punishingly tame S&M club, a "suicide bomber" (performance artist Joe Coleman, who bites the heads off two live mice before detonating fireworks attached to his chest),

an "unidentified AIDS victim injecting himself with heroin,"¹⁹ along with appearances by a number of "underground" personalities including John Sex, Ann Magnuson (beating a stuffed horse), & Karen Finley (covered in raw egg & glitter while delivering a rant against the evils of gentrification).

Post-ironic before its time, *Mondo New York* seemed to prefigure the sad & inevitable fate of every counter-culture in the onward march of an "American domestic colonialism" which has come to extend across race, class, gender & sexual orientation, & whose hunger for expropriation – even of the most squalid "bastions of indecency" (see Samuel R. Delaney's 1999 essay, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*) – has become insatiable, such that even as it hyper-commodifies everything from Basquiat to the Bowery, its "rampant inequality" (as David Byrne complained several years ago in an online opinion piece) "is squeezing out the artistic genius that made New York such a vibrant

¹⁹ Michael Wilmington, "Way Down, Way Out in *Mondo New York*," *Los Angeles Times* (June 20, 1988).



"Stop Gentrification," Lower East Side stencils. 1984. by Bethany Jacobson.

cultural capital.²⁰ For the future sustainability of "gentrification," it's obvious they'll need to maintain a number of urban reserves, appropriately deprived, in which to breed sufficient "artistic genius" to keep the value-adding on its logarithmic curve.

22 | In January 1994, turncoat Democrat Rudi Giuliani was elected to the mayor's office on a "broken windows" platform of zero tolerance towards petty crime: "As of this moment," he proclaimed, "the expressions of cynicism – New York isn't governable, New York isn't manageable, New York isn't worth it – all of these I declare politically incorrect." The clean-up began in earnest & the corresponding drop in the crime-rate was considered "one of the most remarkable stories in the history of urban crime." If Giuliani's tenure is overshadowed by the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, it is nevertheless emblematised by the opening of the world's biggest (17,000 square feet) "family restaurant" a.k.a. McDonalds on Times Square in 2001 – a far cry from the prevailing image of the city a decade earlier when "Bryant Park, in the heart of Midtown & adjacent to the New York Public Library, was an open-air drug market; Grand Central

Terminal, a gigantic flophouse; the Port Authority Bus Terminal, "a grim gauntlet for bus passengers dodging beggars, drunks, thieves, & destitute drug addicts;" as the *New York Times* put it in 1992.²¹

The Times Square redevelopment had been an initiative of the Walt Disney Company, whose way had been prepared under the Koch administration by a series of eminent domain seizures which led to the mass closure of the district's grindhouses, peepshows & small businesses, in favour of large-scale media outlets, finance companies & tourism. The city was swiftly becoming a disquieting penumbra, gaslit with sentimental kitsch, exaggerating at every turn the difference between what's remembered & what was, like a reprisal. The radical turnaround left the broader community in shellshock, accompanied as it was by both a drastic reduction from the beginning of Giuliani's tenure in services for the homeless & a widely advertised increase in the number of homeless arrests, with police regularly sweeping parks & other public places as part of a policy of area sanitation. Giuliani's zero tolerance scheme also extended into civil

²⁰ David Byrne, "Will Work for Inspiration," *Creative Time Reports* (October 7, 2013).

²¹ George L. Kelling, "How New York Became Safe: The Full Story," *City Journal* (Special Issue, 2009).



"Cadillacs... for everyone," 1980, by Robert Carrithers.

rights issues in a crack down on protest & freedom of speech, including an effort to defund the Brooklyn Museum of Art for showing a Chris Ofili painting of an African "Holy Virgin Mary" (Giuliani described it as "sick"); harassing Socialist Workers Party members for collecting petition signatures; preventing the city's cab drivers from assembling ("to make Manhattan a parking lot") in protest against excessive new regulations; barring All Saints Lutheran Church members from delivering an AIDS education programme in the South Bronx; denying permits for a march against police brutality; issuing strict licensing restrictions on sidewalk artists; using a 1926 cabaret law to curtail *any* dancing in bars & clubs; imposing an excessive daily fee on street musicians, & so on. In 1999, Giuliani received the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression's first "Lifetime Muzzle Award" for having "stifled free speech to so unprecedented a degree, & in so many & varied forms, that simply keeping up with the city's censorious activity has proved a challenge for defenders of free expression."

In 1995, in the wake of the Oklahoma bombing – the "deadliest terror attack on American soil" since the Weather Underground, at least till the Twin Towers six years later – & with student protests &

public sector strikes across the Atlantic growing into the largest social movement in France since Mai '68, there was a sense that something might've been beginning. In October, Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March descended on the National Mall in Washington DC, but while in New York demonstrators against state & city budget cuts & police brutality staged blockades of several Manhattan bridges & transit tunnels – & while the "Shut the City Down" protest on March 23 saw an estimated 25,000 students clashing with police while attempting to march on Wall Street – these efforts failed to coalesce, along with on-going guerrilla actions by groups like ACT UP, into an effective political resistance against the changes being wrought in New York society. As Richard Huelsenbeck once wrote, "One is entitled to ideas only if one can transform them into life." And though by decade's end, anger at the city's relentless Disneyfication had fed into the growing Anti-Globalisation movement, culminating in the Seattle '99 riots, there was a growing sense that the New York moment had irrevocably passed. Once the Towers came down & the gentrification police had found their ultimate *raison d'être*, it was clear to everyone whod survived the downtown scene that it was the END.



Checkpoint Charlie, 1985, by Kenton Turk.

"At first it's not possible to describe anything beyond a wish or a desire... You wish that something might exist, & then you work on it until it does. You want to give something to the world, something truer, more beautiful, more painstaking, more serviceable, or simply something other than what already exists. And right at the start, simultaneous with the wish, you imagine what that 'something other' might be like, or at least you see something flash by. And then you set off in the direction of the flash, & you hope you don't lose your orientation, or forget or betray the wish you had at the beginning."²² These are the opening notes of Wim Wenders' first treatment – "an attempted description of an indescribable film" – for *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*; 1987), a film that evokes Walter Benjamin's *angelus novus*, or angel of history, as the supervising witness of our blind pursuit of an ever-elusive "ideal" future & the seeming futile wish to become one with it.

In Wenders' film, the "angel of history" is no longer purely allegorical, or singular, but takes the form of trenchcoated other-worldly characters who haunt the city of West Berlin in perpetual black-&-white, observing its inhabitants but unable to interact with them, without surrendering their immortality. Which inevitably they do, out of a kind of melancholic longing for unification. And if West Berlin acts as a microcosm for the torments of this fallen world (Germany in the aftermath of the War), it's because, as Wenders says, "the (hi)story that elsewhere is suppressed or denied is physically & emotionally present here" – it's "'an historical site of truth... There is more reality in Berlin than any other city' – precisely because Berlin is the paradigm of the *divided city*, that *primally conflicted zone* in which the conscience of the race (to paraphrase Joyce) uneasily dwells: "the sun shines on the divided city, / today, as it did on the ruins in 1945 / & the 'Front City' of the fifties, / as it did before there was any city here, / & as it will when there is no longer / any city." As Heiner Müller once said, "Berlin is the ultimate. Everything else is prehistory. If history occurs, it will begin in Berlin."

This privileged yet equally doomed quality of the city is reflected in its inhabitants, worldly & otherwise, who are all in a sense suffocated in history while nevertheless kept apart from it. The cinematic Berlin they inhabit like ghosts is in fact a purgatory, a between-place, the nascent state, so to speak, of history itself. And it is this sense of being caught in a type of limbo, of dislocation, between Alphaville's "Capitale de la douleur" of the future &

the past capital of the fallen Tausendjähriges Reich, that also conveys the furtive possibility of a *present* that can still, however unlikely it seems, be brought into being. "If I were to give my story a prologue," Wenders writes, "it would go something like this: WHEN GOD, ENDLESSLY DISAPPOINTED, FINALLY PREPARED TO TURN HIS BACK ON THE WORLD FOR EVER, IT HAPPENED THAT SOME OF HIS ANGELS DISAGREED WITH HIM AND TOOK THE SIDE OF MAN, SAYING HE DESERVED TO BE GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE. ANGRY AT BEING CROSSED, GOD BANISHED THEM TO WHAT WAS THEN THE MOST TERRIBLE PLACE ON EARTH: BERLIN. AND THEN HE TURNED AWAY. ALL THIS HAPPENED AT THE TIME THAT WE TODAY CALL: 'THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR.' SINCE THAT TIME, THESE FALLEN ANGELS FROM THE SECOND ANGELIC REBELLION HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED IN THE CITY, WITH NO PROSPECT OF RELEASE, LET ALONE OF BEING READMITTED TO HEAVEN. THEY ARE CONDEMNED TO BE WITNESSES, FOR EVER NOTHING BUT ONLOOKERS, UNABLE TO AFFECT MEN IN THE SLIGHTEST, OR TO INTERVENE IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY. THEY ARE UNABLE TO SO MUCH AS MOVE A GRAIN OF SAND.."

When Bruno Ganz's angel "Damiel" falls for the drifting "lonely trapeze artist" Solveig Domartin, their first physical encounter, in the bar of the Esplanade Hotel, occurs during a live Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds performance, soundtracked by "From Her to Eternity." Cued to such tropes of transcendence, the film enters the life of the present – no longer an allegorical Berlin, but the primevally unreal city of allied occupation, geopolitical separation, artificial economy, "special status," stark generationalism & the long shadow of *Entnazifizierung* (denazification). Like the Manhattan of the '70s & '80s, Berlin was an island with a wall thrown up around it, whether metaphorical or real: more potently metaphorical *because* real. As a physically isolated enclave 161 kilometres east of the Inner German border, within the Soviet Zone of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) a.k.a. "East Germany," West Berlin assumed a unique significance during the Cold War – itself a "war" both more & less metaphorical – "declared" by the Berlin Blockade (24 June 1948 - 12 May 1949), & settling into perpetual stalemate with the completion of the Berlin Wall in 1961. As an "island of freedom" behind the Iron Curtain, West Berlin served as a showcase of the so-called Free World, & while the 12 boroughs of the Western half of the former Reichshauptstadt remained formally under allied occupation (in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement), they were accorded special privileges & subsidies that increasingly made West Berlin a magnet for artists, students, draftdodgers, & disaffected youth generally, who gradually

²² Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images: Essays & Conversations*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Faber, 1991) 73.



Potsdamer Platz in *Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987.

transformed this grey ghost of a city into a global counter-culture capital. In his book on the West Berlin underground, *Subkultur Westberlin 1979 - 1989*, Wolfgang Müller – founder of the band Die tödliche Doris (Deadly Doris) – depicts the city as a “melting pot for all the outsiders in Germany: for the dropouts, the queers, the lesbians, for all those opposed to militarism, for everyone who didn’t fit”²³ – poetic revenge for Hitler’s purge of “degenerates.”

Berlin’s schizophrenia wasn’t solely the product of being walled-in behind an external political border surveyed by guard towers, machinegun nests & Soviet tanks, but of an equally rigid system of internal borders as well: economic, ideological & generational. “In West Berlin,” Müller notes, “there also existed a border between the young & the widows of former Nazis who got good pensions – they were called the Wilmersdorfer Wittwen. So in West Berlin you have these widows, you had a lot of old Nazis & quite a lot of Cold Warriors. And at the same time all the anti-militants, the opposition, the artists...” Accordingly the city’s cultural institutions, as outposts of the West’s “neo-liberal utopia,” remained both highly conservative & market-centred, so that younger artists like Müller, & others including Chris Dreier, Reinhard Wilhelm, Steve Reeves & so on – drawn for lack of realisable alternatives to the example of avantgarde “conceptualists” like Joseph Beuys, Valeska Gort & Dieter Roth – began pursuing informal avenues within the new subcultural “Untergang,” in the hybrid realm of performance, music, filmmaking & experimental living centred around the squatting & club scene: what Beuys called art as social sculpture. The many-divided nature of the city gave this “underground” a radical impetus as “an expression of the times” it might otherwise not have attained (& which ultimately determined its relatively short-lived nature, declining significantly after the fall of the Wall) – an impetus fuelled by both the city’s “exceptionalism” & decades

of “emancipative disillusionment” stemming from the systemic moral corruption of the political Establishment & the impossibility of engaging with it “democratically” on its own terms. It was, as Richard Huelsenbeck wrote of Dada, a “child” of its epoch “which one may curse, but cannot deny.” And like Dada, it exposed itself to the risk of its own death.

In 1965 the unacknowledged social crisis which was the major catalyst of this new underground culture was brought dramatically to a head with the publication, by the Nationale Front der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in East Berlin, of Albert Norden’s notorious *Braunbuch* (The Brown Book: War & Nazi Criminals in West Germany: State, Economy, Administration, Army, Justice, Science). Though at times erroneous, at others incomplete, it was nevertheless the first document of its kind, naming some 1,800 former Nazi Party members & SS officers still serving in positions of authority at that time – including 15 ministers & deputy ministers, 100 generals & admirals, 828 senior judges & prosecutors, 275 senior Foreign Ministry, embassy & consular staff, & 297 senior police officers. These revelations fuelled accusations of a secret “fascist police state” & gave broad credence to a growing militant opposition while casting doubt on the legitimacy of the country’s post-War “democratic” institutions. With the perceived betrayal of the May ‘68 dissident movements across Europe, frustration & anger among large sections of the counterculture finally ignited into violent action, culminating in the “Deutscher Herbst” of Autumn 1977, during which members of the Rote Armee Fraktion a.k.a. Baader-Meinhof Group performed a dramatic series of bombings, kidnappings, assassinations & the hijacking of a Lufthansa passenger jet (the “Landshut”) – events that became the subject of a collaborative film between Alexander Kluge & nine other “New German Cinema” directors, including Fassbinder & Volker Schlöndorff, entitled *Deutschland im Herbst* (Germany in Autumn; 1978) & whose decadence into bourgeois-bohemianism & corporate/state security collusion was darkly parodied in Fassbinder’s *Die Dritte Generation* (The Third Generation; 1979).

In *Das Konzept Stadtguerilla* (The Urban Guerrilla Concept; 1971), Ulrike Meinhof argued the case for abandoning the path of “legality” & political engagement with an aloof Establishment – & for the legitimacy, indeed necessity, of so-called “terrorist” acts. “Legality,” she wrote, “is the ideology of parliamentarianism, the social partnership, the plural society. Many of those attempting to challenge the system ignore the fact that telephones are being legally bugged. That the post’s being scrutinised. That neighbours are being legally questioned. That informers are being paid. And that all this State

²³ Katerina Oikonomakou, Interview with Wolfgang Müller, *Berlin Interviews* (August 28, 2014).

activity's legal. The organisation of political work & activism – if you want to keep away from the eyes of State scrutiny – has to take place on an illegal level, as well as the legal one... We refuse to rely on some spontaneous anti-fascist mobilisation in the face of this kind of State terror... To be an urban guerrilla means to launch an offensive against imperialism. The Red Army Faction is striking the connection between the legal & illegal resistance. Between national & international resistance. Between national & international struggle..." Among the RAF's most dramatic actions was a series of kidnappings & executions of high-profile industrialists, politicians & bankers, including Daimler-Benz executive & former SS officer Hanns Martin Schleyer, West German attorney-general Siegfried Bubeck & Dresdner Bank chairman Jürgen Panto.

To some, the RAF's assault on the "fascist police state" presented itself as a kind of revolutionary performance art, like André Breton's surrealist incitement to take a revolver & fire it randomly into the street, only in this case not as an *acte gratuit* but as a *socially-transformative* action – aimed at a monolithic power structure disguised as "democracy" while in truth serving the interests of actual war criminals. The RAF appeared, in a sense, to accomplish the equivalent in deeds of that inchoate "treason against the state" barely verbalised (yet almost universally suppressed) in such expressions of anti-collaborationist vitriol as the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen." And if the Punk scenes in London & New York initiated the appropriation of taboo Nazi symbolism in order to offend & provoke the guardians of polite society, its adoption in the wake of the "German Autumn" by elements within the West Berlin underground was both more scandalous & served more incisive ends, by taunting the "hidden Nazism" of the Berlin middle classes whose aspirations those symbols had in fact represented merely a generation earlier (& keeping in mind that in Germany, unlike the US, these symbols were now illegal). One of the earliest examples of this was Wolfgang Müller's 10-minute short film, *The Life of Sid Vicious*, first screened in 1981 as part of an emerging Super-8 movement, following in the wake of the '70s "New German Cinema" of Wenders, Fassbinder & Herzog – that included filmmakers like Ulrike Ottinger, Ingrid Maye & Volker Rendschmidt, Jürgen Baldiga, Cynthia Beatt, Brigitte Bühler & Dieter Hormel, Andrea Hillen & Rolf S. Wolkenstein, Christoph Dreher & Heiner Mühlbrock, Klaus Beyer, Michael Bryntrup, Christoph Doering, Lysanne Thibodeau & Yana Yo. Müller's *Life of Sid Vicious* provoked controversy on several levels by featuring a two-&-a-half year old child (Oscar Dimitroff) as Vicious, wearing a swastika tshirt & carrying a knife, "looking for trouble in West



Berlin" – culminating in a bloody re-enactment of the stabbing murder of Nancy Spungen. *Blutige Exzesse im Führerbunker* (Bloody Excess in the Führerbunker; 1982), by Jörg Buttgeriet, brought the sentiments even closer to home – in a context in which the nation's Nazi past was largely suppressed beneath a veneer of middle-class respectability – featuring the director in a rubber Hitler mask (smuggled from New York) & shot on location in parts of the original underground Führerbunker complex. Addressing the camera, Buttgeriet's Hitler introduces himself to the audience with the words, "The young people among you may not recognize me any more."

As with manifestations of Punk elsewhere, the ideological orientation of these works was never straightforward, & rarely translated into a recognisably "political message" within the sphere of conventional social discourse – which was precisely the point. Moreover, during the period following the high degree of radicalism in the late-'70s, the meaning of left-right affiliations was frequently ambiguous, if not outright contradictory, as in the case of Horst Mahler, founder of the RAF alongside Baader & Ensslin, who, after serving a reduced 14-year prison term (thanks to the work of lawyer Gerhard Schröder), adopted an increasingly "nationalist" stance against Germany's ongoing "occupation" & "debt bondage," before eventually joining the far-right Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. During the '80s & early '90s, such tensions contributed to the hothouse atmosphere of the West Berlin underground, with its frequent expressions of "cultural extremism": from bombed-out border zone to non-stop clubbing scene – from Bowie's "Capital of Heroin" in the '70s, to the birth of the Neue Deutsche Welle (New German Wave) in the '80s, & the "techno-undeground" rave-revolution after the fall of the Berlin Wall ("One Nation Under a Groove").

In 1981, Uli Edel released a low budget film set between 1975 & 1977 in & around the S.O.U.N.D. Diskothek & Bahnhof Zoo, a labyrinthine rail &



Trans women on Ku'damm, 1985, by Kenton Turk.

subway station notorious at the time for drug dealing & prostitution, entitled *Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (Christiane F. – We Children of Bahnhof Zoo). The film, which rapidly achieved a cult status, centred on a 13-year-old girl, “Christiane Felscherinow” (Natja Brunckhorst, who later appeared in Fassbinder’s last film, *Querelle*), living with her mother in a housing project on the city’s outskirts & drawn towards the clubbing scene in the Tiergarten district. Christiane’s subsequent descent into addiction & prostitution was recorded in amongst actual junkies, prostitutes & low-lives on location, serving as a documentary record of “vanished landmarks.” The film featured a live performance by David Bowie (“Station to Station”) who also provided the overall soundtrack, drawn from his “Berlin Trilogy” – most of which was recorded, with Brian Eno & Tony Visconti, at Hansa Studios near Potsdamer Platz, overlooking the Wall – including “Heroes/Helden”: “Doch wir können siegen, / Für immer und immer! / Und wir sind dann Helden, / für einen tag.” Bowie (like some perennial Warhol-avatar to the “underground” zeitgeist) resided in the city between 1977–1979, his former apartment at Hauptstraße 155 (Schönberg) – shared with Iggy Pop & Coco Schwab (& briefly Lou Reed) – now a dentist’s office. Bowie, a regular fixture at hip nightclubs like Dschungel & Unlimited, was at the time working to straighten out an incipient coke psychosis & escape the downside of increasing fame, while Iggy (with whom he’d just collaborated on the album *The Idiot*, as he later would on *Lust for Life*) struggled with an insoluble smack habit. Ironically, Reed’s 1973 concept album *Berlin* (his second solo record after leaving Velvet Underground three years previous) – which was “all about” amphetamine abuse in the divided city – was produced before the ex-Velvet ever set foot there, yet somehow approximates a certain “West Berlin” portentousness (“How do you think it feels / When you’re speeding & lonely... How do you think it feels / & when do you think it stops? WHEN DO YOU THINK IT STOPS?”).

Heavily subsidised by the Federal Republic as a “shop window of the Free World,” West Berlin attracted many kinds of filmmakers between the end of the 1970s & November 1989, producing many different kinds of films drawing upon the ambivalent realities of the “island city.” Chris Petit, an acolyte of Wenders & a pioneer of British “New Wave” – whose debut film, *Radio On* (1979), an “existentialist road movie,” was shot by Martin Schäfer & featured a soundtrack by Bowie & Kraftwerk (among others) – made *Flight to Berlin* (1983; “an introspective murder mystery” featuring Lisa Kreuzer & Eddie Constantine) & *Chinese Boxes* (1984; “a cheap thriller with an incomprehensible plot about teenage drug deaths, Berlin gangsters & US intelligence”).



Brian Eno, 2017, by Robert Carrithers.

Describing the West Berlin scene in the early ‘80s as an attempt “to reignite Weimar decadence & blank what had followed,” Petit – who, like Bowie, kept a Berlin address for several years – summed the place up as “less a city than an advertisement for a controlled kind of hedonism: white powder, sex in taxis, vodka chasers... Evenings started late & were marked by theatricality – & a cast of predatory men & feral women, the likes of whom you didn’t come across elsewhere.”²⁴

Following Bowie’s 3-year tenure, the city also exercised an allure upon a wide range of Punk & post-Punk musicians, who either passed through or took up long-term residence. Among them, in 1978, Mark Reeder, founder of the Manchester band The Frantic Elevators (together with Mick Hucknall, later of Simply Red, & Neil Moss). Reeder became Factory Records’ German representative while also working as a sound engineer for bands like the all-women avantgroup Malaria! (Gudrun Gut, Bettina Köstler, Eva Gossling) – who he also co-managed – & Die Toten Hosen. In 1981, he formed the synthpop-rock duo Die Unbekannten (later Shark Vegas), together with Alistair Gray, which was joined by drummer Thomas Wydler (who later played in Die Haut & with Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds). In 1982 Reeder staged a guerrilla concert by Die Toten Hosen in an East Berlin church, disguised as a religious service, later describing the Soviet zone as being “like the hardest club in the world to

²⁴ Chris Petit, “Border Zones,” *Guardian* newspaper (July 12, 2016).



Joy Ryder, 1982, by Ilse Ruppert.

30 | get into.”²⁵ Over the years, Reeder’s position in the underground scene allowed him to accumulate an unparalleled array of live recordings & film footage, including reels by 74 different film-makers which became the basis of the 2015 documentary, *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West Berlin, 1979-1989* directed by Jörg A. Hoppe, Klaus Maeck & Heiko Lange, with Reeder providing the narration. “Ever since Christopher Isherwood wrote the books that later inspired *Cabaret*,” the film’s promotional literature states, “exiled Brits & other outsiders have flocked to decadent Berlin in search of personal & artistic liberation. This archetype received a potent reboot in the late 1970s when art-rock superstar David Bowie moved to the city to make some of his most revered albums. In the 1980s, young Bowie acolytes from all across Europe poured into divided Berlin, lured by its cheap rents, edgy reputation & unique Cold War setting as an island of bohemian excess encircled by Communist East Germany.” Reflecting on the city quarter-of-a-century after the fall of the Wall, Reeder sees it as still a place of inspiration,

²⁵ Joseph Delves, “Punk, Priest, Stasi, Spy: The Man who Smuggled Punk into East Berlin,” *Fact Magazine* (September 24, 2016).

rather than nostalgia: “Berlin is the last bastion of freethinking.”²⁶

Among other “Bowie acolytes” to come to the city were The Birthday Party (a band which Wenders described as the “biggest thing in Berlin” at the time), whose lead singer, Nick Cave, rented a spare room in Reeder’s apartment. In an interview for Lynn-Maree Milburn & Richard Lowenstein’s 2011 documentary, *Autoluminescent*, Cave spelled out West Berlin’s attraction: “It was frenetic & anarchic & really creative. It didn’t have the same prejudices in the superior way that the British had about our band...” Other musicians followed suit, including Lydia Lunch, Crime & the City Solution, Joy Ryder, The Fall, Alan Vega, Swans, The Cramps, Once Upon A Time – all of whom at some stage congregated at venues like Risiko (where Blixa Bargeld bar-tended), Ufo, Park, Moon, Metropol, the Georg von Rauch squat, & SO36 (Kreuzberg’s equivalent of CBGB’s). Emerging from the local Punk & “Geniale Dilettanten” movements in the early ‘80s, & galvanised by The Birthday Party’s manic yet sartorial style, the Neue Deutsche Welle (New

²⁶ James Hopkin, “A new film brings the inspiration of 1980s Berlin to the present,” *New Statesman* (20 August 2015).

German Wave) fused industrial noise, synthesizers & androgyny to produce bands like Einstürzende Neubauten (Blixa Bargeld, Marc Chung, Alex Hacke), as well as Liaisons Dangereuses, Eva Braun, Matador, Die tödliche Doris, Die Haut, Malaria!, Die Goldenen Vampire, Nina Hagen, Mona Mur, Nena, & a raft of others.

Probably the most fertile collaboration to emerge from this New Wave melting pot was between Nick Cave & Blixa Bargeld in the formation of the Bad Seeds in 1983 (along with Mick Harvey), following the disbandment of the Birthday Party the same year & Cave's parting-of-the-ways with former co-writer Rowland S. Howard. Cave & Bargeld's collaboration forms the backdrop to a 1987 Dutch TV documentary, *Nick Cave: Stranger in a Strange Land* (subtitle lifted from Robert Heinlein's novel), directed by Bram van Splunteren. Cave's songwriting of the period was almost obsessively concerned with themes of "death & betrayal, failure & anger," filtered through an American gothic persona redolent of Dennis Hopper's barely suppressed nihilism in *Das Amerikanische Freund* & fuelled by an increasing dependency on speed & heroin. In 1988, Cave checked himself into rehab & in the aftermath published a "fear-&-loathing bad dream of a novel," *When the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989): "And the crows – they still wing, still wheel, only closer now – closer now – closer to me." During the seven years Cave spent working with Bargeld in Berlin, the Bad Seeds released five albums: beginning with *From Her to Eternity* (1984) – which *Melody Maker* described as "widely & rightly acclaimed as one of the greatest rock albums ever made" – & including *The First Born is Dead* (1985), *Your Funeral... My Trial* (1986), *Tender Prey* (1988), & *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1986) – the title of which was taken from a (1934) collection of Samuel Beckett's short stories.

Beckett, one of Cave's many sources of inspiration, had been a frequent visitor to Berlin since the 1930s, & from 1974 until his death in 1989 collaborated closely with director Walter Asmus at the Schiller Theatre in Charlottenburg, where productions also took place during that time of work by Günter Grass, Thomas Bernhard & Pavel Kohout. In September 1976 Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs & Susan Sontag famously visited Beckett in his borrowed apartment overlooking the Tiergarten, an event recounted by Burroughs as "a hiatus of disinterest," with Ginsberg describing the author of *Not I* in a postcard to Peter Orlovsky as "lisp[ing] thin boyish wrinkled Samuel Beckett." Despite his generational association with pre-war figures such as James Joyce & Gertrude Stein, & the institutionalising of his earlier theatrical texts like *En attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot; 1949), Beckett's evolution of post-dramatic theatre & minimalist prose continued to pursue

a line of formal experimentation that persisted beyond the widely heralded death of Modernism & gave impetus, alongside the example of Artaud & Burroughs, to new "underground" writing into the 1970s & beyond.

It so happened that while Beckett was working with Asmus in the West of the city, on the other side of the Wall one of his most accomplished re-interpreters was labouring in the shadow of virtual censorship by the East German state. Heiner Müller, often described as the "most important spiritual heir" of Berthold Brecht²⁷ & "the theatre's greatest living poet since Beckett," had devised a form of textual drama built of "synthetic fragments" ("Fragments," he argued, "have a special value today, because all the stories we used to tell ourselves to make sense of life have collapsed") exemplified in his major works of this period, *Germania Tod in Berlin* (Germania Death in Berlin; 1971) & *Die Hamletmaschine* (Hamletmachine; 1979). Confronted with the dual threat of market capitalism in the West & state capitalism in the East, it was Müller's conviction that "art must awaken a yearning for another world, & this yearning is revolutionary."²⁸ As he wrote in *Hamletmaschine*, "AH THE WHOLE GLOBE FOR A REAL SORROW... / I'M LUGGING MY OVERWEIGHT BRAIN LIKE A HUNCHBACK / CLOWN NUMBER TWO IN THE SPRING OF COMMUNISM / SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE AGE OF HOPE / LET'S DELVE IN EARTH & BLOW HER TO THE MOON."

During the last decade of communism, as Müller's work began to gain increasing official recognition (due mainly to Müller's standing abroad), the epicentre of East Berlin experimentalism became increasingly focused around the underground Prenzlauer-Berg scene (which had begun in the '60s as a refuge for the East's intellectual, artist, student, gay & anarchist communities), closely linked to the so-called "Jungen Wilden" identified with graffiti art, illegal performances, multimedia experimentation & "unofficial" or "samizdat" zines & publishing collectives (channelling the spirit of Baader & Hausmann's "Dadaist Republik") – including musicians, artists, writers & filmmakers like Jana Schlosser, Sven Maruardt, Helga Paris, Stefan Döring, Jan Faktor, Detlef Opitz, Sibylle Bergemann, Micha Brendel, Peter Kahane, Bert Papenfuß, Knut Elstermann, Peter Wawerzinek a.k.a. "Mopel Schappik," & the controversial writer, designer, musician & Stasi informer Alexander "Sascha" Anderson. The threat of police reprisals created a sense of high-stakes which in the West

²⁷ Following re-unification, Müller became director of the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht's former company at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Mitte.

²⁸ Arthur Holmberg, "In Germany, a Warning from Heiner Müller," *New York Times* (July 8, 1990).

of the city found its analogue in the illegal & quasi-legal activities of the squatting & underground drug scene, S&M bars, & informal clubs – documented in films like Brigitte Bühler & Dieter Hormel's *a-b-city* (1985; shot on Super-8 with a score by Père Ubu & Einstürzende Neubauten) & in the photographs of Ilse Ruppert, Miron Zownir, Oliver Schütz, Robert Carrithers & others (Isherwood's "I am a camera with its shutter open" – from *Goodbye to Berlin* (1930)). "I loved chaos!" Ruppert recounts, "West Berlin had a special & unique legal status. Once I hit the town, I went into the groove & didn't see the daylight for days. I basically shot everything I saw." Robert Defcon, a barman at Risiko (the legendary club run by Alex Kögler at Yorckstraße 48, next to the S-Bahn bridges in Schöneberg), described the scene as a gilded paranoid narcissistic doppelgänger of the police state behind the Wall, cruised by everyone from Martin Kippenberger to Michel Foucault & other "talented & well-dressed glamorous assholes of anti-culture" in search of affected transgression. "West Berlin," he recalls, "resembled a fantastical stage before whose profound metropolitan scenery the crazy drug consumption & perpetual sleep deprivation created artificial drama as a means of escaping the latent complacency induced by the city's special status. Cushioned in western amenities & a protective wall providing shelter from German normality, the cheap rent & low cost of living formed the framework to this really rather unglamorous city in its outsider position. Our fast way of living didn't leave room for acknowledging the sad characters on the other side. We were only concerned about our own thing."²⁹

At the beginning of 1981, large-scale government subsidized demolitions of apartment buildings & factories that'd survived Allied bombing & Soviet artillery during the War created widespread controversy in parts of West Berlin, displacing tenants & creating an artificial housing shortage. Entire streets in Schöneberg & Kreuzberg fell under the wrecking ball. Among the immediate reactions to this blatant land-grab by developers in league with city administrators was an explosion in the squatting movement. By spring of the same year, there were over 100 squats in West Berlin, providing alternative communal living, soup kitchens, concerts, poetry readings, experimental movie screenings & so on. Their appearance elicited a mixed & often unpredictable response of official tolerance in some cases & forceful eviction by police in others. The most prominent squat until then had been the Georg-von-Rauch-Haus in Kreuzberg – a former hospital, renamed in honour of a leader of the radical

Tupamaros West Berlin group killed by police in a contentious shootout in Schöneberg, in December 1971, shortly after the building was first occupied. (The Tupamaros, named after a Uruguayan urban guerrilla organisation, first came to attention with the attempted bombing – on February 27th, 1969 – of Richard Nixon's Berlin motorcade.) Later that same month, when police sought to remove squatters by force, they were confronted by large-scale protests which were then countered by teargas & batons – events commemorated in the protest anthem "Rauch-Haus-Song" by political rock group Ton Steine Scherben. The scale of opposition was such that the commune survived, becoming an important precursor to the later East Berlin Punk & New Wave scenes in the late '70s & '80s, & continues to this day.

During the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall & German reunification, squatting remained an important mode of resistance to the increasing commodification &, in the east, westernisation of the city. From the beginning of the '90s, Dunckerstraße 15, in the "LSD" (Lychner-, Schliemann-, & Dunckerstraße) section of Prenzlauer Berg, was the largest squat in the newly unified city, in a district where squatters accounted for some 40 Wilhelmine apartment houses alone, including the Kastanienallee Squat, which came under frequent attack by neo-Nazi skinheads. From 1998, however, following a series of police raids & evictions, Prenzlauer Berg began experiencing rapid gentrification – a situation more & more frequently witnessed across the city as large-scale privatisation & redevelopment gathered momentum. Originally established as a radical democratic alternative to the state-socialism of the GDR, Dunckerstraße came to emblemise – alongside the conspicuous commercialisation & eventual closure of the Kunsthaus Tacheles in Mitte (1990-2012) – the hostile re-colonisation of urban underground culture by the forces of "individualistic" neo-liberalism that Meinhof, twenty years before, had rightly identified as the *real* terrorism threatening the world. While some squatter communes elected to pursue the route of legalisation, by entering into contractual arrangements with the city, there was no concealing the rear-guard character of such actions, designed to reintegrate & normalise the "underground" within a programme of capital-driven "urban renewal" – most visibly centred around the Potsdamer Platz redevelopment – described in Christa Schmidt's 1999 novel *Eselsfest* as "the capital's heart transplant," echoing the famous reference in Wenders' *Der Himmel über Berlin* about the impossibility of finding this former "wasteland" (in fact the film's focal point) now transformed into glass & steel highrises, malls & multiplexes: as has often been said, no other place in the city changed so radically after the fall of the Berlin

²⁹ Robert Defcon, "Memories From Berlin's Iconic 1980s Punk Bars," *Electronic Beats* (November 26, 2015).



Leninplatz Punks, 1982, by Ilse Ruppert.



Just after the Fall, 1989, by Kenton Turk.

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Wall. Along with the revelations of the Stasi archives in the former East (the artist Cornelia Schlime, for example, transforms her old Stasi files into paintings) & the process of de-communisation (from the toppling of the colossal Leninplatz monument, documented in Dušan Makavejev's 1991 film *Gorilla Bathes at Noon*, to the "Ostalgie" of Wolfgang Becker's 2003 *Goodbye Lenin!*), rampant commercial redevelopment galvanised an emergent new writing ambivalent to the mainstream push for the "great novel of unification" – including books like Tim Staffel's violently dystopian *Terrordom* (1998), Ingo Schramm's linguistically dense *Fitchers Blau* (1996), Thomas Hettche's sadomasochistic *Nox* (1995), Ulrike Draesner's textually elusive *Atmer* (1998), Tanja Dücker's cross-dressing *Spielzone* (1999), & Katrin Röggla's topo-erotic *Irres Wetter* (2000).

West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's previously unthinkable appeal to reunification based on monetary union – finessed by a promise to foot the bill of the occupying Soviet forces' repatriation – paved the way both for the (mostly) short-lived cultural flourishing that took place during the six months following the Wall's collapse, & for the succeeding process of social & economic normalisation politely referred to as gentrification. While the GDR had been visibly disintegrating for

some time, the end was still spectacular – "From one day to the next," as Gudrun Gut put it, "Berlin was an uncontrolled city" – attended by the requisite euphoria, & followed by an institutional aftershock that produced, in the East especially, a sudden atmosphere of *laissez faire*. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, daily realities became unpredictable. As musician & founder of Berlin Insane Steve Morell recounts, "Nothing was functioning. There were all these cars from the East, massive crowds clogged the streets... Everyone was getting drunk & going wild. No one knew where it would all lead. After all, there were Russian tanks just outside Berlin."³⁰ With the sudden freedom of movement between the two halves of the city came an influx not only of Easterners into the West, but of Westerners (& others from the squatting, art & music scenes) into the East, seeking to take advantage of the political hiatus. A new "underground" community rapidly formed right in the heart of East Berlin, around the largely paralysed GDR governmental district centred on Alexanderplatz. Squats appeared along Oranienberger Straße (where both Tacheles & the

³⁰ Max Dax & Robert Defcon, "An Alternative History of the Fall of the Berlin Wall," *Electronic Beats* (September 22, 2016).

Aktionsgalerie established themselves, with Eimer around the corner at Rosenthaler Straße 68), in an area that was a monochrome wasteland of decayed grey buildings whose facades still bore the battle scars of WW2. Photographer Ben De Biel described it as reminiscent of the “zone” in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*: “At night barely every other streetlight was lit. The city was bathed in dim, orange light. It was dark. Some streets had no lighting at all. There were hardly any cars. In the heart of the city there were hardly any people on the streets at night... Mitte was a dead city.”³¹ Groups like the Mutoid Waste Company emblemised this post-apocalyptic aesthetic with their fire-breathing machine sculptures & performance spectacles, utilising abandoned Soviet military hardware including a junked MiG21 fighter jet & a painted T34 (the “pink panzer”). The squatting scene was able to establish itself in Mitte with such surreal abandon due largely to the disarray of the local authorities – the zone’s availability for experimental living was even openly advertised in publications like the West Berlin anarchist newspaper, *Interim*, which ran a weekly list of buildings ripe for occupation.

The epicentric shift of both West & East Berlin “undergrounds” to Mitte inaugurated the celebration of a new “communality” (“the single individual has failed”³²), accompanied by paradigm shifts in music, away from post-Punk to techno (the end of “Punk negativity” & the birth of DJ/rave culture), & the defining drug, from heroin & speed to ecstasy – a shift which, ironically or not, exposed the culture to an even more rampant commercialism by the ‘90s mainstream of “money, fucking, money, dancing,” anticipating the industrial-scale clubbing scene that would come to be emblematised by venues like Berghain (the new millennium’s equivalent of S.O.U.N.D.), backed by multimillion dollar global media companies like BMG Rights Management soon headquartered in Mitte. But even within six months of the Wall coming down, these shiny happy people & their militant analogues, labelled “Anti-Berliners” by establishment politicians, were already fighting a rearguard action against rapidly encroaching vested interests who viewed Mitte not as a utopian experiment in alternative living, but as the future monument to triumphal capitalism. In addition, Oranienberger Straße became the frontline in the conflict with an instantly resurgent nationalism, & of the resultant discontent & rootlessness of many younger East Berliners caught up in the surge in unemployment & neo-fascism, as

related in novels like Christian Mackrodt’s *Ostkreuz (Coming of Age during the Transition)* (2014). From May 1990, high-profile squats like Tacheles became targets of neo-Nazi attacks, including firebombings &, from November (the first anniversary of the Fall), of large-scale eviction action by “West German” police (according to some estimates, the most massive police deployment since WW2). For those not evicted, the pattern of attacks continued, & by 1992 these included raids on refugee camps at Hoyerswerda & Lichtenhagen. Civil rights, along with the reformist aspirations voiced in the former East (to re-distribute the national wealth to citizens) by the peace movement (Bündnis ‘90) & others, were among the earliest casualties of what was revealing itself more & more to be an elaborate land-grab. There had been intimations of this even before the dust had settled on the collapsing Wall. As Alec Empire, founder of Digital Hardcore Recordings observed, “The East German civil rights activists, who had triggered the events only weeks before, disappeared overnight. Instead, the patriotism of a unified Germany was being propagated through the media, with the black, red & gold flag colours everywhere.”³³ In addition to which, within just five years, some 85% of the East’s assets had fallen into West German hands, with local industry declining by 30%, & the population by 10%, while the level of unemployment among university graduates became the highest in the world. Meanwhile, though the gay community was less affected for a number of reasons than in New York (male homosexuality having been legalised in the West since 1969 & in the East since 1968), the city’s high rate of intravenous amphetamine & heroine use, & the prevailing climate of the last decade of the Cold War, meant that unified Berlin nevertheless inherited an unacknowledged AIDS crisis – with the number of people testing HIV-positive in 1990 in the West at 42,000 (& only 133 cases reported in the East). Social reality & political rhetoric are only ever proximate by virtue of grammar & unsurprisingly the shine wasn’t long in coming off the “social reality” of Helmut Kohl’s grand Christian Democratic scheme of German reunification, which opportunists in the finance sector were nevertheless dubbing a new *Wirtschaftswunder*, or “economic miracle” – the path through which, ironically enough, seemed increasingly paved with Wall souvenirs & a nostalgia for that rapidly receding decade of “99 Luftballons”: back when, as the saying goes, there was still so much to look forward to.

³¹ Dax & Defcon, “An Alternative History of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.”

³² Robert Defcon, “Steve Morell,” *Spex* magazine (April 12, 2007).

³³ Dax & Defcon, “An Alternative History of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.”



Allen Ginsberg, Prague, May 1965, unknown photographer.

During a 1978 PBS television fundraiser, *The Night of the Empty Chairs*, organized by Leonard Bernstein in support of Amnesty International, Patti Smith & guitarist Ivan Král performed a modified version of a statement by the imprisoned Czechoslovak underground rock band Plastic People of the Universe, entitled "One Hundred Points Revisited." The original statement was an absurdist, mock-bureaucratic indictment of Prague's hardline communist régime, but was transformed by Patti Smith's pumped-up spoken-word delivery into an emotive rallying cry against political oppression in general:

"They're afraid of the old for their memory. They're afraid of the young for their ideas – ideals. They're afraid of funerals – of flowers – of workers – of churches – of party members – of good times. They're afraid of art – they're afraid of art. They're afraid of language – communication. They're afraid of theatre. They're afraid of film – of Pasolini – of Godard – of painters – of musicians – of stones & sculptors. They're afraid. They're afraid of radio stations. They're afraid of technology, free floating forms of information. *Paris Match* – Telex – Gutenberg – Xerox – IBM – wavelengths. They're afraid of telephones. They're afraid. They're afraid to let the people in. They're afraid to let the people out. They're afraid of the left. They're afraid of the right. They're afraid of the sudden departure of Soviet troops – of change in Moscow – of facing the strange – of spies – of counterspies. They're afraid. They're afraid of their own police. They're afraid of guitar players. They're afraid of athletes – of Olympics – of the Olympic spirit – of saints – of the innocence of children. They're afraid. They're afraid of political prisoners. They're afraid of prisoners' families – of conscience – of science. They're afraid of the future. They're afraid of tomorrow's morning. They're afraid of tomorrow's evening. They're afraid of tomorrow. They're afraid of the future. They're afraid of Stratocasters – of Telecasters. They're afraid of rock'n'roll. What does he mean, even rock bands? Even rock bands? Rock bands more than anybody else suffer from political repression. They're afraid. They're afraid of rock'n'roll – of Telecasters – of Stratocasters – of old age – in the streets – behind locked doors. They're afraid of what they've written – of what they've said – of fire – of water – of wind – of slow – of snow – of love – excretion. They're afraid of noise – of peace – of silence – of grief – of joy – of language – of laughter – of pornography – of honest & upright – they're uptight. They're afraid of lone & learn & learned people. They're afraid of human rights & Karl Marx & raw power. They're afraid of socialism. They're afraid of rock'n'roll. They're afraid of rock'n'roll. They're

afraid of rock'n'roll. They're afraid of rock'n'roll. AND WHY THE HELL ARE WE AFRAID OF THEM?"

In the February 1977 edition of the *International Socialism* newspaper "One Hundred Points" was described as "one of the toughest statements yet from the popular opposition in Czechoslovakia," & the Plastics as "a rock band who have consistently refused to toe the line of official culture & have made enormous sacrifices to continue expressing their own views." Ironically, the "One Hundred Points" – according to Archie Patterson's account in *Eurock* – was performed by the Plastics only *after* this account appeared in the Trotskyite press. "The 'Hundred Points...' was recorded live at the Third Music Festival of the Second Culture on October 1, 1977, & the piece has an interesting history behind it. When the band was first arrested in March 1976, an article appeared in an English left-wing paper quoting some of the Plastic's lyrics, including a long, heavily political song called the Hundred Points that the Plastics had never done, let alone seen. I was in Prague at the time when I saw the article & I was livid because the communist press had been printing vulgar lyrics the Plastics had never sung to discredit them. Now the left wing press had descended to the same kind of falsehood, though with the best intentions (the ends justify the means), in order to make the Plastics palatable & sympathetic to people who could only hear what the music was saying if the ideology was right. When I showed the article to the band, their reaction astonished me. They said, There is only one thing we can do now, do it! It was a brilliant solution. Rather than going through the rather complicated hassle of denying the Hundred Points, they simply had it translated into Czech & set it to music. Thus, they made the article in the English paper retroactively true."³⁴

Whatever the accuracy of the story, the "One Hundred Points" remained the Plastics' one overtly political text, while the band themselves took the view that they were "dissident" by circumstance rather than intent – those circumstances being the *de facto* politicisation of the unofficial music scene as a result of increasingly heavy-handed (& increasingly irrational) efforts by the state at its suppression. Formed in Prague a month after the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968, the Plastics attracted the ire of Czechoslovakia's new Moscow-backed régime intent upon social re-"normalisation" after the short-lived experiment in "socialism with a human face" known as the Prague Spring (a seven-month period of liberalisation in which popular culture flourished), cracking down on anything seemingly pro-Western (like rock music) or merely

³⁴ Archie Patterson, *Eurock: European Rock & the Second Culture* (Fresno: Eurock, 2002).



Prague, 21 August 1968, by Pavel Maháček.

non-conformist (like males with long hair). At the time, the band performed mostly covers of Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart, the Velvet Underground & the Fugs – an attitudinal mix of the eccentric & the fucked-off, that clearly telegraphed the band's views to the men in grey suits about their efforts at bureaucratizing humanity to death. If that wasn't enough, the band's name itself (drawn from a track on the Mothers of Invention's 1967 album *Absolutely Free*) took a broad swipe at the collaborationist culture being foisted upon Czechoslovak society by the Soviet stooges up in the Castle – where, only 30 years before, Hitler himself had surveyed his most recent conquest. "We are surrounded by a vast / quantity of plastic people," Zappa's lyrics went. "Take a day & walk around, / watch the Nazis run your town, / then go home & check yourself. / You think we're singing / 'bout someone else. / But you're plastic people." More open & extreme forms of protest against the Soviet occupation occurred, too, most famously the self-immolation by philosophy student Jan Palach at the foot of the Natural Sciences Museum steps on Wenceslas Square – but it was through the unofficial music culture that opposition was most widely shared as a communal experience, if not as a programme of political action.

With an increasing underground following, the Plastics turned from covers in English (described by the authorities as "morbid" with a "negative social impact") to producing original work in Czech even the censors could understand, written mostly by Milan Hlavsa & the former surrealist & banned poet Egon Bondy (who, in a truly Kafkaesque turn, was also a secret police informer) – recording their first album, the psychedelic jazz-rock *Egon Bondy's Lonely Hearts Club Banned*, in 1974 (a nod to the Beatles' longevity as a revolutionising force on the far side of the Iron Curtain). Adding to the fact that only state-sanctioned bands were permitted to

actually play in front of an audience (the Plastics' professional licence had been revoked in January 1970), their performance of a banned writer's work was bound to attract official displeasure, as it did when police shut down a Plastics' concert in České Budějovice the same year, beating & arresting members of the largely "long-haired" (*máničky*) student audience (a nod likewise to the continuing influence of beat poet Allen Ginsberg, crowned "King of May" in Prague in 1965: "longhairs" were considered subversives & in 1966 approximately 4,000 of them were assisted in shaving their heads by the secret police, including Fluxus artist Milan Knížák). On March 17, 1976, the Plastics themselves were arrested along with members of DG 307 & several other groups while performing at the Second Festival of the Second Culture (organised by art historian Ivan "Magor" Jirous) & put on trial six months later for "organized disturbance of the peace" – with four musicians (Jirous, the Plastics' Vratislav Brabec, Pavel Zajiček from DG 307 & Svatopluk Karásek), receiving prison sentences of between 8 & 18 months. Jirous had taken the idea of the "second culture" or "parallel polis" from Václav Benda, as a reference to the underground renaissance the Plastics were supposed to be leading. This may have been wishful thinking on Jirous' part had the trial itself not transformed the Plastics into an international *cause célèbre* & a catalyst for the opposition movement that eventually went on to ride the "Velvet Revolution" to power & bring about the end of state totalitarianism thirteen years later.

For Benda & others, like Jirous & playwright Václav Havel, the idea of the parallel polis extended the notion of "underground culture" as it'd been understood in the West to encompass all manner of civic actions, from organised protest to the establishment of informal economies, information networks, education & research facilities, publishing operations, political structures, & so on: it was, in effect, not merely a subculture, but a fully-conceived resistance movement – a secret "state" within the State. Its objective, short of actual revolution, was to facilitate an *independent society*, able to operate outside the oppressive apparatus of the central authorities. In 1977, Jirous – who in 1989 would become the last political prisoner to be freed in Prague – published, in *samizdat*, "A Report on the Third Musical Revival" (1977), in which he wrote: "One of the highest aims of art has been the creation of unrest. The aim of the underground here in Bohemia is the creation of a second culture, a culture that will not be dependent on the official channels of communication, social recognition, & the hierarchy of values laid down by the establishment." The parallel polis, however, was never a formal

blueprint, but rather a descriptive system of informal “temporary autonomous zones,” as Hakim Bey called them. Yet, as much as it appealed to an idea of resistance, the parallel polis appealed even more to a kind of opportunistic quietism, of a form that eventually prevailed in wresting power from the Communist Party. In 1976 Havel, who would go on to become Czechoslovakia’s president in December 1989, secretly met with Jirous & became convinced that a showdown between the underground music scene & the authorities was imminent, & that this would provide a suitable opportunity to provoke a political confrontation as well. The occasion was the “Second Festival of the Second Culture,” & it was in response to the arrest & prosecution of the Plastic People of the Universe that Havel wrote an “Open Letter” to the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Gustáv Husák, & mobilised support behind what became the major document of the resistance, *Charta 77*, published locally in *samizdat* & in the Western media on January 6, 1977, along with the names of 242 signatories. The charter was a bold effort that landed Havel & many of his fellow signatories in prison, & resulted in the death of the philosopher Jan Patočka after 11 hours of interrogation by the StB (secret police). The document itself, however, was hardly the rallying cry to political freedom that might’ve been expected, but more like a lecture in political morality, chiding the authorities who’d prosecuted the Plastics for not abiding by the Helsinki Accords on human rights that they’d just signed up to.

By calling the régime on its hypocrisy, rather than denouncing it as such, Havel was playing a subtle game of one-upmanship: in the process, both the Plastics & *Charta 77* became focal points of further “resistance” played increasingly to an international audience. In his 1978 essay, “The Power of the Powerless,” Havel wrote: “Everyone understands that an attack of the Czech musical underground was an attack on the most elementary & important thing, something that bound everyone together... The freedom to play rock music was understood as a human freedom & thus as essentially the same as the freedom to engage in philosophy & political reflection, the freedom to write, to express & defend the social & political interests of society.” Written ten months after the implosion of the Sex Pistols – following that band’s ruthless vilification in the US & British tabloid press – Havel’s measured gravitas was a long way from how the “antiestablishment” music scene was being viewed by the leaders of the so-called Free World, where “freedom of expression” in music, literature & the arts was just as often a bellwether of broader civic freedoms. What differentiated the two amounted, arguably, to little more than a rhetorical divide & a conflicting attitude



Wenceslas Square, Prague, November 1989.

towards those opportunities provided by the mass marketing of discontent-turned-to-entertainment. What the West, aided by the likes of Malcolm McLaren, realised in fits & starts at the end of the '70s, which the East apparently didn't, was that dissent was worth big dollars – & that dissent channelled into entertainment & lifestyle merch was the most effective form of mass mind-control yet devised. The problem for the Prague underground of Jirous & Havel was its inability to differentiate between the aspiration to this kind of free-market capitalist kitsch & the creation of a genuinely alternative social reality. The resulting transformation of Prague, after 1989 & the end of what Ivan Klíma called “the Empire of Stalinist tyranny,”³⁵ into a privatised Thatcherite bubble economy, meant that the parallel polis remained a pipe-dream. As the Plastics’ Vráta Brabenec stated in an interview twenty years after the “Velvet Revolution” (so called because not a shot was fired): “I hate it when people talk about that year as a ‘revolution’ in Czechoslovakia. A revolution is supposed to change things. But what has changed? I don’t consider myself any less subversive now than I was back then. I am no less a dissident in a society of shopping, shopping & shopping than I was in a society of socialism, socialism, socialism. It’s all still shit, only different shit.”³⁶

Over the next few years, Jirous’ “parallel polis” would come to seem like a more fitting description of the separations occurring within Prague society on both an economic & cultural level – the outcome on the one hand of a fantastically corrupt voucher privatisation scheme (widely heralded in the West as a new economic miracle), & on the other by the large-scale return of former Czechoslovak

³⁵ Ivan Klíma, Introduction, *Description of a Struggle* (London: Picador, 1994) xix.

³⁶ Ed Vulliamy, “1989 & All That: Plastic People of the Universe & the Velvet Revolution,” *Guardian* newspaper (6 September 2009).

émigrés & the rapid increase in the size of the city's international community. A *New York Times* article estimated that by 1993 there were 30,000 Americans alone living in the city.³⁷ A sizeable number of these had aspirations in the emerging "international scene" – as writers, translators, editors, publishers, artists, filmmakers, human rights activists, booksellers, teachers, students, musicians & trust-fund groupies. This loosely-formed community – the new "second culture" – gave rise to a constructed myth of the city which combined a nostalgic Bohemianism, a belated Western hankering after cultural authenticity (the "poetry of witness"), & a type of *Wizard of Oz* fantasy set in juxtaposition to the 1980s "culture wars" & political bankruptcy of the Reagan/Thatcher era in the US & Britain (which the '90s did little to ameliorate).³⁸ All of which could now be got without the need, for US passport holders, of so much as a visa. Prague, too, became the momentary picturesque outpost of a Berlin which, for some, had been deprived of its *raison d'être* now that the Wall (which had effectively sheltered it from all sides) had come down. Bourgeois bohemians & subcultural proctologists descended on the Czechoslovak capital to take the pulse of the Zeitgeist & add another 15 minutes to their overdraft on celebrity, producing forgettable reams of Praguesploitation. Ginsberg duly put in an appearance. So too Malcolm McLaren. Agonising on behalf of those deliriously caught up in the moment, *Wired* magazine's Bruce Sterling wrote in 1993, "this is a very '90s city. Even its artistic problems are '90s artistic problems: the struggle of a bewildered & put-upon generation to speak authentically in an era whose central directive is to reduce all art & all life to an infinitely replicable commodity, to turn Kafka into a T-shirt & Havel into a carry attraction, to shrink-wrap cultures as pasteurised package-tour exotica, to make art a bogus knickknack & heritage the hottest-selling market segment of the Museum Economy."³⁹

More significantly, thirty years of underground cultural resistance found itself – at the very moment triumph appeared to be at hand – stuck out in the cold. It didn't have to wait to be gentrified out of existence, it simply woke up the morning after & found it'd been made irrelevant – both by a society desperate to embrace materialist amnesia, & a whole new transient demographic of literary dilettantes who for the most part knew nothing about it,

convinced that Prague counterculture meant Allen Ginsberg. It was the starkly ironic inversion of the Situationist credo that the victory of the "revolution" is at the same time its disappearance, having realised its project "by superceding itself." As has often been observed, it was as if '89 was '68 upsidedown. Brabenec summed it up when he said, "Fucking tourists. Once it was Russian soldiers, now it's tourists. I can't decide which is worse." Cynical pundits like Sterling entirely missed the point that their authenticity anxiety was as much a cultural import as was the hankering after the next Hemingway & Gary Shteyngart's endless one-upmanship about the failure of the "Prague Novel" to suddenly materialise out of the overnight efforts of fugitive Berkeley dropouts. "Prague," wrote Sterling for his American readership, "is very much like Paris in the '20s, but it's also very much unlike Paris in the '20s. One main reason is that there is no André Breton here. People do sit & write – stop by The Globe, the crowded émigré bookstore on Janovského 14 in north Prague, & you'll see a full third of the cappuccino-sipping black-clad Praguelydyte customers scribbling busily in their notebooks. There are many American wannabe writers here – even better, they actually manage to publish sometimes – but there is not a Prague literary movement, no Prague literary-isms. No magisterial literary theorists hold forth here as Breton or Louis Aragon [!?] or Gertrude Stein [?!] did in Paris. There isn't a Prague technique, or a Prague approach, or a Prague literary philosophy that will set a doubting world afire. There are people here sincerely trying to find a voice, but as yet there is no voice. There may well be a new Hemingway here (as *The Prague Post* once declared there must be). But if Prague writers want to do a kind of writing that is really as new & powerful as Hemingway's was in Hemingway's time, then they will have to teach themselves."⁴⁰ Presumably Sterling had never heard of Prague Surrealism (Breton himself called Prague "Surrealism's second city") or Prague Structuralism (which contemporary -ISM *didn't* owe some debt to Jakobson?), not to mention Prague writers like Jáchym Topol, Emil Hakl, or the fleet of older novelists like Bohumil Hrabal & Ludvík Vaculík (both of whom sustain comparisons to Joyce), or even the emerging *enfant terrible* of the other Prague scene, Lukáš Tomin, the first of whose three novels in English (*The Doll, Ashtrays, Kye*) was published in 1992 by locally-based Twisted Spoon Press. Tomin, who committed suicide in 1995, is perhaps the best example of why these finger-up-the-rectum opinionisers couldn't steer their way through a subculture if you gave them a

³⁷ "Y(oung) A(mericans in) P(rague)," *The New York Times* (December 12, 1993).

³⁸ The height of this phenomenon came with the US cable television pilot for a resident sitcom to be called "Prague 1," produced by screenwriter Eric Stunzi in May 1993.

³⁹ Bruce Sterling, "Triumph of the Plastic People," *Wired* 3.01 (1993).

⁴⁰ Sterling, "Triumph of the Plastic People."



Alan Levy & Lukáš Tomin at the launch of *The Doll*, Café Kandinsky, Prague, 1992, by Kevin Blahut.

periscope. His work represents what *underground* really means in post-Communist Prague, where “suppression by omission” took the place of state censorship, abetted by Western cultural narcissism (the “doubting world”) & Czech indifference. Yet despite (or because of) remaining unacknowledged on almost every side, Tomin produced the kind of work that could indeed begin to be measured against a Stein – or, to be a little less antique, a Pierre Guyotat, a Cabrera Infante, a Hubert Fichte, even a Nick Cave.

When the expatriate American newspaperman Alan Levy two years earlier called Prague – in an often parroted editorial – the “Left Bank of the nineties,” he appealed not to an instant comparison to the milieu of Joyce, Stein, Breton, but to a future history, though mindful of what poet Miroslav Holub wrote about history being “always a failure by definition”: “For some of us,” Levy proposed, “Prague is Second Chance City; for others, a New Frontier where anything goes, everything goes, & often enough, nothing works. Yesterday is long gone, today is nebulous, & who knows about tomorrow, but somewhere within each of us here, we all know that we are living in a historic place at a historic time. Future historians will chronicle our course – & I have reason to believe that they’re

already here – but even they will need to know the nuts & bolts of what it was like & how it felt to live & be in liberated Prague in the last decade of the 20th century.”⁴¹ But the question that remained was what it could mean in such circumstances to live, as Jirous had argued during the volatile ’70s & ’80s, “in truth” – in the belief that art could expose the régime’s falsification of social reality & bring about its collapse, including, it was now necessary to add, the régime of neo-liberal amnesia presently occupying this city of otherwise invisible thresholds (*Praha*, which was its name before momentarily becoming an American satellite, means exactly that). One was minded of Wim Wenders’ famous line from *Im Lauf der Zeit* (Kings of the Road; 1976): “The Yanks have colonised our subconscious.” It was like the Second Coming of the Marshall Plan. By 1995, when Radio Free Europe moved its headquarters from Munich to Prague’s former Federal Parliament building, a new period of “normalisation” appeared to be in full swing – directed by a new occupying force – which by the turn of the millennium would be solidified by NATO accession, with the unflinching approval of ex-dissidents like Jirous who, in later years (notably during the second Bush administration) became a

⁴¹ Alan Levy, Editorial, *The Prague Post* (1 October, 1991).



Gustáv Husák street art, Prague, 2006.

vocal, even hysterical, critic of domestic opponents of American foreign policy.

Just as in August 1968 when the city celebrated the renewal of its “endless friendship” with the Soviet Union (who’d “saved” it from the forces of “counterrevolution”), so too in ‘89 Prague embarked on an “endless friendship” with Capitalism-with-a-Human-Face. And if Marxism had been “discredited” by History, so too the spirit of dissent was subjected to a tacit disillusionment: while Jirous was free to get as pissed as he liked & dance naked on tables, his brand of “living in truth” descended into a reactionary sentimentalism. As reactionary & sentimental as the gang of self-proclaimed “orthodox Surrealists” who drank that comic avatar of puerile self-interest, Hrabal, under his chair every night at U zlatého tygra (“you have to get your hands dirty in life” – *zamazat se životem* – as the sometimes-collaborationist used to say). What gets obscured behind all this is the very real volatility that characterised the years immediately after ‘89 & continues to shape the political discourse today. One of the features of Jirous’ “parallel polis” had been a relative homogeneity of purpose: state socialism provided the fulcrum upon which the appearance of a movement could lever itself forward. As one of the signatories of Charta 77, Anna Šabatová, recounted, it “brought the atheists into contact with Christians of all denominations. It united writers & artists with scientists & politicians, as well as labourers & clerks. It also brought together the old & the young. Seventeen-year-old dissidents could rub shoulders with people who had fought against fascist Germany & who served time in Stalinist labour camps.”⁴² Yet this “unified front” of solidarity-by-convenience masked often radically contradicting ideological positions, & it is of no surprise that it fell apart in tandem with the collapse of the Communist régime. While the underground itself was for the most part consigned to sudden irrelevance, a minority of dissident figures nevertheless persisted in becoming an ineffectual governing class under whose brief tenure corruption & organised crime ran rampant, before they, too, found themselves supplanted by political careerists such as Václav Klaus (Havel’s Thatcherite prime minister from 1992 & successor as president). Klaus, needless to say, wasn’t the kind of man who had any truck with ideas like appointing Frank Zappa honorary trade representative. Moreover, as the veneer of unified purpose fell away, the dirty reality of xenophobia & domestic fascism came increasingly into view, with brawls between Punks & skinheads occurring regularly on Prague’s streets, along with tacitly police-sanctioned neo-

Nazi rallies through the city’s former Jewish quarter, firebombings of Roma tenements, & beatings of homosexuals (with few exceptions, the handful of gay & lesbian clubs that operated throughout the ‘90s did so behind locked doors).

The first skinheads appeared in the city between 1986 & ‘87, & until 1989 tended to restrict their attacks to members of the anarchist, anti-Fascist & Punk movements, before branching out into race-baiting & so on. Unlike the dissident rock music scene, which managed to produce a number of important recordings under Communism (& went on to comprise the post-Communist status quo side-by-side with unashamed re-treads like Karel Gott, Michal David & Helena Vondráčková – all signatories of the “Anticharta”), the Punk scene released a *total* of three records before ‘89 (one 7” vinyl & two compilation LPs),⁴³ yet it bore the brunt of the succeeded reactionary militancy from the far right. It was here, arguably, that anything that might properly be called an “underground” persisted after the repatriation of Soviet tanks (& when the average Joes were queuing around the block to get a bite at the first McDonalds to grace Kafkaville). While the first & only “official” performance by a Punk band during Communism took place in September 1987 – when the West Berlin group Die Toten Hosen surreally played on the same bill with Michal David at a nuclear disarmament “Friendship” festival in Plzeň (& still managed to provoke a riot) – the indigenous Punk scene (which had emerged on the fringes of underground rock associated with the Plastics, DG 307, & the Prague “Jazz Section”) dates much further back, from the late ‘70s, with bands like Xtempore, Plexis, Michael’s Uncle, Zikkurat, Energie G, Antitma 16 & Psí vojáci (Charta 77 signatory Filip Topol’s band), who played a mix of Ramones, Stranglers, Sex Pistols, & The Damned (cribbed from recordings smuggled across the German border). Throughout the ‘80s, Punk outfits found themselves on proscribed lists (the “régime chart”), while also being targeted by constant police intimidation & a media-channelled propaganda campaign (launched through magazines like *Tribuna*, in which they were depicted as Public Enemy #2 – after “Longhairs,” who remained PE #1).⁴⁴ The threat of police violence was real & death-in-custody not uncommon, the last documented case (of dissident Pavel Wonka) occurring in 1988, two years after Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost. The difficulty of maintaining any kind of alternative community was compounded by living in a society riddled with informers: few locations in

⁴³ Filip Fuchs, “The History of Czechoslovak Punk,” *DIY Conspiracy* (January 11, 2016).

⁴⁴ See Michaela Pixová, “Alternative Culture in a Socialist City: Punks & Long-haired People in Prague in the 1980s,” *Český Lid* 100.3 (2013).

⁴² Anna Šabatová, “From 1968 to Charter 77 to 1989 & Beyond,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (May 31, 2005).

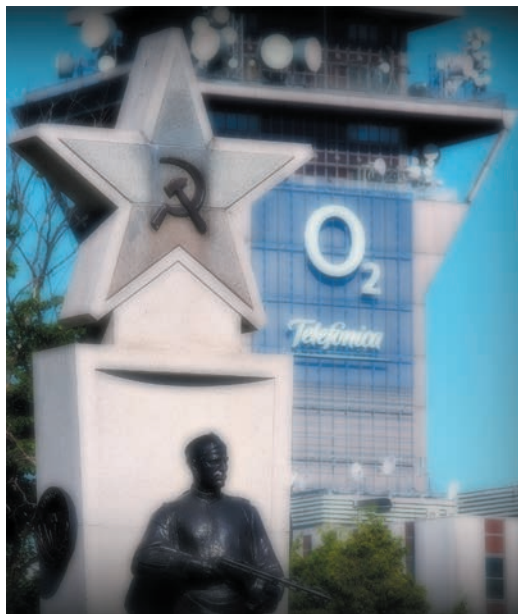
the city could serve as meeting points out of view of the general populace & state security, though places like Kampa & Štřelecký Island were safer than most, along with a few pubs like Klamovka & U Zpěvácků, & sometimes Klub 007 (Sedmička) at the Strahov dormitories. In addition, for what was predominantly a "youth culture" (Energie G & Antitma 16 were both made up of high school students), there was the problem of mandatory military service (for men), which was only marginally better than doing time in a Communist prison, if potentially more fatal. The situation was hardly better for early '80s all-women bands like Plyn (later Dybbuk), whose feminist stance was at odds with a "socialist" ideology that expected women to express their "liberation" at the kitchen sink & was in barefaced denial of the chronic levels of domestic violence that occurred in this Workers' Paradise. Like the kind of Punk, street art & squatting culture that had developed in places like Berlin, the pursuit of gender equality beyond Party platitudes only became possible in Prague after the end of the régime.

17 November – the date on which the "Velvet Revolution" began in 1989, eight days after the fall of the Berlin Wall – was, not uncoincidentally, the date first observed in 1941 for International Students' Day. This event in turn originated with a funeral procession on 15 November 1939 for the murdered Czech medical student Jan Opletal, who'd been shot during an earlier march (in celebration of the anniversary of Czechoslovak Independence, 28 October 1918), which itself had quickly become a protest against Nazi occupation. Among the retaliatory measures taken by the Nazis had been the forced closure of all Czech universities for the duration of the War, the deportation of 1,200 students to Sachsenhausen, & the execution – on 17 November – of nine student leaders & professors. It was a date, therefore, almost overburdened with symbolic significance. When in 1989 the Socialist Union of Youth & a group of independent student leaders organised a mass rally to mark the 50th anniversary of the Nazi executions & to voice their opposition to what, by that time, was already a moribund régime, it was bound to resonate. According to estimations, about 15,000 students took part in the rally which was eventually broken up by riot police on Národní Street, in front of the National Theatre. The brutality of the crackdown provided a catalyst for the "Velvet Revolution" proper, additionally fuelled by one extremely bizarre event which came to assume almost mythic proportions. This was the supposed police murder of one "Milan Růžička," apparently a student at the Mining University in Ostrava, whose body was left lying in the street when security forces withdrew after a baton-charge on protestors. Footage of the incident existed & news of the "dead

student" quickly circulated. This "dead student" turned out to be a person whose real name was Ludvík Zifčák, a senior officer in Department 2, Section II of the Prague StB directorate. Zifčák had been commissioned to "directly penetrate the 'enemy' environment of the opposition & student movements." His role as the "dead student" was eventually exposed in January 1990, although the purpose of the stunt has never been clarified. When the Communist Party abandoned power on 28 November 1989, the Party General Secretary, Gustáv Husák (who held on to the presidency until December 10) ended up, in yet another bizarre episode, officiating over the appointment of Havel's new non-communist government. Husák, architect of post-'68 "normalisation" & "Hero of the Soviet Union," died barely two years later, virtually forgotten. It wouldn't be until 1991, however, that the Soviet tanks (stationed in the city since '68) finally left. And even then (& moreso following the "August Coup" of that same year, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was kidnapped by Party hardliners – the "Gang of Eight"), Prague residents continued to harbour suspicions that Russian tanks would soon be back, leading to an atmosphere in the city of more than usual irreality. Meanwhile, on the night of 23 April 1991, artist David Černý, along with a group of accomplices (the "Neostunners"), launched a guerrilla action against the "Monument to the Soviet Tank Crews" located on Kinský Square, painting the tank pink & erected a large middle finger on its turret. Černý was subsequently arrested under pre-existing "public disturbance" laws & the tank was repainted green. In response, 15 members of the newly-elected parliament, making use of their immunity from prosecution, took it upon themselves to paint the tank pink again. With the resulting controversy, Černý was released, the monument was stripped of its status &, after being repainted green & then pink several more times by competing groups, the tank was eventually removed to a military museum. When real tanks finally did return to the centre of Prague (in 2001), taking up positions at the top of Wenceslas Square almost identical to those occupied by the Soviets in 1968, they weren't Russian but part of the Czech Republic's NATO contingent, put there along with a system of concrete barriers in response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. As a new American vassal state, the tanks had been sent to defend Radio Free Europe's headquarters from imminent "terrorist" attack. A leftover from the Cold War, RFE finally relocated out of Prague's centre only in February 2009, but for the intervening years the tanks & barriers remained in place, as if Prague were once again an occupied city. And in case the comparison had been missed, at 7:30a.m. on the 6th

of March 2003, in an echo of the self-immolation of Jan Palach in 1969 near the same spot – & only metres from the RFE barricades – 19-year-old student Zdeněk Adamec poured petrol over his clothes & set himself ablaze in protest against the hijacking of democracy by corrupt politicians & corporations, & in opposition to the US-led war in Iraq. Adamec's action also corresponded with the inauguration of Václav Klaus as president of the Czech Republic (with the backing of parliamentary members of the unreconstructed Communist Party). The media just called him crazy – as, indeed, the official state media once characterized Palach, whose funeral went on to become a highly politicized event & whose death has since gained national significance. Adamec's funeral, nobody remembers.

When the borders opened after '89, & with infrastructural chaos reigning in the city, Prague developed a major live music culture, with semi-legal & often short-lived venues appearing on an almost daily basis. While Berlin was embracing techno, Prague became a magnet for post-Punk & Indie rock groups, along with a steady stream of refugees from the war in the Balkans who infused the scene with a radical, post-Cold War impetus. Dozens of squats existed briefly in the city's suburbs & downtown, adjacent to such well-known landmarks as Charles Bridge (including Asylum, a performance space on Betlémská Street established by the poet Jay Godwin & home to the Electric Circus). Many of the buildings that housed them had been left in legal limbo following the '89 revolution & the ensuing restitution laws which sought to return formerly nationalised properties to their pre-1948 owners. Among these was the Art Deco Café Slavia, located opposite the National Theatre, a centre-piece of Prague's pre-communist literary culture. Slavia was closed for lengthy periods throughout the early '90s, under administration by the Academy of Performing Arts. On 8 November 1993, the "Society of the Friends of Café Slavia" (John Bruce Shoemaker, Glen Emery, Marek Gregor, Ladislav Provan) gained access to the building & squatted the café for two weeks – attempting to restore the café's former ethos – until the authorities had it closed down again on the 20th (it re-opened definitively only in 1997). As the '90s progressed, an increasing number of bars & clubs opened in neglected buildings across the city. Many of these became well-known, like Roxy (on Dlouhá Street), Klub Stalin (a.k.a. Pod Stalinem, located under the demolished Stalin Monument in Letná, a space now adorned with an enormous metronome), Bunkr (in a former Civil Guard bunker & nuclear shelter, along with Radio 1, at Lodecká 2 in Nové Město), Jo's Bar & Garáž (opened in 1992 by Canadian Glen Emery – a former resident of the ČSSR in the '70s & '80s



Soviet War Memorial, Prague, 2014, by Vadim Erent.

– on Malostranské náměstí), Repre (briefly located downstairs in the pre-restoration Obecní Dům – co-owned by John Bruce Shoemaker, frequent sponsor of Twisted Spoon Press, *Trafika*, *Optimism* & *Think* magazines), Tam Tam (located on the second floor in Slovanský Dům, now a boutique mall at Na Příkopě 22 – operated by Christoph Brandl), Klub X (first in Palác Metro on Národní, then in the basement of Dětský Dům, across the street from Tam Tam at Na Příkopě 15) & Chapeau Rouge (on Jakubská). The Thirsty Dog (not to be confused with the present Žízňivý Pes), a bar which opened on the western side of Obecní Dům for only 18 months during 1993 & 1994, achieved particular notoriety before being shutdown on 7 June by city health inspectors: Allen Ginsberg read there, Joe Strummer performed there, & Nick Cave wrote a song about it for his album *Let Love In*.

Through its past connection with the Beats & the Manhattan post-Punk scene (via Ginsberg, Ed Sanders, Ivan Král), Prague in the '90s – with its decaying façades under layers of brown coal-soot, its subway gloom, its whores all along Národní & Wenceslas Square, its abandoned Trabbis & half-toned Škodas jacked-up on bricks, its dirt-cheap apartments, Monopoly-money economy & sense of free-for-all – seemed to represent an extended riff on the theme of '70s New York via '80s Berlin. Along with Cave & Strummer, there were Blixa Bargeld, Diamanda Galás, Brian Eno, as well as long-term habitués like former Khmer Rouge frontman Phil Shoенfelt. Shoенfelt, who



Blixa Bargeld with Einstürzende Neubauten at Divadlo Archa, Prague, 2010, by Robert Carrithers.

toured Prague in 1994, formed Southern Cross with members of Tichá Dohoda there in 1996, & later toured Europe with Nikki Sudden (recording *Golden Vanity* in Berlin in 1998), before joining the Berlin-based outfit Fatal Shore with Bruno Adams & Chris Hughes (both formerly of Once Upon A Time). Fatal Shore produced four CDs before reforming, after the death of Bruno Adams, as Dim Locator – named after a Rowland S. Howard song on the Birthday Party's *Junkyard* LP. Khmer Rouge (Shoenfelt, Barry "Scratchy" Myers (tour DJ for The Clash), Marcia Schofield (later keyboardist with The Fall) & drummer Paul Garisto (Iggy Pop, The Psychedelic Furs)) had been managed in the early '80s by former-Warhol Factory photographer Nat Finkelstein & produced by Tom Scully, & Shoenfelt brought the ethos of post-Punk, No Wave, Noise & experimental New York music to a scene that was already synthesising Berlin & Balkan influences, with bands like The Ecstasy of St Teresa, Colorfactory, Rány těla, Moimir Papalescu & the Nihilists (later Kill the Dandies!), Liquid Harmony, Ohm Square, Support Lesbiens, Zuby Nehty, & eccentricities like Kollaps, the Pazvuky Noise Project (PNP) & Blaq Mummy (once described as "Einstürzende Neubauten sideswiping the Cramps on a deathride to Sun Ra").

Going by the name Reverend Feedback, former-PNP & Blaq Mummy frontman Vincent Farnsworth was a poet who Tom Clark had referred to as "brute sage of destiny" – & the magazine he managed with Gwendolyn Albert throughout the '90s, *Jejune: america eats its young*, was one of dozens of art, lit & otherwise unclassifiable zines & magazines produced during the "Prague Renaissance" & in the wake of *samizdat* precursors like *Revolver Revue* – including *Divus*, *Yazzyk*, *X-Ink*, *Umělec*, *Gristle Floss*, *[unpronounceable symbol]*, *One Eye Open/Jedním Okem*, *Knee-Deep in Rivers of Rage...* Farnsworth, along with Shoenfelt (whose novel, *Junkie Love*, appeared from Twisted Spoon in 1997) & writers like Lukáš Tomin, Katka Piňosová, Laura Conway, Thor Garcia, Šimon Šafránek, Věra Chase, Vít Kremlička, Pierre Daguin, translators like Alex Zucker, artists & photographers like Markéta Othová, Lucia Nimcová & Veronika Bromová, publishers like Ivan Mečl & Howard Sidenberg, musicians like Dan Kenny & Ken Ganfield, filmmakers like Tally Mulligan, theatre directors like Richard Toth, performers like Curtis Jones & others, comprised a diffuse experimental scene distributed mostly around the downtown, Letná & Žižkov neighbourhoods & drawn to the legacies of Czech New Wave cinema, Jan & Eva Švankmajer's neo-Surrealism, the photomontage



Flyer for Curtis Jones at Tam Tam club, Prague, 1994.

of Prague Dadaists like John Heartfield, & the general influx of ideas from all corners – a broad cross-over between music, art, writing, film & performance, forming a kind of meta-underground to the whole “Left Bank of the ‘90s” phenomenon & the remnants of ex-dissident self-mythologising.⁴⁵ In 1997 the radical neo-Duchampian group Póde Bal was founded with the intention of re-politicising the art scene in the face of post-’89 tendencies in many areas of society (including the arts) towards introspection & amnesia, circulating slogans like “PODE BAL WARNS THAT SMOKING NON-STATE-OWNED DRUGS CAN DAMAGE YOUR FREEDOM” & performing critical interventions like “GEN – Gallery of Established Nomenclature” aimed at exposing “the ever-present totalitarian trends in Czech society,” replete with a video of riverside daubers transposing the view of Prague Castle into easel paintings of swastikas. In 1998, Bil Brown, Jenny Smith & Jenne Magno founded the Pražská škola poetiky (Prague School of Poetics), in collaboration with the Schule für Dichtung in Vienna & writers/performers Anne Waldman,

Jerome Rothenberg, Bernadette Mayer & Lydia Lunch. “There was a feeling at that time,” Magno recounted in a 2010 interview, “that Prague was the vortex.” And while that sense of moment was soon to pass, it did so by absorbing into itself a deeper sense of history no longer defined by post-Wall euphoria or the opportunism that followed it. As Ide Hintz, co-founder of the Schule für Dichtung, noted at the time, “Central Europe has always been & always will be a genuine transmitter & translator between cultures & languages (traditional & utopian)... The Velvet Revolution – together with other post-Stalinist revolutions – was prepared mostly by poets, artists & intellectuals.”

By September 2000, however (after Y2K had failed to bring the about the End of History – just as liberal democracy had failed to do in 1989 & the Cold War had somehow failed to do during any of the preceding forty-odd years), the crowds in Wenceslas Square would be lobbing Molotov cocktails at Czech riot police in protest against rampant global capitalism, in the form of the World Bank & IMF. Unlike in ‘89, cobblestones would be ripped from pavements & hurled from barricades, with bands of protestors smashing every McDonald storefront in town. It was the logical conclusion of a critique that formed a parallel polis within the “parallel polis,” & was

⁴⁵ *The Return of Král Majáles: Prague's International Literary Renaissance, 1990-2010*, ed. Louis Armand (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2010).



IMF protest, Prague, September 2000, by Michael McGuerty.

perhaps most forcefully articulated in the last decade of communist normalisation in Robert Kalivoda's *Emancipation & Utopia* (published in German in 1982). The "formulation of the emancipation ideal," wrote Kalivoda, "must pass into a far more concrete, not easily attainable sphere. At this level it is mostly a matter of life & death... it is no longer just a wish."⁴⁶ During the "Days of Rage" anti-globalisation protests, delegates to the World Bank/IMF summit held at Prague's communist-era monstrosity, the so-called Palace of Culture in Vyšehrad, needed to be evacuated by police, despite efforts to cordon off the entire district. While the protests descended into running battles between demonstrators & police throughout the centre of Prague, the city itself seemed to author a kind of parallel universe scenario in time-delay of the protest march of 17 November 1989. These events, however much politicians tried to link them to foreign provocateurs, drew from wellsprings of deep social discontent within Prague's increasingly ostracised "minority" cultures dissatisfied with the "false choice" between globalisation or reactionary nationalism.

Jakub Polák, a prominent Czech anarchist & campaigner against racism & for Romani rights, was a cofounder of the 1989 strike committee that contributed to the Velvet Revolution & afterwards founded & edited *A-Kontra* magazine, the central mouthpiece of the Czech anarchist movement. During the '90s he was particularly active in the fight against the neo-Nazi resurgence in Central Europe & was a founder of Prague's first post-Revolution squat in 1990 (on Podplukovníka Sochora Street in Holešovice, close to Vltavská metro & to Bubny train station – the central deportation point during WW2 for Prague's Jewish population, organised into transports by the local collaborationist Council). Unlike in Berlin, the

Prague authorities maintained a general hostility to squatters, attracting accusations in the late '90s of complicity with neo-Nazi groups involved in violent attacks on squats in Prague & elsewhere – a pattern that has repeated itself more recently at "Klinika" in Prague 3. Some squats, like the one coordinated by artists Igor Tchai in the Vršovice district, served as ad hoc artist-run exhibition & performance centres. But though initiatives aimed at promoting public art in neglected "private" spaces were supported by the likes of the Soros Foundation, nothing of the character of "Kunsthau" Tacheles was ever permitted to develop in Prague. The closest approximations were Ladronka, Zlatá Loď, Buďánka, Sochorka & Villa Milada⁴⁷ (a dilapidated pre-war house flanked by communist-era highrise dormitories across the river from the recently re-designated "Franz Kafka" train station, which soon after its occupation on the 1 May 1998 acquired a reputation as a centre of Prague's second-wave post-'89 counterculture). By June 2009, Villa Milada was the city's last remaining squat from the '90s, when council authorities moved in to evict its inhabitants. Three years later, the building (originally slated for demolition, but still standing) was temporarily reoccupied by a group of some 30 squatters before riot police again intervened.

While no visible squatting or street art scenes existed in Prague before the fall of Communism, oppositional art frequently took the form of in situ "Aktionism," such as the work of Jiří Kovanda, Zorka Ságlová, & Milan Knížák (along with Western Fluxus agents like Jeff Berner, Serge Oldenbourg & Ben Vautier) in the '60s & '70s – & later in the form of semi-legal exhibitions like the "Confrontation" series organised by Jiří David & Stanislav Diviš from 1984, representing a new wave of young artists situated between the musical underground & Punk scenes, comparable to the Times Square & New York/New Wave shows of 1980-1 (of which news had slowly filtered through). The one major manifestation of "street art" prior to 1989 was the "Lennon Wall," at Velkopřevorské náměstí – a graffiti pilgrimage site in the '80s for dissident "Lennonism" adorned with a frequently-repainted stencil of the face of John Lennon & comparable, in its iconicity, to Keith Haring's 300-metre Berlin Wall mural (1986) & the "East Side Gallery" in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. For obvious reasons, street art only began manifesting at the beginning for the '90s, with artists like Rake, Mascee, Chise, Vladimír 518, & as elsewhere has since become semi-officialised in parts of the city. Unlike Berlin

⁴⁶ See Robert Kalivoda, "Emancipation und Utopie," *Utopieforschung. Interdisziplinäre Studien zur neuzeitlichen Utopie* (Stuttgart: Vosskamp, 1982) 307.

⁴⁷ See Michaela Pixová & Arnošt Novák, "Prague Post-1989: Boom, Decline & Renaissance," *Baltic Worlds* (June 23, 2016).

& New York, however, Prague never developed a major commercial art industry into which street art could be readily expropriated, & underground tendencies have continued long after '89, from expressway flyovers & underpasses, to hole-in-the-wall galleries like Display (now Tranzitdisplay) & the more recent neo-Dadaist anti-gallery "The Solution" (run by former Cabaret Voltaire squatter, Mark Divo), alongside the few large-scale semi-commercial venues like David Černý's Meet Factory & Petr Hájek's Chemistry Gallery.

The forces of capital, being by several orders less expansive (though no less prevalent) in Prague than in Berlin & New York, have accordingly yet to discover a compelling need to disinter the remnants of the city's "second culture" from the margins of its Faustian credit economy. Left thus to pursue a troglodyte programme of subsistence-subversion in that savage zone between touristed dreck & institutional inertia, the fate of this "parallel polis" is doubtless more desirable than those outright expropriations by global entertainment & real-estate

cartels that have elsewhere so comprehensively asset-stripped Western Culture™ down to the very last "rampart of bad faith, senility & cowardice" as Breton 80 years ago predicted – such that commodification itself is made to appear as the only remaining "revolutionary" path available. Beneath a skein of postmodern corporatism, an *other* Prague indeed still exists, the last underground perhaps: an underground of more *fugitive* than *temporary* autonomous zones, of sub-subcultural alienation, of elective affinities with a "movement" whose bastions elsewhere have all but been industrially cleansed-out-of-existence, but whose forms nevertheless persist, whose lingering "poetic genius" still disturbs the drift of millennial fallout like a wounded vengeful spirit trailing noise across the cosmic TV screen, jamming the signal, desynchronising the image, refusing to be bored into submission by the self-evangelising spectacle of those-who-own & those-who-must-be-obeyed.

Prague, June 2017 ■



Louis Armand, 1996, by Cait Regan.



A black and white photograph capturing a surreal scene in a city street. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair lies on a table covered with a white cloth. She is wearing a dark, sequined mask and looking directly at the camera. The table is set with a glass of champagne, a bottle, a plate of food, and a decorative centerpiece. In the background, tall skyscrapers and a traffic light are visible, suggesting a busy urban environment. The text "NEW YORK" is overlaid in the center of the image.

NEW YORK



Wendy Wild, 1982, by Robert Carrithers (above); Club 57 calendar, May 1980, designed by Ann Magnuson (opposite); Store mannequin, New York, 2015, by Robert Carrithers (previous spread).

One of the first people I met when I had moved to New York was Wendy Wild. Alexa Hunter first brought me to Club 57, which was located just two blocks from where I lived. I met Wendy there & I will never forget it. Although I didn't know it at the time, Club 57 was to become a crucible of creativity on the downtown arts scene, as well as opening up a completely new world for me personally. It was just such an amazing place. Every night something different would be happening: one night an art show, the next live music (often a parody of some mainstream genre, such as Country & Western), then some off-the-wall performance art. Basically, you never knew what to expect, even though the club put out a monthly calendar of events. A lot of people experimented & developed their creativity there. Other clubs soon began to develop a similar philosophy, venues like the Mudd Club & Danceteria. But Club 57 was one of the first. It was a genuine scene because everyone supported & inspired each other. Instead of being negative or bitchy about someone else's work, they worked collectively to bring out its spark, its originality. It was precisely this lack of competitiveness that made it all such fun.

Wendy & I had been involved in an acrobatic dance company called Rockercise, which was started by Lorie Eastside, another important downtown mover & shaker. I'd studied dance before coming to New York, but not acrobatics. We practiced several times a week & the dance group would be rented out to clubs for performance events & fashion shows. Wendy was my first New York "crush" & I used to follow her everywhere. She was always raving about the wonderfully creative scene at Club 57, where she & her roommate John Sex would go all the time, both to hang out & perform.

I met Alexa when I was going to theatre & film auditions. We were both involved with acting & both of us had an interest in something more than just the standard acting roles. We were both hungry for creativity, but not the typical fare on offer. Alexa was a regular at Club 57 & told me that I had to go there.

I was quite surprised to find out that the club occupied the basement of an old Polish church on St Mark's Place. Not, I thought, a very promising location for an arts & performance space. Boy, was I wrong! The first person I set eyes on as we walked in was a woman who resembled an extra-terrestrial Morticia Adams. Sitting at a table blocking the entrance, she was even more beautiful than the black haired Morticia, & had large, dreamy blue eyes. If I'd run into her ten years later, I might have described her as a "Goth," but of course this fashion style didn't exist at the time, or at least it hadn't been marketed. Alexa introduced me to Susan Hannaford. She told me I'd need to buy a membership card if I wanted to come in. I paid her

three dollars & became a member, & from that moment on I felt like I belonged

Susan announced it was Monster Movie Club Night & that a film called *The Astro Zombies* was showing. Afterwards, there would be live music with a band called The Fleshtones, one of downtown's classic garage bands. I was handed a monthly calendar of events & we went inside.

An audience that numbered no more than twenty was sitting on wooden school chairs, watching this amateurish & badly-made B movie. Instead of trying to take the film seriously, they were laughing & making irreverent comments about what was happening on the screen. This appreciation of the inept for its own sake would later be known as the "Trash Aesthetic." If you've ever seen an Ed Wood movie, you'll know what I mean. Club 57 was at the cutting edge of this emergent sensibility. The humor was based on parody & subversion, what

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Ann Magnuson, 1981, by Robert Carrithers (above); Club 57 calendar, October 1980, designed by Andy Rees (opposite).

might be called “camp” or even *détournement* (if you were a French intellectual).

In between the row of wooden chairs a young guy with spiky blond hair was operating an ancient film projector. It had definitely seen better days, maybe back in the 1950s or 60s. And there was this one particular funny female voice that would yell out the funniest things to the film. It was like she was part of the film, the comedy side. She would say something & the whole room would break out laughing. Alexa introduced me to the voice after & it was Wendy Wild. We hit it off right away & became instant friends.

Wendy introduced me to the charismatic Ann Magnuson, manager, creative programmer & den mother of Club 57. I looked around the room at the people sprawled out on ratty old couches in front of the secondhand furniture & ‘60s lamps. The furniture combined with the decor was like a parody of my grandparents’ living room back in Chicago. Next to the bar an intense young woman with black-framed glasses & punky blond hair was playing records behind two turntables. Funky garage ‘60s music was her genre of choice, & small groups of frenzied dancers were jumping around to the beat of the music.

Wendy then introduced me to her pal John Sex, a former artist who had given up painting in favor of live performance. He was talking to his friends Keith & Kenny.

Wendy made a point of introducing me to all of the main people on the Club 57 scene, some of whom would later become alumni of the New York arts world. By the mid 1980s their works would be selling for millions of dollars, but at the time it was all about good times & fun. Some of them became my close friends, & all of them inspired me in one way or another. Many of those who survived are still in touch with me today.

Introductions having been taken care of, The Fleshtones started to play their brand of New York garage punk. Wendy & I ended up dancing to their music until dawn.

The loose, spontaneous atmosphere at Club 57 meant I was able to fulfill my acting fantasies in a much more creative way than if I’d been working at one of the established off-Broadway theatres. We were the new kids on the block, & Club 57 functioned as a creative laboratory where the financially poor but creatively rich could meet each other & swap ideas. It was a place where everyone was encouraged to develop their talents & have

fun while doing so, the fun element being the all-important glue that bound these creative misfits together. Artists, filmmakers, performers, musicians & scene-makers would all work together, develop their ideas & put them into practice *immediately*. Fun, spontaneity, creativity, humor, & immediacy – these were the key components that made Club 57 unique. Strindberg it most certainly wasn’t.

It was truly amazing that this tiny basement of a Polish church in the East Village could be so life-changing for me. It was certainly a case of being in the right place at the right time. This was an artistic playground where we could discover our creativity & reinvent ourselves. Everyone pitched in & would do everything they could to inspire each other to greater heights of originality & humor. At the time New York was becoming a magnet for creative people from across the world trying to fulfill their dreams.

It was also a city that had recently been declared bankrupt. The streets were dangerous, especially late at night, garbage lay piled up on the sidewalks because of endless public service strikes, & the old tenement buildings of Alphabet City were crumbling into dust. The film *Midnight Cowboy* gives a pretty good idea of how things stood at the time. Yet out of this grime & danger creativity blossomed...

Club 57 was a magnet for creative outcasts who couldn’t fit in anywhere else – not even in a place as artistically radical as New York. It was a magical force that somehow pulled together the right group of people at the right time. In this context I recall someone saying that Club 57 members were like “Andy Warhol’s Factory Kids.” There was a similar sense of oddballs being drawn together & defining the zeitgeist, almost by accident, the collective sum adding up to much more than the individual parts.

I remember the first time I saw Keith Haring





Keith Haring, 1981 (top) & Stanley Strychacki, 1981 (bottom) by Robert Carrithers; Club 57 video night Keith Haring/ Kenny Scharf, 1980, flyer designed by Kenny Scharf (opposite).

perform dada poems wearing a giant TV around his head. Keith had his first installation there & created his signature work, as did Kenny Scharf. Keith went on to curate his first exhibition with other artists called the Club 57 invitational, & then had his first art exhibition where he painted the walls with his art in Day-Glo colors. The following day it was painted over to make room for the next event. Those pictures, had they survived, could have been sold for millions today. He went on to do many other exhibitions, like the Erotic & Pornographic Show, The Xerox Art Show & The Anonymous Art Show. He developed his work at Club 57, & then unleashed it on the walls, billboards & streets of New York, finally getting his first show at Westbeth. Later he became the curator of the art space on the fourth floor of the Mudd Club.

Kenny Scharf was another future star who had his first exhibitions at Club 57. These were one-nighters too. He created the performance-singing duet The Batusi Brothers along with Drew Straub, & participated in John Sex's "Acts of Live Art." This was an event in which every Club 57 member put together some sort of live performance piece, either with others or individually. It was the first time I had seen John Sex do a striptease act with his snake Delilah! Then there was Ammo! (Shawn McQuate), an extreme performer & fashion designer who participated one hundred per cent in Acts of Live Art. He also put on events of his own such as "Universal Interaction" where everyone performed in different parts of the club at the same time. Very Dadaist, but with a gritty NYC sensibility...

Ammo was the one that talked me into doing a very silly dance performance in BVD white underwear together with Kenny Scharf & Billy Harris. His crazed fashion shows at Club 57 were memorable to say the least, with the models deliberately falling off the stage or spitting out fake blood. Remember, this was decades before *Zoolander*. Also memorable were the Amazon fashion shows done by designer Stacey Elkin.

Club 57 exorcised America's evil spirit. I think a new exorcism is long overdue. American stereotypes were parodied & made fun of, nothing was off limits for satirical demolition. One evening a Country & Western redneck show might take place among piles of hay & manure; a couple of nights later you might show up & witness a burlesque memorial to the hamburger-guzzling spirit of Elvis Presley; then there'd be a striptease performance with John Sex

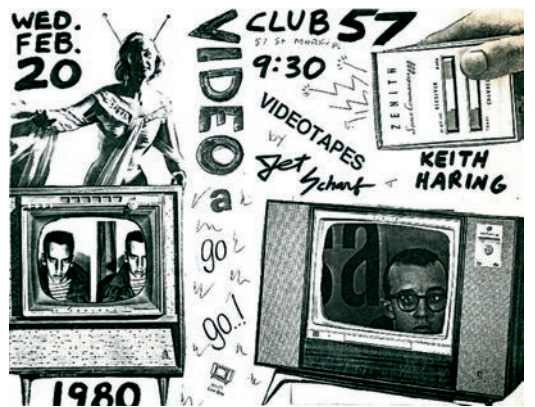
& his python, or a concert by singer Wendy Wild & her group The Mad Violets. Wendy & her cohorts once took the audience on a psychedelic trip by getting everyone present to ingest hallucinogenic mushrooms.

The group Pulsallama was also born at Club 57. This was a group of a dozen or more girls, who sang in the style of a Greek chorale while banging on beer bottles, pans & cowbells, & shooting into audience with toy machine-guns. Pulsallama made it so far that in 1982 they were the opening act on the European tour with The Clash.

Spontaneity & openness were key factors in all of this. Nothing was planned, everything seemed to happen of its own accord. Someone would say, "Hey, things are getting boring around here" & out of nowhere dozens of mad ideas would start to germinate. There were no passive spectators at Club 57, only active participants, & everybody would contribute with their own views & perspectives.

Besides The Fleshtones, there were many other indie bands that played at Club 57. The most memorable ones for me were The Fuzztones & Kai Eric's various projects. I do remember a special performance with Klaus Nomi & Joey Arias at Club 57. Then there was Art, who billed themselves as "The Only Band In The World!" This was a punky conceptual group based on the ideas of singer Mykel Board, aided by the humor of Kim Davis, Crackers on guitar (later replaced by Dale Ashmun) & Lori Montana doing the vocals in sign language. They actually went on to play Carnegie Hall.

Club 57 went through many phases & managers. When Ann Magnuson stopped being the production manager, I remember it went through a very theatrical period. I'll never forget Scott Covert playing the evil little girl in a Club 57 theatrical



MARC and SCOTT
present

HOLLY WOODLAWN
in
"THE SOUND OF MUSIC"

starring
J.P. DOUGHERTY

CAST

(in order of amount of rehearsals attended)

Maria, a pastulant at Ceasars Abbey	HOLLY WOODLAWN
The Mother Abbess	J.P. DOUGHERTY
Captain Von Trapp	J.P. DOUGHERTY
Sister Joey Heatherton	YOUNG MARGE GROSS
Sister Morphine	MICHAEL MUSTO
Sister Sledge	LINDA KRAUSS
Sister Norma Kamali	L.A. SANK
Sister Record Deal	WENDY WILD
Sister Thing	JOHN SEX
Sister Effie White	LENNY DEAN
Sister Snooze	JAN MOHLAN
Sister Conan	VICKI SCHROTT
Sister Twister	SCOTT COVERT
Sister Sammy Davis Jr.	GERARD LITTLE
Liesl	WENDY WILD
Rolf	JOHN SEX
Gesundheit	JAN MOHLAN
Pia	MICHAEL MUSTO
Shnitzel	LENNY DEAN
Schwartz	GERARD LITTLE
Wilhemina	YOUNG MARGE
Elite	L.A. SANK
Gestapo	VICKI SCHROTT
Guggenheim	SCOTT COVERT
Elsa Dearest	LISA ALTOMARE
Adolf, The M.C.	IRA A.
Maurice Fägula	MARC SHAIMAN
Diana Von Ross	MICHAEL MUSTO
and The Supreme Beings	WENDY and MADGE
Yittle and Gittle	HAINES and PIG

"Directed" by	SCOTT WITTMAN
Choral Master	MARC SHAIMAN
"Do-a-Deer" staged by	ANDY REES
Sound by	D. PERRY BRANDSTON
Sets by	WOOLWORTHS
Costumes by	assisted by SCHROTT

from the Cast's Closet

SPECIAL THANKS to; Julie Andrews, Sally Field, Audrey Hepburn
Mary Tyler Moore, Debbie Reynolds, Roz Russel

KATY K
PRESENTS

TRUCKERS BALL

All Honky Tonk Angels and Truckers Welcome!



10:30

friday
MARCH

6th

\$3.00

CLUB 57
ST. MARK



John Sex, 1981 (top); & Ammo, 1980 (bottom) by Robert Carrithers.



Tom Scully 1981 (top); & Scott Covert, 1982 (bottom) by Robert Carrithers.



Andy Rees, 1982, by Robert Carrithers.

production of "The Bad Seed." And then there was the crazed version of "The Sound of Music" directed by Marc Shaiman & Scott Wittman. It starred Holly Woodlawn in the Julie Andrews role & John Sex & Wendy Wild played the children. They changed the lyrics somewhat & made it into a Lower East Side version with a dash of John Waters' influence. This was during the period of Andy Rees' managerial tenure (before Kai Eric & then Ira Abramovitz took over.) William Fleet Lively was also active in putting on shows). Marc & Scott went onto write the music & lyrics for the Broadway hits "Hairspray" & "Catch Me If You Can."

The genesis of Club 57's reinvention began in 1979, when Susan Hannaford & Tom Scully produced a show called the New Wave Vaudeville show at Irving Plaza on East 15th Street. Ann Magnuson was credited as director & it was something completely different. New York at the time had a very exciting music scene, mostly based at Max's Kansas City & CBGB's, but there was no room at these venues for performance art & burlesque. The New Wave Vaudeville show provided an outlet & was the place where Klaus Nomi first premiered. This was around the time of his collaboration with David Bowie. I remember him dressed as a punk rock alien, singing opera in a high falsetto voice & shocking the leather & studs crowd out of their complacency.

Irving Plaza was where Susan, Tom & Ann met Club 57 founder & director, Stanley Strychacki. He was running things at Irving Plaza while doing the events programming, but needed some kind of alternative entertainment for the smaller club he had acquired at 57 St Marks Place. He'd been hosting rock bands & fringe theater groups but wanted something more. Susan & Tom started with various film programs & then the Monster Movie Club on Tuesday nights. Ann Magnuson became the new manager & creative programmer. Ann thought up theme parties for every other night of the week & scheduled events for the monthly calendar. Everyone pitched in ideas & decorated & furnished the new venue with articles they found & taken from the streets.

The chemistry was there right from the start. Ann was able to experiment, to develop her ideas & performances, as well as giving the same opportunities to the rest of the Club 57 members. Susan & Tom helped create theme parties as well & threw an annual Halloween Ball at Irving Plaza. Ann handled the day-to-day work at the "small"

Club 57 while Susan began working closely with Stanley booking bands at Irving Plaza (along with Chris Gremski, Club 57's first manager in 1978.) The whole operation, chaotic as it often was, managed to stay afloat. Not an easy task, keeping in mind the fact that New York was broke.

Tom took his role as Monster Movie Club curator very seriously. He would organize all of the screenings & was the projectionist for all of them. He would organize low budget B-movies, the monster/horror films that the East Village audience loved. He would also invite filmmakers to come & speak about their work. If I'm not mistaken, he even managed to get cult filmmaker Russ Meyer to come & give a talk. Susan encouraged people to answer back to the films, to laugh & have fun. Tom was more the professorial type, but would often get caught up in the fun. Intellectually serious as he was, he was not afraid to perform & make himself look silly. He often said, "If you can't be silly & idiotic sometimes, then what's the sense of it all?" And that in essence is what Club 57 taught me. I learned not to be afraid & to take chances, that being creative was more important than worrying about looking foolish. It pushed the boundaries of artistic freedom & encouraged people to express & bring to fruition their wildest most way-out ideas.

Unfortunately, things started to turn sour when money entered the picture. Suddenly art was no longer enough – some people found fame, wealth & adulation, while others were ignored by the critics & fell by the wayside. Hardly surprising that jealousy & rivalry began to rear their ugly heads. And then, of course, came AIDS & gentrification, the latter ripping the heart out of the Lower East Side community in a process that continues to this day.

I count myself very lucky indeed to have experienced Club 57. Many people who were involved in it are no longer with us, but their spirits still remain. Club 57 was a major cultural influence on New York & the art world in general, a fact that will be recognized through a Club 57 group exhibition at MoMA in the autumn of 2017. I'm very proud to say that I'm one of the survivors of this scene, & I'd like to pass on my experience to the next generation. In this written piece & the photographs that accompany it, I haven't been able to mention a lot of people who deserve mentioning. I intend to make up for that shortcoming at a later date.

I originally took these & other portraits as a book project based on the years 1980 to 1983. I focused on



The Vipers, 1983 (top); & Dino Sorbello & Wendy Wild, 1983 (bottom) at Danceteria, by Robert Carrithers.



The Fleshtones, 1981 (top); & The Sick Fucks, 1983 (bottom), by Robert Carrithers.



Dany Johnson DJing at Club 57, 1980, by Robert Carrithers.

the personalities from Club 57 with the intention of expressing who they were & what they were doing. I recognized that something special was going on & that these people were magical & unique. I wanted to help them achieve the immortality I felt they deserved, which is why I interviewed them & took their portraits.

In 1984, I relocated, first to London then to Los Angeles. I'd got a bit burnt out from living in New York, & needed to recharge my batteries & get fresh ideas. I sublet my flat to some people I knew, but to be extra safe I left the raw version of the book – including the transcriptions of all the interviews & the color Xerox portraits – with a friend of mine I believed I could trust. It was with shock & great dismay that I later found out that this person I believed in had lost or misplaced everything.

The book was to have been called "57 Varieties," & it was like a knife in my heart to discover that all the raw material for it had disappeared. It's taken me a lot of time & effort to recover it, but now that I have, I'm pleased to announce that in 2017 the Berlin publisher Pogo Books will be printing a hardcover edition of my Club 57 portraits, along with the stories from that time which I've attempted to recreate. The circle will be closed for me & it gives

me some peace of mind to know that I've finally achieved what I set out to do all those years ago.

In another world, in another dimension, in another New York City, there was once a special creative laboratory called Club 57. It was a magnet for creative souls in every type of media, people who came together, inspired each other & helped each other find their artistic identities. In the beginning there was no rivalry between them, & out of this cooperative environment came a special type of creativity that has had a huge impact on culture throughout the world. New York at that time was a place where young people had the leisure time to make their dreams come true. They didn't have to work twelve hours a day just to survive, they didn't need billionaire parents to pay their 2,000 dollar a month rents on Avenue C, actually the fact that the city was bankrupt & dangerous even helped. People had to come up with their own solutions, & this in itself was a form of stimulation. The spirit of Club 57 was to say "Fuck you! We'll be creative, original & provocative, & what's more we'll have loads of fun doing it! We won't go begging for sponsorship deals, we're punks & we'll do it ourselves!" And looking back, that's exactly what we did.

MUDD IN YOUR EYE

Halloween is my favorite holiday for many reasons, but I find it particularly magical in New York. I hate New Years Eve in every other city that I've experienced it. I see it as a lame excuse for mobs of people to get as drunk as they possibly can. They do their best to make it the most important night of their year, yet inevitably it leads to disappointment & a massive hangover – not a great way to usher in the New Year. In contrast, I've always loved Halloween, which I tend to treat as my personal New Years Eve. I was surprised to find out recently that the Celts had a different calendar to the one we use today. Halloween was their New Years Eve & November 1st was the start of their new year.

Halloween – known to the Celts as Samhain – marked the boundary between the realms of the living & the dead, two worlds which came together on that one night of the year. People would get drunk, jump through fire, engage in divination & wear animal masks & skins. It was a time when gods & fairies could cross into our world, & grinning

pumpkin heads were carved in order to scare away evil spirits. All in all, Samhain must have been one hell of a party. I guess I've got some Celtic blood in me, as Halloween always makes me feel special, as if my spirit has been freed. On this night anything is possible, strange things can happen & they quite often do...

I've spent Halloween in many parts of the world, but it's always New York where the experience has been most vivid. It's not only about dressing in costume & going out to parties. It's the Otherworld atmosphere that does it for me – if there's one thing that inspires me, it's visiting other dimensions. Maybe that's why I worked as an actor at one point in my life– it offered me the chance to enter & explore other people's lives. And particularly in New York, an innocent looking doorway, once opened, can lead you into unexpected situations. One staircase might take you up to heaven; the other might lead you to hell...

My first New York Halloween was in 1978. I



The band Art at Club 57, 1981 (top) & Kitty Brophy, 1981 (bottom), by Robert Carrithers.

remember it to this day. I'd met up with my good friend Stephanie, who I'd often go out clubbing with just to see what would happen. Frequently, we'd lose track of time & wouldn't make it home till late the next morning, laughing & drunk out of our heads.

On this particular Halloween, I'd arranged to meet Stephanie at a bar down the street from where I lived. Before I'd even had time to sit down, she'd dragged me out the doorway, refusing to say a word.

"Where the hell are we going?" I asked. "Why the big mystery?" She looked at me with a devilish glint in her eye & replied, "Some place in Tribeca. Number 77 White Street. Lots of cool loft parties happening in that area tonight."

We walked there from the East Village, going from Second Avenue to Houston to Broadway, through Little Italy, Chinatown & on down to Tribeca. As we walked along White Street, it soon became clear where we were headed. Dozens of people were milling about in front of a red brick building. A silver link chain – a barrier more symbolic than real – guarded the entrance. Two people were standing in front of the door checking people out, occasionally opening the chain in order to let the chosen ones inside. Meanwhile, those who hadn't been selected waited in a state of high anxiety, hoping against hope that the doorman's steely eye would fall favorably upon them. One of these guardians of cool was a guy called Richard, whom Stephanie & I both knew. Stephanie got his attention, whereupon Richard opened the magic chain & allowed us to go inside. Passing by the security guys, we entered a dark room, where we were immediately hit by a great blast of body heat & loud, blaring music.

A band was on stage at the far end of the room, wearing crazy costumes & jumping around with abandon. The singer was wearing a dress covered with plastic bananas, & on his head was a huge hat with even more bananas dangling from the brim. As he cavorted back & forth, he beat on a cowbell & screamed directly into the audience's faces something incomprehensible about a rock lobster. Surprising, to say the least. Flanking him were two women with huge beehive hairdos, dancing & singing in unison the words: "Rock Lobster." Again, a little surprising. Stephanie grabbed my hand & pulled me into the mass of wild-eyed hedonists. There wasn't a lot of space in which to move, & as we danced we continually crashed into the tightly

packed bodies around us.

While we were being buffeted from pillar to post, I scanned the room to see if there was anyone I recognized. People were wearing all kinds of way-out costumes & it was impossible to know who was who. I forgot about that quickly enough & just concentrated on staying upright. Stephanie was dancing wildly in front of me, her long blond hair flying in all directions. I could just make out the words of the singer as he yelled, "Dance this mess around!"

After the band had finished their set we headed for the bar. The DJ had started playing "Warm Leatherette" by the English electro band The Normal. I knew right then that I was in the right place with the right companion at exactly the right time. Something new was going on here, & we were right in the middle of the action.

We ordered two beers & were about to explore the club when a man in a white doctor's coat approached us. He was wearing a stethoscope around his neck & looked disturbingly like Larry, a character from the TV comedy "The Three Stooges."

He introduced himself as Dr. Mudd & welcomed us to his party. Before we'd had a chance to reply, he'd already walked away. Little did I know it at the time, but this guy was to be my future boss & I'd later begin working here. It was, in fact, the opening night of the soon-to-be legendary Mudd Club.

We decided to explore the premises. Apart from anything else I needed to piss, but when I eventually found the bathroom the only stall there was locked. I could hear muffled laughter & a pronounced sniffing coming from inside. When I knocked on the door a voice screamed, "Fuck off!" followed by an explosion of laughter. Things were starting to get a desperate. Luckily I found another bathroom right next door with two or three urinals. Various characters in costume were standing around, sniffing drugs with no regard for who might be watching. Meanwhile, I could hear a couple having noisy sex in the stall at the far end of the room. When I returned to the first bathroom, I realized I'd lost Stephanie, she was nowhere to be seen

As I looked around, I spotted this intense-looking woman over in the corner. She was hanging out by herself just taking in the scene. Her head was completely shaved. Bear in mind this was long before Sinéad O'Connor made the look fashionable. She was dressed in a black leather jacket & a tight-fitting black skirt & wore heavy black



Lady & Billy Harris, 1982, by Robert Carrithers.

eye-liner that accentuated her dark blue eyes. Those eyes were looking directly at me. An invisible charge seemed to pass between us, & I walked towards her without the faintest idea of what I was going to say. We simply looked each other up & down & didn't say a word.

When I finally got it together to ask what her name was, she replied in a deep husky voice, "M."

With no more preliminaries we suddenly started kissing each other. There was no need to waste time with the usual formalities of courting & seduction. The physical attraction was so powerful that it overrode all our inhibitions. We no longer cared where we were or who was watching (not that anyone at the Mudd would have given a damn anyway). I don't know how long we stayed there, French kissing & touching each other up. Time had lost all meaning. All I know is that we suddenly stopped, walked through the throng of costumed people, went out to the street & jumped in the back of a yellow taxi. She gave the driver an address on 23rd Street, & we continued to grope & kiss each other till we reached our destination.

I paid the fare & stumbled out of the cab. I looked up to see where we were & was intrigued to discover that we were outside the Chelsea Hotel. I suddenly became hyper aware of my surroundings. The Chelsea Hotel was famous for the legendary artists who had lived (& died) there. The stories I'd read about the place had fired my imagination when I was a teenager growing up in Chicago. It had also been sung about in classic New York songs such as Nico's "Chelsea Girls." I didn't say anything about this to M. I didn't have to. She only had to see the expression on my face to know what I was thinking. She picked up her key from the front desk & we went upstairs to room 23. I still remember that room number to this day.

Inside it was a complete mess. Articles of clothing were strewn about. The only furniture was a desk, a chair, a clothes rack & a bed, which was half covered with a tangled sheet that looked somewhat used & stained. In silence we gravitated towards it while continuing to kiss & embrace. As we collapsed onto the funky old mattress, M became more aggressive & began to tear off my clothes. Soon we were both naked, rolling around the bed, clawing, kissing & licking each other's skin. It was more than just chemistry. It was chemistry plus combustion at that point. The pleasure I felt as M fucked my brains out was like nothing I'd experienced before.

We continued our Halloween sex ritual till the sun was high above the rooftops. Finally I told her that I'd have to leave. I had several classes ahead of me at the acting school I was attending, & later in the afternoon I had my shift at a telemarketing company. This was how I made my living, calling up people & asking them stupid questions about things they didn't want to talk about. But before I left the hotel room I had to find out what M's real name was...

She turned towards me & smiled her cat-like smile. "I'll tell you the next time we meet," she said.

"Do you want me to come back here & see you again after I finish work?"

It took a while for her to answer. She was obviously thinking things over. Finally she laughed & said, "Yes, I do, I want."

"I'll take you out to dinner then, so we can actually talk."

"I'd like that," she replied. "Yes, that'd be really nice."

We didn't say too much after that. We were both delirious from making love all night & I could tell she wanted to sleep. I stood up & collected my scattered clothes, located my shoes & got dressed. I looked in the mirror, threw water on my face & finger-combed my hair. I turned to look at her in the bed. She was already half asleep. I kneeled down next to her, kissed her & said, "8 o'clock, okay?"

"Yeah, 8 o'clock, it's a deal."

After kissing her one more time, I crept silently out of the room. I walked down the steps, past the reception desk & out onto busy West 23rd Street, my nerves jangled with the noise of cars honking & people walking quickly to wherever it was they were going. I stopped at a nearby coffee shop & ordered a breakfast of eggs, home fries & toast with coffee. I needed some fuel. I was burned out, spaced out & tired, but my system was full of adrenalin from the night I'd spent making love to M. I felt happy & more than satisfied. OK, so I hadn't slept a wink, but I felt good, damn good. Maybe I was even in love. Thank God for New York's coffee shops & their policy of endless refills. I walked through the streets towards my school feeling on top of the world.

My elation didn't last long. In class I couldn't concentrate, & when I was called out to do an improvisation, I was absolutely hopeless. It was obvious for everyone to see that I'd been out partying & hadn't slept a wink. I should have just taken the day off school & stayed at the Chelsea with M.



Bradley Field & Patti Astor, 1981 (top) & Gerard Little, 1980 (bottom), by Robert Carrithers.

After classes had finished for the day, I made it into the office & sat down with the rest of the working stiffs – all of them talking on the phone, hustling for their quotas & commissions, asking people ridiculous questions from assorted company survey questionnaires. I put myself on automatic, drank more coffee & forced myself to get through it all. Right before my shift was due to end, we celebrated someone's birthday with cake & wine, which I really didn't need. It was 5 pm & I wanted to get home & take a short nap before meeting M.

Back at my apartment, I took a shower & lay down on the sofa. I guess I was even more tired than I'd thought, for when I woke up it was 1am in the morning.

I couldn't believe it! The most beautiful girl I'd ever met & I'd fallen asleep & missed our date! I immediately started to panic. Should I walk to the Chelsea or call? I decided to call her.

The receptionist tried to put me through to her room, but there was no answer. I left a message apologizing for my non-appearance, & promised I'd call her the next day. Then I went to bed & attempted to sleep. Impossible. When I called again in the morning, she still wasn't there. Who knew where she might have gone, or who she was spending time with? I decided to walk over to the Chelsea & try to find her after I'd finished work.

With zero enthusiasm, I managed to get through my morning classes & my afternoon shift at the telemarketing office. The minute I got out I took the subway up to 23rd Street. Room 23 on West 23rd Street – the two numbers kept repeating themselves inside my addled brain. When I asked the receptionist to call her room, he stopped writing in the hotel register, looked at me & said, "She checked out."

"Checked out?" I repeated, unable to process the information.

"Yes, checked out! She was behind in her rent & left quickly."

"Did she pick up her messages?"

He looked over at the various boxes on the wall behind him & pulled out a stack of papers.

"Seems she hasn't picked up her messages for quite some time."

"Did she leave any contact? How do I contact her?"

"No idea. But like I said, she still owes us money. So if you do happen to run into her, please remind her.."

With that, he went back to writing in the register. I stood there ignored, feeling like schmuck, not knowing what to do next. Finally I walked back out through the lobby onto the noisy streets of midtown Manhattan. It felt like someone had punched me in the gut. As I walked home in a daze, I was hardly aware of my surroundings. I tried to contact her at the Chelsea several more times, but it seemed she'd disappeared off the face of the earth. I couldn't sleep for more than a week, torturing myself with thoughts of what I should have or could have done. Could have... should have.... I hated myself & tormented myself with these futile regrets.

I felt so bad I even had to take time off work. I retreated into the shell of myself & didn't hang out with anyone for several weeks. Finally, I had to let it go. I had to, or I'd have gone insane. You fall down & you pick yourself up & you continue with your life. New York is a tough town, & it doesn't forgive people who feel sorry for themselves. In fact, it's the worst place in the world to be down & out, especially if you're prone to self-pity & depression. You'll be walked on, sucked in, chewed to pieces & spat out again, & nobody will care or even remember your name. This was the one big lesson that New York taught me at the time: how to survive when you're being dragged under & all your bearings have been ripped away. Too many people I used to know didn't survive – something went wrong in their lives & they never managed to find the inner strength to lift themselves out of the quagmire. So yes – even though I felt mortally wounded, I discovered something inside myself that allowed me to continue.

It was maybe a year later, & I was riding the downtown subway on my way to school, lost in my thoughts. The train had stopped at 14th Street, & just as the doors were closing, some impulse made me look up. M was standing there on the platform staring straight in at me. It was uncanny, almost a replay of the night we'd met at the Mudd Club. Her eyes were the same, intense & dark blue, but her hair had grown out, almost to her shoulders, jet-black with bangs, like a young Betty Page. She was beautiful. As we continued to stare at each other through the window, the train began to pull out of the station. She smiled sadly & waved goodbye.

I felt helpless, trapped in a nightmare I couldn't wake up from. I got off at the next stop, crossed over & took the next train back to 14th Street. I ran up & down the platform, desperately trying to find her,



Daria Deshuk, 1981, by Robert Carrithers.

but without success. For the second time in a year I'd lost the woman of my dreams. I was feeling so frantic & confused that I even took the train up to 23rd Street. Maybe she'd gone to the Chelsea & was waiting for me in reception, knowing that this was the one place I'd come looking for her. So I went there as well, but of course she wasn't waiting, the receptionist had never even heard of her. I imagined us going around New York in ever-decreasing circles, always looking for each other but never managing to connect.

Sometimes you just have to let things go. Sometimes you have to say goodbye, to bid farewell

to people you loved that weren't good for you. It hurts like hell, the pain never ends, but in the end there's nothing else you can do. Years have gone by since that night at the Mudd Club, but her ghost comes back to haunt me from time to time. I will never forget her for as long as I live, of that I'm sure. I can still see those beautiful dark blue eyes, staring at me out of a past that somehow never came to fruition. And I never even discovered her name. So I'll just remember her as M, & perhaps with this story I can finally allow her ghost to return to the world of the dead.

HAVE A GOOD EVENING,
MR CARRITHERS

It hadn't been easy, but the moving was finally finished. "Well, at least it's mine," I said to Bill as I was carrying the last heavy box up the dirty tenement steps. After walking up six flights of stairs, I dropped it onto the peeling linoleum floor of the apartment. Bill looked at me with a big grin on his face. "You could have continued staying with me," he said, patting me on the back. "You're gonna have the same kind of roaches here!"

It was true. I could smell the cockroaches. They have a distinct smell & I could tell right away there were hundreds maybe thousands of them hiding in the walls. Later, I turned off the light to go to sleep, but then turned it back on again so I could see exactly how many there were. I was going to have a battle on my hands, that was for sure. But Bill knew very well that the problem hadn't been the cockroaches. The problem was his possessive girlfriend Molly, who had moved in & made my life unbearable. She was worse than all of the cockroaches put together, but she'd won & I'd moved out.

I'd moved to New York with Bill & two other guys from Chicago – Ron & Valentino, the first black guys I knew that had a rock & roll band. Three black guys & me, driving to New York with all our belongings, making the big move to New York City. You'd better believe we'd gotten pulled over more than once!

We'd slept on many a couch until we found our own places. I met a large black man on Tenth Street putting up a "for rent" sign on the front door of a tenement building. I immediately asked him about

the apartment. We'd been looking for a while & so far we hadn't had any luck. He looked me up & down. We talked for a bit & found out that we were both from Chicago, which sealed it. His name was Mr Nelson & he was my New York angel. Bill & I signed the lease the next day.

I used to visit Mr Nelson in his apartment, where we'd talk about anything & everything while drinking iced tea. He used to like his iced tea. I never had anything stronger with him. He appreciated my visits because most of the other tenants were always just trying to get something out of him. He was the superintendent of the three buildings on East Tenth Street, 213, 215 & 217.

I found out later that he'd actually owned one of the buildings, & that he also supervised the drug dealers out front.

I was living in the 213 building with Bill, but even though it was me who'd found the place, somehow Molly had ended up pushing me out. Again Mr Nelson came through for me, & kicked out a junky who was behind with his rent from the apartment at 217. Finally I had a place of my own.

When Mr Nelson showed me the apartment I was a little taken aback, even though I tried not to show it. It looked like someone had purposely trashed the place. Mr Nelson looked at me to gauge my reaction. "You still want it?" he asked. "It's gonna be a whole lotta work to fix things up..."

I looked the place over. It might have been a year since it had last been cleaned. The floor was



Bill Landis, 1981 (top) & Snooky, Tessie & Tish, CBGB's womens toilets, 1981 (bottom), by Robert Carrithers.

covered with filthy linoleum that had once had some sort of pattern on it, but the dirt was so thick you could barely make it out. There was a bathtub in the kitchen that you knew had once been white, but now it was a brownish grey. I looked into the tub & could see specks of blood. There were wooden boards lying all over the place in the front room. I figured that these had probably been used as a bed.

"That idiot totally destroyed this place & I'm outta four months rent!" You sure you want this?" Mr Nelson looked me straight in the eye.

"Yes, I'll make it my home."

"OK, but you have to do the work. You should have your good friend Bill help you! I'll repair the broken windows & the oven, but that's all I can do."

And I did make it my home. It was a lot of work. This was a typical old-style railroad flat with the bathtub in the kitchen. At the back was what was referred to as the water closet, which is like a toilet in a closet. A hundred years ago they'd put the bathtub in the kitchen because it was the warmest room in the flat. The water closet or toilet used to be shared by everyone on the same floor. Before that, there was an outhouse in the backyard for the whole building. I found out the history of the building as I was living there.

New friends I'd made in New York came over & helped me clean the place up. We painted it too. We must have had a lot of excess energy in those days, because when we'd finished we had one hell of a housewarming party. It was the beginning of my new New York life! This is what I'd been dreaming about & now at last it was coming true.

Not long after moving in, I came home late one night to find the door of the flat wide open. I didn't have many possessions at the time, but my record player & TV were gone. I'd been robbed. Dirty footprints were all over my bed sheets, & my clothes had been taken from the closet & thrown on the floor. They'd also been stepped on. I felt violated. It had never happened to me before. Did I go to the police? Hell, no! What could they have done? I went straight outside to talk to the Columbian guys who sold drugs in front of the building.

I walked up to the biggest guy, the one with the crazy look in his eye.

"I've been robbed!" I said. He replied, "What d'ya want me to do about it?"

I stood there for a while not knowing what to say. I guess I must have looked kind of helpless. I turned around to go up the steps, but he put his

hand on my shoulder & turned me around to face him.

"Sorry man! It musta been that fuckin' sneaky Hakkim! Fuckin' slime junky motherfucker always makes sure he robs the new guy on the block! It won't happen again! We'll watch your back. You tell us if anything is happenin', that's all. Won't happen again!"

And with that he let me go. I looked down the street & saw his three fellow drug dealers look me in the eye & kind of nod their heads. From that moment on we had a silent pact to watch each other's backs. That's how I took it anyway.

I walked back upstairs slowly, in a daze. When I inspected my door, I noticed that the lock had been broken, so I couldn't lock it. I didn't give a shit. I left it open that night & collapsed on my dirty foot-printed bed & fell asleep. The next day I got a new lock & put it on. This was my home & I wasn't going to move.

The drug dealers outside always greeted me in a friendly way. I was never robbed again. They'd open the door for me & say, "Have a good evening Mr Carrithers." ■



Robert Carrithers, 1983, by Tom Scully.



Tom Scully, 1981, by Joseph Szkodzinski.

A story should have a beginning, a middle & an end, but not necessarily in that order.

– Jean-Luc Godard

So I got a job in my last year of SVA (School Of Visual Arts) at ABC News – ABC Sports actually – & did a lot of work expediting film & all of that kind of production stuff you do in the commercial sphere. It was an unproductive time for me, but I was making a lot of money because it was 1976, the year of the Olympics, so of course there was lot of hackwork that needed to be done. Later I switched over to the archives. They had a film library at ABC going back to the silent era. It was a better job than the one I'd had before, & paid just as much, but even so I felt like I was losing my creativity. I wasn't doing any of my own work, just this drone work for other people. It was overtime all of the time & I basically lived in the fucking place. I got so fed up with doing all that stuff, so it didn't really matter that I was living mainly in my work place, because anyway I wanted to move out of the apartment I was living in on 26th Street. Then all of these fantastic things started happening at once, who knows why, it's all a bit of a blur to me now. But I do remember I was looking for a loft, which I finally found in Chinatown, at number 55 Chrystie Street.

I loved that whole area, & I remember doing a lot of research on the gangs of New York from a hundred or so years before. The kind of stuff that Herbert Asbury had written about in the 1920s, & that was later made into the famous film directed by Scorsese. My ancestors had actually grown up in this neighbourhood, down around Canal Street, & in the light of all this research I was doing, everything "downtown" were starting to make a lot more sense to me. I guess you could say I was discovering my roots, though it wasn't in some half-assed liberal kind of way...

New York City had just been declared bankrupt by the Federal government. It was 1977 & the timing was just perfect for the year that Punk exploded. The atmosphere was like, "This is the end of the world! There's no fucking money anymore, so let's have a big party!" Can you imagine this state of affairs happening today? New York City declared bankrupt & the president of the USA telling it to quote/unquote "Drop Dead"? No Taylor Swift or NYU property buy-out deals back in those days! This was the backdrop to the so-called Blank

Generation, CBGB's, the No Wave scene, the whole underground filmmaking scene of mid 1970s New York. It was something you'll never see again, not in fifty or a hundred years. Not unless there's a total financial & cultural collapse, that is...

I was at CBGB's at the start of everything. I even remember seeing Bob Dylan watching a Patti Smith show there. CBGB's was only country & western music before punk came along & exploded everything. I think the Ramones first played there in 1975. But there was something in the air, something was about to happen, you could just smell it. CBGB's was like my neighbourhood bar, it was the place I could go to have a drink & walk home afterwards. CBGB's was like the rendezvous place, & it was also where I met a lot of my old friends – Kristian Hoffman, for example, who played with Mumps, Lydia Lunch, Klaus Nomi & James Chance at various times. He lived around the corner from me, on Grand Street. CBGB's was also where I first met Lydia, through Bradley Field, actually, who was living with Kristian at that time. Who else was in the neighbourhood? Well, just about everyone. All the bands & filmmakers lived in that area. You know – cheap rents, dangerous streets, psychos with knives & baseball bats lurking in darkened doorways. Nobody in their right mind would ever have wanted to live there – only penniless artists, junkies, ethnic minorities & fuck-ups.

I met Amos Poe at CBGB's. I helped him with his films because, like me, he was a Godardian. And of course, Godard is God! Amos & I agreed on just about everything when it came to cinema. The cinema begins & ends with Godard! At the time Amos was making a documentary about CBGB's, filming all the classic New York punk bands, with Ivan Král as his co-producer & cameraman. They ended up calling it *The Blank Generation*. I let Amos cut that film – & many others, actually – at ABC Sports, so you could say I'm partly responsible for propagating the so-called DIY punk ethic. What that means is, I let Amos come into the ABC archives after work & use all of the goddamn machines for free! So like I say, he ended up cutting all of his films there. Working on *The Blank Generation*, but also working on another movie at the same time – I can't

remember which one – with Eric Mitchell. We'd all go to CBGB's afterwards & have a drink – several drinks, in fact – & talk about *Cahiers du Cinéma* & Godard. Yeah, those were the days – the interface of the French Nouvelle Vague & The Ramones...

You know, Amos didn't go to film school. He was self-taught & financed his own films by working as a cab driver. But he was documenting important stuff, & I wanted to do that too – not just work at ABC Sport! I didn't want to copy him, though, so I decided that I'd do theatre Punk style (like Amos was doing "Punk cinema") & to mix film & music together with theatre.

I was writing scripts, poetry & plays at the time, & joined the St Mark's Poetry Project. Everybody seemed to agree that my play *Moo Goo Guy Plan* should be put on, so I got an old friend of mine to help me produce it. It was performed at St Marks Church, where Jim Carroll, Victor Bockris, Gerard Malanga & Patti Smith all used to read. Jackie Curtis agreed to play the main role. I got a few other people from his gang to do things too. We had a cast of 20 people. It was a thirty-minute theatrical production, Shakespeare done punk style. I took a lot of my inspiration from walking around the streets of my Chinatown neighbourhood, seeing what was happening & writing it into my plays. You know, bag ladies, junkies, derelicts, that kind of thing...

So anyway, *Moo Goo Guy Plan* became something of an underground hit, but it was only intended to be put on the one time. It turned into an "event" & the place was packed out. Jackie Curtis was great! It turned into a whole weekend party & I think it shook a lot of people up. I acted in it too & I also got Ann Magnuson to play the Jane Mansfield part. She was recommended by some people in the St Marks Poetry group. It was right after she'd moved to New York from West Virginia. She was a theatre student at the time, directing a Molière play somewhere uptown. I went to see her at this uptown theatre with my girlfriend & collaborator Susan Hannaford. Ann turned out to be very easy going & cooperative & agreed to work with us, & ended up playing the Jane Mansfield role in my play.

So like I say, Susan & I had just moved to the Chinatown loft & things were happening very quickly. We were meeting so many people. I remember I had a Rolodex (desktop card index, invented by Hildaur Neilsen in 1956 – ed.). Remember, this was a long time before the Internet – there was no Facebook, no Google, no Twitter. Can you imagine that? Trying to organize all this shit in a time before social media

was even dreamed of? It was extremely important in those days to have a Rolodex! Filofax came much later. If you wanted to produce something you needed to have a Rolodex, it was essential.

Susan really did a lot of research on the old theatres of New York that were active in the Vaudeville days – something like a hundred years before. A lot of them were on the Bowery & many of them had been neglected & had burned down. PT Barnum had put on a lot of shows & he even had a circus going on the Bowery. A hundred years before the circus at CBGB's was even a twinkle in Hilly Kristal's eye!

So we were looking for a theatre that had supported Vaudeville in the old days, preferably on 14th Street – you know, somewhere that had some history, a bit of atmosphere to it. I put out a casting notice for "New Wave Vaudeville" acts, a description that I considered had a kind of punk edge to it. The casting notice attracted so many people I was getting phone calls from all over the place. I knew right then that this was going to be big. I thought, "What am I getting myself into here?" Of course we had to get the money to put it together, but I was still working at ABC Sports, so that kind of helped.

We did the casting in our Chinatown loft. A lot of people came along & did their thing. Susan was more into the casting side of things, & I was leaning more towards the technical aspect, because, you know, we needed to get the lights & the sound system together, as well as all this other stuff.

So like I say, finding the right theatre was very important at this point. We got Irving Plaza by accident, through trying to find this ideal place on 14th Street. The funny thing about Irving Plaza was that we didn't know anything about it. We were frustrated at not finding anything on 14th Street, & were walking back home through Irving Place one day when we saw a poster on a billboard announcing *Made in USA*, showing at Irving Plaza. As I said, I was – & still am – a total Godard fan, & this was the one Godard film I'd never seen. Because, as a matter of fact, it was banned in the USA. I don't know why, but they'd banned it, just like that, & it was never shown in America. Freedom of expression, right? But anyway, we assumed it must be the Godard film of the same name, so we went into Irving Plaza & bought a couple of tickets. And when we got inside it was some fucking horrible band playing, called *Made in The USA*. So we tried to get our money back & that's when we ran into the manager of the venue, Stanley Strychacki. Total serendipity, in other

words. So one thing led to another, & Susan & I looked at each other, thinking: "This place would be perfect!"

And in the end it was perfect. But of course they didn't have a proper sound system, or anything much at all, in fact, in the way of equipment. So we arranged a meeting with Stanley & one of his sidekicks Chris Gremsky to talk things over. I love Polish people – I love doing business with them! We hit it off right away, & hung out with them & had a few drinks together – you know, very down-to-earth & pragmatic, the Polish way of doing things.

So we made a deal with Stanley & I checked out the wonderful mezzanine they had there, I was looking at it from a technical angle from the very first moment I first saw it. I figured that we'd be able to project the films from the mezzanine, but I also knew right from the off that we'd have to rent lights & a sound system. I had to take all this into account & figure it out in terms of the potential box office take.

Actually, it was Susan who took care of the money side of things. She was the one who took care of all the diplomacy too, & financial negotiations, she worked it all out with Stanley. I just wanted to get cracking with the technical stuff, I knew I'd have to get projectors & spotlights. We also needed a big sound system to support that space, it's pretty damn big, after all. We didn't make money out of this, by the way, but we put a lot of money into it. We never broke even, not even later with Club 57...

Did you know that I was Lydia Lunch's manager for a while? I managed her band Teenage Jesus & the Jerks. We'd always play Max's Kansas City because that was the only place that she ever wanted to play. God knows why, probably because Lou Reed played there. She was about sixteen years old at the time, still at Catholic school. They wouldn't even serve her drinks at the bar, she was too young. This was the same time as James Chance & the Contortions were kicking up a fuss, the start of that whole No Wave period that Brian Eno documented. Anya Phillips hated me, by the way, but I always thought she was great – consistent, if nothing else...

Then there was Klaus Nomi. Klaus lived on St Marks Place. He made a living by making German pastries before he started collaborating with David Bowie. He was originally from Berlin – a pastry baker from Berlin! He certainly stood out from the crowd. I always put the casting posters for the Vaudeville shows on St Marks Place & he was one of the people that responded to them. He came to the casting the

first time along with somebody else, & I thought his audition was terrible. But then he came a second time on his own & I thought he was great. He put on some scratchy old record then sang along with it in an operatic style, & I said to myself, "Wow! This is wonderful!"

He'd actually studied opera back in Germany. I don't know if that was before or after he became a pastry chef. His falsetto wasn't exactly typical either, but it was certainly effective. And I liked the fact that the record he sang along to had scratches on it. Gave a kind of Weimar Republic, Marlene Dietrich feel to the proceedings. He was very demanding in what he wanted – I mean money & all – & his act had to be the crescendo of the show. The smoke bombs were expensive, I can tell you, & they had to be set in a certain way – just so.

Then there was Ladybug. Do you remember Ladybug? She was a striptease dancer who used to perform with bugs. You know, insects. She had these huge centipedes in cages & she'd be dancing with snakes & stuff & her centipedes or millipedes were huge & looked like a big blood sausage. They looked seriously dangerous & she'd be dancing with these things & taking her clothes off at the same time. Really deranged stuff. She had some nice backing music too & her whole bug collection would be on display out back of the club after the show. Yeah, Ladybug – I wonder what happened to her?

Kai Eric then & Peter Smith were also crucial members of the scene. They used to turn up dressed in brown shirts, like German storm troopers, or something out of that Liza Minnelli film *Cabaret*. The bar staff were pretty theatrical too. But it was a lot of work, putting all this shit together, deciding which films we'd show, what the themes would be, the logistics of production, all that kind of stuff. I mean it was every Friday & Saturday & then we did it again the following Friday & Saturday. There were four shows & everybody participated for free. I have to emphasize yet again that nobody ever made any money out of this. In fact I lost money on it, everybody did! But it was fun, a labour of love. Like David McDermott once said, it was like the "Our Gang" series combined with "Let's do a show!"

Then we went from what was known as the "big club" at Irving Plaza to the "small club": what would become Club 57 on St Mark's Place. There, instead of having lots of shows in one night we could focus on one complete show a night. The space was only 120 square feet. SVA helped me by giving me a

screen to project the films onto. They even lent me projectors until I made enough money to buy two of my own. Actually, I was renting equipment at first, which is one of the reasons we never made money.

Since I'd been running the film society at SVA I'd learned a lot about distribution & renting films. I already had contacts with all the major distributors of 16mm films. I had large catalogues to draw on, especially budget catalogues from Los Angeles, & like I say I was in charge of working out the budget for renting films for SVA. A feature that was something like 80 or 90 minutes only cost about ten dollars to rent. That's how you knew it was trash! And that's exactly what we were after. Trash Gold!

The film society at SVA mostly showed foreign films & they really didn't have a theme or even a focus to them. The way that Susan & I got into these trash films is that we used to go see these low-budget films up on 42nd Street – you know, Ed Wood kind of things, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* & the like – & they were always an event. All the pimps who were waiting for their whores to finish work out on Times Square would be shouting insults at the screen, the movies were so bad – not aggressively, but in an irreverent, fun kind of way. So we'd shout insults too, it was great fun & nobody cared, nobody complained. Everyone knew the films were garbage & enjoyed them precisely for that reason – the whole thing was like a microcosm of American popular culture, which of course is trash anyway. We wanted to do that downtown, create our own 42nd Street on St Mark's Place!

Club 57 was just waiting for people to rent it out. Patti Smith & Sam Shepard did their play *Cowboy Mouth* there. Stanley had things happening there sporadically. Susan & I were very well organized. We had to do all of the posters & we got everything technical that we needed to be there. We had a membership drive before we even opened. I put posters all over town. Membership was only two dollars. We offered black & white t-shirts printed with Monster Movie Club printed on the front. If anyone still has one I want one! As a matter of fact they'd be worth a lot of money these days, collectors' items...

We were doing Monster Movie Club & then Ann Magnuson became manager of Club 57. At first with Monster Movie Club it was only a film place showing lots of trashy films. We used to get dressed up in costumes too, but on the weekends we had Irving Plaza to go to. That's when I first became a DJ. The Vaudeville show kind of kicked that off. It got people familiar with Irving Plaza as a cool place

to go & hang out in. Since we were working with Monster Movie Club we would promote there on the weekends. Jane Friedman got involved with Irving Plaza too. She was a very big promoter of bands. They enlisted me as a DJ.

Lisa Baumgarner also did a film series at Club 57 & would show all of the Warhol films. I remember Ondine being there & I remember talking to him. In fact most of the Warhol crowd came at one time or another. I know that Andy Warhol came along & stayed in the background, quietly observing. Bill Landis showed the Kenneth Anger film *Scorpio Rising* there & even had Kenneth Anger speak after the film. So it wasn't just fun & games & trash culture at Club 57, we had "serious" things going on there too, haha. But mostly it was just one big party.

At this point Monster Movie Club had about 200 members. Joey Ramone was one of the more enthusiastic ones. I was also able to show some different stuff at Irving Plaza on the weekends while DJing. I would rent films for Monster Movie Club, but also silent films from the library & show them for free at Irving Plaza, because they were by then in the public domain & didn't have to get permission to show them. And I would play a DJ mix along with the silent films. People loved it. I always played films at Irving Plaza while DJing. It was a lot of fun, & it added a different dimension.

After Club 57 took off, I remember Steve Mass, the owner of the Mudd Club, approaching me at Club 57 & telling me, "Hey, I'm gonna take all of these people away from you." I felt like a jerk because there I was doing all of this work for the love of art, film, music, whatever, & I have to say that certain people used me. I used to go out promoting & developing my rolodex of contacts of people on the scene & got them to be members of Monster Movie Club at Club 57. I found these people, each of them personally. I got a lot of people from SVA too, but first I had to meet them face-to-face. That's how I got to know them, & to this day I've got only a few people from those days that I can still say are friends. Back then people would approach me to promote events because I had my own crowd, they knew that whatever I promoted would be successful. New York was a small place then. Once you met one person, the energy bubbles would be bursting all over the place – from the CBGB's crowd, to Max's, to SVA, even to Studio 54 & the gay scene. Everyone knew each other & everyone got off on the energy. But these days I feel cut off from most people, it's not like it was back then. The connections just aren't

there anymore, at least not for me...

But I want to make one thing very clear – Club 57 was a real club! You can call a Mudd Club a Mudd Club & you can call Studio 54 this or that, but they were never membership clubs. Club 57 was actually a club, a real old fashioned film club! The definition of a club is that people participate in it. It was a community of artists. Frank Holiday would do little theatre productions. I would do the film things. Kai Eric would come in & do music events. Henry Jones would come in & do things, Keith Haring & Kenny Scharf would come in & do things. We were like school kids, crazy little Dadaist school kids!

I think Club 57 put a dent into what was considered “hip” at the time. Just take a look at the calendar of films Ann Magnuson put together. It went all the way back to 1963 & her taste became very influential, so that within a few years of Club 57 finishing you start to see posters around town, or magazine articles, or certain things on television & in films that started to resemble all that. What I’m saying is that Ann had a BIG influence on the next New Wave of alt/mainstream Hollywood flicks. You get the feeling that people like John Waters, Jonathan Demme, even Tarantino, were standing in the shadows, quietly taking notes...

People were watching us, for sure. In the advertising world especially, those images started cropping up all over the place. Maybe the “creatives” wouldn’t want to admit it, but yeah, they were ripping us off. They were making money off of us, too. But we were the ones who were pushing the envelope of popular culture, we were the ones who had the guts to put it out when everyone else was hung up on being taken seriously as an “artist.” And we had a hell of a lot of fun doing it too, so fuck them all!

As for my romantic life – well, New York then was no place for falling in love. Too hard, too pitiless, too unforgiving. But in the end I guess I did. I fell for a French girl called Sybille & we moved away from New York, to Europe. Things started to slow down, at least for me. New York wasn’t bankrupt anymore – at least not financially – there wasn’t any garbage on the streets anymore, no rats in the toilets ready to jump out & rip your ass, not even any genuine punk rock anymore – only the recycled corporate shit we all know & love today. New York got kind of dull after about 1985. Club 57 had its funeral with Needles Jones (legendary NYC drag queen, performance artist & ex-junkie – ed.). I think the problem there was that everyone was taking

too many drugs. Same old story, I guess you’d say, going back to the Jazz days at least. The visionary artists being too sensitive to live & all – hello Keith, hello Jean-Michel – while the corporation owns everything *in perpetuum mobile* & just keeps on raking in the profits till forever & a day.

Now I’m living here in Berlin, still together with Sybille, though things aren’t so easy since she got ill. We did make two beautiful intelligent daughters, though. I even started a band called Monster Movie Club. We only played two times with me as a vocalist, but maybe that was enough to show me that the idea was still alive in my mind. Even people here in Berlin had heard about what happened in that grungy old basement room on St Marks Place. How many decades ago is that now? But for me the concept is still alive & kicking, just like one of those monsters that refuse to keel over & die in the B-movies we used to show at Club 57. I see our influence everywhere, in magazines, films, advertising, you name it. People just don’t know where the aesthetic came from – but we know, don’t we? ■

* These are excerpts compiled from an interview that I did with Tom Scully in his Berlin bunker in 2016. Tom is one of the unsung heroes of the New York underground scene of the late 1970s & early 1980s. With Susan Hannaford, & later with Ann Magnuson, he produced a lot of the shows at Irving Plaza & Club 57. His sense of aesthetics influenced many of the movers & shakers in film, theatre & music who later went on to gain wider recognition. – Robert Carrithers

* Joseph Szkodzinski is a NYC native who has been a photographer since the mid ’70s. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts with a BFA in photography in ’81, his thesis was on NYC nightlife mainly in the downtown NYC clubs. While still going to school he got a job working as a photographer for the Bronx VA where he met John Sex who invited him to Club 57 to photograph the “Acts of Live Art” show. He found a goldmine of raw talent in a church basement that night & continued to document the Club 57 & later Club 57/Irving Plaza. He went on to have his commercial work represented by The Image Bank & later onto Getty Images. After graduating SVA, he went on to be a photographer for NYPD while still pursuing his personal work. His work has been published & exhibited worldwide & is in many collections including Keith Haring Foundation, Getty Library, Museum of NYC.



KLAUS **NOMI**

I shot Klaus in my loft apartment on Lafayette Street as well as at the Mudd Club in 1980. He looked & sounded like no other. In fact he looked & sounded like no other pastry chef that I had ever met. I photographed him twice: once at the Mudd Club before the backdrop was painted & the next time when it became a mottled brown backdrop. He was a burst of energy & he was wonderfully deviant!

– William Coupon

I am a portrait photographer from New York City. I work out of lower Manhattan, near the South Street Seaport. I was born in New York, & raised in the Washington, DC, & the suburban San Francisco area. In fact, I was raised where Apple Computer now has its headquarters in Cupertino – although I was 13 then & more likely working the orchards of the areas near Santa Clara than on any computer at the time. I was always inspired by travel, by culture, by faces. And for some reason, I have always been drawn to formal portraits & their relationship with painting. The chiaroscuro lighting is prevalent in my working style when it comes to the formal studio portraits but I also feel the “street” photography is also a big part of my career, & gives a sense of place to the studio portraits: I do both. In any case, my first thought was to photograph everyone in the world as a formal portrait, & although I got off to a pretty good start, these days I realize it would take a lot longer than originally expected.

My first true photographs were photographs that talked – called “audiographs” – which were photographs that had looped cassettes behind a framed image, & photographs that moved – called “kinetographs” – which were photographs that were attached to moving motors. The “kinetographs” were commissioned for window displays at Bloomingdale’s in the late 1970s – advertising Sonya Rykiel swimwear in their large corner window. I photographed a documentary on Studio 54, the legendary New York disco, in late summer 1978, & they immediately were included in the International Center of Photography exhibition: “Fleeting Gestures: Treasures of Dance Photography.” The show was a huge success, & my work was the last images in a chronological history of dance in photography.

I became interested in formal studio portraits in 1979 while observing it’s lower Manhattan youth (my peers) & its present counter-culture, & decided early on to use a single-light source & simple mottled backdrop as a studio style. This was then used to document global sub-cultures. Many of the projects – referred to as “Social Studies” – became documents of indigenous people. These include projects on Haiti, Australian Aboriginals, Native Americans, Scandinavian Laplanders, Israeli Druzim, Moroccan Berbers, Alaskan Yupik, Spanish Gypsies,

Turkish Kurds, Central African Pygmy, & Panamanian Cuna & Chocoe. These projects also included Death Row Inmates, Drag Queens, & Cowboys. Stylistically, they were always photographed formally & contextually, or environmentally, with 2 1/4 Rolleiflex black & white images, which were meant to be companions to the studio portraits. In 1992, I was invited to photograph the world’s tribal leaders during Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I was asked by the United Nations & the United States Congress to exhibit this work in the United States Senate Rotunda, as part of the UN’s Year of the Indigenous People. These are exhibited in large archival IRIS &/or Inkjet prints.

In addition to this personal work, I have worked extensively in commercial photography & film. I have photographed 20 *Time* Magazine covers – including portraits of all the Presidents since Richard Nixon. These include the Clinton & Bush Person of the Year covers. *Newsweek* covers include Michael Ovitz & Jerry Garcia. *Rolling Stone* magazine covers include Mick Jagger, George Harrison, Jerry Garcia, & Neil Young. I have directed television commercials for Danone Yogurt, & documented my ethnographic series on digital video. I worked for nearly a decade (1985-1994) with Issey Miyake, the Japanese fashion designer, doing men’s wear for the Japanese market & photographed numerous album covers including Bette Midler, Ron Carter, Stanley Turrentine, Isaac Hayes, Essa Pekka Salonen, Chou Liang Lin, Midori, Daryl Hall, Foreigner, Wynton Marsalis, & Yo-Yo-Ma. I have an extensive doll collection & through their graciousness, have been allowed to photograph their image with 4x5 digital equipment as well as the large 20x24” format Polaroids. Many of the ethnographic portraits were also taken with SX-70 film – a wonderful collection of Rembrandt/Holbein-like images that look like miniature paintings. Other projects include a still life series: *Life Stills* & a large format Polaroid series of nudes. A book of the ethnographic work is forthcoming, with the title: *Social Studies*. A companion book of the celebrities, politicians, & sports figures has also been designed: *Portraits*. And a third book, on the New York City Punk scene entitled, *The Punks of New York*. ■



LYDIA LUNCH

I photographed Lydia at her apartment in the East Village, the summer of 1979. She was raw, raucous & had a real raw sexiness to her. She was very smart, too! I had a huge crush on Lydia. – William Coupon

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO MUCH
TO CAUSE TROUBLE THESE DAYS
AN INTERVIEW WITH LYDIA LUNCH

What follows is the transcript of a video interview I did with Lydia Lunch in Vienna in 2010. I conducted it for the Australian director Richard Lowenstein, who wanted to include it in *Autoluminescent*, a film he was making about the brilliant musician Rowland S. Howard. I remember first seeing Lydia Lunch play with her band 8 Eyed Spy at a New York club called Tier Three in 1980. It was my first introduction to No Wave music. Her strong onstage persona even back then overshadowed the music & blew me away. For me, Lydia Lunch is a New York icon. Lydia can be anywhere in the world, but when you see her she has that New York City edge about her. When I think about New York I think of Lydia. I can't help it. As for Rowland, I was first introduced to his unique guitar sound through listening to his band The Birthday Party. Rowland was from Melbourne, Australia, & the first visual image I had of him was in the Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire*, one of the best films about Berlin ever made. There is a scene in the movie with a specific iconic image of him playing with the band Crime & the City Solution. In the scene I'm thinking of, he's playing in a dark Berlin club, extracting weird, otherworldly sounds from his guitar, an ash-laden cigarette dangling from his mouth. Whenever I see that image, I automatically think of Berlin. He did live there for a while, but ultimately it doesn't matter whether he originated there or not. For me, he embodies that place & that time – the Berlin of the early to mid-1980s, before the wall came down. Lydia & Rowland collaborated on two albums & they performed live concerts together over a period of several years. – Robert Carrithers

LL: You don't have to do much to cause trouble these days...

RC: Well, they're always watching.

Absolutely true! They have eyes in the back of our heads. You think that you're watching TV, but the TV is watching you. One of my pieces actually starts with the words "freedom is just a hallucination." It quotes Burroughs. It's about a pathological lack of paranoia. The question isn't whether you are paranoid, but rather if you are paranoid enough! RFID chips, spy chips, they're everywhere!

People get immune to it, don't you think?

That's their problem. I'm not immune. But I guess that's my problem. I'm not immune, which is why I keep raging & ranting.

That's good because somebody has to do it. No one else is doing it. Not enough anyway.

It's fairly pathetic at this point. Lady fucking Gaga you gag me. This is the bullshit that passes for culture – the pop pornification & the commodification of everything. You know, especially middle-aged women running around in leotards that went out of style in 1977. I just don't understand how it's come

to this – what modern culture has been reduced to is porno princesses prostituting themselves for major record companies. Big Daddy Pimp! I think that it's worse than ever.

And that's why, myself & a handful of others, I guess we are, beyond the call of duty, forced to continue. I mean that for every Lady Gaga, my job becomes easier or harder, I'm not sure. Well, I just keep going so it doesn't matter. I'm not paranoid at all because all conspiracy theories are true & in a sense that negates everything, since I believe in every conspiracy. I believe in the Kabbalah. I believe in the secret elite. I've been talking about the New World Order for thirty years. I believe they are out to get us. And who are "they"? They are the powers that be, the ones that control the planet, this prison planet. The kleptocracy, the coporate-ocracy, the dictators, this is all for real – & they used to consider me such an exaggerator in my spoken word. I was talking about reality. Since when could you exaggerate about reality? I have been called the No Wave Nostradamus, especially about all of my predictions, especially about nature, that I've been talking about for decades, saying that Mother Nature is getting pretty pissed off. She's getting pissed off about men doing violence against her with tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods & plagues. Mata Kali is calling.

Let's speak a little about Rowland now.

Well, Rowland like myself, was an outsider by birth, our birth defect was our outsider status, which we were of course, & still have to be proud of. We were very different, Rowland & I, & I think that's why we had such an unusual friendship. It was an immediate friendship. He was so sensitive & sweet. We were both very funny. I guess he wasn't very afraid of my aggressiveness, the way that some macho guys are when confronted by me. His torture was his own oversensitivity. I use my oversensitivity & it makes me appear insensitive. You could tell how sensitive he was just by the nature of the sounds that he created. These were otherworldly sounds. This was an ethereal celestial being. This was a living dying angel doomed to die & dying since the day that I met him.

It was no surprise to me that he died. It was horrible that he did, but some souls are just too sensitive for this planet. They can't take it for too long. They can't take it & by whatever methods, whether it is the chronic condition of your own birth defect, or whether it's what you do to protect yourself, which in the end becomes self-destructive. Drugs are like a protective blanket that people use in order to buffer themselves from even more pain than they can withstand. It doesn't lead to a very long life in some cases, but it's not the amount of life that you live that counts...

I always go back to Hubert Selby, in relation to people who I feel are great geniuses. You know that Selby was my literary hero. He didn't write that many books. As a matter of fact, when I met him he was already in his 60s. I think that he had only written four or five books. When I consider that he was one of the great American novelists, it's not so much of an output, but they were four books that really mattered! There are six or seven if you add them all up & I think it's the same with Rowland. I have bemoaned a lot about why he didn't put out more, & I know how painful it was when I recorded "Shotgun Wedding" with him because it really was like milking magic out of a spider web in a sense. It was so difficult, but every song was so perfect, was so beautiful, every note that he created was exactly what needed to be created. I can't compare anyone's rate of creation to my own because I'm insane & schizophrenic so I can create at a much faster rate & I collaborate with more people.

You both recorded "Shotgun Wedding" in New Orleans, didn't you?

We rehearsed it in New Orleans & recorded in Memphis. I was living in New Orleans & he was living in London. I moved there after going back

to New York again for a few years. It was in the early 90s & it just felt like the place that you had to be. I mean he was always doing these swampy blues, magical voodoo, so I decided to bring him to the source, bring him right down to the swamp & see what happens. The album was beautiful & the live shows were great, especially because they featured Harry Howard (Rowland's younger brother – ed.) & Rowland Howard so that was just a musical sandwich that was delectable, from the word go. Delicious I'd say!

I remember once being backstage & Harry walked in the room. You know, Harry was really shy & very smart & reserved & very un-rock! Very straight! Not doing drugs, but maybe drinking once in awhile. I just threw a knife & it stuck in the wall next to his head & I said, "Don't piss me off Harry!" And of course he hadn't! Rowland just smiled, probably knowing that I would never throw a knife at him. Not that I should have thrown a knife at Harry, but it just had to be done.

Harry's commented when asked about this incident years later was.... He always thought I was rather spirited!

I guess that you had a point to prove!

There was no point, but the point came across literally into the wall beside his head.

It was something for him to remember you by.

Something to remember me by, Harry! You have me to thank for having both of your eyes! I used to live in this horrible depressing apartment in London. I moved there to work with Rowland. I had been living in L.A. then I went to New York for some shows, & I met The Birthday Party (September/October 1981 – ed.) & I said that's it, I'm moving to London. And of course as soon as I got there they left to go on tour.

When did you first meet Rowland?

In New York, when the Birthday Party first played in New York to twenty five to fifty people. But I'd had their albums in L.A. & I was very excited & I just went up to Rowland & that was it. We were instant friends. I just decided that it would be a good time to go. I'm like that. I will, at the drop of a hat, move to wherever I need to move for whatever reason, to collaborate, to create something, for architecture, for a change of atmosphere. I guess I'm a mobility junky. More expensive than most habits most people have, but better for my health I think. I decided to go to London for a while & see what would happen.

So I had this terrible apartment, & it was just so

depressing & awful, & Rowland would come over & I think we were preparing to do the song "Some Velvet Morning," suddenly we just had this feeling, this oppressive monstrous feeling like there was an axe-murderer in the kitchen. We were just suddenly overwhelmed with panic & fear, but I don't frighten easily & I never panic. Of course I have to run right to the source of whatever the terror is, & of course there was nothing there. We had these sensations a few times & I guess that was a good reason to bring him to New Orleans, because if you're going to go ghost-hunting, you might as well go where a lot of ghosts are trapped by the atmospheric conditions – go all the way to the swamp – but we didn't have too many of those experiences there. We just made the music.

What made you & Rowland decide to do the song "Some Velvet Morning" together?

I was a huge fan of Lee Hazelwood, as was Rowland. I mean Lee Hazelwood didn't have the popularity he later gained, especially after Steve Shelly of Sonic Youth started releasing his records. Rowland had very eclectic tastes & he knew all of the weird material of Lee Hazelwood. I had already done a few covers, mostly live, including "Lightning's Girl" by Lee Hazelwood. I think he suggested that we do "Some Velvet Morning" & we did it. And those were the days when you could release a two track EP on vinyl with a beautiful big record cover. He suggested we do it & we went into the studio & Barry Adamson played on it – he lived around the corner from me in Baron's Court & that was convenient. And it was just one of those beautiful magical records & the other side was the song "I fell in Love with a Ghost" & we were back to ghost-hunting again. It was the realm that we had just floated in. With Rowland it was interesting because...

So, I went to London where I was supposed to do a show supporting the Birthday Party with my band 13.13, but I'd fired them just before I went to London, so the show I did with The Birthday Party actually was the genesis for what I do now with my solo performances – what I call illustrated WORD with semi-improv text & semi-improv music which then BECAME Rowland & I doing mini-versions of this, opening up for The Birthday Party, much to the consternation of Nick Cave & Mick Harvey, who just could not understand it & hated it, cursed it, insulted us, & just did not get it & never got me.

Did you have a good relationship with the other members of The Birthday Party?

I had an interesting relationship with Nick at the time because we did some work together. He

had an idea for fifty one-page plays, & we did write fifty one-page plays together, & they were published in comic book form called As-Fix-E-Ate by Mike Mathews, an amazing illustrator who then committed suicide or was murdered, & whose body was found in the Thames. We never found out. It was one of those mysteries.

Nick & I did things together, but I think that the drugs really separated me from a lot of people at the time because I was never a junky, & when you are straight around a lot of heroin addicts you are seen as suspicious. I was the suspect. Go figure! Whatever, if you want to think that I was the Yoko Ono for encouraging Rowland, I didn't tell him to quit the Birthday Party. The Birthday Party was my favorite band in existence first of all! I did encourage him to be more forthright & to do more solo stuff, but I don't think I had any big influence on that. I am not taking that mantle upon myself. I don't really know what the situation was. I know that neither Nick nor Mick ever really got my more avant-garde weird experimental trips. They're traditional musicians & Rowland was just more experimental from the word go, & was more open to things like that.

And a lot of times when you are doing something experimental it's going to be the worst piece of shit you've ever heard in your life, but if you are going to take the chance for the brilliance which might just occur – well yeah, I *will* take that chance because I'm not that vain. I'm not afraid of falling on my face, of making a fool of myself musically, if I think that one out of X amount of times it is going to be, as people have actually said: "That was the most amazing thing I have ever heard!" Not that I'm doing it only to hear that from them. I really don't care. I'm doing it to take a chance. I am doing a musical experiment that can either transcend creativity or be the most embarrassing moment of your life. Does it matter? I guess that I have no shame. I never did!

It was interesting that Rowland was willing to take that chance with me. It was a good learning process for me & probably for him as well to just be freer musically. I think experimentation is in so much music now. For me there's nothing more boring than to play the same songs the same way night after night. And the same was true for Rowland, which is why his performances were rare objects of beauty & maybe that is why it took him so long to write songs. He wanted to make sure he got the ones he wrote right, perfect!

You said that The Birthday Party was your all-time favorite band. Why do you think they broke up & how did you feel about that?

I don't really know what the internal dilemma was there. I am sure drugs had a lot to do with it

because everyone was fucked up, whether they want to admit it or not. They were all poor. Nobody was eating. Nobody was sleeping. You know, too much genius in one place, it's got to break up. It's like any movement. Think of a band as a mini-version of any movement, whether it's Surrealism, Dada, Fluxus or the Paris Commune. It's got a limited life span because it's explosive & what makes it genius is exactly these explosive tendencies, & you just can't carry on operating at that fever pitch. You can't! It's not meant to last. I've always felt that for me, creatively, not for everybody else, things were meant to be conceptualized, conceived, collaborated, documented, then: onto the next level! Things break up! Things change! They have to! It's mandatory! Otherwise it's by rote!

What is your viewpoint about drugs & creativity & the connection with the breakup of bands?

Well with the Birthday Party maybe they weren't all on the same drugs. Drugs can really bring people together for a certain amount of time & then it's always going to end badly. Someone is always going to end up hurt. It never has a happy ending. I still love drugs & do them when I feel like it & which drugs I feel like doing, but since I have never had a relationship with heroin or alcohol that much, & I think that those are the two most devastating drugs for people. They stopped making the drugs that I liked, like Quaaludes, Placidyl, Mandrax, Seconal etc. I once asked a friend why he thought I didn't need to be in NA or AA. I mean I still like drugs. I still do them. I don't have a problem with them. He said, "Well you don't hate yourself!" And I said, "Well there you go."

I guess I'm the only one I know who doesn't hate themselves because I hate everyone else. I'm an equal opportunity hater! I don't hate anyone personally. My hatred is so global I just don't have any hate left for myself. Therefore I guess drugs never got a hold of me. I think drugs are great for expanding expression & creativity until when it's become enough & changes. When it stops having the effect that it first had on you because you are still chasing after something you can't regain, then that's when the problem starts. I guess then it's hard to pull away. I never had a problem with drugs, they see me & run. That is the way it is. I am the drug. My drug was always adrenalin!

What are your thoughts about Rowland as a musician?

Rowland was like the way Robert Quine, Johnny Thunders, Weasel Walter & Jimmy Hendrix were, if you want to go there. Hendrix, I only include on

the sidelines as a visionary, but I think Hendrix is in the mix as well. It's just that every few years there comes a sound from a guitar from someone who is channeling something that is so bone-chilling, so blood-healing, something that twists your molecular structure. Mine at least! Hendrix, Johnny Thunders, Robert Quine, Weasel Walter & Rowland. I don't think there's been a guitar player since that's done that for me!

What made them so different from other guitarists? What would you call it in a word or two?

Genius! The problem with genius is that just to be able to exist in society as it is in the first place is painful; walking down the street is painful. Just the day-to-day pressures of life, of functioning, are painful. And then when your vision is skewed or perpetuated by this thing that you are channeling – well, that is almost beyond your ability to handle. It's something that is coming in from the outside. You are the vehicle for it to make itself known, almost like some kind of alien intellectual artistic life form that's using your body, your fingers, your mouth as the vehicle with which to communicate, & that is an enormous pressure. I think it's that some people are too oversensitive. It's so much of a pressure for them to live day-by-day.

I am very good at functioning day-by-day because I'm disciplined, I'm focused & I can multi-task. People like Rowland cannot multi-task. Mono-task perhaps, because it takes all of their energy, & in a sense if we want to look at this kind of genius as an alien life form that is actually viperizing the physical form of a human being, see it as some kind of celestial-terrestrial, extra-terrestrial being, then of course the sad & sickly amongst us are going to suffer more greatly when this contagion is inside them – this force which has to come out, which has to infect other people, which has to influence other people. So the carrier, the poor diseased carrier, the poor sad & suicidal genius isn't going to last very long. Like Robert Quine, who committed suicide. It's often suicide or an early grave. Not always. I think just for those who are too sensitive.

I guess what made me & Rowland quite different is that I always chose to focus the torture outwards. I never tortured myself. I was always more of a mirror than a drowning pool. So whatever society or life or trauma is coming this way it's going to be reflected back & that's my way of self-preservation. He didn't have that kind of distance. I've had decades where I was physically not well myself. I mean when you are physically unwell, either from self-contamination or just unwell because you are genetically unwell, & he was not well I think from the moment I met him & he was quite young then. He could have just been

genetically predisposed & that's a burden on the mind. When the mind & the body are in conjunction to becoming sicker or more twisted it's just a very difficult burden to bear. It's nearly impossible.

So I don't blame anyone when they search for a drug, any drug, even if they realize that it's not going to be the cure & that it just might kill them. You can't blame someone for that. Ultimately it multiplies the pain. You can reach intellectual conclusions far ahead of what the body or the emotions allow you to accept. The intellect can be right there, you can be morally arguing with yourself, but the body & the emotions will scream like infants throwing a perpetual tantrum until they are fed what they want. Some of us can control the inner infant & some of us cannot!

When you're the mother of all Goths, Goth-Mother, you try to be in control! I am in control, but I don't feel like I am controlling anyone. That is why I can work with so many people. I am never collaborating in order to control anyone. I am collaborating to set them free. To be more free! That's what you hope to offer someone. That's what I hoped to offer to Rowland. I thought that he was very underappreciated & unrecognized. I love not only to coddle people, but I love to shower them with compliments because I mean it. I could mother Rowland to a degree, but I wasn't babying him. I was just trying to offer comfort to him. The comfort of complete acceptance & appreciation for what he did, & also encouragement! The big fucking cattle prod! Get some songs out!

Would you call yourself a survivor?

I feel like a survivalist more than a survivor. If you view time as one long second that stretches on for an eternity, first of all that will fuck you up forever, which is an eternity. I just feel like I'm built to survive, as a survivor that smells like a victim, which, by the way, aren't we all? But I am a survivalist. I am active in my survival. I love these times. They are ridiculous to me, obscene, pornographic. One of my performances was called "The Real Pornography" & it was about war. But to me there is always war. War is a virus. It never stops. Maybe I'm just more aware of it because I've got a God complex, anti-father, anti-God, anti-warlords & that's probably why I never get into fights on a personal level, maybe that's why I am easy to get along with because my anger is on a much grander scale.

Sometimes guys that are seemingly very macho have an issue with me. The sensitive ones never do. Maybe it's the survivalist in me. They fear me. Rowland never feared me. He never felt threatened by me. He probably felt safe with me because he knew I could protect him to the best of my ability.

The album "Shotgun Wedding" was such a beautiful marriage of specifically his vibe & one of the vibes that I have. I guess my white trash semi-psychedelic Bobbie Gentry vibe. I have to get that out every now & again! It was wonderful to sing with him. He had a voice that mine will eventually be as deep as. I'm looking forward to that. A voice that in the future only a dog will be able to hear! I'm working on it.

And especially with "Some Velvet Morning" which is such a perverse song anyway. Lee Hazelwood being such a perverse songwriter. I mean an American classic of the weirdest order. "Some velvet morning when I'm straight..." What an opening line for a song! Pure genius! And I could never again sing in that falsetto, because when I did that song I guess I was in my early 20's. I'll never get that falsetto back. If I had to cover it again I would be singing the Lee Hazelwood part & I'd be looking for my Nancy Sinatra. It ain't gonna happen! You start as a hysterical falsetto & you end up speaking out of William Burroughs' shoes.

What about the other album that you & Rowland did together?

It was appropriate that we followed "Some Velvet Morning" with the album "Honeymoon In Red". It was a messy honeymoon! Some of it was recorded in Berlin; somebody came in with some money to record some songs. It was recorded in different periods; Nick Cave & Mick Harvey were involved. Mick suddenly pulled out & didn't want anything to do with it. The tapes were lost for years & then found again, lots of remixing. I don't even know how that album "Honeymoon In Red" came to exist. I had to cobble it together. With "Shotgun Wedding" the concept was swamp, voodoo, romantic, lush, & the commingling of these energies. All of my albums have a conceptual feel to them. "Honeymoon In Red" is scattered, but I think there are some great songs on it. The duets with Nick Cave are absolutely, outrageously, ridiculously fantastically perverse, beyond even Lee Hazelwood's scope. Rowland's guitar playing is amazing. There is some beautiful material on that. It's kind of under-heralded, but it's one of the many records that I put out. It took seven years to come out.

Why was success so elusive for someone as talented as Rowland?

Well everyone always wants the singer. They don't give a shit about the rest of the band, no matter how good the band is. That's just the focus of people's attention. Why did so many Goths buy Nick Cave's crappy Bad Seed records in the middle of his career?

I don't know. I call it the bad Wayne Newton phase. I just didn't like all those sappy ballads, but he's not making records for me. There's no explanation for why people bought them. They loved him! Who knows why? Good for him! He's not making music for me, but I think that it's always the singer that people focus on, not the guitar player.

Look at Keith Richards. If you want to take another extreme, do you think he's selling that many records? He never did & he had a few good records. Maybe Rowland projected something that to a lot of people was just too delicate for them to comprehend. There was some part of him that was just too ethereal. Nick's feet were always in the mud somewhere. Nick is almost like a redneck Shakespeare in a sense. I mean he's neither a redneck nor is he is goddamn Shakespeare, thank you very fucking much. However, he's a genius & he is kind of a redneck Shakespeare, so I've got to put that in. But I think with Rowland, he was just too ethereal, he was just too otherworldly to gain a wider audience.

Look, if you want to be as big as Nick Cave you've got to work as damned hard as he has worked! And he has worked hard. You've got to tour the same songs over & over again for year upon year. You know, Sonic Youth, as influential as they are, haven't sold that many records. But I can assure you they draw big concerts because they've played the same songs – or new songs in the same format – over & over, ad nauseam. It makes me sick just thinking about it. That's what you have to do to if you want to get to that level of success!

92 | Rowland & I both had to crab-walk laterally through our own so-called careers, but I do more things & my popularity hasn't gained any in the last twenty years. I can support myself doing that, he couldn't, because he just had one real focus & that was his music. I have a lot of different disciplines, so it makes it easier for me to support myself as an artist who doesn't have to do, as I just said, ad nauseam the same fucking thing until you've pounded it into enough punters' heads that they are supporting your fucking rock star lifestyle! Whatever! I'm sure that Rowland wanted a bigger audience, but you've got to want it BAD to get to that level! If you don't want it, you're not going to get it, & some people just don't want it enough. They just want to do what they do.

And the drugs didn't have any effect on all of this?

Look, drugs didn't interfere with Nick Cave's success, did they now? He was able to be fucked

up & still make bank! That was his magic! I mean with Rowland I just think his constitution was such that he couldn't do what needed to be done to get a bigger audience, which is to be much more proactive & put yourself out there. He just didn't have the constitution, with or without drugs; I think he was fragile to begin with.

I mean the price you pay for creation is always a high one, even on the best of days, under the best of circumstances, under the most coddled existence, if you are truly blistering with the need to create, if you must spread this contagion across the stage, across the page or vinyl, it's going to take its toll. It doesn't matter how strong you are to begin with. You will pay the price. I mean that's the Devil's bargain. You will pay the price! But you are the vehicle for this universal & very ancient channeling of magic, which is what the music that Rowland made is. Magic will take its toll. If you are going to make something that is so magical, that is so unique, you are going to pay the price. That is the Devil's bargain. Rowland left an undeletable mark of beautiful music. He left an undeletable universe no matter how petite the planet is that he left behind trailing in another dimension. Something that is mystical, that is magical, that is him. So it carries on, it continues to exist. I mean what is all this anyway, but a temporary vehicle? We will all be sad to see it go because we're all selfish & we want more. We want more life. We want our friends to live longer. We want to use & abuse it all longer, but you know, I mean I'm amazed myself that I lived past twenty-one, thirty-one, forty-one, coming on fifty-one, so I'm not taking any day for granted. It wasn't even a hundred years ago that fifty was seen as old age. Some of us are born ancient & Rowland was ancient in that sense. He was like an ancient soul. ■



Nick Cave & Rowland S. Howard, 1981, by Peter Milne.



Donna Death & Roberta Reitz in *They Eat Scum*, dir. Nick Zedd, 1979.

NYC is a portal, not a destination to somewhere better. It is a transit station attracting people fed up with wherever they came from. They move there to start new lives based on different myths, like wanting to be part of a community of free thinkers experiencing some kind of alternative to mainstream society. In truth, that myth erodes in inverse proportion to the time spent there, once one faces petty landlordism & predatory capitalism, at war with every inhabitant. Many refuse to recognize the psychic mutation that occurs in remaining in NYC & continuing to accept the miserable conditions necessary to survive there. Those who become lost to the myth live in a self-imposed purgatory accepting elaborate rationalizations for not leaving for somewhere better.

I was once one of these creatures but found a way to escape to a better place. For me, an important facet of living in NYC was my personal discovery of xenomorphosis, the union of opposites that wipes out the fake paradigms with which dominant culture clouds individual judgment. The eradication of the middle class, a by-product of the class war waging in NYC & other cities, has resulted in a great divide in which large segments of the population are relegated to poverty & unemployment while a rising class of urban professionals pay obscene sums of money to inhabit slumlord owned buildings enriching the bank accounts of the predator class. Subsisting as wage slaves in a perpetual state of fear & misery, aided by self-medication through alcohol & other drugs, New Yorkers face a dismal future in which most counter-culture is airbrushed out of their lives.

As a target in this class war being waged in NYC, I resisted for decades, living in roach infested apartments packed with valuable artifacts that eventually ended up in the Fales Library Downtown Archive. For decades I moved to cheap neighborhoods, living in low rent apartments. I later was targeted by greedy landlords for eviction when the "market went up" following an invasion of higher wage earners who had nothing new to say or contribute, bringing rancid bankrupted values from whatever hell hole spawned them.

NYC is now a dead zone overpopulated with tourists, conformists, yuppies, middle class students & other vermin with no interest in alternatives to the dominant culture's restrictive view of reality which is designed to benefit landlords, bankers, developers, rich investors & foreign interlopers, not those who invested decades raising families, making art, homesteading buildings or participating in community activism & collaborative theater enterprises with little financial reward while being shunned by wealthy cultural institutions catering to

tourists & the rich.

By recognizing the temporary nature of NYC & what it represents, a portal to better places elsewhere, it is possible to effect a productive tenure as a resident, but staying there is a dead end. Unless you completely sell out & compromise any vision & integrity, it is impossible to survive there.

NYC breeds paranoia & assholism. It is a petri dish of petty jealousies, nitpicking resentments & self destructive competitiveness at odds with human creativity. The mutated creatures who stay are eaten out from within, hollow crusts, posing as former versions of themselves in order to rationalize their status as outsiders while being insiders in a snobby & exclusive in-crowd; players in a small pool of backstabbers. Even within the ghettoized scenes of competing subcultures, a substrata of socially retarded dorks & squares snub those who dare to infringe upon their domain if they are perceived to be too cool or intelligent. The resultant anti-intellectualism & anti-style prejudice is thus fertilized in a malignant environment inimical to growth & creativity, particularly when an attendant desire for commercial success corrupts what little vision exists in the minds of these provincial art cripples.

The entire edifice of NYC is an experience designed to benefit a ruthless class of capitalists who function as parasites, sucking ever bigger sums of cash from wage slaves, forced to use overpriced & substandard public transportation, pay skyrocketing rents & purchase high priced foods & services in a merciless economic system designed to destroy autonomy & individual spirit.

As a transit station, NYC used to be a good place to experiment & discover new ways of living, but the vile destruction of history & culture has resulted in a hostile environment for free thinkers, truth seekers & innovators who have never belonged to the privileged class that dominates & controls all institutions.



Nick Zedd & Lydia Lunch in *The Wild World of Lydia Lunch*, dir. Nick Zedd, 1983.

The best place to be if you value your sanity is to get out of a place like NYC. Traveling to foreign places strengthens & expands ones view & erodes the provincial mind rot that comes with long term residence in one place.

Having experienced the raping & pillaging

of the counterculture of NYC, I must stress the importance of going somewhere else & meeting new people while transforming ones vision in complete opposition & resistance to the dominant culture's corporate agenda of exploitation, deceit & betrayal.

TAYLOR MEAD

MAY 12TH 2013

I met Taylor Mead in 1989 when we both acted together in a science fiction movie shot in the Hall of Science at the World's Fair Grounds in Queens. I'd seen his acting in the seventies when I move to NYC & saw *Nude Restaurant*, *Lonesome Cowboys*, *Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* & *The Flower Thief*. Taylor was a free spirit on film, exuding a peculiar elastic quality that was all his own... He had a languid goofiness that cut through pretension, an ability to hold your attention by virtue of an unexpected quality.

I used to run into him in bars on the Lower East Side where he always got free drinks. He would never want to talk to any female companion I might be with, but would converse about the Warhol years & other subjects. I was surprised at how politically conservative he was, defending the insane lunacy of

the Cheney-Bush junta's wars of aggression which drained our economy & jump-started a new era of repression & naked imperialism that will no doubt result in the fall of the US empire & untold misery for millions of innocent people. Taylor's political opinions seemed to have been inflicted upon him by the Fox News Terror Network, a source of malignant propaganda directed at misinformed old people too lazy to turn off their TVs. It was unfortunate that this barrage of poison had infected Taylor's thinking, but politics had little to do with our shared lifestyles as underground outsiders & Taylor's memories were feeble so there were no hard feelings when we met.

Once we walked downtown from an event in Times Square, stopping on 6th Ave so he could leer at bodybuilders in a gym on 17th street. Later we headed to Bowery Bar, where his presence



Willoughby Sharp & Nick Zedd in *Police State*, dir. Nick Zedd, 1987.

produced a parting of the Red Sea & afforded us entry into a snooty, vile watering-hole for young urban professionals immersed in a particularly repellent form of toxic narcissism that inexplicably enthralled Taylor. As muscle bound Ken Dolls reached around Taylor to grab their brewskies while engaging in besotted mating rituals with assembly-line Barbie Dolls exuding a noxious inbred plasticity, I asked Taylor if this was his idea of "fun."

"These are MY people!" he exclaimed. "You need to get out of the Lower East Side, Nick."

"But THIS IS THE LOWER EAST SIDE, TAYLOR!" I replied.

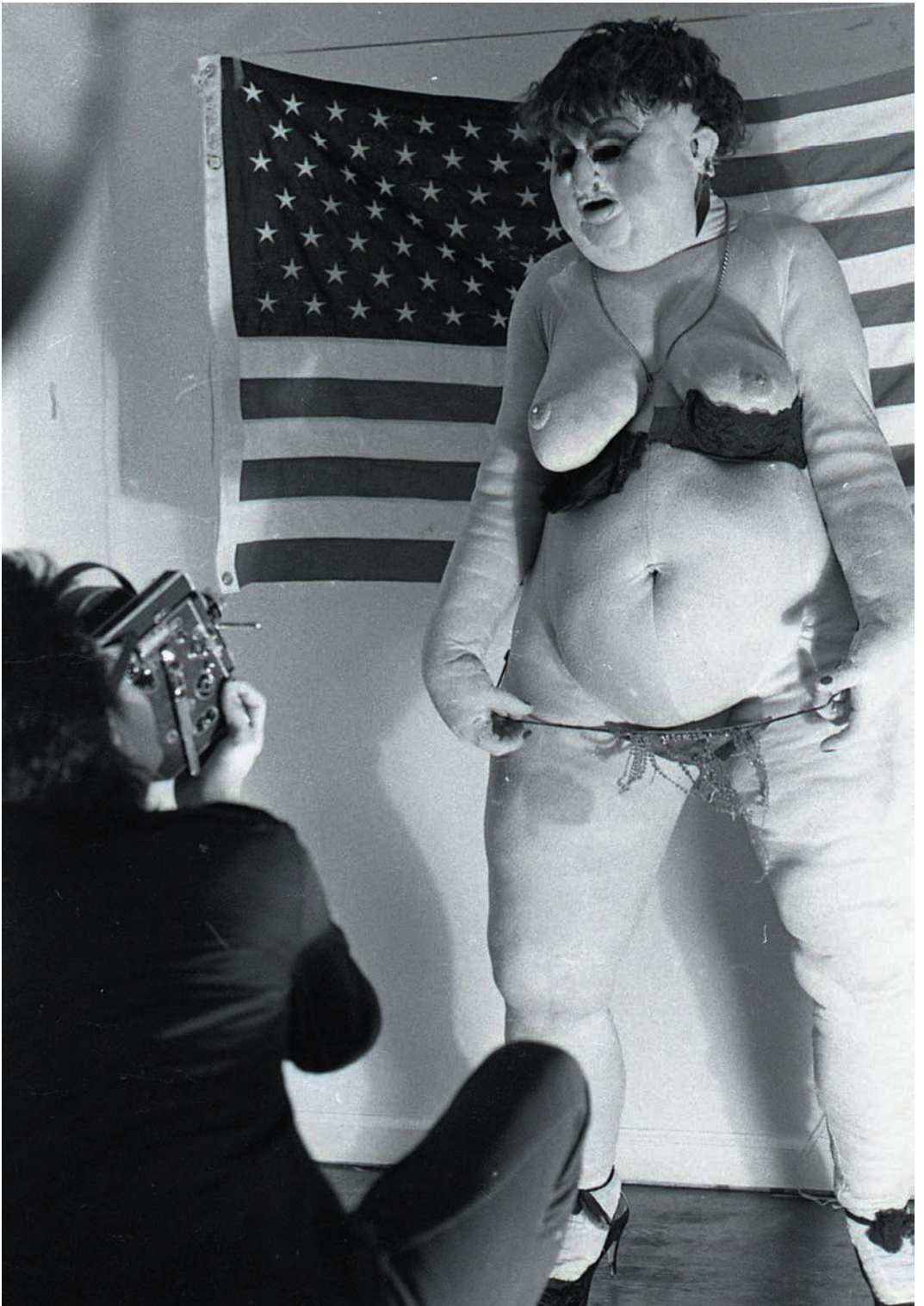
In 1999, I directed Taylor in *Ecstasy in Entropy*, wherein he gave a brilliant performance as a leering pervert in a lapdancing joint, shot in a place called Art Space (rumored to have once been a whorehouse) briefly the hottest experimental autonomous zone in NYC. After a year & a half of community board & police harassment, the groundbreaking performance space was padlocked forever, another victim of unrestrained government fascism, killed by a vicious vendetta of busybodies with too much power on their hands. Half a block away, heroin dealers continued to peddle their wares on the sidewalk, ignored by the cops & community board nitwits who were terrified of the existence of real art in the LES.

Taylor would yearly appear at the Poetry Marathon at St Marx Church, delivering rambling

oratorios accompanied by a shabby cassette player; self-indulgent exercises in embarrassing egomania which seemed to enthrall the less discriminating sentimentalists in attendance.

Taylor hosted an equally self-indulgent stint at the now defunct Bowery Poetry Club, where on Friday evenings at 6 or 7 he'd fumble with his tape deck onstage & listen to himself talk while two bartenders rolled their eyes & waited for customers to show up. A few hours later, the place would be filled with pitiful amateur rappers boasting of their sexual prowess & animal machismo to an ugly crowd of clueless cretins who failed to tip the bartenders (who hated them.) By then Taylor was probably onto his fourth bar, filling up with free drinks before climbing 4 flights of stairs to his filthy apartment.

In 2005 I directed Taylor in the origin episode of *Electra Elf* where he played Jennifer Swallows' grandfather, shot in Taylor's filthy one room apartment on Ludlow Street where he'd lived since 1979. Crawling with roaches & filled with trash & old paintings, this hovel was his final home in NYC until his greedy & disgusting landlord decided to embark upon a campaign of harassment designed to drive Taylor crazy or kill him. Taylor stubbornly refused to be moved while the construction crews demolished the interior of his building until he ended up in the hospital & decided to accept a large sum of money to leave. A few weeks later he was dead, having escaped to live with a niece somewhere in



Grier Lankton in *The Bogus Man*, dir. Nick Zedd, 1980.



Nick Zedd & Kembra Pfahler, 1992, promotional still for *War is Menstrual Envy*.

the Midwest.

Such is the way authentic artists are now treated by the city of New York, forced to flee in terror by troglodyte landlords & hordes of yuppie scum, poisoning every inch of "prime real estate" in an orgy of predatory capitalism; a degrading devolution of life based on "profits," "the bottom

line" & creating a playground for rich, spoiled brats with nothing to offer.

Taylor Mead was a living embodiment of freedom & slack... & therefore had to be wiped out... but his legacy lives on in our memories & in the movies, writing & art he left behind, if anybody still cares.

THE STATE OF CULTURAL JOURNALISM

JUNE 18TH 2013

From my perspective, what passes for cultural journalism in both Mexico & the United States is abysmal. Having been a journalist myself on occasion over the years, I can attest to the fact that editors & publishers seem oblivious to the fact that good journalists deserve to be paid fairly for their work.

Having pseudonymously written a few excellent pieces for a Mexican online journal, the pay was quite low, but the opportunity to reach readers made it preferable to not being read. Following publication, the editors didn't follow up with more assignments to take advantage of my expertise, knowledge & close proximity to important cultural events in NYC & Mexico, missing a golden opportunity to become a significant magazine after printing two pieces. Money was their excuse.

Getting free mediocre writers to produce fluff was preferable to them.

On another occasion I was interviewed in Mexico by an American expatriate for a piece in *Vice*. The result was a hatchet job focusing on petty gossip, ignoring the more controversial & thought provoking elements covered in our conversations, particularly in relation to work I've produced in Mexico since my arrival two years ago. The piece came out many years later, leading me to surmise that *Vice* may be a data gathering tool for the NSA to keep tabs on dissident voices with a history of shaking things up, (otherwise marginalized by the censorship of omission practiced by corporate media.)

A short profile was written about me with an interview, appearing in a Mexican art magazine called *Spleen*, which was quite excellent, though it

should have come out a year earlier. Journalists & editors are notoriously late in catching onto anything interesting that's going on, in both Mexico & NYC.

I've noticed several cultural publications in Mexico that are completely unreadable & insufferably boring, obsessed with "good taste" & "contemporary art." They feature dull profiles of bad artists with pedestrian resumes, all carefully avoiding disturbing the status quo by producing anything remotely disturbing or innovative. One free paper in Mexico that appears to be designed to showcase new cultural events & products is completely clueless as to who the best artists currently flourishing under the radar in Mexico are. They regularly focus on conservative fashion shoots & pieces reviewing cutting edge artists from 50 or more years ago, with occasional forays into predictable tattoo art or trendy corporate rock bands.

On one occasion last year I was invited to the office of a free art magazine in Mexico City to discuss possible articles or artists to write about. The editor, who acted as if he were interested in my perspective, never followed up with any assignments. He did the same thing to a Mexican curator of art parties which he'd invited to the office to see if she'd also contribute. His publication continues to be irrelevant & deeply conservative in its timidity, apparently due to a fear of offending potential advertisers. Like every other art zine in Mexico, it is unreadable.

Due to the unfortunate vacuum of remotely interesting cultural journalism in Mexico City, it became necessary for me to self publish my own magazine here, in Spanish & English, called *Hatred of Capitalism*. Included in the premiere issue were photography & illustrations by powerful Mexican artists, ignored by the elitist media & cultural institutions here, as well as my own writing & pieces I selected critiquing contemporary art. Included was The Extremist Manifesto, announcing the emergence of a suppressed movement of radical artists opposed to the stifling corporate contemporary art scene, creating genuinely shocking & provocative work under the radar of curators, journalists & institutions who have been co-opted by the rancid values of crony capitalism & tired elitism.

As usual, when corporate & so-called alternative media fails to do its job, it becomes necessary to create your own media. As Duchamp predicted, the great artists of the future will go underground. In NYC, I published *The Underground Film Bulletin* for 7 years to cover a flourishing scene that had been completely ignored by all journalists & curators due to its potent content. Later, a book was published in England called *Deathtripping*, exploring the material we covered in the magazine ten years earlier. Better late than never. This is where the cinema of

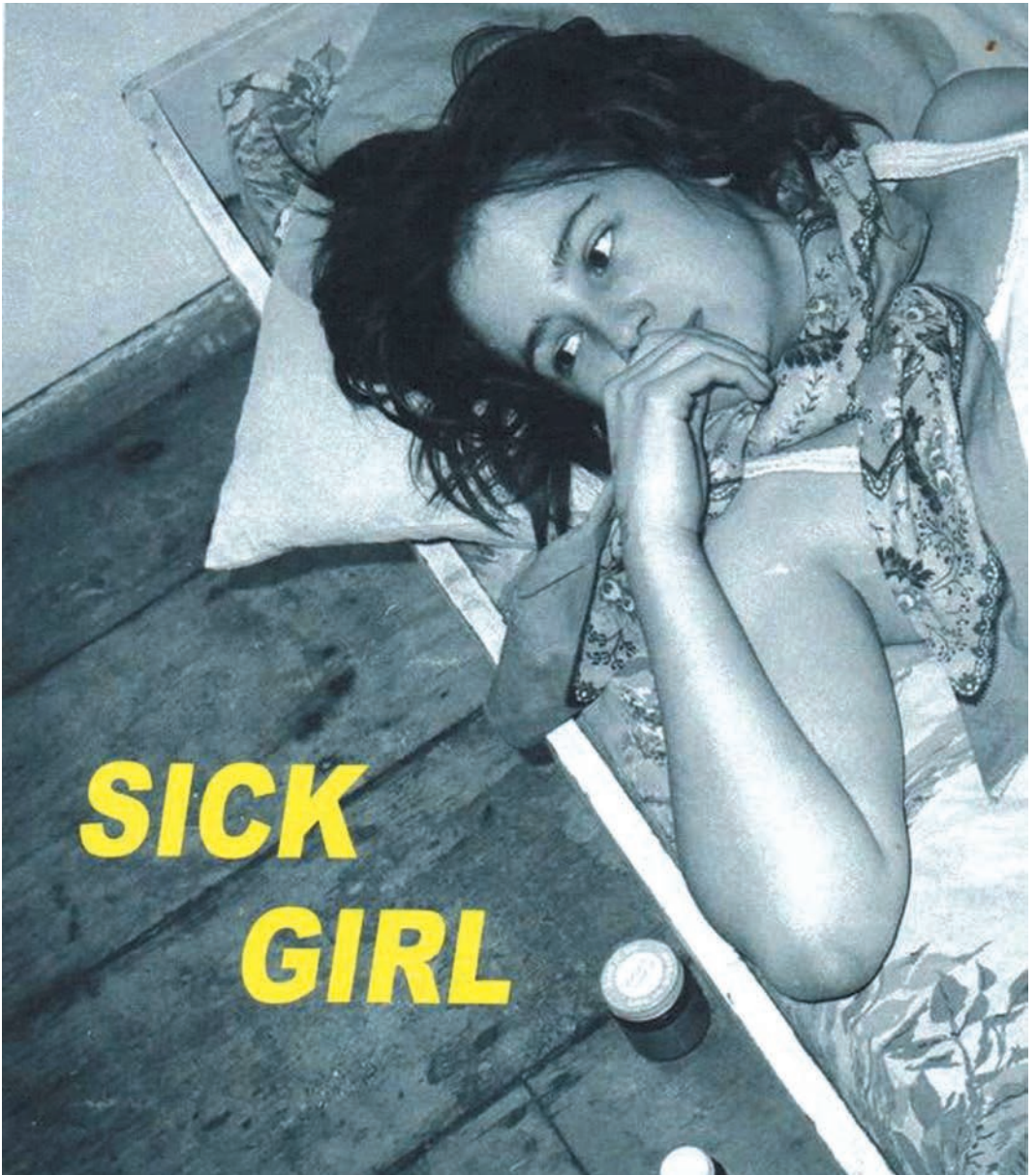
transgression became known to world academic communities & continues to reverberate in such shows as the Kunstwerk Museum's retrospective in Berlin last year. All museums & galleries in Mexico are still oblivious to this important movement, as well as the homegrown extremist artists I am trying to call attention to in Mexico City.

Art is meant to disturb. There is now a system in place that rewards art that is boring, pointless & insignificant; a huge mass deception designed to keep in place a trivial, fashionable clique of followers incapable of resisting what is expected of them. Successful practitioners of capitulationist art make big, bland "conceptual" or "business" projects/pieces that offend no one & remain safe for corporate sponsorship. In this way, the global elite that pulls the strings of gatekeepers playing by the rules of predatory capitalism are able to neuter the power of modern art by burying it alive.

The situation regarding cultural journalism in America is slightly worse. Real estate greed has rendered NYC a cultural wasteland; astronomical rents extracted by landlords have made it impossible for artists to produce cutting edge work in an underground environment & any semblance of community has been wiped out with few exceptions, usually erased by the police as soon as any attention is focused on something new & original.

Boring art newspapers like the *Brooklyn Rail* have a policy of avoiding anything controversial, thought provoking or original, just like their counterparts in Mexico. As a result of this censorship of omission, people are starved to experience real art that challenges their perceptions & prejudices & I am flown in a few times a year by newcomers wondering what happened before everything got sanitized, in order to lend authenticity & expose them to what they have missed.

This sad state of affairs could be rectified if just one person with money would step up & publish a useful magazine on paper or online & employ good writers to cover interesting subjects. That is how history is made. We are apparently living in a new Dark Age, where everything is a simulation, & millions of people are pacified by propaganda & corporate disinformation, while essential, significant & newsworthy art is being regularly ignored & avoided by gatekeepers & sheeple playing by the rules, which stinks. Conformity & complacency are at an all time high while the global elites & their empire crumble & things get worse. I can only continue to fight against it with no funding or support, in private & occasionally in carefully circumscribed public forums, taking a hermetic path to the truth, which must be avoided at all costs by those in denial of this sorry state of affairs. ■



SICK GIRL

THE NEW PUNK GIRL,
NEW YORK 1979
VICTOR BOCKRIS

*All these punk girls started turning up.
They were new, & that was exciting.
Hence there was a whole new breed of groupies that came along. Fascinating.*
– Johnny Rotten

At the climax of the nineteen seventies a disturbing new pattern began to emerge. I could not of course see it at the time, but it transpired that after scoring a major victory in my career I would almost immediately enter into an affair, which threatened to nullify everything I had done. Never was this clearer than on that spectacular Saturday in early September 1979. I remember the date because it marked the start of a brilliant new period in my life. In the afternoon I signed my first book contract & collected the \$1,000 advance. In the night I took home a girl who told me she had nowhere to go & asked me if I could help her out.

At first Damita Richter appeared to be the perfect girl to accompany me through the writing of my *With William Burroughs* book. A precursor of the heroine of *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, Lisbeth Salandar, Damita was a small boned, skinny little girl, who measured five feet & weighed 95 lbs. She was twenty-four but easily passed for fourteen. The Talking Heads drummer Chris Franz called her "The Punk Lolita."

Like Salandar she overcame a torturous childhood & emerged as a courageous, strong, self made character. They could have been twins. The difference was that Salandar hardened herself into a world-class hacker & declared war on a major category of creeps. Twenty years earlier Richter had also declared war against the straight world, but in a different way. She repeatedly seduced men into loving her, then abruptly "fucked them over good." She was a hardcore junkie, a stripper & a prostitute, who wrote defiant street poetry about her gritty life. She had dreamed, just before we met, that she had given birth to a child fathered by "William Burroughs."

102 | When I first met Damita at the Mudd Club I was writing a book about William Burroughs. I had also spent the last year being astonished by the new breed of punk girls & writing down everything they said. Damita was the third girl in my punk trilogy. She embodied its ground in a culture of contradictions. Damita was The Girl Who Kicked Over My World.

When I think about New York in 1979, I think about a Sunday afternoon when Damita & I were fooling around under a blanket on the couch. She was wearing her Catholic Schoolgirl dress & her forest green knee socks & I had my hand on her ass inside her white cotton panties. Legs, Lori & Jeff stopped by. We lay there chatting with them for an hour without moving. After they left, Damita told me how special it made her feel that I had my hand on her ass the whole time they were there, but none of them knew it. That's sex. I told her she was a little red bird sitting on my shoulder. Her eyes shone at me like diamonds, "Oh Victor!" she said, "That's so pretty"

We used to walk home from the Mudd Club every night. It was a lovely walk & it was fun to walk through the streets of New York at 2a.m. with Damita looking forward to going to bed with her. One night in October we were heading for the big record store at the junction of 8th Street & 6th Avenue. Every week an exciting new album came out. I was still playing the Ramones *Road To Ruin* & Blondie's *Parallel Lines*. There was a big display of the new Blondie album, *Eat to the Beat*. The cover was great. We both crouched down in front of the window to read the back-cover song listing. The second song on the B side was "Victor." It was so great to be able to share that moment with Little Ramona. We were close enough to experience it together without yelling. It was just really quiet & magical. When a community has bands there's a time when they go on the road & you lose touch with them. Debbie & I had a real friendship almost untrammelled by fame. I couldn't have taken acid with her. But yes I really dug Debbie Harry. She was inspirational to work with. Damita had had an adventure with her too. So that was another connection between us.

The great thing was how easily Damita fit into my world. One afternoon we stopped by the Factory. As we walked in I told Damita to sit on a small hardback chair placed unusually in the middle of the otherwise empty reception area where everybody could get a good look at her. Andy & Fred were standing behind the glass top desk where I recently transcribed one of Andy's Rolling Stones tapes for Interview. David Bowie had visited for lunch earlier in the week & I started joking with Andy about how short he was – "A PEANUT!" Andy pretended to be surprised & defend him. "No he was...aaaaahhh I mean he was he was eeeuuurrghh TALLL, wasn't he Fred? I mean..."

"He had on those big platforms!" I concluded waving my arms & jumping up & down. Andy laughed & laughed. Suddenly Gael Love from Interview bustled by like freight train hissing, but with an edge of admiration, "How old IS that girl, Victor?" Andy had already checked her out.. He

was looking for a trio of little girl back up singers in Catholic schoolgirl dresses for Walter Stedding's band The Dragon People Andy was managing.

The following week I took Damita to the Bunker for dinner with Bill. Howard Brookner was there. She gave Bill a small cannon for Christmas & I gave him a St Laurent shirt. Howard left soon thereafter. We had a pleasant dinner. William was in fine shape. He spoke about poisonous snakes, insects & drugs with Damita. They got along quite well. The last time they met at my place, Bill had fallen just like everybody else for the mischief in Damita's eyes. Her hair was short & she wore the generic teen costume of jeans & tee shirt that made Bill see her as a fourteen-year old boy. Bill gave her the googly eyes & played footsie with her under the table. Nobody said anything. He still insists that she's fourteen years old – "your Lolita" – but otherwise I must say he seems to have taken a liking to her which is nice for me & for D.

Things weren't always so easy. One intimate morning Damita suddenly called Michael Parker in the middle of an embrace & squealed, "Oh! Oh! He's beating me up! Oh no!" Upset, I slammed my finger down & hang up. "Help!" she screamed. I realized she was trying to provoke a fight. The only arguments we had were about keeping the apartment clear because my Burroughs book was spread all over the living room.

"It drove me crazy," Damita told me later. "You really wiggled out around those papers. As soon as I came in & dropped my coat on the floor you started yelling, 'What is this chaos on the floor! I can't stand all this chaos!!' And I'd say, 'Oh, uh, OK I will pick it up.' I was pretty docile when I was on heroin."

Damita was a good storyteller. One morning she told me how she met the legendary Anya Phillips, the manager of James Chance, with whom she had been living with before we met.

"One night at CBGB's this dramatically beautiful Chinese girl, Anya Phillips, was staring at me. After a few minutes she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Nothing." She said, "You want to come over & get tied up & have coffee?" I said, "Yes. You got any cigarettes?" She said, "I got to buy a pack." We bought a pack of cigarettes & went to her house & heated up some sake & got drunk. She pulled out all these chains that went around my waist & had leather cuffs for my neck & ankles & put leather underwear on me & a little leather vest. I told her I was a stripper & she said, "Dance for us." I danced around the apartment for them & her & Diego just

sat on the couch & smoked cigarettes & watched me. Then she said, "How would you like to come to bed with me?" I said, "Sure." Then she said, "You have to sleep in that." She kept me chained up for a few days & Diego came over & spent the night & jumped on me & fucked me, which I thought was a lot of fun because I couldn't do nothing about it if I wanted to. It was sort of romantic. I thought, "Gee, decadent New York."

On the eve of my 21st birthday we went to CBGB's & Anya introduced me to Sylvain Sylvain of the New York Dolls. A couple of minutes later he said, "Well, I am going home. You coming?"

So I went out with him & I had a really good time & the next morning I woke up & it was my birthday. I said,

"Oh, it is my birthday."

He went, "Oh, great," & he ran out & got me a scrambled egg sandwich & coffee & made me take a bunch of vitamin B. He said, "You know when you drink a lot you have to take your vitamins." Then he told me all these stories about Japan & the early New York Dolls when they had a lot of money & went through heavy-duty drinking. Then he walked me back to Anya's at 101 St Mark's Place.

That night we were going to see Talking Heads at the Ocean Club. I'd seen them play a bunch of times. I had already met Tina & Chris, hanging out at CBGB's I had asked Tina to sing The Girls Want To Be With The Girls for me on my 21st birthday. And she said yes. Anya talked me into taking acid. I said, "No, no, no." She said, "Yes, come on. It's your 21st birthday you got to take acid." So I did. She dressed me up in skin tight purple satin peddle pushers, black stiletto high heels with caribou feathers around the top & a really tight angora sweater, & we went out. I made her buy me a bottle of Jack Daniels because I told her if I started freaking out I wanted something to come down on.

They were videotaping at the Ocean Club that night & we were at a very fun table trying to share a shrimp salad. It looked really horrible. The lights were so bright I could not stand to look at anybody. Then Joey Ramone came in & sat with us. So I told him, "Look, I don't have any money & I am just coming down off acid. Can you help me out? Buy me a couple of beers or something."

There was this girl following him around & she kept saying, "You're talking to him too much. I want to be with him. Please go away & let me have a chance." I said, "I am just drinking with him." I didn't, like, plan on going home with him or anything but

it ended up Joey was trying to like ditch this girl. So he says to me, "Come on, let's go to CBGB's & drink there. "It was well after five in the morning. I go, "But it's closed now." He goes, "It's not closed to me."

On the way to CBGB's this girl is still following us. I held my coat so nobody could see him take a piss in the street. By the time we got there she is, like, practically crying. So Joey said, "Come in with us." And the rest of The Ramones were there & Hilly & a bunch of people like Roberta Bayley, & we were playing pinball. I was sitting on the pool table & Joey asked me to watch his beer because he had to go to the bathroom. He comes running out of the bathroom & jumps on top of me & spills beer all over my pants. And he starts kissing me. And I am, like, "Oh My God this is really exciting. I got Syl, who I always wanted to fuck, last night & now I am getting Joey!" And the girl is like crying, "Oh, that's right! Why don't you just drag me all over town & then just ignore me!" And he is like, "Oh, we are going home now." This girl was following us right to the door & he goes, "Well, we are going to bed." She goes, "Oh, that's it. I take the train all the way to the Bronx." And it's like, "Okay, come on up."

So we are sitting on his bed giggling & kissing & she is sitting on the corner of the bed crying. So Joey said, "Hey, do you want to watch TV? Just keep it low so Arturo don't wake up." She goes off & we hear her fumbling around in the dark & she knocked a bunch of stuff over & Arturo jumped up screaming & threw her out & me & Joey were just laughing our heads off, but trying to be quiet so Arturo doesn't scream at us.

I ended up fucking Joey but it was, like, really awkward the next morning. He was looking for his glasses. I couldn't find my bra. It was, like, really, "Oh God!" We were both really embarrassed & I couldn't wait to get out of there.

I was really hung over & I was walking down East 3rd Street eating a popsicle when this really mean Hell's Angel, Big Benny, says, "Hey! Come here. I want a bite of your popsicle." I looked at him & said, "They only cost a dime." He said, "You fucking bitch!" And he picked up a wooden chair & flung it at my back. It almost knocked me over & he ran up & said, "I am going to fucking break your neck. I will kill you." I said, "Here, take the whole thing." He goes, "I don't want it. Don't let me ever see you again." And I was like, "OOOOOH!"

I went back to Anya's & I was, like, shaking. I told her what happened & she said, "Well, it's your own fault. You never should have had anything to do

with them in the first place." I said, "I was just walking down the street! I didn't do anything! Why are you picking on me?" I didn't realize how really truly crazy Benny was. He's dead now you know.

People came over to Anya's, & I would make tea for them. But basically I think Anya was such a bitch she didn't really have any friends. But we just got along pretty good. She is a year younger than me. Debbie & Anya were acquaintances but I would not call them good friends, at least not then. Anya & Terry Sellers were lovers & had been living together. I first met her after they broke up. Terry used to come around once in a while. But I think Anya just needed a friend, & I was the new girl in town. I was also obviously establishing myself quickly. From day one I got into CBGB's for free.

Anya was stripping some of the time & getting into pornography. She would talk about how she had a crush on David Byrne but she was fucking Chris Frantz all the time. (James Chance wasn't even on the scene. James was, you know, probably going to art school or something). She was always trying to make David Byrne. She would be like, "Oh, God, I love him so much I can't breathe." Well, she got him over there one night & she fucked him & he left his cigarettes. She kept them on top of the refrigerator & she would go, "Oh, these are David's cigarettes." She would just go like, "Oh, David." But she could not fuck him again. She said she would go & fuck Chris Franz. She was like really proud of the fact that she could grab him away from Tina right in front of her & take him to her house & fuck him. She said, "Well, Tina is so stupid. She is so nice to me & I am fucking her boyfriend. Ha Ha Ha." Anya was... so I was like you know kind of shocked by this because I thought it was really weird that she was in love with David but since she could not fuck him because he was afraid of her because she was very aggressive, so she would fuck Chris instead. And then got off on the fact that she was fucking over Tina. I was very impressed with her."

Life with Damita was always eventful. She never let a week go by without some subversive prank, like dealing heroin out of my apartment when I was in the US on a green card, or dropping some other bombshell. The constant whining, the high maintenance & the implied threats (I never knew what was going to happen) were wearing me down.

The night before Thanksgiving we were walking home from the Mudd Club when we got into such a terrible fight, we had to step aside & lean up against the wall of an apartment building. "WHY CAN'T

YOU STOP BEING SUCH A CUNT?" I was screaming at the top of my lungs, apoplectic like my head was going to explode, when some gay guy opened his 8th floor window & yelled, "Yeah! Give it to her buddy, sock it to her! That was a good one!"

"WHY DON'T YOU COME DOWN HERE AND I'LL SOCK IT TO YOU TOO!" I yelled back.

Suddenly turning into a truck driver, the guy bellowed, "I'LL BE RIGHT THERE!" & slammed the window so hard we almost fell over. We split fast to find another place to complete my tirade. Except in the midst of this retreat, Damita suddenly shouted out, "THANKS!" shaking her tiny fist at heaven "THANKS A LOT!" then sprinted back to the Mudd Club. I half-heartedly gave chase for a block then slowed down & started calmly walking back home. I sort of regretted not having her with me in bed but I was also relieved from the 24-hour maintenance.

Anyway, something happened! When I got up the following morning around 10a.m. after washing up & getting some coffee, I sat down at my table. Jeff was out. And for one & a half hours a voice in my head dictated a diatribe about punk girls. It was inspired by Damita's courage in the face of God & her odds. She was a prostitute, stripper & junkie on the west coast. In NY she was one of the top ten girls from the Lower East Side Woman's Auxiliary who slept with the punk bands, particularly the Clash. Some would have said that she was the #1 Punk Rock Groupie. But there was little for her in it in the way of security & a lot of bad sex. (The piece was as much inspired by the attitudes & lifestyles of two other punk girls photographer Marcia Resnick & a painter whose name I cannot recall). I titled it,

NEGATIVE GIRLS

The lives of American girls terrify me. I cannot look.

BOYS TELL LIES, GIRLS TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS

Girls are climbing all over the living room furniture, & crawling out of my hair, girls are using my eyes, girls are slipping my checkbook into their handbags, girls can't stop talking. Allergic girls. Detergent girls. Floating girls. Stolen girls. Girls & death. Girls defeated by hammers. The girls department. Girls & money. Girls for sale. Legendary girls. Insect girls, Inspect girls. Inject girls. Girls in the supermarket. Backstreet girls. Singing girls. Driving girls. Let me go girls. Walking girls running girls standing still girls. Hot & cold girls. Hot & cold running girls.

Cunts tits feet faces hair. Electric girls. Nominated

girls. Financed girls. Jungle girls at the Mudd Club. Diamond girls at the Pierre. Cunts with shields & cunts with spears. Spy girls. All the same girls. All the time girls. Finished girls. Girls in the war. Girls on tour. Girls in the mens room. Inquisitive girls. Intuitive girls. Exquisite girls. Girls who live in the crotch of metropolitan life to illustrate what it's like to be a girl in America today. Negative girls who say, "We are second class citizens!" White girls who want to be black, they demand to be recognized as dogs at war. They learn to say,

"I had to be a prostitute!"

"I had to do it! He would have killed me!"

"He shot me in the chest from four feet & then spent half an hour cleaning up the apartment before he even called an ambulance. The cop thought I was going to die & held my hand all the way to the hospital."

Negative girls are mirrors. They are seeking for the proof of their visions every day in every activity. They take photographs of boys telling lies then show them the photographs of their lies revealing the false structure of our sexual code, which negative girls aim to break.

Most girls who get thrown down stairs, beaten up, raped, left, used, abused, slugged, whored, wined & dined close up like foul black flowers & become ugly dishwashers, but negative girls never fall in love, they rise in hate. They take their pain to the public. They exorcise disappointment with its photograph. They celebrate another moon. They chase gaiety & emerge purged. A negative girl only has bad news. A negative girl only tells bad stories. She likes to tell stories about every bad person she ever knew, & if you try to cheer her up by telling her something good she'll turn down her mouth & say it didn't happen to her. But most of all she likes to tell bad stories about herself.

"Did you stuff blueberries up my cunt last night? I thought so! I told you not to! Now I have a swollen cunt. I hate cunts. I wish I didn't have one. All it does is get me into a lot of trouble."

"Well... I think you have a very nice..."

"Oh stop it! I don't care what you think. I'm going to have my cunt sewn up!"

Negative girls know that the male's primary impulse is to insert himself as far into the female's body as he can possibly go & they don't care. Negative girls pretend to be forced to have sex because it proves how negative it is, how negative you feel about them, & how negative their lives are.

"Well you fucked me last night so you're not

going to fuck me again this morning. You're not going to fuck me in the ass. It hurts too much! I've tried. You can jerk off into my mouth."

"When did you last come?"

"Ten years ago. What happened last night?"

"Well I was fucking you, I was fucking you for a long time &..."

"I don't remember anything."

"Then you came."

"I NEVER COME WITH YOU! I'm sorry, but..."

"Oh no, it's okay. It's okay. No, I know, but anyway you seemed to have a good time."

"Well, I don't know."

Negative girls are very annoyed if you suggest they enjoyed themselves too much. Negative girls are distinctly unhappy if asked by their partners to adopt a superior position during coitus. Little girls who really need help, vulnerability is their strongest suit. It always hurts negative girls when you fuck them. "Ouch ouch, you're hurting me. Stop. Oh My God." Negative girls are embarrassed about sex & don't like to talk about it. If you start being passionate she will scream out, "I'm very drunk! I just want to get raped & fucked! Just fuck me! Rape me! Oh God rape me!" & expect you to rip her clothes off & fuck her like a savage from the realms of Tarzan's imagination.

Lawyers, book keepers & priests everywhere tell me there are a lot of normal reasonable girls around capable of leading a straightforward adult life, getting married, settling down & raising a family. I've never seen any & I don't believe it. Every girl I meet is just as crazy & remarkable as the one before her. It's always bad with their wheedling & whining & little girls cries: "Sally wants presents. Sally wants ten presents. Sally wants more presents. How many presents does Daddy have for Sally?"

WARNINGS ABOUT NEGATIVE GIRLS

You take a negative girl out on the town everywhere in a limousine & keep giving her cocaine, you take her to exotic private dinner parties, then you ask her if she had a good time & she says it was okay, before going uptown to turn a trick for fifty dollars – just to make sure you understand how much she needs you & how much she wants your attention. A lot of attention. All of it. A night with a negative girl is fraught with danger & can be a nightmare. At any moment she may turn its tide, leaving you washed

up on the alcoholic shores of morning. Flapping off of grey rocks you wake to find yourself fully dressed alone, a cigarette between your teeth, a pork pie hat stuck on your head.

A negative girl will never stay in one place for very long. A negative girl gets bored easily & if you aren't running around with a feather stuffed up your ass or dressed in a chicken suit, or if you haven't got any more funny stories to tell her or famous people to introduce her to, a negative girl will run off screaming, "Where's the party?" Negative girls are not interested in newspapers or politics. Negative girls do not like to think, although you have your substrata of intellectual negatives, really bitter bitches with whiplash tongues, regal snatches up on the higher floors who make men kill to fuck, snapping turtle cunts in jaguars, all whoring for power.

Be very careful who you introduce a negative girl to because she will always collect any famous phone numbers lying around & then call up the famous person & say you told her to call. Negative girls will use your name & connections indiscriminately, but if you ever try & elicit a favor from a negative girl – an introduction, a place to stay, an invitation – she will recoil in horror & assume a superior, removed position.

It has been asked: are negative girls aliens? Negative girls were certainly given different orders.

FROM KNICKERS & KNEE
SOCKS TO SWITCHBLADES
& STILLETTOES: HOW BAD
GIRLS UNDRRESS

Negative girls don't have many clothes because they spend a lot of time in bed, mostly just sleeping it off, although they do have to perform or else they wouldn't be allowed to stick around. What they wear is remarkably uniform, depending upon the image the individual chooses to employ. When dressing, negative girls concentrate on what will be immediately recognizable to negative boys, except in the few cases where the girl doesn't have to bother what she wears she'll get fucked.

The majority of negative girls wear black. If they wear dresses the skirts are short over black stockings or knee socks, white cotton underpants are de rigeur, high heels (to push their asses out)

bras (to push their tits out) & black leather jackets. If they wear pants the pants are black the boots are black the jacket's black. The underwear may also be black. Some negative girls throw in a few colors, wear red shoes or pink feather boas & carry yellow plastic handbags, but only on the weekend or if they're temporarily acting in a recording company office. Negative girls are too serious to get that fanciful about their outfits. A seminal costume for the negative girl is the Catholic School Girl dress. Variations run through most school girl uniforms from China to Paraguay. An alternative is the little boy's sharkskin suit worn over black high heel boots & under short spiky hair. Add tear gas gun & – Hey presto! You're a negative girl!

Where do negative girls get their clothes? "We shop in other people's closets!" A negative girl rushes into an apartment & heads straight for the closet to see if there's anything she could wear you might lend her for the night. A negative girl will never return anything she borrowed & if you ever leave anything in a negative girl's bed it will get lost before you remember where it is. I have lost a number of small items this way. Watches, drugs, credit cards... Negative girls are jackdaws, but even the ones with the biggest noses & worst acne are always pretty because they dress up in ballerina clothes & wear black gauze masks & spangles around their ankles. Negative girls are confectionary. Their cunts taste like candy.

NEGATIVE GIRLS & DRUGS

Negative girls are great in bed if they're not too sick, but they're sick a lot. Some negative girls are always sick because they never eat anything & take as many drugs as they can. But negative girls are quite particular about what kind of drugs they will take, & most of them abhor marijuana. Boys who smoke marijuana around negative girls always catch a lot of flak -

"What a pothead!"

"That stuff stinks!"

"Oh God! More marijuana again..."

– because it makes them paranoid & paranoia is the last thing a negative girl can afford to have added to her afflictions.

Negative girls like speed & their mouths are always falling out. A lot of negative girls have to take qualudes in order to get fucked because they're too tense otherwise. They say all girls like to

get smacked & negative girls concur, liking smack better than anything else. You can pretend heroin doesn't exist, or only underworld stooges of the lowest order use it, but negative girls shout, "We're going to get some smack as soon as we get to London! Don't be a boring moralist about it!" While sociologists pout, "Many young girls who fear the permanent side effects of drug addiction accept bizarre sexual experiences in the belief that they are the lesser of two evils." What sleazy liars they are!

NEGATIVE SEX

A boy walks through a crowd of beautiful girls wearing a black bandage across his eyes. A negative boy walks through a crowd of beautiful girls he cannot see. He covers his eyes with a black gloved hand. The wind blows a boy in a black hat & coat over, a car veers around the corner, the streetlights go out. Two priests pull up in a limousine. A negative boy goes into another world he has the pictures of. A negative girl screams: "THAT ISN'T WHAT HAPPENED! WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THE BIT WHERE HE TOOK HIS PANTS OFF!"

Negative girls only like negative boys & negative boys hate their girlfriends, so negative girls are always close to the flame of hate. This keeps them awake. Negative girls want to have sex with negative boys because negative boys match the desired sequence of pictures negative girls have superimposed on their sex screens. The negative girl sees the negative boy walking across the room, she appreciates his skinny ass his skinny legs his skinny head his skinny brain his skinny veins – all withered up & dried away, which is why he's off the stuff for a while. They flip for his tight skinny mouth & his giant animal-like member protruding from his pants like a rolling pin. How many times have I had to listen to negative girls describe their boyfriends' cocks with the guy nodding out right next to them? I always think the guy is going to be embarrassed when his girlfriend says, "You can't help the way nature made you honey, you have a beautiful cock," but he just pops another quarter in the pinball machine.

Negative boys say, "Going to bed is really giving up. We never go to bed until we pass out. All imagination of the future is wrong & I am in a precarious position flying over unknown territory without control of my plane, so don't bother me."

How do negative girls deal with negative boys? Most negative girls are frigid. They can usually

cover it up pretty well with their acting experience, but most negative boys are impotent, even after reading textbooks on the physiology of erections & this creates a problem. She tries to jump on top of him wearing red knee-socks & a t-shirt that says FETISH or ROCK & ROLL HIGH SCHOOL on it, but he can only jerk off to her voice over the telephone. A negative girl will never masturbate her boyfriend.

"Could I just ask you a favour that'll only take two minutes. Would you just jerk me off?"

(Outraged). "No!"

"There's nothing wrong with asking as long as you don't try & force someone!"

"There's nothing worse than asking." She is embarrassed if you mention masturbation.

"Getting caught masturbating would be more embarrassing than getting caught turning a trick," a negative girl told me over a lunch which she ordered, stirred around & disdained at Mortimer's. It is unwise to take a negative girl to a restaurant. She'll make sure it's expensive, then keep the waiter standing around while she bites her nails & asks what everything looks like. When it comes you realize why. She just likes to look at the food & push it around. (Unless she's at DAVE'S LUNCHEONETTE, where she'll eat everything on the plate & lick it.)

Negative girls communicate with their bodies as bait, but negative girls own their own bodies completely & can do whatever they want with them. The city is strewn with corpses of boys who thought they owned negative girls. Negative girls like to boast about how much they've been getting. They insist on their right to be debauched. Negative girls demand to get fucked. "I want to get fucked!" they scream at you over the telephone, & running into your apartment they hand you a rubber, wail "Wanna Fuck?" & dash into the bedroom. Negative girls demand control. Negative girls want to get excited. Negative girls like to seduce young boys. Negative girls like to be little girls & fuck famous old men. Negative girls like to fuck drummers, singers & guitar players. Negative girls look for cute boys wherever they go. Negative girls rip off straight men whenever they can. Negative girls have sex with giant insects. Negative girls are treated like garbage & they come. Negative girls are fulfilling comic book fantasies.

A negative girl would never think of getting married because she knows if she sits at home & watches television knitting & washing dishes & walking around the block with babies, she will

become suicidally depressed, & her boyfriend will become incredibly bored with her ugly pan & will hardly ever want to see it, let alone touch her creepy flesh. Negative girls are smart. They keep moving.

Grab a negative girl by the wrist, fling her onto the carpet, drag her across the floor & throw her out the door into the corridor & she will threaten to sue & walk around with a bandaged wrist for a week, but all she really wants is an apology. Apart from photographs, negative girls like to collect confessions. They always make it seem like it's your fault & they are very persuasive so you often end up apologizing to negative girls. This one girl was complaining about how her boyfriend wouldn't even give her fifty cents to go uptown so she could be a model for *Penthouse* magazine & I said, "But he arranged for you to make two hundred dollars so that's pretty nice of him," & she goes, "Yeah, but because of that stupid jerk I met at *Penthouse* I went on the Scaresdale diet & consequently became a junkie & a whore again, so I don't think arranging a photo session at *Penthouse* for me was really such a nice thing for him to do." The same girl saw *Quadrophenia* three times & blamed its destructive influence on the boy who had given her his tickets. Intercourse is when she is "used" by her partners, pregnancy is when she is "ill" & childbirth is when she "gets better."

Negative girls can be very violent very suddenly. The only way to handle this is to be equally violent. All negative boys have had to beat up negative girls. Zsa Zsa Gabor says, "I love it!" And most negative girls make a big thing out of getting beaten up. Bruises are beautiful

IS THERE ANYWAY TO TELL
IF A NEGATIVE GIRL IS
HOMICIDAL?

"There you are. No. That's what makes them so dangerous. Makes them change from being your friend into being your murderer in a second's time. We all hate to a certain extent. You'd be surprised at the murderous daydreams that some sweet old lady is indulging in, but it's only when hate is damned up that it breaks out in murder. Imagine an infant enraged over some slight frustration like having a toy taken away. Then think of her with the strength & imagination of a negative girl. She would kill."

NEGATIVE GIRLS & MONEY

SCIENTIST: In order to maintain replacement fertility, financial incentives to encourage childbearing may eventually become necessary.

NEGATIVE GIRL: I'm a beautiful girl & I shouldn't have to do that.

Negative girls are irresponsible. They deny any demands. They don't owe you anything. Try & find a negative girl on Thanksgiving Day. She shakes her fist at the sky & screams, "Thanks! Thanks a lot!" before running inside. Negative girls never have any money but they often "have some coming." The mysterious source of their supply is not easy to discover. Negative girls spot friends in the morgue & identify them for newspapers, making an extra buck on the side. Sometimes their grandmothers back in Wyoming died & they got two thousand dollars, all of which they will immediately spend on shoes, airplane tickets & heroin. Some negative girls have families living somewhere else who occasionally send them money, like maybe there's a baby in the background or they're getting paid to stay away. Negative girls are brave because they always live alone. Alone she goes to the hospital in a cab to have her baby, paying with a jar full of change. Inside the hospital no one tells her anything. She screams, the brat is stuffed in an incubator.

Negative girls count their money & curse. They expect you to pay for everything & they expect it to be good or they will complain. A negative girl only reads the wine list to make sure the wine is expensive. She will not accept a house wine. She recommends prophylactics made from imported lambskin, (\$6.98 for 3, but definitely don't break.). If you ask her to pay for anything a negative girl will be insulted. If she does give you any money she will throw it at you, having taken fifteen minutes to extract it from her boot. If you expect her to pay again she will start to flirt with other men in the restaurant, or run uptown to turn a trick. Meaning rises out of what we don't understand.

NEGATIVE GIRLS ON TELEVISION

Negative girls are nervous, irritable & excited. They cannot just sit staring at television, they have to get up & go out & do something. "OH GOD. WELL LET'S GO TO THE MUDD CLUB. FIRST ONE'S ON ME!" And all the girls run down the street for a drink.

Negative girls are much more interested in how horrible life is now than how terrible it was then, & this is, in my opinion, much to their credit. Did television come as voice-overs in your future? They rarely talk about the past. Of course you had a bad childhood, childhood is a bad time & people didn't use to pretend they did until television put the alphabet in its grave.

Negative girls are appearing in increasing numbers on television. Look for these scenes: crying on the toilet. Beating up on their kids. Really pretty but always tightlipped. Must be the season of the witch. Sociologists say negative girl beating is widespread, but a negative girl always wants a negative boy to take care of her because she always has a lot of problems. It's like a cop show on T.V.: a chick arrives with a problem. The policeman comes to her aid & helps her solve her problem. In the end, the chick is happy again. But then another chick arrives with another problem for another sucker. Negative girls spin out their mythological routines on television. Negative girls are Cleopatra. They want to live in electric times & quiver in the silver light of morning with the haunted duchesses of history where television is Shakespeare.

NEGATIVE GIRLS IN THE FUTURE

A negative girl will never be happy. A negative girl will never be satisfied. A negative girl will never be afraid to admit she is bored, tired, depressed, broke & has V.D. again. Every negative girl carries a camera in her cunt, a taperecorder in her head, a loudspeaker in her mouth & television in her eyes. Negative girls are agents. Sex with them is dangerous. They keep files. They hold conferences. A negative girl's common complaint: I am a photograph fixed in the imagination of men. They are whatever they want to be. Negative girls don't think about whether they're happy or not. What a dumb thought.

A negative girl's main ambition is to have fun, but in order to really have fun she is going to have to get a gun. I am putting forth a motion for all negative girls to be able to have licenses to carry effective handguns in their garter belts. They should all be allowed. Of course a lot of people would get shot but so what. If they want to mess around with negative girls that's their prerogative. It's par for the course to get smashed up by a negative girl. At some point she will do her best to bring you down

crash. The trap in her magnet is honesty & pain. Sitting next to it you get hit.

A negative girl wears a shield on her wrist - her suicide scars: all negative girls have scars. All negative girls have abortions. There's a little bit of whore in every negative girl. Sex is too dangerous. All negative girls have been raped & will admit it. But when you try & talk seriously to a negative girl about taking more precautions & not being out alone at 4 a.m. drunk & depressed she gets annoyed & says, "Well you make it sound like it was my fault." A negative girl will not be intimidated. She appears in my room three times in the night crying, "I am dead. I am dead."

A negative girl is a play. A negative girl is an abortion, a moment, a mirror, a mirage, a motor, a meatcleaver, a meathook. Negative girls are Queens of the Mudd, negative girls are bright & beautiful, negative girls walk grandly in regal splendor, negative girls always have a lot of cash in their voices, negative girls are demons & sorceresses &

witches - messengers from a contorted night star. Negative girls rise like wraiths in a funnel of black silk over forests & disappear into fairylands forlorn. Negative girls go out of their bodies & have electric sex. Negative girls are all supposed to be good at pinball but this isn't a magazine world. Negative girls read their schoolbooks & paint the cave walls & experiment with nitroglycerine. Negative girls are serious students learning the skills necessary to qualify. They are invisible in your dreams.

I urge you to make a contact with them. They are the language. They will teach you how to fall over without hurting yourself & how to plan your itinerary with the doctors. Negative girls are the bottom line in girls. You cannot retreat or advance further. They are capable of blurring into the essence of adolescence & freezing in future frames.

GIRL'S ROOM
MUDD CLUB
4-6 AM

THANKSGIVING DAY 1979 ■



Victor Bockris, New York City, 2015, by Robert Carrithers.

I didn't know Nico as well, or as long as many people, but her influence started way before I met her, & in some ways continues to this day. For a couple of years, she played a significant part of my life. She was like no other, before or since.

At a young age, I became fascinated with all things strange & mysterious. I was 8 or 9, & even then was drawn to anything obscure. I was particularly enthralled, however, by pictures of Andy Warhol's Factory. Ultra Violet, Viva, Candy Darling, Edie Sedgwick, Ingrid Superstar & of course, The Velvet Underground mesmerized me, especially the Velvets. With their black turtle necks, sunglasses, rather menacing looks, & this beautiful, arcane blonde. In my opinion she remains one of the most beautiful women that ever lived, although falling into a dragging, then expeditious degeneration years later. My family adamantly discouraged my interest in the weird & wonderful, so I was reduced to coveting the odd picture in the Los Angeles Times. (Although a few years later my Mom did procure a copy of Kenneth Anger's Hollywood Babylon for me) so at this time my interest in the Velvet Underground, Jayne Mansfield's death & The Church of Satan would have to be put on hold for a few years.

When I was older, punk rock had arrived. Blazing, boisterous, uproarious. Similar to all my peers, however, we listened to all good music, new & old. The Velvets were one of our choice bands. I'd been waiting anticipating for years to hear them & knew I would love them & I did. And my favorite songs on the first album were, of course, Nico. As unique as they were, she seemed even more so. It was also an arduous effort to find much information regarding her, & my extreme enchantment grew. I had all of her solo albums (up through *The End*, *Drama of Exile* hadn't come out yet). I listened to them over & over, they were just so dissimilar than anything else that had been done, & it was obvious she didn't give a damn, as in all things, as I was to discover, she did what she wanted. I had taken a photo of the cover of *Chelsea Girl*, & blew it up to a 2'x3' poster for my wall & hauled it around to innumerable apartments. *Chelsea Girl* saw the first & last of her recording only other writers songs, & additional things as well. During that time, she wore average 60's garb, had her long blonde hair & seemed to follow the folky, semi-commercial route. Why, I never discovered but everything changed after that. The long dark hair reverted to a reddish brown (when I asked her about that years later she said it was "too much trouble" which, like most of what she said, could've meant any number of things.) Clear, concise explanations were not her strong point. She took to wearing blousy, flowing caftan like things over loose fitting pants tucked into Frye Boots (I'm



pretty sure it was the same pair as when I finally got to know her.) & now playing the harmonium & writing her own songs. There was nothing like *The Marble Index*. Her next albums followed the same pattern, slow, melodic if rather depressing ballads. Goth way before Goth. I loved the album covers almost as much as the music itself, reinforcing this



Nico, 1979, by Jex Harshman.

arcane, almost ghost like creature, that seemed to do nothing at all to promote herself or even care if anyone liked her. I don't believe she did anything just to be "weird" or, "different" this was just her. Her own songs, the strange subject matter, the harmonium added to the mystique, at least to me.

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Fast forward to 1979. I was living in San Francisco, & Nico, my hero for these multifarious years was playing the famed Mabuhay Gardens. Of course I went, seeing her perform live, in the flesh, hearing that voice in a minute club, was going to be the height of my existence so far. Of course, I took no end of pictures. I'm sure the show wasn't superb, but I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever seen. Prevalent well known local band members came to see her as well. She was always a little befuddled by this, saying, "my music is much different than theirs. They always ask me about Lou Reed, & that was long ago." She signed autographs, which she wrote a particularly fitting one to me, which I will attempt to reprint here. I barely knew what to say to her, just sort of stood there in awe. She wasn't friendly or unfriendly, just sort of otherworldly (which translates to extremely high) She wasn't the gorgeous blonde from *La Dolce Vida*, but she was still stunning in a

shambling sort of way, complete deterioration had not quite assailed as yet. She was also rather tall, imposing without quite meaning to be.

Later that year, I moved to NYC. That's where my strange friendship with her began. It wasn't a friendship per se, I idolized her & thought she could do no wrong. I was living in the Chelsea Hotel, room 406 to be exact, & it was rumored she stayed there off & on. I knew a musician who lived there, & invited me to his room one night where he had a fair amount of musical equipment. A few minutes later, Nico appeared at the door. They had begun working on a song, not for any length of time, but hearing her in such close quarters once again left me dumbfounded I can't remember much of that conversation, only that she was quite funny in a quirky way, & at that point still took an interest in her music & working with like minded musicians. She could be difficult, but more in a petulant child way rather than a yelling over dramatic way. I still didn't really know her, but she played a month or so later, I think it was at Max's but it was 35 years ago & I went to an abundant amount of shows, so I'm not absolutely positive. I went over to her after the show, & she did remember me. She gave me

her Christian Dior compact (this is just the eccentric sort of thing she would do) & we exchanged phone numbers. I was living in the West Village by then, & my roommate announced there was a telephone call for me. I will never, ever forget that deep brooding voice saying "Hello Jere? Thees esss Nico" I literally almost fell over, Nico calling me! I wasn't aware of it then, but this was the beginning of taking limitless buses & doing myriad amounts of heroin.

We arranged to meet at a place in the East Village, 13th street, where she was staying. She went through a good number of temporary accommodation, she was infamous for not paying bills or rent, although she usually didn't have to, people were always willing to put her up for a short period of time. & having very annoying habits. So, I arrive at her place, (which didn't last long) the place certainly looked like a place Nico would dwell, scarves draped over everything, candles, incense, & the harmonium in the corner. In addition, an enraged roommate popping in to enquire about the rent.

Idol or not, even I had to admit she'd seen better days. She'd put on an enormous amount of weight. Those caftans didn't flow as free & easy as they once did. Her hair was more often than not greasy. (I was to discover, like a lot of junkies, showers were not her friend.) She rarely changed her clothes, she tended to wear a brownish red caftan, with a black one for performing. And a red muffler type scarf around her neck. Actually, she wore a vast number of scarves, even if it was 90' outside. In the cold, I never saw her in a coat. A big sweater, some shawl like things, but never a proper coat. She said she didn't really notice the weather. She also chain smoked Marlboro Reds, not such a big deal back then, but her lodgings were never capacious so the odor was cloying, much to the chagrin of more than one roommate. This was also to be the start of countless bus rides, as this seemed to be her preferred mode of transportation. In my delusional state, I thought she was much too dignified & important to take the bus; after all she was a former goddess. When I would offer to pay for taxis, she'd reply "NO, that is stupid, that money could be spent on heroin". I think she took a perverse pleasure in exasperating the bus drivers, taking infinite periods of time to count out her change & being rather stropky about it. I'd done heroin, & quite liked it, but in keeping up with my hero, doing bounteous amounts. (And paying for more & more as well, although she could be generous if she had money which wasn't often.) She followed a plenary nomadic pattern, go for a short

tour somewhere or other, & enlist a new roommate upon return, someone presumably not familiar with her pattern of bailing on money issues. I was always attempting to get her to practice, & she had many willing musicians, but seemed to be consumed increasingly with procuring & doing heroin. Through it all, however she retained that peculiar sense of humour, & still had those beautiful blue eyes. One time, after shooting up she informed me I had arms like "small sausages!(which was extremely bizarre as I've always had rather small arms) By this point she was owing copious amounts money & getting kicked out of various living situations. Around this time, she got a fairly long engagement at the Squat Theater, also in Chelsea. She was staying with some musicians which was working out well as she actually had to play & rehearse, had some friends around there, &, as a matter of course, drug contacts. Here took place a most memorable occasion for me. In the past, many would label her racist, but I never saw this. Case in point, after rehearsing one day, she took me to meet Sun Ra. I guess because they both lived in somewhat alternate worlds, they had an artistic friendship of sorts. Members of the Archestra were there also, he was very, very gracious, but completely batshit crazy, in an endearing kind of way although, some of what he claimed did have a twisted sort of logic. They had finished their practice so I didn't get to see that, but meeting him was an experience in itself. She was getting worse by this time, everyone's longanimity, including mine was wearing thin with her. It was an impeccable time for her to tour Europe, & consequently settling for a time in Manchester, England. She called to say good bye, which is more than many of her peers received. I never saw her again.

In 1988, I was residing in England myself, although in bona fide Nico fashion she was in Ibiza. I happened to be reading the paper at work when there was a brief article saying she had died. I was deeply saddened, especially as it seemed the last few years she had gotten herself together, quit dope & was recording & playing again. It was ironic she died riding a bicycle, the Nico I knew would've never ridden a bicycle! (Although one never knows, she could be full of the unexpected)

So, did I know Nico? I knew one facet of her at one point in her life. She never ever talked about people in her past, never mentioned her son, or really anything intensely personal. She'd discuss her travels, had a witty way of describing events, & truly was one of a kind. And she died owing me \$30.00. ■

LIBERTE, EGALITE,

FRATERNITE

PENNY ARCADE

There has been so much talk about what made America great lately – well, for well over 200 years the answer to that question was New York. I am talking about the mythological New York that belongs to everyone all over the world but which functioned in real time on this planet as a place that created culture, politics, & realities not possible in other parts of America or in the world or that matter. New York is like a stray mother cat which births litter after litter of realities & those realities make their way like dandelion fluff & settle in other places. From its earliest times New York was the place where new ideas, new politics, new sociology fomented & were distilled.

In the 20th Century NY took over from France as the place of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.

After World War Two, with the intelligentsia of France, Germany, Austria, Belgium yea the whole of Europe, transported to New York, France ended its 300-year reign as the center of art & New York leapt at the nourishment provided by those émigrés & applied New York's grit, edge & sharp sense of reality & from the 1940s to the 1990s, NY s burned with a fierce light, unequalled anywhere else on the planet.

Of course that is less true now as New York style inquiry & culture have been seeded all over the world from Beijing to Tokyo, Paris to Buenos Aires, Seattle to Bangkok & while NY is far from dead it is the wounded warrior of urban centers as its geographic size, defined by being a very small island, has made the conquering of it, through the control of real estate interests, pitifully easy.

Even here in the East Village & Lower East Side, known since the days of Emma Goldman at the turn of the 20th century, as a socialist & anarchist stronghold, the strength of our politics has been no match for the strength of their checkbooks. Like petrified wood, authenticity, rebellion & individuality has been replaced with something that has a 100th part of its originality; like cheese flavor in Popcorn, it tastes similar to cheese but there is no cheese in it.

New York is a walker's city. People who say they love NY have a personal relationships with its streets. You set out, your feet guide you, aided by the unseen, those ghosts of NY who are never far from you & who whisper, like wind in your ear, suggesting a turn here, a turn there, as you walk. The wonderful thinker & writer Luc Sante explained it by saying "New York has no truck with its dead, &

they stay unburied, & lay their cold fingers on the present." Honestly, if you are truly interested in NY you need to read his book *Low Life*.

I managed to live in NY as if on holiday for over 40 years. Always feeling like I was on an adventure just walking around doing errands.

Everywhere wild nature asserted herself, thru a crack in the sidewalk filled by a dandelion or on an abandoned street corner where the weedy Sumac trees grew high as if the island itself was trying to toss off its concrete sheeting & return to its wild pristine nature. As late as last year there was a tunnel of wisteria that hung low to the ground at the corner of Stanton St on Clinton St, half a block from my house. It funneled there for close to 40 years but now it has been cruelly cut back by people who apparently don't want to have to bend over when they walk the 12 feet of it.

Certainly from its earliest days New York lured the unusual, the different, as well as the alienated & desperate to cross onto its island of sanctuary & possibility.

They who yearned to breathe free, far from the confines of small town morality found themselves mindlessly washed up here, often with no forethought.

What kept most of us in NY despite the stench & crime, rats & cockroaches was the unparalleled freedom, the anonymity & the crackling electricity of the city itself which most of us who call ourselves New Yorkers ground to, like Walt Whitman before us, thru the bottoms of our feet.

To be honest it was a crap shoot to live NY through the '80s, a kind of outdoor Wall of Death, where you took your chances with your life, your sanity, your morality & your equilibrium. Since the 1990s that crap shoot has been largely economic, NY is expensive, competitive & still very unpredictable.

Case in point: a few years ago I misplaced my keys & at 4a.m. I had no choice but to ring my neighbor Barbara's bell. At that point I had known Barbara for over 35 years. In fact, I had introduced her to the man she would marry, which brought her to live in the small loft building I had lived in for 4 years before she came.

She answered the buzzer, I apologized & said "Barbara, I have lost my keys & I am locked out of the building. Her response? "Shit, man! what are you going to do?" So as you can see nothing is certain in this town.

New York is a place where you eat in the street. You eat as you walk because in NY you always walk & you feel the freedom to eat; a hot dog, a buttered roll, a pizza, a doughnut, a bagel with a smear of cream cheese, a knish.

EB White said that to live in NY you need to be willing to be lucky but many of us felt we were lucky

just to live in NY. NY has a way of caressing those to whom it calls, to others who see NY as alien, harsh or cold, the comfort some find here will remain forever a mystery.

In some ways it is like being loved by monster; hard to explain to other people.

Ten years ago I spent ten days in Paris & returned to New York & was shocked when I experienced New York, for the first time, as ugly. After the fluidity, & curves of the Seine & its languid Parisian streets, New York looked like a grey grid, sullen & stiff compared to Paris.

I was shocked, embarrassed. I felt like a child who had gone to their first day of school & who among the prettier mothers of his schoolmates, discovered for the first time that his mother was not beautiful.

I believe this "ugliness" had to do with the loss of mystery that New York was always shrouded in prior to gentrification & which was almost totally erased by hyper gentrification. Certainly as far back as my first years in NY in the late 1960s, people asked me why I lived in NY, how could I stand it.

Yet I never saw what they saw & I was glad they found it ugly & unlivable & I longed for them to go because I found them boring, with their whining about NY's harshness, a harshness I found intoxicating.

I had lived in NY for almost 40 years at that point, & had always "seen" NY as sexy, glamorous, in a word – beautiful. But it had been the stark urban edginess & tumultuous energy that gave NY that beauty. Stripped of its authenticity, of its hovels, of its wind blown alleys, its no mans land streets, its 24 hour diners, its dive bars, its all-night nite clubs, its bathhouses & sex clubs, its whore strolls & midnight hustlers, I was left seeing just the bones of the place. Like a field of tombstones to a by gone era.

Yes, once this urban beast without pity offered peace & sanctuary to millions who in the shadow of tenements & skyscrapers found grounding & acceptance thru they're place in this landscape.

Real New Yorkers love nothing better than when other people who live in NY go away. Summer, Christmas, 4 & 3 day holidays, where others make their escape are the very times we long for, like a jealous lover who wants their beloved all to themselves. Extreme weather too makes one feel close to the heart of this city; Blizzards, fog, heat waves, downpours; for NY is an island with island weather, with its emotional changeability.

There are many New York's – there is New York at dawn, New York in the middle of the night & by that I mean 3am. There is New York at dusk & New York at high noon & New York at rush hour. New York at dawn with its pink sky & stillness fills one with a sense of possibility. New York between 3a.m. &

5a.m. brings a pondering solemnity with a tearing edge of giddiness, it is the philosophers Stone, the birth canal of wit.

New York at dusk with great clouds afloat in a cerulean sky is the hour where time stops, the sky stays blue, even in winder for many, many hours. New York during rush hour, both morning & evening, is the stream that ferries the commuters in & out of the city. They are daily visitors & for them New York is a paycheck & maybe a night out. They spend their leisure time living elsewhere.

People ask me why I live in NY if I can admit to all of this. My answer is always the same: Cheap rent. A community of sorts. The fact that everywhere else in the world is wracked by the very same gentrification & hyper gentrification which has hollowed NY out. In 2002 in my play *New York Values* I said "New York is not going to become the most boring place in the world in the next 15 years."

And I find that that is true. NY is not the most boring place in the world. However, neither is it that fountain of culture & creativity that it once was.

New York has gone from being a cultural capitol to being a marketing capitol.

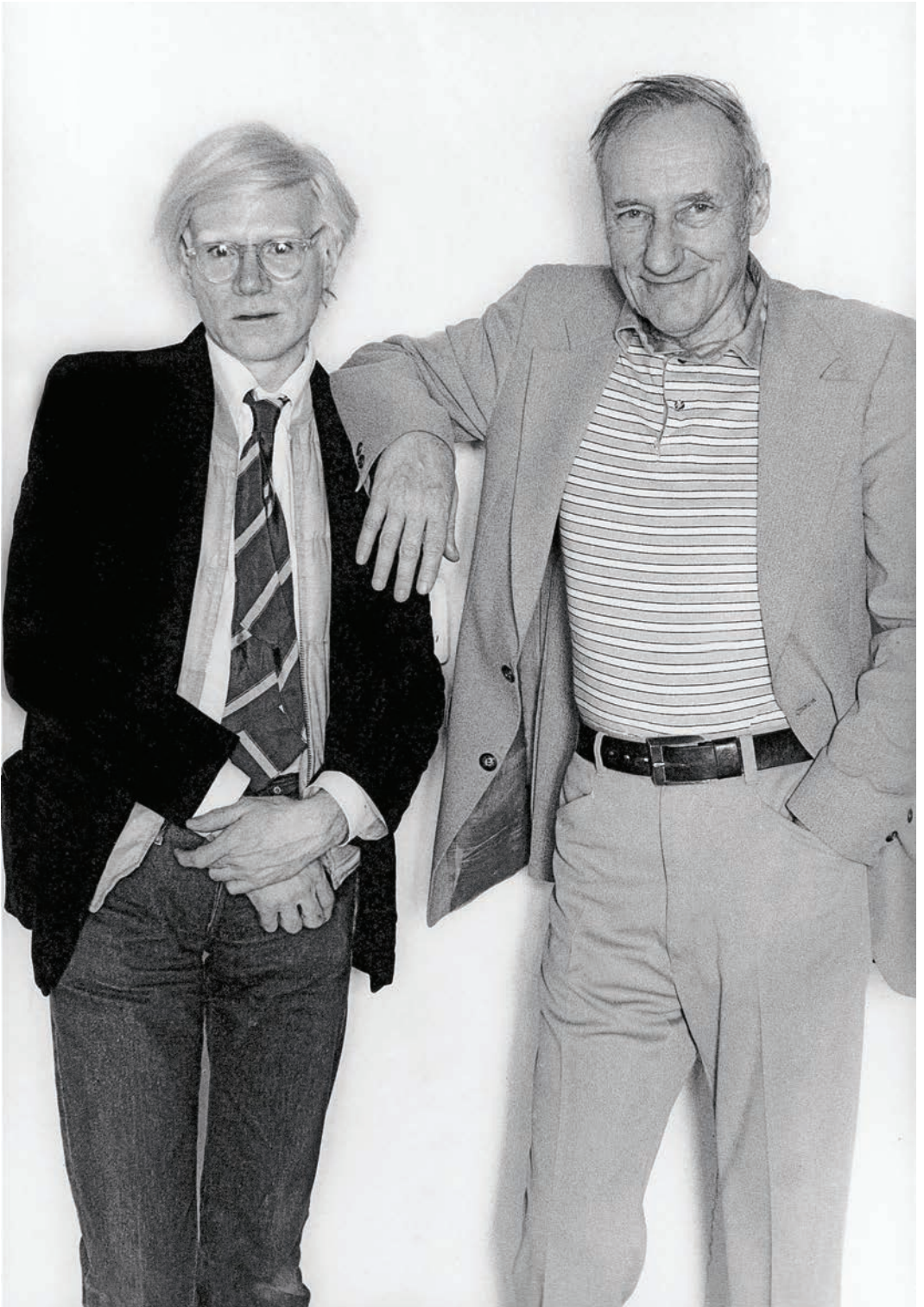
Full disclosure: I first said that in my play *Sisi Sings The Blues* (1996).

That said, the role that New York played for so many decades, indeed, perhaps for close to three centuries, has not been taken over by anywhere else.

Not by Berlin or Prague, or Beijing or Shanghai or Portland or Mexico City, or Buenos Aires or Montreal. No matter what you read in travel blogs & hipper than thou magazine articles. The truth is that what made New York great & vital & generative was that the fruit of it lay so close to its thorns. You can't just create a funky environment & think that is the same thing.

The echo of that thrilling New York is still resounding in these skyscraper canyons.

All you need to do is walk & listen & remember what Walt Whitman said, "If you are looking for me; you will find me under your footfalls." ■



Andy Warhol & William Burroughs, 1980, by Marcia Resnick.

MARCIA RESNICK:
AN APPRECIATION
ROBERT CARRITHERS

My first major influence in photography was Diane Arbus. I love taking portraits of people revealing who they are & what they do. Diane did a lot of street photography & at the exact right moment she somehow captured people that she did not know at all. I truly admired her ability to do that. She did eventually go into people's lives as well & photograph them. Each portrait was a moment of who that person was at that particular moment. You look at the photograph & it tells a story. "My favorite thing," Diane Arbus once said, "is to go where I've never been."

I moved to New York to be closer & to be inspired by my cultural heroes from the early Warhol factory days to New York literature & the exploding music scene that was happening. Finally, when I was living in New York, I would see this energetic woman taking photographs of lots of musicians & things happening in the various scenes. I was having too much fun at that time to take photographs & truly regret that now. She was the photographer Marcia Resnick, who was directly involved in the scene. She was having fun & doing her creativity all at the same time! How can I not admire that?

She took portraits of all of my favorite New York cultural icons. She got to know most of them personally & she did revealing personal portraits of all of them. These portraits really expressed who they were in many different ways. Marcia has a true talent for people to trust her & open up to her. A good example of that is the photograph here of Andy Warhol & William Burroughs. It is an amazing portrait of them together. It was a known fact that Andy Warhol did not like to be touched, at least in public & I have never seen a photograph of William Burroughs smiling, but here you have it all in Marcia's photograph. They were relaxed with her & they totally dropped their guard. I love this photograph. It shows their human side.

I love a lot of photographers & their work, but Marcia has inspired me more than any other photographer. She has a wonderful book out now called, *Punks, Poets & Provocateurs: New York City Bad Boys 1977-1982* with writing by Victor Bockris & others.

I noticed one common thread through Marcia's portraits in this book. In most of the photographs, the people's eyes are looking directly at you. It is said that the eyes are a mirror to the soul. Marcia managed to get this & more. This is really much deeper than just showing who the person is through the portrait. These portraits also somehow reveal her as well. The quote from Paulo Coelho below sums it up. Marcia's photography is magic for me.

"The eyes are the mirror of the soul & reflect everything that seems to be hidden; & like a mirror, they also reflect the person looking into them." (*Manuscript Found in Accra*) ■



Lina Bertucci is a visual artist working in photography, video & film, known for her investigations of identity, subcultures & social landscapes. Pursuing an intense interest in portraiture, American subcultures & the urban American landscape, Bertucci has photographed many once unknown & emerging artists who have since become cultural icons in their own right. In the early 1980s Bertucci captured the creative explosion of New York's downtown club culture – Post-Punk, No Wave, Hip-Hop – including portraits of artists & performers such as Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Ann Magnuson & a host of others. In the 1990s her subjects included Jeff Koons, Elizabeth Peyton, Damien Hirst, Maurizio Cattelan. Recently her work has been exhibited at the New Museum in New York & acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art. ■







William Burroughs, 1987 (top left); Andy Warhol & Grace Jones, 1983 (bottom left); Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1983 (top right); William Burroughs & Keith Harring, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 1987 (bottom right), by Lina Bertucci



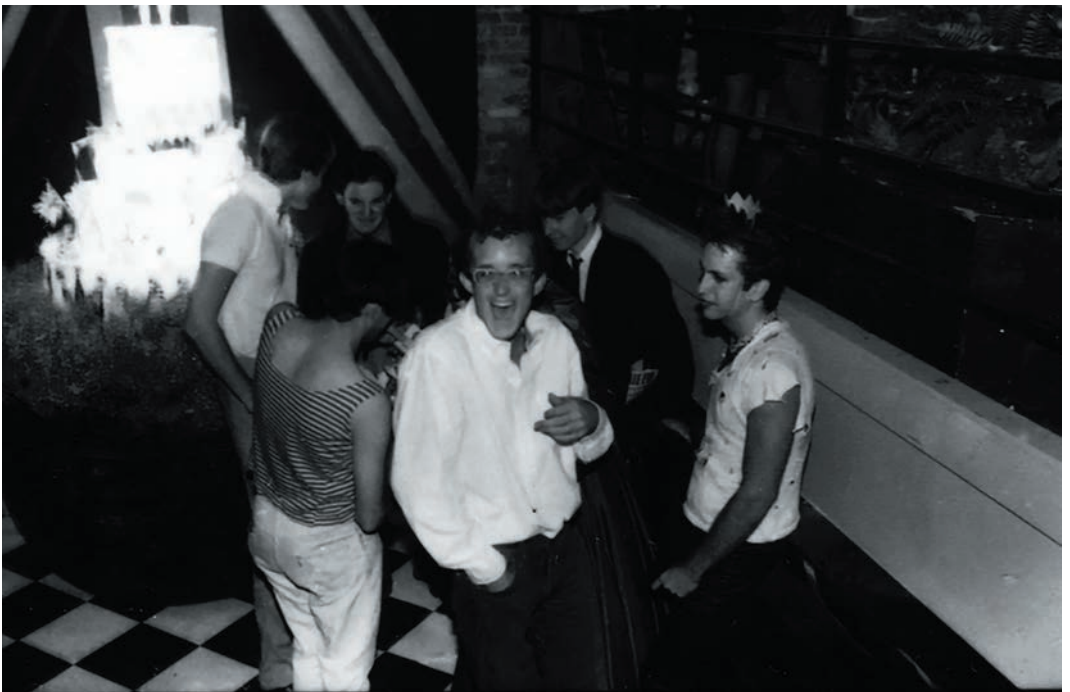
Ira Abramowitz, behind the bar at Club 57, 1981 (top); Ann Magnuson with Kenny Scharf, Royal Wedding Party, 1981 (bottom), by Lina Bertucci



Madonna with Martin, bartending at Lucky Strike, 1982 (top); Break Dancers, South Bronx, 1982 (bottom), by Lina Bertucci



Andy Rees & Ann Magnuson, "Praise the Lord" Party, Club 57, 1981 (top); Kwong Chi with Peter Kwaloff, Club 57, 1981 (bottom), by Lina Bertucci



William Burroughs with friends after his painting show at Tony Shafrazi Gallery 1987 (top); Keith Haring, 1983 (bottom),
by Lina Bertucci



The Fuzztones (Deb O'Nair & Rudi Protrudi) at The Cavern, 1981 , by Robert Carrithers.

We didn't realize at the time that our neighborhood, known as Alphabet City, was the drug center of Manhattan. Although our apartment was easily the most attractive on the block, with vines growing all the way from the ground level to the very top of its sunlit 6 stories, & our particular block seemed fairly safe & well kept, we were stationed smack-dab in the heart of a bohemian ghetto, the rest of which resembled a war zone. 11th, the neighboring street between avenue A & B didn't even have macadam on the street, just ploughed up dirt. Abandoned cars & long-neglected garbage littered the streets. From our kitchen window we could see the building on the corner of 11th & A which bore the boldly graffitied message "HEROIN FOR SALE" in huge white letters, painted on it's side. If we woke up early enough we could view the cue of antsy hopheads lined up outside. From our kitchen window, we enjoyed a bird's eye view of the apartment directly in back of us. At least two couples didn't feel the necessity to pull the shades when they were in a randy mood, & their amorous antics often provided me the incentive needed to face the piles of dirty dishes that would otherwise remain neglected.

JACKSON: Remember all the roaches in that apartment?

DEB: That I remember! You'd turn the lights on, there'd be hundreds of 'em! They'd be eating the cat food.

JACKSON: My mom had this – I guess we moved up there with some furniture – a dinner table & chairs. I might've moved out by then, I never thought about it but years later my mom says, "Whatever happened to that dining room set?"

DEB: (Laughs) Well, here's what happened. The building was such a wreck, & the boiler system was like from the 1800s, you know, the early 1900s. The original furnace was so old it kept backfiring & shutting down & setting on fire & filling the whole building with smoke, so we had no heat & no hot water for a long time. Many nights we were freezing cold, & so we were kind of like savoring that dining room set. Each night we would break a part of it up – one chair, burning the other chair, we broke it apart & we burned it. And then the table... I don't know if we burned the table, I know we burned all the chairs. One chair was the chair I hit Rudi with when we were having a fight (laughs).

Once we were settled in, I wasted no time exploring the neighborhood. I strolled down Avenue A towards 14th Street, the stench of rotting garbage raping my nostrils. NY's garbage men had been on strike for months. Passing a mountain of hefty garbage bags, I noticed the leg of a Collie sticking out of one. Just a few blocks later I noticed a box containing a dead Cocker Spaniel among more piles of trash. It dawned on me that New Yorkers didn't have a lot of options when it came to disposing of departed pets. After all, it's not

like anyone has a backyard where they can bury their canine companions or feline friends. It didn't take long for us to realize just how dangerous our neighborhood was. Tompkins Square Park, which was directly across the street, filled up with thugs & riff-raff as soon as night would descend. Often were the times when we would hear a girl screaming "rape!" at the top of her lungs, only to run to the window & see the silhouettes of her & her attacker, struggling on the basketball courtyard. Each time I'd call the police, & unlike LAs "finest," they'd be there in no time, but always too late. The park thugs had a system in place – when they'd spot the Man, someone would whistle from the other end of the park, another would repeat the signal a few yards away, & so forth. By the time the cops arrived, the attacker would be long gone. In the ten years I lived in the Village, I witnessed several rapes & even a stabbing. The perpetrators were never caught.

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NIGHT TIME IS THE
RIGHT TIME

Despite the danger prevalent in our neighborhood, we weren't about to miss a moment of New York nightlife.

DEB: We'd stay out late all the time – you'd come home, the sun would be coming up, I would take a shower & I'd go to work.

There was always an unexplored nightclub beckoning. So when Marek & Peter from The Flestones invited me & Jackson to go out clubbing with them, we eagerly accepted. I was more than a little taken aback when we arrived at the Crisco

Disco. My trepidation when being enthusiastically frisked by two leather boys at the door only increased once I spotted the huge replica of a Crisco can that served as a DJ booth. After I had to step over a drag queen, obliviously administering fellatio to a faceless shaft in the dim red light of the "men's" room, we decided it was time to blow the joint... no pun intended. At the time there were several sex clubs operating in the city, the most famous being Plato's Retreat. I never made it there, but Jackson & I did go to Chateau 19, an S&M club where anything went. There were only two girls in the whole club, one dom & one submissive. I grabbed the sub, & with no further ado, had my way with her as a bunch of old geezers encircled us, pulling their puds. Still, it was the Rock'n'Roll clubs that were the real attraction. We'd hit two or three a night, always working out some scheme to get in free, or close to it. Max's & CBGB's stamped your hand after you paid, so we'd all chip in for one admission & I'd go in & pay. A few minutes later I'd come back outside, we'd go down the street & I'd copy the stamp design, drawing it onto Deb & Jackson's hands, & we'd go back in. I had an old white motorcycle jacket that belonged to my cousin, Jimmy, in the '50s. Both pockets had huge holes in the lining – wide enough to slip a six-pack through. We'd finish the sixer & restock on the way to the next club. We made friends easily. Deb became a model for Animal X, a haggard punk clothing designer whose hot pink hair & revealing outfits displayed her ample cleavage, as well as the scars where she'd been severely burned in a mishap she never spoke of. Her fashion shows featured porn stars (Sharon Mitchell was her "star" model) attired in her shabbily sewn punk creations & were usually held at places like the Mudd Club. Because I was with Deb, I would be allowed backstage, where the real show was happening. I'd hide behind a pair of shades, enjoying the view as the models changed into their outfits. It was at one of these outings that we met Helen Madigan, who'd been doing skin flicks with Marc (Mr. Ten Inch) Stevens. When she heard we were looking for female backing singers, she volunteered. Although Helen certainly had the look & attitude necessary to become an Oralette (she even invited us to watch her live sex show in Times Square), her oral skills were wasted on a microphone & our search continued. We held endless auditions in the filthiest hellholes ever to be construed as rehearsal spaces. One of the places we frequented was run by Elda Stilleto (née Gentile), who used to sing with Debby Harry before Blondie. We even practiced at a studio run by a crazy Russian who claimed to have managed the Rolling Stones & the Yardbirds. His name was Georgio Gomelsky.

DEB: I ended up rehearsing there all the time, with Das Furlines. I know him still now. He's a wacko!

But a good wacko. He was running a softcore S&M club on the ground floor, & the rehearsal room was upstairs, & whenever Tina Peel would go do gigs, on weekend nights, the S&M club would be in full swing, so we'd have to load our equipment out through these parties, & there was always this big guy – we used to call him Baby Huey – 'cause he was huge, almost seven feet tall, he musta weighed about 300 pounds, & he would be running around in a diaper. This giant diaper with safety pins. And this other girl'd be chasing him with a whip. And all these people'd be doing the weirdest stuff in there & we'd be loading our equipment out & be like, 'Hi everybody!' & we'd go off & do our gig, then we'd have to come back late at night & they'd all still be there.

Of course rehearsal spaces cost money – even the filthiest hellholes. I lucked out, got an extension on my unemployment comp, & stayed home working on the business end. Once Jackson's unemployment ran out, he found a job as a chimney sweep. Deb became an ice cream scooper at the Christopher Street Häagen-Dazs.

PATRICIA: I remember Rudi heckling Walter Lure on 8th street, telling him they did not sell little boy flavor ice cream at Hagen Dazs.

STRANGE ENCOUNTERS OF THE IGGY KIND

Eventually we graduated to a better rehearsal space, a loft where admission was gained only with a secret knock. After about five minutes, one of the owner's reluctant henchmen would peek through the one-way peephole & cautiously allow us entrance. Once inside, we had to pass through a lobby area, where the owner could always be seen reclining on the couch, a mountain of white powder piled on the adjoining coffee table, & an impressive array of NY's elite hipsters glomming lines. Iggy Pop & Blondie's Nigel Harrison & Frank Infante were regulars. One night, after we'd just finished a song, Iggy popped his head in the door, just to tell us we sounded great. Only in New York! And not once, in the entire time we rehearsed there, did we ever see the owner get up off that couch. A few months later I had another Iggy experience, albeit quite different. I'd taken a cab uptown to see Iggy at a club called Hurrah. I'd pushed my way to the front of the stage, as usual. I'd seen Iggy a few times, & knew to expect the unexpected. I'd seen him demand the booking agent of the Peppermint lounge come onstage & pay him, only to throw the money out into the audience. The same night, after the set was over & the band left the stage, Iggy returned, completely nude, & strutted back &

forth, staring down the audience. Hell, I even saw him get a handjob onstage. But it's a little different when the weirdness is directed at you. Somehow I caught his eye during the first song, & from that point on he seemed to be directing the whole show toward me. He stared at me intensely, his bug eyes searing holes through me. In fact, he didn't look at anyone else for the entire performance! Although I'm a huge fan, I did not enjoy the attention at all, & in fact felt extremely uncomfortable, & made a quick exit as soon as it over. Later I hit a trendy after hours club I knew of, saddled up to the bar, & was casually nursing a cold one, when in walks The World's Forgotten Boy. Actually, he strutted in, like he was 6 foot 7, making every move of his well-defined torso count. He spotted me immediately, & slowly strutted my way, again penetrating me with a stare that clearly announced that he wanted to fuck or fight. Neither option appealed to me, so I made a hasty retreat. My last Iggy adventure occurred when he was playing the Ritz about a year later. Believe it or not, as the frontman for Tina Peel, I actually had enough clout to have had a balcony table reserved for me by the management. Sitting alone watching The Idiot strut his stuff, I was suddenly approached by two shadowy figures. "Mind if we sit here?" One asked. "Sure," I replied casually, motioning to the available seats, & then averting my eyes back to the stage, obviously too cool to be impressed by the likes of them. I mean, after all, it was only Keith Richards & David Bowie. Yeah, I know.

GIMME DANGER

My financial stability was in no way secure enough to allow me the luxury of cab fare, so I was in the habit of taking the subway at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, alone. It was just about dawn by the time I hit the Lower East Side. As I made my way down Avenue A, past the 11-year-old Puerto Rican kids selling works, I heard some commotion in back of me. I was already street savvy enough to know that by abruptly turning around, I'd only show that I was frightened. As I looked ahead I saw the shadows of several people, approaching close behind. One suddenly held up a baseball bat & it was aimed at my head. I spun around so rapidly I seemed to have taken my attackers by surprise. There stood four Puerto Rican teenagers, probably no more than 16 years old. One was a girl. It was only because of her that I became frightened, sensing that these pint-sized thugs wouldn't hesitate to kill me to impress her. With as much attitude as he could muster, the ringleader demanded my money. Although my heart was doing a Buddy Rich drum solo, I didn't let on, as I somehow managed to explain, in a tone that sounded much more relaxed than I was, that I'd

just blown every cent on clubbing. I suggested, as nonchalantly as I could, that they'd do much better Uptown, where I'd just been, than down in Alphabet City, where the only marks were junkies & artists. They looked at each other, shrugged, & walked away. I went to Times Square the next day & picked up a switchblade &, from that point on, never left home without it. A few days later the Dead Boys drummer, Johnny Blitz, was critically stabbed during a confrontation with a Puerto Rican gang.

DEB: I was walking up Tenth street, that's in the days when the East Village was pretty rough, & cab drivers wouldn't even take you below Avenue A. It was pretty bombed out looking, & was a pretty horrible ghetto. And I was coming up Tenth Street, & Tompkins Square Park was a pretty rough place, a lotta kids hanging out in there, a lotta junkies, bums, criminals. And these two little kids came out of the park, just teenagers, & they just walked up to me & put a knife to my stomach. Like a big bowie knife. And I don't know why, I just looked down at it, looked at them, & just started laughing. And I said, "Whaddya think you're gonna do with THAT?" And they just got shocked! I said, "Get outta here, you little punks, before I kick your ass!" And they just put the knife down & sulked & walked away! Another time, It was night-time, it was hot, & this little black kid climbed up on our fire escape, was looking in the window, & said "I'm gonna rape you, bitch!"

Deb was lying in bed, & I was in the other room. I heard some commotion & ran in as he bolted up the fire escape. I called the cops. He convinced our ultra-liberal nymphomaniac upstairs neighbor that he "lost his basketball," & she let him in, probably hoping he'd give her some of what he promised Deb. By the time the heat came, he'd escaped. They offered some friendly advice: "Next time, get him to come in. If you kill him outside, you can get arrested." *Only in New York.* As bad as it was by night, daytime was only marginally better. Deb & I encountered more than our share of rough situations, such as walking down the street, as two black thugs would be approaching. As we'd pass, one might just grab a tit or her ass. Sometimes even her crotch. I felt like a puss doing nothing, but I knew they did it hoping I would react. I might as well jump in front of a train. I'd probably have a better chance of survival. Of course not everyone on the Lower East Side placed the same emphasis on survival as I did, as I was to witness first-hand one afternoon in the subway. I'd just jumped the turnstile as the train approached. Even as jaded as I was fast becoming, I was not prepared for what I saw. A 12-year-old black kid, who'd been waiting on the platform, leapt in front of the oncoming train. However bad he must have thought his life was before he jumped, it must've seemed like Paradise

once he realized that he survived. Unfortunately his legs didn't. The paramedics took him away on two stretchers. Whenever I could skip taking the subway I would – I walked 20 blocks a day easily. At the time the subways were just too dangerous. Besides that, there was the matter of fares. Still, there were times when you had to take one, & taxi fare was just too outrageous. The way taxi drivers flew down those streets, you'd probably be safer on the subway anyway. Let me describe what a typical subway ride was like back then: I'm sitting across from a junkie, nodding out with her baby carriage in front of her. A car full of white office workers try desperately to look unperturbed as a black ghetto thug strutting into the car with monster blaster on his shoulder turns up his gangsta rap full-volume, hoping to incite trouble. Or maybe a Vietnam vet rolls in on his mobile bodyboard, torso missing from the waist down, hitting each & every commuter up for change. I once stepped over a dead tranny that was blocking the entrance to the subway. A daily routine of this can make anyone jaded in no time. Surprisingly, I only had two close calls in the entire ten years I lived in NYC. The first being the aforementioned mugging attempt by the Puerto Rican teenagers. The last was at a subway station in upper Manhattan at about 3a.m. I'd spent the evening out at Hurrahs, which was uptown. As I recall I had to switch trains about halfway home. I'm sitting alone on a bench, wearing a pink motorcycle jacket & shades. And there's no one in this station. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I see this black thug slinking towards me. Slow & predatory. My heart started beating so fast & loud I was almost afraid he'd hear it, but I knew that he couldn't see my eyes behind my shades, so my best bet was to act as cool as possible. I continued to look ahead & not toward him, & as nonchalantly as I could, slipped my blade out of my pocket, & rested it on my knee, with my finger on the trigger button. As soon as he spotted it, he backed off. From that point on I developed a bluff to get me out of potentially bad situations – many times walking home in the East Village at night, when I'd pass thugs on the street, I'd simply look them right in the eye as I slowly, & very deliberately, reached into my pocket. Even when I wasn't carrying a blade, it always worked, & I never had any more trouble. Our first gig was the infamous Mudd Club, where we received the unheard of sum of \$500. But not without having to jump through a few hoops. As he had done absolutely no advertising, we had assumed (as is usually the case) we were expected to advertise ourselves. We'd made fliers advertising the show, & Deb & I spent hours in the freezing Manhattan night roaming the streets with a large bucket of paste, slopping the fliers onto telephone poles, buildings

& over other band's fliers – most of which had just been put up only a few hours earlier. We received a call from an infuriated Doctor Mudd himself, Steve Mass, the next day. Livid, he yelled, "I don't even allow the B52s or Richard Lloyd to advertise!" He claimed that the club had it's own clientele, & he was adamant that no low life infiltrate! On the day of the show, Mass had assigned a big black guy named Howie to set our stuff up, but he showed up one & a half hours late. We were reliving the whole Atlantis fiasco over again! After our equipment was set up, Mass called the club & demanded that all our stuff be taken off the stage, & the stage taken down. He was concerned that the stage "took up too much room." As this was our NY debut, we'd invited press, & wanted to make sure they could see us! I called Steve back, threatening that we would not play unless we were allowed the stage. He finally acquiesced, but not without a hitch: we had to strike down the stage immediately after our set. We were scheduled to do two sets. The place was packed. Many of our DC fans came to show their support, as well as several local celebrities. During the set, I fell into a hole in the stage & promptly began jumping on it until it became a gaping trench. My contribution to "striking down the stage." Even though we went over great, Mass decided there would be no second set. I jumped up onstage, grabbed the mic, & announced that we were being deprived of playing the expected additional set. I got the specific impression Doctor Mudd rarely met with opposition, & he once again gave in & allowed us back onstage for the final set. After the show, Howie was nowhere to be found. Steve warned that if we didn't get the equipment moved immediately, he'd deduct \$100 from our pay! Realizing I would have to move our stuff myself, I ran down to the dressing room to get out of my sweat-soaked black skin-tight polka dotted pants & into something more practical, when I spotted Howie, smoking dope with two stylish strumpets. Although Mass had told me Howie would take our stuff back to our place for \$15, Howie claimed to know nothing about it &, taking advantage of our stressed predicament, renegotiated the fee to \$25. We had to harass the owner, Steve Mass, for three days until he finally paid us. After dealing with the likes of Steve Mass & Paul Parsons, we were rather taken aback when Hurrah's gay staff treated us like human beings, especially manager & former Yippie, Jim Fouratt, who made a habit of booking us once a month. From that point on, every member of Tina Peel was added to the permanent houseguest list, no matter who was playing. A few days later we appeared in Rock Scene & were reviewed in New York Rocker. We took our EP to Max's Kansas City & played it to Peter Crowley, proprietor of the legendary sleazepit

that spawned the New York Dolls. He was holding some sort of summit with Jerry Nolan's band, the Idols, in his office. Steve Dior, the lead guitarist, seemed amused by "Punk Rock Janitor," so Crowley booked us to open for the Misfits, & like Hurrah, put us on the permanent guest list – even though we hadn't played yet! In fact, our EP was even added to their jukebox. One week later Doreen Reilly called from Epic Records, requesting a copy of the single. And a few days earlier Bobby Stardup called to offer us a gig at the Hot Club in Philadelphia. Things were moving so fast we could barely keep up.

THE BAND THAT GLOWED IN THE DARK

Thursday March 29, 1978, the day after our Max's gig, we learned that there was an accident at Three Mile Island, the nuclear plant that was situated less than a mile from my old Pennsylvucky trailer park. Pregnant women & children were being evacuated within a 10-mile radius. A few days later they upped it to 20 miles. Dad called to tell me he was evacuating. Jim & Cheryl were predictably nonplussed. Jim even called me a week later to break the good news: He & Cheryl were getting married, & he wanted me to be the best man. I'd have to wear a baby blue tux. Right. Rene still lived in Harrisburg, no more than five miles from the site, & was anxious to finally move to New York. In fact, after Rene had spoken with our landlords, they offered her a 2-bedroom apartment in our building for only \$300. She asked Jim & Cheryl, who both had jobs & still lived with their parents, to share it with her. Jim said he doubted they could get the money together. Although Jim had kept stringing us along, it was at that point we knew he would never leave his cushy Pennsylvucky life, & a new search for the right bassist ensued. Meanwhile Rene had quit her job & given notice to her Harrisburg landlord when the apartment our landlords had offered her fell through. The flies might've all been expiring in Highspire & our bass player might've been suffering from Pants Separation Anxiety Disorder, but every night's a happy holiday down at Max's Kansas City, baby. Deb & I left our woes behind & gallivanted off to catch Johnny Thunders' late set. At one point after the show, she was standing around downstairs when Thunders teetered up to her, & looked at her as if to say, "Hey Baby, here I am, let's go." She started laughing hysterically at him, so he just turned & staggered away. A few nights later we went to see Roxy Music at the Palladium where Deb claimed that David Johansen was giving her the eye. Sylvain had heard that we refer to him in the lyrics to "Punk Rock Janitor" & came to a gig to check

us out. As far as I was concerned, we had arrived. Obviously influenced by Tina Peel, Steve Mass threw a pajama party at the Mudd Club, & even requested our single for the DJ. I met Ramones manager Danny Fields, who'd seen us at Max's & Hurrah & thought we were "very good," & said he liked our songs. Hurrah's Jim Fouratt tried to talk me out of my pajamas. In the nights to follow we rubbed elbows with Eno, Tina Weymouth, & Glenn Buxton from the original Alice Cooper band. Greenwich Village groupies indeed! It soon got to a point where, if we didn't run into celebrities, we'd think a club was boring. Out of all the NY clubs, the Mudd Club was the wildest – literally a rapacious Romper Room for horny hedonists. Rock'n'Roll's answer to Studio 54, complete with obnoxious doormen whose Nazi-esque admittance policies insured that only the highest echelon of underground elite gained entrance while forcing desperate posers to wait – sometimes for hours – for the privilege of shelling out the inflated admission charge, not to mention the exorbitant drink prices. Despite Tina Peel getting off to a rough start with Steve Mass, he hired me to paint wall murals for theme parties, stock the juke box, & help decorate the club for theme parties. Hence I was usually granted free & prompt admission. Still, if a doorman didn't know me, it was possible that I might have to wait in the cold with a herd of Long Island losers for up to 15 minutes – something I couldn't possibly do without the proper liquid incentive. I soon developed a nightly ritual. I would pop one or two Black Beauties, & stop at a generic bum bar a block away (it was actually called "Bar," & offered bargain basement prices to a clientele consisting solely of professional drinkers). After downing 2 shots of cheap whiskey with a beer chaser, I'd return to the Mudd, ready to join the "beautiful people" who waited patiently for the privilege of admission. Once inside, I would immediately finagle a free drink & proceed to lean on the bar, striking my most convincing "available" pose. It rarely took more than 15 minutes to be picked up. The girls that frequented the club were quite aggressive & usually very attractive. Sometimes we'd even exchange first names. Hell, I read somewhere that Madonna used to frequent the Mudd back then. I wonder if I ever fucked her. The Mudd bathrooms were "co-ed," & the stalls were almost always occupied, either by fornicating strangers, or music industry types "powdering their nose." On more than one occasion, couples who couldn't wait for privacy fucked openly in the club. I inconspicuously balled a chick on the dance floor one night, standing up, utilizing a slit in her dress. Another time I divested an obnoxious go-go dancer of every stitch of clothing, which I threw on top of the suspended PA columns, forcing her

to run around the club stark naked, screaming for help. One night, upon spotting *Punk* magazine's new resident punk, Spacely, nodding off at one of the booths, I convinced a nearby punkette to be my accomplice, as we removed his pants. He was still there, hours later, exposed & unnoticed.

I took Jim Nastix to the Mudd one night. As we stood swilling Black Russians at the bar, a little blonde chick approached me. Without a word, she began to unzip my fly. Trying to remain casual, I warned her that if she took it out, she'd "better suck it." In front of at least 50 people, she dropped to her knees & did just that. I was sure that Jim would move to New York after that display. The fellatrice in question, by the way, was Demeta, who makes an appearance or two in Legs McNeil's excellent chronicle of the NY Punk scene, *Please Kill Me*. It wouldn't be the last time I'd experience her rather unconventional approach to breaking the ice. After hearing that Shadows of Knight frontman Jim Sohns was tour managing Skafish, I went to Irving Plaza to see them, with hopes of meeting Sohns. My plans were waylaid when I succumbed to the call of nature & visited the venue restroom. Opening a stall door right in time to catch Demeta finishing a guy off. Without missing a beat, she invited me in with a rushed "Next!" Demeta was a gal of few words. Needless to say, I missed the show. There was ALWAYS something going on. Every night there was at least one band I HAD to see. One happening I HAD to attend. I was getting more sex than I'd ever imagined. I was rubbing elbows with all the "stars" we'd only seen in Rock Scene magazine. It was hard to fathom why someone in a podunk town in Pennsylvania could possibly prefer commuting to the Big Apple to be a weekend rockstar, & then scurry home in time to get a good night's rest before returning to his mall gig. Where else could you catch The Heartbreakers playing Max's whenever they needed junk money? Or witness Cheetah Chrome get his ass kicked on an almost nightly basis; Sid Vicious playing a 3 night stand just before killing Nancy; Experience Jerry Lee Lewis crooning country tunes at the Ritz, while Johnny Thunders, in a drunken (I assume) stupor, pushes his crotch against your ass while yelling, "play some ROCK & ROLL, you FAGGOT!?"* In the ten years I lived in the Rotting Apple, I saw EVERYONE worth seeing, & rarely paid a dime! In fact the only time I wasn't out 'till daybreak was when I was sick, & other than a hernia operation I conned Medicaid into paying for, I can't even remember ever being sick. Hell, I can't even remember half the acts I saw at this time.

*After that same show, while hanging around in the lobby of the Ritz, I saw two bouncers carry the comatose body of opening act, Mick Ronson, out of the club. Later, a Ritz employee told me that Mick

had been backstage, snorting brown heroin with Jerry Lee. Lewis then went on & did a brilliant set, but lightweight Ronson evidently couldn't keep up with the Killer.

FOR ONE EYE'S CLOSED
(THE OTHER'S
TWO FOOT OPEN)

One day we got a call from CBGB; the headliner cancelled & we were offered a gig headlining over the Shirts, whose singer, Annie Golden, had starred in *Hair*. The gig was a success, despite Jackson's black leather jacket being stolen. While I sat backstage afterwards, drenched in sweat, I experienced my first official encounter with N.Y.groupies. Submarina & Cindy wanted to take me downstairs to the infamous bathroom for a workout. Submarina,* who'd earned her moniker, in her own words, because she "went down, down, down," later became the manager for the Raunch Hands. Cindy was Spacely's biker wife. Although Jim & I ended up leaving with two other girls, I took a raincheck & Submarina did come through at a later date, in an atmospheric CBGB's stall, as promised. Cindy wasn't much to look at but made up for it with her 'one of the guys' demeanor. She swore like a trucker & could match me drink-for-drink, not an easy feat considering I was on Black Beauties. Although I never took her up on her less-than-subtle advances, we did play footsies under the table when she, Spacely & I would go out drinking. Or maybe I should say she played footsies. My feet weren't involved. It was obvious what Spacely saw in her – the drinks were always on her. So when she got killed (a car or motorcycle accident, if memory serves), he went off the deep end & became a junkie. Well, not just a junkie, but probably the Lower East Side's most notorious junkie, aside from Johnny Thunders. I remember how quickly the change took place. One day I saw him walking around the Lower East Side with his brown hair & both eyes intact, & only a few days later, his hair greased back & died babyshit green (actually, a failed attempt at "blonde") & an eyepatch covering the eye he said he lost to the heel of a drag queen in a skirmish at Dave's Luncheonette, an all-night diner on Broadway & Canal. We weren't tight pals but did hang out fairly often (we shared the same birthdate, giving us something in common) so it was a drag to see him deteriorate into the loathsome scumbag he became. In 1985 Lech Kowalski made a documentary film about him, entitled *Gringo* (retitled *Junkie* when released on video), which more than adequately summarizes the Lower East Side junk scene at the time. Spacely died soon after from

junk-related complications.

*Submarina went on to produce the *Marina Experiment* a "shocking, one-of-a-kind documentary about a father's voyeuristic obsession with his daughter."

57 VARIETIES

As unlikely as it seems, Deb & I somehow became patrons of the elite Club 57, a small members-only nightclub located at 57 St Mark's Place, in the basement of the Holy Cross Polish National Church in the East Village. Predominantly a hangout & performance venue for artsy fags & weirdos, & presided over by performance artist Ann Magnuson.

ANN MAGNUSON: Stanley, the middle-aged Pole who worked at Irving Plaza, needed some "alternative" entertainment over at a smaller club he had on St Mark's Place, so Tom Scully & Susan Hanaford started the Monster Movie club on Tuesday nights, while I managed the joint the rest of the week. Soon Keith Haring was curating erotic Day-Glo art shows, & folks like Kenny Scharf, John Sex, Wendy Wild, Klaus Nomi, Joey Arias, Tseng Kwong Chi, Tom Rubnitz, David McDermott & Peter McGough, Fab Five Freddy, & countless others got in on the fun. (This was) back when there were fewer than a hundred pointy-toed hipsters skulking around the East Village streets & a boy could get the shit beat out of him for dyeing his hair blue. Girls fared a little better. We could parade about in our rockabilly petticoats, spandex pants, & thrift-store stiletto heels & get away with just a few taunts ("Hey, Sid Vicious's sister!") from a carload of Jersey assholes.

Although the club was primarily the stomping ground for budding performance & visual artists, most of whom (if not all) were gay, there were quite a few rather interesting bohemian babes in attendance as well, especially Wendy Wild, who would go on to form Mad Violets & finally Das Furlines, as well as several members of the zany all-female percussion ensemble, Pulsalama.

DEB: Too bad I was so busy playing in Tina Peel... I wanted to be a Pulsalama girl.

The club was open every night & members were encouraged to host their own presentations – Keith Haring used to read his "neo-dad poems" from inside a fake television set & later put on events & exhibitions there, as did Kenny Scharf, who curated the *Black Light Show*, which featured manager Ann nude, decorated in day-glo body-paint to match the psychedelically-painted neon fixtures. Ann, who was as much den-mother as curator, was responsible for many of the "theme nights," most being one-off performances that have gone down in the annals of East Village myth, such as Women's Wrestling

Night. All the 57's gals (the "Ladies Auxiliary," as they preferred to be known) participated, each creating their own wrestling persona & matching costume. A make-shift ring was constructed especially for the event. Then there was the ingenious Monster Model Night, where model kits were provided, along with model cement & bag. Live ambient noise was provided by the Man Rays (Tom Scully on electric drum pads, Magnuson's boyfriend, Kai Eric on bass, & myself on Frequency Analyzed guitar), while toxic fumes engulfed the non-ventilated venue. Ann's Striptease Night was a big success as well, & although I could've skipped John Sex's bare-all, Ann's performance was certainly a sight for sore eyes. Even Deb had a night of her own (Deb O' Nair's Tribute to the Farfisa Organ), & The Fuzztones debut gig was one of the last events held before the club changed hands. Probably the event that initially enticed us was "Monster Movie Club." Every Tuesday night, Tom Scully & Susan Hanaford would show the worst monster movie that they could find, & everybody would scream & carry on, interacting with the movie. Bitchy queen Drew Straub was 57's own Rex Reed & a natural as the house critic. As the event got more popular, Scully started inviting cult directors & actors to present the films. When they showed "Ilsa, She Wolf Of The SS," Diane Thorneguested. For the screening of "Blood Feast," Hershell Gordon Lewis made an appearance. He even got Russ Meyer & legendary TV horror host Zacherle. It was at the screening of Hershell Lewis's *2000 Maniacs* that I had the unfortunate experience of meeting Bill Landis, who'd later enjoy cult fame as the editor of *Sleazoid Express*, the first magazine to cover exploitation movies. Overhearing a conversation I was having with Deb about my favorite film of all-time, *Nightmare Alley*, he butted in from behind, utilizing the opportunity to expound on the film, & on carnival geeks in particular. At the time I was going through a phase, instigated by the film, where I was fascinated with geeks. So to meet a fellow freak fanatic seemed like a good thing. After all, it wasn't everyday that I met someone who shared the same rather isolated obsession. He conned me into giving him my phone number & sure enough, he called the next day, proposing we act out the dialog of the film to each other over the phone. When I balked, he insisted with an intensity that made me rather uneasy, to say the least. I guess we must have given him our address too, since the next thing I knew he was knocking on our door. As he entered our apartment, it was obvious that he was agitated. He started ranting about his parents, & a bully that had picked a fight with him. He whipped out a spray can of mace, & proceeded to wave it around the room while telling us he'd just tested it on a stray dog. I kicked him out.

RENE: Bill Landis was an odd duck, for sure. I seem to recall we met at the Monster Movie

Club. He was totally into gore, snuff & splatter films. We were going to the Mudd Club for the Nazi Love Party. Why he was at my apartment, I don't know. I only remember that I had a groovy little biker cap & a riding crop I made from a drum stick & strap of some kind. I pretended to spank him with it & he almost went into a coma of bliss! It was a little freaky. He became a regular at Club 57, despite being despised by practically everyone there. Although I was certain that he was a homophobic closet case, he somehow developed a relationship with a Pulsalamma size-queen named Stacy, who was so impressed with his massive meat spigot that she entered his statistics in the Secret Boy File, the holy grail of the Ladies Auxiliary. The file contained indexed cards, each supplied by a member of the Auxiliary, revealing sexual details on scene guys they'd bedded. To access the files, one had to submit an entry.

RENE: The Secret Boy File! Well it was pretty interesting to say the least. Designed to allow us girls to share info on any man in order to choose wisely. In order to elaborate I would have to divulge info & so no. It will always be a secret. Most of them were nice but some were warnings. So & so is funny, this guy has herpes, that guy kisses like a fish. Watch out, this one cheats, that one is only into himself, he's a fun date, great dancer. Stuff like that. Word must have gotten out about this unlikely stud, as he went on to do quite few porn flicks.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS

Eventually Ann Magnuson left her position as manager of Club 57 to pursue a film career (she starred in "Making Mr. Right" with John Malcovich, & appears in a key scene with David Bowie in "The Hunger"). In 1981 the Mudd Club's Steve Mass began showing up at Club 57, & hiring members to help him acquire part of that scene.

ANN MAGNUSON: Ironically, about the same time money & fame entered the picture, so did AIDS. By that time, Club 57 was winding down. The place closed around 1983. After that, a good third of our surrogate family died from the Plague & we were forced – reluctantly, & painfully – to grow up.

Klaus Nomi was the first casualty of what was then called GRID (Gay Related Immune Disease), soon to be known as AIDS after it was determined that heterosexuals were also susceptible. Notorious sex clubs like Plato's Retreat soon closed their doors & the gradual cleaning up of Times Square began. Yet the AIDS scare that dominated the nightly news didn't seem to be much of a concern in the rock clubs that I frequented. Perhaps I wasn't the only

one not entirely convinced by the Green Monkey explanation – I mean, after all, men have been fucking monkeys since the dawn of time, right? Why would they suddenly get AIDS from a little Jungle Fever?

STEVE ARM (MUDHONEY): Rudi Protrudi. We pattern ourselves after him. "AIDS is a government plot to keep me from having sex!" He actually said that!

IN FUZZ WE TRUST

Although we'd actually played the Fuzztones set as Tina Peel at the 9:30 Club in 1980, & opened for Tina Peel as The Fabulous Fuzztones at Hurrah the year before, our official debut gig as "The Fuzztones" was actually at Club 57 the following year. For years I've erroneously reported it as 1980 but while researching for this book, I came to realize that it was, in fact, September 19, 1981. Club 57 rarely had bands, but since Deb & I were members, & our debut was more of an event than a gig, the exception was made. We arranged for a psychedelic lightshow to be projected in back of us, & day-glo painted go-go girls to dance while we played. I believe they were topless as well. Instead of an opening act, we rented a video projector & showed *Riot On Sunset Strip*. We provided the DJ with the appropriate sounds to play before & after our performance. The show was a smash, & that fact was not wasted on two specific members who sat in the front row, studying us intently. Tom Scully, who was in charge of Monster Movie Night, & his pal Rebop, approached us a few days later, with the idea of holding a big psychedelic event in town. They wanted us to headline. To prepare for such an important event, we began rehearsing at a professional studio arranged for us by Patti Smith's manager, Jane Friedman. We also started taking as many gigs as possible, "warming up" for the big event. We soon found ourselves playing to 10 people on audition night at CBGB's, or at the bottom of the bill at Great Gildersleeves, a heavy metal Bowery bar just one block north of CBGB's that *Fanzeen's* Robert Barry Francos described thusly: "It was a miserable hole with no atmosphere & that did not feel like any other club at the time: It felt like jocks, frats & yuppies, & just stank of poseurs." Everyone with whom I hung out felt the same way. There was something tainted about the place, so it was very rare that we went there, even though they occasionally had some major shows. There weren't many places around to do a show, so a band would play where it could, but it always felt like seeing your favorite uncle in a hospice. We'd gone from \$1000 a night as Tina Peel to \$10 – & sometimes as low as \$5 – as The Fuzztones. Of course we were expected to split that

amongst the four of us. Forget about paying the roadies! Admittedly we missed the money we got as Tina Peel, but something about a band starting from scratch & roughing it out brings them together. By the time Scully & his pal had secured a location for their proposed event we were ready. They chose a huge venue on North Moore Street, six blocks below Canal. It was called the Cavern (not to be confused with LA's famed Cavern Club). The event was to be called *Tom Scully's Psychedelic Weekend*, & would present 3 of NY's top psych bands each night, in addition to go-go girls, light show, & all the trappings... or should I say trippings? Of the psych bands chosen, we were the only retro-oriented act – Certain Generals, who headlined opening night, were heavily influenced by Echo & The Bunnymen, as were most of the lesser known bands on the bill. We would be headlining Saturday night, with Wendy Wild's band, Mental Floss opening. Scully promised abundant promotion, but better still, he & Rebop had promised us a very substantial cut of the take. Determined to make the most of the opportunity, we developed a promotion campaign of our own.

MICHAEL PHILLIPS: We went on a self-promotion trip around Washington Square Park with some cans of spray paint. Feeling brave, I jumped out of the car, walked up to a bank & sprayed "Fuzztones" in big letters on the bricks. Jumped back in the car only to find out I misspelled it as "Fuzztoes." I got some serious glares from Rudi & Deb that time. Scully had plastered the city with giant posters, & gotten the *SoHo News* to do a big pick-of-the-week feature complete with photo of a bunch of the more visually-oriented musicians & cast, posing in front of a giant psychedelic mural left on an East Village apartment building – a genuine artifact leftover from Greenwich Village's glory days. Caught up in the momentum, I volunteered to help prepare the club, & ended up painting an entire room of the club in black & white op-art motif, putting in several 8-12 hour days in doing so. Keith Haring & Kenny Scharf were scheduled to "add color" to the Happening, but I have no memory of them being involved.

LSD MADE A WRECK OF ME

October 24, 1981. The afternoon of the gig was spent body-painting go-go girls. Despite the unusually generous promotion, I was still amazed at the turnout that night. The venue was packed. Over 1000 in attendance. It was obvious that New York was ready for an entirely new scene, & we were determined to usher it in. The neo-psych noodlings of the opening bands had set the stage & by the time we went on the audience was more than ready. Marsha, an Amazonian go-go girl who would later

become the organist for the Fall, approached the microphone. "And now, ladies & gentlemen, the real thing... The FUZZTONES!" A killer light show by animator Henry Jones illuminated us as we hit 'em with everything we had & the crowd flipped. After our humbling experiences at CBGB's & Gildersleeves, it seemed we had finally arrived. Basking in the afterglow, I decided to head over to see my pal, Bob, one of my Mudd Club bartender cronies, who was manning the punch bowl.

ROBERT CARRITHERS: I had a small bar, like almost a hole in the wall, in the basement of the club. Only five people, at the very most, could stand at the bar. Maybe less. I was nicknamed the Rev or the Reverend because of that place. Why? Because people would go to my bar & I would get them all very drunk & they would confess things... What can I say? Most were friends who got drunk at my bar for little cost. Or sometimes for nothing. It got to be known as the Reverend Bob's confessional booth. The punchbowl... I forgot whose idea that was... There was a guy named Bebop who worked there & managed the club. He OK'ed it. I think it was Tom Scully's idea. We mixed the punch with acid & made it shine a bright purple under the black light. The people could only get the punch from me. Bebop was at the door & he gave special specific people a small bell. When people handed me the bell & asked for the special, I would give them a glass of spiked acid punch. I forgot how much acid there was in it, but it was certainly enough, that's for sure. The acid in the bowl was purple Owsley acid that someone brought from San Francisco, the real stuff. I remember *SoHo News* did, surprisingly, write that the punch would be "flashy." I'm surprised we didn't get closed down, but that was a different New York.

Of course, having already done my bit, I felt compelled to enjoy the rest of the evening in the spirit that it was intended...

ROBERT: I do remember giving some to Rudi. He laughed a lot. At one point he licked the bar & laughed. I recall him dancing with some of the painted go-go girls & getting smeared with paint. After a certain point in the evening, he could not talk. He only made noises, but no words.

DEB: We were harassing the hell out of people, that's what I remember, just like walk up to them & start, like, saying things... like "poo poo?" We were trying to get them to engage in a conversation with us, by doing that, see what they would come up with.

ROBERT: They did play a fantastic show with the Fuzztones though, but when it came to getting paid, Rudi was in the back office. I think they wanted to pay him less than what they were supposed to get paid. He laughed at it & walked out without

getting paid anything at all! That is my memory of it – but then again, I was a bit hazy that night.

I may have been laughing on my way to the office, but my recollection of the events differs slightly from Robert's. I'd gone to get paid & I remember Rebob sitting behind his desk, all smug because he'd made a killing. When I told him I expected the amount we'd agreed on earlier – a percentage of the door which amounted to a couple grand – he told me he wasn't going to pay it. If I'd been straight, I would've jumped over his desk & rearranged his face. But the minute I heard those words uttered from his thieving mouth, I peaked. The acid hit me like a ton of bricks & I couldn't speak. My whole body began to convulse. It was actually all I could do to just get up & wobble out of there. They did rip me off, but karma has a way of biting you on the ass...

ROBERT: At the end of the second night, Tom ended up at home with Charlotte & Marsha, two of the go-go girls who danced on stage with the bands. Their skin was painted a bright florescent blue & yellow & glowed under the black lights as they danced wildly. When they got to Tom's place, he passed out. As he was sleeping, they painted him all blue, but they did it with the wrong paint. Tom woke up the next day in an acid haze, saw himself blue in the mirror & was in shock. He had a bigger shock when he found out that the go-go girls used the wrong paint & he was blue-skinned for over a week.

VULCAN DEATH GRIP

Ann Magnuson had stopped managing Club 57 & by '82, had gone on to the silver screen, her first major accomplishment being a prominent role as David Bowie's first victim in *The Hunger*. She maintained her high profile as a NYC performance artist, & it was around this time that she asked me to play guitar for a one-off heavy metal satire band she was putting together for an event called *Dark Amusements* ("A Private Experience in Depravation") at Danceteria. *Vulcan Death Grip* was to be the name of the "band," which consisted of her then boyfriend Kai Eric on bass, & a drummer whose identity has long since escaped me. Other than the location – "the forgotten, decayed decrepitude of a top secret abandoned floor atop the gothic Danceteria complex" – not a lot of thought seemed to go into the first show. Although we were supposed to be some kind of metal parody with heavy occult leanings, our material consisted mostly of covers of stuff like "Smoke On The Water," & "Purple Haze." I wore a heavy metal-style wig, & there was a lot of smoke. I can't remember much else. What I do remember was that, with Ann's newly acquired fame, she was able to get us \$1000 for the show.

ANN MAGNUSON: That was a heavy metal band & I did it one night only at Danceteria. It was in the wake of *Blade Runner* & *The Road Warrior*. The show was on the abandoned tenth floor & we just trashed the place, which was already trashed to begin with. We had two smoke machines & all these people there with snakes & lizards & a humongous green jello bar, but most people left before the show was over, the smoke just pushed everybody out. We did a heavy metal medley: "Smoke On The Water," "Purple Haze," "Five To One." I did a black magic incantation & had these two monks present wigs to the guitarists. It was ridiculous.

After the show, Ann & I discussed doing it again, only next time we'd put a lot more thought into it. By the time we played the *Limelight* (or "the *Limelight Memorial Coliseum*," as Ann renamed it) a month later, we were already writing our own material & had our act down. No longer Ann's main squeeze, Kai was replaced with genuine heavy metal bass beast Randy Pratt, who would assume the moniker "Wolverine."

RANDY PRATT: I was the bassist in New York City's newest, coolest band, *The Fuzztones*, when Rudi asked me to be part of his latest brainstorm; a heavy metal spoof to be called "*Vulcan Death Grip*." The *Fuzztones* knew that I was an unrepentant metal head. They teased me a lot for it, but for this project, I guess it was a plus. Rudi took me to a club on Ave A one night to see Ann Magnuson perform. She was a musical comedienne who had conceived *Vulcan Death Grip* with him. I have a pretty clear memory of her doing a folk spoof, but I ended up getting a little drunk. Some guy turned me onto speed in the men's room & I ended up going home with a cute Asian comedienne & having violent sex 'til dawn... a great beginning to a great band!

Ann & I both agreed that our drummer wasn't right for what we had in mind, so once again a borrowed musician from another band, Ira Elliot from the *Drive-Ins*. In his *Adam & the Ants* make-up & horned Viking helmet, he became "Vlad the Impaler." And then there was yours truly – K-Zar, the Man Beast. No longer content with merely one wig, I now donned two, one for length, with the other added on top, for that impressive Johnny Thunders overkill. Aware that we had to outdo the bands we were satirizing, I chose a snazzy black leather jockstrap, which I customized by adding a metal airplane ornament lifted from the hood of a car. I completed the outfit with black fishnets & thigh-high black leather platform boots. Ann's character, the flaming red-maned Raven *Bottecelli* from *Ronkonkoma, Long Island* (pronounced *Long Guyland*), was the frontwoman from hell, sporting skimpy skin-tight leather apparel & a pentagram magic-marked onto her generously exposed cleavage.

RANDY: Our first gig was opening night at the Cat Club on 13th street in Manhattan. I was blown away by the turn out & response. The place was sold out! Around 600 screaming people. We went down a storm & I felt we couldn't fail. Ann, who had appeared a little East Village frumpy to me up 'till then, amazed me by transforming herself into "Raven" for the first time. Wild & sexy in a bouffant wig, lurex body suit, thigh-high platform boots & garish make up, I wouldn't have recognized her if I hadn't had the thrill of seeing her put the outfit on in front of me. I admit I developed a big crush on her, but was too intimidated to let on.

Maybe Randy didn't know that we'd incorporated tapes of thousands of metal fans screaming their guts out, which we had the soundman mix in with the applause after every song, to great effect. No longer retreading obvious Hard Rock covers, our set was now comprised of outrageous original material like "I'm on a Holiday in Hell (& I'm Wasted)," "Pigs Squeal in Fear," "Eat Shit & Die," & "Get It Up Or Get Out."

RANDY: The songs were written very quickly in my rehearsal space in the Music Building on 8th Ave & 38th. Rudi & I threw a lot of metal clichés at Ann for her funny lyrics.

We proceeded to play all the coolest clubs in town & got cockier after every performance. Ann's raps were great. She poked fun at suburban metal stereotypes. She referred to the town, Lake Ronkonkoma, in Long Island, as a make believe mecca for metal heads. I asked her about it once & she said she didn't know anything about the place. As an interesting, full circle coincidence, I've been playing since 2002 with Bobby Rondinelli, a real, live, Metal God. Bobby's performed & recorded with Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow, Black Sabbath & Blue Oyster Cult... & lives in Lake Ronkonkoma! Raven's hilariously outrageous monologues, coupled with the band's over-the-top attire & onstage antics, easily outdid anything Spinal Tap would dream up a good two years later. After our debut gig, I was recuperating backstage, when someone came back to tell me how much they loved when I kicked the dwarf across the dance floor! Two members of the opening act, Raging Slab, had confirmed it, but I had absolutely no memory of it whatsoever. What I do remember is getting picked up by a groupie who fully believed that I was the real deal – a Heavy Metal guitar god with the next soon-to-be-famous Metal band. The fact is that I couldn't play an Eddie Van Halen lick to save my life. But I can fake it real good.

VICTOR POISENETE: I always thought Rudi was a brilliant guitarist & he'd never flaunt it. I remember seeing him at Danceteria with Vulcan Death grip & thinking, *This guy owns that fucking instrument, bought & paid for!*

RANDY: We based our image on Mötley Crüe. My girlfriend worked for their management company & gave me pictures of them before their album was released. Their mixture of New York Dolls hair & metal attitude was brand new & we stole it before they were famous. Tommy Lee saw a picture of us my girlfriend had in their office & got upset! I'm pretty sure that this was also before "Spinal Tap." We were cutting edge hip.

I left The Fuzztones while VDG continued. I'm still conflicted about that decision. Rud I had scooped me up & tutored me patiently, showing me how to be a Rock star & run a band. I owed him a lot, but I felt that I had to invent myself with my newfound skills. He was very upset, but we liked each other, & I really tried to show him how much I appreciated all he'd done for me. I even gave him the Vox Phantom bass that I'd purchased to fit into the Fuzztones. That sealed it & he let me stay in Vulcan Death Grip. After all, I was the only member that didn't need a wig! The Grip became so popular in the gay & performance art circles that we were able to sustain the act for several years, playing once or twice a year at venues like the Limelight & the Ritz. We eventually became so adept at our shtick that we were actually mistaken for a real heavy metal act, not just by the clueless press, but by an outraged audience. But more on that later... ■

*Excerpted from *The Fuzztone: Raisin' a Ruckus* (Fanpro, 2016)



Deb O,Nair & Rudi Protrudi, 1981, by Robert Carrithers.



Ann Magnuson & Ammo at Danceteria, 1983, by Robert Carrithers.

My first visit to Club 57 was in Sept '79. Not sure of the exact date, but I was visiting the brother of a beautiful girl, Ginny Hutt. I was dating Ginny in Lincoln Nebraska where I was living at the time after a rough two & a half years in LA (April '75 until Oct '77). Tom & Ginny grew up in Tecumseh, Nebraska, a small farming community located in the southwestern corner of Nebraska, not far from my hometown of Lincoln. I was there on a one-week vacation & Tom, whom I had never met, welcomed me warmly since I was dating his sis. He was living on 13th Street between 1st Ave & Ave A & had a very nice one bedroom on the third floor of a five floor walkup. Tom was gay (which was not a very safe thing to be in Tecumseh Nebraska in 1979) & moved to NYC less than a year before I stayed at his place. He took me to great restaurants in the East Village, including three that were to become fixtures in my 11 years living there. These were the Kiev, the Odessa & Leshkos. And then there were the slices! In 1979, you could buy them for as low as 45 cents in the East Village. Subway fare was half a buck, & you could get a transfer from midnight Sat. to early Monday morning that allowed two rides for the price of one.

Early on in this autumn 1979 visit to NYC, I was walking back to Tom's place after exploring the fascinating St Mark's Place area between Ave B & Third Avenue. This neighborhood was punk rock central. John Holmstrom, creator of *PUNK* magazine & creator of the Ramones logo & numerous album covers, had an apt on 10th near First Avenue where he still resides today. I met him at a Club 57 event, where he was showing his multi media production "The Joe Show" based on, who else, his comic book character Joe.

But I digress, which I'm prone to do. Back to my first experience at Club 57. While walking back to Tom's I usually walked down St Mark's Place to Tompkins Square Park & then turned left to walk over to E13th. One fateful night, I saw a bunch of very sharp dressed young men & women hanging out in front of Club 57, which was located in the middle of the block between 1st & 2nd Avenue, at where else, 57 St Mark's place. It was in the basement of a Polish Catholic Church & I thought to myself: Are these hep cats going to a Church service at 11pm on a week night? In a way they were, & you could call it the Church of Club 57. A poster outside advertised that Monster Movie Night was underway, hosted by Tom Scully & Susan Rose (now Hanaford Rose), creators of the Monster Movie Club & instrumental, along with a man named Stanley Strychacki, in creating Club 57. The admission was cheap, I think \$4 but they offered a discount if you joined the Monster Movie Club. So I bought a membership for I believe 5 dollars & only had to pay 2 or 3 bucks to see the film. I knew I would be coming back to this place & saving a buck or two on admission every time I did. Plus I was put on the mailing list & received

very informative Monster Movie Club updates every month. I don't recall what the double bill was, but Tom & Susan favored low budget scare 'ems from the '50s & '60s. Tom was the projectionist & host while Susan worked the door & was a charming hostess. Tom also gave very learned & passionate but brief intros to the films. Needless to say I was hooked on this place. I grew up on Monster movies. I still have a copy of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* #1. At the age of four, my mom let me skip out of my morning session at Merry Manor Nursery School so she could drive me downtown to see the latest low budget creature feature from Hollywood playing at the Varsity Theatre. For a mere 25 cents admission I thrilled to the rampaging fury of The Giant Behemoth. I still recall the quizzical look on the bus driver's face when I walked to the van & told her, "I'm not going to school today. My mom is taking me downtown to see The Giant Behemoth." I also recall the envious looks on the faces of the other children on the bus.

I went to the Club every night I had left on my vacation that September. I probably attended at three other events & learned about the Club 57 part of this amazing space, when I attended some unremembered event created & produced by Ann Magnuson, who served as the bar manager for the club & created, produced & directed countless memorable events over the years. It was the punk rock '70s version of Micky Rooney & Judy Garland saying "Let's put on a show!" Although where Judy & Micky's "shows" cost millions of MGM dollars & lasted the duration of the film, Club 57 averaged five distinctly outré events per week produced on a shoestring budget. ■

On the Town



NEW YORK POST
NOV 9 1989

MARS: A patron in a Madonna outfit and her partner dance the night away at top nightclub.

MAN FROM MARS ZAPS CITY HALL

By MATTHEW FLAMM

ANGHY nightclub owners and musicians descended on City Hall yesterday to protest new city proposals for regulating nightlife in New York.

Dressed in a de rigueur black suit, Rudolf Pieper, who runs the huge disco Mars at Tenth Avenue and 12th Street, told the City Planning Commission. "The people who are presenting these proposals have no knowledge of this business whatsoever.

"I see us compared to amusement arcades, to health clubs, to movie theaters. We are neither of them. We are nightclubs."

His biggest beef was with a proposal requiring new clubs to include four square feet of waiting room per person.

"Come on, we are not a movie theater," said the club owner known as Rudolf. "There is no 'next show time' in a nightclub. Having a waiting area makes no sense whatsoever."

The hearing, held in the state Board of Estimate hearing room, was the latest skirmish in an on-going battle over how discos and live music establishments will be regulated in the city.

The proposals, first introduced



RUDOLF PIPER

"We're not movie theaters."

in a slightly different form last year, are intended to replace the city's old Cabaret Law with a wide-reaching network of rules.

The old law, which made it illegal to have more than three musicians on stage in unlicensed clubs, was declared unconstitutional last year.

Rudolf also argued against the proposal that new clubs in certain parts of the city be required to get a special permit before opening.

"I see that several zones that are traditionally dedicated to night clubs are being [required to] request special permits," he said, citing the Flatiron district in the 70s as one such area. "I say that special permit is just a bureaucratic way to 'just say no.'"

John Argento, founder of the old West 21st Street club Danceteria, said he would have trouble opening a new club if the proposals were passed.

He hopes to open a club on Rivington Street on the Lower East Side, but the location is 50 feet from a residential district. The proposals would require clubs to be at least 100 feet away.

"It's taken so long to find this location, and now I find out that you're trying to pass a regulation against me," Argento said. "This industry pays hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes. We pump millions of dollars into the economy."

An earlier version of the proposals also called for 12:30 a.m. week-night and 2 a.m. weekend curfews for night spots. That provision was dropped after the State Court of Appeals ruled this summer that the city did not have the authority

See **CLUBS** on Page 14

MAN FROM MARS ZAPS CITY HALL

The *New York Post* has always been known for its splashy headlines, & this one is one of my preferred ones. In the late 1980s, the powers to be in the city of New York decided it would be a good idea to pass a law closing all eating & drinking places by 1a.m. An totally absurd idea in the city that, allegedly, never sleeps! I went ballistic & founded what is now known as the *New York Hospitality Alliance*, an entity whose purpose is to combat all these stupid government regulations. City Hall wanted to pass the new law without calling too much attention to it, so I decided to go to the press & raise a stink. At the time, I was the owner of a very famous underground club called *Mars* &, from there the guys at the *Post* got their lead for the headline. As expected, the uproar that followed got the proposal soundly defeated. But, bureaucrats never give up, so, believe it or not, the proposal has been presented repeatedly ever since, even to this day! One has to remain constantly vigilant to assure that the city that never sleeps will continue to suffer from insomnia...

— Rudolf Piper

Hi there! My name is Rudolf & I used to own & operate a whole bunch of nightclubs in New York during its glory days, roughly from 1978 to 1990. I was at the helm of Studio 54, Danceteria, Tunnel & Palladium, amongst others, & I certainly have a lot of stories to tell. Here are just a few. Times were pretty crazy back then. Bob [Robert Carrithers] used to be a regular in all my clubs & witnessed a lot of the goings on. If you don't believe what you read, just ask him! He even has some photos to show you! Have Fun!

THE NIGHT
KING JUAN CARLOS OF SPAIN
VISITED STUDIO 54

In 1981, after Steve & Ian, the original owners of Studio 54 came out of jail, they reopened the place &, for a while the wild parties continued as if nothing had happened. It still was the most fabulous nightclub on Earth, with celebrities, photographers, beautiful women & all the good things that come with it. The owners had an eclectic way of going about business & most of their promotional team had to wear several hats according to the occasion. I was one of the directors &, because of this management philosophy, it fell upon me to supervise some of the Sunday night events, which were gay. When I say gay, I mean *really* gay, that out of control gayness from the disco era, before the AIDS plague. This crowd used to leave all their clothes at the coatcheck, & dance around just wearing their slippers & cowboy boots. Everybody was doing all sorts of drugs, you name it: coke, ups & downs, quaaludes, locker room, GBH... all at once! As the night progressed, people were fucking in every corner, specially in the mezzanine, which was worldwide famous for exactly that.

Steve Rubell, who was gay & therefore was the mastermind behind the success of these Sunday nights, rarely showed up, because of his already legendary Saturday night excesses. Ian almost never showed up on any night, period, so sometimes it fell upon me to be the eyes & ears of the owners.

That night, I was sitting in the office when the telephone rang. It was the Spanish Embassy asking if it would be possible for King Juan Carlos & Queen Sofia to come & visit Studio 54 that night. They had never been there & were super curious & this was the only free night they had in New York.

After convincing myself that this was for real, I

tried to explain to the embassy guy what kind of a night this happened to be. To my (only relative) surprise, he knew all about these famous Sunday shindigs & insisted in guaranteeing admission for the Royal Couple. He emphasized that the Queen & the King were extremely open minded & certainly would love the atmosphere. Of course, no photos would be allowed because, he said, imagine the Spanish press printing some pictures of King Juan Carlos amidst *that* crowd! Fortunately, in those days cell phones had not yet been invented...

I said OK, be welcome at your own risk. Then, I proceeded to alert all the staff, door & security. Knowing Steve's obsession with celebs, I was sure that Steve would jizz in his pants once he heard who the VIP guest of the evening would be. I called him some 20 times, until a cadaverous voice answered, asking what the fuck was the problem. When I told him the news, you bet, he did have a premature ejaculation & started to get ready to come over!

Then, I went down to the dance floor & set aside the best booth in the house, specially prepared for the comfort of His Royal Majesty. The place was packed beyond belief. Crazy queens screaming everywhere, taking their clothes off & soon the real Queen Sofia was about to arrive... Oh my! Oh my!...

Suddenly, the place got invaded by some 20 or 30 huge men in black suits that promptly took position on all strategic places of the club. Obviously, they were the bodyguards of the king, but the crowd did not know that, & thought it was a police raid, so they immediately dropped all their drugs on the floor & continued to dance with fake abandon.

Then, upon a warning from the door, the DJ announced:

– Ladies & gentlemen, welcome the King & Queen of Spain!

This announcement was immediately followed by Elgar's solemn Pomp & Circumstance March... *in disco music!* How on Earth did the DJ have that song in his record bin? Ah! Mysteries of the night!

After the applause, the crowd realized that the men in black were not about to stage a raid, because they were just the king's security team. This prompted a frantic search for all the drugs dropped on the floor!

The first vision King Juan Carlos & Queen Sofia had of the place was of thousands of guys on their knees, some of them in the most bizarre outfits, searching for their stash on the floor. It was so beautiful!

I showed the Royal Couple the royal booth & *noblesse oblige*, the owner or the director of the royal club had to sit with them for a few minutes to make them feel at ease. So, I did & started a conversation with the king. He was quite handsome & seemed to be really amused by the whole scene. I doubt he had seen anything like it before. The queen was grumpy & *antipatica* all night.

What to say to a king is always a challenge for even the most experienced conversationalist. I had to touch on several subjects in order to see which one would obtain a favorable reaction from him. At the same time, Steve was taking an awful amount of time to arrive... I was dying to pass the hot potato (sorry, your majesty...) to him & get the hell out of that situation.

Well... after some lo-o-ong 20 minutes Steve arrived... in the most lamentable shape!.. He was completely fucked up, disheveled, bearded, red eyes, incoherent... you got the picture...

He threw himself into the royal booth like a potato sack, almost hitting some poor lady-in-waiting & then waved to the king saying:

– Hi, King! Great you're here! I own this place, you know? Hey King! You like this place? Yes, I own this place, you know? I'm glad you're here...

When Steve was high, he had this penchant for repeating himself endlessly. So, he went on:

– Hey King! You see those lights blinking up there? Man, they are incredible! Blinky, blinky, blinky... King! See those lights! I love those lights blinking! Watch them, King! Blinky, blinky, blinky!... You know, King, I own this place, you know, King, I own this place... Watch those blinking lights, King!...

And so it went on & on & on, while the royal couple just watched in disbelief. The king continued

to be quite amused & his royal consort continued in her furious mood, hating the whole thing.

Steve then continued to babble about the blinky blinkies, his voice lowering slowly to a whisper, until he fell asleep, right then & there on the royal booth in front of the royal couple...

The royal guests still stayed for a well mannered half hour & then discreetly left the premises, while the big securities also left silently, one by one. The party went on wildly & nobody noticed their absence.

The whole thing certainly was a memorable fiasco, but I am sure the king never forgot this night...

That too, was the magic of Studio 54!..

WHERE IS THE FUCKING MONEY?

There are so many stories to tell about all the Manhattan clubs but, in my opinion, no place was more whacked than The Tunnel.

Everything about that place was weird, starting with the location inside of a huge & sinister warehouse building located in the middle of the abandoned New York piers. There were hookers & hustlers & dealers everywhere, besides from some 20 gay S&M clubs, the best known one being the Mineshaft.

The Tunnel was, well... a tunnel, more precisely a railroad tunnel that had been left unused for 75 years & that went all the way under the city & the East River to emerge in Brooklyn. It was an almost endless space, huge, with cavernous brick walls, 70ft high curved ceilings all in a neo-gothic style, totally fabulous! When I saw the space, I knew that I would have to eat shit to get it open, because it would require millions of dollars for that. And so I did! Somehow I found a well heeled partner, Elli Dayan... or he found me, I don't remember. He was from a prominent Israeli family, young, good looking & the owner of Bonjour Jeans, a top brand in those days. He also was a serious party man, besides from being quite insane. The perfect guy for the project, but... he was constantly surrounded by other Israelis, & we all know that Israelis are, by definition, a quarreling bunch. Day & night there were screaming fights between them over nothing. Then, they started to get paranoid about my German nationality & hired detectives to find out if there were any Nazis in my family. I guess that my neo-punk décor concept of "Auschwitz in Las Vegas" did not help... When the

results came out negative, I felt they were almost disappointed. But they kept calling me a fucking nazi anyway & I didn't mind, cause I was used to it.

Then, one day, Elli got rid of all the quarreling Israelis, but retained only one of them, a contractor in charge of the construction of the club. He was a real weirdo. He decided to live inside the tunnel in a filthy makeshift barrack. Every night he went out to the piers chasing little hustler boys & brought them back inside the tunnel. The Tunnel of Love! The boys stayed there for weeks & were hired to work on menial jobs. He managed to have at his disposal a real harem of boys which were constantly involved in jealous fisticuffs between them. Then, after a while, they used to steal everything they could get their hands on & split. Sometimes, the whole construction job stopped because some kid had stolen all the toolboxes of the workers. Elli had to indemnify them, but even so, the general mood of the construction crew was getting more & more somber. I always was concerned that some of the boys were underage, but Elli reassured me that his buddy, the Israeli contractor would never do something like that... Yes, sure...

Then, Elli decided it was time to open &, against all advice, fixed an impossible deadline for that.

We had to hire some 150 additional workers to be ready on time. Weekly payroll escalated to some \$80,000... 30 years ago!

Then, on a payday 2 weeks before the grand date, the contractor took his car to go to the bank in order to withdraw the money for the weekly salaries. He never came back.

By around noon I got concerned with his absence & notified Elli. He came over like a lightning bolt & told me that the contractor had to go to court to "answer a minor case" & would be back in no time.

Well, he didn't...

Elli called the (Israeli) lawyer he had hired to defend the contractor & was told that the case had been lost & that his loyal Israeli jack of all trades had gotten 7 years in the clinker for this & that with minors.

Shit! I got really concerned with the deadline (invitations for the opening were already out) & with the fact that, from then on I would have to direct the construction works myself.

While I was lost in these depressing thoughts, Elli shouted:

– The money! Where is the fucking money from the payroll ?

Fuck, no idea, so we both ran & turned upside

down the filthy shack of the fucking contractor & found nothing. Where could it be? I said it probably could be inside the car, but where was the fucking car?

Elli & I ran outside looking for a shabby chevy 1972.

Nada...

Then, Elli concluded that the contractor went to court with the car & therefore the fucking car would be in a fucking parking lot near the fucking court.

So we took a cab & ran to court & looked inside all the nearby parking lots.

Nada... & time was ticking. By 5PM all our moody workers would demand their pay &... I didn't wanna imagine what would happen if not... considering that, by now, little me would be the new contractor in charge of telling them why not...

Then, Elli considered that there was a good chance that the shyster he had hired to defend the contractor would still be in the courts. He would be able to find out where the car was. Yes, the good thing about these jaildoor lawyers is that one always knows where to find them!

And, there he was!

Elli started to scream at him out of his lungs, where is the fucking car, where is the fucking car, until security told him to shut the fuck up or else.

The lawyer went inside the temp detainee room for a moment & came back with the location of the car.

The fucking Israeli contractor had parked the fucking car with fucking \$ 80,000 inside... *on the street!...*

We ran down the stairways & into the streets until we found it peacefully stationed on the corner of a major avenue .

Then Elli shouted...

– The keys! Where are the fucking keys!

We had forgotten to ask for the keys, of course, but Elli, true to his Israeli army upbringing, went to a demolition bin nearby & got a steel bar & smashed the windows of the car with it.

At this point, people walking by noticed that something strange was happening & stopped to watch...

Elli didn't give a fuck, & kept shouting about the money, & throwing filthy things from the car onto the pavement. I, myself, took out a lot of disgusting trash, like cum splattered t-shirts, stinky sneakers & things like that, until Elli screamed – I found it! I found it!

With victory glowing all over his face, he showed

me a trashed & ripped old pillow which contained all the dough inside, mixed with the feathers.

It was then that we noticed that there was a huge crowd around us, watching astonished these two seriously deranged people ripping off an old car, looking for money.

– Shit! There is no time to lose! Let's get the hell out of here before they call the cops!

And so we began to elbow our way out of the circle of gawkers, which sort of stepped aside in fear of these two demented thieves that certainly were going to stop at nothing in order to complete their devious plan.

We ran down the avenue with all the speed we got, Elli keeping the filthy pillow tight to his chest, feathers flying while we were trying to put some distance between us & the spectators, er... *the witnesses!*...

And then, hallelujah, we found a cab, threw ourselves inside &, upon arrival, finally paid the workers, all this before 5p.m.!

Mission accomplished! Uff!...

THE DAY I BOUGHT ONE MILLION MATCHBOXES!

Elli Dayan, my partner at the Tunnel! I still don't know if I love or if I hate this guy, but he certainly spiced up every single day I was running the club!...

Being an Israeli & a millionaire, he always considered himself the best businessman in the world &, to his understanding, I was the worst. And, quite frankly & up to a certain extent, he was right.

Even so, he was reluctantly forced to let me run the club, because he knew nothing about promotion. But he had this penchant for making some "surprise" visits here & there, to see if I was not setting the store on fire.

At one of these occasions, he showed up while I was ordering matchboxes with The Tunnel logo from a salesman. Ah! Those were the happy days when everybody was still smoking!

Anyway, he was surprised & shocked to see that I was ordering 50,000 matchboxes at 12¢ each.

I already had negotiated the price down as much as I could, but he still considered the sum absurdly high & decided to show me, once & for all, how a real businessman makes real money.

He asked the salesman what would be the price per box if he ordered 100,000 of them.

The man calculated it would cost 10¢ each.

Then, Elli asked what it would be for 200,000 boxes.

At that point, I was getting uncomfortable, this was a lot of matchboxes...

The price per box would be 8¢, said the man.

Elli thought for a brief moment & requested an estimate for 1 million matchboxes!

The man & I got really nervous cause this made no sense, but he finally estimated that the price was 4¢ per.

– Deal! Elli shouted!

He was ecstatic! In a 5-minute negotiation he managed to reduce the price of each matchbox by two thirds!

– You see, Rudolf! This is the real way to save money! We saved a fortune! The problem is that you know shit about business!

I was flabbergasted! I could not understand the math. In my initial deal we were going to spend \$6,000 & now we were having to lay out \$40,000... And... what would we do with all these matchboxes? In spite of the huge capacity of the club – 4,000 people – I quickly came to the conclusion that it would take more than 15 years to get rid of all them... I tried to explain to Elli, but...

– Rudolf! You know shit about business!

So, much to my sorrow, several pre-dated checks were cut & we all shook hands, the vendor explaining repeatedly that the customer was responsible for the storage. Nobody paid attention.

Weeks went calmly by when, one sunny day two huge trailer trucks from Ohio stopped in front of the club & started to unload one million matchboxes! Nobody could ever have imagined the volume occupied by one million matchboxes! Needless to say that those were *good* matchboxes, the kind that comes with wooden matches inside.

Of course, Elli did *not* show up that day so as to tell where to store all that stuff...

We put part of it in an unused catering room.

When that was filled to the rim, we started to put them in the basement.

When that was full, we put them inside every single nook & cranny we could find & even then, there were enough boxes left to fill half of our offices with them.

When Elli arrived & saw all that, he was the happiest man in town! Such a good deal, he kept saying.

The next days & weeks, he started to act strangely, going around the club giving matchboxes to everybody & their mother, regardless if they were

smokers, or not, weather they were his friends, or not.

– Here, have a matchbox, it's a great matchbox & I made a great deal on them!

People used to look surprised, like saying... huh?... OK... whatever...

Elli even started to judge people according to their willingness or capacity to accept more & more matchboxes from him...

Even so, we were only getting rid of some 500 boxes a week...

Several months later, we still had some 982,000 matchboxes in stock...

Then one day... *Götterdämmerung!*

An old & cranky sergeant from the Fire Dept, one of those with a big white moustache, came over to make a routine inspection!

When he went to the basement, he didn't like at all what he saw there! Some 400,000 matchboxes... maybe this being a tiny little fire hazard I'd say...

Then, when he entered the catering room & saw another batch of only some 300,000 more boxes more, he went apoplectic!

And then, in every nook & cranny, more & more boxes! A nightmare! In the office, more boxes! What's going on here? Call the cops! Call the Fire Commissioner! Call the District Attorney!

Needless to say, all hell broke loose! I was calling all saints to help me. Elli was calling all his lawyers & rabbis in Israel.

Needless to say that the club got immediately closed down, & Elli & I were unceremoniously handcuffed & sent to some downtown precinct, accused of reckless endangerment, violations of all imaginable fire codes, arson attempt, & hell knows what else, lascivious conduct included.

As a result, the club stayed closed for almost a month, dozens of summons were issued, the lawyers cost a fortune, the landlord freaked out & wanted to cancel the lease, the insurance companies doubled their premium, banks cut our credit & the press was tar & feathering us.

And, to add insult to injury, the Fire Dept. forced us to take all the matchboxes out of the club &, at our expense & with the supervision of one of their men, safely destroy the whole lot!

Adding all these expenses, I calculated that each one of those damn matchboxes we had managed to give away, had cost us some \$10 each!

Such a good deal!

Elli was almost crying... & I was almost about to kill him, but I had to refrain myself, or he would call me a fucking nazi!...

Many years ago, when New York still was that shadowy & tentacular megalopolis of weird & wonder, there used to appear a new kind of drug on the streets almost every week! And really cool people (that means all of us on the scene) were supposed to try them ALL, just to stay current with... with progress or whatever!...

So, one day, I got hold of a few super-mega doses of a Novocaine-Procaïne concentrate. It was the newest IT drug of those current 15 Minutes. In small amounts, these medicaments were legal & used in geriatrics, to increase the patient's "awareness". In other words, it helped senile people to understand what was going on... But the stuff I got was a million times stronger & more concentrated than what's used in normal circumstances.

One evening, being alone in my apartment in the still wonderfully dilapidated Lower East Side, I put an LP of Tangerine Dream to play & decided to try a doses of this thing. I was told the effects would arrive almost imperceptibly, & then only last for about 20 minutes. Perfect! I drank it, sat down & relaxed, waiting to see what would happen...

Little by little, I had deeper & deeper thoughts. I started to understand things I never grasped before... Then, I began creating new mathematical formulas in my head... Next, the entire Kant-Hegel-Marx philosophical triangle became so ridiculously simple, it was borderline infantile!... The Gramsci Concrete-Abstract-Concrete Circle was totally obvious, a piece of cake!... Non-Euclidean Geometry, no problem!... What else?... Billions of galaxies outside the Milky Way... I knew where they were... I knew each one of them, they were my friends!... The Alpha Point, fulcrum of the entire Universe compressed into one tiny dot ready to Big Bang all over again... it was so delicious I wanted to eat it!...

Well... all this was very good, but, quite frankly, I had been there before, with other formulas, other experiments... Then, something different happened, when I looked outside my window, to the abandoned building across the street . Sitting in front of the main entrance, was a strange man... I stared at him for quite a while, unsure weather he was just a homeless person or if he was a man of wisdom... an envoy maybe... Yes! Of course!... a man sent by Destiny!... a prophet!... how did I not realize?... & I thought I knew everything!... he certainly was one of the Elders meant to show me the path!...

Excited with this god-sent apparition,

I precipitated myself down the stairs & ran to the building where he was. I wanted to knee before him... I felt some kind of supernatural urge to share his aura & receive his guidance through this vast Universe... no, excuse me, these vast *Multiverses*...

Dazed, I stood in front of this ... this guru... for a long long time, in silence, not knowing how I, humblest of all creatures, should address this.. this reincarnation of The Divine Light!...

He was poorly dressed, like all pilgrims do, seated on the entrance steps of this burnt-out building, very relaxed & looking at me enigmatically. I felt I had to say something, something deep & urgent, while his eyes were painfully piercing through the flesh of my body, but all I could do was to utter :

– “Hey man, what’s happening? What’s the word?”

Motionless, he stared at me for some very long minutes... his look was vague... maybe distant... as if I was a million miles away... & then he said one phrase... only one phrase :

– “The Door is open.”

WOW! I was mesmerized at the sheer conciseness of his infinitely razor sharp knowledge. I instantly understood the thousand meanings of his words... I was marveled... I was perplexed... & then I looked at the front of the building again &, to my amazement, I saw that the main entrance door, which normally was boarded-up, was now... was now... OPEN!...

I could not believe what was happening... I repeated to myself over & over “the door is open!” ... what a fantastic metaphor!... the circle had gone instantly from abstract to concrete, & there it was... it was open!... a passage!... a path from the circle of realness to enter the unreal!... but, was it a circle or a sphere?... I had to enter!... it was, I just knew it, it was MY door that was open for ME & for only ME to enter!...

I rushed up the stairs past the wise man & entered into the dark unknown!...

Well... there was nothing really there... it was an abandoned building, all right. What else? It was just empty. Everything inside was dirty & smelling like shit. Some mice were running for cover in piles of garbage. Water dripping down from the upper floor. Broken glass all over. Junky squatters had made a mess before moving on.

I was flabbergasted... confused... what was the meaning of this?... How can this make sense in the circle... what circle?... well, some circle!... And why is

this such nothing ?... Slowly, I was feeling somewhat tired... So, this is what life is, huh ?...

Then, suddenly I looked around & wondered what the fuck was I doing in this rotten building anyway? And what was that guy outside doing in the meantime?

I ran out of the place... he was GONE!... Disappeared! Dematerialized. Disintegrated.

But... but...who the fuck was that guy anyway?...

THE COOLEST FASHION SHOW OF THEM ALL

Before the supermodel era, before the fashion world became boring, before glossy magazines took all the space in the newsstands, there was a short period of time when new & advanced clothing trends were created & presented in perfect synchrony with what was going on in the streets & in nightclubs.

At Danceteria, around 1984, this concept was taken a step further. Steve Lewis & I decided to host a long series of weekly fashion shows featuring major & minor designer names. The crowds were huge & the energy always at an all time high, regardless of what was showing on the runway. It was the perfect interaction of creativity with the ultimate consumer & critic – the public. Steve was & is total promoter, a fast talking & quick thinking type of a guy, & he operated miracles, getting major names on stage & giving one-of-a-kind opportunities to new talent. At a very low cost, he somehow managed to present every week names like Boy of London, Martine Sitbon, Body Map, Black Designers Collective, Betsey Johnson, a then totally unknown Marc Jacobs, & many others.

He even got major professional models to work for free! What he told to all these people & what he promised, I never wanted to know, but he always made the impossible become possible. One has to realize that our budgets were low, because Danceteria , in spite of being huge, it was still an underground club where very few people did pay to get in. And we made History by breaking the ivory tower where the fashion industry did hide itself for so long by bringing a breath of fresh air into the scene. Our motto was “Fashion for the people by the people”!

Quite frankly, I never understood why fashion shows were always such exclusive events, so cliquish, so unreachable & distant from a segment of the population that was really interested in seeing

them. And, I'm still flabbergasted by the fact that it *still* is that way in the 21st century!

Well, for a while, Steve & I changed all that & people loved it!

They loved it so much that we decided to take our show on the road, presenting young New York fashion in Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, etc. A huge success everywhere! Then, we took it a step further, & decided to make a splash in London. All this on a shoestring budget but with lots of enthusiasm & some sponsorship. If I remember it well, air fare & hotel for everybody, including the models, cost some \$4,000 total. That was cheap, even by the standards of 30 years ago!

And it was in London that we had a magic moment, that I will never forget, because it was the coolest thing that ever happened on the runway. We were presenting the East Village Fashion Show, at a time when the East Village was the center of the Universe. The venue was a huge, cavernous & very trendy club under a bridge, called *Heaven*. The whole city was abuzz about this event. Everybody was enthused by the concept of a real fashion show inside a club, something still new & unheard of over there.

On the day of the event, Steve & I spent the afternoon organizing things at the club, directing rehearsals & so on. Later, we sent the models back to the hotel to relax & get their make-up & hairdos over there. As all the clothes were on racks inside the club, ready for the show, Steve & I thought it would be smart to stay put & keep an eye on the merch, cause we knew that these London kids were fanatical fashionistas & would not resist the temptation to lift some souvenirs... And so we stayed, waiting for the club to open.

The show was scheduled for midnight but, much to our surprise, the club opened at 8PM! We didn't realize that in London the clubs used to open at these ungodly hours! And when we looked outside, there were already thousands of people waiting to get in! The most beautiful & fantastic bunch of people I had ever seen, all dressed up to the teeth, wearing outrageous hairdos & the latest new wave outfits! And they kept coming in hordes! By 10p.m. the place was filled to capacity & nobody else could come in. Riots outside! Police was called but, even so, there were still some 2,000 people outside refusing to leave.

While watching that mess it downed on us that our models, still at the hotel, would not be able to come in! They were going to be locked outside!

A disaster! If the show didn't go on, the audience would turn nasty, kill us & hang our balls on stage. I didn't like the perspective. What to do?

It was Steve who, once more saved the situation with a brilliant idea: Rudolf would go on stage & announce that we were taking the concept of "Fashion by the people for the people" a step even further & make it also "*through* the people"! Therefore, we would be going through the audience & select the trendiest of the trendiest & have them be models in our show!

People could not believe it! They became delirious! Everybody wanted to participate! We were on the verge of having thousands of people on the runway & nobody in the audience! Really! When we walked into the dance floor to start the selection, we had to bring some serious bodyguards with us otherwise we would have been torn apart!

But we managed to go through with the selection & we got some 50 or so of the most fantastic fashionettes ever seen! And, the best part was that they already had perfect hairdos & make-up!

And, as the dressers also were left outside in the cold, we told our new models to help themselves at the racks & do their own creations! They went crazy!

The way they put themselves together was something so fabulous & original, that it was wa-a-ay better than the original plan. Totally great! Indescribable success! Crowds in ecstasy! Tears of joy to my eyes.

That show was the climax of everything that Steve & I ever dreamt! After the spectacle was over, we both sat there, shaking our heads in complete disbelief of what we just had managed to do. We knew we would never be able to do anything better than that. Then & there we decided that this would mark the end of the road of these endeavors. Unintentionally, we had somehow created the *Grand Finale* of this cycle of events & that was simply that, no more.

And besides, in midst of the confusion after the show, with no supervision, our new "models" disappeared, having stolen most of our clothes! ■



Wim Wenders, Chambers Street. 1987, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.

The Christmas tree was a fire hazard by the time I gave the farewell party for my Chambers Street loft in the spring of 1993. After coming home one wintery night earlier that year to find my loft ransacked, resembling a scene from a bad detective novel, I knew it was time to leave. I first moved into the vacant block-long commercial space in the late 1970s. My rent was five hundred dollars a month & the streets were desolate at night. The tenants had been fighting the landlord for a decade, in defiance of his aggressive tactic of turning off the heat & hot water. When a suspicious fire in the fall of 1986 devastated the top two floors, we decided to resist the court order to vacate the building. The other tenants did not return & eventually sold their loft improvements to the landlord.

I stayed. Sleeping in an eerily empty building with smashed locks & no services, I kept a large hunting knife under my mattress for security. An anonymous caller was leaving strange sound effects on my answering machine. It was an unnerving period in my life. Eventually, services were restored & the gaping hole was repaired where the firemen had ripped open the ceiling. I knew the meaning of having "space" back in the '70s, when the nearest supermarket was two miles away & I would walk to Chinatown to shop. Tribeca, which stands for Triangle Below Canal Street, had yet to become occupied by celebrities like Robert De Niro & Martin Scorsese. My building was the low point in a canyon of Art Deco, Beaux Arts, & Neo-Gothic architectural wonders that included the Woolworth building. I could watch the jazz musician Cecil Taylor playing his grand piano for hours through a window across the street.

I was within blocks of the Mudd Club, Area, Franklin Furnace, Artists Space, Group Material, Exit Art, & the Clocktower. Collective space & collaborative actions by artists were a commonplace at a time when cheap commercial space was available & the downtown art world had yet to become commercialized. At night the lights in the office buildings & the green interlocking reflections from the Twin Towers gave off a magnetic glow. As the last remaining tenant with a top-floor view in the shadow of the World Trade Center, I knew that the landlord had his reasons for wanting me out. Yet this two-thousand-square-foot loft was home. I had made love on its raw wooden floors kept warm by a rickety metal gas heater, created photography projects, written & filmed my movies with hand-cranked 16mm cameras, & thrown raucous parties that went until dawn. I had even photographed a few famous artists on the roof.

When I first arrived in Tribeca in the mid-'70s, I was failing out of Cooper Union art school & considered myself a punk. I lived in another loft, a nineteenth-century warehouse with a view of the Hudson River. You could see the old West Side Highway from my window & watch the passing ocean liners, a reminder of New York's glory years as a port. Boris Policeband, my roommate, whom I had met at a local bar, ate canned ravioli & listened to Rachmaninoff on his portable record player. He played both classical & punk electronic viola. Looking like a Jewish Joey Ramone in a black leather jacket, Boris had a huge collection of sunglasses, which he wore at night. He told me he had a heart condition & wouldn't survive long.

For a brief period, I worked at Mickey Ruskin's Lower Manhattan Ocean Club on Chambers Street. Most of the New Wave bands played there: Television, Talking Heads, & Patti Smith, among others. Patti Smith would hang on the sidewalk after the shows. Her androgynous style appealed to me & I respected her poetic lyrics. Working there was a bit of a nightmare. Julian Schnabel was the kamikaze chef, shouting at the wait staff to get their orders right. Ellen Barkin & Glenne Headley, both aspiring actresses, were my co-waitresses. It was complete mayhem, as the Warhol crowd treated the place like it was their living room & regularly walked out on their checks. The bartender nicknamed me Blasphemy because I cursed like hell when I couldn't remember my drink orders or a customer ran out on me.

I knew a lot of guys in construction. That's how many artists & writers in their twenties made a living. Boyfriend, experimental filmmaker, poet, & construction worker. Jim Krell, later known as Hammerhead, helped build my loft. Jim had large hands & strong features. His steel-tipped size



Iggy Pop, Chambers Street, 1986, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.

thirteen black boots from his days in a federal prison for a major drug bust impressed me. He was a Jersey boy & the oldest of a very large Polish-Irish family. I had never met anyone like him. He was extremely well read yet scratched his balls without a hint of self-consciousness. Jim introduced me to poets like Edward Dorn, William Carlos Williams, & Charles Olson. I read his poetry, sent biweekly typed on the back of postcards, which inspired me to write my own poems.

We had a long collaboration, which included poetry posters, writing projects, & 16mm experimental films. Under his tutelage, I worked with his all-male crews as a house painter & demolition person. I took crazy risks, climbing out on tenement building window ledges to paint fire escapes with no safety gear. Our favorite hobby was dumpster diving for amazing bric-a-brac thrown out of the old downtown commercial buildings now being transformed by artists. We once removed a tempered-glass bus shelter, intending to transform it into a coffee table, but it dramatically exploded into a thousand pieces.

My husband-to-be, Tom Dewe Mathews, & I met at a dinner party on Reade Street

in 1982. We discussed James Joyce & Beat poets. He worked at the DIA Art Foundation warehouse as a freight elevator operator. He told me that the job gave him a lot of time to focus on his writing. I liked that he wrote on yellow legal pads & had lovely penmanship from his years at a posh British boarding school. I had lived in London for three years during high school, so I was partial to Brits. Tom's visa was going to expire, & we were both broke. We decided not to steal the Warhol paintings stashed in the DIA warehouse. Instead, we agreed to marry because we were in love & he needed a green card. He was tall & handsome & had a slightly droll British accent, which impressed the gatekeepers at all the clubs & got us in without waiting on line. He knew who the "right" people were.

One cold winter night we were sitting in an Ethiopian restaurant near Canal Tunnel, an area otherwise devoid of eating establishments. There was only one other occupied table in the dark, cavernous place. Tom leaned in close & asked me if I recognized the other patrons. I shook my head. He said that's David Byrne & Brian Eno. I was impressed when Tom recognized people. I was more of a dreamer in my own world. I had been a huge fan of their collaboration on *Remain In Light*, a mix of African beats, found sound, & sampled grooves.

We interviewed David Byrne months later but were unsuccessful in getting it published.

I admired Eno's ambient work with Michael Brook & Jon Haskell. At the time, I was creating experimental films, video art, & art photography. Between 1982 & 1983, I completed my first experimental video, *All Exits Final*. Its acceptance into the Video Culture Festival in fall 1984 took me to Toronto, where I had the good fortune to meet Brian Eno, whose video painting *Thursday Afternoon* was also being shown. He was down to earth & charming in person. We discussed Marshall McLuhan & sang to Mahalia Jackson.

When you are young, there are many firsts. You also tend to be more fearless. Despite the fact that I was quite shy in my twenties, I didn't know enough to second-guess myself. That's how I got my 1983 photography show *Danceteria*, run by the dashing Rudolf. I showed up at the club one summer day with a huge black leather portfolio, wearing black-&-white polka-dot pedal pushers & my sexiest halter top, & convinced Rudolf, whom I had never met, into giving me a show in the club's private Congo Bill space. I had loved photography since my teens, when my father gave me an old WWII-era Leica &, later, a 35mm Nikon. This would be the first time I shared my photographic work publicly.

I enlisted the collaboration of several artist & musician friends, including Jun Mizumachi, Fred Szymanski, & Jim Sutcliffe, & we put together a mix of light show, experimental music, & my photography that filled the top floor. Roger Cutforth, a friend & conceptual fine-art photographer, printed the twenty or more Cibachrome prints of my photographs. I showed up late for my debut, not because it was fashionable, but because I was overwhelmed. It was an expensive show to mount for the two days it was up. I recall the excitement of a room full of people, many of whom were strangers, looking at my photographs. On the second day, the infamous Holly Woodlawn seated herself in front of one of my photos, a shot of a quintessential Broadway diner. She stayed there holding court – I never introduced myself – but this unexpected juxtaposition remains vivid until today.

In spring 1983, Reagan announced his "Star Wars" program (Strategic Defense Initiative), triggering outrage & deep concern. I was working on image-processed video projects dealing with weapons technology & mind control experiments. For inspiration, I read Paul Virilio's *Speed & Politics* & Bachelard's *Poetics of Space & Psychoanalysis of*



Keith Haring, Area Club, May 1985 (top); Jean-Michel Basquiat, Area Club, 1985 (bottom), by Bethany Eden Jacobson.



Rammellzee, May 1984, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.



David Wojnarowicz on his apartment roof. 1984, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.

Fire. Jim Krell introduced me to Millennium Film Workshop, started in the late-1960s & initially run by experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs. Jim taught me how to use a hand-operated 16mm optical printer. This was a tedious process; for hours we sat in a dark room, where we took turns re-photographing film at various frame rates. In the digital age these effects can be accomplished much faster with editing software. However, this analog process was essential – two frames to one, three frames to one, & so on – & allowed me to create irregular durations & rhythmic patterns of the moving images.

Avant-garde filmmakers & video artists flourished in the late-1970s & 1980s in New York City, partly due to venues like Millennium, Anthology Film Archives, & Film/Video Arts, which engendered a spirit of collaboration & experimentation. Combining found footage from NASA & original Super-8 movies, I manipulated the footage using optical effects & image processing techniques. Another crucial place for my work was the Experimental Television Center in Oswego, NY, founded by Ralph & Sherry Hocking, which gave residencies to artists & invited experimentation in electronic & media art through new technologies that included oscillators, buffers, & sequencers. I particularly loved the Paik/Abe colorizer (designed by Nam Jun Paik & Shuya Abe) for its intense tropical hues. These were the glory days of analog video. Both *All Exits Final* & the video elements for my subsequent three-channel installation work *Raw Zones*, shown at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City, were created during residencies at the Experimental Television Center.

But, along with these heady pursuits, we needed to eat. Tom suggested we pitch stories as a team to British rags like *Harper's Bazaar*, *Tatler*, & *Blitz*. I was game. Thus began a collaboration that led to meeting & photographing a variety of musicians, artists, & downtown scene makers. When Iggy Pop & his PR rep Alvin Eng arrived in front of my building in 1986 for the *Blitz* magazine photo shoot for his album *Blah, Blah, Blah*, he introduced himself as Jim Osterberg. Jim said he was from Detroit & that he appreciated that I was a native New Yorker. I couldn't resist his natural charm. I had seen him onstage, in his live-wire act with his signature baritone, cutting himself with glass & throwing himself into the mob, but I didn't know much about him personally.

I suggested that there was a cool view from the roof. He grabbed a long piece of lumber & we headed up the wooden stairs. Jumping on the narrow precipice separating two buildings, & using

the wood as a prop, Jim transformed himself into Jesus on the cross, with the World Trade Center as his backdrop. I was shooting film with my 35mm Nikon & a handheld light meter. When I asked if he would mind lying on the front edge of the building, next to a sheer five-flight drop, he complied without saying a word. His open spirit & physical grace were a pure pleasure to photograph.

In 1984, I shot a photographic series about the abandoned Pier 34 on the Hudson River. It had been taken over by artists who trespassed the city owned shipping terminal building & turned it into an incubator for new art. David Wojnarowitz & Mike Bildo led the way in creating a series of makeshift studios & site-specific murals. They saw the site as anti-commercial, releasing a statement to the press about their intention "to explore any

image in any material on any surface they chose." Wojnarowicz was a painter, photographer, filmmaker, writer & AIDS activist.

In his gut-wrenching book, *Close To The Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* Wojnarowicz details his youth as a male hustler. The Westside Piers were known as a gay cruising grounds. Much of the site-specific work at Pier 34 had a raw power that emanated from the sexualized outsider status of the West Side piers. The decaying piers had a melancholic beauty that felt timeless & removed from frenzied materialism of New York City. In fall 2017, the exhibition *Pier 34: Something Possible Everywhere* at 205 Hudson Gallery, curated by Jonathan Weinberg, reprised the work at the pier through documentation & original art. Wojnarowicz's work was exhibited at Civilian Warfare, Fashion Moda, & Gracie Mansion, & is now in many major collections, including the Museum of Modern Art & the Whitney Museum of American Art. He died of AIDS in 1992.

In the 1970s I became a fan of the New German cinema & was introduced to the films of Rainer Fassbinder, Margarethe von Trotta, Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders & Werner Herzog. Tom Farrell, who had acted in *Paris, Texas*, mentioned to me that Wenders would be in New York City for the US release of *Wings of Desire*. This inspired me to reach out to him for an interview for the downtown paper *Cover*. It was the first time I had interviewed anyone for the media. Peter Falk, who plays a former angel in the film, was an old family friend, so possibly this convinced Wenders to agree to the interview. During the amazing afternoon we spent together our conversation encompassed German post-WWII



David Wojnarowicz, murals, Westside Piers (Pier 34), 1984, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.

history, the role of angels in his narrative, poetry, cinema, & collective memory. Wenders, himself an accomplished photographer, wanted to see the view from the roof. As he turned, I caught him unawares looking up as the sun hit the Twin Towers & snapped the shutter. It was a magical moment.

While I was fortunate to have met so many talented artists, one group stood out. Futura 2000, Ramelzee, Phase 2, Lady Pink, Daze, & Crash were among the graffiti artists I photographed for a Harpers/Queen magazine assignment. I went into the subway tunnels & filmed a few of them spray painting the exterior of a subway car. In the nearly pitch-black tunnels, they carried ladders & masks to the cars. They worked with incredible speed & mastery. It was a pure adrenaline rush to watch them work. Though they were breaking the law & transit cops could arrest us, I was more terrified about stepping on the third rail. The hip-hop scene overlapped with the graffiti-artist world. Celluloid record label founder Jean Karacos, whom I knew, worked with producer Bill Laswell & released albums by a myriad of artists: Afrika Bambaataa, Fela Kuti, Sly & Robbie, The Clash – too many to name – & several that I had photographed, including Futura 2000 & Phase II.

White artists dominated the mainstream gallery scene, so it was important to see the graffiti artists coming into their own & start to be exhibited. The alternative art space Fashion Moda, founded by Stefan Eins & co-director Joe Lewis in the South Bronx in 1978, was home to many graffiti artists, who were mainly black & Hispanic. The South Bronx

had been ravished by neglect & poverty. In August 1980, Ronald Reagan who was running against President Carter visited a vacant lot on Charlotte Street, & to the dissent of angry residents, denounced the incumbent for failing to solve urban blight. Two other pioneers, Patti Astor & Bill Stalling, brought the graffiti & hip-hop scene to their East Village Fun Gallery, inviting the local Puerto Rican community to participate in their events. The overlap of street culture with alternative spaces & clubs like the Pyramid, Club 57, & Dixon Place gave energy & vibrancy to the community.

Tompkins Square Park was the stronghold & epicenter of the East Village. It was both funky & dangerous. Economically, times were tough. The homeless, punks, junkies, & older immigrants co-existed in a precarious balance. The park's Tent City, comprised mainly of the homeless, had grown during the late-1980s, polarizing the locals as the

tide of gentrification slowly threatened to transform the neighborhood. The squatter community had taken over nearby abandoned buildings in what was called Alphabet City, fighting extended legal battles with the city government to keep their homesteads. Some won hard-fought battles, while many left the city for good or were casualties of drugs or the AIDS epidemic. East 7th Street, where I filmed my video installation *Raw Zones* in the winter of 1986-87, was filled with empty, rubble-strewn lots littered with hypodermic needles, but

the drug dealers didn't interfere with my shoot as long as I didn't interfere with their business.

During that same winter, I met John Penley, a local activist who invited me to participate in a benefit he was hosting at Cuando, a community space, on Second Avenue.

I welcomed the occasion as a way to lift my spirits. The struggle to restore my ravished, unheated loft to a livable condition during what felt like an unending winter was taking its toll. I decided to read my poetry publicly – just this once. As I mentioned above, an anonymous person had been leaving sound effects on my answering machine – wind, rain, banging doors. I decided to incorporate them into my reading, played as background from a boom box. I wore my favorite faux-leopard coat & a gray fedora. One of my poems began, "You just want me baby, cuz I'm not around, where were you when the punch line got brok'in."

Afterwards, I met Steven Taylor & Tuli Kupferberg, who had also performed. Tuli was a poet, singer, cartoonist, & anarchist funny man, one of the original Fugs from the 1960s counterculture. Steven was a composer/musician & Allen Ginsberg's guitar accompanist at his readings. I remember sitting in Ginsberg's kitchen on East 12th Street & discussing Leica cameras with him, as he was an avid & talented photographer. Steven became a collaborator on my *Raw Zones* installation as a composer/lyricist. Loosely based on the Pandora myth, the multichannel video explores the influence of war technology on a woman's consciousness.

I met many extraordinary people during this period but what strikes me in hindsight is the fluid nature of the downtown scene in those days. My good friend Robert Watlington, a poet, filmmaker, & painter, has lived in the East Village since the sixties. Born in Harlem, he had been a serious junkie, but had quit heroin by the time we became friends some thirty years ago. When we first met, Bobby would regale me with tidbits about his Studio 54 disco

days. His love of dancing & old-school manners gave him entrée into both the uptown & downtown scenes. Though he was not an actor, his striking dark chiseled features & his poetic manner convinced me to cast him as Prometheus in *Raw Zones* alongside the pale Tamela Glenn, who was the girlfriend of Jim Carroll, writer of *The Basketball Diaries*.

The wonderful cinematographer Babette Mangolte shot *Raw Zones*. Tuli Kupferberg, in military uniform, sings his composition "Military Man" in the middle of an empty 7th Street lot strewn with sandbags to make it resemble a war zone. In June 1987, the video installation was exhibited at PS1. The original sand-bagged set was evoked with a wall-to-wall archival montage from the archives of Bell Labs & IBM. Editor Bruce Tovsky & I worked for months to complete the three-channel, thirty-minute analog video. The synchronization of the three video decks was critical. Dieter Froese, a video artist & founder of Dekart Video, was instrumental in ensuring that the piece ran smoothly & continuously with the aid of an analog synchronizer.

That fall, I traveled to Europe in an attempt to find interest in exhibiting the piece at the ICA in London & the Centre Pompidou in Paris, but without success. I felt isolated & went through a period of questioning about whether to continue making video art. Late one night, standing in a snowdrift in SoHo in front of the Spring Street post office, my good friend, artist, & provocateur Sante Scardillo rode up on his bicycle like a raggedy knight. He asked what I was up to. I told him that I was about to mail my application to graduate film school. Sante exclaimed that this was a big waste of money & tried to convince me to change my mind. He didn't, but I got a ride through the snowy night on the handlebars of his wobbly bicycle.

During my first year at NYU graduate film school, Steven Taylor & I collaborated on a music film for the punk band *False Prophets*. Steven enlisted me for *Never Again, Again*, a song about the AIDS epidemic with references to the Great Plague of London. It aired March 17, 1989 on MTV's 120 Minutes. As Steven quotes in his book, *False Prophets: Field Notes From The Punk Underground*, "One freezing afternoon we borrowed a car & drove to a cemetery in Queens to be filmed among the gravestones, against the background of Manhattan's towers, so that the whole city looked like a giant graveyard. We pasted newspaper headlines onto boards & panned the camera across the type: '1 in 61 Babies Born in New York City Has AIDS Antibodies...' 'The Real Fear

of AIDS Mustn't Be Plague Panic.' We photographed children playing at the Asher Levy School at First Avenue & Twelfth Street. Bethany then shot a (live) show at the Pyramid Club."

This was my first & only music video, filmed on 16mm reversal film with a Bolex & Arri S, with no budget & edited directly on the original film stock. While the music wasn't exactly my sensibility, I respected Steven & the subject was timely. I don't remember what the response was when it aired, but I remember it was a fun challenge to make the film & deal with the personalities of the group. As so often happens, Steven & I lost touch for many years. We reconnected when Tuli Kupferberg passed away in 2010 at the ripe age of 86. Tuli's satirical critique of the warmongering capitalist system is more than apt today.

I recall seeing Tuli on West Broadway well into his eighties, when his sight was failing, seated with his wife, Sylvia, & hawking his satiric political cartoons, his wit sharp as ever. In 2008, in one of his last interviews, he told *Mojo* magazine, "Nobody who lived through the '50s thought the '60s could've existed. So there's always hope." In Tuli's honor, I would expand that quote to say that no one who lived through the downtown scene of the '70s & '80s in New York City could imagine that in 2017 the counterculture would still be alive & kicking. More than ever we need to remember those who gave voice to the collective spirit of resistance & experimentation. *So there's always hope.* ■



Bethany Eden Jacobson, 1983, by Roger Cutforth.



Ivan Král, 1993, by Robert Carrithers.

ŠÍPKOVÁ RUŽENKA
ROXANNE FONTANA

ROMAN BARTOŠ

I must tell you about Roman Bartoš. He is one of the most incredible painters & sculptors ever. You won't find anything on the internet. The most incredible of all his works is a sculpture of a perfectly real man as skirted Pharaoh, about 10 feet tall, with his hands placed urgently on both sides of his head, which is the head of the ancient, magical Egyptian bird. The perfectly shaped & painted calves of the man, his elbows, & my God, that head.

I was aghast when I saw it. I think today it is in storage at someone's house in America, abandoned by Roman, who returned to his native land just north of Prague.

He created this creature when I had run away from him, to Los Angeles. When I returned I attended a party at his Williamsburg loft where the Egyptian giant stood amongst us revellers. The tormented giant, wishing & trying to remove his magical head.

While I was away for those eight months, besides creating this amazing piece, Roman had also gone & joined the local branch of the OTO. A vintage occult Secret Society, the OTO pre-dates English magician Aleister Crowley, but became dedicated to AC since he was 'given' the Order to run, sometime in the 1930s or 1940s. I can't remember. Roman did this all to impress me, so he could bring me there when I'd eventually return to him. I had turned him on to all of this occult lore during our intense relationship. A relationship that

everybody knew about & spoke about.

It was at a concert/party thrown by Giorgio Gomelsky, the larger than life Eastern European music promoter who became famous by discovering the Rolling Stones, & the Yardbirds, in London, in the mid-1960s. Giorgio had relocated to New York City & was quite prominent in an underground scene. He had an affection for the refugee Czech artist community in NYC & threw them a big bash in the Spring of 1989. My Czech friends, & *only* Czechs, all played short concerts, & I, as an "honorary Czech" was invited to play. I showed up with my New York band of Italians who all promptly left as soon as we were done playing, with a wave of the hand goodbye to me, & a glance that was *not* one of true curiosity.

It was at this party that Roman Bartoš apparently fell in love with me as I performed three songs with a band, so he told me & always reminded me afterward. He called me a week later on the telephone at my Upper East Side two-room apartment. "I am one of the Czechs, what are you doing tonight?" And so it began, a love & sex relationship lasting about five years that should have ended after the first two months. He looked like the blond Russian spy from TV's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

Roman was fiercely dedicated to his art & to work. He told me how his father would bring him to a lake & set him up with an easel & paint, & not come back all day, forcing him, against his will, to paint. But his talent was authentic. Oh boy was it ever. His oil paintings were indescribably realistic & tortured, sometimes subliminally, as were his wicked macabre-looking chairs, which kind of freaked me out. I was about the blinding light, I listened to John Lennon, Roman listened to Prodigy. We seemed opposite, yet we were both the Eye of Shiva, which upon opening, all is destroyed in anarchic fashion. He said he didn't love me, but wanted me & had to have me. He wouldn't let me go, but he cheated on me & was tormented when I'd find out. Out of the blue he'd dump me in the middle of the street, yet when I ran away to Los Angeles, word got back to me that one of his current girlfriends said all he ever talks about is Roseann Fontana.

I returned to get a sex disease, & take part in the final funeral of our love. It was over for me, but he still didn't want to want me. I wrote a song for him, & recorded it, it's called "Roman's Holiday." I did a video for it in the old earthquake-rattled ruins of Bussana Vecchia in Italy. You'll find it on the internet.

I can't tell you how I felt sitting there. The apartment was crowded into obscurity but with a little effort one could see it was a one bedroom with a skinny kitchen with no kitchen table. As usual, as at all these Czech parties, the ratio of women to men was about 2 to 5, & consisted predominantly of Japanese girls, & me. But tonight my object of woe was a beautiful, Dresden-complexioned, pale-as-a-ghost & heavily made-up, curly red-haired girl from Berlin, in a rubber punk-rock dress, who resided at the Chelsea Hotel.

Jirka crouched down in front of me; his long wavy, fair brown hair, out from its usual pony tail, framed his gorgeous face. "You shouldn't be like this," he said kindly. Despite Jirka's gorgeous looks, I'd never ever go for him on any level. First, he was the biggest womanizer of all the Czechs, & a graphic designer with *material* aspirations. The only things he had in common with most of the Czech guys was that he was in the arts, ultimately by chosen profession, had risked his life by illegally escaping, most likely on foot, Communist Czechoslovakia, & his choice of apartment, this place we were partying in, here on historically bohemian & rocking St Marks Place, NYC's East Village.

I just stared back at him, with an expression of, "yeah, I know, ok, cool." What he was referring to was the heavy saturnine misery that was so intensely emanating from my presence. It was ruining this party, which was very loud, & as I said, packed, wall to wall, but my wet blanket was so large that even superficial Jirka had to take notice. He pulled his long gorgeous thin legs up slowly & made his way back to his loving girlfriend, of the week. Jirka's girls were always the same: beautiful conservative-type Americans dotting on him, who noticed nothing else but him. They were always replaced by the next week, with another of the same.

The source of my misery was the guy sitting about two people down from me on this long futon, who was practically weeping into his beer because I wouldn't leave him alone. I think his real name was Jan, but he was known as "Bovi," as in David Bowie, but pronounced with a German accent.

I'd met Bovi two weeks before that party. It was at another party, but I can't remember now at whose place it was. I would be invited to a Czech party every single weekend. I was living alone uptown in an old historic Czech neighbourhood, on East 73rd Street, by the river. These parties had nothing to do with my neighbourhood but everything to do

with my obsession for everything Czech, the art, the poetry, the fiction, the photography, the food, the politics & history of it, & most especially the men! I was working at Rolls Royce, the service station, which also serviced Jaguar, two doors down from my tenement apartment share, & closer to the river, also on East 73rd Street. It was a strange & lonely life. I was known on the music scene all over NYC as I'd played with my band at CBGB's so many times, & many other places. I knew plenty of people, but for this phase of my life, which lasted a long time actually, years, my social life consisted of no one, no one, but the Czech artist's community of New York City. I worked every day 9 - 5 in the office of the Rolls place with a couple of tough uptown Puerto Rican girls, & we didn't like each other much. They must've thought I was weird, a girl singer, who lives with her cat next door, & working in this place with them, & they were very normal.

These days were the early ones of my adventures with the Czechs. However, I was a bleeding heart romantic, of course I wanted to hook up with one of them "for real." The sex was always happening, but I wanted a lasting relationship, I thought, & to get married, of course. I was in my mid-20s, & had already been through a bit of vagabond travelling, & living in LA, Amsterdam, etc. I loved this lonely life in a way, searching for a true Czech love. Sure there were rock musicians amongst the Czech crowd, that was one manner in which I met so many of them. Pavel Pernica, bassist for Iron Curtain, another CBGB's band, was brought to one of my shows at CB's for the purpose of meeting me & embracing me further into this large circle of men. That was a little bit after the party I am speaking of at Jirka Kolas'.

When I met Bovi he swept me off my feet. He was poetic & emotional, & strange. Dramatic, & very into educating me about the politics of Czechoslovakia. He told me about a recent night he'd been drunk & made a call to the Czech government from his Lower East Side studio apartment. He bragged, with ultimate remorse, the call was so threatening that within hours the police had surrounded his mother's house in Prague. He was major cute, his the nickname, & he was treating me like a Princess, like a Queen! But there at the party, a mere two weeks later, the girl from Berlin, who lived at the Chelsea – & I cannot remember her name although she was at least as famous as me Downtown – showed up, & I did not exist. She was apparently the girl who christened him "Bovi." They embraced & made out

right in front of me, & Bovi said to me, "We are all free here, there's lots of men here." But I behaved very uncool, with my heartbreak.

I would learn fast. There were so many lovers after that, I cannot remember their names unless I think really hard. I had a great time for the most part. About three years after that I was living in LA, with a luxurious office job, working for actress Connie Stevens. The Czechs of New York beckoned. The old Rosicrucian man Mr Voboril on East 69th Street, had died in his apartment which he'd lived in since the 1920s. Mr Voboril used to be a first port of call for some escaped young Czech men before they got on their feet. He had died & some of the crowd were taking over the apartment. I was invited to move in. It was all very respectful, & Mr Voboril's spirit was so strong that I gave up Occultism & became a Christian there. Yes, I moved in. Connie Stevens called me from Los Angeles, "Come back! You can move in with me." "Really? With the girls?" I thought she was referring to her daughters. "No, with me at my house." She was referring to her Bel Air mansion. I knew she'd understand, "Connie I'm living with four blue-eyed men, I'm not coming back." And she did.

By the time the authorities wanted the apartment cleared out, by law, a year later, there were newly-arrived Czech girls, & guys, sleeping together in every room, more than two couples sometimes in one room. One of them, Paul, blamed me: "It's all your fault. You've made us all sex crazy when Honza moved into your room."

There were times of course, when I played my shows in this era, with American musicians, & when I ventured out, however rarely, away from the Czech scene.

"Roxanna, you getting laid?" Fred Sessler, who was the best friend of Keith Richards (& a Polish immigrant), asked me this in front of a lot of people at a Rolling Stones clique party, when I walked up to them. Just a tad startled, I reacted truthfully, "Uh, yeah." "Roxanna always gets laid," he announced with the greatest respect.

BOB KRČIL

I need to tell you about how sad it was attending the funeral service of Bob Krčil in 1992, on West 14th Street. The large room was packed with people. Most of us were in rows of folding chairs, heads down, with many people standing around at the ends of the rows. What an absolutely terrible

scenario. Why did this happen? If I'd had my will, & my way, I would have now been a young widow, & *that* was apparently *not* meant to happen. Was this why? Leave it to Bob that even after he exited my life for good, I'd be dazed, & unable to focus.

I wrote a few songs about him. "Melancholy & You," "Dreaming She" – which I recorded in 2000, & released on my cd *Souvenirs d'Amour*. He was one of many Pisces men I'd be magnetically attracted to in my life, as my Sun sign opposite, & his version of the male Piscean monastic renunciant of materiality really took the fucking cake. He was poorer than a church mouse, & was very content with that, in his one-room apartment on a top floor of a Rivington Street walk-up on the Lower East Side.

Bob was slightly older than most of the Czech refugee boys. Most of the others escaped during the mid-1970s; he left in 1969. He travelled to Afghanistan first, & as if the Russians were on his tail he got there before they did! He did lots of photography there, & in the Indian Himalayas. Some of the photographs were printed up into postcards for the Funeral Service, to take away. I grabbed some in my dazed-out state & took a seat. Of course I was impressed with human nature that someone with no money whatsoever, & no real public profile, could pull in a crowd like this for his farewell party.

Bob died of lymphoma, quite suddenly, after passing out on a street a mere few months before. I was still new to Christianity at this time, & on my second visit to him at St Vincent's hospital, also on 14th Street, I prayed, knees on the cold floor, next to his bed, with my old bass player Vinny. Bob was under the covers, having just come out of a chemotherapy treatment, & he was shaking uncontrollably. I'd never been so intimate with someone in my whole entire life as that moment, & it wasn't quite what I had in mind for me & Bob Krcil, but this is how it was meant to be. I was surprised he even let me in, as the visit before that one, he was very awake & uptight & yelling at me that I better not let Pavel come see him because Pavel has TB, & on & on he railed about this. With equal fervor he pointed to a nearby Bible with a nod when I told him I was no longer an occultist.

All of the Czech boys, even the material aspirant ones, were in awe & respect of penniless Bob Krcil. For a free ride uptown, he'd treat Michael, Tony driving the van, & Petr to a cool dinner party at the home of some eccentric older uptown Czech dwellers, & yes they could pick up some American

girl who is into Czech culture, on the way there. That girl was me. That was the night I was officially embraced by the New York Czech community, in late 1986. I gravitated towards this petite quiet "leader of the pack" Bob, with the sad dark eyes, in his skinny jeans & oversized pink sweater. He ran away from me all night. In the weeks & months that followed I fell through the looking glass with him; the games, the long visits of getting high & talking about politics & the human condition for hours & hours, & nightly one-hour phone conversations. He told me the old man I'd written to from California & had met only once, in the Czech Center on East 73rd Street, had been murdered & thrown in the river down my street. Found on the side of the river close by, his death ruled a suicide. Bob told me it was the Czech KGB. There was all that sort of intriguing talk between us, & me turning down his invitation to go to bed, & then his consequential rejection of my love & refusal to see me. The energy between us was too hot to touch, first for me, then for him.

IVAN KRÁL

I will now tell you how I must've been the most electric 17 year-old walking down Bleecker Street. The large newspaper I had just purchased from a record store on MacDougal Street had "Blondie" – Debbie Harry – in a tight dress splashed down the entire front cover. A headline boasted a feature inside on Ivan Král.

It was my first day ever in Greenwich Village, a place I'd dreamed of since I was a little kid in nearby Brooklyn. I felt so free, ecstatic, I felt so beautiful, & intrigued with everything around me as I walked my skinny legs, in my platform shoes & tight blue jeans, newspaper opened in front of me to the pages of the interview with Ivan Král. It was 10 years past the days of when Jimi Hendrix & Bob Dylan owned these streets, but I still felt that I could "feel" them... "How does it feeeel?" – exhilarating – "Can you see me?" – yes I can.

I will now tell you how it was at 16, when I was at the outdoor concert in Central Park of Patti Smith on a hot night in early July. It was a sold-out show, & I was surprised by this. She wasn't on the radio, she wasn't on TV, she was only in some underground rock magazines, but this was Central Park. I was a Rolling Stones teenager. People all over the world knew about me & corresponded with me at my parents' house on Long Island because I ran an International Fan Club for Brian Jones.

But that fateful evening in Central Park was extremely emotional & I didn't know why, but I knew I was madly in love at-first-sight with the guitarist on stage wearing the green & white windbreaker with the red Stones tongue on its back. I had to have this guy, I had to know him, I had to do something. I borrowed someone's binoculars to get a better look at that energy.

I will now tell you how important I felt when Ivan Král came out on stage at the Bottom Line waving the designer scarf I'd gifted him with moments before, which he tied to his mic stand. And Lenny Kaye, the other guitarist, a rock writer & one of the Kings of the hip rock world, wore the t-shirt I had painted of Arthur Rimbaud for their singer, Patti Smith.

Two of my items were on the stage! Lenny Kaye wore that t-shirt for 5 nights straight at the Bottom Line concert run, & on the final night, at the end of their set, Patti tore it to shreds off his back. This was my official & portentous arrival to Rock n Roll: hidden, important, & powerful.

I will now tell you why it was surreal that I was getting postcards & notes & letters from Ivan Král at my parents' house when I was 18 years old. I'd had crushes on maybe just a couple of local boys on Long Island. My Italian-American parents were very strict & closed-minded. According to them I'd live at home until I was married, & marrying anything but an Italian-American would not be welcomed.

Yet I had this mad crush on Ivan Král, even before I knew his name. A refugee from a country that was under Russian rule. Czechoslovakia. He wasn't famous, neither was his singer, but the confidence around this band of true rock n roll musicians was red hot, & the burn was G-I-o-r-i-ous. It was where I needed to go, & be. Ivan was also confiding in me in these letters, from where he lived, on Bank Street on the west side of Greenwich Village. My psyche was filled with dreams. Magical dreams that smelled of subway piss, & moved like drugs, speed, as I'd sneak late at night on buses & subways, to catch club shows of other bands in this scene.

I will now try to make you understand how good it felt as I sat in a hotel room at the Hotel Iroquois at 20 years old, as my demo blared out of Ivan Král's boombox. He sat there rocking back & forth, with his feet on the dresser & the front feet of the chair up off the ground. He said, "You wrote this?"

He told me to drop off the masters at the hotel desk in the next few days & he'd re-mix & master them on Iggy Pop's studio time. He took me out to

lunch at a big Chinese restaurant in Times Square. I didn't say much nor could I really eat. My music was my medicine for my damaged ego. I was able to do it, I knew my songs were as good as anyone else's. I was damaged in my heart, but my ego was big, & as heavy as a bullet-proof vest. Ivan had a live-in lover for many years; it made me so sick. The music was the only thing I could do. I couldn't look for another love interest, so my energy bottled up was then only for the love that loved me back, my guitar.

I will now tell you how I was the most beautiful 21 year old-girl in the world in the last weeks of August of 1981. There was a magic around me & I was truly enchanted. I was living on the Lower East Side of NYC. I went to visit my Aunt Philly on Long Island during a visit to my parents. She'd known me & seen me often since I was born. She was sunbathing in her yard & looked at me & said, in a most strangely dreamy & unusual way, "You look beautiful." I knew it was true & I knew why.

When Ivan took me into his bed after drinking a bottle of wine on his antique Iranian rug, there at his new "bachelor's pad," I went into a spell like never before & never since. It was a good time in my life, I had just finished playing to a full audience 1,200-plus strong at The Ritz – the hottest venue in NYC – with my Long Island band Kid Blue. In a few weeks I would open an even bigger show on Long Island for the Specials, who had a number one record in England.

I will now share how at age 26 I cried like a baby, lying in the back seat of a taxi through Central Park in the pouring rain. It was such a very dark night. My tears fell as fiercely as the rain did. The driver tried to console me from the front seat, through his plastic partition. I was on my way home to my apartment on East 73rd Street, which I shared with a much younger girl junkie.

The concert I attended on the Upper West Side at the China Club was of Ivan Král's new band Eastern Bloc. I attended to say hello, & catch up. Ivan was wearing a wedding band on his finger, & so was his gal of the old days. The music wasn't really great. It was okay.

ME

I should tell you about Me. I was born Roseann Fontana in Brooklyn New York in 1959, to first generation Italian American parents. I am now Roxanne. I have been Roxanne Fontana since late February 1997. This was the name my mother

wanted me to have, but my father won that battle. The Roxanne asteroid, named for the Queen of Persia, sits in the 10th house, a house that is about the world, 'the public' in astrology, & the asteroid sits at the highest point of my astrology chart. Asteroid Roxanne sits next to my north lunar node – which designates where I need to go. Didn't know any of this at the time I changed the name – I was surely surprised. Yet my mother who chose this name, has a mental block that I am anything more than merely her daughter.

I have written loads of music. I have designed jewelry & made lots of it – ethnic jewelry, antique beads from Africa, the Middle East, & Europe. I have designed & made clothes: cashmere capes with silk linings, crushed velvet hot pants. I've done some film acting. I am a decent astrologer, having studied for years. I am an intuit. I became a Christian while living in a newly deceased old Rosicrucian Czech man's office on the Upper East Side of NYC. The Holy Spirit guides me well – what I see of this world, & the people in it, breaks my heart, but this same power protects me & makes me a force no one can ever kill. I am anti-violence & can never be killed.

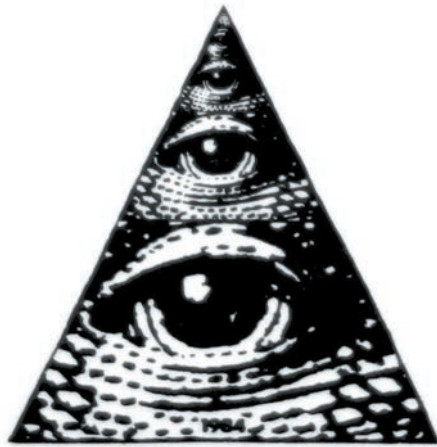
I now live in the beautiful English West Midlands

on the Welsh border with my husband who is a brilliant rock n roll guitar player from Montreal. I met him when he was working behind the counter at Manny's Music on 48th Street in NYC. He was 20, I was 40, it was love at first sight on my part. We got married in the non-decorated Bleecker Street church over a year later, & moved to LA.

While living in Beverly Hills, as statistically part of the 2 percent poverty rate there, I got pregnant when I was 44. I gave birth on Christmas Eve of 2002, to a Down Syndrome girl. She is an amazing blue-eyed beauty who can play more songs on the piano than I was able to play on the guitar at her age.

I wrote a memoir called *American Girl*. It took me a full year to complete, working for about 4 - 6 hours per day. The memoir follows my life up until 1999, which is the year I met Mat Treiber at Manny's. It includes the story of the week of December 1980 when John Lennon was killed. I wrote a song hours before his death called "Time Won't Wait." I am happy to say that recently I recorded it with John Lennon's producer Jack Douglas. John spent his last hours with Jack in NYC as I was writing this song. It is magical that it was written, & finally recorded with Jack Douglas. ■





THE STORIED SIGHT OF HUBERT KRETZSCHMAR

JOHN HOOD

The story goes like this:

A King, tired from a Hunt, took forty winks beneath a tree. Deeply asleep, he dreamed of his lover's fan. When he awoke, he decided to build a castle on the very spot. From the new castle radiated a town, spread in the shape of the dream fan. The King's name was Karl. The town was named Karlsruhe, or "Karl's Resting Place."

Like Bentham's Panopticon, the town was at once monstrous & beautiful. The spines of the fan became Karlsruhe's major avenues. At the fan's base where the streets met, loomed not just the castle but a number of strategically-placed cannon. Thus were the town folk kept in line & under eye.

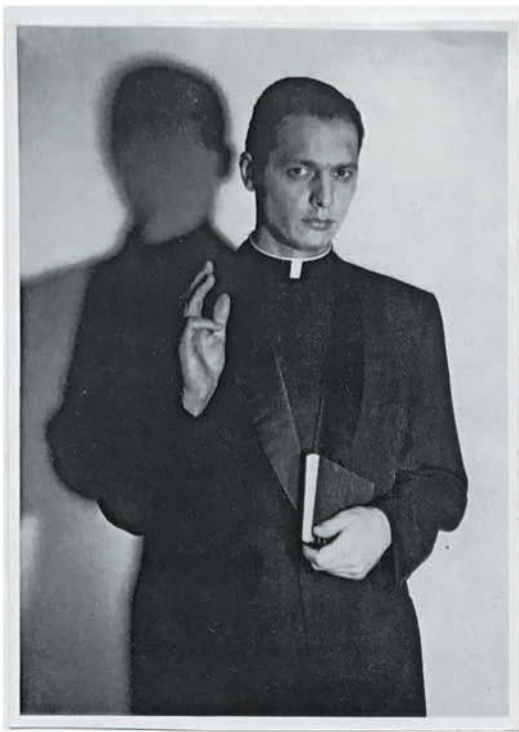
Karl's final resting place was marked by a large pyramid, which stands to this day, just outside the castle. Karlsruhe, hard on the Rhine River & skirting the Black Forest, is a magical construct. In time, engineers would control the river, but the wild willfulness of the surrounding woods remains uncollared since before the town's birth.

Neither would the willfulness of Karlsruhe's people be completely tamed. Hubert

Kretzschmar was raised in that land of Kings & Forest. As a child he played among the ghosts of the dense, dark Forest & the River's tributaries. As a student, he mastered the King's symbolic iconography. As a New Yorker, an exile among exiles, Kretzschmar took those hauntings & symbols, made of them a totemic body traversing disciplines, & made of himself a visualist of some repute.

Like a Liberator in Weimer, Kretzschmar mines his cultural history, while challenging its legacy of tradition. His is a vision of composite of which Beckmann, Dix & the rest of the Republic regulars would approve. Picture Dürer at the gates of the digital age; a happening along the clean lines of De Stijl, suffused with the raw irony of Dada; Surrealism's fluidity matched with Pop Art's reverent irreverence. Experiencing this work, we become aware of unconscious meaning imbedded in the stuff of everyday.

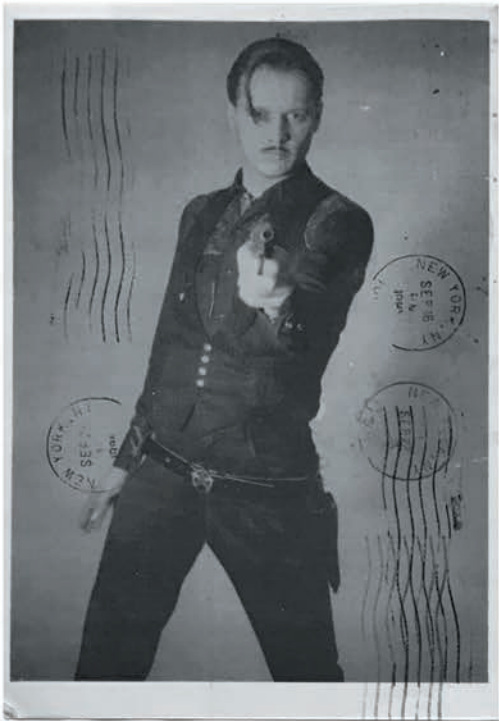
Nearly two decades before it became currency, Kretzschmar pioneered the marriage of fine & applied digital art. It began in 1980 on a Computer hybrid Paint system at Digital Effects (later noted for their work on *Tron*); segued through the Apple IIc campaign of '84 (Kretzschmar's Apple-jacked self-portraiture was the face of the brand in Japan); came of age celebrating the New Wave music revolution (album covers & art for Talking Heads, Eno, Kraftwerk); & matured with the branding of names like the Rolling Stones, Fiorucci, Thurn & Taxis, Warner Brothers, BMG, Chrysalis, Nike, Sony & MTV/Viacom. It's a testament to the integration within Kretzschmar's work that it has been shown not just in galleries & museums (New York, Philadelphia, Houston, Zürich, Budapest, Tokyo, Berlin, Düsseldorf &, yes, Karlsruhe), but also on the streets, newsstands, music stores & nightclubs around the world. ■



Above: Selfportrait postcard series 1979 to 1992, "Priest, Sailor, NYer, in the court of Louis XIV." Previous page: The World (254 E 2nd St) New Years Eve Party logo, 1984, design by Hubert Kretzschmar.



Selfportrait postcard series 1979 to 1992, "Joe Dalesandro, Clark Gable, Hip Hop, Gangster."



Selfportrait postcard series 1979 to 1992, "Gunslinger, Country singer, Boxer, Scanner"

© 1982 HUBERT KRETZSCHMAR



BRIAN SALTERN
INVITES YOU TO A **ZOO** PARTY



FEATURING THE WORLD RHYTHMS OF
SWOLLEN MONKEYS

LATIN POLKAS, MEXICAN GERMAN JAZZ, ZAPPA-ESQUE ROCK & ROLL
ANYONE DRESSED IN AN ANIMAL COSTUME ADMITTED FREE



WEDNESDAYS AT THE
UNDERGROUND
860 BROADWAY JAN.27/ 11PM
D.J.S: EJAL, BILL BAHLMAN
ADMISSION \$ 10





Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1979, by Robert Carrithers.

I met Jean-Michel Basquiat as “Samo” at a downtown New York party in 1979. The first thing he asked me was, “Do you want to start a band?”

Visual artists in bands were commonplace back then, with the end result being “no wave” post-punk music that was, more often than not, hard to listen to. But who cared, when everyone looked so good in 1960s thrift-shop suits?

But Jean & I *embraced* our lack of musicianship. Using a more sonically sculptural, painterly approach, we plotted to create “new” music that no one had ever heard before. Jean named us Gray.

Our first step: recruiting band mates with style, an instinct for the delightfully unexpected, decent knowledge of art history, & in possession of no discernable musical skills, what-so-ever.

We called this aesthetical sensibility, “ignorance,” meaning: *“The casual, offhanded ability to create something that shouldn’t work – but does – in spite of itself.”*

Godard’s films are a good example of this beautiful, not-taking-oneself-too-seriously – yet brimming-with-pathos – absurdity we aspired to.

By late 1979, Gray was Wayne Clifford, Nick Taylor, Jean (as unspoken leader) & myself. It didn’t matter what we played, since our approach was, *“We are alien to this world, & do not know how these instruments are meant to be played. But we know beautiful sound & music when we hear it.”*

Nick might run a guitar pick, slowly up & down the tight ridges of an electric guitar string (“det-det-det”) as I ripped masking tape off an amplified snare drum head (“shear-RUNK!”). Wayne might rub sweaty fingers across a wooden, African xylophone (“WHOOO-whooo-WHOOOO!”), as Jean played electric guitar with impossibly loose strings, on the floor, with a metal file (“plink-plink-plink, plink-plink”).

Blindfolded, you knew you were listening to conventional instruments playing avant-garde industrial music, but exactly how the instruments were being manipulated (corrupted really) might have confounded you.

While in Gray, Jean was yet to discovered his masterful style & vision as a painter, but his late-1970s “pez” baseball cards were an obvious precursor to the Xerox photocopy collages he would glue to his mid-1980s canvases, & his late-1970s surrealistic

“Samo” poetry foreshadowed his never ending use of words & text in his future paintings, & came in handy with his own lyrics & vocals in Gray.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS OMNIPRESENT?

- A. LEE HARVEY OSWALD
- B. COCA-COLA LOGO
- C. GENERAL MELONRY
- D. SAMO©...

A PIN DROPS LIKE A PUNGENT
ODOR. SAMO©

MAKE SOUP, BUILD A FORT,
SET THAT ON FIRE. SAMO©

And Jean designed all of our band flyers, which combined his collage style with words & text, as well. Looking back, Jean’s painterly aesthetics – as we know them now – were very much in evidence, as we made music in Gray.

Gray was a democracy in terms of individual creative input, but Jean always had the last word. In my mind, I see us applying our sounds to a song the way he would later apply paint to canvas. Constantly editing, crossing out, leaving empty when appropriate.

During live performances, Jean often sat on the stage floor, like a small, lonely child, reciting poetry like:

*Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, men
have named you, a second-class citizen, tea-
stain brown with missing pages.
If shown the motor, each
man would use 200 pounds
of effort, denied the
logic of primitive cartoon.*

Gray’s absurdist aesthetics were not limited to music. In 1980, writer Glenn O’Brien hired Gray to perform at Leo Castelli’s birthday party at the Rock Lounge in Tribeca. Jean had recently met a young sculptor (Peter Artin) who - inspired by the San Francisco art collective Survival Research Laboratories – built a rudimentary, robot-like machine, made out of a shopping cart, an electric motor & various bits of

metal. It made a lot of noise, & that was about it.

On stage, Jean plugged the thing in whenever the mood struck him. As this super loud contraption bounced violently across the stage, Leo Castelli pressed back against his seat in genuine panic. It was his 73rd birthday.

For a Mudd Club performance in 1981, we built a geodesic dome stage set, from my design, out of scaffolding, lumber & garbage, which the various members of Gray would play embedded inside of, teetering on top of, & underneath (Vincent Gallo was a member of Gray at the time).

Jean arrived late for sound check, astonished & impressed to behold the finished monstrosity. Jean ran outside, & then returned in five minutes with an empty wooden shipping crate, three feet cubed & opened at one end. Jean threw the crate on stage, squeezed inside, pulled his mini-WASP synthesizer

in with him, then looked out at me & smiled.

Quickly searching the streets, Jean found something that not only worked with our absurdist, geodesic dome design, it also made him the focus of attention. Jean rocked like that.

Today, Gray makes music for film & television & performs at major art institutions, such as: The New Museum in Manhattan; the Brooklyn Academy of Music; the Parrish Museum in the Hamptons; & the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. We (Nick Taylor & myself) released an album ("Shades Of..") in 2010 & are working on a new one at this very moment.

As in the past, our musical approach is still very much the same: we listen for the unexpected, seek the sublime & embrace ignorance at all opportunities. Listen to the sounds of Gray & you'll hear what I mean. ■



Michael Holman, 2013, by Rob Northway.

yes richard i was awakened by lots of sirens too. actually was not asleep since i rarely do though lying in bed heard more sirens than ever before... so that is the biggest change to deal with. now herein as per your letter a synopsis or should i say synopsis of memory regarding dalachinsky & the changes incurred upon the face of soho since my almost thirty-odd years of living here.

listening to slow (what else is there) feldman piano music i will start as follows with my career of selling on the street... that began in 1976 on the corner of west broadway & spring when the now armani store had ledges to sit on & before it was an ad hoc... it was an early fine arts gallery owned by a woman what was her name? ah elise meyer, she owned the property as well. early co-op bldg, i believe nicholas ray stayed in as did richard gere & spike lee latterly... next door was another gallery cum print, poster & frame shop that joann, the soon to be gracie mansion, worked in with her pal sur rodney sur. we were friends then before she changed & became gracie m the lower eastside gallerist. buster cleveland & ed higgins did dada limo show on that corner. we called it "the office" & printed a one time newspaper called "the office" which included rene the i am the greatest artist fellow now too gone, & another steve, a photographer who struck it big in real estate & who's daughter was killed in the preppy murder case in central park (photo of her as a kid was in said "office") & there were many other locals within its pages. i sold basically as i still do lps & sometimes books which i do more of now... from that corner i moved to the kochendorfer ledge where i sold same plus anything i could get my hands on i.e. clothes shoes & assorted sundries... like the ledges on spring & west broadway alas the kochendorfer (knife & tool sharpeners) platform was also removed to discourage folk, tourists included, from sitting on said things... from there i moved in front of jamie canvas (its second incarnation) where i sold mainly lps & saw young upstart basquiat aka samo come to do his zeroxing (jamie had state of art 1st color zerox on block or universe). i used to chase samo away from my corner on w.b. & spring when he sold hand made postcards... he was a real brat. he worked then in a used clothing store on bdway called unique boutique.

i also used to make fun of him when he brought his goods to be xeroxed... oh little did i know... if only i had those postcards now. more about him later... i had met nudel when i was on the platform. he looked at me & my merchandise aloofly & with disdain... he was also a snob... smart & elitist & very covetous of his intelligence & knowledge. he, like me, was/is a poet only he was an educated one who studied with creeley & had 2 degrees & me just a poor dropout basically self taught though now i can say that i am a much better poet than he... anyway from jamie, when he moved, i, neighborhood gypsy pioneer street vendor, moved to the corner parking lot (spring & wooster) that is now a flea market & that was enclosed by a fence... i sold everything from "soup to nuts" & had a then friend sell next to me as she did in my first location. then the 2 pair for \$5 sock sellers started coming & with them the police. anyway that parking lot became a flower-ice cream place for awhile & then a flea market. harry nudel & i got friendlier. he was selling in front of his bldg at 135 spring when by this time urban archaeology occupied most of the space (before them there was a machine shop on one side & a large drago shoe repair on the other – after them there were the first wave of "bad" art galleries as the giant spaces were broken into two & then came the clothing stores the helena rubinstein & now a burberry as the divided spaces are turned once again back to their original giant sizes for amazingly giant rents.) anyway i moved across the street with him set up on the ledges of urban a. beneath their windows, those beautiful cut glass & cast iron ledges that are there still, & thru much turbulence & hardship & relationship difficulties with nudel & others am there still some 15 yrs later which makes a grand total of about 25 yrs on & off, mostly on, of selling on the street & still not figuring out how to make a decent living from it. on this final spot there was a time when i sold bootleg tapes, among which the crème de la crème of poetry & literature, kerouac being the first, which later inspired that whole rhino boxed set thing... my last encounters with basquiat came then... sometimes i would sell across the street from harry if he & i or the landlord & i would have fallings out which we frequently did... samo, who by now was very famous, would come by & buy lps from me with the stipulation that they had to be originals which they generally were & cheap at that. the last lp he asked me for on that side of the street was a coleman hawkins side that contained a solo piece he wrote called picasso. samo only knew the title & not the history he wasn't all that



Steve Dalachinsky, "Empire of the Spiders," 1990.

learned. i told him i had it in my collection & that i'd make him a tape. he only wanted the vinyl so hence the deal fell thru.. that spot had gone from a sanitation place & a daytop village to a youth hostel. do not know what it was in between. oh bead store. frame shop. household goods. clothes. but i digress. anyway back to my final basquiat encounter. by then he was sick. he came by smoking a giant spliff & asked me for some kerouac tapes. i told him sure & gave him the price. he became very abusive (what's new) & said i was taking advantage of him because he was now rich & famous (almost everyone who comes by & who is rich & famous thinks i am taking advantage of them & believe me many have come by), wherein i said read the sign jerk that's the price i charge everybody & if you weren't so mean, etc. i'd've probably given them to you for free. wherein another transaction was not completed. i never saw him again & he died shortly after. for awhile i hung out in some clubs he frequented though i only went when invited because yuko & i hated & still hate the club scene as we do practically every other scene. we even once did a reading in the mudd club but i digress again... during a period when h.n. & landlord overly bugged me i sold for a short time on spring & lafayette after spring natural restaurant moved there as rents on this end were sky-rocketing. you might say that he & i pioneered that end of town though he fared better than i & is still doing so. he, robert, one of the owners used to own slugs. we got pretty friendly. he also had nice ledges that i used to sell on... but too many local winos used to sit on them so he put up a kind of uncomfortable railing like they do for pigeons, to discourage them. it did as it also did me. i re-negotiated & was back at 135 spring though by now urban a. was gone. i took on a disciple for awhile (we had terrible fights – everything becomes so damned territorial.) his name was steve too hence we called him steve two.

more & more people began to sell on the streets bringing more & more problems & police due in part to the wrath of the soho alliance & good ole phoney liberal katherine freed...

now because of lederman's art pioneering the place is a zoo & it's gotten so bad that they've managed to rezone the area so that people aren't allowed to sell on spring or prince streets between broadway & west broadway on the weekends... i never liked or trusted lederman. i thought he was basically out for himself but of course he soon made it into a campaign for art & freedom of speech for everyone so he wouldn't look like the egoist that he was. though i must admit he accomplished his goals. we never actually spoke though i'm sure he was aware of my vending on the street since he sometimes set up near me on west broadway... did not know guy lessim. i do not consider myself an antiquarian.

richard i'm sure if we talk more we can come up with every venue change of the past 35 yrs from orange juice & fish sellers to old lady with thrift shop to steve's clothing store (that's right yet another steve & the first i believe upscale clothing store in the neighborhood) which moved from spring as rents jacked up to wooster where now resides the peter blum gallery one of less than a handful of good galleries that remain... then there was harry's (a different harry) paint shop & the hardware store(gone & torn down) & the spring street bar & berry's & the charcuterie & napoli & the dry cleaner & the mob hang out & the candy store & dom blue the don of the neighborhood & fireworks & printed matter.

very few of older businesses still remain. prime ones are eli buck... that weird woman on west broadway & certain bars like the broome street bar & fenelli's (tho that has 3 times changed hands) some local artists, what there is left of them, still hang out there though it is a tourist trap now... lots of other local artists who did not move, get forced or bought out, were fortunate enough to buy their spaces & as one told me recently, he makes more money renting out the

ground floor store in one month than he made in his entire years as an artist.

oh & you know 420 w. bway castelli & sonnebend & all that crap. & mary boone. & central falls. & whole foods & the restaurant called food. & samaria's before manhattan bistro which is still owned by maria. & where'd her husband sam disappear to? & the new morning book store that became spring street books & then the umpteenth overpriced shoe store which it is now... & all the bookstores including soho books & the upscale rizzoli's now gone because of all these astronomical rent hikes i.e. chanel paying 50k per month.

me, i live in a very tiny apartment & pay near zero rent so that's how i survive.

& whatever happened to etan patz. the case finally closed.

if you need more, of which i'm sure there's plenty, let me know...



Stills from *Money*, dir. Henry Hills, 1985.

MY UNDERGROUND NEW YORK

HENRY HILLS

Standing at the corner of Ludlow & Houston today, the gateway to a haven of Hollywood hipsterdom – (“Live like a Rockefeller, Party like a Rock Star – The Ludlow”), it’s not so easy to imagine the repulsion & pity felt by my relatives when they visited me at my apartment here in the ‘80s. The front door was never locked, so all the drunks came inside to pee behind the stairwell & more than once I stumbled in on a hooker giving some guy a blow-job; there was a shooting gallery just at the top of the stairs on the second floor landing run by Steve, a former lover of the landlord who supported his own habit by charging \$5 to a steady flow of workers bringing their own works to get high & listen to Louis Armstrong & Billie Holiday with him; my next door neighbor Eddie, a retired fireman with a much younger dissatisfied but enduring mail-order Trinidadian bride-with-child, would go on his monthly benders, totally jolly at first, some days later unshaven lying on the sidewalk indistinguishable from any Bowery bum, always finally calling the cops to haul him away to the tank to dry up – once, after a loud banging, I opened my door to find two police with pistols drawn pointed at me asking what was the problem & somehow amazingly calmly I replied that they must want the gentleman next door. The summers stank as Katz’s Deli brewed their 50 gallon barrels of sauerkraut on the sidewalk under my window & refrigerator semis sat all night with their diesel engines fuming. The neighborhood was a mostly amiable mixture of poor people – primarily blacks who all seemed to be related to each other, the patriarchs, who held court during the day on the stoops, having moved downtown from Harlem after WW2, &, I think, Dominicans – & white artists, including Kiki Smith & all of the CoLab people, as well as an unusually large number of filmmakers, including Coleen Fitzgibbon, Peter Hutton, Jon Rubin, Aline Mayer, Bradley Eros, Jeff Preiss, Abby Child, & myself. The omnipresent heroin retail business was much more subtle here than in the burned-out shells north in Alphabet City. Whenever fatigue overcame me working late in the evening, a visit to Sal’s Pizzeria was like snorting speed: Sal & Sal Jr, forever grilling sizzling greasy sausages, the radio blasting, the TV blasting also, the crazy guy always sitting at one of the two bar chairs having an ongoing shouting conversation between his selves & the TV, the always flickering fluorescent bulbs, & the two ancient beeping video games in the back that the neighborhood kids were constantly banging around. My rent was very cheap. I could make it working one week a month labor for an all-artist construction company, partly hired from small real estate guilt to renovate lofts as other artists were displaced in SoHo & TriBeCa.

The most happening place for film at that time was the greatly missed Collective for Living Cinema down in TriBeCa. Originally founded in protest to the formation of the Essential Cinema canon of Anthology Film Archives (which collection ended in the early ‘70s, seemingly denying the possibility for

future generations of experimental filmmakers owing to the pernicious emergence of experimental film as an academic discipline, which incidentally provided employment to the majority of living artists in the Essential Cinema collection). Fall though Spring, the Collective screened experimental films every

Friday & Sunday evening to a generally large & often contentious crowd (& oddball narrative films on Saturdays, to not collide with the in-person filmmaker series at the more moldy but enduring Millennium Film Workshop, the chosen venue for the annual visits of Stan Brakhage & George Kuchar, & a paying gig for those of us who happily frequented any theater which screened our type of work). There were also numerous pop-up showcases; you had to check the "Other Films" section in the *Voice* every week. Anthology itself, the wonderful 80 Wooster Theater of which was intermittently closed during the decade for fire violations & finally shuttered & sold in preparation for the move to its present 2nd Ave & 2nd St courthouse location, had the best projectionist in town at the time, Rick Stansberry; it was totally mind-altering to watch, for instance, their pristine 35mm Vertov prints – a serious viewing location indeed. MoMA had their own Monday night in-person Cineprobe series as well, it seems like it was monthly, & even the Whitney had regular screenings. But the Collective was the cutting edge, the feminists versus the formalists, with ardent, high-pitched, often quite contentious & stressful, discussions; the godheads being Ken Jacobs & Yvonne Rainer. But the No Wave scene totally dominated media attention – cheaply-transferred super-8 projected on such video beamers as existed at the time, on St Mark's Place. We thought it was nothing at the time. There was an impressive flyer-posting blitz throughout the East Village & environs by Scott & Beth B which almost matched the obsessive inflating omnipresence of Basquiat's SAMO© graffiti campaign in SoHo a couple of years earlier. Their films seemed more than rapid enough, though, until the long-winded narcissistic Nick Zedd came along. When I arrived, I got the impression that everyone in my peer group was trying to make their Ernie Gehr film. Obviously not so easy as it might appear, but I wanted to do something different, something new & never before done.

I had been composing silent single-frame totally text-free 16mm films in dreamy San Francisco. Even though maybe 100 people ever saw this work, I relished what I thought to be the international & direct quality of the communication. I have unfortunately never been much of a careerist. As noise is an obviously present quality in New York, always fascinating just as the visuals are even to this day always fascinating walking the streets, I imagined methods to adapt sound film to my crazily radical aspirations. It took me a bitter while to get access to the equipment to do so. I had been equipment-loan manager at Film/Video Arts (I only lasted a couple of months) & while I loaned out sync-sound rigs to other filmmakers, I was not able myself to borrow them because a \$2000 security

deposit was required on the insurance policy. My first "sync" sound film was shot on a wind-up Bolex with audio recorded on a Sony Walkman cassette recorder. Fortunately, as the local TV stations switched their news equipment to video, Rafik acquired several Frezzolini single-system 16mm cameras. Rafik, a true film angel, was a Palestinian living underground without a visa, who had stayed on in NY against his parents' wishes after he graduated from Pratt & had founded a cooperative film production fantasy which had evolved into an out-dated film-stocks & short-ends mail order operation (the context I had been introduced to him by Nick Dorsky) & went on to become a post-production facility & the only downtown film supplies headquarters & further evolved into an inexpensive low-end but problematic video transfer facility. He gave an annual Thanksgiving party that was the only place (except maybe in the elevators & hallways of the various labs) where members of all the different low-budget film communities ever crossed paths: Jack Smith, Jim Jarmusch, Robert Frank, experimental, documentary, indy narrative, & punk filmmakers. These Frezzolini's he had bought (& rented out at something like \$125/week) recorded sound directly onto a magnetic stripe on one side of a reversal film strip; it was possible to be a one-person crew. Babette VanLoo, a Dutch filmmaker (we had studied together with George Kuchar at the Art Institute), hired me to shoot the historic Joseph Beuys lecture at the Great Hall at Cooper Union; this gave me a chance to learn how to use these cameras; unfortunately I didn't figure out how to focus the image until halfway through the first 12 minute reel (out of two). When we viewed the rushes, she was incensed, but I was ecstatic because I at that moment discovered the answer to a mystery that had entranced me since I saw my first experimental films, *Bike Boy* & *Nude Restaurant* at the Central Theater in Atlanta in 1967. Since in such a single-system camera (like also Warhol's Auricon) the sound is recorded directly onto the film, there is a brief swooping whistle alongside a flash frame whenever the camera is turned on while the motor comes up to speed (24fps). This lasts way less than a second but can be very distinctive if the shots are short. Warhol used this accidental effect increasingly in his sound films; often, when he seems bored with the ceaseless chatter of his superstars, turning the camera off & on until the flashing & whooping becomes incredibly manic. This technique fit perfectly with my intention to fragment language in order to focus on movement & gesture & especially, rhythm. I flipped the switch on these cameras off & on so many times that I totally destroyed at least one of them. My idea of content was to use other radical artists as my stars & subject matter, presenting them

& their work as the raw material for creating my own, mostly outside on the lively streets of downtown on sunny days. My thought: use the experts – poets for language, musicians for sound, & dancers for movement, & natural lighting.

If any artists can be more pure & free from fashion & market influences than experimental filmmakers, that would be poets, I always thought. Which could possibly be translated as poor & ignored. I had met Ron Sillman & many of the “West Coast” language poets before I left San Francisco, but $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ magazine was reaching out to other artists in New York, & Charles Bernstein & Ted Greenwald had started this amazing Saturday afternoon reading series at the Ear Inn, where totally wild poets like Hannah Weiner, Peter Seaton, Jackson Mac Low, Tom Raworth, Diane Ward & Bruce Andrews were regularly reading. For several years a lot of these readings were big events (you can listen to most of them streaming on PennSound); the bar scenes afterwards were also pretty wild. The younger poets around St Mark’s Poetry Project seemed to have an aesthetic of fucking-up their lives with weird sex, alcohol, drugs & general low life in order to have something to write about in their repetitive autobiographical focus. The language gang, though, with their formally & politically radical focus, were reaching out (both directions) to other artists, whatever media. Most scenes are so xenophobic, so this outreach attitude drew a lot of us with similar aesthetics in. The pleasures of streams of words flowing over you! Is real life a thing of the past? It got harder for me to keep up as their books got longer. What was great at this time was a kind of sense of communal experimentation & a receptiveness to wilder & crazier is better.

Somehow a lot of musicians moved (or moved back) to New York in the late ’70s & something that was not quite free jazz was beginning. Bruce Andrews & I had organized a series called Last Tuesday which combined 3 mini poetry readings, 3 short experimental 16mm films, & one jazz set, to be held the last Tuesday of each month at the Millennium. For the second (&, as it turned out, final) event, we invited John Zorn to play. Larry Ochs had told me this was someone on my wavelength that I should check out. We had a particularly large crowd that evening, &, as soon as he rolled up his pants leg & stuffed a tennis ball into his sax & started squawking (to the accompaniment of Polly Bradfield playing electric violin with a toothbrush), people started leaving, gradually & then in large groups until there was no one left but me & Bruce & our girlfriends. That was the beginning of a great friendship. Going record shopping with Zorn was an education in itself. The new “downtown improv scene” had a rehearsal/performance space called,

oddly enough, Studio Henry, in the basement of a pet store at 1 Morton St, which had been started by Wayne Horvitz & Robin Holcomb & was later run by Mark E. Miller of the Toy Killers. It felt like there was some sort of improv gig going on there every night & it must have been free or donation-only because I went all the time; I could take a break from my own work, bike over & listen to a set of fresh exploratory improvisation & then go home all revved up with ideas. I remember a performance of Zorn’s *Jai Alai* where there were more people on stage than in the audience. The musicians came from a wide range of backgrounds—all varieties of jazz, folk, rock, funk, minimalism, & electronic music, many classically trained, some artists not really musicians in any formal sense – but all were committed to making something new & unpredictable & they fearlessly banged their heads together in public. Fred Frith was almost a rock star when he left England for this downtown scene. Zorn, whose performances on duck calls were absolutely breathtaking, began composing his game pieces to give some kind of order to all of this energy. It was a recruiting station for Bill Laswell’s various studio productions. There were other spaces – Inroads, King Tut’s Wah-Wah Hut, the Saint; Roulette on West Broadway was the center for many years, the Knitting Factory when it was on Houston St & later Tonic down on Suffolk. And after Bruce got together with Sally Silvers, she educated us in what was going on in tandem with post-Judson dance.

In this environment of parallel aesthetics across a range of fields & media, I made three historical films beginning with the still-radical *Radio Adios*. I mean they’re all pretty whacked, but, in some ways *Money* often looks like my sell-out commercial film by comparison. (I had made an earlier exploration, *Plagiarism*, which has a fantastic soundtrack, but I was not happy with the visuals, especially compared to the dazzle of my previous silent films; all those protagonists re-appear in subsequent works). With *Radio Adios*, the first rough-cut was composed from a transcription of the intentionally very fragmented sync rushes to be a wild avant-garde poem (the actual text was published as one in the magazine *O.A.R.S.*); after I had finished cutting the sync version on the flatbed editing machine, I put the rolls up on rewinds &, wherever the strip itself was not visually interesting enough to the naked eye, I intercut other footage (for instance, my first rolls of Sally Silvers’ dance moves, which were often absurdly criticized at the time as having awkward transitions, but, when montaged, no transitions were necessary) to jazz it up. This film included, in addition to my repertory cast, Jackson Mac Low performing from *The Asymmetries* & Hannah Weiner reading from the notebooks that became *Little Books/Indians*,

George Kuchar playing a Maoist revolutionary, Jemeel Moondoc with Ensemble Muntu (Roy Campbell, William Parker, & Rashid Bakr) & Rashid Ali, & performance artist Aline Mayer talking about sex. This film (up until the release print) was somehow entirely self-financed; with it's out-dated filmstock, it has a kind of endearing poverty look. As I was finishing it I wrote a half-drunken application to the NEA to make a 12-part film based on Frederic Jameson's *Marxism & Form* & miraculously got the grant. \$25,000 seemed like an immense fortune at the time but I ran through it fast enough (I paid my lab bill, bought a new Bolex, bought a new projector, bought a tape recorder) before I was barely half-way through my project, the difficulties of finishing which (& otherwise I would have had to pay back the funding – as if...) led to it's title, *Money*. It was the Reagan era & we were resisting (& having fun). Is this even possible now? It stars Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Jack Collum (who was Brakhage's brother-in-law & lived down the block from me on Ludlow), Alan Davies, Susie Timmons, James Sherry (my boss when I gave up construction work & became the mail order clerk-& later the president-of the Segue Foundation, as "Mr Money," because at the time we thought him corrupt since he took a job with IBM), & the goddess Diane Ward – as my poets. Zorn & Tom Cora, my main musician stars besides David Moss, helped facilitate my music shoots. I began with Toy Killers at Studio Henry. I shot tons of horribly underexposed footage there when I first got my grant, film-stocks just weren't fast enough at the time to shoot in such a low light situation. I hadn't realized how low the light was because the music was loud & the performances so visual. So I returned to my Bolex & sunlight to shoot dance improv in order to systematically replace these bad visuals (& sync them up to the best music bits) & began, for instance, filming Pooh Kaye improvising movement as well as Sally. I think I provoked a lot of future collaborations between artists of like aesthetics who were not previously aware of each others' work. Yoshiko Chuma gave an amazing sync sound performance of a high energy improv dance in the middle of Avenue A & 7th St speaking Japanese the entire time. I intercut this with David Moss singing & playing a sheet of tin on a Sunday on Orchard Street, the most congested situation you could imagine in all of Manhattan but a somehow always mellow friendly environment. Orchard Street on Sundays was truly amazing; it was like Democracy at it's most ideal, Coney Island around the block. It had been that way for a century & then suddenly it was gone. I gradually figured out the possibilities of performance space exposure & had well-lit shoots of what was Zorn's probably even-to-this-day largest cast piece, *Croquet*, at Verna

Gillis' legendary club, Soundscape, which included rare footage of Bill Laswell, Eugene Chadbourne, & Bob Ostertag, among others; of his *Track & Field* at Roulette, featuring Christian Marclay, Jim Staley, & Butch Morris, with Ikue Mori on drums; of Arto Lindsay at Giorgio Gomelsky's Zu House; & of various other improv gigs with Frith, Derek Bailey, & others. I shot Zorn outside on his block of 7th St. until a drug kingpin chased us off & then inside at his blackboard, & filmed Tom Cora playing his cello with the huge rubber band on the Brooklyn Bridge. Tom was particularly supportive not only during production but later as I was trying to get this film out into the world. It opened many doors for me. Afterwards I made a book to go with it: *Making Money* & then started renovating a building near Tompkins Square Park where I would eventually move. During this process of creating beauty (& a home) out of rubble, I made *SSS*. *SSS* is a dance film, with a soundtrack improvised before most of the shooting was done by a trio of Tom Cora, Christian Marclay, & Zeena Parkins, with the understanding that I could cut it up & reassemble it into my own composition. I started shooting with Sally & Pooh & continued over almost three years, using mostly various dancers who performed with them: Harry Shepperd, Kusil-ja (then known as Kumiko Kimoto), David Zambrano, Mark Dendy, Lee Katz, Ginger Gillespie, & numerous others. When it was a sunny day & I was free, I would call around & get dancers to come over to Avenues B & C & improvise movement for me on my Bolex. Barbara Kopple was making her film *American Dream* about a Hormel meatpackers strike that unexpectedly dragged on & on & which was thus years in postproduction & generously rented her editing suite at Cabin Creek Films in the evenings for very cheap to poor independent filmmakers, & so I went there after work several nights a week & ran the music & the work-print of the movement footage together randomly over & over & pulled out whatever sections "hit" sync. It took quite some time to reassemble these fragments into something coherent. By the time the film was done, the world had moved on. When it was released, except for showings at Sally's & Pooh's performances, it was a huge flop; everyone thought it was just *Money* without the poets & musicians. But maybe 5 years later the world moved on again & it gradually became, & still remains, my most popular work, maybe partially because of nostalgia for '80s fashions & the pre-gentrified East Village. By the early '90s these scenes as scenes largely disappeared. The ever increasing rents drove out the small performance spaces & forced most people to get full-time jobs or become famous. Somehow, though, New York is still an incredibly energizing place live. I feel like I'm still Underground. ■



Bowery bums, 1976 (above & opposite), by Gary Ray Bugarcic.

It was the quiet desolation of 31st Street that I remember most back in the fall of 1976. To be exact, I lived at the Hotel Le Marquis at 12 East 31st Street right off of Fifth Avenue. After 7pm on weekdays & almost all day & night on weekends that area below 34th Street & above 23rd was dead. As you walked down the sidewalks all you'd run into were rats, huge water bugs & the occasional homeless sleeping in cardboard boxes. At those times there was rarely another soul around. If you went west, there were a few artists & musicians living in lofts towards the flower district & if you went east you were sure to run into streetwalkers on either Madison, Lexington or Park Avenue. Of course you would see the Johns in their cars slowly cruising the girls as they tried to decide whether to pull over or not. And if you looked closely enough you might also see a few reclining pimps in their conspicuously parked brightly colored Cadillacs. Not all of these girls were with pimps mind you. It was obvious that a few would take the train from Westchester & Connecticut to Grand Central Station & then just walk a couple of blocks south on Park Avenue for a night of work. By all means, a cinematic street setting we've all seen many times on the big screen. Furthermore, at night, the only places open for food near the Hotel Le Marquis were Smiler's Deli, the Belmore Cafeteria on Park Ave & a Chinese take-out just west of Fifth. Since Park Avenue was a good walk from my hotel, my unpredictable hunger was usually satisfied at Wok-In, the Chinese take-out. It was on one of my nightly trips to Wok-In to pick-up some dollar shrimp balls that I first met the young homeless guy who was a regular fixture in the neighborhood. He was a humble & handsome black man with dreadlocks who seemed to be just a few years older than me. He never spoke a word, & to this day, I'm not sure if he was fully deaf or not. He never asked me for anything, but if I could afford it, every time I saw him on the block, I would buy him an egg roll or some other Chinese delicacy. I'll never forget his grateful eyes warmly thanking me. Well I left the hotel after about eight months & for the next thirty years lived all over the city. It was just about 2006 when I was walking on the 22nd Street side of the Flatiron Building that I ran into my homeless long lost friend again. I could not believe my fortune in turning a corner & seeing him standing there by the subway entrance. We both looked at each other like we were brothers separated at birth! He then asked to see the newspaper I was carrying & he took out a pen & wrote, "Hi Gary, how are you?" Is this for real? I thought. He actually remembered my name. I couldn't believe it & was overcome by emotion & started to cry. No doubt I needed that release. To console me he put his arm around my shoulder & it was all coming full circle now. "I'm sorry but I can't remember your name?" I whispered as I was attempting to collect myself. He took the paper & pen & wrote "Your friend always, Darryl!" "Darryl!" I said, even though it truly didn't sound familiar, "Of course!" We quickly caught-up with one another's lives best we could in the few minutes we were together, then I gave him twenty dollars & ran off to an appointment I was already late for. I never saw him again after that which makes me cherish that moment & our peculiar friendship even more. It was a friendship started in a different New York City & reassuringly rekindled today in this unfamiliar world of uncertainty.. ■





"What I saw": view of the Bowery, 1986, by Sara Driver.

HOW I ENDED UP ON THE BOWERY...

SARA DRIVER

My mother warned me as a teenager. "Don't drink or get in trouble or you'll end up on the Bowery."

In 1985 we were living in a rent-stabilized apartment in a tenement building on Prince Street between Mott & Elizabeth, paying \$180.00 a month. We were under constant harassment by a criminal thug landlord. He would threaten in a thick Brooklyn accent, "Hey did you ever see a blind motion picture director?" It was pretty stressful. One day a musician friend called & told me about a loft on Bowery. He wanted to take it. But he & his very pregnant wife already had a two year old & understandably she couldn't handle a walk-up.

I went over to the building, the former Lincoln Hotel & saw the loft – windows facing the east & west, a huge 12' x 9' skylight. The shadow of trained pigeons, from the neighboring rooftop, crisscrossed the walls as they flew past. I thought, "This is unbelievable". It had an open courtyard in the back surrounded on 3-sides by tenements, with a huge flowering tree in the middle – & a very active wild bird population. I signed the lease. We paid our rent to a former boxer, Mr Cambareri. I had to bring our check to the flophouse he owned down the street.

Our new home was the former Lincoln Hotel. It was converted into residential lofts in 1968. Before that, it had been a men's hotel/flophouse. In the 20s & 30s, the men would sit on a long bench with a rope stretched from one end to the other. A penny bought them the right to rest their head on their elbows on the rope. In the morning the taut rope would be released & everyone would wake up. Later beds were crammed onto each floor. We found the blueprint showing the lay out for the tightly packed beds. It was one of the first artist loft buildings established in lower Manhattan.

Before moving in we shot my first feature, *Sleepwalk*, in the empty loft. We used to take whatever food was left from the shoot & set up tables outside. The homeless guys would politely line up & take their turns filling their plates. We'd put out the condiments – ketchup, mustard & they would help themselves to the hamburgers, salad, & pickles.

I watched & engaged with a population that chose to live on the street & sleep in roach riddled flophouses. This was their street. It belonged to

them & they knew it. Often I would pass punch-drunk boxers if I moved my hand too quick. They would raise their fists & take a boxer stance. It was a society pretty much exclusively of men.

In 1980, '81 the Bowery changed. President Ronald Reagan decided to release all the mental patients out of the public mental health institutions. I'd see a lot of guys walking around with hospital bands on, not knowing where they were. It changed from being alcoholics, & guys trying to flee their pasts, to a combination of people with drug problems & the mentally ill who really needed some kind of medical attention.

I witnessed one guy who appeared on the Bowery in a three-piece expensive suit. His shoes were well polished. The next time I saw him. His jacket was missing. Soon after, I saw him wandering barefoot in the streets with a red-cloth tied around his neck forming a cap. His trousers were cut short about the knees, a kind of child's idea of a homemade a super hero costume.

The streets were rough. I was young; I cut my hair very short so I looked androgynous. I wanted to be left alone & navigate the streets without any problem. I remember you really had to have a keen antenna to sense & be sensitive to the people around you. Some of the guys on the Bowery just wanted a hello, or just to be seen. And then there were the ones you did say hello to, that maybe you shouldn't have.

We all sort of watched out for each other. There was a real beauty in that. I kept journals of things people would say to me each day. Or conversations I overheard. I incorporated some of what I witnessed & heard in my film *Sleepwalk*. NYC was intimate & there were interactions between people. That is a sad loss. It's funny; I feel like I'm more in danger now with the well-off drunken people on the Bowery who are going to clubs, than I did then. It is also a whole lot less interesting.

Anyway, we moved from Prince Street to the Lincoln Hotel. With the help of a few friends, we walked all our worldly belongings over in heavy-duty trash bags. We didn't have any 'real furniture,' all our furniture we found on the street. Tuesday night we



"Girl by the Window," 1986, by Sara Driver.

called Furniture Night, the night you could leave & find large items on the curb, waiting for garbage pick up. That was how we *^furnished^* our tenement apartment. I remember seeing Louise Nevelson, the wonderful sculptor. She lived on the corner of Mott & Spring St. She'd be out on Furniture Night, wearing her long mink eyelashes & chinchilla cape, collecting thrown-away wood scraps, & furniture parts for her artwork.

When we first moved into the loft we only had – a bed, a table, & a few chairs. We'd play whiffle ball in the large open space, using Time Magazines for the bases. Often friends would stop by for a quick game.

The Bowery was a forgotten place, & up until very recently if a person emerged from the past, from 100 years ago, they would have recognized where they were immediately. But that's quickly changing. The Bowery could have easily been made into one long museum of architecture, celebrating its seedy & riveting history. But nobody wants to celebrate the wild & depraved. They want that kind of history to disappear. Some of the most interesting political times & history in NYC took place on this street.

There were four beautiful buildings across the street from us that were built between the 1820s to the 1860s; one was truly unusual, & looked almost like a French chateau with a sculpted Victorian slate roof. It was really heartbreaking to watch those historic buildings be demolished. I wrote to Landmark's Preservation Commission & pleaded with them to save the buildings. I looked up all the

historical relevance & forwarded it to them. They wrote me that they didn't have time.

In the '70s & '80s, nobody wanted to be on the Bowery or on the lower eastside. That was a gift for us – to have this part of NYC to ourselves. It formed our community & gave us inspiration.

Because we were such a small community below 14th street, everybody knew each other from the clubs – Tier 3, Mudd Club, Club 57, CBGB's, Area, Reggae Lounge, Madame Rosa's, Palladium etc. We all witnessed, helped & supported each other. Carlo McCormick organized a great show [the "Downtown Show," 2006] at Grey Gallery NYC. It kind of blew my mind. There I suddenly understood how much we all cross-pollinated each other. We were not separated by medium or form—people were filmmakers, painters, dancers, musicians, etc. We were all mixed together. Anything you wanted to be, you could be. Even if you didn't do it well, why not try it? There weren't restrictions. There was this great feeling that nothing could really stop or hinder you – if you wanted to test something out, you could. It was an empowering feeling, I don't know why we felt that way, but we all did. Between the dancing, drama & drugs, as a group of people we produced a lot of work.

I have to thank the Bowery bums for their inspiration in my life – with their interactions, own laws & genteelness toward each other. These men liked to live together without the society or pressure of women. On the Bowery there was always a code of respect & acknowledgement. Keep your distance but have respect & if you feel like it say hello. ■



Shalom Neuman,
"Neo Nuky Madonna," 1985.

Contemporary art is, by definition, in the here & now, current & therefore “up-to-date.” Because it is “modern” it speaks to the times in which we live, to our loves, our hates, our politics, our feelings, our desires & sometimes, our innermost thoughts, all of which is reflected in the mirror that contemporary art holds up to society. Paradoxically, while contemporary art is a reflection of our present it is also a projected reflection of our future. Contemporary art is art of the moment. Fusionism is an attempt to capture that moment.

Fusionism is the art genre that best mirrors our 21st century with its constant chaos, multi-sensory bombardment, & ever-advancing technology. No other art form has captured the vicissitudes & capriciousness of life like fusion art does. In fusion art as in life, what one understands about it & how it is perceived is dependant upon each individual's vantage point, each individual's life experiences & on each individual's focus & focal point.

There are still conventional & academically accepted approaches to the various artistic disciplines of painting, sculpture, theatre, music & the spoken/written word. Fusionism is an attempt to break the conventions by refusing to be linearly creative. Fusionism poses these questions: “Why should an artist be creative only within a set form(ula); why can't an artist be creative by combining the genres?”

By fusing or commingling the disciplines we can create art that is infinite, not finite like painting on a canvas or sculpting in one medium only. Art that is created by artists who limit themselves to the “pure” disciplines is outdated & outmoded.

I have made fusionism my life's commitment. I define it as follows: “Fusionism is the seamless interdisciplinary integration of all artistic mediums, a merging of painting, sculpture, light, sound, video projection, photography, performance & the written word. It melds / fuses the various genres into a genre of its very own. Any artistic ‘structure’ (such as a painting, a sculpture or a performance) can be transformed into a fusionism work. Fusionism, by its own definition, is limited only by its creator.”

One of the more extreme examples of fusionism occurred on the Lower East Side during the 1980s & involved an empty lot on Rivington Street. This piece of unused property was commandeered by a group of artists who began to weld a huge metal structure combined with myriad found objects from the neighborhood within the empty lot. What began as mere sculpture set the stage for its eventual

evolution into a temporary autonomous zone where the rule was that there were no rules & the participating artists were free to be creative without any creative constraints or boundaries being forced upon them. In the midst of the imposing & steadily growing metal & found object sculpture & scattered throughout its mass were musicians, actors, performance artists & visual artists all of whom were individually creating their own art within the sculpture, thereby being creative & innovative within the art form while simultaneously creating a new art form.

The Rivington sculpture garden provided the ideal atmosphere for a fusionist like myself to create a “fusionism event.” It was fertile ground for experimentation. The time & place provided me with the circumstances to be able to incorporate everything from sound, music, movement, lights, painting, theatre, & poetry into the structure that was steadily growing in the garden. The outcome of all of this was that as director of these fusion events in the Rivington Sculpture Garden I was able to create a living, moving work of fusionism. By placing the performers aesthetically within the structure, what was eventually created was a vibrant & very complex image. The visual images & auditory changes were combined while they simultaneously competed with the movement within the sculpture. I had the artists playing to the sculpture. This was the antithesis to conventional theatre where stage is subordinate to the overall performance. By virtue of its scale, mass & density, the structure in the Rivington garden couldn't be subordinate to the performers. In this instance the sculpture took on a far more important role than that of a traditional backdrop or theatre set.

The fusionism performances in the sculpture garden had no controls other than the placement of the various artists within the structure & the lighting that I used via my own computerized dimming system. This dimming system enabled

me to use light to “paint” various portions of the fusionism work, thus heightening the visual effect on all who watched.

Everything in the garden was commingled. There was a constant bombardment of stimuli, a created perpetual chaos. Because everything was moving (including the audience), the observer was like a pedestrian walking through an unknown city. There was a voyeuristic feel to it all because it was so visually captivating. This is the strength of fusion art – there is always something else to be seen, another idea or form to be explored & experienced. It is art that needs to be revisited over & over again. One visit is never quite enough. This was & still remains the concept behind fusion – to explore an alternative to creativity that goes beyond following a linear sequence or progression. It is the understanding that art is limitless & therefore a multiple of all multiples. Fusionism is the ultimate democratic art form because there is room for every artist who has something creative to say. Fusion art maintains that the creation of artistic genre hybrids is the most honest attempt at defining contemporary culture, It is a historically important albeit much neglected contemporary artmovement.

I opened FusionArts Museum at 57 Stanton Street on Manhattan’s Lower East Side in 2000 & we closed our doors in 2012. During the time it was open for exhibitions it was is the only contemporary art space in New York City that was exclusively dedicated to the art of fusionism & to those artists who have made the commitment to fusionism as a genre.

I was born in Prague in the aftermath of the Holocaust & World War II to parents who escaped Czechoslovakia’s incoming communist regime after losing most of their family to the Nazis & having survived a 5 year internment in Siberia. Their escape route involved a train from Prague to Italy where they took a boat to the small seaside town of Kiriyat Chaim in Israel where they settled. Growing up in a tiny rural village on the Mediterranean Sea had a strong impact on me & it left its indelible stamp on my evolution as an artist & on my art. Had I been raised on this continent, I am certain that my development & artistic vision would have been quite different. I wasn’t exposed to hype, to aggressive advertising & to an overwhelming barrage of commodities. I was exposed to camel & donkey caravans & to my mother’s aggressive bargaining for food with the Arab vendors. It was a very humble & remote environment. There were no televisions to watch, no video games to play, no

corner stores to hang about in front of, idly passing the time. I passed the time creating art.

Art was a necessary part of my life as much then as it is now. To paraphrase Kandinsky, it was an inner necessity that brought me to funnel my life’s energy into creating art. It was a need, not a choice. It was not a career decision made upon application to college. I made some of my most expressively honest drawings when I was 10 or 11 years old. I would always have been an artist.

As a teenager I questioned what I saw as the accepted artistic norms. Why were painting & sculpture considered separate disciplines? Isn’t the motivation the same? It made no sense to me to use them separately when creating art. I always believed that the adventure of discovering something never before imagined or conceived was the ultimate reward for an artist. I certainly didn’t pursue formal art training in the hopes of becoming an artist. I already knew that I was one. I pursued formal training because I believed (& still do) that foundation is essential to the final art work much in the way a house cannot last without a good foundation to stand on. A good foundation can only enhance an artist’s work. I needed to be proficient in both my knowledge & my technique. As an undergraduate at Temple University’s Tyler School of Art I told the sculptor Italo Scanga that I wanted to create a bridge between painting, sculpture & the other disciplines. Italo thought that “ambitious.” I began to draw plans for transitory types of environments. Since life is transitory, I wanted to create a room that mimics life, an environment that is timeless & only in the moment.

Once that moment is gone, it can never occur again & is simply replaced by another transitory moment in time. I built models in my attempt to create a room where structural elements & illusional images melded & a distinction between these images & elements isn’t perceptible.

I transferred from Tyler to Carnegie Mellon University where I teamed-up with Paul Szymanski who was a friend & fellow student. Paul was majoring in both physics & mathematics. He helped me create the first computerized dimming system with infinite lighting combinations. At the time, such a device wasn’t on the market. The only systems that were commercially available at that time could only provide very simplistic & finite lighting variations & were also prohibitively expensive. Paul’s system enabled me to create an environment where the perception of space was undefined & painting,

sculpture, light, sound & movement all melded into one seamless intricately woven, self contained & cohesive whole, which constantly changes & is never repetitious.

Elaine DeKooning liked my work & my concepts & persuaded me to move to New York after I graduated from Carnegie Mellon University where I earned dual BFAs in painting & sculpture. Following this same track in graduate school, I was again awarded a dual degree with an MFA in both painting & sculpture. I moved to New York in 1980 & set down roots on the Lower East Side in 1982.

In the early '80s I was able buy a three story building on the LES although I had little money. It cost me what a square foot of property would currently cost on the Lower East Side, south of East Houston Street. I purchased this decrepit house from an eccentric male nurse by the name of Mr Youmans who spent much of his time collecting junk. He was a hoarder – the entire building was packed with broken things that he believed were worth a lot of money. In order for me to get him to sell me the building I had to become his intern. He would insist that my wife & I accompany him on his prowls as he combed the streets looking for bits of metal – rusty nails, screws, broken ladders, car parts, chairs, tables, the list was endless. If it was put out for trash we dragged it into the Mr Youmans' building.

He was also an animal lover ad kept 10 cats, 5 dogs & homing pigeons on the roof, all of them rescued from the streets much in the way he rescued his metal bits & pieces. The stench was rank. And yet I remained his intern, winning his trust until he felt comfortable enough to sell me his treasure of a building when he reached retirement age. At that time, calling it a treasure didn't even come close.

The building was surrounded by a bombed-out neighborhood comprised mostly of vacant buildings (known as squats) that were inhabited by junkies, prostitutes, pimps & pushers. This neighborhood was identified as a red line district which means that banks would not lend money or write a mortgage to purchase property there. Needless to say it was very difficult for us to buy this property, dump that it was. It took months to clear out the garage & the rest of the building of the clutter & trash. We change our cloths every time we went in & out, not knowing what the building was infested with.

With the help of a few homeless people & quite a few dumpsters we eventually cleared the building out. The downstairs space, including the garage, became my studio space & our living space was

one floor up.

Living there during that time, when the neighborhood was referred to as the "wild, wild west", was an experience. It was not uncommon to hear yelling & fighting outside the bedroom window. We have seen & heard the violent beating of a prostitute by her pimp in front of our building. On many occasions we saw a homeless man strip naked right at the curb in front of our house & use a washcloth & a bit of soap to wash himself in the water from the constantly dripping fire hydrant.

There was a transvestite we saw going into a dumpster, picking out a sequined dress & trying it on in that very same dumpster. And of course there was the constant presence of the whores & junkies who really did rule the streets, streets where you didn't dare ever park a car if you wanted to use it again. Stolen tires, broken off rear view mirrors, blown out windows & the burned carcasses of cars torched by the Allen Street gang were the norm as were muggings. Drug deals went down on the corners in pure daylight because the police couldn't be bothered.

Soon other artists began to settle in this neighborhood, drawn by the cheap rents & a burgeoning gallery scene on the Lower East Side/ East Village. The art scene was created by galleries such as *No Se No, Nada, FusionArts, Freddie the Dreamer, ABC No Rio, the Rivington Sculpture Garden* & many others. Eventually the city destroyed the Sculpture Garden & developers began to buy property, making this area a hot real estate commodity, but at the same time, unaffordable for most artists.

I agree with Kandinsky that to work within another artist's concept or vision only promotes that individual artist or group's conceptual vision, not one's own. Artists need to absorb ideas & move on to build on those ideas. Why would any artist in today's world want to create an impressionistic, expressionistic or minimalistic painting? There is no challenge in repeating what has already been historically documented & recognized. It breaks no ground & doesn't move the artist into another conceptual place. Instead it mires the artist in the past. Art is a continuum. It is a dialogue between the past & the present. Artists must consume the past to create in the present & open the door into the future. Artistic freedom means not accepting the parameters of any one discipline & not being confined by those very parameters.

It makes no sense not to use electric lights in



Fusion Arts storefront (top); Shalom Neuman, Art Alchemy – FusionCaskets* (performance), 2007 (bottom).

creating contemporary art. We are surrounded by artificial light. It is in our homes, in our offices & in our streets. An artist can paint with electric lights much in the way he paints in a palette of oils or acrylics. Isn't light color? If we dim the ambient lights the painted images & colors change. If we use colored lights, all the colors change.

When we use projected lights, it animates the art. It enables the art to breathe & makes it alive. Before your eyes colors change, contrasts change, shades, shapes & values change. Projected moving images onto a structure creates a multiplicity of change – the moving image changes while at the same time the painted surface or structure is changing in the dimming & brightening of the lights. The painted structural surface has moved to another level.

Why can't artists paint with plastic toys? Why can't artists re-appropriate materials or cultural artifacts & "paint" with them? Color should not only be about the accepted artist media of paints, pastels or crayons. Color can be found in the refuse & detritus of our culture & society – plastic toys & detergent bottles, household appliances, telephone wire & computer motherboards. All these materials are colorful, archival & speak to our culture & the

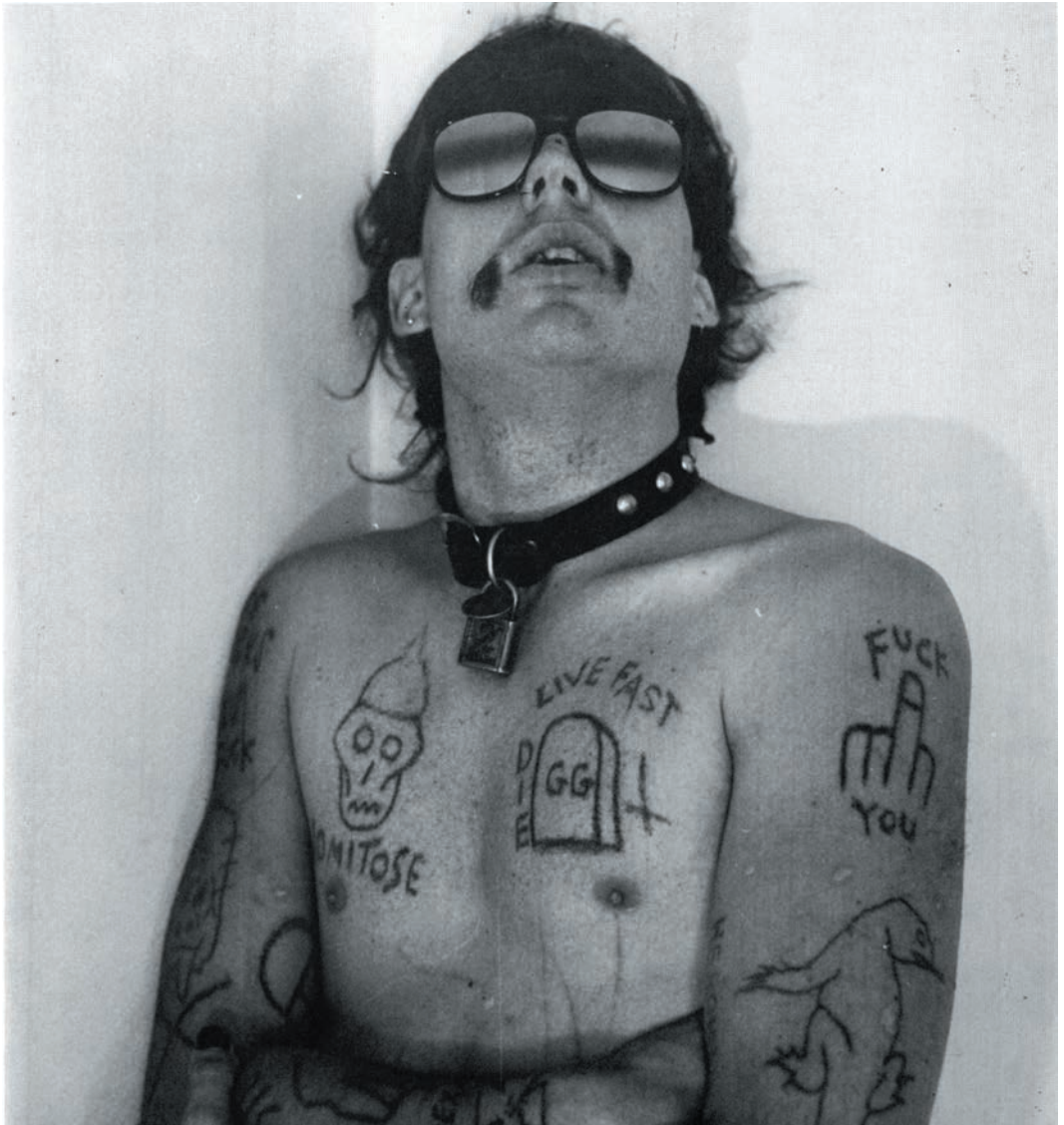
ideas & technology they promulgate.

Doesn't sound occupy the same space that a painted surface does? Doesn't text resonate in our head within the same space that we are in? Aren't all wavelengths – sound & light & mind related? Aren't we multi-sensory beings? Why isn't art, so often hailed as a reflection of contemporary culture, multi-sensory?

Fusionism a genre that is predicated on being multi-sensory, on being inclusionary, not exclusionary, on incorporating as much of our surroundings as possible including technology. To be contemporary art must be about more than paint, canvas & structure. It must include the technology of our world & the iconography of our culture if it is truly to be considered "current."

In essence fusionism is timeless but in ways that are different from the accepted idea of timeless art, i.e. those works created by Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Monet, Matisse, Picasso, Mondrian & Pollack. It is timeless in it's ebb & flow, in it's ephemeral nature. It is art that is forever in the moment & then the moment is gone. And you cannot step back & repeat a moment in time. Isn't that truly reality? ■





GG Allin, 1987, ROIR

GG

MYKEL BOARD

GG died last week. His last show... at The Gas Station... the most violent I've ever seen. GG followers pack the abandoned pump stand... the venue for the show. The place is an old garage, a welded metal art gallery, a concert venue, & a blight on the neighborhood.

Tonight, a big kid, built like a football player, swigs from a Colt 45 forty-ouncer. Another kid, not older than 14, plays with his just-died green hair.

Donny The Punk shows up in his sailor suit, sporting a fresh herpes sore on his upper lip. A curious college boy sits by himself among the metal art. He's playing the silent brooding intellectual. It's a freak show: Scummy & proud.

"Will this be the show where he kills himself?" asks the 14 year old.

Todd Phillips, GG's film biographer, answers, "I hope not. When he goes, he's gonna take an AK-47

& bring the audience with him."

GG pushes into the performance space. He wears only a jockstrap, & boots. Soon he ditches the jockstrap. Starting with a new song called "I Am The Highest Power," he complains about the microphone.

"You're just a pussy!" shouts a blond young man, with scraggly blond hair.

GG turns "I'm a pussy?" he shouts.

He takes the microphone & slams it into the side of the young man's head. Bang! The blond crumples. A trickle of blood drips from his forehead... down the side of his face... puddling under his ear.

A fat guy with an ADDIDAS t-shirt grabs the body by the legs & pulls it off the performance floor, dumping it on the gravel outside.

"I'm a pussy! I'm a pussy!" shouts GG, banging his head into the metal doors that had once opened into the garage. GG's bloodflow is heavier than that of the blond boy. It spiderwebs over his face, coming together in a red smear over his naked chest.

Then something else happens. The crowd bunches in one corner. A loud smacking comes from the middle.

"Alright, show's over," yells an authoritative voice.

A bearded young man runs through the side door... his hand pressing his left eye. Blood oozes between the fingers. More banging. People explode out of the building, running backwards, away from the naked GG.

One... two... three... four. The wounded stagger out, pushed in a bloody path by the force of the crowd.

Outside, the adrenalin still pumps. The guitarist from an opening band hurls a bottle at a passing car. The football-player sized kid runs up to a passing bus. He climbs on the front bumper. Then he smashes his fists against the windshield. The terrified driver plows ahead, throwing him to the side.

Bottles fly overhead. GG is out on the street, still naked. He hugs a lamppost, smashing his head into it. Then he walks toward his fans. They scatter, tripping over each other in the scramble to get out of the way.

The blood, now in torrents, pours down GG's body. Sirens ring in the distance. GG crosses the street, walking quickly. A dozen police cars pull up from all sides. Cops get out... only a few in helmets.

"Put the bottles down," comes the voice from a bullhorn. A few half-hearted bottles land near the cop cars. Then it's over. The punks & the kids walk away. Quietly. An injured girl sits on the sidewalk. Blood dribbles into a rag pressed against her shaven head.

The first casualty... the young blond guy... is awake now. "Wow! What a show!" he says.

GG gets away. Naked, covered in blood. He gets away. This is Sunday.

Monday afternoon, my phone rings. It's GG's

brother, Merle.

"GG passed away this morning," he says. Such a coy euphemism about a man who detested euphemisms.

It's over.

After Geraldo, a year & a half in jail, his picture in the mainstream press, & a national tour that left a ten-city trail of destruction, GG died in his sleep from a heroin overdose.

His fans said he was God. They were close. Pure id, GG refused to bend to any rules. He lived through pain, coma, hospital & jail. He was afraid of none of them. Free of fear, he was absolutely free to do what he wanted. What he wanted to do, was destroy.

You'll read obituaries calling him sick, a sad comment on society, maybe even pathetic. He was not. Though he lived for less than 40 years, he lived without duty, without thought to the future, without ever worrying about bills, without ever acting politely for the neighbors. He did what he wanted, when he wanted... without fear of consequences. How many others have lived so fearlessly for so long?

No, we didn't get the final fireworks we expected. GG died privately, curled up on a friend's floor. The crowd of GG idolizers hoped they'd be there when GG *did it*. They weren't.

A videotape of GG in San Francisco shows an interview. Someone asks him why he didn't shit on stage, as is his custom.

"The crowd expects it," said the interviewer.

"With GG Allin you don't get what you expect," GG replies. "You get what you deserve." ■

Punk rocker 'G.G.' found dead in N.Y.

By Associated Press and Sentinel staff writer

New York, N.Y. — Kevin Michael "G.G." Allin, an East Village punk rocker once arrested in Milwaukee for defecating on stage, has died. He was 37.

Allin, who used the performing name of G.G. Allin, died of an apparent overdose, said Detective Kim Royster, a Police Department spokesman. His body was found at 9:30 a.m. Monday in an apartment on St. Mark's Place, she said.

Raised in Lancaster, N.H., Allin recorded with several bands, the latest called the Murder Junkies.

He was arrested more than 50 times for his over-the-edge stage antics.



Allin: Defecated on stage

Playing with a band called the Toilet Rockers, Allin was arrested at Milwaukee's Odd Rock Cafe on Feb. 28, 1989, after he defecated on stage and threw his feces at the audience.

A Milwaukee County jury convicted him of disorderly conduct, and he was sentenced to 60 days in jail.

Allin reportedly played his last show Sunday night at a bar called the Gas Station. He began fighting with the crowd, at one point smashing himself through a French door.

His brother, Merle Allin, the band's bass player, said the singer had "been partying all day and all night" Sunday.

"I think it's safe to say he OD'd," Merle Allin said, "although with G.G. you never know."

A police spokesman said investigators were awaiting the results of a toxicology report and did not know what drugs, if any, Allin might have been taking.



Julius Klein with Mark Kostabi & unidentified woman, at Quando, June 1985, by Raken Leaves.

New York City is a bitch, we all know it, although we try to remain optimistic for as long as we can.

Living in Chicago, people would often say when I had made some music or painting or some kind of goofy theater thing that “you should move to New York.” I always thought of it as a cliché for an artist to move to NYC. Were they giving me a compliment? Or, was that a subtle way of saying “get the fuck out of our city!” Probably both. Now I’ve been here long enough for an infant to be born, go through school & get pregnant, oh well...

The queen ant that decided to colonize the trash can in my bathroom must have read on a insect/rodent bulletin board that there were cheap digs at the storefront on the corner of Second Ave & First St, my shop, judging from the many varieties that I shared my existence with. Flies; small quick ones, big lumbering easy to kill ones & all of their prodigious maggots. Mosquitoes, buzzing & biting (mainly in the summer) but occasionally showing up in other seasons as well. Ants; small brown ones, & big black ones. Roaches & big waterbugs with their cute antennae. Ticks from the lumber, termites in the lumber & spiders (our friends). Centipedes & millipedes scurrying here & there. Rats, mice & occasionally, crazed or sick & dying pigeons.

In the winter rats ruled the roost. You could hear them in the ceiling & walls, carrying on their society with all the vigor one would expect of a species so evolutionarily well endowed. In some ways I felt for them, always having to gnaw on things to keep their rodent teeth from growing too long.

But let’s face it, when I leave a slice of pizza on the table & go out to buy a pack of smokes only to return minutes later to find bits of pizza shredded in the most horrible of ways, scattered all over the place, it’s time to throw down. We are now competing for the same food source... And those little turds all over the place? Hearing about a college kid who died a few years before, of some strange kind of bubonic fever from airborne, rat shit particles, inhaled while sweeping out his father’s warehouse in Brooklyn or Queens made me kind of nervous.

It really started to bother me when people would be over, usually uptown types, pretending to be interested in my paintings, that’s when the rats would really start whooping it up with their scratchy sounds & fifty yard dashes inside the ceiling. Either the Armani clad Gent or the perfumed Dame would

stop mid sentence & gasp “what’s that?” “Oh just my hamster collection.” I might respond or maybe my ingeniously built, low tech sound system acting up. “RATS!!! Egad!!!” They would quickly flee. It’s not that I totally hate rats, I just hold them personally or rodentally responsible for most of my failures in life.

My first defensive, or offensive act was to set traps. Yeah, those comic rat-sized mouse traps. SWACK! Your neck is broken! Or, Ha! Ha! You’re stuck in the glue trap & will either be flung wholly into the garbage or you’ll have to gnaw your front paws off & push yourself back to the disabled rats’ hole where you’ll surely be cannibalized by the young ones who don’t give a fuck.

Trap placement & different varieties of baits began to obsess my thoughts “ooh yeah, a piece of chicken held to the trap spring by a still attached tendon or a glob of delicious chopped liver from the deli or peanut butter, mooshed into a piece of cheese cloth so they’d get wacked tugging on it (sometimes, it goes out on the rat news that “the traps are out,” a wise rat thinking that if it licks gently, it can cheat the reaper, hence the use of the cheese cloth, WHACK!). Maybe a glue trap placed at one end of a small crawl space, where an already placed snap trap & bait setup lay unmolested, the critters having gotten hip to that setup. I could hear their little ratty conversations.

“Oh he thinks we’re gonna fall for that old chopped liver thing again. Hey Joe, looky over here, there’s a puddle of sweet honey.” Yeah STUCK, like Dino in the Tar pits.

At one point I was working four snap traps & maybe half a dozen glue traps. It was becoming this grotesque rat, freak show circus, every few minutes a snap & there’d be an even bigger & nattier coated one, one from deeper into their lair, it’s back broken & it’s head pulled up, mouth open, eyes bulging. Then a glue trap with legs would go running by.

Occasionally I’d hear a snap, & when I’d check it out I would discover the trap sprung & Mr or Mrs Rat just standing beside it, apparently stunned by the concussion. Time for the two by four. I’d aim for just behind the neck, then BAPP! Blood all over the place.

The bodies started piling up. In one, two hour session I had wasted twenty-three of them, proudly putting them in a mass grave in the open garbage can, on the corner, under the streetlight, me hanging around listening to pedestrians passing by grunting with disgust & instinctual fear.

All of this carnage started to take its toll on my

psyche. I was losing my appetite, withdrawing from normal social situations &, as it seemed even with the ongoing massacre, that I still wasn't making much of a dent in their overall population, I decided to try poison on them. Poison! Skull & crossbones, chemical warfare, hoping they'd ingest it & die on the street somewhere, trying to drink water from some puddle to quench the fatal thirst brought on by the poison's dehydrating properties.

Of course, as everybody knows, when you use poison, the rats do a manja fest-last supper thing & end up dying & rotting in some totally obscure nook in the wall, floor or ceiling; the fetid stench grows & grows, eventually permeating every corner, every fiber. No incense, Glade, Renewsit, or Lysol can mask that smell.

Noise in the walls persisted, the fifty-yard dashes across the ceiling continued. Frequently, a drug-poisoned rat would stagger into my human zone & would make easy prey, scaring the shit out of whom ever might be over. Me, being used to the routine, I'd do maybe a Daniel Boone thing & whack it with my worn-out old straw broom.

TIME TO GET A CAT

The plan was to go up to the ASPCA & rescue the biggest, no tail, one-eyed scraggly tomcat. Give it a reprieve. Bring it downtown, treat it to a steak, or a big hunk of salmon. Let it know that it was the boss, The Shop Cat.

As in many aspects of my life, my thoughts/ words were miles away from my thoughts/action. So for many weeks, maybe months, as I would interact with people, if the subject came up, as it frequently did, concerning rodent problems, I'd give my schpiel about going uptown to the ASPCA, the no-tail, one eyed cat thing as my next & final solution.

As it happened, word must have gotten out that I was looking for a cat, because on one of my junk sale days, those being Sundays when it was relatively nice out & I was broke, I'd haul out onto the sidewalk, in front of the shop, various bits of junk that I had collected along the way. Anyway this nice interracial couple that I knew walked in with a cat in a carry case, a cat poop house, litter & a large bag of food.

"We heard that you were looking for a cat & thought we'd give you ours, as we both work in the film industry & are seldom home, you know 'bi-coastal' bla bla bla."

What did I know about cats? Although my long

time living companion has always had a cat, she always takes care of it, me finding their company little more than a nuisance. Not only that, I had a bad childhood experience back in old Chicago.

BAD CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

One summer day, as a young boy of 7 or 8, I was sitting on the stoop, in front of our apartment building, probably picking my nose. This beautiful young lady with a cardboard box broke me out of my spell & said, bending down, looking into my face.

"Little boy, would you like to have a kitty?"

"Uh ok" I responded.

She placed the box on the sidewalk in front of me & left saying something about the "film industry," "bi-coastal" bla bla bla."

The top of the box was held closed by that interlocking flap routine that was still almost certainly a mystery to me then. I opened it slightly & was startled to see two eyes staring back at me. No sounds, just a grey cat looking at me through the small opening at the top of the box.

I started to get excited as I climbed the stairs. "I can pet my cat & we can play together, & he'll be my friend, & I'll take him to school with me, & he'll ride on my shoulder, & I'll teach him to do neat tricks, like fly & everybody will think I'm so cool."

No one was at home. I took the cat into my sister's room, it being off the kitchen & closed the door. I opened the box, he jumped out & started sniffing around.

"Better get him some milk." I thought.

"All kitties like milk, everybody knows that!"

Having brought back the milk, I sat down to enjoy my new friend. I reclined on the floor & petted the cat as he lapped at the milk. Suddenly, he snarled & swatted at me, his claws tearing deep into my arm. I jumped up & screamed, fearing he might tear my eyes out. He ran & hid under the bed. Another "Leave it to Beaver" episode gone bad.

Later on, when everybody was at home, me not mentioning our little incident earlier, it was agreed that I could keep the cat, even though I was secretly afraid of IT. Strangely, my Grandmother, who lived with us at the time had a major phobia of cats, having evidently something to do with a bad childhood experience of her own. She would scream & I mean SCREAM that the cat was scratching her legs, even though he wasn't presently in the room. Later that evening, with a very quick & decisive move, my Father grabbed the cat by the scruff of its

neck, walked out the front door with it & that was the end of it.

So, back to my adult life in NYC, on Second Ave & my second adventure in owning a cat. The cat came with the name "Polson" which seemed a bit awkward for a large, female black cat with big green eyes, white paws & a white tuff on the inside of her neck. I believe they're called "Tuxedo" cats. Whatever.

My first thought was that, "oh shit now I have to close the front door, so she won't run away" But quickly decided that after a few days of her getting used to the place, that I would let her come & go, & if she didn't return, so be it. I let her sniff me & *gradually*, having learned from my old experience, started to pet her.

Very quickly the first of her annoying needs became apparent. Whenever I would pet her, her ass would go straight up in the air & in my face as much as possible, this I learned later, that for a female cat is quite normal & is called "presenting herself" something I wish females of the human species would be more inclined to do in my presence, yeah, yeah, shut up. Her need for affection was constant & unending. I was always a bit relieved when other people were around to take some of the heat off of me. She'd do her rub up against their leg thing & most likely they would respond by doing that, pet the cat from the head, down the back & up the tail stroke, her going with the movement & "presenting herself," they being attention starved New Yorkers, would think it a compliment. Ha!

If I was hosting some kind of show, say where people were sitting in rows, she would work it row to row & back again. Usually the biggest retards would say to me "see, cats really love me." They thinking they had been singled out. I was happy that they were getting a little positive, *in vivo* psychotherapy from my cat, whom I decided to rename Toemain. Toemain, as of course in, Toemain poisoning – poison – Death to the rats – rats be gone.

The problem being she, owing to the fact that she had always lived in a nice apartment & was probably taken away from her mother before such skills could be learned, possessed little or no animosity or even curiosity towards the rats. I had thought, owing to PBS nature programming, that the stalking & killing of prey would certainly be reawakened, instinctually. No way, the rats became her furry friends. I thought that maybe her scent would, at least keep them away. No.

One time I saw two ratties eating from her food

bowl, the ultimate rat dis. Did she care? Did she respond? No! She was lounging on a pastel drawing that I was working on. I was so enraged that I threw her at them. Being a superior life form, I zeroed in & hit my mark. Everything went all over the place, rats scurried. She was, *cat mad* at me & sure enough, she went into the back room of the shop & pissed all over my assorted footwear collection.

She was right to seek retaliation; I had turned my frustration with vermin into violence towards her. The job was simply too big for her, the rats too large & numerous. Had she asked for the job? No. On the other hand, I have to admit that more than a couple of times when I very reluctantly agreed to let some drunk from the bar across the street pass out at my shop. She would rise to the occasion & discreetly deposit a nice, partially mutilated rat, not a big one, but a disgusting dirty rat none the less, into their bedding. In the morning when I would come to open up, my hung-over guest would comment that "uhh, man, you've got a rat problem." Yeah, like I didn't know.

GERTRUDE

In 1984, probably owing to the childhood memory of an old, old, very dark skinned street performer, known to generations in Chicago as "The Chicken Man" who would have as part of his act (really more a part of his persona) a live chicken standing on his head, I decided to construct a sort of hat that would incorporate an enclosure for a live chicken to ride on my head, as part of a performance piece at QUANDO.

In the early 80ies there were still a few live poultry businesses in Manhattan: the ones I knew of, one on east Houston near Ave D, & another last vestige of times gone by, almost comically located in "SOHO" on Broome St just west of a by then very posh West Broadway.

On entering the place, it's farmy odor preceding it by quite a distance, as it was well into summer, one could gaze upon & inspect not only the many types of chickens, but also varieties of duck, geese & rabbits. We decided on a sturdy looking hen, whitish with grey accented plumage, & an endearing beak that did not seem to match top to bottom; meaning the upper part kind of crossed the lower at a funny angle, like if you pointed your chin to the left & nose to the right & opened & closed your mouth.

"Yes, we would like that one" we announced to the heavy set old guy with cut off pants just below

the knee, exposing large open sores on his lower legs.

"You want me to dress it for you?" he cheerily offered, cleaver already in hand. "No thanks, we'll take it live."

We had made a small coup in my studio, where the bird could live while we made the silly head gear & she could spend the few days leading up to the show. And yes, we made that mistake, the mistake that every farmer knows all too well of giving her a name, Gertrude.

I don't recall exactly what we fed her, but we soon learned how quickly what went in came out; but, all in all, we kind of liked having a chicken for a while.

The show was a blast & went quite well. Amazingly so, she didn't poop once while on my head & seemed rather calm, making little chickie sounds, every now & then. We decided to reward her by forestalling the inevitable, even though we had been researching the best way to "dress" a chicken, from the many authorities that were in close proximity to us: Among others, there was the Kosher butcher on Ave. A, the old Puerto Rican Yedges (Grandmothers) who lived in the building, they having a bit of an argument in Spanish on the subject outside, in front on the stoop, then with calm nods of agreement, passing their collective wisdom through one of their english speaking sons as to the correct procedure.

As the studio was on the ground floor, little chirps could be heard as one had to pass by on their way to the stairs. Older tenants remembering the not so distant past found it a pleasant topic of inquiry & a must stop by for their kids or grandkids to feed it. Some of the very new tenants probably found it disgusting & cruel (although they rarely spoke to us, so I'm just surmising)???

One chicken is not hard to maintain if done daily (not to stinky), & so it was for a while, pleasant & a little amusing until, of course, a large cat had some how gotten in through a window & injured her so that she could not close her left wing. So that was that, we had always from the start planned to eat her.

Well, we did the deed, baked her in the oven, & featured her as the star of a "proper" Sunday dinner, which of course we couldn't eat. We decided to carve up the meat & make a large casserole with rice & vegetables, we still couldn't eat it, well maybe a few nibbles.

Not wanting it to go to waste we called friends of ours, a couple who had just had a baby & were big-

time broke. Offering the feast to them, they must have gotten word, they declined saying "Gertrude, no thanks."

We finally brought it over to a soup kitchen, where they gladly accepted it & hopefully served it up as a delicious meal to numerous appreciative folk.

AND: MORE WILDLIFE

Finally, after 2 weeks. I received my "shift pay" from the Saint Marks Bar & Grill. Shift pay is what, if you work in the Bar/Restaurant industry, is the paltry hourly pay you get, balanced out by your tips.

As usual, at that time, that being the early 1980ies, in NYC, we who worked till 4a.m., plus the extra half hour or so to clean up, would head to an after hours joint, there being many within a block or 2 or 3.

All you had to do was identify the place you worked at, & if it were a place of note, of which, The Saint Mark's Bar & Grill certainly was, especially after the Rolling Stones did their "Waiting on a Friend" video there, you would be admitted.

So after an hour or so, a line or two of coke, a joint, a free drink or two, I was done & off I went. Saint Marks, west to Broadway, then north, to 27th St, between 7th & 8th Ave. where I was still living in the top of an elevator shaft.

As it was late fall, it was cold & still dark out, maybe a touch of dawn, hidden by the heights of the buildings.

At around 26th St walking on the west side of that very empty, predawn street, not yet knowing, or having forgotten the street wisdom when walking, very late at night, to walk close to the curb on the street side, as opposed to walking near the building side. A young wirery man, not so different then myself, stepped out of a doorway & shoved a knife into my belly.

I wasn't stabbed, I was just poked with the point of the blade. As I naturally stepped back, another blade poked me from behind. This asshole's partner was in the doorway to the south.

"Give me your fucking money" or something like that came from the mouth of the ass in front of me. I had been so broke, so hopeless in the preceding months, that I said that I hadn't any money, even though I had, maybe \$120 stashed in the inside pocket of my jacket. The first real money that I had made in quite a while.

The guy in front of me, with his hand fixed tight

on my collar & his knife, again plunged, slightly into my gut. "give me your mother fuckin money or I'll stick you!"

He started tugging at my shoulder bag, which I stated only contained a note book & a pair of goofy black, patent leather shoes which I had found earlier on the street. He continued, still tugging at my bag. "Give me your money or I'll stick you!!"

His dopey partner behind me, reached into my right hand pocket of my pants & extracted maybe ten dollars worth of quarters, (at that time, I had not yet learned, as a bartender to cash in coin for bills) also, (I would like to point out that a beer might have cost \$1.50 or 2 bucks at that time, so that a quarter or 50cents two bits, was considered an appropriate tip). Coins went splashing onto the vacant sidewalk. "See, I was just bumming change all day," I said, thinking they might lay off on the sympathy thing.

As the one fucking asshole grubbed up the coins on the ground, his buddy tugged more & more at my bag, yelling at his boy to fuck that change.

I was like "there's nothing in this bag except a pair of crappy shoes, which you can have, but I need my notebook, which won't do you any good

anyway," as his knife went a little deeper into me.

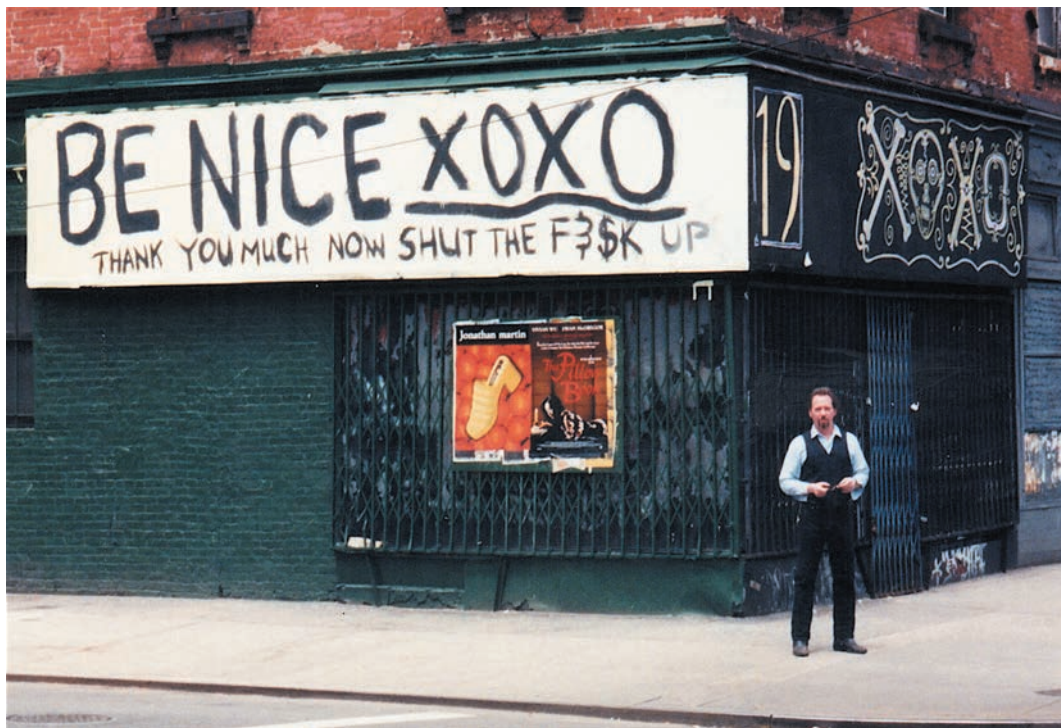
"Give me your money, or your dead!!" as he tugged on my bag & again admonished his confederate. "Fuck that change!!" It came to a critical moment; I don't think that he really wanted to stab me. But there we were.

A car, a block or two north, made a screeching noise as it rounded the corner. For a moment the asshole in front of me, with his knife still in my belly turned his head. I pushed him off me, spun around & started running south on Broadway. After a short time, I looked over my shoulder & saw that they were in hot pursuit.

Gaining a bit of distance between us, I started to slow down, anger & rage welling up inside of me. I noticed a grippable length of pipe in a pile of rubbish. I grabbed it, turned around & started walking towards them & said "OK! MOTHER FUCKERS LET'S GO!!!"

With their knives out, they started to negotiate with me as I approached them, metal pipe held high in my hand.

A good old NYC taxi, the old checker kind, came to a screeching halt, & the driver yelled "jump in!" Which I did, throwing the pipe at them. We sped off & that was that... ■



Julius Klein in front of XOXO, May 1997, by Raken Leaves.



Peter Smith, 1981, by Robert Carrithers.

Most New Yorkers depend on air-conditioning to survive the summer heat waves, however AC always felt to me, as if a dirty old man from the Arctic was breathing down my neck & that dirty old man wasn't Santa Claus.

Truthfully I liked the heat & any temperature under 92 was survivable with the aid of a strong metal fan & a couple of cold beers. Above 92 Fahrenheit required multiple baths in my kitchen tub & the drinking countless liters of water, however as July 1999 stretched into its second week of body-sapping heat I surrendered to the weather.

I needed cold.

Renting a car for a drive north was not an option, since the Eastern Seaboard was smothered by an oppressive mugginess from Cape Hatteras to Eastport. My bank account held enough money for a small 6000 BTU AC & I staggered out of my apartment onto the breathless sidewalk.

The nearest appliance store was on 14th Street, but I was dazed by the brittle sunlight of East 10th Street, until someone called my name.

I blinked several times & saw Crazy John exiting from the Russian Baths. The white-haired junkie walked toward me, as if his feet had no bones.

He was not a friend.

No junkie is.

Crazy John was standing in line to inherit millions from a family trust. He lived on the Lower East Side to stay close to his dealers. My uncle let the remainder man sleep in his basement, since Crazy John had promised to reward Carmine for this favor.

Personally I thought the ne'er-do-well was full of shit.

Most rich people are when it comes time to pay their debts.

Especially rich junkies.

Crazy John stood at the bottom of the Bath's stone steps.

He glowed red.

"You weren't schvitzing today?" I loved the baths, but not in the summer.

"Why not? It's so hot inside the steam room that outside on the street is almost winter." Crazy John's blood ran cold as a snake. "You should try it."

"No way." I was scared of an internal heat implosion. "But I need to get cool."

"Why don't you go swimming in the East River?" His eyes were narcotic pools the color of mercury.

"The East River?"

"Yes."

"You have to be joking."

"Not at all." John was as serious as an OD.

"Only the Dead End kids swam in the East River & that was in the movies."

"You're right, but a peninsula of construction rubble sticks out from East 20th Street."

"I see where you mean." That spit of sand covered an abandoned sewer outlet a block south of the gas station underneath the FDR Drive."

"That's it & I've seen people swimming there. Not me, so I can't vouch for the quality of the water, but billions of gallons of sea water flush the river twice a day. My friends tell me it's okay for swimming."

His only friends were the heroin addicts haunting the blocks between Avenues A & D.

"I'm not sold."

"It's closer than the Rockaways or the Hamptons. Give it a try & let me know. I might join you one day."

Crazy John sauntered off toward shooting galleries on East 4th Street.

Sweat ran down my face. The sidewalk radiated heat. I reflected on Crazy John's suggestion.

The East River had served as a sewer for centuries, but the old addict was right. The East River was close enough & I returned to my apartment & changed into shorts & reef-walkers. The purchase of an AC could wait until I checked out Crazy John's information.

Hitting the street again with a towel over my shoulder I headed toward the river.

No one was playing basketball on the asphalt frying pan of Tompkins Square Park. Old men in tank tops listlessly played dominos under the wilting trees of East 13th Street, while a pack of children scampered through the feeble spray from a fire hydrant. I resisted its temptation & slogged past the Con Ed power station.

The river wasn't far now.

An elevated section of the FDR Drive shaded a cluster of improvised shelters. The derelict inhabitants lay on cardboard boxes, as if they were exhausted from praying for winter. Come January they wouldn't be so happy about having their dreams coming true. I strolled across the road.

The broad East River separated Manhattan from Brooklyn. A tour boat steamed upstream & two jet skis skated through its foaming wake. Their drivers wore wet suits & laughed like they were having a good time. The air was scented by the evening's incoming tide & I hurried to the sand spit projecting into the green water from 20th Street.

It was just like Crazy John had said.

Several old-timers basked on lawn chairs &

sea gulls perched on the waterlogged stumps of a forgotten pier. The lap of waves dampened the rush-hour traffic on the FDR Drive & I climbed over a railing to set foot on the algae-slick sewer outlet. The water emanated a chill & I tested the temperature with my foot. It was cold & I cautiously inched into the river, because anything could be stuck in the sand bottom.

Soon I was knee-deep & thought I was the only one in the river, then a man's head popped from the river & he wiped the wet from his eyes.

The swimmer smiled with a broken grin.

"C'mon in, the water's great."

He wasn't a stranger.

"Jamie?"

"Way you say that makes me think you thought I was dead."

Jamie stood up like he was tottering on an unsteady perch.

"I heard a few things." Prison was one of them. OD was another.

"I'm too crazy to die, but I heard you died too." His beard was a grizzled gray, but he was unmistakably alive. "Somethin' about a bike crash in Burma."

"It was more a near-death experience than the real thing." A bent left wrist was a reminder of that head-on accident & I hung my shirt along with my towel on a stump.

"Hey, those are the worst kind." Jamie was as wiry as a meth addict's pit bull. "Are you going to swim or what?"

"Is it really okay?" A flotilla of plastic bags bobbed past him.

"It ain't the Riviera, but it's better than Coney Island with a million people pissin' in it & I haven't broken out in a rash."

"It does feel good." I waded into the river & goose bumps popped on my flesh.

"If the water looks clean & smells clean, then there's a good chance it won't kill you." Jamie swam on his back. "Don't be a chicken."

Those words spurred my diving underneath the water & I rose from the shallows refreshed by the cool plunge. The few of the sunbathers ignored us.

"So what you think?" asked Jamie & I replied, "Almost as good as Jones Beach."

"Hey, why shouldn't it? The water comes from the same ocean. Just don't swallow any of it?" Jamie glided on his back & the current tugged him away from the shore. He broke free of the river's grasp with a frantic flurry of flailing arms & kicking feet. Reaching me, Jamie said, "Damn, it's dangerous. Excitin' too."

"I have to admit it's nice swimming in the city."

"They' forbid us from doing it." His tone made no bones about who 'they' were. "A friend of mine

dove off the helicopter port. The authorities decided he was a suicide. The fire department & police tried to rescue him. He kept on doin' the Australian Crawl. Hah. Even the police divers were scared to enter the river, but it's not too bad once you're used to it."

Pedestrians stood by the embankment & gaped at us. It might be another ten years before normal people chanced swimming in the river. They walked away shaking their heads.

"Where you been lately?"

"The Bellevue doctors diagnosed me as manic-depressive & I wasn't in any condition to argue with their assessment. They sent me to a hospital near Binghamton, where I discovered that the State was hiding hundreds of madmen & women in these old nut houses. Most of them not really crazy. Only homeless."

"What do you mean?" I was suspicious of conspiracy theories from such a dubious source.

"You ever wonder where those Squeegee men went? No, cause you were too happy with them off the streets."

Very few New Yorkers missed the hordes of beggars, although their near-extinction posed a very sinister mystery.

"I figured the Mayor had hired a death squad from Columbia to kill them."

"He's too cheap to pay more than the price of a bus ticket."

Up on the promenade an old man shouted from a bike.

Jamie waved & returned to the beach.

"Friend of yours?"

"I met Dynamite upstate. He was once was a fighter, but too many punches left him a little brain-dead."

Jamie picked up a torn tee-shirt.

"You want me to meet him?"

"Dynamite's a little touchy around strangers." Jamie motioned for me to stay in the water. "He should be getting' help, but they emptied the hospitals, cause the mayor's thinkin' of runnin' for president & he can't piss off those upstate hicks, so you'll be seein' lots more of my friends."

"I'll keep my eyes out for them."

"See you when I see you."

Jamie climbed the embankment to the old man. I saluted him with a raised fist & exited from the river. The sun dried my skin in seconds & I sniffed at my arm. My skin smelled clean, but I reckoned that a quick bath was in order after this adventure.

Back at my flat I scrubbed my flesh raw.

That evening the weather broke & the temperature dropped into the 70s.

The next day I told several friends about my swim. Their faces warped between disgust & disbelief. I fought off a grin, since I hadn't witnessed such

boldfaced distaste since the grammar school nuns had condemned my wearing a leather jacket to Mass.

I swam a few of more times in the East River without running into Jamie.

As the summer rounded the homestretch into September & his prediction bore fruit.

Legions of homeless people begged quarters & harangued passers-by with demented litanies. Most East Villager ignored them in the hopes they would disappear with the change of the season.

After Labor Day NYU opened for the fall semester & one afternoon I stood on 3rd Avenue in awe of the passing parade of young students. The pudgy collegians strolled heads-down to their cellphones. I considered their craving for online contact an addiction yet happiness beamed from their clean faces infecting the East Village with a suburban blandness.

The traffic light turned green & the insensate students disregarded the 'don't walk' signal, which I might have obeyed forever, if Jamie's gravelly voice hadn't hijacked me back to the present.

"Nothin' stays the same."

"No one said they do." I turned to face Jamie.

He was wearing a sweat-stained rumped suit & yellowing bruises discolored his face. His hand deftly covered his mouth & slipped on a cap to fill the gap in his grin.

"Remember the way it used to be." He pointed up 3rd Avenue.

"This was a fucked up neighborhood back then."

You got that right. Junkie prostitutes worked out of decrepit vans in the parking lots & Johnny Thunder used to pawn his guitar at the hock shops. Shit, the director of TAXI DRIVER filmed Jodie Foster at that SRO hotel on 13th Street. I even saw William Burroughs shamble down the sidewalk skin in a gray suit on his way to Eldridge Street."

His fond nostalgia for the 1970s was scary, since the bad from those times was so much more memorable than the good.

"Burroughs is living out in Kansas. Some university town." I headed to Stuyvesant Street. Jamie followed me, speaking with a belligerence better saved for the start of an argument.

"Yea, he's gone & we got these kids in return. I hate them. They wear bicycle helmets & condoms for sex. They stare at us like we don't belong here, but it's them that don't belong," Jamie snarled at two teenage punks.

"They're kids. You were young once too."

"But never young like this & I'd love to run a gang of thieves, pickpockets, conmen, & grifters. I rip these spoiled brats off for every last penny & send them back crying to their fat-ass parents."

"Only one problem. They don't carry money. Only credit cards."

"And those fuckin' phones. Useless fucks."

"Little angry this afternoon, Jamie?"

"Damn right, I'm angry." His eyes twitched without focus. "I just finished a weekend bid in jail."

"For what?"

"This film crew was tearing branches off a tree blockin' their fuckin' shot. I told them to stop & they ignored me. I punched out the producer & the pigs arrested me for tryin' to save a tree."

"That's very green of you." I liked saving the planet, though not enough to go to jail.

"I didn't give a rat's ass about the tree, but I hate film people believin' the shit they film is truer than life."

"Did you make bail?"

"No, the producer dropped the charges, but then I get out & find out they hospitalize Dynamite for observation, because he was rantin' about a fight he might have lost twenty years ago & if that's a crime, they'd throw all the assholes talkin' on cellphones in the looney bin too. I wish I had a hockey stick to slapshot them off their ears. I mean who are they talkin' to anyway? Their stupid friends?"

Jamie seized my arm. His fingers bit into my bicep & I pried them loose. It wasn't easy.

"You gotta calm down."

"Don't tell me to calm down." Jamie spun on his heels, as if a sudden spurt of vertigo might shift the time twenty years into the past.

"Then don't calm down."

"Calm, not calm." Jamie staggered to the fence around a weedy garden. "You gotta remember why this ain't how it was."

"Why?" I was stumped by his question.

"Because Hakkim's gone."

"Hakkim?"

"You don't remember Hakkim?"

"How could I forget?"

"And the night they shot him?"

"We were at the Horseshoe Bar on Avenue B."

"Good, you haven't forgotten. Sorry, I lost it, but I get a little crazy, if my blood sugar gets low. They still have egg creams at the Gem Spa?"

"Same as ever."

A family of Pakistani might have taken over the newsstand, but they honored the ancient recipe of chocolate syrup & seltzer water.

"I drink one of those & I'll be good. You have money?"

"Yes, but if you go crazy & you're on your own." I walked him to the corner of St Mark's.

"Hey, I'm just havin' an egg cream." The evaporation of his rage had left him a fragile shell. "But can you do me a favor?"

"What?" I hoped that he wasn't contemplating robbing the Gem Spa.

"For once it'd be nice for someone to wait



"Sedated Girl," East 10th Street 1979, by Robert Carrithers.

around, instead of runnin' away." He almost sounded like an orphan. "Can you do me that solid?"

"Yes, but hurry."

I couldn't refuse this small boon & waved him inside, while I examined the street to recall what remained of the East Village from twenty years ago.

In truth very little.

Back then East Village resembled ancient Rome a week after the Goths had sacked the city. Apartment buildings had been left to ruin or torched for insurance by indebted landlords.

The Ninth Precinct had unofficially declared the streets east of 1st Avenue a 'no-go' zone, but my West Virginia girlfriend had fallen in love with the rundown neighborhood & she wasn't the only one. The East Village was the center of the universe for punks, musicians, artists, runaways, B-grade models, painters, dancers, actors, & sculptors recolonizing the burnt-out blocks between 1st & D Avenues.

Alice & I made our move on an unbearably hot July 1st, which was terrible day to move, especially since the taxi driver emphatically refused to proceed any farther than 1st Avenue.

"It's only a little bit down the block," Alice pleaded with an Appalachian accent. Speaking in tongues was one of young actress' gifts.

"I don't care if it was five feet. I'm not going another inch." The driver pulled over to the curb.

"Thanks a lot." We unloaded our bags onto the sidewalk & I tipped him a dollar.

"You said a good tip, when you got into the cab."

"It is a good tip for not taking us where we wanted to go." I slammed the door & the taxi driver cursed me in Greek before racing uptown.

"Thanks for not losing your temper." Alice smiled her gratitude.

"I didn't want to start off on the wrong foot." I looked down the block

Near-naked children played in the spray from a hydrant & their parents lounged on the steps.

"Guess we're home." She beamed & lifted a box.

"No, home is upstairs." I tried to manage with the other four. One toppled onto the sidewalk.

"Mister, you need help?" Two scrawny kids ran up to us.

"\$1 each to carry a box to our new apartment." I pointed to the third stoop on the south side of the street.

"Can we trust them?" whispered Alice. Her eyes were two different colors; green with tints of red. The latter was the color of fire.

"We let them help & no one will think we're stuck-up white people trying to evict them from their neighborhood?"

I handed them each a dollar & the kids joked about us being Mr & Mrs Opie, then fell silent at the door to our new address.

A pockmarked junkie sprawled before the door & the taller kid said, "That's George."

"Is he dead?" asked Alice.

No, he ain't dead, just fucked up," said the shorter of the two.

"Let me see, if I can wake him."

I called his name several times & then climbed the stairs to lightly nudge the comatose junkie with my foot. As he slumped from the doorway, an enraged voice shouted, "Who the fuck are you to kick George?"

"Oh shit."

The two kids dropped the boxes & ran toward 1st Avenue. The kids in the spray of the fire hydrant scurried to their parents. A bare-chested black man wearing jean too tight for his muscular build approached us with yellowed eyes bellowing with fury.

My girlfriend stepped behind me.

"I ask you before. You kick George?"

"I didn't kick him."

"You callin' me a liar, you white piece of shit?" the junkie snarled from the sidewalk.

"I'm sorry." I couldn't look him the eyes.

"Too late for sorrys. You're fucked." The veins on his neck pulsed with thick throbs of blood & put a foot on he steps. "I'm gonna to kick your ass."

Countless scraps with Southie gangs had taught me the value of not fighting fair & I threw the boxes at his chest. Their weight knocked him off balance & his body slammed onto the sidewalk. The crack of his skull on the pavement echoed off the opposite building. A trickle of blood seeped from under his head.

The street grew very quiet.

George rose from his slumber & stared at his friend & then me.

"Hakkim, what you done to Hakkim? You fucked yourself good. Hakkim gonna come for you & your little girlfriend. Take your clothes, TV, jewelry & fuck her."

Anyone stupid enough to threaten you deserved a beating & I kicked him in the head. My girlfriend stopped me & said, "We better leave before the police come."

"Ain't no police coming here." I opened the door & carried the boxes to our third-floor flat.

That night I lay awake on the futon waiting for Hakkim's revenge.

A little past 3a.m. Alice said, "Nothing is going to happen tonight."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing bad." She slipped across the futon into the arms.

The next morning we awoke to birds singing in the alley & made love on a dusty futon. The two of us shared a bath in the kitchen tub. She washed

me & I shampooed her hair with the sun streaming through the willows in the alley.

Later I went to buy groceries & the domino players across the street greeted me with a wave.

On my way back Hakkim appeared sporting a stained head bandage. George had a black eye & a swollen cheek. Their eyes followed me, but neither man tried to attack me that night or any other, however their unexpected leniency didn't curtail their reign of terror against the neighborhood.

Two models, Valda & Mary Beth, moved into an apartment across the street. They heeded my warnings about Hakkim & installed theft-proof grills on the windows.

For several weeks they were spared the unwelcome wagon treatment, but only because Hakkim had been busy elsewhere.

One evening they returned home to discover Hakkim had chopped through the walls to steal their money & defecate on their beds. They moved out the next morning.

A musician friend devised the unusual strategy of leaving his door unlocked.

"I have nothing worth stealing." Kurt upped this security measure by throwing his trash onto a growing garbage heap in the corner.

"That's all I have &, if anyone wants it, they can have it."

A lack of cleanliness was meaningless to a criminal so far removed from godliness as Hakkim & one day I spotted him in a jacket, which Kurt had buried under a pile of Chinese take-out boxes.

Observing my horror, Hakkim warned ominously, "I been waitin' for you. Waitin' real patient for a piece of your girlfriend too."

A friend gave me a gun. I stashed it in the closet. I felt safe, but I had to tell my girlfriend the news.

Alice shook her head & thrust the Village Voice in my chest. The weekly was opened to the APARTMENT FOR RENT section & she didn't mince words.

"Find us an apartment quick. I don't care where as long as it's not East 10th Street."

I called the landlord of a one-bedroom in Gramercy Park.

It was available & my girlfriend said, "Go over & sign the lease."

"Right away." I left the apartment & walked to hail a taxi on 1st Avenue.

Loud shouting rang from the corner.

Hakkim & another junkie were arguing about the split of swag from their robberies of apartments.

"You gonna throw down on me? You a punk bitch same as the rest of 'em. I own you all."

He was threatening his partner in crime, but I snatched a wooden stick out of the trash. Hakkim saw me coming & scrambled between two tightly

parked cars, as I swung at his head. He ducked the blow & stumbled into the avenue to be struck by a Daily News truck.

Its fender sent Hakkim flying fifty feet in the air.

When he landed on the other side of the street, a bone audibly snapped & his body tumbled to rest.

I expected the other junkie to blame me for causing this terrible accident, instead he rifled through Hakkim's pockets & cried out with joy upon discovering several glassine packets of dope, then fled east shouting, "Hakkim is dead."

Long-time residents emerged their apartments & stood over the fallen thief.

Everyone was getting in their kicks.

Only the arrival of a cop car prevented a murder & the crowd begged the police to leave the scene.

The officers apologized, "Sorry, we have a job. For him as much as you."

People swore at the cops, as an ambulance carted him off to Bellevue, but no one was afraid to pray aloud for their tormentor's death & that evening people walked on the block with newly purchased TVs, radios, & the stereos, that they wouldn't buy as long as Hakkim controlled the streets.

"You still want to leave?" I asked Alice. The sun was setting in an orange sky. Children laughed beside an ice cream truck. She tucked her arm around my waist.

"If he's gone, then we're still home. You want vanilla or chocolate?"

"Both."

Within a day flowers sprouted in the beaten ground underneath the trees. Supers swept the sidewalks & music filled the street. This miracle's lasting forever was too much to ask from a place so beyond the pale of civilization as East Village.

Two weeks later I sat on the stoop with my upstairs neighbor & his face went white.

"What's wrong?"

"Look."

"No way."

Hakkim hobbled down the sidewalk on crutches. His admirers toasted his resurrection by ripping the flowers out of a recently planted garden.

"Hey, you motherfuckers." Hakkim waved a clump of roots over his head. "Get ready for a Christmas in the springtime, cuz I been hearin' you bought a lot of shit for me."

Everyone shirked his gaze & I shook my head.

When I broke the news to my girlfriend, she cried.

"It's not fair." Alice believed that Hakkim was coming for her & I took out a five-shot snub-nosed revolver from its hiding place in the closet. The gun was hardly the most accurate weapon in the world, but if I could get within ten feet of Hakkim,

he was a dead man. I said nothing to Alice & left the apartment.

Hakkim wasn't at Brownie's or the East Village Artist's Club on 9th or at any of the shooting galleries on 4th.

I ran into Jamie Parker at the Horseshoe Bar on Avenue B.

"Have you seen Hakkim?"

He pointed to a group of passing Puerto Ricans.

"They're gonna find Hakkim way before you. He ripped off their bruja. This fucked with their juju, so have a drink & let them do Hakkim for you."

"No, I have ___"

"You don't have to do nothing. Sit down & wait."

He pulled me onto a stool.

I drank a few beers, but kept on imagining Hakkim on the ground before me. The gun was in my hand. My finger was on the trigger. Jamie sensed the rising tide of vengeance & ordered me a shot of whiskey. I pushed away the shot glass.

"I need air."

"Don't go far."

"I'm not going anywhere."

The night was still & the streetlights were black. Someone had knocked them out. Running feet slapped against the pavement. It was George. No one was catching the little junkie.

"Who was that?" Jamie exited from the bar.

"Fucking George. Hakkim can't be far behind."

My hand slipped inside my jacket to the revolver.

"Help me. Please help me." Hakkim wobbled along the street on his crutches with five young men behind him. "They gonna kill me. Help."

"No one's callin' the police." A gang of Puerto Ricans mocked him.

"Help me. Help me."

Scores of people were on the street & many more watched from the windows.

I started to cross the street to kick him off his feet.

"This doesn't concern you." Jamie restrained me from joining the fray.

"It does."

"Not anymore." Jamie wouldn't release my arm & I watched, while Hakkim swung a crutch at barrio toughs. Six more kids ran up carrying pipes. There was no escape for the terror of the East Village.

"Help me for God's sake," Hakkim screamed with his head to heaven.

"Anyone want to save Hakkim's ass?" a teenager in a black satin shirt mercilessly asked the onlookers.

The people in the windows shut them. Those on the streets walked away. The courts might accuse us of being accessories to murder, but that night we were the judge & jury giving the junkie a death sentence. None of us would lose any sleep about our verdict.

I went back to our apartment.

"What happened?" Alice was sitting on the futon. She was wearing a white cotton shift. Everything about her said West Virginia.

"Hakkim's gone." I stashed the revolver in the closet.

"Gone?" The question bristled with hope.

"For good." I lay down next to her & pretended that I was Lil Abner. "I had nothing to do with it."

"I know." Her reward was sweet.

That night was a long time ago & I turned my head in time to catch Jamie coming out of the Gem Spa.

He finished the egg cream with one long suck.

"Damn, that was as good as it ever was."

"Glad to hear it?" I stepped aside for a quartet of retro punks dressed in new leather. They bumped into me as if to demonstrate their toughness.

"Watch who you bump into." Jamie's eyes locked on them & they ran off like rats with their tails on fire. He tossed the empty egg cream into the overflowing trash bin. "Wannabes."

"Jamie, I didn't need your help."

"Didn't say you did, just my way of sayin' thanks for not walkin' away, while I was in the store."

"Jamie, you be careful." I had someplace to go.

"That might be asking too much?" Reacting to my facial expression, he added, "Don't worry, you ain't seen the last of me yet."

To prove his statement, Jamie strolled across the avenue, daring the traffic to hit him. A cement truck lurched to a screeching halt & he yelled, "See, I'm invulnerable?"

Reaching the other side of the avenue, Jamie stopped to speak with a fat coed on the sidewalk. He must have told her a funny line, because she laughed with a hand covering her mouth. They vanished into the crowd of college students. Jamie was lucky with girls, although it was the kind of luck that few people wanted anymore.

In the following weeks I expected to see Jamie again, except he had slipped into the cracks of the East Village.

He might be living with the fat coed.

More likely he had lost his temper & the police had thrown him in jail.

If not, I hoped that he left town & whenever I stopped at the church on East 14th Street, I lit a candle for Jamie.

Maybe he'll return, once the neighborhood reverted to its old wickedness.

Maybe not.

That East Village only exists once & in some ways I do miss junkies.

Not Hakkim, but the others.

They kept a city honest & no city can achieve the future without its past. ■



Khmer Rouge (Barry "Scratchy" Myers, Phil Shoenfelt & Marcia Schofield), Chinatown 1984, by Nat Finkelstein.

ONE NIGHT AT MAX'S
MARCIA SCHOFIELD

"You okay, there, Brooklyn?"

I opened my eyes. Wild Bill had just blown a straw full of crystal meth up my nose & my nostrils tingled, eyes watering & a horrid taste of something like Schweppes's tonic mixed with bleach covered the back of my throat.

"Fine, yeah, great." I smiled weakly.

He peered at me, bulging eyes in a face full of jet black hair. It erupted from his eyebrows, ears, nostrils... a wild mane of jet black hair falling halfway down his back when not tied with a leather lanyard. His bushy black beard & general air of menace gave him the look of an 18th-century pirate, albeit one in Angels colours.

"You want a gin with ice? That's what you drink, right Brooklyn? Gin with ice?"

I nodded. "Great," I said. "Whew!" I said. "That's some shit."

He grinned, showing a mouth full of toothless gum. "The best!" He said. He sucked in his cheeks & blew them out. Meth tic.

"My old lady's outside, go say hi."

The fact that there are New York city ordinances against drinking on the street, especially in front of a bar, & when you are underage, clearly didn't apply here. The cops had no beef with the Angels, who were left to drink within reason, horse around setting each other's pony tails on fire, & gun their hogs generally unmolested. They occasionally beat the shit out of some poor guy who resented his girlfriend being heckled – often beat each other up; but usually for a good reason, & tried to police themselves as much as possible. No intelligent NYC cop who wanted a decent life in the Toilet (as they affectionately called the third Precinct) wanted beef with The Hells Angels. And of all the Angels to not have beef with, Wild Bill was definitely the one to leave alone.

I have no clue to this day why the scariest of the scary, the man who was reputed to have rearranged the skeleton, faces & lives of those that annoyed him, took me under his wing. But from the first day that Alan introduced me to him, he always went out his way to be nice. In his Wild Bill way.

"This is my surrogate daughter," said Alan. "She's from Brooklyn, & she's smart."

Wild Bill looked me up & down. "You like crystal meth?" He asked.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," I replied.

Wild Bill laughed & sucked his cheeks in & blew them out again. He palmed a straw & beckoned me closer. I moved in. He stuck the straw up my nose & blew.

I staggered back.

Both of them cracked up.

"Some dad you are, I said, looking straight at Alan. "What the actual fuck was that?"

And every time I saw Wild Bill, the pattern was set. A nostril full of meth, some gin & ice, a little shoot-the-shit... I wasn't the only girl benefitting from Wild Bill's meth largesse, but I was probably the only reluctant one.

I shook my hair, jitters from the meth making me shiver involuntarily. Frankly, I hated meth. But it was late, & I was tired, & chances were I would be here till at least 6a.m. Until it was safe to board the subway for the long ride back to the neighbourhood, changing my clothes & heading for the last week of 11th grade in the morning.

I was tough & streetwise; leather jacketed with piles of spiked bracelets up my arms, a tattoo on my shoulder & a bike chain for a belt. But even I wasn't stupid enough to ride the subway at night – all the way back to Midwood – alone, in 1978. Before the Guardian Angels spread their peace onto the lawless Wild

West of the subways, the cars were peopled by ghosts, gangsters & the recently decanted mad of the city's latterly-shuttered nuthouses.

I pushed my way back into the main room of the downstairs bar. Peter waved from behind the bar; & Wayne County sang "If you don't want to fuck me, baby, fuck off" from the legendary Max's jukebox. I saw Wild Bill sling his stick & limp toward the bar, helping himself to another Michelob for him, a Jack for his old lady & a gin & ice for me.

It was crowded for a Wednesday, with the usual junkie mob sitting forlornly at the bar sipping vodka & waiting for their dealer, Ty, to come back with the stuff. In the bizarre logic that only a teenager can justify, I looked down on junkies. They were scuzzy, they smelled like stale clothes, didn't wash & generally tried to rip you off.

Although I loved The Heartbreakers, I was pretty over their cult of shooting up & nodding off in the middle of gigs.

Mark, the guitarist from Lost Patrol who worked the door upstairs came by. He was another Brooklyn kid, like me. There was a slight air of shame in coming from Bridge & Tunnel land, but at least it wasn't Jersey. Mark & I looked down on people from Jersey even more than we looked down on junkies.

"You coming to watch your surrogate dad later?" He quipped.

"Yeah. I'm gonna check out Wild Bill's old lady & then I'm coming up."

He smiled. "Got a whole room full of Heartbreakers fans up there Boy are they gonna be pissed off when Alan & Marty hit them with that crazy shit."

I grinned, the meth making me reckless & confident. "Lock the fuckers in," I said. "They will fucking freak."

He burst out laughing. "Oh my god!" He said. "That is so fucking funny. Yeah! I'm gonna do it! Can you just see it? All those junkie motherfuckers having their ears fried & Alan hitting his face with that mike so that blood spatters all over them?" He chuckled. "They come for the Heartbreakers, & we give 'em Suicide. You're a genius, Brooklyn."

He turned to walk up the long staircase to the upstairs bar & live room. A very wobbly young woman was being manhandled down the stairs by three of her friends.

"Dusted," said Mark, disgustedly, pointing to the girl.

"Fucking Jersey," I said. "Only Jersey dicks think it's cool to get a chick dusted."

I walked outside into the sultry New York night. I looked way up the canyons of Park Avenue South, to where the downtown grit met the uptown glitz. Past the potholed, piss-smelling street to where the concrete containers full of artful planting demarcated tony Park Avenue from grimy Park Avenue South. I could see the Empire State, the Chrysler, a hundred other nameless skyscrapers where the history of the world was being written. All this going on in my city.

I had as much in common with the apes in suits in the skyscrapers as I had with the dusted chick from Jersey. But here, in this little bar, that had seen better days, that had been famous, then not, then famous again, I felt at home. Like all the things I never knew I missed, all the things that made Home were here: in the neon, in the jukebox, in the pick-up gigs as the lone girl keyboardist, in the friendly banter & the casual way no one judged an angry 15 year old girl who hated her name, her school & everything about the fucked up aspirations of the neighbourhood kids.

I walked to the curb, where a few Angels were amusing themselves lighting firecrackers & throwing them at the passing cars. Wild Bill's old lady sat across the passenger seat, her long legs dangling out the door of his primer turquoise pickup. She was beautiful, like a Navajo priestess. Fierce, like a warrior. She was confident, took no shit – not even from Bill – & no one knew anything about her, not even her name. But that was OK, cause she was Wild Bill's Old Lady. Or maybe Wild Bill was actually, Wild Bill's Old Lady's old man. It was hard to tell.

Wild Bill's old lady hated everyone. But I liked & admired her. And she didn't tell me to fuck off like she told everyone else.

"How's the tattoo, Brooklyn?" She asked, pulling me closer so she could see it better under the street light. A skein of long dark hair brushed my skin. Her almond eyes under her long lashes. A little delicate tracery of multi-coloured ink trailed down her left arm & crawled up her collarbone. Practice ink.

"It still feels a little sore. But I'm just so happy I got it." I beamed. It took me 6 weeks & incessant nagging to get Bob Roberts to ink the dragon over my deltoid, & it was my prize possession. More than my Farfisa,

more than my Hammond B2. I lied about my age, pleaded, cajoled & finally wore him down. After he finished it, he took out his polaroid & snapped a picture. "Pretty good," he said, "I like the yellow in the tail."

I danced home on a cloud, high as a kite.

She appraised it with a knowing eye. Wild Bill's old lady was a pretty good tattooist. But she wasn't Bob Roberts. Even she knew that. Even though Wild Bill & Wild Bill's old lady were gonna bust my chops probably for the rest of my life because I didn't let her tattoo me, it was worth it, every time I looked in the mirror. I had already cut the left sleeve off everything I owned except my leather jacket.

"What did your mom say?" She asked.

"She cried. But actually, she was glad I wasn't hiding track marks under those long sleeves." I grinned sheepishly.

She snorted. "Yeah, I bet she cried."

"I guess she thinks I'll never pass in the straight world," I said philosophically.

Wild Bill's old lady started to laugh, a big honest-to-god belly laugh. I looked at her. "What???" I asked. She could barely speak. "As if you could fucking ever pass in the straight world, Brooklyn." She wiped a tear from her gorgeous almond eyes. "You got 'don't even think about it' written all over you in billboard letters." She shook her head. "That's a good one. You do make me laugh, little mama."

I felt a bit on the back foot. Wild Bill's old lady could do that to you.

Wild Bill came over with the drinks. Wild Bill's old lady was still chuckling. "What?" said Wild Bill

"Brooklyn just said her mom cried about her getting a tattoo because her mom though she wouldn't be able to pass in the straight world anymore."

Wild Bill threw his head back & howled. "That's fucking perfect," he said. To me he said, "you should give up that music bullshit & become a comedian."

"What?" I said. "I could pass for straight. I'm smart. You know"

Wild Bill's old lady snorted again. Wild Bill looked square at me. "Yep," he said. "You're smart. Too smart," he said. "You're gonna be someone. Someday. If you don't get your ass killed." He sucked his cheeks in & blew them out again.

"Now, get your ass upstairs & go see that fucking lunatic. I cannot for the life of me understand what you like about that music, but I'll give it to Alan. He's good people. Solid. A Vietnam Vet, like me." He paused to swig his Michelob. "That fucking place." He shook his head, "Fuckers."

"Maybe it's therapy," I volunteered.

"Therapy!" snorted Wild Bill's old lady. "He's fucking mental. He needs a padded cell."

"Aw, he's ok," said Wild Bill. He put his arm around her shoulders. "Don't be mean, mama. Papa got something for ya, right here..."

She gave him the stink eye & downed her Jack. Tossing the glass out the window, where it bounced off a passing taxi, she slid round into the driver's seat & gunned the engine in one super-smooth ballet of legs, ass & hair.

Wild Bill looked at her admiringly & turned back to me: "Isn't she just? Oooh, mama..."

"Yep," I said. "She's a goddess. Fucking goddess."

He pulled his bent, metal-rodged-&-screwed legs into the truck & slammed the door.

"Stay safe, Brooklyn, out in the straight world."

They screeched off, cackling & whooping. He leaned out the window: "I LOVE THIS FUCKING WOMAN!" He whooped & banged on the side door of the pickup.

The Angels on the curb raised their bottles & cheered.

I turned around & went back inside to the gig. ■



Khmer Rouge (Barry "Scratchy" Myers, Phil Shoenfelt & Marcia Schofield), Woodstock 1983, by Nat Finkelstein.

They lined them up along the sidewalk in the rain, Louis freaking out, waving a stick above the customers' heads, yelling at them to settle down, muthafuckas, or I'll kick your ass, don't even think about trying to jump the line. Some of them were sick & it showed in their faces, the skin drawn tight & grey, eyes bright with hunger for the ten dollar bags of heroin soon to be handed out by the dealer – if nothing bad went down first. There must have been a hundred waiting to buy, all of them panicking like rats in a barrel in case the dope ran out or the cops mounted another raid. Already that morning they'd busted Toilet, & everything had closed down for two hours till the heat moved off the block. Now 357 Magnum was about to open, & as word filtered through the neighbourhood all the pale zombie faces began drifting towards 3rd & B, the newcomers standing in line, the regulars hanging back at a distance, knowing the stuff wasn't here yet, that something would happen to break up the crowd. And Chino, high on coke, walking up & down the line, smelling the tension, especially off the young ones – gotta cop, gotta cop – they made him wanna puke, all whining voices & fumbled, nervous gestures, at least with the older junkies they didn't make you pissed, just stood there quiet & resigned, knowing the score. Not that there were many of them left these days. Mostly they died from infection or OD, or burned themselves out with the day-to-day hustle till they were so weak & sick they couldn't do it anymore. Freddy's old man over on E 6th St was like that. A mentally impaired derelict at the age of forty two, the only time he got high now was when somebody threw him a dime bag out of pity – or for their own cynical amusement. Salivating like a mangy old street hound, & grinning slyly at his benefactor, he'd tear the bag open with claw-like fingers, then gaze on in rapt attention as the dope bubbled away in the spoon.

The weather was turning cold, & Chino started to walk towards the coffee shop on the corner of 5th & B. No use in standing around – there was nothing for him to do until Willy arrived with the package, & anyhow Louis had taken charge of the line.

Sitting at a table were a couple of workers from the coke joint on East 4th St, hunched over in hooded jackets, quietly sipping coffee. They looked up briefly as he entered, but Chino sailed right on

by, pushing his way through the group of young kids clustered around the game machine in the corner. No one here that he particularly cared to talk to. Reaching the far end of the room, he sat down on one of the counter stools, then ordered a lemon tea from José saying, How's business? Uh-uh, real slow – an' yours? Same thing, man, it's bad – fuckin' cops busted Raoul's place again this morning, scared all the suckers away. Now the word is out we gettin' ready to open, an' right away they all back here an' actin' up somethin' crazy. I'm tellin' ya man, it's gonna get worse before it gets better, shaking his head & stirring sugar into his tea, when suddenly the door bangs open & in walks some skinny white kid, dressed in leather biker jacket & combat pants. Breezing on over to where Chino is sitting he taps him on the shoulder, then asks him calm & outright if he knows what time 357 is gonna open, like it's a fucking library or something.

Chino stood up, a look like murder in his face, then grabbed the kid by the throat & pushed him backwards out the door, yelling DON'T EVER FOLLOW ME IN HERE LIKE THAT AGAIN YOU LITTLE PUNK SHIT AN' DON'T EVER TALK TO ME ON THE STREET LIKE YOU KNOW ME OR I'LL KICK YOUR FUCKIN' ASS TO PIECES AN' YOU'LL NEVER BUY IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD AGAIN – giving him one final, double-handed shove that sends him sprawling in the rainwater & muck of the gutter. Ya see that?! Ya see that?! screamed Chino, dancing on the sidewalk above him. The asshole has the nerve to even touch me! But I never forget a face, man, never in a million years, an' that punk gonna be sorry the next time he comes down here lookin' to cop! Then shaking with rage, & feeling more than a little edgy, he goes back inside & sits down on his stool, trying to regain the high. But once a coke high's gone it's gone, ain't nothing you can do about it 'cept wait awhile before takin' some more. Do it nonstop an' you end up like Louis, cracked in the head, talkin' nothin' but lies an' bullshit.

Chino downing the dregs of his tea, quiet now, immersed in himself, trying to find the still centre so he can build from it again. But in the end he throws down some change, gets up from his stool & nods to José, then walks back out into sudden bright sunshine, cold still but clean, & with everything sharp-edged & in focus. And suddenly he's got it

again, the high, like out of nowhere, ain't nothin' gonna bring him down now – the little kids playin' handball across the street, an' some young black chicks doin' double-dutch, everything somehow innocent & pristine.

From behind him a squad car pulled up slowly, stopping just a little way ahead. The cop on the nearside opened his door, then stood in the sidewalk blocking Chino's path, so either he has to change direction or stop & acknowledge the cop's presence. But then saying anyway, Hi Officer Marino! It sure is nice to see you, man. How are things at the precinct? Beautiful day, huh? Trying to play it straight, but not trying too hard, allowing an edge of sarcasm to creep into his voice – which he knew from past experience would most definitely register, & which he immediately regretted using. But then thinking, What the fuck, I ain't holdin' anyhow – let the asshole go ahead an' search me, no problem with that, man, no problem at all.

The cop smiled his sicko cop smile, like he knew something Chino didn't (BULLSHIT!), then looking around & sniffing the air began to talk softly in his dumb-ass guinea accent. Seems kinda quiet around here today, don't it Chino? How come you an' your homeboys ain't hangin' out on the corner, keepin' a lookout for your favourite neighbourhood patrolman? (JERK!) No business today, huh? You all takin' a holiday?

Chino smiled sweetly. That's right, Officer Marino sir, it's like you say, a holiday day, an' I'm just steppin' out an' diggin' the scene, takin' things easy an' mindin' my own business. Ain't no law against that now, is there? But stating it more like a fact than a question.

The cop in the driver's seat, who Chino didn't know, was making to get out of his side of the car, as though he were expecting trouble. Marino motioned for him to stay where he was, then stood on the sidewalk with his hands on his hips, still gazing around & still with that shit-eating grin on his face. No Chino, he said slowly, there sure as hell ain't, there sure as hell ain't, chuckling to himself as he considered the validity of that last debatable remark. And with a final nod, & with a definite twinkle in his eye, Marino got back in the car & gave the order to drive, winding down the window as it pulled away to shout, Have A Nice Day Chino! (ASSHOLE!)

Feeling a little spooked, but determined not to lose the high, Chino turned west into 3rd Street & took quiet stock of the situation. Just like he thought – the line had broken up, most of the customers heading back towards Avenue A, ducking into doorways & vacant lots whenever a patrol car rounded the corner. A few of the more desperate ones were hanging out at the pizza joint, trying to

look interested in buying a slice, when really all they felt like doing was throwing up. This made Chino want to laugh out loud, & catching sight of Louis went over & held up his palm, going through the ritual, saying, Yo! My man! Well alright! letting him know he was on top of the world, that nothing was gonna faze him now, not cops, not white boys, nothin'!

They went into the shadows of a tenement doorway, & Louis extracted a small wrap from inside the rim of his cowboy hat. Unfolding it, he dug the nail of his right hand pinky into the white powder, then offered it to Chino saying, El Primo man! None of that cut shit they be sellin' on the block, this stuff straight off the mo'fuckin' plane from Columbia! Ol' Louis got connections, you best believe it. Well alright! said Chino again, & it was alright, he was riding a wave of energy now, but only in his head, no speed body jitters an' no shitty novocaine numb neither, just pure cool sunlight diffusing in his brain, cool pure liquid air an' no danger of a crash, no way baby, no way. He could ride this wave like those surfers on TV, ride it forever, cos forever was now, slide down the wall an' disappear in the tube, then shoot right back up there an' never get wiped out.

These thoughts through Chino's brain, taste of burning synapses, a thousand thoughts per second all hoppin' an' poppin' an' boppin' on their speedy way to oblivion – sunlight, sky, a cat's black tail, the angled fire escapes, the wail of a siren, a window closin', boxes playin' hip-hop, a couple arguin', the lookouts gettin' ready on the corner – an' Louis babblin' on about some bitch he's screwin', like sheeit man she the hottest piece of ass you ever did see, only fifteen but man she likes to fuck – special when she got some of this up her nose, she's a real hog an' ain't that the truth. Likes to dress in that punk rock style, cock-tease the guys an' gets away with it too. But not with ol' Louis, I ain't into that shit – for me boss is boss an' bitch is bitch, an' that be an end of the matter, ya know what I'm sayin'? Chino nodded his assent. Like if she try it with me she gonna get a busted face, an' she know it so she don't try it. I'm tellin' ya man she respect me for it too, damned if she didn't tell me so herself. Y'know how it is with these young bitches – Chino nodded again – take all they can get if you let 'em. An' specially 'Rican chicks, if ya don't smack 'em upside the head once in a while, they think you just a pussy – an' once a bitch get to thinkin' that way, ain't no retrievin' of the situation. So like I say, this girl is hot, an' sure a little crazy too, but she love me in a big way, do anythin' I tell her. So maybe soon I turn her out, start workin' her ass on East Houston Street. 'Cos that's the law of the jungle, man, an' with all those bridge 'n' tunnel suckers just waitin' to be taken, an' ol' Louis in need of an extra supply – like

The Man say, Diversify Or Die. An' like I say, she be ready willin' an' able to do anythin' I tell her, 'cos ol' Louis gotta cock that never stops, an' she know damn well she ain't gonna get so good a fuckin' any place else. Or such good coke, thought Chino to himself, while nodding & repeating, Ain't it the truth, ain't it the truth.

Slowly the line began to form again, maybe forty or fifty people in all, the usual mixture of hippies & freaks, punks & stoners, wasted looking girls in denim & leather, downtown office workers on a lunchtime spree, mainliners, poppers, full-timers & weekenders, the whole sorry collection looking beat & downtrodden, somehow less than human. And all with whining junkie voices that grated on Chino's nerves, till his jaw clenched in anger, filling him with an unaccountable rage. They reeked of failure, even as their cheap clothes stank of sickness & sweat, so that sometimes he had an overpowering urge to beat on them, to break them into pieces, reduce them to the level of human shit they knew themselves to be – if only they'd admit it – he being a prince in this particular neighbourhood, & proud of it too, full of that contempt for the weak & the hopeless that the strong & aggressive instinctively feel. And enjoying the sight of the fourteen-year-old lineworkers marching up & down with baseball bats, restoring order when a fight broke out, or when someone tried to skip a place, raining muscle-deadening blows right this minute across the arms & shoulders of some luckless specimen who'd got elbowed out of line & was pushing to get back in. And allowing himself to reflect back upon his own time working the lines, before he'd risen to his present position of dealer, having proved himself tough enough & reliable enough to take charge of the dope – each bag stamped with the logo of 357 Magnum – that came down through the network to be sold on the street by Chino & Louis & others like them. Neighbourhood kids who'd grown up in the tenements, who knew the system & how to work it. He remembered how good he'd felt back then, skipping school & all the shit that came with it, being first tried then taken on by Black Mark, the operation where his older brother Angelo worked as a distributor. He'd quickly mastered the tricks of his trade, & was soon making more money in a day than most people made in a week.

He'd also liked the prestige of his job & the respect it engendered – especially when he ran into kids his own age who were still in school. He enjoyed flaunting the designer clothes & jewellery he'd invested in, while they were still wearing the mass-produced tat their moms had bought on 14th Street. It felt good to have money in his pocket, to be able to buy things for his younger siblings, take them to Coney Island or an uptown movie, give his mother a

break. Taller than average for his age, he felt justified & purposeful with baseball bat in hand, guarding the line & giving orders to people years older who couldn't argue back – not if they wanted to cop, that is. And given the excuse, he'd beat on anyone who gave him lip, or didn't move fast enough, or whose attitude he didn't like. Because they were the trespassers on his turf, mostly degenerate whites whose only reason for being in this neighbourhood was to buy drugs & get out fast, back uptown, back to the suburbs, back to the damaged, dysfunctional families that had spawned them. So sure, he'd take them for all he could get, do them bodily harm if the chance arose, seeing in this some kind of justification, a payback for the privileged lives he imagined they led – or at least had access to if they wanted. How could he even begin to respect these people, these fools who pissed their lives away & cash on dope? They were weak & useless, slaves to their addiction, & if they got ripped off or worse, they had only themselves to blame. And that was it as far as Chino was concerned.

By now the line had doubled in length, maybe ninety or a hundred people jockeying for position & more arriving by the minute. With the other joints still closed, there was a lot of pressure on the 357 Magnum crew & tempers were getting frayed. Everyone was expecting the package to arrive – junkies & workers alike – & when it did there'd be a free-for-all as everyone tried to jump the line.

The whole of the last week had been like this. City elections were coming up, & the mayor, desperate to hold onto office, had gone on TV, pledging to rid the streets of junkies, dope dealers, whores & muggers. This meant a lot more raids than usual, with the actual prospect of being sent upriver – rather than the fines, probation & random beatings that were the usual methods of street control employed by the cops in this precinct.

The cops themselves were under pressure from City Hall. For the past few days the neighbourhood had been simmering, as each of the parties tried to assert its own aims & interests at the expense of the others. People's livelihoods were at stake, & it made Chino pissed to think of ol' faggot Hymie sitting pretty in his townhouse, handing down decrees & causing all this trouble just cos he wanted to hold onto his crummy job. The rest of the time nobody in City Hall could give a shit about this neighbourhood, its crumbling tenements & garbage-strewn sidewalks having long been consigned to an administrative black hole. And now suddenly there's TV crews filming people getting busted, an' ol' fuck-wit on the news speaking about THE BIG CLEAN UP, like Chino & his friends are vermin or cockroaches, or something distasteful that climbed up outta the sewers.

On the other hand the clamp-down meant a chance to make money fast, with everyone buying as much as possible, not knowing when there might be a chance to cop again. Unlike the lineworkers, Chino was paid on a percentage basis, depending on how many bags he sold. After all, the dealer was the one taking the risk, holding anything up to a hundred dime bags at any one time, so a rapid turnover meant a sizeable amount in commission. This on top of his basic wage. And not only that – the desperation of the customers in such a situation meant it was easy to hand out the occasional dummy bag, so enabling him to supplement his income even more. Of course, you couldn't pull that type of trick too often. If the bosses found out, they didn't fuck around, & Chino remembered what had happened to Angelo when he'd abused his position in the chain of command. Dissatisfied with the money he was making, his brother had gotten greedy, creaming off an ounce from a pound of pure, then adding a cut to make up the difference. He'd been rumbled almost immediately, & Indio, the boss of Black Mark, had sent a posse of his guys to take back what was theirs. After beating him up & scarring his face, they'd banned him from selling in the neighbourhood again, so that now he was reduced to working across the river at some rat-infested shooting gallery in East New York – though if the Italians had gotten wind of the deal, he wouldn't even be walking around.

Chino shook his head at the memory, still amazed that his brother could have been so dumb. He was starting to come down from the coke now, & was just on the point of asking Louis for another taste – it really was the best stuff he'd had in a long time – when a ripple of excitement down the block announced the arrival of the package. Scanning the sidewalk (RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT), he saw Willy & his bodyguard moving in fast, & nudging Louis softly in the ribs, & with a Yo! Later my man! from the corner of his mouth, Chino left the shelter of the doorway & moved swiftly across the street.

Positioning himself at the head of the line, he watched as Willy ripped open the package, then accepted the bundles of dime bags that were shoved in his direction. From here on in it would be a race against the clock, the dealing fast & furious as he tried to sell out before the cops arrived & broke things up. He could never be sure just who he was selling to – junkie or undercover narc – needing eyes in the back of his head to cover all the possible angles. And all of this while hoping to God the lookouts on the rooftops were awake & keeping their eyes peeled. Pulling the elastic off the first bundle, he palmed the rest & got ready to sell, watching from the corner of his eye as Willy concealed himself in the shadows of a brownstone

stoop. Because this was the way it went. No one person ever held onto the entire amount, & as soon as Chino's first hundred were gone a runner would be sent over to replenish the supply. You never knew when the shit would come down, & with several hundred dimes in the package it was better not to take the risk.

So the general level of tension was high as Chino began to deal, a helper taking the cash while he gave out the bags, slapping two, five, sometimes ten into one sweaty, outstretched palm after another. He never looked them in the eye, focusing on the count instead, not needing to look at any of them, because they were all the same: weak, dependent fools who didn't deserve to survive, & couldn't – not without the addictive white powder that he & his homies controlled. Occasionally he glanced up, a sneer of contempt curling his upper lip, scanning the line for any hint of trouble, any sign of approaching heat. Bag after bag & dollar after dollar changed hands, until the first hundred had dwindled to ten & he signalled Willy to send over another batch. Then he began all over again, & still the line was fifty yards long, & as news got around the grapevine everyone converged on 357 Magnum.

The ones who'd already copped walked quickly away, eyes darting from left to right, back to the cars, buses, subways & trains that would siphon them off into the hinterland. Or if they were really hurting, making for one of the local shooting galleries, crash pads where they could rent a set of works & shoot up for two dollars. And looking up on one occasion, Chino happened to see, about ten yards back, the same young white kid who'd followed him into the coffee shop half an hour before. Gloating inwardly, he made up his mind to slip the fool a few dummy bags, taking pleasure at the thought of this small revenge, this payback for the lack of respect shown earlier. Which, as he thought of it again, made his jaw clench with anger.

By the time the kid was at the front of the line, Chino had five dummies ready in his hand, expecting him to buy two, maybe three, & a little surprised, not to say pissed, when the kid tells him, "Yo, my man, gimme eight!" Realising he could have made eighty instead of fifty, but resigning himself to the fact anyway, & slipping three normal bags in amongst the dummies. But hey! What the fuck! He's still come out the winner, fifty bucks richer when the bags are sold later. His only regret is that he won't be there to watch when the kid squirts water into the spoon, when he sees the ground-up codeine floating on top of the water. And if he's dumb enough to bang it into his vein, well so much the better. Mainline codeine & you think you're having a heart attack – your pulse rate goes through the roof, you can't catch your breath, the skin on your arms comes up

in hives & your fingers swell like sausages. And with Chino relishing that singular thought, & with the line now dwindled to maybe twenty or thirty people, suddenly there's a shout of BAJANDO! BAJANDO! & almost immediately two, three, four patrol cars come careening around the corner of 3rd & B, lights flashing & sirens wailing, cops jumping out, heads getting busted, guys being cuffed, some crazy bitch screaming the whole time & – worst of all – this maniac in a business suit with a snub-nose pistol held two-handed before him, yelling FREEZE!! Like, WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS? Some freelance psycho or undercover narc or what? The whole crazy circus spinning out of control, with everyone running in every direction, including Chino who takes his chances & dives for the nearest doorway. While the guy with the gun is still wheeling about, like some rampaging robot on the loose, arms rigid & locked before him, turning first this way, then that, & spotting Willy cowering by the stoop runs over quickly to cover him, allowing Marino an' his nigger partner to jump out of a patrol car & put the cuffs on. And who knows how much of the package was left, or if Willy had a chance to stash it before they got to him? Material evidence, they call it, but if the evidence don't materialise they'll plant it an' bust you anyway.

By now Chino is through the hallway & out the back door, jumping over a low brick wall then into the vacant lot behind, still with a bundle of twenty bags clutched tightly in his fist. And if somebody squeals he'll tell the boss that he had to stash the stuff in case he got caught, that when he came back later to pick it up everything was gone. Some junkie must have stumbled on the hidey-hole, took the whole caboodle for himself before Chino could go back to retrieve it. And hey! that's an extra two hundred bucks in private sales, two hundred an' fifty with the switch he pulled on the kid. Because that's the way it goes down here – survival of the baddest, Jim – an' even though life might be a crock of shit, he ain't sellin' his ass cheap for no one.

And twenty nine were arrested that day, several heads broken, a cop got a minor knife wound, a few people were taken to hospital & more to jail – mainly junkies rather than dealers, but it looks good on paper & on the six o'clock news, all grist to the mill of the mayor's re-election campaign. Footage of junkie scum getting their heads busted then hauled off to stir, Officer Marino on TV, calm & reassuring, his Italian good looks well suited to the medium – just like a crime show cop, in fact – saying Yes ma'am, the operation was a complete success... carefully planned & carried out to the letter... acting on information received after months of undercover work... have to clear the streets of this evil, like a cancer spreading through society... & Chino watching the whole thing

on the black & white portable in Vincent's kitchen, having made his way there after the bust went down as the nearest place of safety.

He'd stayed there the whole afternoon, not wanting to chance the streets in case any cops were out there looking for him – his being a known face, after all – occasionally shouting at the screen, Ya fulla shit, man! & What a fuckin' jerk! shaking his head, half in amusement, half disgusted, while thinking the whole time about what might have happened to the package. He already knew that Willy had got busted with close to four hundred bags, that the cops had taken him back to his apartment – & searched it without a warrant – before any of the 357 crew could pick up the remaining stuff. So it was a big day for them, with maybe a pound of uncut stuff netted, yet no mention of such a large haul on any of the TV news reports. And of course they can turn in a fraction of the amount, using the remainder for their own special purposes – either in small quantities to bribe stoolies, or to pass on to their own dealers, making a good profit in the process. At least that's what Chino would do if he were a cop, & if they don't then they're bigger fools than he thought. An opportunity not taken being an opportunity wasted, one sucker's loss another fucker's gain.

Vincent was a few years older than Chino, a friend of Angelo's from the Black Mark days, when both of them had been lineworkers. Out of the business now & determined to go straight, he'd gotten himself into law school, & by all accounts he was making a success of it too. He'd even managed to get funding off the City to help pay his fees, & though he spent much of his time at the college in Brooklyn where he studied, he still lived in, & retained links with, the neighbourhood in which he'd been raised.

Vincent was no chump & kept his ear to the ground, & he didn't put on airs or graces like you might expect. Consequently, whenever Chino needed impartial advice, or a safe place to hang out, or just somebody free of bullshit to talk with for awhile, he tended to gravitate towards Vincent's apartment. There they'd sit in the cramped kitchen, drinking cup after cup of Bustelo coffee, chain-smoking & rapping for hours on end about all kinds of interesting things. Sometimes Chino even thought he'd like to emulate Vincent, leave dealing behind & put himself through school before it was too late. Because everyone knew that ultimately it was a fool's game, that either you made money & got out fast, or you ended up broke, maimed, dead or in jail, the choices weren't exactly inviting.

Of course, for the guys at the top it was different. They had money enough to pay off the cops & to all intents & purposes were immune from prosecution – unless something went badly wrong,

as it occasionally did. They were the ones who could afford the stretch limos, the winter homes in Florida & the elegant bitches, who walked through air-conditioned hallways & dressed in designer suits, who reaped the profits but never soiled their hands with the day-to-day running of the business. Guys who were so far out of Chino's league, that they were more the stuff of legend than reality. And suddenly the satisfaction he'd felt at acquiring the extra bags, all of it seemed to evaporate now, leaving his actions looking small-time & cheap, somehow pathetic. He knew right then, & with a terrible sense of certainty, that he'd never reach the point where he could leave Alphabet City behind – the overcrowded tenements with their roach-infested rooms, the hungry babies crying in the predawn light, the piss-stink hallways & unlit stairs, the broken glass & garbage in the streets. All of it crowded in on him now, until the barred windows & green-painted walls made Vincent's kitchen seem like a prison, until all he could think of was his own demise, the sheer impossibility of changing the trajectory of his doomed & fucked up life. And as the last vestiges of the coke high finally disappeared, all the big talk & bravado he normally carried like a shield also fell away, leaving him hunched & brooding, an introverted figure in the lengthening shadows of the room.

For if his life was indeed mapped out, predicated on failure, then why even bother with the nickel-an'-dime lies, the jive & bullshit that only served to mask the dismal reality of his situation? There had to be a way out, but where it was & what it was he didn't know. Feeling in his heart that he would never follow in Vincent's steps, lacking as he did the power to extricate himself from the day-to-day hustle, to stay outside it long enough to reorientate himself. To do that required a measure of belief in the future, & the more Chino saw the less he believed in anything but the indisputable fact of his own existence. Certainly not in some abstract world of diligent striving & honest toil, where the promised pay-off was so far down the line you couldn't be sure it would ever happen.

Slowly the mood of depression lifted, the black waves of paranoia ebbed away. Chino & Vincent began to speculate on the day's events – how much dope the cops had really netted, who would get time & who would be paroled, how much longer the heat would last, the social & political ramifications of the raid. The light of the setting sun slanted in across the rooftops & slowly the contours of the room became lost in shadow. Vincent lit a candle, placing

it on the table amongst the coffee cups & dishes, then dabbed at his forehead with a bandana. The air in the kitchen was close & sour, & as he stood up to crack a window the desolate wail of a police siren echoed around the riverside projects. Chino was relieved to be off the streets. When Vincent suggested he crash there for the night, he gladly accepted the offer.

His thoughts turned again to the bags of dope, hidden away in the lining of his jacket – bags he'd have to sell outside the neighbourhood, in case word filtered back to the 357 bosses. Tomorrow he'd go across the river & speak with Angelo, who would surely help him off-load the stuff away from prying eyes. In fact it might be a good idea to stay there until the dust settled – just in case anyone was prowling the streets looking for him.

The conversation lapsed into silence as Chino watched a big brown bug climbing up the wall. A moment later it lost its grip & backflipped onto the stack of dishes in the sink. A couple were arguing in the apartment next door, & when Vincent turned on the radio to drown out their noise Grandmaster Flash came blasting out of the speakers: DON'T PUSH ME CAUSE I'M CLOSE TO THE EDGE, I'M TRYING NOT TO LOSE MY HEAD... IT'S LIKE A JUNGLE SOMETIMES IT MAKES ME WONDER HOW I KEEP FROM GOING UNDER... The song said everything that needed to be said about the current situation on the street.

Chino felt good that his life & times were being documented in this way, that his struggles & those of the people around him could inspire such powerful music. It made him feel significant, like a character in a movie, a lone heroic figure fighting against impossible odds. Maybe The Man was the winner for now, & it would take a while to get 357 up & running again. It didn't matter. Sooner or later things would swing back, the way they always did. Even if he had to work for a while at one of the other joints, then so what? Right now he was running free, & even more importantly he still had his self-respect. As he & Vincent listened to the music, everything seemed to expand & open out until his own life took on the colours & dimensions of a myth.

But now the talk was of mutual friends – who was still around, who was dead or in jail – & as old stories were rehashed & neighbourhood mysteries delved into, Vincent broke open a bottle of red wine, pouring out a glass for each of them. Then he picked up an orange paperback by a writer called Fanon & handed it to Chino, saying... ■

NYC in the early '80s was perhaps the freest place I've ever experienced. You could live like a king (by Lower East side standards anyway) without money for the most part. Rents were cheap, more than ten times cheaper than they are now, at least, so downtown was thriving with artists, musicians, filmmakers (I was one, & still am fortunately), actors, all types, managing multiple lives, usually living late nights, attending parties, club openings, theater openings, after hours joints, all without having much in one's pocket in terms of cold cash. It was a very creative time. New movements in painting, independent film, live music, art shows, theater, you name it. I recall one day where I had literally five cents in my pocket & yet I found myself in a limo, going to a theater opening, with a group of other crazy people, with much legal & illegal being consumed, & then later going to one of the many nightclubs & later still to the after hours clubs, drinking free all the while with drink tickets throughout the night. The only thing it seemed we needed to spend money on was marijuana.

My go-to pot dealer was a guy named Jon, but we called him the Magician. He had a place he dealt out of on East 5th street, just a few doors down from the local police precinct. It was a fifth floor walk-up, a tenement once inhabited by immigrants, now occupied by every kind of person imaginable, from ancient characters in rent controlled railroad flats, to NYU students & crazy artists. Jon actually lived somewhere else, but would show up there each weekday around 4:30p.m., so he could sell weed to people as they were getting out of work. It was a convenient location for Wall Street types – half way between their place of work & their uptown digs – as well as us downtown denizens.

He was called the magician because in fact Jon had several different occupations, among which, & most interestingly, was that he did magic tricks, & would make efforts to get gigs at children's parties & bar mitzvahs, doing those routines. He had a thick Brooklyn accent: he used to call me "Cawl," & he had some expressions that he tended to use over & over, like "very very good."

You'd have to call him up before coming over, so he knew you were on your way. I was working uptown for a good stretch during that period, so I'd call him around 5 or so when I needed something & the conversation would go something like this, every time:

"Hi Jon, how are you?"

"Who's this?"

"Carl!"

"Oh Cawl! Hal ya doin'?"

"Good, thanks, I was wondering if my friend was there."

"Oh, yaw friend. Well, yaw friend isn't here this week, he might be he-ah next week, but they-as a friend of the friend right now."

"Nice friend?"

"Yeah, I'd say very very noice."

"Sounds good."

"When were ya thinkin' of droppin' ovah?"

"Time it takes the subway to get down there. Like half an hour I guess."

"Half an owa. Very very good. See ya then."

The guys I worked with also used the Magician to acquire their smokeables, so I'd ask if anyone needed anything, collect the money if others wanted in, & head downtown on the R train. I'd walk east from Broadway then down to 5th, & ring his bell.

After a short time he'd answer.

"Who is it?"

"Carl."

"Cawl! Very very good."

He'd buzz me in & I'd start the long trek up the five flights of stairs, often passing some Wall Street types in suits with their ties undone, looking happy & droopy eyed on their way down.

On the fifth floor landing his door was painted white, badly. I'd knock, hearing a good deal of chatter from inside.

"Who is it?"

"Carl."

I'd hear the bar being slid back & there was Jon, all five feet five of him, beaming with a smile.

"Come on in, Cawl! Nice to see ya!"

He'd turn around & head back through the first room, more or less empty, with warped, sloping wooden floors painted white & marked up by months if not years of foot traffic. It always impressed me that he had no furniture in that room whatsoever. Ahead was the room where all the activity was happening, a small living room with an orange shag rug & at the far side a brown furry sofa, facing the front door, & Jon would navigate

past the many people sitting on the floor or leaning against the walls, waiting for their turn. A coffee table sat in front of the sofa on which were a mirror & the ubiquitous scale.

Flanking the sofa were usually kitchen-sized black garbage bags filled with weed. Smaller bags were strewn on the sofa itself next to where Jon now sat himself back down carefully, apologizing to the person he was in the middle of doing business with.

"Ok, way-ah were we?"

The customer, whoever it would be, would remind him, often with how much he wanted of which particular type of grass Jon had at the moment.

Under the coffee table was a shelf, on which were countless magazines on body-building. In fact Jon, though small in stature, was extremely compact, & had enormous biceps & probably other muscles as well. Besides doing magic tricks & dealing weed, Jon was also a body builder, & he worked at the NYU library as his straight job. His career as a purveyor of marijuana was only from 5-7p.m. weekdays. He had a huge, loyal & repeat customer base, made up of people of all stripes. Rich kids from the Upper East Side, Wall Street bankers, downtown artists, musicians, filmmakers, European jetsetters, sports jocks, pretty much the gamut. At any given time the room would be filled with characters, some of whom I'd see throughout the years on more than one occasion, but often I'd see people there I'd never seen before. At a certain point, though, Jon stopped accepting new customers, & would only break that rule if someone came recommended through a long-time customer.

Just off the little room where the action took place was a tiny room with a locked screen door. Through it I could see he had several cats, sleeping & lounging in what seemed to be bunk beds for them. It was their room. They didn't seem bothered at all by all the noise & comings & goings of people, nor the smoke from people trying out the product now & again, be it with bongos or joints or pipes. They never made a peep or a meow, they were probably all completely stoned from the second hand smoke. There were no windows in this room, & though in the front room with no furniture there was one window facing a wall, it was painted shut.

So I'd wait, while Jon measured out the desired weed of those ahead of me, & he was very meticulous in his measurements, to the last crumb. If something cost x dollars a gram he'd make sure the weight was precise, so neither he nor the client would be cheated. As a result the process was laborious, & slow, but his prices were good, & as the years went on the types of weed grew more diverse & of higher quality overall. It also got more expensive.

When it was my turn, the usual routine would take place.

"So, Cawl, sorry it took so lawng."

"Busy here today."

"Yeah, so what can I getcha?"

"What do we have?"

"Well I have the usual Mexican brown, that Columbo you had the other time, not the last time, but the time befaw that. 'Member? Nice & mellow. Very very reloiable."

"But the friend?"

"As I moit have mentioned, yeah, no, yaw friend isn't here now, we ran out of the friend. But there is a friend of the friend. It's a Jamaican, very very interesting."

He'd pull a bag out from behind him, containing perhaps a couple pounds of buds from recently separated bricks & he'd open it up & hold it under my eyes & nose.

The aroma would be intense, fresh, musky & appealing.

"May I?"

"Shu-ah."

I'd lift a bud out & look at in the light. Multiple strains of different earthy colors, green, gold, brown, intertwined, with a fine coating of what looked like a spray of gold dust. Very pretty for pot connoisseurs.

"Expensive?"

"Well, yeah, sawt of. Compared to the othas, yeah. Fawty-five an eighth."

I'd make up my mind, buying for me & whatever friend I was on a mission for as well, hand over the money & wait for what felt hours for him to measure out the exact, perfect amounts on his scale. Bud by bud, crumb by crumb. He'd seal the purchases in individual zip-lock baggies, then I'd hoist myself off the floor, maneuver my way past those whod come in after me & he'd escort me to the door. Almost invariably someone else would be coming in as I was leaving.

"Thanks, Jon."

"Anytoim, Cawl. Say hello to Ritchie faw me. And Leon."

"Will do. Take it easy."

"You too, very very good."

As I'd head down the stairs I'd hear the bolt being slid back into place & Jon's voice through the door.

"OK, Billy, what can I get ya?"

On my way down the stairs I was inevitably conscious of the intense smells wafting from the bags in my pocket. On more than one occasion I passed an elderly lady on the landing below, as she'd be letting herself into her apartment with some shopping. I always wondered how the poor thing managed to climb those stairs with all that weight every day. She must have been close to 80, if not older, & she must

have known what was going on up in Jon's place by now, but she minded her own business, never seemed to mind or be bothered, or care.

I'd go out of the building & look to the left, where about twenty yards away the police station would be buzzing with activity; cruisers double-parked, cops either chatting with one another or hauling someone in. With the skunkweed in my pocket I always turned right, back to 3rd Avenue even if I needed to double back around on St Mark's Place.

I originally met Jon thanks to a friend I met through my first job ever in NY, a film & commercial production company. Throughout the next few years I must have brought him at least 20 other customers, all regulars. Once I tried to imagine the kind of turnover he did, what kind of money he'd be pulling in. I figured it was a lot more than he ever could have been making as an assistant at the NYU library, & I knew that though he considered himself a magician more than anything else, his tricks & gigs didn't get him much in terms of paid work. One friend of mine, who was one of the last Jon would accept as a new customer, worked for an advertising agency, & organized to shoot a video with Jon to promote his magic business.

The intention was good, but it looked like an act that Broadway Danny Rose might have represented. When I saw that classic Woody Allen film, & there was the scene of the hypnotist who accidentally kills an old lady under hypnosis (& then offers the husband a meal at a Chinese restaurant to compensate for his loss) it reminded me of Jon. There was the same kind of language, the same accent, & the same provincial quality of "Joe Franklin" style showbiz. It would always be small time, local, charming in its cheapness, & in spite of whatever "magic" might impress you in any given trick, it still came off like a minor league act. My friend tried to help elevate the production value, but Jon's style & timing, would always relegate his act to a sort of grade-B Borscht-belt level.

I think it was in 1985 I tried to call at the usual hour & there was no answer. I tried several days in a row with no luck. I had no idea what might have happened as the last time I'd spoken to Jon wasn't that much earlier & he had said nothing about being away in the coming period. A few days later a friend of mine who was also a customer gave me the news. He had run into the magician at NYU & heard what happened from him.

Some guys had come over with the intention to rob Jon of his weed & money. They came with guns, & kicked in the door & raided the place. Only they got the floor wrong, & busted in on that old lady's apartment. They scared the hell out of her, at first not believing that they had made a mistake. In the meantime, upstairs, Jon had just arrived for his usual

shift, before any clients had come yet, & he heard the commotion on the floor below. He hurried up, grabbed his bags of weed, ducked out of his apartment, & went up to the roof, where he stashed the weed in a storage closet, & waited. He peered over the edge of the building until he saw the guys leave downstairs. Then he combined all the bags of pot into one giant trash bag & made his way out, toward 3rd Avenue, & away from the police station.

Somehow he got his stash safely back to his real apartment, & he laid low for a couple weeks. He unloaded the place he'd been using, cancelled the lease & I heard he gave a gift to the old lady to help her recover from the shock of the home invasion she'd suffered by mistake. A few weeks later he resurfaced, in another dumpy apartment on 5th street, further east, between 1st & Avenue A.

It looked very much like the other place, & the same sofa & coffee table were set up. Like the other place, the arrangements were the same: same hours, call first, be admitted, wait your turn, nowhere to sit except the floor, the same muscle magazines, the same cats, although in this place they didn't have their own room & they wandered languidly on occasion from one corner to another.

Now NY in the mid-eighties was going through some significant changes. The scene was getting heavier, & the infiltration of crack cocaine was impacting the vibe & the overall tenor of things. A lot of people were doing too much coke, heroin, & ecstasy was popular. But Jon always stuck to just pot. He never sold any other drugs. And apart from the one instance with the guys who meant to rob him & went to the wrong apartment, he always avoided grief. He never quit his job at NYU, he never gave up his amateur body building competitions, & he never gave up on his magic acts, although he never really succeeded with that, in spite of video efforts & some attempts to promote himself more commercially.

Then I heard some sad news. I had been traveling for work & hadn't been in NY for almost two months. When I got back I asked a friend if he had anything good to smoke & he realized I didn't know. He told me we'd have to find another dealer now.

"What about the magician?"

"He died."

"He died?! What? How? When?"

"Last week. Apparently he had a tumor, but didn't know it, & they found it late, like two months ago, right after you left. It nailed him really fast, & he died last week."

"Oh, no. Poor Jon."

"Yeah. Brain cancer"

"Shit. Like Bob Marley."

"Yeah, makes you wonder."

"Yeah. Damn. Nah."

"Listen, I have some shake left, it's not very good, but it's better than nothing."

"Sure, let's smoke one for Jon."

"Yeah. Let's."

After that I started getting my weed from an actor I'd known, who was on a terrible spiral downhill himself, as he didn't maintain the same wise policy Jon had held of only dealing in pot. Instead this friend started selling coke & heroin & using them as well. Before long he was letting out his dumpy little East 12th street place to hookers & crack addicts, & he & his girlfriend became hard-core junkies. She died of peritonitis & he ended up getting AIDS from shared needles.

With the decline of the scene, the death of friends from AIDS, the gentrification of the lower east side & downtown in general, the city became more dismal, more expensive, more sad, & before long I was ridding myself of the mythology I'd bought into for

so long that there was nowhere on earth better to live than New York City. I'd been traveling for work & now the city was less appealing. I sought out prettier places, warmer places, less grungy places, places with history, charm, & naturally some dimension of art, culture & hipness. And I found other places that offered that, & ultimately I left NY.

But the magician could only have existed in that NY at that time, with his accent, his style, his charm, his meticulousness in the midst of a mess. Here was a young man who was ritualistically careful with his body, & yet his body did him in. I later wondered whether the cancer he developed had been a result of steroids he might have been doing for his body building efforts. It's possible, some medical friends told me, though you just don't know with these things. Nevertheless, with the death of our beloved magician, a period of my NY life came to an end, & it would never come back. ■



East 7th Street, April 1984, by Bethany Eden Jacobson.

WHERE I'M FROM -
EAST 10TH STREET SUMMER

In the summer
somebody always
sets some speakers
on the windowsill
Sounds of Willie
and Hector
fill the streets

We dance
in the coolness
of fire hydrants
Abuelas rest
their elbows
on pillows,
keeping one eye
on the pots,
the other one
on the street,
throw down change
for icies

Tamarindo
Mango
Papaya
Piraguas in large
triangular cone
shaped cups

Louie sells cerveza
on credit
Ephraim's got the best
nickel bag
on the block
It's mother's day
& everyone's
got money

And we were happy
There was no word
for homeless
Everyone was home

In six floor walk-ups,
toilets in halls,
bathtubs in kitchens,
police locks,
buildings so old
if you plugged in
an a/c the entire block
went out

Families escaped the heat,
slept on rooftops,
kids tied to their waists
Marriages began & ended
on the front stoops
The West Village
was another country
A pack of cigarettes
cost two dollars
& all the bodegas
sold loosies

And nobody
was homeless
Wherever we were,
we were always home

HERE IS WHAT YOU
DON'T KNOW

Before your favorite bar closed
There was a village
Before you cried over Benny's
Burritos or Kim's Video
There was a village.
Shoemakers
An egg store
A pork store
Fruit stands
Macintosh apples
& coconuts
There was no kale

There was a village.

We played our numbers
on 11th street
Bought umbrella strollers
on Avenue A
When a toddler
tripped on a crack
hands reached out
and caught him
Abuelas babysat,
elbows on windows
We spent our days
in the park
Our kids ran laughing
through the sprinklers
We drank beer
through a straw

There was life
Before the buildings burned
There was a village.

Here is what you don't know.

A fire on 10th Street, 4AM
I lived on the fifth floor
Little Bit banged on my door
She was alone with the kids
We smelled the smoke

The trumpet player in 2C
had nodded out
with a cigarette
He died in the blazing heat
Methadone, always
triple digits back then
Worse than dope, but legal.

Little Bit handed me Santino
We threw blankets over the boys
& raced down the stairs,
the banisters in flames
We ran through fire, kids
in our arms,
safely made it to the street
A month later, I threw my furniture
over the connected roof tops
& moved to the 6th floor
of the building next door.

Our disasters were not far
removed from our norms
Buildings burned
to the ground
every day
In most cases it was not the fault
of a jazz musician & his cigarette
Every day, families disintegrated
Every day, tenements made room
for the newcomers who would
arrive a decades later
Skeletons occupied the streets
where we once lived

We were families
The newer kids, like us,
didn't come here to be artists
Artists were people from Scarsdale
or West 10th Street.
We didn't know why we were here
We didn't know why we were anywhere
No philosophy, no flags to wave

We were already artists
But we didn't know that either
No purpose, no reason
Random movements
in the moment

Nobody grew up ice-skating
Nobody took a dance class
Nobody had a bank account
Our money was in our shoe
Same place we always kept it

We made our own language,
dead now to all but a few,
alive in bones arthritic
from too many beatings
or nights out in the cold

Just a few of us left,
speaking in tongues

Here is what you don't know.

There was life
before the buildings burned.

There was a village.

MEANWHILE ON A ROOF IN CHINATOWN

INGRID RUDEFORS

I wrote *Meanwhile on a Roof in Chinatown* while I was living “in exile” from New York. After having spent 15 years actively involved in the downtown New York nightlife, I moved back to Sweden in 1993. (I am now back & consider New York City my home for life).

Although the story is fictional, many of the locations & characters in the novel are based on real places, people & events. *Chinatown* is set in the early 1990s, before cellphones & the Internet – a time when you really could get as lost as my main character Alice does in her 48-hour descent into the underbelly of New York City.

In this excerpt, Alice, a middle-aged University professor from Sweden, is lured by the mafia boss Sal to visit his social club. The club is next door to where Alice’s boyfriend Charles lives & Sal is Charles’s landlord. This Sal & his social club are based on very true events.

In 1987-88, I lived at 247 Mulberry Street, next door to John Gotti’s infamous social club. In 1985, John Gotti (only 45 years old at the time) had organized the murder of Paul Castellano, the Gambino crime family’s big boss. Gotti subsequently took over leadership of the family, becoming one of the most powerful & dangerous crime bosses in America. During his era, he became widely known for his outspoken personality & flamboyant style & he quickly became known as “The Dapper Don” for his expensive clothes & his personality in front of news cameras.

Every Thursday, big black cars would line up outside the building on Mulberry Street for meetings with leaders of the Gambino family. John Gotti often had his private meetings in the hallway outside the entrance to my apartment. I presume they thought it a safer place to have private conversations than the social club, which very likely was bugged by the FBI.

This meant that Thursdays I could very well come home to find The Dapper Don & some associate in a serious whispering conversation in the hallway outside my door. I remember being petrified, with these gangsters hovering just next to me, key in my shaking hand, trying to unlock the door while doing my best to appear to not be hearing anything they were whispering about. “Don’t you worry sweetheart,” Gotti would say in his calm charming voice. “You are safe here with us.”

The superintendent told me that Gotti referred to me & my two roommates as “the German models & the little one.” We were all Swedish & none of us anything near a model. But as long as he seem to like us, he could call us whatever he liked.

My character Sal is based on John Gotti as well as some other dapper but quite shady guys who owned some of the clubs that made 1980s New York such a special place. Some of them are still alive, no names mentioned. (You know who you are & you know I know more than I should...but I won’t tell).

– Ingrid Rudfors

We meet our main character, the middle-aged Swedish professor Alice, with her new lover Charles & some of his neighbors, outside of a building in New York’s Little Italy, a nice early evening in September...

The city around her smelled so indefinably delightful. A woman in a window high above them was laughing, the exhilarating sound of hip-hop pounded from a passing car, the operatic voice down the street was practicing scales again. Next to her, a family was walking into the building, everyone

greeted each other & there was laughter at a screaming tired two year old in her father’s arms. Someone went skateboarding down the street, a couple walked past entwined, constantly kissing – & a black limousine parked across the street.

Sal climbed out of the car accompanied by two gentlemen in suits. They slipped quickly into position, one diagonally behind Sal & the other beside him. When Sal caught sight of Alice, his face lit up & he crossed the street, followed by the other

NEW YORK AT NIGHT

1930s

THE
CHRYSLER
BUILDING
FROM
42nd STREET
Samuel Gottlebo

1978

RADIO CITY
MUSIC HALL
James Hamilton
(overleaf)

Undated

THE MUDD
CLUB
Sonia Moskowitz

There's nothing like it, day or night. But at night New York is a *very* special place. *Nighttime New York: Photographs — 1950 to 1982*, assembled by Philip Gafter, brings it all to life at City Gallery, 2 Columbus Circle, through February 16. Selections:



two keeping an eye out in every direction.

"Well, good evening. Very nice to see you in our neighborhood, *again*. Incredible, isn't it?" He stopped & took Alice's hand & held it a moment in his. A hairy, slightly sweaty hand, a wide wedding ring pinching his thick ring finger.

"As always, a pleasure to see you, sir," said Charles, with a somewhat unsteady voice Alice thought.

Sal turned his attention from Alice, nodded toward the neighbors standing outside the front door & patted Charles amicably on the back.

"Everything all right?" He repeated the question to the others & everyone mumbled an affirmative answer.

High above them, the opera singer was standing at his window, now silent, studying what was happening on the street. How Sal turned toward the couple with his hand firmly holding the woman's fingers again.

"And where are you youngsters off to then?"

"To have some dinner," replied Charles. "At one of the places down the street."

"So nice. Really." Sal nodded towards Alice & winked conspiratorially. "Our street has quite the European atmosphere that I'm sure will suit the little lady. Good wine, checkered tablecloths, candlelight. You'll feel right at home, sweetheart."

He turned to Charles & added, "But not just any place, right? Some of those joints are awful tourist traps. I would love to be of help, if I may."

Without waiting for an answer, he turned to one of his beefy lackeys.

"Go with them down to Cucina Carmela & make sure they get a nice table without having to wait. You know, the usual...or wait a second..."

He turned now to Alice again with a smile & a somewhat insistent look in his eyes. "It's still early, my dear. I would very much like to offer you an aperitif first. What do you say?" A solicitous nod towards Charles. "This way. Follow me."

But Alice had no desire to have an aperitif with this man. The magical atmosphere was about to crumble. She didn't want it disrupted yet. Wanted so desperately to remain the moist, erotic, euphoric Alice. The one who wandered around in a strange city with bachelors she hardly knew who made love to her on flowery synthetic sheets.

"But that's really not necessary," she interrupted quickly.

He turned in the doorway of the place next to Charles's building & raised his eyebrows, amused.

"But...a little aperitif. I won't accept no for an answer. It isn't every day we have ladies from good old Europe visiting."

The opera singer, who suffered from a certain lust for sensational melodrama, nodded to himself up there at his window & resumed practicing his scales. "This isn't going to end well," he thought excitedly with the same feeling that used to spread across his diaphragm at the end of the second act. "Not well at all."

And the Italian ladies, who avoided looking at Alice as she was being pulled into the place next door, now looked up at the window where the singing got louder, shaking their heads & sighing. While the super took the opportunity to immerse himself once again in the horse racing columns.

Everything happened so quickly that Alice couldn't continue to protest. She was pulled through a door, found herself in a narrow passage leading into what appeared to be a former workshop. Maybe an old stable? She could see traces of hooks & tools on the walls.

A couple of older men sat puffing cigars, bent over an ongoing chess game. It smelled of cigarettes & pungent men's colognes whose various sickening essences clashed with each other in the small room & mixed with a stuffy scent she didn't recognize. Thick. Filled with... uneasiness. Farther into the room, at a shiny black glass bar, a bald bartender immediately put down his newspaper when he saw who had walked through the door. Sal greeted the men in the room amicably & nodded to the bartender. "Send up a bottle of our best Chianti."

Charles was holding Alice's hand tightly as they walked up a narrow spiral metal staircase leading to an upper level.

A soft green wall-to-wall carpet covered the floor, even the kitchen area where a luxurious AGA stove was enthroned just above the stairs. She turned to Charles to point out the stove, "A Swedish AGA stove... *here*..." but he avoided her gaze & focused instead on Sal who stood in the middle of the room working a remote control to adjust the room's lighting.

The windows were covered by thick, poppy red velvet curtains. A huge sofa & a glass coffee table took up the front of the room. A hand mirror & a razor lay on the table beside an ornate candle holder. The rest of the room was dominated by a large tub in the form of a giant wooden barrel: a cannibal stewpot.

"Here, you see," said Sal as he took her hand & pulled her toward the tub. "Here, you can take a relaxing bath in a Jacuzzi. Doesn't that sound nice?"

"Nice, indeed," echoed Charles behind her.

Sal turned on the water which trickled down into the tub from a faucet shaped like a dolphin's mouth.

"The tub is custom-made. In pine. Direct from Colorado. Totally unique. Isn't it beautiful? The shape & height of the sides are designed so that you can bathe in it without having to feel embarrassed when there are other people in the room. They're supposed to be the rage in Japan." He smiled & put his arm around her shoulders. "If you want to try it out, we have some nice bathrobes imported from Milan. The best terry cloth on the market. What do you say? "

Charles nudged her softly. "That sounds nice, doesn't it?" she heard him say. And she turned abruptly to see if he was serious, but he coughed nervously & slid over to the couch where he sat down & took out his pack of cigarettes.

The wine was now opened & poured into small crystal glasses that Alice noted were more suitable for liqueur than for a full-bodied Chianti. She took a glass, grateful that so little wine fit into it – tried to catch Charles's gaze. But he avoided looking at her while he lit another cigarette from the previous butt. The man who accompanied them to the upper level remained discreetly in the background, while Sal now went over to the wardrobe & took out a soft terry cloth robe. He handed it to Alice, allowing his finger to caress her hand lightly, & whispered in a deep voice, "Go ahead. You can change in there." He pointed to a closed door next to the AGA stove.

Charles coughed violently & abruptly stood up. "I have to..."

"There," said Sal & pointed to a door further away in the room.

Charles disappeared into the bathroom & Alice just stood there with her glass & the terry cloth robe. Tried to understand what was happening. She was a mentor to young people. How had *she* ended up here? Everything had happened so terribly quickly. One minute they had been standing on the street in a quiet neighborhood on their way to a restaurant. And a second later, she was sitting in something akin to a brothel. This kind of thing didn't happen to her, Alice Berglund, tenured professor at the university. She was so very, very tired. This simply couldn't be real.

She sat down on the sofa, leaned back, trapped in a dream which had been woven like a sticky fuzzy

cobweb around her. Sal was moving along the edge of the cobweb, Charles was somewhere far off, passive, not involved.

The sofa felt soft, as if it had swallowed her. The soft stuffing & low height made her feel like a child. She raised her glass of wine to her lips. Looked down at it, smelled it. Knew that if she tasted the plum red liquid she was lost. She stood up. But the sticky cobwebs held on to her & she just stood immobile by the couch & stared at Sal who had changed into a silver striped bathrobe.

He felt the water in the tub while he quietly watched her.

"Mmm. Come on. Go & change now." He came closer, leaned into her, patting her gently on the cheek.

"Charles usually likes it here. The others will soon be here too. Relax now, sweetheart. Would you perhaps like a line – to perk you up, I mean?"

She felt his eyes wandering down to her cleavage. Close. And her passivity gave way to anger, panic began to rise inside her. A line of what? What others? At last she came to life. Got her bearings.

"I think I'll go now. Thank you for the wine." She put down the nearly full glass. "You can tell Charles that I went home. My daughter is waiting for me."

She started walking towards the stairs but Sal caught up with her & put his arm around her. "Take it easy now. No one wants to hurt you. I'm going to take a bath & you drink up the good Chianti. I import it myself."

Without answering she tore herself free from his arm & started down the stairs. It was quiet behind her. She heard someone clearing his throat uncomfortably. "Frigid bitch," it sounded like.

And she heard the other man laugh.

As she hurried down the spiral staircase, she tripped & caught her heel on one of the narrow steps. She pulled her shoe free causing an ugly tear in the suede. On the lower level, everyone sat petrified & stared up at her as she came down the stairs with the shoe in her hand. The mixture of smells made it hard to breathe. What was that stench? Her heart was pounding. She had to get out. Turned the door handle but the door wouldn't open. She pushed it, jerked the large steel beam that covered the door like a slat. But nothing happened. Turned around, but now everyone was looking down at their chess game – as if she weren't there.

Perhaps she didn't understand the locking mechanism, she thought, now back to her objective

self. Wanted to be the usual Alice & not this woman with a shoe in her hand, who was locked in a room that smelled of...fear. She felt the perspiration on her neck, wiped her forehead. Was completely drenched in sweat.

One of the gentlemen who had been in the car with Sal earlier, stared at her as he quietly opened the door. Did not step aside. But now she was filled with pure rage & pushed him backwards. Could feel something hard under his jacket.

Politely, he held the door open. "Nothing to be afraid of, Madame." He smiled cordially & slinked back into the dimness of the room she'd just left.

Outside, everything was normal, as if the room behind the discreet door didn't exist. The Italian wives had retired. The super sat alone. He looked silently at her with a nondescript expression on his face. He just looked at her without saying a word. A blank look under heavy eyelids.

She stopped, leaned against the wall, wiped her forehead & neck. Her turtleneck sweater stuck to her breasts. Why was she wearing a synthetic bra?

She gasped. Maybe she was stupid to just rush away like that. Allowed herself to get scared, gotten the heel of her shoe stuck.

From somewhere high up, you could hear the clatter of pots & a screaming child. A bellowing fire truck drove past on Lafayette Street. The opera singer paused in the middle of a phrase & stood staring at her. But of that, Alice was quite unaware.

She put on her shoe & breathed in the urban air which, despite its exhaust fumes & the humid September heat, felt like fresh mountain air compared to the sickening feeling that hovered like toxic gas on the other side of the door.

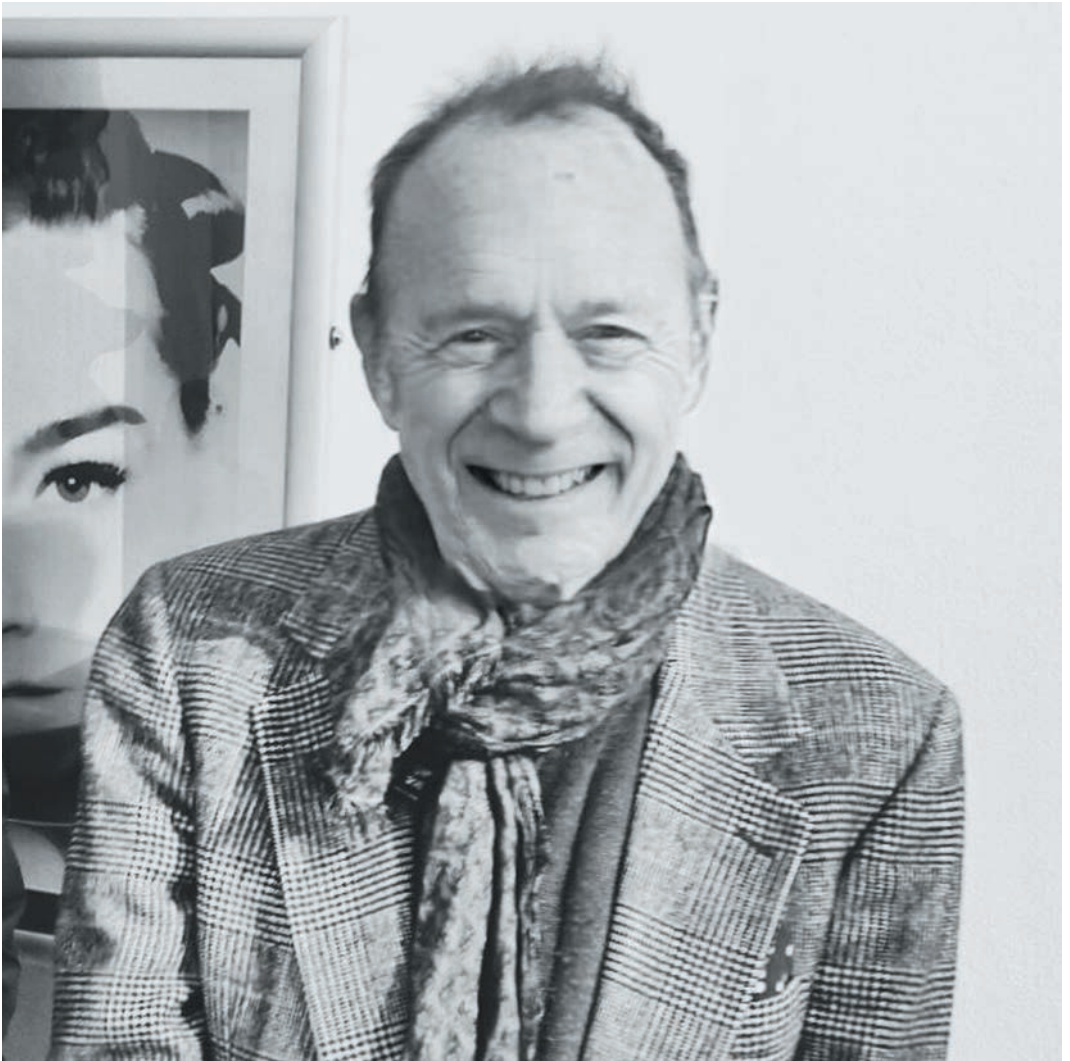
She rubbed her eyes. And felt that she had lost her bearings. Where was Chinatown? What was north & what was south? Now that she really needed a taxi the magic didn't work anymore. No car appeared like a magic carpet.

The street was deserted & the super looked pointedly down at his newspaper. ■

* Translated from Swedish by Odella Schattin. First published in English in 2015 by Triangle Ranch Communications.



Ingrid Rundefors, Jan Long Collins & Kenny Scharf, Mudd Club, 1981, by Robert Carrithers.



Anthony Haden Guest, 2015, by Hubert Kretschmar.

I was speaking to Toby Beavers one morning, I don't remember where he was, only that the former Nightlord – an Upper East Side hotspot, the Surf Club – had abandoned New York. And I wanted to know why?

"It's boring, boring," he explained.

Was it? I had just returned from LA & I had called Otter. She said the following night, a Saturday night, was her regular night at the Pyramid. Her night is called Trip & Go Naked. "I'm doing my vibrating pussy piece, so I suggest you catch it," she said. I told her I would do my best.

My date & I arrive just in time for us to see Otter to disrobe from her Little Bo Peep costume, stripey *Alice in Wonderland* stockings, plumed hat. Women are running around topless. One screams at a heckler "It's not that I like women. *I hate men!*"

A guy comes on-stage, wearing a suit & tie, like a salesman, but then he too proceeds to undress. It turns out that he is a fire-eater. A Scotsman, my notes indicate, name of "Flambeaux." Not a terrifically Scots name really. He eats fire, caresses his body with it. But now it's Otter's moment. She approaches, displaying a fine flame tattoo on her belly, reclines, takes off her red panties, spreads her legs like a nutcracker on the ready & tells the photographers they can come up close.

Flambeaux then breathes flames into her pudenda but it doesn't look like a particularly hot fire, more like the blue flame that licks a Christmas pudding, so it doesn't seem a life-threatening process but it's really impressive the way she expands the fire, presumably by using natural gases. She then salutes "My fire-breathing pussy!" & thanks everybody, meantime delicately covering her pubes. Which hadn't seemed to vibrate so maybe she had been referring to a different performance.

Ugh! At this juncture my notes become both telegraphic & opaque, so curiously promising. They read: *Miriam Bendahan with fuchsia hair... drag queens & dominatrices... what would you do for \$50... blue family with red children... water balloon attached to his penis which exploded after simulated sex... two lesbians called the Scum Sisters... douches for the dicks... three hairy apes who exposed their arses... an English blonde Sophia who failed to*

perform... a cartoon imitator, Snaggletooth, Maggie, Mr Burns... even the dominatrices were laughing... refusing to do Homer until after he lost... five...

Who did what for \$50? Just where did blonde Sophia draw the line? Homer lost five what? Perhaps deep hypnosis would fill the gaps? But lucidity returns to my handwriting & I am watching a bald youth, clearly a popular favorite, who stands there while a beer bottle is shattered on his head. Weirdly there was no blood. A fresh bottle is swung, strikes his skull. And bounces.

Otter, the Diaghileff figure here, is clearly getting quite frustrated that no blood is spurting. Blood is definitely on the menu. "He's not bleeding! We need another bottle!" she demands.

Another bottle is put into play. This too is ineffective.

The bald young man is standing outside as we leave. "Are you alright?" I inquire.

"Now you ask" he says, sounding aggrieved.

"A little late" says his friend.

I was really glad that there hadn't been blood. That would have been a really bad example. These were not good times for fooling around with blood.

Dinner at the Bowery Bar with a friend & our dates. Taylor Mead was there. So too Jared Paul Stern. So clearly this was before his regrettable flame-out. Of course, you may need Professor Google's help with that incident, as with many of these names. My pal's date says her brother works at Expo. Expo is where Xenon once had been. She gives me a VIP card, but we decide to go straightaway, that very night. It was 11:20, too early, but all the better for taking a look at the old place.

But it was chilling, climbing those stairs to the VIP room again, & walking past the desk where a pretty girl secretary sits as she always sat, except this time with a diamond in her nostril. The office was cheesy as ever. The bathroom, with the grey mosaic floor, the shower, the loo, the basin which I must have used as a support while entering a date – how often? Seven or eight times for sure,

The manager was paunchy. The office wall was covered with color photographs of him with celebs. Ex-celebs mostly, to be accurate.

Cornelius Craane was in the office along the corridor, which (I think) is the one that used to house Peppo Vanini. Now it contained a glass-fronted case filled with spiders & scorpions so huge that I assumed them to be theatrical props. But Craane swears he has seen water scorpions in Latin America as big as puppies. He gestured to indicate a creature a foot long & six inches off the ground.

I had always thought there was a natural limit to creatures with an exoskeleton. Perhaps these things are different in The Tropics.

We looked down to the club beneath, heard the music pumping. It was house music.

"At two in the morning it becomes salsa" Johnson said.

"I remember sitting there with Rachel Ward & the Kennedys," a girl said, pointing down to where the celebrity tables used to be.

We watched the dancers. Suits, floppy hats, even ties. What was the age group, I asked? Club owners no longer shared Steve Rubell's vision that a dance floor should be a human salad. It was closer to Peter Gatien's notion of niche marketing.

"Tonight 21 to 24," the manager said. "Tomorrow 21 to 32..."

The décor included a Cadillac. "That's from when this used to be Shout," he said. "Do you wanna drop the star? That was from Xenon."

The 45 foot star came down. It was positioned near the mandatory disco ball.

"That's the largest crystal ball in the world," he said. "I brought it in from Orlando."

There were searchlights, flying blobs. But the disco ball was motionless.

An old friend & I take two Canadian cuties to the ballet. Run into the ballet critic, Clive Barnes, there. He didn't like the new ballet. I did.

We then hit the town. Went to the MercBar on Mercer, decided it would be a great place to commit murder, being as black as a hearse & filled with folk who don't look like they would be greatly missed. Then back to the Pyramid. Otter was wearing rings on just about every cleft or promontory of her body, the ring finger excepted, & she was entertaining the house by shoving chicken limbs & other eatables up her privy parts.

She offered me a chicken leg when she was through with it. I said I had already eaten.

The two Canadians complained that they got plenty of that sort of thing in Toronto.

"Isn't there somewhere elegant where people

just sit & drink & talk? You know, real New York?" one asked wistfully.

We said that, yes, there certainly was, but it was rather too late to go & find one.

About forty years too late, as a matter of fact.

Went to Le Club with a fashionable Englishwoman. I was wearing a black tie & tux. Le Club, which is run by the politely towering figure of Patrick Shields, was just about the first discotheque in the new New York & some of the people there looked as if they were there on opening night & never quite made it home.

I took off my jacket to dance. Suddenly a man was thrusting my jacket at me. Presumably a club employee. He was acting with some nervousness, like a matador showing his cloak at a bull, prior to jumping out of the ring. It was outside Le Club that some friends of John F Kennedy Jr got into fisticuffs with a new power in Nightworld, a bunch of paparazzi. Don't know who won that evening but the paparazzi would prevail in the end, of course.

There was a party for a book about Elvis in the Mercury Lounge on East Houston. The last time I had tried to get into this joint there had been a party for Marianne Faithfull & I was on a list. It was only when I got to the front that I discovered it was a list which allowed the doorman to ignore me totally. No problem this time. The place was dark, also smoky. Was that still allowed these days? There was a band onstage not doing any Elvis material that I recognized. Ran into Ronnie Sunshine.

Onto George Plimpton's for a party for the Humor Issue of the *Paris Review*. Which hadn't arrived yet. "It's a tragedy," Plimpton exclaimed, in a melodramatic mode, rather than a tragic one. A quarter century after Gay Talese dissected a Plimpton event in *Esquire* he can still fill a room. If there *is* a literary life in Manhattan, this was it. Calvin Trillin, PJ O'Rourke, Art Buchwald & James Atlas were huddled in a foursome & Atlas, the only non-humorist, seemed to be doing the talking. A behatted columnist was scribbling notes. A downtown columnist, of course, the hat not being an indoors wearable on the Upper East Side.

"Why isn't everybody at their websites?" asked somebody genially at large. The way he was eyeing the young female literati provided one satisfactory answer & another was that websites seldom have a wet bar attached. In a corner a clump of junior socialites were complaining to each other that they

didn't know anybody except, well, each other.

Onto the Supper Club where "Everything But the Girl" was playing. The place was jammed with EBTG fans who applauded rapturously on hearing the first note of each & every song. They had an odd look, neither Punk nor Grunge. I tried out Punge & Grunk on a few ears but neither caught on.

Andy Moses, Bitten, Ian Irving, Eric Goode were in the Bowery Bar. Ran into the Cosmetician from Another Planet who said she was on her way to both Spy & Rebar but she got a bit fuzzy when I asked what was going on there. Here at the B Bar though there was a Wonderbra event which sounded full of promise but I saw no women there who seemed Wonderbra material. "These parties are a great way to meet guys" a friend told me, gloomily. Great line but I forget just which friend so now it's mine.

I called the Cosmetician from Another Planet for a catch-up later.

"We went to Spy & to Frederick's & then we went back to the Bowery Bar," she said. "But Debby saw the guy she's dating with another girl. So we went home."

Debbie is a blonde stripper. So was the other woman.

"But she had bigger boobs," the Cosmetician said.

What about Rebar?

"Oh, yeah. But it was too collegey."

We ended up sitting beneath the flying saucer lighting fitments at Mortimers. Peter Beard was there, talking somberly about wildlife. Claude Beer was there, & a clump of models. Some of the Hair People had made it there too

Now, in editing mode, I have no idea whatsoever who these Hair People might have been. Not, by the sound of it, Mortimer's regulars. Or I got my notes mixed up. That's a possibility too

Went to the opening of a club called... was it CV? "It used to be a bank," somebody said. I had no writing paper so Carmen d'Alessio gave me a couple of blue cards concerning International Fashion Friday at the Buddha Bar. Sorry, I missed that. "Don't forget my name" the DJ said. I promised not to & scribbled it down. But I can't read it. Sorry about that too.

Cindy Crawford was talking to Ethan Hawke, but, no, it can't have been because Cindy Crawford was doing House of Style at Spy Bar, & this was an event so exclusive that I was told that even the owners, David Sarnier & Michael Ault, were not

being admitted, thereby improving on a much too well-known line by Groucho Marx.

The VIP room was snotty.

Was this place a bank, I asked?

"No. But it will be," I was told. Hopefully.

Steven Lewis, Fred Rothbell-Mista & others gave a party for barmen at Roseland on Monday. It was on a Monday because that's the night that clubs are usually dark. The co-sponsor was Camel & there was a terrific, splendidly cynical display of huge images of ashtrays with butt ends, flaming lighters & so forth. Cigarette girls were distributing free packs of Camels & people were puffing up a storm. Even as a non-user I found this amusing. "This is like being invited to a party by the Cali cartel," said Peter. Peter who?

The Roseland party had an Open Bar. There was then to be an After Party. which was to go until four. Meaning six hours of Open Bar, with all that rampant Bar Energy running around.

Four balloons onto which were projected the names of clubs were released into a greenish-rosy haze filled with sparkly lights. Peter said he was reminded of Wednesday nights at Arthur Weinstein's tremendous club, The World. when balloons would be released, each of which would contain a hundred pellets of Ecstasy.

Roseland was full of thin young women in black slips, with lank greenish-blonde hair, muscle-beach Cro Mags with necks like truck tires & youths with shaven heads, baggy pants, ear-rings. A magician was sawing his arm off & there was a fire-eater – no, not Flambeaux – in black vinyl... So it was a nothing muchness. But a nightperson urged us to go to the piping hot Sinner on West 23rd Street.

It was there, or very possibly someplace else, later, that there was an argy-bargy ahead of me at the door, causing a spiky-haired giant in leatherwear & silver chains to back into me.

"Excuse me, dude," he said, politely, clearly no irony intended.

Right ahead of us a man was being told he wasn't on the list.

"But it's my party," he whined.

"Everybody's got an attitude," sneered the doorman.

Should I have called Toby Beavers with this report from the front-lines of the boring, boring New York Nightworld? Toby would perhaps have said "Same old, same old." And, God, how I wish it were that still. ■



HEART OF DECADENCE

MARK STEINER

"Home is where the heart is," goes the old saying. Over the years, as a musician, I have discovered through my travels many other places in the world where I can find comfort & inspiration, including cities such as Berlin & Prague. I even feel at home in a few other, more remote parts of the world, such as Melbourne, Australia, the land down under, as well as Reykjavik, where I have been unofficially adopted by an Icelandic couple.

Most people these days seem to think that I'm Norwegian, which is true in the sense that my mother's family is Norwegian, I speak Norwegian, & I look like a Norwegian. I even have a Norwegian passport & a Norwegian ex-wife. However, in Norway, where I planted my roots in 2003, just a few months after 9/11, I'm still thought of as an "utlending," which quite literally means "outlander." I must admit, though, that in my heart I consider myself first & foremost a New Yorker. Always have, always will.

I was born in Manhattan in 1970, the same year that The Stooges released the quintessential album "Funhouse," just a few years before my sister & I were taken to a presumably safer upbringing in

the suburbs of New Jersey. As a family, we were unknowingly escaping the decaying metropolis as it plummeted into near-bankruptcy, yet even as a child I found myself mysteriously drawn back towards the sounds of the sirens on that island across the Hudson River.

From age 14, my friends & I began taking the bus from Tenafly to the George Washington Bridge bus terminal at 178th Street, where we would then briskly walk past the beggars & the drunks who lingered in the subterranean passages so that we could grab the next "A" express train, which in turn would barrel downtown to our destination at West 4th Street. Greenwich Village was the neighborhood where we would shop to add to our growing comic book collections, a habit which initial was replaced with a thirst for vinyl records, & before too long, alcohol. Within a year, the lot of us underage Jersey kids could be found hanging out in front of Ukranian sidewalk cafés in the Village, smoking cigarettes & getting drunk on White Russians (which we naively believed might be perceived as simple, innocent glasses of chocolate milk to unimpressed passers-by).

By the time I was 16, I had started to spike my hair & began dating a cute & sassy Punk rock girl who owned a Honda Accord, & we would drive regularly into the city to go to the East Village to see concerts at CBGB's & at The Ritz on East 11th Street. During the late '80s I caught many a great show, including the likes of Iggy Pop, Peter Murphy, The Cramps, The Pogues & much more. One of the highlights was seeing "Joey Ramone presents The Holy Inquisition Circus of the Perverse" live at The Ritz, which featured The Lords of the Dead (Stiv Bators & Cheetah Chrome," along with a circus-like cast of characters from the local Punk contingency. I'll never forget seeing Debbie Harry seize the stage that night to do an outrageously sexy rendition of "Venus in Furs" in a tiny black leather bikini.

By my senior year at high school, my best friend & I had mastered the art of buying pot in Washington Square Park, & I swapped out my torn, Punk slogan-covered bluejeans & homemade printed anarchy t-shirts for a black wardrobe so that I could hide in the shadows at downtown Goth clubs on the weekends. As I began to discover more like-minded misfit kids from other towns out in Jersey, I suddenly found myself singing with a Goth-Punk band called Unified Division. We debuted with a bunch of cover songs at a battle-of-the-bands at Tenafly High School, & even got a group of the kids dancing & pogo-ing to The Clash's "Should I Stay or Should I Go," but of course the attending panel of adults judged a jazz act to be the winning band. Soon afterwards, we played a party in the gymnasium at Dwight Englewood, a private institution where the drummer & bassist went to school. When we started playing a Sex Pistols medley, the horrified faculty tried to shut us down by turning off the circuit breaker in order to kill the lights in the gym. To the dismay of the teachers & volunteering parents, we had used a long extension cord & unknowingly tied into a different breaker. So of course kept on playing, much to the delight of the students (or at least some of them), even as the lights went out. There was a suburban club out in Haledon called The Rat Trap Café where we also played a couple of fun gigs to other misfits of the Bergen County area, but we never had the guts to try to book a show in the city. By this time, the local punks & ageing hippies were declaring the end of an era, as The Gap had finally opened on St Mark's Place.

In those days, wandering the streets of Manhattan could still be a bit risky at times, despite the fact that the rough nature of the city was slowly being replaced with so-called gentrification. Graffiti-doused Subway cars were already becoming a thing of the past. Windshield-

washer men & their filthy cleaning rags gradually became less of an annoyance to commuters as they became a less frequent sight off the West Side Highway. Signs of the economic changes to come had already begun to surface back in the late '80s, but the real steps to purify lower Manhattan was to arrive with the '90s & the advent of the so-called "Grunge" era. Under the watch of then mayor Dinkins, a bunch of cops had covered their badges with black tape, put on riot gear, & then bulldozed & chased out the homeless from their largely peaceful encampment in Tompkins Square Park. This sort of activity merely intensified in later years under the more subtle claws of the real-estate moguls, who by then had partnered up with Mayor Rudy Giuliani. The Ritz had closed, moved uptown, & then closed again. The fuel pump station on the Bowery had been transformed into the pre-hipster era Bowery Bar. Starbucks began squeezing out various independent diners & bodegas, long before 7-11 even dared open their own franchises along the avenues. Olde New Yawk was rapidly transforming into the playground for the wealthy & prosperous which it has since become.

But despite the "zero tolerance" regulations imposed on the city, there was still a thriving underground scene during the nineties, especially in downtown Manhattan. Swamp-rock bands like Chrome Cranks & Valentine Six played various dives bars like Brownie's. Former guitarist of both Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds & The Cramps, also founding member of LA's The Gun Club, Kid Congo Powers finally stepped forth from the sidelight with Congo Norvell & later his own band, Kid Congo & The Pink Monkeybirds. Michael Gira of Swans put things on hold to focus on his new projects, including Angels of Light, as well as his own label, Young God Records. JG Thirlwell, aka Foetus, could be seen lurking in the corners at gigs & parties as a DJ. No Wave legend Jim Scavunos juggled his own band called The Vanity Set along with The Gunga Din, who were my personal favorite choice as far as local bands went. Any of these characters & their kind could be observed at the various bars & clubs which splattered the East Village & along Ludlow Street in the Lower East Side as both neighborhoods grew safer with a new air of refined debauchery. Of course, old guard watering holes such as Mars Bar provided a safe haven for junkies & derelicts who drank alongside pre-hipsters, who could also be found flocking to live music venues like Sin-é, Mercury Lounge or Coney Island High on St. Mark's Place, where Lemmy could be seen shooting pinball & drinking whiskey. I spent much of my time wandering from gig to pub, from bar

to party. My "living room" was a first-generation Irish pub called The Scratcher down the block from my apartment on East Fifth Street. If I started my evening drinking Bass Ale on tap there, which was usually the case, I often ended up there again on my way home from The Raven, a Goth-Punk bar over on Avenue A, where I eventually became a regular. Once in a while, I'd videotape a band or do some photo-journalism for some local street rag, & my network began to grow. It was a good time to be living in Manhattan, all things considered, especially as I was drawn to things dark & decadent.

One day, some college friends of mine introduced me to The Lower East Side Tenement Museum. At the time it merely consisted of a brightly lit store-front which served as a souvenir shop, a contrast to the actual museum itself, which was a grim, dark & dank 19th-century building looming just across the street. This tenement held long-since abandoned cave-like single room flats, each with a dirty or missing window looking into the neighboring apartments. These tenants of these abodes, in turn, might have been so lucky as to have had a window into the mere shaft of a courtyard, which under city ordinances provided for some meager ventilation & a possible hint of daylight from the sky far above. Between a dozen or even twenty-some-odd people might have shared each of these rooms at any given time. They often slept on the bare floors & dumped their waste out into the street. Disease, theft, suicide & murder were far from uncommon. The idea that countless New Yorkers had evidently lived in such squalor simply blew my mind. The growing juxtaposition with the streets outside was astounding. The museum shop sold a white T-shirt, which on the back featured a hand-written price list of services which had been found in the pocket of a little-known gangland thug named Piker Ryan. This so-called "take-out menu" listed the following:

- Punching \$2
- Both eyes blacked \$4
- Nose & jaw broke \$10
- Jacked out \$15
- Ear chewed off \$15
- Leg or arm broke \$19
- Shot in leg \$25
- Stab \$25
- Doing the big job \$100 & up.

I was sold. I simply couldn't resist – I just had to have that T-shirt. And to bring me up to speed, I also bought myself a copy of Luc Santé's historical overview of NYC, *Lowlife*. Over the years, I'd read plenty of Bukowski & Burroughs, but this

deeper collection of stories of local urban struggle brought my concept & twisted appreciation of decadence to a whole new level. Strangely inspired by this largely rotten & often overlooked part of the history of The Big Apple, I decided to start a new band, so I placed an announcement in the classified section of the *Village Voice*, & soon met a Belgian ex-pat, a guitarist named "Phil the Tremelo King." I told him of my devious plans, & the band Piker Ryan's Folly was born.

The Tremolo King & I soon hit the stage, he with his Gretsch guitar & a blue shark-skin suit, & me in a dirty black jacket & matching slacks armed with a microphone & often a bottle of one of the "three wise men" (Jack, Jim & Old Grand-Dad). As a duo, backed with pre-recorded rhythm tracks to an S-VHS tape, we finally debuted in September 1998 at "Alchemy," a weekly Monday club night at CB's Gallery which catered to the Goth & Darkwave scene. I belted out lyrics of debauchery, sorrow & rage, sometimes with references to Herbert Asbury's book "The Gangs of New York."

Through an additional classified in the *New York Press*, we soon took on a drummer, a bass-player, & a keyboard player, & eventually recorded an EP & starting playing gigs wherever we could. On a typical night, people in the audience would buy me shots of bourbon during our shows at watering holes like CB's or The Pyramid, & my drunken stage performance would get all the more sloppy with each gig. Somewhere along the line, someone in the audience called out that I should "go back to substitute teaching." During a gig at The Charleston in Williamsburg, a guy in the audience, a friend of our drummer, began to heckle me. I guess that I must have accepted his raucous challenge, because he then suddenly decided to assault me on stage, barreling into me right in the middle of a Dead Kennedys-inspired song called "Paper God." Needless to say, I was so charged & full of adrenaline & bourbon that I threw him straight back off the stage (which was marked by simple length of orange tape on the floor) into a table. As he smacked into the side of the table & fell to the floor, the bewildered drunk was then immediately dragged out to the street by the aging proprietor & his son. Of course, the band didn't miss a beat & kept playing on to the room of a mere half-dozen drunken onlookers.

The band members of Piker Ryan's Folly began to come & go. We reluctantly had to let go of our bassist, Bob, who we had acquired from the band Valentine Six, but who was always broke. Bob had inadvertently gotten us scolded one day at a rehearsal space called Smash Studios for pouring an ashtray onto the carpeted floor. It turned out

that the “pile of ashes” he had left behind in the studio was in fact bits of his rotting sneakers which were so old & rank that they were decomposing beneath his feet. We also soon kicked out the drummer for being too passive-aggressive towards the rest of us, & he later grabbed me by the throat after a gig at CB’s after he saw that he had been replaced.

At a gig at The Bank, a Goth venue on East Houston Street, I guzzled half a bottle of Maker’s Mark on stage. I got so fucked up that except for the first verse, I had forgotten the lyrics to “Goddamn the Sun” by Swans, which we had decided to cover that night. My German roommate at the time left during the show, but only after making it quite clear to me that he was not at all impressed. “Zis was za vurst konzert I have ever seen,” he huffed before going home. I sat on the edge of the stage as the band played the same four chords over & over again, & finished off the bottle. Not exactly my brightest moment. As the months passed & the new millennium quickly approached, my blurred senses began to get the better of me, yet I somehow began to draw the conclusion that being the drunk frontman of a swampy lounge-noir band was perhaps not good for my morale, my reputation, or my health.

Meanwhile, the overall “improving” quality of life in Lower Manhattan was taking its toll on the native art community. The city was becoming more expensive. Already struggling clubs, bars & independent shops began to shut down as they made way for those who could afford the obscene hikes in rent. It started to become obvious that even though Piker Ryan’s Folly had finally found the right rhythm section, which included the drummer from my high school band along with his brother, this rag-tag band would have nothing less than a shady future in the brightening lights of this big city. Tired & frustrated, Phil threw finally in the towel & decided to pick up & move with his family from Alphabet City to start a new life in New Orleans. Piker Ryan’s Folly went on hold.

During this time, I had purchased a bowler hat which matched the gangland images as seen in Alfred Stieglitz’s photography from the previous turn-of-the-century. This hat also reminded me of the novel “The Unbearable Lightness of Being” written by Milan Kundera. The latest Piker Ryan’s Folly recruit, a keyboard player who went by the nick-name “Eric the Heretic,” also turned out to be a fan of Kundera. In an attempt to get my shit together & get focused (& ideally more sober), I picked up a white Fender Stratocaster, & the two of us started a new musical project. It made sense to simply called the band Kundera.

Almost surprisingly, things began to pick up rather quickly. Eric & I managed to recruit a double-bass player we knew, along with a drop-dead beautiful violinist named Susan who I saw performing one night at The Limelight some years before. With a guitar in my hands, I was taking live music performance much more seriously. The new century – a new millennium – was dawning. Eventually, during a family to Oslo, I even bought myself a Washburn semi-acoustic so that I could play a last-minute gig at a bar called Paragrafen. There, I fell for a Norwegian woman who I had just met at a friend’s party the night before. I returned to New York. Less than a year later passed, & during one of her visits, I proposed to her on the middle of The Brooklyn Bridge. We got married in Central Park, & even held a full-on rock’n’roll wedding reception at CB’s Gallery. That was back in September, 2001, just three days before the towers fell.

One bright Tuesday morning in early September, I awoke to find myself running a bit late for work, but I didn’t care. Gro Marie & I had just gotten married on Saturday, & I had even taken Monday off, so it had been a long weekend in more ways than one. I had some coffee, grabbed her bridal dress & my suit, & headed for the drycleaners so that I could drop them off on my way to my job on West 21st Street. The air was cool & crisp, & the sky was clear & blue. The New York City summer had come to an end. As I headed up The Bowery & began crossing Astor Place, I could hear the sound of an approaching jet engine above. I looked up & suddenly saw a passenger airliner. It was headed Southbound, & was flying so low that I could make out the windows as the plane disappeared above the buildings. I thought: “Holy shit. That plane is going down,” & a moment later, the sky began turning black with smoke. The plume was thick, & I felt a lump in my throat.

I ran across the street & entered Chris French’s shop with my drycleaning. The cashier was furious, banging the phone against the wall, as if he didn’t see me come in. “Goddammit! Try to call 911 & it’s fuckin’ busy! Fuckin’ typical!” he bellowed.

I looked at the guy, his face quite pale. It was obvious that he seemed both confused & upset. “If you are trying to report the plane which just went down, I think half the city is probably trying to dial nine-one-one by now,” I said with an unexpectedly calm tone.

He paused & stared at me. As the color began to return to his cheeks, his gaze moved to the clothing bag draped over my arm. “Dropping off, then? Cash or charge?”

For a moment there, life still felt normal. I

walked out & picked up the payphone outside. I called my job, & asked to speak with Rich, the manager of the communications rental company where I had been working since '98. "Hey Rich. Listen, a plane just went down in lower Manhattan. I know I'm already running late, but I'd like to go back home & check in on my wife." Gro had only been living in New York for about a month at this point. "Is that ok?" I asked.

"Really? Wow. That's pretty fucked up. But listen, we've got a busy day here today. Lots of clients who need to pick walkies this morning. We need you."

"I understand," I said. "Let me just call Gro, & I'll be there in about 10 minutes."

I hung up, put another quarter in & called the landline in my apartment. Gro Marie seemed surprised by my call, although when I told her about the plane, she admitted that she had oddly felt like the building had shaken a few minutes before, but that she hadn't heard any explosion. I told her to turn on the news, & that I'd call her from work. As I hung up, I glanced at some graffiti which seemed out of place. Someone had etched a swastika into the side of the payphone, & a word suddenly came to mind: terrorism.

I jogged up Fourth Avenue, & as I got to Union Square Park, I could see a large crowd of people to my left. They were staring off toward the south down University Place. A police car pulled up onto the curb, & as an officer with a moustache stepped out of the vehicle, he took off his hat. "I don't fuckin' believe this," he said, staring with the rest of the pedestrians who had stopped despite the flashing "walk" sign.

It was like something out of a Hollywood blockbuster starring Schwarzenegger or Bruce Willis. There stood the Twin Towers, only now there was the distinct flaming outline of where a passenger jet had made it's impact into the one skyscraper. As we stood together, silent, suddenly there was an explosion, & a black mushroom cloud wafted from the other tower. People began to scream. Someone shouted "Wait! That must have been a gas main in the other building!"

I contemplated diving into the nearby subway entrance, but instead began sprinting up Broadway toward West 21st Street. By the time I got into the office, I was almost out of breath. "Hey everybody! A plane crashed into the Twin Towers!" I shouted.

Rosa, the receptionist looked me square in the eye. "Where have you been, Mark?" she demanded. "TWO planes have hit the towers!"

I turned around & ran straight back home.

By the time I got to the apartment, Gro Marie's eyes were plastered to the television screen. Both

towers were in flames. It must have been surreal to her, having only moved to Manhattan from Norway just a few weeks earlier. I realized that trying to leave the city was not an option at this point, as thousands of people must have been flooding the tunnels & bridges in panic with that same thought in mind. I told my bride that we needed to stay put & bunk down in the apartment, but that we needed to first stock up on supplies. We ran downstairs & around the corner into Metfood, the grocery store on Second Avenue. The place was pretty empty, & it didn't seem like the cashiers had any idea of what was going on outside, as the speakers played muzak instead of the news. I handed Gro Marie a shopping basket, & we split up to grab different things like canned goods, toilet paper, & beer. By the time we met back at the register, which was only a few minutes later, the shop had become a mad house. People were racing up & down the aisles, grabbing whatever they could. Some were even arguing. "You selfish asshole! How about letting somebody else get some of that soup!" It was insane. The poor cashiers looked terrified, still not quite aware of why customers were suddenly rushing in through the doors. We paid & ran back down to East Fifth Street. As we arrived at the stoop to our building, Gro Marie suddenly stopped & swore in Norwegian. "FAEN!"

"What is it?" I asked her, also in Norwegian.

"I forgot to buy a pack of cigarettes!" she exclaimed.

I looked at her. "Gro Marie." I said calmly. "You're not buying a pack of cigarettes."

I had quit smoking two-&a-half years earlier. My wife stared back at me, daggers flying from her eyes. I finished my sentence. "Because I'm gonna buy a carton!"

I ran back around the corner & grabbed a bottle of Jim Beam & a carton of Camel Lights.

We climbed up the six floors with our bags of groceries, & went back into the apartment. The towers were still burning. The phone rang. It was my best friend Harald calling from Norway, who also happened to be married to Gro's cousin Linda. We spoke briefly, & asked him to call Gro's mother & my grandparents to let them know that we were ok. I then tried to call my parents out in Jersey, but the signal was dead.

And then it happened. The South Tower collapsed. We both gasped in horror. I suddenly realized that an enormous cloud of dust & debris was headed our way. The windows to the fire escape were loose, & didn't close properly. I told Gro to fill the bath tub as I grabbed a pile of towels, soaked them in water, & placed them at the base

of each window in the apartment. A moment later, the outside went grey with smoke & dust.

The phone rang again. I picked it up. "Hello, Mark?" Said an unfamiliar voice with a distinct Asian accent.

"Uh, yeah? Who is this?"

"Mark! This is Nikki. Nikki from Singapore! Are you ok? What's going on over there?"

Nikki was a pen pal I had met through a classified ad I had once placed in *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* magazine a decade earlier, when I had felt inspired to make a documentary film against censorship. We had never met, never spoken over the phone, only communicated through letters, & years had passed since I had last heard from her.

"Holy shit! Nikki! Wow! This is weird. It's great to hear your voice!" I briefly forgot what was being shown on the TV. Gro looked up at me from the sofa. "Um, yeah. Nikki! We're ok, thanks. Me & my wife. We just married a few days ago. But you obviously know what's happening. One of the towers just fell! This is awful!"

We spoke for another minute or two, & I put the phone down. "Who was that?" asked Gro.

Before I had a chance to explain, the phone rang again. I picked it up straight away.

"Mark! It's Myke! Holy fuck! Are you guys ok?" said a very familiar voice.

Myke was the singer of the Goth-Punk band Empire Hideous, for whom I had made both a mockumentary (a tongue-in-cheek documentary *à la* Spinal Tap meets the Goth scene) & a few music videos. He was also proving to be a very dear friend.

"Myke!" I said. "Yeah, we're ok. This is totally fucked up, but we're ok. We just got food & supplies from the store. One of the towers came down, dude. This is crazy. Listen - could you do me a favor? I can't seem to call out. If I give you a couple of numbers, would you pleas call my mother & my father & let them know that we're ok, & not to worry too much?"

"But of course," said Myke. I gave him the info & we hung up.

The second tower went down about a half hour later. It felt like war had begun.

A few hours later, my friend Erik came over. He lived over in Alphabet City. When the dial tone returned, I discovered that we could at least make local calls, so I had dialed up Erik & convinced him that it was probably safer to stay with us in our building as his neighborhood might soon be dangerous with the prospect of looting.

We sat around, watching the news while we drank beer & whiskey & smoked cigarettes. As the sun went down, I looked above the rooftops in the

direction of where the World Trade Center once stood. "Isn't that almost ironic? Look at all of that smoke coming up, & just to the left of it there's a bright star in the sky," I commented.

"That's not a star, Mark," said Erik. "That's a planet. In fact, that's Mars."

The world as I knew it had changed. I lit a cigarette & had another drink.

Six months later, I found myself living in Oslo, Norway, with my blonde & blue-eyed bride & a whole new life ahead. Traumatized by the things we'd witnessed back in New York, I had little idea of what changes were yet in store for me. Sadly, my Washburn guitar stayed mainly underneath the bed, & except for the occasional Kundera "reunion" gig during visits to NYC & even during a visit from Eric in Oslo, I hardly wrote any songs or rehearsed my music.

A little over a year passed, & my wife & I got separated, & then divorced. I suddenly faced two options: move back across the Atlantic with my tail between my legs, or stay put in Oslo, & give single life in Europe a go. Fortunately, I already had good ties with family in Norway, spoke the language pretty fluently, & my mother had even been clever enough to insist on getting me a Norwegian passport during my childhood, so I was pretty set. Fate had somehow tricked me for the better, so I went with the latter option & decided to continue getting settled with a new life in Norway. I picked up my guitar again, & started writing new songs. Eventually, I began focusing on my music & becoming a solo artist.

I tried to start a few new bands in Oslo, but it seemed like every time something got rolling, each new project would rehearse, then play a fun gig or two, but then things finally ended up sputtering to a halt. I had a hard time finding musicians who were interested in the sort of music I aspired to make. Through the use of a website called MySpace, I slowly began meeting other like-minded people with similar tastes in music & other interests. Living in Oslo certainly had it's advantages, & traveling around Europe has proved to be both affordable & easy. In 2006 I arranged a European tour for my old New York band, but as Phil had to pull out last minute, we abbreviated the name to "Piker Ryan." After that tour I played a solo tour of Portugal. From that point on, I decided to work as a solo artist, under my own given name. My love for music & travel began opening new doors all across Europe, & eventually brought me to Paris, Berlin, Prague, Lisbon & Reykjavik, & even as far as Australia. But that's a whole other story... ■





BERLIN



Holger Knote, 2013 (previous spread); Lexy, 2013 (above), by Robert Carrithers.

I was walking down St Marks Place in the East Village & saw the booksellers with their books upon the various cloth fabrics laid out on the pavement. I walked slowly, looking down at the various book covers with their titles. Once in awhile a book calls out to me & I have to have it, & this was one of those days. My eyes caught sight of the title written in large black letters: The Berlin Stories. This book screamed at me, so I quickly leaned over & picked it up from its resting place. I skimmed through the pages as the bookseller eyed me. I bought it without a second thought. I knew I was going to enjoy this book. I didn't know at the time what an inspiration it would turn out to be. I'd heard the name of the writer from somewhere before – Christopher Isherwood. It sounded familiar, as if it were someone I'd known in the dim & distant past.

I was really looking forward to reading this book. I was due to go to Berlin for the first time in two weeks. While growing up, I'd been heavily influenced by the cities of London & Paris. These cities had lured me to me them through my experiences with film, books & art. I eventually lived in both these cities & experienced them to the fullest in the mid-1980s. I even married Véronique, a French woman, & ended up living in Paris at one point. I had a flat, but no money. That is certainly another story to be told. The city of Berlin was a different proposition, though. It had a mystery to it unlike other cities that I was attracted to. It had a darkness to it & it also had "the wall."

I remember living in Los Angeles with a couple, Lake & Steffie. She was from Berlin & when we saw the wall coming down on live television, tears of happiness were streaming down Steffie's face. Other emotions were also evident, but I didn't want to pry. She later confessed that it was actually the wall that had made Berlin special for her, & also for many other creative people that she had known. She felt somehow safe in doing her art there & free to be herself. She felt ashamed, but had to admit that she somehow felt protected by the wall, that it allowed her to be an individual in the Berlin community & to feel a connection to the others who were active within this community. She told me that she knew that this was all going to change now.

I was attracted to Berlin for its music & arts scene, but also to the political mentality of the people there. Berliners didn't take any shit & always rose to the challenge whenever their community was under attack. I also felt that New York & Berlin had a lot in common, with their endless nights of bars, clubs & art happenings. The word "decadence"

has been associated with Berlin throughout the city's history, & this in itself fascinated me.

In 1986, I saw the Berlin band Einstürzende Neubauten play at the Palladium in New York. It was an infamous concert that later became known as the time Einstürzende Neubauten tried to burn the Palladium down. It was the first time I had seen them & for me it was a type of music that I had never heard before – what later became known as "industrial music." They were crashing & hitting pieces of metal together, electric chainsaws were cutting metal plates with sparks flying all over the stage, while other musicians were playing normal instruments. The singer Blixa Bargeld was screaming into the microphone, staring into the audience with a deranged look in his eyes.

About 90 minutes into the show, he kneeled down in front of two metal plates & sprayed some inflammable liquid onto them, then proceeded to set them on fire. Blixa then sprayed more liquid, as the flames grew larger in front of him. The management of the club immediately pulled the plug on the band & muscular security guards rushed onto the stage. Some of them had fire extinguishers & sprayed it on the flames. The rest of the security team physically forced the members of the band off the stage. The audience went wild & sensing a riot I quickly got out of the place with my friends. There was a true sense of danger in the air. Fire in a concert hall, an angry audience & pissed off gorillas all make for an explosive situation.

I saw the all-woman Berlin band Malaria at Danceteria, the legendary club on West 37th Street run by Rudolf Piper & Jim Fouratt. Malaria was a band that was truly unique, with its intense harsh but melodic sound. These were strong Berlin women

HIER WOHNTE VON MÄRZ 1929 BIS JAN./FEB. 1933
DER ENGLISCHE SCHRIFTSTELLER

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

* 26. 8. 1904

† 5. 1. 1986

SEINE ROMANE „LEBWOHL BERLIN“ UND
„MISTER NORRIS STEIGT UM“ BASIEREN AUF
SEINEN ERLEBNISSEN AUS DIESER ZEIT.

NACH MOTIVEN BEIDER ROMANE ENTSTAND
SPÄTER DAS MUSICAL „CABARET“.

going all the way with their music without making any compromises. In my opinion they were much better than most of the all-male bands I'd seen up to that point. I recall thinking to myself, "My God, are all Berlin women like this?"

I got to know band members Gudrun Gut & Bettina Köster in

New York. They had decided to stay in New York for a while & they immediately fit right into the New York scene. Gudrun was DJing at various clubs around New York & Bettina worked at Danceteria. I remember some good moments with both of them in New York & the lively & intelligent conversations that we had at the time. I feel lucky to still call them friends today. I met lots of people from Berlin in New York during this period. I felt a connection between the two cities. Various Berlin people came to stay at my 10th Street apartment for varying lengths of time. Two of those people, Barbara & Brigetta, stayed with me for several months. I gave them their own keys so they could come & go as they pleased. They

were really appreciative of having the flat to stay at, the New York I showed them, & the freedom to go wild in the city. Afterwards, they were always writing to me that they wanted to return the favour & to do the same for me in Berlin. I finally took them up on their offer. It was overdue & it was 1990! It was time for me to go to Berlin!

I went to London first to see some old friends & then took a train to Berlin. I finished the book "The Berlin Stories" just before I arrived in Berlin. I love reading a book that connects to a specific city prior to going there & this book captured something truly special about Berlin. Christopher Isherwood wrote about his life in the city of Berlin during the years 1930 to 1933. He focused on specific characters that he considered "the lost ones" who were yet so full of life. It was a time when the decadence of Berlin was at an all-time high with clubs, cabarets & what was basically an alternative underground culture for those who didn't fit into normal society. At the same time, the economy was in ruins & the Nazis & Hitler

were rising to power.

Isherwood caught all of this in the wonderful character Sally Bowles, the naive British girl who was a cabaret singer & doing her best to be part of a high society in decay. In my opinion he also caught the mood & mentality of the then "German public" through the character of Fräulein Schroeder, the owner of the flat where he lived. Later this book was adapted into the theatre play & film "I am a Camera." Later it was famously transformed into the musical "Cabaret," then the film, whereby the wonderful Liza Minnelli became eternally associated with the sad character of Sally Bowles.

I arrived at the main train station in Berlin & had to find my way to a part of the city known as Schöneberg & then to the U-Bahn stop Nollendorf. I finally made it to the address that Barbara & Brigetta had given me: Nollendorfstr 17. I stood in front of the building, & had just put my bags down to look for the bell, when I suddenly noticed a bronze metal plaque on the side of the building. The writing was in German, but I clearly understood what the meaning of it was. It basically read: Christopher Isherwood lived in this building & it was here that he wrote his famous book "Goodbye to Berlin," which was later made into the musical "Cabaret."

I was truly amazed. I was tired from all of the parties in London as well as the long train journey, but this shot up my adrenalin level at least a couple of notches & I couldn't wait to meet & tell Barbara & Brigetta about this coincidence. I rang their bell & they buzzed me in. I picked up my bags & climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, where they were waiting at their apartment door to greet me.

We hugged & they ushered me quickly into the flat. They hadn't changed a bit. Barbara still had her black pageboy haircut with 1920's style bangs. She was wearing her rockabilly styled clothing with a kind of cowboy shirt tied around her midriff that exposed her stomach. She had an impish face & dimples when she smiled. Brigetta was much shorter & had long brown hair that hung to her waist & had sparkling green eyes. She was dressed in a short skirt with a black cut off t-shirt. She was jumping up & down all excited to see me & Barbara was hugging me. I finally had a chance to speak & tell them, "You'll never guess what! I've been reading this book called *The Berlin Stories* all the way from London to Berlin & I arrive only to see the plaque on the wall outside telling me that it was actually written here!"

Brigetta & Barbara looked at each other &

laughed. They took me by my arms & pulled me into the living room & threw their hands in the air. Brigetta laughed again & said, "And this is where he wrote it!"

I didn't quite understand. "What?" I asked.

Barbara replied, "It's true. Christopher Isherwood actually wrote the book in this flat! We know. We were told about it when we first rented the place. We then became obsessed with the book."

Brigetta chimed in, "I must have read it five times. Twice in German & three times in English."

Barbara smiled & added; "Well I've read it eight times my dear!"

A cat slowly strolled into the room & began purring & caressing itself along my leg. Brigetta kneeled down, petted the cat & looked up at me, "And now let me introduce you to Fräulein Schroeder, the caretaker of our home!"

I looked around the room. It was a large living room with several overfilled bookcases along the wall. The sun was shining through window & a nice cool autumn breeze rippled through the white transparent curtains. In front of the window was a large glass table with knick-knacks such as pens & paper strewn across it. The walls were painted yellow & all of the furniture was green, including the couch on the other side of the room next to a large light green ceramic stove. This stove was probably the only original thing left from the time that Christopher Isherwood had lived there, & I could imagine the coal burning in it & heating the room. I had never thought the colors yellow & green would ever go together, but this proved me wrong.

Barbara & I sat down at the table & Brigetta went into the kitchen & brought back several bottles of red wine. We starting talking nonstop to catch up with everything that had happened since the last time we'd met. Meanwhile I couldn't stop thinking about the bizarre fact that this book that I had been reading was actually written in this very room! Before we knew it, darkness had fallen. The time had passed quickly. As I stood up, the wine suddenly hit me. I explained to them that I was really out of it because of too many parties with old friends in London. They had already planned a full night of things to do for me in Berlin, but we put it off until the next night. They set me up in a really nice loft bed with clean sheets & an eiderdown. There was a TV on a shelf directly in front of the bed. They gave me a remote control & told me to feel free if I wanted to see German television. Then they went out to meet the friends they'd planned to

meet with, leaving me feeling very comfortable in the big warm bed.

I looked up at the ceiling & spaced out a bit. It was painted light blue & was very relaxing. It was actually too quiet so I grabbed the remote control, propped up some pillows against the wall & pushed the on button. The TV came to life with the sound of a song. A woman with a black-haired pageboy hairstyle was singing along with an impish looking fellow:

*Money makes the world go around,
The world go around,
The world go around,
Money makes the world go around...*

I sat up straight in bed & cried out loud, "Holy shit! It's *Cabaret!*"

At first, I couldn't believe it. I thought it must have been a joke from Barbara & Brigetta. I leaned over to see if the VCR player was on. It wasn't. I switched the channels just to make sure & it was definitely German television, not a video cassette. I sat back in bed & switched back to "*Cabaret*" & watched it. All of the songs were in English, but the dialogue was dubbed in German. I was in a daze & tired. I was watching it & at one point I must have fallen asleep. I woke up many hours later & the television was still on. I switched it off & went back to sleep.

The next morning I was having breakfast in the kitchen with Barbara & Brigetta. I noticed the kitchen was painted orange, which at the time I thought strange, but somehow an orange kitchen in this flat worked. They'd had a late night & needed their coffee, but as soon as they seemed awake enough I had to tell them. "You'll never guess what happened to me last night!"

They stopped eating & looked at me. I didn't know how to start & just said it straight out, "I switched on the TV & the first thing that came on was the film "*Cabaret!*"

At first they laughed & didn't believe me, but as soon as they could tell that I wasn't bullshitting, the debate began with Barbara saying, "There is a thing called synchronicity!"

Brigetta laughed & replied, " No, it isn't! It's called serendipity!"

The argument went back & forth until Barbara stormed off into the other room & returned with an English dictionary. After flipping through the pages she loudly declared, "Synchronicity: the coincidental occurrence of events & especially psychic events (as similar thoughts in widely separated persons or

a mental image of an unexpected event before it happens) that seem related but are not explained by conventional mechanisms of causality – used especially in the psychology of CG Jung!"

She flipped through more pages & read, "Serendipity! The faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for."

She looked at Brigetta & with a note of triumph said, "Well looks like I WON THIS ONE! Robert had synchronicity!"

Brigetta scowled & resumed drinking her coffee in silence. I looked at both of them & said, "You know what I think?"

They both looked at me at the same time & said, "What?"

"I think it was supernatural!"

They continued to stare then burst out laughing in unison, with Barbara between laughing saying, "Ooooo... Spooky! We have ghosts! We are haunted by the spirit of Herr Issyvoo!"

I got caught up in the laughter & said, "Ah, but he died in California!"

Barbara quickly shot back, "Well then, it must be the ghost of Sally Bowles. She was a bit of a trickster after all. Seems like her style!"

Brigetta looked at the cat curled up in the corner & quickly disagreed. "No way," she said, "it must have been Fräulein Schroeder! She always controlled what happened in this flat!"

I couldn't believe it, but they started to argue about this! My mind drifted off & I thought to myself, "So, this is how Berlin works!"

Well I was wrong about that one. This peculiar household worked that way, but certainly not Berlin. I went out with Brigetta & Barbara & they showed me the many worlds of Berlin starting with their neighbourhood of Schöneberg, with places like Café M & Fish Labor. We started slowly, but then went to Kreuzberg & further east to Prenzlauer Berg. The old east was full of dilapidated buildings that had been abandoned & left to go to rack & ruin. It reminded me the South Bronx or the Lower East Side of New York in the 70s & 80s.

Energetic young people had moved into the neighbourhood, opening bars in these run down buildings & bunkers that often lasted for just one or two nights. Anything & everything was possible in East Berlin at that time. There were no police around & everyone did what they wanted. There was a real sense of community, with squats sprouting up on almost every block. After going from bar to bar, party to party, we'd return to Nollendorfstrasse

sometime around noon the next day.

Brigetta & Barbara also showed me the daytime life of Berlin, the sidewalks & the outdoor cafes where we would drink large cups of milchkaffee & talk for hours. We went to the parks where people relaxed, sprawled out on the grass, reading books, & at weekends having picnics & barbeques. There were bike paths everywhere & the one thing I quickly had to learn was not to stray onto a bike path. These bicycle people were serious & there would be a good likelihood of getting hit by a bike if I walked onto one of those paths. All in all, a very liveable city indeed! I wanted to move to Berlin at that point, but I knew I'd have to go back to New York soon or later to deal with unfinished business.

One night when Barbara & I arrived at the flat, she realized she'd forgotten one of her keys. The door had two locks, & although the bottom one could be opened from the inside, it couldn't be opened from the outside without a key. She rang the bell & knocked loudly, hoping that Brigetta would be home. She wasn't. We could hear the cat purring on the far side of the door, & Barbara started to speak to it, telling it to jump up & turn the door handle. Sure enough the cat started jumping. Somehow it managed to accomplish the task & the door magically opened! I couldn't believe my eyes! Barbara reached down & started petting & kissing the cat.

I still couldn't believe it & said, "That is one fucking smart cat! What do you call this situation? Synchronicity?"

Barbara smiled & looked up & said, "Luck!"

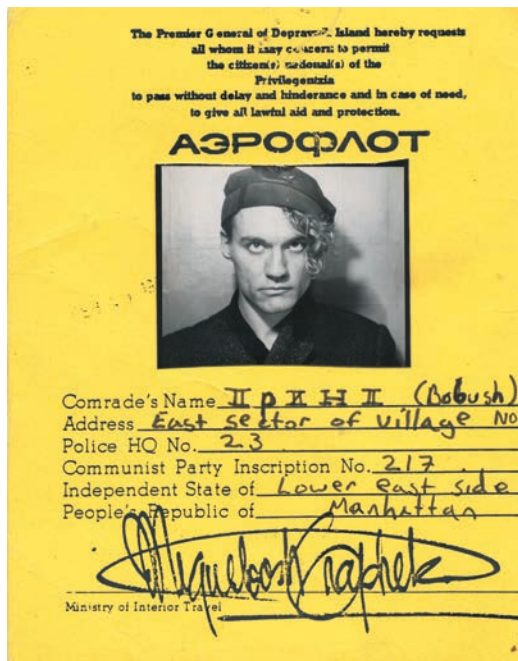
I'd never cared for cats much until that time, but now I have a special respect for them.

The time passed quickly. Finally I had to leave Berlin, but I really didn't want to. I went out with Barbara & Brigetta for one final night of fun. We came home drunk. I went up to that comfortable bed one more time & quickly fell asleep. I had a very intense dream that night. My friend, the New York performance artist John Sex was in my dream & told me that he wanted to say goodbye to me & that it had been nice being friends. He was saying that he appreciated our friendship & then he disappeared. I clearly remembered this dream the next day, which is unusual because I usually remember my dreams when I wake up & then they kind of evaporate & I forget them as soon as I get out of bed. This dream stayed with me. I knew that John was very ill with AIDS in New York & I thought a lot about that.

Brigetta, Barbara & I said our tearful goodbyes.

We promised to meet again soon, either in Berlin or New York. I never saw Barbara again. A year later she moved to Los Angeles & became a make-up artist for films. I had lived in Los Angeles & did not care for it much & never returned there. I met Brigetta many times after that in Berlin. She went on to work as one of the organizers of the Berlin Film Festival. I even stayed with her several times, but unfortunately once Barbara had moved she had to relocate to a smaller more affordable flat. I never experienced the pleasure of that magical flat on Nollendorf 17 again, but I still remember it as "the place of synchronicities..."

I was walking down St Marks Place a few days after my return to New York from Berlin & ran into an old friend. He told me that John Sex had died. I was stunned at the news & didn't feel much like talking. Somehow I was absolutely sure that he had died at the same time as I'd had the dream. Afterwards I did a bit of research & found out that it was true. That night, as I lay in my bed, unable to sleep, I began to say my long & painful goodbye to New York. ■



Robert Carrithers, Depravnik Island Party, "Easter Sector" pass, Danceteria, New York, 1983.

BERLIN SCRAPBOOK

ROBERT CARRITHERS

I love going into other worlds & there are many worlds within Berlin. I went with my camera to capture these worlds with its atmosphere, clubs, cabarets, the various personalities & the special ones I call the Berlin Beauties. The following photographs with text & stories are a mix of photographs that I have taken in Berlin over the years that capture some Berlin personalities, locations & atmospheres that I like. In some of the short stories that go with the photographs there is a measure of creative collaboration with the people featured.



"Lola," silkscreen, 2013, by Robert Carrithers.

I made a series of silkscreens along with photographs of Berlin personalities for an exhibition that I had at the Solomon Arts Gallery in New York in 2013 (many thanks to Rodrigo Salomon, the owner of the gallery). I also exhibited the work back in Berlin in a group show at Cross Arts Atelier in Kreuzberg, along with photographer Jackie Baier & artist Maria Imania.

I was on a mission with Cross Arts Atelier's owner Carmen Aigner to capture Berlin personalities through photographs & silkscreens & we had a time limit. With Carmen's strong discipline & an occasional crack of the whip, she got me in line & we managed to complete it all within two months. It would have taken me a year to complete it if I hadn't been working with Carmen. As a result of this important collaboration we got it done in two months.

The first silkscreen, "Lola" was inspired by three things: First, it was directly inspired by the famed Marlene Dietrich film *The Blue Angel* directed by Josef von Sternberg. The film tells the tale of a respected professor who criticizes his students for immoral behavior & as a result ends up at a cabaret that the students frequent. To his surprise, he becomes lost in his lust & desire for the cabaret singer Lola. His out-of-control passion for her eventually ends in his downfall & destruction. This film was made in 1929 & is set in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. It is notable for capturing the mood & atmosphere of the time just before Hitler took power.

The second inspiration was a woman that I that was involved with in Berlin who had changed her name to Lola. I had a very memorable night of passion with her once & it got very hot, much hotter than I expected! She had this romantic idea to set lit candles all over the flat to surprise me. Upon my arrival we got right down to business, & while we were making love one of us accidentally kicked over a candle, which then knocked over some of the other candles. A "domino effect" in other words, but with fire. We were so involved in each other that we failed to notice that the room was ablaze! We tried to put it out, but it proved impossible, & we quickly made the decision to call the fire department.

The fire department arrived & did what fire departments are supposed to do, but the flat was completely destroyed. Lola had to find a new flat. Needless to say, we broke up because of this. I met her several months later & she told me that since our night of "hot love" she'd only had relationships with women. In fact, she never had a relationship with a man again.

The third inspiration was of course the muse of this silkscreen, Charlotte R., the model that I photographed & projected "The Blue Angel" onto. We collaborated creatively on this silkscreen & I thought it would be appropriate if she wrote something here:

"When I first came to Berlin I found a special world of explicit freedom, a society where everyone could live the way they wanted, if they were able to feel this special kind of mental & physical freedom within themselves, this special vibration one feels & also, of course, the willingness to take a risk. When I met Robert & he offered me to be the "Lola" in his silkscreen-project it was a great honor for me. The meaning of 'Lola' for me is a sense of vulnerability but at the same time of being very cold. She grabs the person who loves her & leaves him with nothing. She shows exactly how love can be a destructive force. She is like a deep sea, but it is actually just her self-protection. She's hurt & anxious & in the end she will always be alone. While Robert was photographing me for the silkscreen these thoughts about the character of 'Lola' also passed through my mind: The diversity in her soul, the destructive fight between looking for love & at the same time being afraid of finding it. She's a victim, even though she seems to be so strong." – Sabine R.



DIETER RITA SCHOLL

This photo of Dieter Rita Scholl was taken during a performance at THE GREAT ANNUAL PORN FILM FESTIVAL PARTY in Berlin, 2013. "Be free, be wild, be yourself! The PRIVATE is POLITICAL!"

– Dieter Rita Scholl



RUMMELSNUFF & ASBACH

Captain Rummelsnuff makes music for men. His gripping melodies that tell tales of the wide open sea, of gear-heads & motors, of wurst & schnaps, of boxers & wrestlers & body builders & now he has a growing female following as well! Captain Rummelsnuff & Maat Asbach, the dynamic duo of raw electrified sounds (as defined in the German term "derbe Strommusik"), sing about the burdens of hard labor ("Treibler," "Straßenbau"), about human cattle being fattened up with that certain cheese from the German "Harz"-region that many locals consider an acquired taste, while Dr Rummel is dancing with his arch nemesis Mr Snuff to an unexpectedly funky tune. On their new album, *Rummelsnuff & Asbach*, no song follows the same stylistic traits as its predecessor, yet everything always remains thoroughly infused with Rummelsnuff's trademark sound. Electro-Punk, grand melodies, folk, disco, maritime songs... just about anything goes! Rummelsnuff, the ancient bodybuilder with the rusty dumbbells & Asbach, tenor baritone & offspring of a famous dynasty of German liquor distillers, are taking wide strides towards perfection... while cautiously avoiding it by any means! (These photographs were taken at the Rummelsnuff & Asbach record release concert at S036 in Berlin, 2016.)



MARCUS WOLFF

I first met Marcus when he was known as Maria Psycho. As Maria, she introduced me to the wonderful world of Queer Riot Club in 2013. Queer Riot Club was founded by Maria as an artist's collective serving different disciplines: art, photography, performance, music & many others. They used to put on monthly events at various locations in Berlin & explored different concepts of gender through their cabaret performances.

"I am a costume designer & performance artist. I am now working for Cirque Le Soir. I have done performances with them in Singapore, Doha, Qatar, Baku, Aserbaidshan, London & New York. When this photo was made, I was still at the beginning of my career & I had some crazy performance events in Berlin with other international artists. I was always inspired by '80s New York. I seem to be doing something right now, because I am a resident performer in the famous Berlin Kitkatklub & in the infamous punk club SO36 & I also perform with the Cirque le Soir all over the world." – Marcus Wolff



GUDRUN GUT

I took this photograph of Gudrun in 1983, while she was DJing at a place in New York City, in the East Village, called "Lucky Strike." I lived just two blocks away, so I was there quite often. I'd got to know Gudrun after seeing her play with her band Malaria at Danceteria a few weeks prior to taking the photograph. I was introduced to her by mutual friends, & thereafter I made a point of seeking her out wherever & whenever she was DJing. It was Gudrun who first introduced me to the Berlin music that was to change my life, though of course I didn't know it at the time...

When I look at the picture today, it makes me recall one night in particular. I'm standing next to her in the DJ booth, a loft-like structure above the bar at Lucky Strike. She & her friend are spinning records by bands I've never heard of before. They sound totally different to the American & British punk & post-punk I'm accustomed to hearing. This music seems to have been made using sheet metal, drills, piledrivers & hammers, rather than electric guitars & drums. What on earth is it? Can you even call it music? What parallel dimension is it coming from? Where did Gudrun find it?

These bands – Einstürzende Neubauten & Die Haut amongst others, though Die Haut were more traditional in their approach – were to have a profound influence on my life. I became so fascinated by these alien sounds, & the otherworldly images they evoked, that I ended up moving to the city that had produced them – Berlin. It's strange to think now, but as Gudrun was spinning these amazing records from her DJ booth above the bar, a young lady called Madonna – who would later become quite famous – was working as a bartender, partnered by her manager Martin.

As I found out at some point, Gudrun had been one of the founding members of Einstürzende Neubauten, as well as Mania D, another groundbreaking, all-female Berlin band. At the time we met she was playing drums with Malaria. Later she went on to form the three-woman band Matador. An innovator & entrepreneur, Gudrun has created electronic compositions & is responsible for many film scores. She is also the founder & owner of two labels: Monika Enterprise & Moabit Musik. Monika Enterprise supports young artists in the realm of new electronic/independent music (est. 1997, over 80 releases to date), such as Quarks, Barbara Morgenstern, Cobra Killer, Contriva, Michaela Melián, Islaja.

Gudrun continues to DJ at clubs & festivals & in April 2007 she released her first solo album, *I Put a Record On*. Since then she has been doing live performances with her laptop & microphone accompanied by her video clips.



Photograph of Pia Staudacher at Cross Arts Atelier, Berlin, 2013, by Robert Carrithers.



NHOAH HOENA

Nhoah is a Berlin-based music producer, composer & artist. He works with national as well as internationally successful artists, has a large studio specialising in electronic music & is co-founder of the artist- & label-collective R.O.T. He's received various gold & platinum records for his productions. He is currently on tour worldwide with his projects Tangowerk (melodic techno with live vocals) & the Berliner Elektrosalon (an interactive party concept with changing, electronic musicians from Berlin). This photo | 255 was taken in Berlin, 2013.

PIA STAUDACHER

"As a visual artist I feel particularly inspired by the female figure. She can exude strength & courage as well as vulnerability, innocence & depravity. I've been fascinated with this figure ever since my childhood. The root of my fascination might come from my mother, as she was raising me alone. Those traits, combined with darker elements, are present in almost every painting of mine. I've never committed myself to a certain medium. As a result, I'm painting with oil, acrylics, pastel, coloured pens, charcoal & markers. More & more often, I create paintings in conjunction with multiple materials. I'm creating assemblages out of modeling material & I find other types of material, which for some might seem bizarre. Not everyone wants to hang my paintings above his couch & that's a good thing!" – Pia Staudacher



TIMMI KÖNIG

I remember taking this photograph at the Cross Arts Atelier, Berlin, in 2013 in honor of the American holiday, Thanksgiving. I brainstormed with Timmi about what photograph we should do & we came up with this.

Timmi is a very special species known as a freak of the night. He believes in porn revolution, lust for life & freakability! He is an amazing dancer & acrobat. If you want to look for him in Berlin you can find him in the darkest edges, dancing away the night on a crowded dance floor or performing on glamorous stages at the finest underground clubs.

256 |

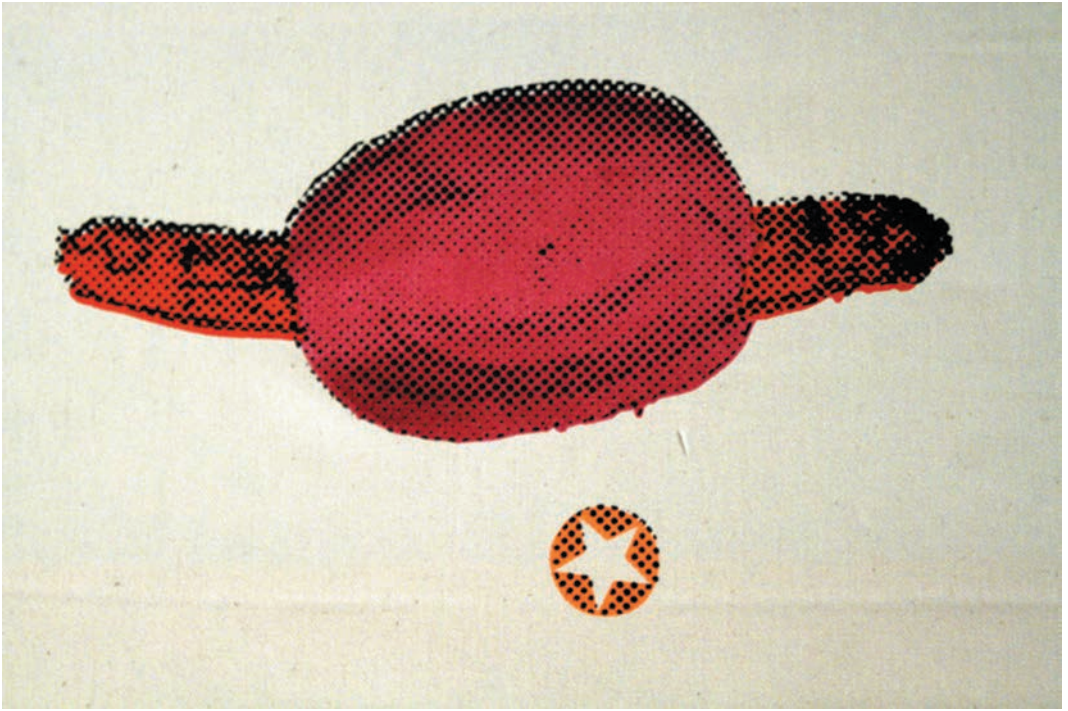
"I moved to Berlin to study, but I ended up being the host of some of the biggest gay parties & then as a performer working mostly with acrobatics, burlesque & drag. Berlin is a special place where anyone can be whatever he or she wants." – Timmi König



TRISTAN REHOLD

I first met Tristan at Queer Riot Club events in Berlin. I watched him while he did a wonderful punk ballet performance & threw up blood all over himself for the finale. All in all it was quite sweet & I became an instant fan. This photograph is from 2013.

"I moved to Berlin in 2010 for the love of a particular man & also for the city itself. Now, after living here for more than 6 years, it still feels like I am in the process of moving to Berlin. I have my own space, my friends & my own things to do, but somehow, I am still discovering new things, people are discovering me & I enjoy the friendly camouflage lifestyle of Berlin. You can hide in Berlin but it also supports you in your own personal mission. One thing that I have learned is, I don't have to define myself as a dancer or as a social worker or as a performance artist etc. I just have to be honest to myself & to the possibilities in this city." – Tristan Rebold



BRATWURST & BEER

I originally made this silk screen as a joke with the idea of the iconic Warhol banana silk screen in mind. It is a Berlin bratwurst with the bottle cap of Berlin's cheapest bottled beer Sternburg Export. The Berlin breakfast of champions after a long night out, although some people prefer currywurst! And some trivia: Sternburg was a brewery in the GDR & became the first East German beer after reunification to achieve EU quality assurance standards!

SCOTT GRABELL: THE BLUE BUNNY

I first met Scott at a New York club in the early '90s. I could not help but to notice him. He was strutting around the club in a blue bunny outfit with high heels. The moment I saw him, I knew that I wanted to know him. Anyone who dresses up as a blue bunny is OK in my book! I did not see him for many years & then up he pops up in Berlin! I saw him emceeing at a burlesque event at the Bassy Club, we got reacquainted & that was that! This photo was taken at The Chelsea Bar in Berlin, 2015.

"I've been performing as Scotty the Blue Bunny since 1996, when I did my first formal tour with the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus. I graduated college in NYC in 1989 & spent my time afterwards on the poetry scene, & then I got involved in drag & started working in nightclubs. There was a great mix of everything "back then": gay, straight, cross-dressing, drag, circus, BDSM, etc. I was lucky to see performers who had survived the ravage of first-wave AIDS, who made clubs that, were art houses. The people I had met & conspired with were who they were on stage & in real life. Eating fire & belly dancing on broken glass wasn't something we did – it was who we were. Fast forward 20 years & I'm now living in Berlin. I have always wanted to live abroad & had the opportunity to do so. Berlin has been my home now for 4 years & I love it. Events can run the gamut from late night decadence to early galas. The best thing about Berlin is that it is really international. Everyone comes to visit, & people from all over live here. It's very inspiring – you never know who you might meet. And the homegrown scene was a joy to be embraced by." – Scott Grabell





IN A DARK CORNER OF A BERLIN CLUB

One night in 2013 I was wandering around the deep dark depths of some club of perversions in Berlin & came across this creature sitting in a corner bathed in blue lights. She sat there motionless for a while as I stared at her. She slowly lifted her hand & motioned for me to come over. I looked around to make sure & it was certainly me that she was motioning to. I was the only one in the room. Someone entered the room & began to walk through, I stopped them & asked, "Do you have any idea what that is supposed to be about?" My eyes went to the creature's direction. The person explained it to me this way, "She is one of specialties of the club. She is wearing a blowjob mask. She doesn't talk. You stick it in & she does the rest." I looked back at the creature for a moment & when I turned to reply to the person, he had already walked away. I decided to continue walking & see what I would find in the next rooms, but before I did that, I took this photograph.



KING KHAN & THE SHRINES

King Khan & the Shrines are a legendary Berlin cult musical phenomenon with a fan base of fervent punk rockers, soul music lovers, free jazz tea heads & garage rock officianados. Khan has also recently provided an original film score for Miron Zownir's film *Back To Nothing* starring Meret Becker, Birol Unel & Milton Welsh. This photo was taken at the Creepy Teepie music festival in Kutná Hora, 2015.



MILTON WELSH & NICHOLAS VANPITTMAN

I was invited to go on the film set while Miron Zownir was making his film *Back To Nothing* in 2014 & take photographs. I took some good ones & was lucky to capture these two talented Berlin actors in action. Milton Welsh is a graduate of Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio in New York &, like Nicholas VanPittman, lives in Berlin:

"I grew up in NYC on 'Sugar Hill' Kurtis Blow taught me how to play baseball! My band played on a bill he headed here in Berlin & it was quite an honor! I appeared 'on Broadway' at the Lambs Club theater in a play directed by Gordon Parks called 'Mrs Carrie B Phillips' with Tony Award winner Theresa Merritt & Josephine Primice. I also appeared in a PSA directed by Melvin VanPeebles for the sickle Cell Anemia Foundation, which was critically acclaimed; this was before 1973 when I was a child. I have appeared in several commercials for television & print. I was a principle in a ROTC ad (reserve officer training corps trying to recruit black families) I've done some theater as an adult in NYC as well at the Theatre for the New City in *Children of the House Afire* in the late '90s I believe & I have done a bunch of stuff in Berlin. I had the lead role in a production of 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses' which really changed my life. I became... Elegant! I've done some German TV. I am the proud father of three children, all half krauts!

"My time period? That undoubtedly has to be the post punk new wave/disco hip-hop '80s in NYC & then the '90s in Berlin. Oh yeah, in the '80s, I was the sales Manager at ESP guitars (electric sound products shibuya Inc) Japanese guitar Co & that's where I met folks like Dave Stewart, The Stones, Anthrax, Al Anderson & Tyrone Downey (from Bob Marley's Wailers), Ronnie Wood & Keith Richards, & my good friend Bernard Fowler, who is really my connection with The Stones, but I knew him way before I worked at ESP. I cut my Teeth at M-R studios in NYC as a teen with clients like The Ramones & all of the NY punk bands, Klaus Nomi & also all of the NY session cats. At the moment I'm trying to do something with the Grammy Award winner Larry Mitchell. *Back to Nothing* is the second Miron Zownir film that I have acted in. The first one was *Phantomanie* with Bruno S of Werner Herzog fame. *Phantomanie* was Bruno S's last film!!! My dog MoMo & I have appeared in many experimental films by Phillip Virus. Phillip & Miron are good friends & a scene unto themselves. I appeared in the Grace Jones 'One Man Show' & have kept in touch with her over the years. My wife whom I swear was the most talented actress the world will never know was killed in LA, Hollywood in 2014, Katinka Haerte! RIP!" – Nicholas VanPittman



ANNA ALIENA

Anna Aliena has loved making music since her childhood. Her grandma used to teach her lots of old folk songs. Before her second birthday she asked her parents to buy her the first records for her collection. In those days Anna had a crush on a German crooner. A bit later she first started to learn the electronic organ & then switched to the church organ at the age of 13. While delving into the *Barcelona* album by Freddie Mercury & Montserrat Caballé, Anna discovered her love for opera. Although she had dreamed of becoming a rock star, her first singing teacher gave her a chance to train her classical voice. Anna's attempts to form a serious rock band in the Lower-Saxon countryside failed. In Berlin she met Oliver Höhne with whom she formed ShirayasDream. The duo existed from 2008 to 2010. After their separation Anna became a solo artist in 2011. In this photograph, which I took at Cross Arts Atelier in 2013, Anna is with her beloved painting of her muse Klaus Nomi.



BERND BRECHT

Bernd Brecht is a German performance artist, musician, composer, actor & author. With the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Bertolt Brecht's birth in March 1998, Bernd produced a fire performance at the Bertolt Brecht monument at the Berliner Ensemble, as well as a program with XUR (the "latex king of Germany") including a performance of *Brecht In Red* for the 35th theatertreffen. During the Kosovo war, Bernd performed his solo "man against war" over 74 days at the Brecht Monument. He has continued with his work as a "Broken Art Artist" across a wide range of media. This photo was taken in Berlin, 2013.



“ORPHEUS ASCENDING” :

STEVE MORELL & MONIKA POKORNÁ

I was asked to curate an exhibition for the Neurotitan Gallery in Berlin. I knew I wanted to do the exhibition with Berlin photographers Miron Zownir & Tina Winkhaus. We had to brainstorm together to see what we had in common & we came up with the theme of darkness. We called the exhibition “Your Daily Darkness.” I then included the painters Luis Cerdas from Costa Rica & Raissa Angeli from Cypress. I then added artists Darina Alster & Elis Unique from Prague. They created a video installation. All of these artists explored the theme of darkness in their own unique way. For myself, I chose the theme of fairytales & mythology. Fairytales & myths have always been very dark through the ages. They have been used as a learning tool for children to adapt & to learn the hard lessons of life, but there is always a dark subtext to these stories. I worked with various international personalities involved in the Prague cultural scene & told them to tell me their favorite fairytale or myth. Once the story was chosen, we then went on to explore the subtext with its darkness, eroticism & sexuality. We then captured the image with the models in a unique & modern way usually loaded with lots of dark humor. I worked with a crew & it was very similar to making a film. All of the photographs that I did for the exhibition were done in Prague except for this photograph with Steve Morell & Monika Pokorná. This was the only one that I did in Berlin. They chose the story of the myth of Orpheus & Eurydice, where Orpheus descends to Hades to rescue the love of his life, Eurydice. Orpheus was the ultimate musician. It was said that nothing could resist his music & melody, neither enemies nor beasts. He meets with Hades, played his music for him & melted his cold heart. Hades told Orpheus he could take Eurydice with him, but under one condition; Eurydice would follow him while walking out to the light from the caves of the Underworld, but he should not look at her before coming out to the light because if he did, he would lose her forever. If Orpheus was patient enough he would have Eurydice as a normal woman again by his side. Orpheus thanked the Gods & left to ascend to the world with her. He was trying to hear Eurydice’s steps, but he could not hear anything & he started believing that the Gods had fooled him. Of course Eurydice was directly behind him, but as a shadow, waiting to come to light to become a full woman again. Only a few feet away from the exit &, well, we know what happens next, Orpheus lost his faith & turned to look; Eurydice was behind him, but her shadow was sent back to the dead. Relationships are tricky, aren’t they? We all have lessons to learn in life. ■



Bettina Köster, Zürich, 2015, by Cinzia Giunta da Ros.

I had a store in West Berlin – Eisengrau – it had a basement – could be a rehearsal room – there was a band that never played – well – why not?

Mr P introduced us to his London friend, Mr M – who had a store on Carnaby Street when he was 16. He was travelling with a soccer team – they played Spandau – we were joking – hehe – Spandau Ballet.

It was dark & rainy – nothing special in West Berlin – anyway – we only got up after dark set in – so we never saw the grey – my friend Miss G & I met Mr M & Mr M. S. at the Metropol on Nollendorf Platz – the details a bit murky – Miss G had been concerned about her safety so she had gotten a gas-firing pistol – just in case. As she was new to firing guns the charge went off & hit Mr MS in the face – he turned around & ran. We took Mr M – who was more adventurous than Mr MS – to Miss G's flat & kept him there until his train was leaving – don't remember if we had tied him up or not. I think that Spandau won the match.

Miss G & Miss T, the silent actress, & I got drunk on Southern Comfort at the Dschungel on Nurnberger Strasse – Miss G wanted to drive my car – never mind she had no license & had no idea how to drive. Travelling up Hauptstrasse Miss G hit a parked car – the silent actress fled the scene. Me & Miss G as well – but with the demolished car. Next day we had hitched a ride with Mr A who, on a regular basis, drove with his Volkswagon bus to London to buy Punky things for his store on Bellziger Strasse. Mr C, the synth genius of a German band with dreams about kebabs & somewhat of a criminal, had offered to let the smashed-up car from the hit & run “disappear” – but as we were driving down the street & saw the cops measuring & taking paint samples from the other poor car, now all smashed up – gave me anxiety. On the drive to London I was reading *The Talented Mr Ripley* & thought if he gets away with murder then I will be in the clear. Anyway, we were in London now – staying at the squatted house of the singer of the band the synth guy was part of – Finsbury Park – a whole lot of sound systems playing in the streets – there were

riots in Brixton – cool cool cool – & Major Tom had just become a junkie – Miss G & I went to the Blitz – Mr C of Blue Rondo a la Turk had told us to check out – ooh – all that lace! There was another club – Miss G asked what's the name? Beat Rouge – I told her that meant Rote Beete – Rootebaggers – well, our English was not that great. There was a band playing that night – remnants of Rema Rema. Still one of my favourites.

I had been in New York a few times – singing – & now there was Mister M & the British Invasion – we sure were wild this time – M had turned out to be a great organizer of fun – so much fun! Danceteria, Berlin, the Roxy, AMPM & all the Q's.

And then there was the booker at Danceteria who didn't like girl bands – we wanted to tour with A Certain Ratio but she had a crush on Simon so she stuck us with a band that she considered to be awful – they never finished their sets because the venues always cut the power – so off we went to Washington DC – turned out they were just as noisy as we were. They were Australians – all skinny because they were so poor & London was so expensive. Berlin is cheap – one day they were at our door step in West Berlin.

It was dark, dark, dark on Dresdener Strasse – with our new Australian friends we drank all the Raki at the Turkish Club, Beer & Schnaps in the Kogge & on Oranienstrasse there was the Franziskaner.

On the other hand, we used the sets Kreuzberg provided us with – a dark dark dark basement for our Geld/Money Video shoot & as we sat moping around how we could afford to shoot another video for our “Your Turn to Run” song, Christine came in & said – Girls – there's a car burning in front of the house – Yeah Yeah Yeah – turned out to be a nice video...

Visiting from New York in 1989 it seemed a lot had changed in Berlin – now the dark places were in East Berlin. New Year's Eve Party at Wim Wenders' place on Oranienplatz & at the strike of midnight the house across the square burst into flames. “Berlin bleibt doch Berlin.” ■



Mark Reeder, 2013, by Robert Carrithers.

One night out with my friends in an East Berliner Youth club, I'd seen a new wave band called Die Vision (The Vision). The band had changed their name from KomaKino to Die Vision after a forced line-up change. Both band names were an obvious reference to their main musical influence. There was something about KomaKino that didn't suit the East German authorities & it certainly wasn't only just down to the music. They decided the band's frontman Uwe Geyer, was moving in undesirable Punk rock circles. Officially, Punk rock was non-existent in the workers & farmers state, after all they maintained, Punk was uncontrollable & it reflected the failings of a capitalist society where the kids were unemployed & unemployable.

As everyone worked in East Germany, there was no unemployment & therefore no Punk. After a certain amount of stern persuasion, Geyer was forced into making a career changing decision, if he wanted to continue making music, he would have to play to their tune. In other words he was *encouraged* to disband KomaKino. Although this part of the story is unconfirmed, it is understood that probably as part of his deal, Geyer was allowed to form a new band – Die Vision. From that moment on, he literally played in the hands of the STASI (The East German Secret Police). Sadly, this kind of *persuasion* was a usual tactic to keep tight control over its citizens & one of the more unfortunate aspects of living in a totalitarian state, governed by a paranoid regime. Put a person in a frighteningly compromising position, threaten them & then use them as informers.

Basically, state sponsored abuse.

For the poor unfortunate placed in this horrible position, they had little choice. Indeed, the East German state was all about control. Control over every aspect of life, & whatever they couldn't control was considered subversive & threatening, & therefore had to be stamped out.

During the latter few years of the 1980s, Die Vision became very popular with a generation of young East Germans, who like the band themselves, had grown up on a diet of West Berlin radio broadcasts, presented by SFB radio's Monika Dietl, or through listening to John Peel's much loved radio shows on the BBC & BFPS (British Forces radio). They religiously absorbed the music by bands like Joy Division, Depeche Mode, Sisters of Mercy or Soft cell which these radio shows occasionally provided.

These poor kids craved their own version of cool, credible sounding indie music, as opposed to the tepid rock rubbish the communist state usually put on offer for the masses to suffer through.

Die Visions uncontrollable popularity & with it a growing notoriety was, however, becoming a bit of

a problem for the East German authorities & they were facing the choice of either banning the band, or giving them a recording contract.

They realised, banning the band would probably cause more problems than it was worth. Further, a ban would surely make Die Vision even more important. So, as everything in East Germany was about control, the authorities decided to sign them up to the state-owned record label AMIGA, more to prevent them from becoming martyrs than pop stars, & thus enabling them to keep some form of control over the band & their music.

As for most things in East Germany, each stage had to be supervised. You couldn't just leap to the top. Whether a singer or an actor, each had to follow a strict protocol of succession. First, Die Vision recorded their first few demo tracks in a small home studio of the pop band *Mixed Pickles*, their second tape was recorded in the kitchen & cellar of their keyboard players house, these songs were presented on the radio show of Lutz Schramm on DT64 at the Rundfunk der DDR (East German Radio's version of a John Peel session) & from that, their popularity grew & grew.

Before this little band's story unfolds however, it is important to understand how different & difficult it was to actually form a music group in the communist East German state. Being in a band in *The German Democratic Republic* (GDR) was nothing like being in a band in the West. It was fraught with all kinds of problems. Firstly, there was no freedom of artistic expression (or otherwise) in the East. If a musician wanted to play before an audience, they first had to audition & pass all the obstacles the government put in place. Then, there was the further problem of obtaining instruments & equipment. You couldn't simply go into a music shop & buy an electric guitar, a set of drums, a bass & a few amps, & off you go & form a band. To get anything, you first needed a permit.



Getting instruments & their spare parts, such as strings, was always a huge problem, it wasn't impossible, just very difficult. Many Eastie musicians would usually send their grandmothers over to the West with long shopping lists to buy strings or cables, because once having reached retirement age, pensioners were given free access to cross through the border into the West & back, probably in the hope many would eventually stay over there. PA Equipment was very hard to come by, mixing desks or PA systems were highly prized items. Some desperate musicians would even travel to Czechoslovakia or Hungary to buy equipment or instruments.

In the GDR, you had to earn your right to perform before an audience.

Much like today's TV casting shows, a musician had prove that they were proficient, they had to have a clean, commie-compatible conservative-looking image & be talented enough to be unleashed upon the general GDR public, but more importantly, their music had to be equally bland & apolitical enough not to rock the communist party boat. To reach this goal therefore, a musician had to be *vettet*. That is, they were *eingestuft* – in other words, they were allotted a proficiency level, which determined where they would be allowed to perform: big events, youth clubs, or the cellar of the local town hall. And that in turn, determined how much a band would also get paid too.

The leading rock artists of '80s East Germany, were bands like Silly, City, Karat, Phudys & Stern Meissen Combo. All of them aging fourtysomethings who would perform at the biggest socialist events. Notably, none of them would dare to sing in anything other than German... well, maybe a popular Russian song might creep into an occasional set. Once approved, an artist was able to go with their official document & buy an electronic instrument. That is, providing the East Berliner music shop had any... & that really all depended on the communist party's five year plan.

Although difficult to obtain instruments could also be acquired through other unconventional means, such as flea markets or privately, actually performing with them was another matter entirely. Any unofficial bands were instantly put under STASI observation the minute their existence was announced & incredibly, under the watchful eye of the State, most of these budding amateurs would be tolerated to a small degree, as long as they performed at unofficial events (peoples private parties & the like), but if they looked like they were being in anyway political or socially critical, then their days were certainly numbered. Thus, depending on their image & musical style, if an unofficial band proved to be popular, they would be scrutinized &

if they were lucky, then they might be invited to an *Einstufung* & if they were very lucky perhaps even get a few songs played on one of East Germany's radio stations. These Peel-esque style sessions would then be played on the radio over & over, & if they received the required positive audience response (naturally sent in on a postcard), then the band might even be allowed to make a record with the state owned label AMIGA. With this method of control, the authorities could also keep track of the audience of such music too.

Such was the case with Die Vision. I suppose Die Vision were one of the first real "indie" sounding bands of the communist GDR & the only East German band who were officially allowed to sing in English – this privilege was granted only because Geyer studied English at the Humbolt University. Studying English in a Eastern Bloc state wasn't an easy thing to achieve either. With the GDR being a satellite of the Soviet Union, you couldn't just simply choose which language you wished to study – especially one of a capitalist state – you first had to be proficient in the Russian language too. During the latter years of the 1980s, the band had started to become very popular, especially with the generation of young people who had grown up listening clandestinely to John Peel's much loved radio shows on the BBC World Service & BFBS (British Forces Radio). These poor kids craved for their own version of cool, credible indie music, as opposed to the tepid rubbish the communist state usually put on offer for the masses to suffer through.

Die Vision certainly appeared to fulfil this longing & being much loved, their meteoric success & demand saw them performing throughout the GDR in the state's packed youth clubs, many full of testosterone pumped, pissed up youths, all with the miserable spectre of obligatory National military service hanging over them, & all of them frustrated. These youth clubs were potentially explosive places, grim & smoke filled where all forms of anti-state sentiment rippled though the thick smoky air. They were always full of frustrated young East German kids, most hoping to escape their mundane existence while having a bit of fun drowning their misery & problems in booze, as other drugs were virtually non-existent. These youth clubs sold no beer, only cheap, hard alcohol with some kind of indescribable juice mix or acidic tasting East German *Club-Cola* (disgusting stuff that tasted nothing like the original & made you feel as if your teeth were dissolving away with each sip). But the *JugendClub* was a refuge to break the monotony of oppressed East German life & these places gave the kids the opportunity to let off some steam, jumping about to homegrown bands like Die Vision or Die Art.

Die Vision's uncontrollable popularity & with it their growing notoriety, was however becoming a bit



Mark Reeder with Shark Vegas at Quartier Latin, 1985.

of a problem for the East German authorities & once again they were given the choice of either banning the band or giving them a recording contract. They realised, banning the band would probably cause more problems than it was worth. Further, a ban would surely make Die Vision even more important. Thankfully for Die Vision, the AMIGA took note of the way the Polish authorities had previously handled with such problematic "new" groups & decided upon the latter option.

The authorities decided to sign them up to the state-owned record label AMIGA, more to prevent them from becoming martyrs than pop stars, & thus enabling them to keep some form of control over the band & their music. As for most things in the GDR, each stage had to be supervised. You couldn't just leap to the top. Regardless if you were a singer or an actor, each had to follow a strict protocol of succession. First, Die Vision recorded their first few demo tracks in a small home studio of the pop band *Mixed Pickles*, their second tape was recorded in the kitchen & cellar of their keyboard players house, these songs were presented on the radio show of Lutz Schramm on Radio DT64 at the Rundfunk der DDR (East German Radio's version of a John Peel session) & from that, their popularity grew & grew.

In 1988, Geyer helped arrange for his band to perform at an *illegal & highly secret gig* in the grounds of the Hoffnungskirche – *the church of hope* – in Berlins Pankow district, together with (West Germany's most infamous punk rock band) Die Toten Hosen. This had been clandestinely organised under the disguise of being a benefit concert for starving Romanian orphans by me, my dissident friends, members of the church, Die Vision & my pal Trevor Wilson (the editor of *Ich und Mein Staubsauger* magazine). In reality, we needed Die Vision to be the front for the gig, being from the GDR. I had previously co-organised the first secret Hosen gig with the same bunch of Eastie friends, that gig was disguised as a "*blues-mass*" back in March 1983 for a handful of specially invited punky guests, this was also in a church, the *Erloeserkirche*, in Rummelsburg. However, this particular second so-called *secret gig*, with Die Vision, was in fact not as secret as we had hoped & even though only a handful of people had actually been personally invited, over 200 people turned up on a freezing cold Saturday morning in the churchyard.

The East German *Volks-Polizei* hung about outside while Die Vision heated up the assembled audience, while the STASI took steps to stop the Toten Hosen from playing. Moments before the Hosen were about to perform, it was announced by the priest that unfortunately, *due to the ice age that had enveloped the Republic*, the Hosen were sadly unable to play. A disappointed groan was followed

by the usual yielding resignation to the powers of the spoilsport communist state & as some of the Punky-people spilled out onto the streets outside, angry at the denial by their state of an afternoon of music & fun. We, the organisers, desperately tried our best to resolve the situation, a situation that looked increasingly hopeless. Then we hit upon an idea, we thought, the STASI probably didn't know what the Hosen actually looked like, so we suggested to the priest that they should pretend to be simply another band from Dresden or Leipzig.

As he meekly announced to the disgruntled audience that another band from would perform, I ran about urging the kids (with a wink) to return because "*another band from Dresden*" were going to play instead & they would definitely want to stay for that. Some just blankly stared & looked incredulously at me & walked off, while others heard the pfennig drop & gleefully hurried back. The Hosen gig therefore went ahead until our deception was eventually discovered & the show was stopped. After the gig, we took Die Vision, Die Hosen & a huge group of East German Punks downtown for a slap-up meal in the House Budapest, a lavish & by East German standards very expensive, Hungarian restaurant on the Karl-Marx Allee.

To ensure we got a table, I & one of my US Forces friends, dressed in his full Class B dress uniform, had gone into the restaurant a week before & ordered a table for 20 people. Going by the look on his face, the waiter just couldn't believe it, he grovelled about in true subservient style & was probably already mentally spending his western cash tip on frozen peas & coffee in the *Intershop* as we left the premises. You could almost hear him thinking "Wow! 20 high ranking soldiers of the US army.."

It was dusk as we approached the red, green & bright white lights of the Haus Budapest, which cascaded onto the footpath outside. Asking everyone to quietly remain outside for a moment, I walked in first with my soldier friend, the waiter instantly recognised us & beaming, nodded his approval of his eagerly awaited *American* guests. Then in we all traipsed, a band of biscuitized, boozed & bleary-eyed band of Punky brothers, some still drinking bottled beer & shouting loudly. Indeed, for nearly all of these Eastie kids, this was the first time they had ever set foot (or even been allowed) into this high-class restaurant. The waiter's face sank like the Titanic, he stared at me with gama-ray-eyes, "What the hell is *this!?*" his expression shouted. "...& where are the soldiers?"

We were over 20 people, mostly scruffy looking punks. They all sat about a bit too *leisurely*, smoking & drinking & feeling what it's like to be *decadent*. We ordered practically everything on the menu. Paying with the secretly smuggled-in East German



The Wall, 1985, by Mark Reeder.

cash, which was a long way from being spent up. As midnight approached, we hurriedly left the restaurant for a mad dash back to the border. Our American soldier friend broke as many traffic rules as possible, such as driving the wrong way down a one-way street, or skipping the red traffic lights. Once at the Friedrichstrasse station (*Palace of tears*) border-crossing going from East into West Berlin, I met up with the band.

Campino was stopped by the first guard & asked to remove his woolly hat. He readily complied & as he did so, he revealed a head of bright red hair sticking up all over. Startled at this impressive sight, the guard exclaimed dryly, "which idiot let you in then?" to which Campino sharply replied "one of *your* idiots!" Without further ado, he was immediately hauled off to have his personals taken down & have the guard with the brown nose come along with his funnel & rubber gloves...

By early 1989, due to their now legendary association with the Hosen gig, the popularity of the band had reached astronomical proportions by East German standards. Also Die Vision had recorded a series of demo cassettes & had thus been approached by the State owned record label AMIGA, with a view to recording their first album. At this stage, Geyer asked me again if I would produce it for them.

Geyer had already suggested his idea to me months before at a party, but I thought it was probably just a pipe-dream & was sceptical they would actually be given a recording contract. Besides I told him, if it happened, how would that work? I am a Westerner, & as a rule, Westerners were not allowed in such sensitive places as factories, schools or recording studios, so I very much doubted I would be allowed anywhere near the official East German recording studio. So I said to him, if you can get the permission & can't find anyone else by June, I will do it. In retrospect, I believe he just simply waited until June.

Then one evening, he appeared in West Berlin & said "we haven't found anyone, we have a contract, will you please do it?" Now, it was otherwise impossible for the average East German citizen to simply cross over the East/West border into West Berlin *before* the wall came down. There was no freedom of travel, at least not unless you had the permission of the State. Which usually was only given to people with incurable ailments, those who had reached retirement age, or were very trusted people, such as communist party businessmen, sportsmen, celebrities... or the STASI.

Curious at his sudden appearance, I asked Geyer how on Earth did he get permission to come over to West Berlin & he shrugged off my query by telling me, albeit with a smirk on his face, that he had a

serious heart problem & was classed as an *invalid*. I couldn't believe it, as here standing before me, was probably the healthiest person I knew, who was into bodybuilding, Tai-Kwon-Do & all kinds of sports! Yet, I had to accept his excuse & as I had made a promise, it is after all, a promise, so I finally agreed to produce their album. I thought, if we can pull it off, it will probably be quite a unique & thrilling experience for me to record an album in the East, whatever the outcome (I certainly had no idea just how unique this was going to be).

As it turned out, it was to be the first – & last time a British citizen had ever been allowed into East Berlin's main recording studio to produce an album – in the GDR). In reality, the real reason was a query by both the KGB & the STASI as to what I was actually doing in Berlin, not to mention they probably wished to test my abilities as a music producer. Although I didn't know it at the time, I had been classed as *subversive* by both the KGB & East German State Security. They were very confused about my actions. Even though I had made a few TV programmes, which cast a positive light on East Germany for British telly, they still didn't know what to make of me.

I was unfathomable. Behind the scenes, they desperately wanted to know who I worked for, MI5 or CIA? What was my long-term agenda? Maybe, the total corruption of East German youth? What I didn't know was that I had been flagged many years before, for enquiring about the underground. To them, they thought I meant the dissident, *political* underground, not underground music. To make matters ever more suspicious, over the years I had also moved in very dodgy GDR & Eastie dissident circles, I had US army friends too, & I had helped to organise illegal concerts & regularly smuggled music into their Republic & now finally, here was an opportunity to get up close & personal & put me under stricter surveillance. What better way to do this but to have one of their own agents watching over me, all day, every day?

By this time, the political situation in East Berlin had also started to drastically change. Since our secret gig, the ice age had finally begun to thaw. By May 1989 the Hungarian authorities had dismantled their border security with Austria, & hundreds of East Germans were suddenly applying for visas & flocking for a brief holiday in Hungary. It was the talk of everyone you met.

In the meantime, the band had also acquired a manager. The West German photographer Alaska. He had attended a Die Vision concert in East Berlin & suggested to the band that he become their new manager. Indeed, he eventually managed to persuade the AMIGA into entering into a joint venture & make their album, which he would then release in the West. It was agreed by all parties that

I would produce this album. So one early morning, I was invited to East Berlin to the AMIGA offices to arrange my studio timetable. I got off the U-Bahn at Friedrichstrasse station & entered the passport control. The bright neon lights & bile-green tiled walls gave the crossing point a toilet-esque ambience. I handed the border guard my passport along with the invitation from the AMIGA. He scrutinized it & turned to his phone. After a few whispered words & without as much as a glance, he took a drag on his cigarette, stamped my visa & I slipped through customs without a hitch.

Once on the other side, I strolled along the Reichstagsufer by the river Spree (which I couldn't actually see due to a 4 meter high, yellowing corrugated plastic fence with a barbed wire topping, which stopped anyone thinking of swimming to freedom). This little street was virtually void of human life, probably because a Volkspolizei policeman stood lurking every 150 meters or so, waiting to pounce. Almost at the end of the road stood the AMIGA offices & a few meters beyond it, the dreaded Berlin Wall & the Reichstag.

I eventually came to a bleak looking barrack row & before me stood this huge, impressive building – the former *Reichstag Praesidenten Palais*. This was the home of the AMIGA. Up until then, I had only ever seen this historical building from the West side of the wall & hadn't a clue what it could be. From this position, it looked fascinating. It was from this building that Hermann Goering & Joseph Goebbels had used a secret passageway to set fire to the Reichstag in February 1933.

A policeman checked my papers for the final time & I was allowed to proceed into the barrack. The concierge, a small pointy nosed former Nazi type, sat in his little pokey office, which he'd made into a home-away-from-home, complete with replica paintings of Brandenburg, a TV, a radio, potted plants & net-curtains. The aroma of brewing ersatz coffee & cheap cigarette smoke filled the foyer. He was as impolite as anyone could be, he briskly demanded my passport. In return, I was given a *besucherpäss* – a visitor's card – a well-used, floppy piece of yellowing card, covered in cheap East German cello-tape which had accumulated fluffy dust along its grubby edges.

I was directed upstairs & noted the prefabs spongy grey lino-floor. What luxury. Silence was observed. The place smelled of floor cleaner & looked like it would fall down if you knocked it too hard. In the office a smallish rotund woman with a 60s *helmet* hairdo, sat before a huge brown leatherette ledger. It looked like she was pouring over an ancient religious relic. She opened her big book & turned a page to the correct date.

"Now, when would you like to start?" she politely

enquired. Foolishly, I was thinking of how studio time is bought in West Berlin or UK, so I just said, "I will probably need about 6 weeks to record in total, with full lock-up."

She looked at me, smiled, took a deep breath & said, "Oh no, that's impossible. *This* is Socialism... here we work in shifts ... you can have Monday from 3pm & Tuesday start at 7:30 am..." it was a blow.

She planned the first four weeks with me. Secretly panicking, I was wondering how am I going to work *this* out? Studio was going to be starting at a different time every day & for only a couple of hours too, after which all my mixing desk settings would be messed up! It would mean having to write absolutely every little thing down. Not a savoury prospect.

The AMIGA's Brunnenstrasse recording studio was situated a stone's throw away from the Berlin Wall. In that respect, it was almost a tarnished mirror image of the famous Hansa studios, both had a huge hall & both were very close to the Berlin Wall, but that is where the similarities ended.

Bordering Reinickendorf in the West, the Brunnenstrasse teemed with Volkspolizei, who would always make spot checks. It made me feel like I was in a scene from *The Great Escape*. From the street, the frosted glass fronted entrance blended neatly with the other doorways. There was no polished sign, nothing to indicate that this was the place where most East German artists recorded their albums. The building had previously been a cinema before the war, hence once inside, you had to walk down a long thin foyer to end up in the reception area, which was a Formica covered desk, only to be greeted by his majesty, the Hausmeister Eberhard, a scruffy looking individual from Saxony with a bit of a Napoleon complex, & a greasy rock & roll haircut, who wore plastic slippers & a grubby diarrhea brown overall.

Beside him the TV was constantly on, with no sound. His job was to push the buzzer to let people in. However, being a bit of a capitalist, he had a little side income on the go, selling dreadfully weak ersatzcafe (his coffee was so weak it was nearly a fortnight) & old dry bread rolls, smothered in margarine & layered with sweaty cheese of no description, is was either that or stinking salami. The whole place stank of cheap caro cigarette smoke, salami, coffee & cheese.

I was introduced to the guys who would be my engineers & help me with the production, Dieter Ortlepp & Kai Lautenbach. They kindly gave me a guided tour explaining the studio & how it worked. I discovered they had virtually built the Brunnenstrasse studio themselves, by hand.

The main recording hall actually had a fantastic sound, but my wonder was frustrated by Dieter's constant apologies as to the state of the studio &

its equipment. Apparently, they only had "very old microphones" & all the other equipment also dated back from the '60s & early '70s. So imagine my awe when I saw that in the middle of the hall stood a beautiful old Steinway grand piano, encircled by a forest of old Neumann valve microphones. They also had a Marshall amp, a VOX AC30 & even a real Fender Stratocaster & a fully functional Melotron. This was all original stuff, bought in the mid 1960s. From Dieter's expression, he obviously didn't really believe me when I told him I was very impressed.

On my first day in the Brunnenstrasse Studio, I made enquiries about the other producers working there & the music they were working on. It turned out most were fairly elderly types who liked to work early & go home early. I approached my first victim, the diminutive Herr Richter. He looked like a schoolteacher, shabby suit, grey hair, dandruff & glasses. He was mixing a compilation album *Bird sounds of the GDR* it was sure to be a million seller. I asked him if I could swap my day shifts for his night ones. Obviously thrilled at my request, he readily agreed, thanked me & over the next few days all the other producers came creeping in to ask me if they could also swap. I thought at least now we could work with an unlimited open end & probably get one song finished per day.

So, Die Vision started recording their debut album in the state owned AMIGA recording studios. That was during the late summer of 1989, just as waves of East German refugees were starting to leave the GDR via Hungary in their droves.

Dieter epitomised the true meaning of the word *Tonmeister*. This guy was absolutely amazing. He looked like a '60s hippy & wore his beard in a permanent state of untidiness & he wore a brown hairy pullover, which he donned every day. He lived on a diet of Caro cigarettes, disgusting black ersatz coffee & the occasional salami bread roll. That was all I ever saw him eat. The only proper East German recording studio that Dieter & his assistants had made, was certainly a masterpiece. It was like... Frankenstein's monster. They had literally built this studio from "bits." The 24 channel tape deck was made up of an old OTARI shell-housing, with a Telefunken motor, bits off a Studer & Revox deck & that wasn't all, the whole studio was full of unique & individual self-made creations. This was definitely where the phrase "necessity makes you creative" became literal. On the wall, directly behind the self-made mixing desk, was a large, long, brown paper plan of the entire electrical system of the studio, which they had wired themselves. Below that, was a Frankenstein-style power switch to turn on the main power. It was fascinating.

Proudly, Dieter guided me to his latest pride & joy. It was the tape recorders new (self-made)

remote control unit. He explained, as it was currently fashionable in the West to have a remote control to start & stop the tape deck, they too didn't want to be left behind & so they had built their own! It was a primitive looking aluminium box with clunky buttons & switches, placed on top of a snare stand & gaffa-taped to it. Dieter carefully explained that as it was a home-grown product, it would be safer if he operated it, as there was a slight, 5 millisecond delay time from the moment you pressed down the buttons to drop something in or out, & that the operation had to be spot on to work. I couldn't believe what I was hearing but hastily agreed with him.

The first thing to do was to get the band in & play. The equipment was set up & the band ran through a few songs to warm up & so we could get some sound levels. It was apparent that the drummer Ratzi would have to hit the skins a little bit harder if he was to get a full, meaty sound, but he seemed very timid & unsure of himself. It wasn't going to happen that day though & we all just thought he's probably just nervous & left it at that. However, the following day, we had the same problem & so the position of the microphones were changed. Still, his punch didn't have enough power & we asked him what the problem was. Did he practice at home & wasn't actually allowed to make any noise? & how did he play live? He was very nervous & obviously worried. The next day he came into the studio, walked up to me, apologised & told me he was leaving the band! *Fuck!* I thought, am I really that much of a tyrant? Was my session that bad? He simply had other more important issues on his mind.

That started well, I thought. So what were we to do *now?* Three days into recording & the drummer leaves the band! *Brilliant!* I decided we needed to keep up the momentum. If we couldn't find a solution, then this production could be cancelled before it had really started. I decided we would have to lay down the tracks using a drum machine. Yet as this was a socialist affair, we would have to order it officially through the AMIGA, but then it turned out that the one & only drum machine in the entire German Democratic Republic was already on loan to the Friedrichsstadt Palast Orchestra. This meant, I would have to wait forever to get it. I decided to return to West Berlin & smuggle one back over with my GI friend.

I sat up with ex-Shark Vegas drummer, Leo Walter for three nights programming all the basic drum patterns for the songs intended for the album, on his Kawai drum machine. Hoping at least that by the time we came to mix it, the band might have found a new drummer. Thankfully half way through the production, Mixed Pickles drummer, Ulli (the brother of Die Vision guitarist Sebastian) stepped in

SO 36 Oranienstraße 190

Konzert
zur Einheit der Nation

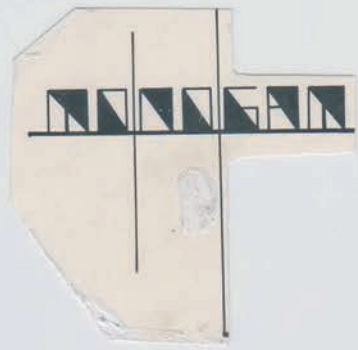
Mittwoch, 17. Juni 1981 21.00 Uhr

Die Karte verliert nach Verlassen des Raumes ihre Gültigkeit

Vorverkauf 6,- № 168

Abendkasse 8,-

Stange, Berlin 61



David Kopelant. (left) & Die Unbekannten (right) pre-gig at Lukov, Czechoslovakia, 1982, by Mark Reeder.

to fill this important role. I relished the days when I could spend all day in the recording studio.

The early morning ride by tram to the Brunnenstrasse & then the walk up the hill to the non-descript entrance had something very clandestine to it. Before Die Vision had got anywhere near the recording studio, Geyers English-ese lyrics had been thoroughly scrutinized by the AMIGA to see if he would be singing anything anti-state, but once we started recording, it proved that most of them were actually nonsense & un-singable. I asked my friend Dave Rimmer if he could help. He was an author & he also knew Geyer & understood exactly what we wanted.

Although Dave isn't a musician, he is a music fan, & an excellent writer & he understands how lyrics work. He could also see my problem. We interrogated Geyer, asking him what his songs were about, *Love by Wire* for example, was a song about a long distance relationship he was having with a French girl he'd met. That in itself was an almost impossible situation, seeing that almost no one in East Berlin had a telephone at home & to make a long distance call, you had to apply days in advance & collect a lot of coins. Other lyrics for songs such as *Doomsday* (an homage to *through the barricades*) had the underlying potential to become politically & socially unacceptable, the original lyrics were amended to appear as before but with a slightly different message, yet other lyrics had quite innocent roots such as *Cry of the wolf*, this song was written after Geyer had seen the film *The Howling*, but mainly to keep on the safe side & away from the salt mines, most of the songs were themes of dreams & fairytales.

So over a few nights, Dave bashed Geyers lyrics into shape & knowing the original lyrics had already been approved, cheekily added a few clandestine messages, carefully disguised within the texts. Without a doubt, Dave made an invaluable contribution to this album. Once the album recording was finished, Dave & I even wrote the text & together we designed the layout for cover.

Inside the Studio control room, was a big Frankenstein-style power lever on the wall, which once activated, threw the whole place into life. I also soon discovered why there was a huge circuit plan on the wall too. Due to the GDR's constantly fluctuating power supply, there were always minor problems to contend with. If the power dipped, it would immediately turn all channels of the 24 track tape recorder onto record, wiping anything previously recorded. Sadly, this happened a few times during the making of *Torture* & each time, meant we had to improvise or re-record the part. One example is track 16 *Cross over the church*, featured on CD2, the original track had a intricate percussion intro

played by accomplished East German percussionist Hermann Naehring, but that unfortunately fell victim to the fluctuating current. We saved what we could. On a few occasions, I would sit with Dieter, usually after the band had left & secretly replay the bits we were missing.

Over the months, the band also suffered mentally, with daily reports of friends suddenly disappearing Eastwards, only to reappear a few days later in the West. Walking through the streets you could almost taste the unease in the air. The East German state was seemingly heading towards greater upheaval, chaos & revolution. There were rumours that the forthcoming military parade for the impending 40th anniversary of the GDR, could even turn into a Tiananman Square style bloodbath.

These historical events undoubtedly influenced the band & songs like "Doomsday" & "After the sunset," as both reflect their uncertainty & hope of the impending situation. Before all this mayhem started, the future for Die Vision actually looked quite promising. They had successfully manoeuvred through all the aptitude tests that the strict communist authorities request a band must take to be able to perform before an audience. They had even managed to get a record deal & gain Alaska as their manager in West Berlin. Now, the future suddenly looked uncertain. Even before the recording was fully completed, the album (which by this point I had named *Torture* – because it was quite literally that to make) had incredible-to-imagine-today-pre-sale figures of around 37,000 copies & the AMIGA record representatives were fairly confident they had a potential massive seller on their hands.

The AMIGA head A&R Matthias Hoffmann asked me what I was going to do with all the money I was going to be earning from this album? A valid question, as I obviously couldn't take inconvertible East German Monopoly money out of the country. I hadn't even thought about it & so I hadn't a clue, buy a new GDR toaster perhaps? or some hideous Eastie fashions, or maybe more East German records? Then one dreary, drizzly night, after finishing a gruelling recording session, he took me for a little pep-tour around Pankow in his shabby Trabant. As we crept through the deserted streets, he showed me an array of beautiful villas (or *objekte* as he called them). We cruised among what could only be described as opulent capitalist palaces. "That one is free... & that one..." inside I was laughing. In West Berlin, I lived in a small 22sq-metre hovel, with an outside toilet, no hot water & a coal oven heater & here I was, in the posh part of Pankow in East Berlin being shown around a selection of luxury villas.

I thought I was hallucinating. Wow! This is so bizarre. Does this mean I'm going to be owning



a mansion in East Berlin? Yet as we would all later discover, history was soon to change all that.

Due to the traditional system of shift work, regular power surges & an acute lack of equipment, the recording of the album had taken us many more months than we had all originally planned. We finished our final recording session on the evening of November 2nd, 1989... just seven days before the Berlin wall would come down. This major historical event was to make *Torture* the last album to be recorded in walled-in communist GDR & also the first East German album to be sung in English & produced by a Westerner. And through Alaska's involvement it would also become one of the first East/West joint-venture projects too.

However, before mixing the album, I had planned a short break. Dave Rimmer, Trevor Wilson & a friend of his John Stokes & I had months before decided to go on holiday, to Ceausescu's Romania, a road trip traversing the Ostbok, taking in Poland, Czechoslovakia & Hungary. Excited, we left late in the night of the 8th November for Krakow & we only found out about the wall coming down many days later while we were in Hungary. As it proved, nothing was to be the same again. Devastated by this news, we nonetheless proceeded to our destination of Romania. Our harrowing experiences as communism fell apart behind us, is documented by Dave in his book *Once Upon A Time In The East*.

Upon my return from Romania, expecting to finish producing the album, I discovered that the AMIGA had also undergone massive political changes too. All the hardline commies had been sacked from their positions & the AMIGA label disbanded. Matthias Hoffmann was now *the* man in charge. Proudly, he told me they had renamed AMIGA with the inspiring moniker ZONG. I asked them why couldn't they change the name to ZONY? At least we could then all have a laugh, but they never liked the idea of being called zone-zombies or zonies for living in the Soviet Zone. Matthias Hoffmann told me the Die Vision album would still be released, but as everyone now only wanted to buy *West Musik*, the expected pre-sales figures were being leisurely discarded. (I thought typical! There goes my villa!)

Further, the album would now come out simultaneously in both West Germany & East. Geyer & Alaska had decided to release it in the West themselves, because they knew the former AMIGA only had contacts to shops in the East. They scraped the money together & I went along to Tom Muller, chief *tonmeister* at Hansa studios, as he was going to master it. I gave him the tape & he immediately transferred it, I noticed though that the sound levels weren't quite right & I pulled him up about it, he snapped "its ok I will correct that when I master it". He never did. The West CD version on Vulture

was released with Tom Mullers error on *After The Sunset*, where halfway through the beginning there is a sudden surge in volume. Thankfully, on this remastered release we have finally managed to correct this. The Zong CD evaporated like alcohol, leaving a thousand vinyls to be passed about the former GDR to be copied & swapped.

The next step now, after all this political tumult, was to finally mix the album & produce it for CD & vinyl release. Dieter & Kai desperately wanted to experience a Western studio & so we mixed it in Vielklang Tonstudio, near to the Anhalter Bahnhof. They had a state-of-the-art solid state mixing desk & lots of flash equipment. Everything was in total contrast to the Brunnenstrasse.

After all the troubles making this album, I had already decided it should be called *Torture*. This title I thought, not only summed up our situation while making the album, but also the situation of what many East Germans had gone through. I also had a cover in mind too. I had met an African-American artist called Cynthia, who had been working in Berlin. She told me she had returned from a trip to Africa where she had been inspired by two people she had met. They had been working on a sugar cane plantation & because they hadn't achieved their crop quota, they had been severely punished. These poor devils had both their hands chopped off! She was so moved, that she had painted a series of pictures, which I had seen in a gallery. I thought, if any East German complains about having had a hard life under the commies, then they can look at this picture. Now THAT image was torture.

I also liked the idea of having two black people on the cover & not a picture of the band. I thought it would help let the Easties confront their racial issues, knowing Die Vision had quite a large following of *anti-communists* & indeed, the image proved to be quite a controversial topic at the time of release in spring of 1990.

In retrospect, this album is simply a sign of its time. Due to the circumstances under which it was made, it is arguably an outstanding piece of work. The music is not world shatteringly original, but it did provide an all-important soundtrack for thousands of Eastie kids who had just been given the gift of freedom of choice – & before they all ended up embracing a new western dance music style called techno, many of them chose to listen to this album by their own Eastie boys. Actually, most of them have never owned their own copy of this album. They had their friends copy their copy from a cassette copy, taken from a vinyl. That is what made it special. This album is for all those who have always wanted to own it. We hope you will enjoy this historical piece of work & be able to evaluate it for what it is.

Sing it out loud for a better world. ■



Christopher Dreher, 2010, by Robert Carrithers.

YEARS OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY:
DIE HAUT & BERLIN IN THE EARLY '80S
CHRISTOPH DREHER

At first nobody realized that we had been shot at. It was only later that somebody saw the hole in the window, & we found a small caliber bullet in the opposite wall. We had had a little session in my loft in Kreuzberg, which at that point was inhabited not only by my roommate & myself, but the whole of The Birthday Party including girlfriends. It was clearly not a shot intended to kill. Obviously somebody in the neighborhood had found us taking things a little too far by having an amplified improv session in our backyard loft which had not been soundproofed. So it did not seem unreasonable at all to us, this little warning shot. Without it, we would have never known that someone was bothered by us.

Nowadays it is hard to imagine what Kreuzberg was like in the early '80s. When my colleague from film school & I rented that loft sometime in 1978, our footsteps could be seen in the dust of the backyard. It was like a ghost town. My car was the only one parked on the entire street, the houses of which were unchanged since after the Wall had been built. The houses mostly had bullet holes in the facades, toilets in the staircase or in the courtyard, coal furnaces. No baths. Very few people were living there at the time, mostly Turkish migrants, the German working class inhabitants of Kreuzberg having long ago moved into the new satellite quarters with their modern high-rise ghettos. Central heating, bathrooms & elevators. Small companies occupied the other lofts in our house, like the printing shop downstairs. After 5p.m. we were pretty much on our own.

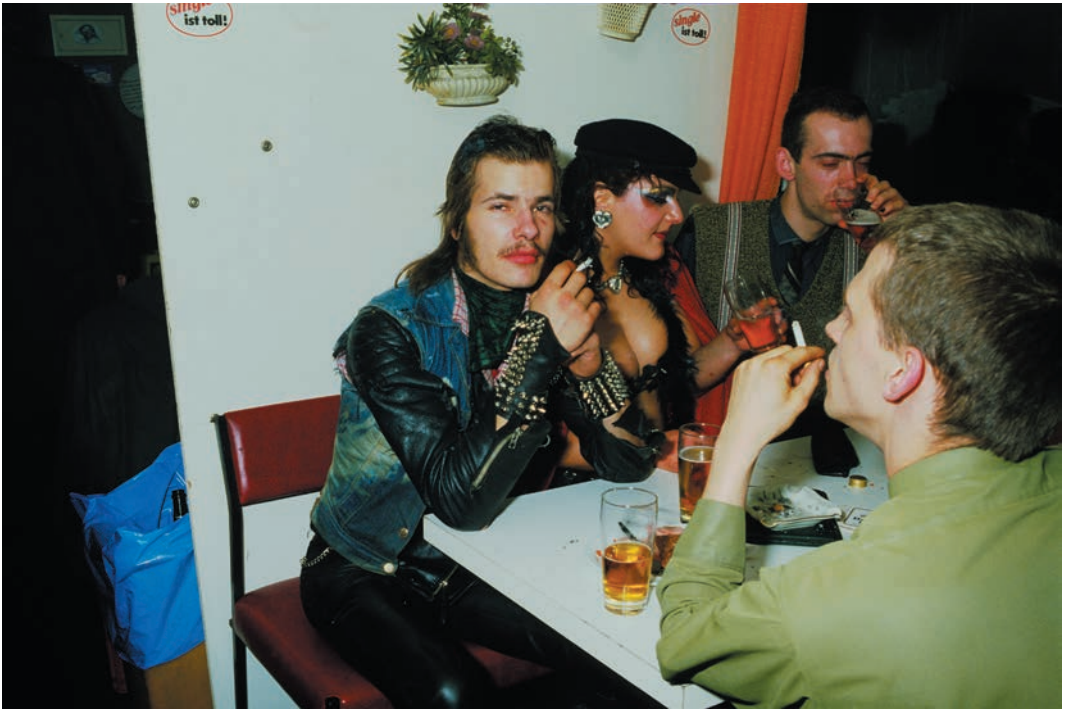
We had recently finished our first tour with my band Die Haut, supporting The Birthday Party, who were on their second tour of Germany by then. Die Haut had a strict suits-only-policy in the jazz tradition of the '50s & early '60s & a corresponding cool performance. The Birthday Party fancied cowboy boots, leather pants & flamboyant hairstyles. Their performances saw half of the band down on the floor, usually with the bass player lying on his back, making humping movements. Nonetheless, beyond these negligible differences, there were a lot of common interests in films & books & music.

At the end of the tour, we invited them to Berlin. Accustomed to tiny, dark & cold flats in London, they were impressed by our comparatively lavish loft situation & the moderate rent. Even more to their liking was the scene around us, with bands like Malaria!, Einstürzende Neubauten, Liaisons Dangereuses, Sprung Aus Den Wolken & various painters & filmmakers.

Nick Cave & co. were amazed by the spirit of collaboration & experimentation, which was the exact opposite of the competitive London scene where everybody wanted to be a pop star. In Berlin, we despised the idea of entertainment & entertained the ideas of confrontation & provocation. In a matter of days, I had introduced The Birthday Party to our colleagues, & a mesmerized Nick Cave had witnessed Einstürzende Neubauten in the studio with half a pig, which served as a percussion tool for Blixa Bargeld when he wasn't using his own chest instead.

This was a time of constant collaboration: New groups were often formed of members of various bands – & many musicians regularly played in several bands. Painters & filmmakers wanted to make music too, whereby the expanded understanding of what music is or can be – prominently & later famously promoted by Einstürzende Neubauten – helped a lot. To practice at home in order to become an accomplished musician was considered silly. It wasn't that a lot of the people involved didn't work hard or have ambitions. It was just that it was simply all about daring & doing & the excitement of the moment & the shared experience.

While the other members of The Birthday Party got flats on their own or moved in with other people, Nick & – for as long as their relationship lasted – his girlfriend Anita Lane stayed in my flat in Dresdnerstraße for years to come. Everybody was on the road a lot, so there were always pauses to the collective living situation. I made music videos for Nick's next Band, The Bad Seeds. He sang on Die Haut records & occasionally went on tour with us. There were eventual incidents at the house, which were probably due to the widespread appetite for our "uptown" & "downtown" additions to (if not replacements of) nourishment at that time. One time the collateral damage of a small family controversy included all of the windows in the staircase. In another, my glass coffee table. But these kinds of trifles couldn't disrupt what I thought of this moment in Berlin. It was a time of friendship, intensity, exploration & adventure. ■



Die Tödliche Doris founder Wolfgang Müller, with call-boy Detlef (left), burlesque dancer Valerie Caris Ruhnke (middle), & the artist Reinhard Wilhelmi (right), West Berlin, 1984, by Ilse Ruppert.

ILSE RUPPERT: AN APPRECIATION

ROBERT CARRITHERS

As a fellow photographer I am envious of Ilse, but in a very positive way. I had the good fortune of living in New York in the early '80s, and was able, through my camera lens, to capture some of the key moments and legendary personalities of that place and time. Ilse had the double good fortune of living and experiencing the early '80s in both New York and Berlin. Comparisons are often made between these two cities, but there was, in fact, a big difference. '80s New York scene people loved being photographed. In Berlin, on the other hand, if you attempted to take someone's photograph, and they did not know you, very often you would end up getting your camera smashed. There was a completely different mentality in Berlin at that time. In the "selfie-world" of today, where people apparently can't get enough of being photographed, perhaps this is hard to believe; but '80s Berlin scene people simply weren't into having that sort of exposure. It was a private world and they wanted to keep it that way. Ilse was an active participant in that scene and was not considered "the enemy". She was one of the few who was able to document and capture this special time in Berlin. ■



Nina Hagen, West Berlin, 1984 (above), by Ilse Ruppert.



Matador (Manon Duursma, Beate Bartel, Gudrun Gut) at Schokoladenfabrik, West Berlin 1984 (top); Claris Runke, Beate Bartel & Blixa Bargeld at TV-producer Jörg Hoppe's birthday, on a ship on the Spree, 1984 (bottom), by Ilse Ruppert.



Ost-Punk "Colonel" looks out over Christinenstrasse, East Berlin, 1982 (top); Christiane F. in her room with her drug dealer, 1983 (bottom), by Ilse Ruppert.

SEX, DRUGS, ROCK 'N' ROLL
& THE BRUTALITY OF DREAMS:
THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ILSE RUPPERT

MONA MUR

"Icons / feed the fires..." – Siouxi

Whisky a Go-Go. A thunderbolt, the name speaks for itself. Los. Angeles. 1980. Outlined against neon: Jello Biafra, Dead Kennedys frontman, half naked, shamanic, generating a force field of airwaves called PUNK. The picture, black & white, glows, bursting with sheer infernal pressure as if about to set itself on fire: "Holiday in Cambodia."

You can veritably *hear* it.

At the very moment of firing, in the eye of the cyclone.

The detail – *le cadre* – the frame – never arbitrary, always a conscious decision. "Killer instinct," as Ilse Ruppert calls it.

Nothing in the world of pixels is carved in stone. Sounds & images are in free flow. Everything could also be completely different – at all times.

But what counts in a work of art is just:

Is it like having your brains blown out?

Is it like being whacked over the head, like a boot in the gut?

Divine rapture?

Neither wholly staged as the portraits of Annie Leibowitz, nor quasi documentary as Nan Goldin's "reality" shots: Ilse Ruppert's are just mysterious, like film stills.

"Photos from the '80s" are in a class of their own, unfathomable, surreal, sexy – *iconic*.

How come?

Only true risk can generate a force field.

288 | Born in Mespelbrunn, a happy childhood with village, woods, water castle, & gangs of boys, she their ringleader, 15-year-old Ruppert abandoned the prescribed path for young females in the Spessart forest – she hightailed it, to Hamburg, to the Star Club on the Reeperbahn, where at that very moment Screaming Lord Such leapt out of his coffin & screamed his head off.

Of course, it meant should have to face the biting headwind blasting from the social milieu.

At 19 she left the village forever. Moved to Frankfurt. Then off into the wide wide world. Saw Janis Joplin & Jimi Hendrix live. Heard Pink Floyd, Carlos Santana & Roxy Music, Brian Eno's "Baby's on Fire" & Procol Harum's "Whiter Shade of Pale" in London's Summer of Love. Hung out with jazzmen. For the photographer-to-be music became the most important driving force.

Not your normal, well-behaved pop music. But the *dark side*.

Ilse Ruppert turned photographer in 1976. The initial impulse was an experimental photo of herself taken by a Mexican art student she was friends with, black & white, in candlelight. A sudden shock of insight. The next day she acquired her first camera. Took off for Mexico, Lanzarote, Morocco. Taking photographs, self-taught. To begin with: stones & landscape structures. "But the real trip is the people." She discovered the groundbreaking work of the Italian photographer & revolutionary Tina Modotti & drew inspiration. She learnt how to work with b&w & set up her own lab. Success was instant. Actors asked her to photograph them for their set cards. Directors took notice of the photographer:

"Her pictures have the beauty of dreams & the cruelty of nightmares," reported stage director Hans-Peter Cloos, who immediately took her off with him to the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris. The magazine *INTERVIEW* featured her portrait of Fassbinder.

Then came punk & new wave. A vast pop-cultural revolution of incisive energy swept away the bombast of 1970s rock dinosaurs.

Mudd Club... CBGB's... Marquee... Roundhouse... Risiko... Dschungel... Subito... auspicious names – of adoration, of apotheosis – the international concert halls, clubs, dancefloors & dive bars of the late '70s & early '80s. Those who knew them understand what it means to have survived them. Ilse Ruppert documented, ennobled, amplified, mirrored, loaded the goings-on of musicians on stage & backstage, unbridled audiences in boulevards & back alleys.

Her images smack you in the face, take hold of you. Forget the rest.

When I got to know Ilse Ruppert in spring 1981 in Hamburg's Markthalle, a venue stuffed with concertina wire, I was living as an upcoming musician & author directly above the notorious Subito.

It's where everyone who was anyone headed after concerts & parted till they dropped.

Ilse photographed for *SOUNDS & MUSIKEXPRESS*, for *STERN & PLAYBOY*. An artist addicted to music & adventure, always on the move between Hamburg, Paris, West Berlin, USA & elsewhere. She had lived in Mexico, Brazil, Paris, New York & LA, had shared a joint with the New York Niggers outside CBGB's.

She was intrepid & uninhibited & utterly driven whenever she was considering the next photo shoot, rip-roaring idea or gripping story. She drove a Cadillac on her own all the way from Los Angeles through Las Vegas to New York. She danced through the nights at Berber shindigs in Morocco.

Back then there weren't many role models at hand for young women looking to live in the fast lane. Ilse was one of them. Ilse was undiluted rock'n'roll. For a while I became one of her photographic *Objects of Desire*, & we became friends for life.

The white nights, tempestuous amber nights, the grey mornings in vodka, in whisky – always with the edgiest music, the fucking lethally hottest outfits. Outclassing any Fellini film set in terms of beauty, authenticity & the morbid Cold War poetry & the prospect of white-hot nuclear fire. Ilse Ruppert, forging her own myths, captured all this in Blakean images, entranced by the razor-sharp gaze of pitiless erotomania & exaltation, always on a quest for the moment of truth.

Clinging to the PA, Ilse pressed the button when in Hamburg the political punks of The Clash turned the Markthalle into a witch's cauldron, riot included:

"I truly adore chaos."

She came to blows with Dennis Hopper who in powder- & whisky-fired paranoia was intent on exposing himself to her. Frank Zappa sent a limo to pick her up. She managed to lure a smile from Nina Hagen. In 1982 we spent a week in East Berlin together on a reportage assignment, Gonzo style. Ilse photographed the first East punks posing in front of the Lenin monument

– beautiful, young, strong.

The photos went round the world, from *KONKRET* to *ACTUEL*, from Japan to Sweden.

Ilse dared go anywhere & returned with hot stuff.

She did what she wanted & was incorruptible in her aesthetic judgement.

Her pictures took your breath away.

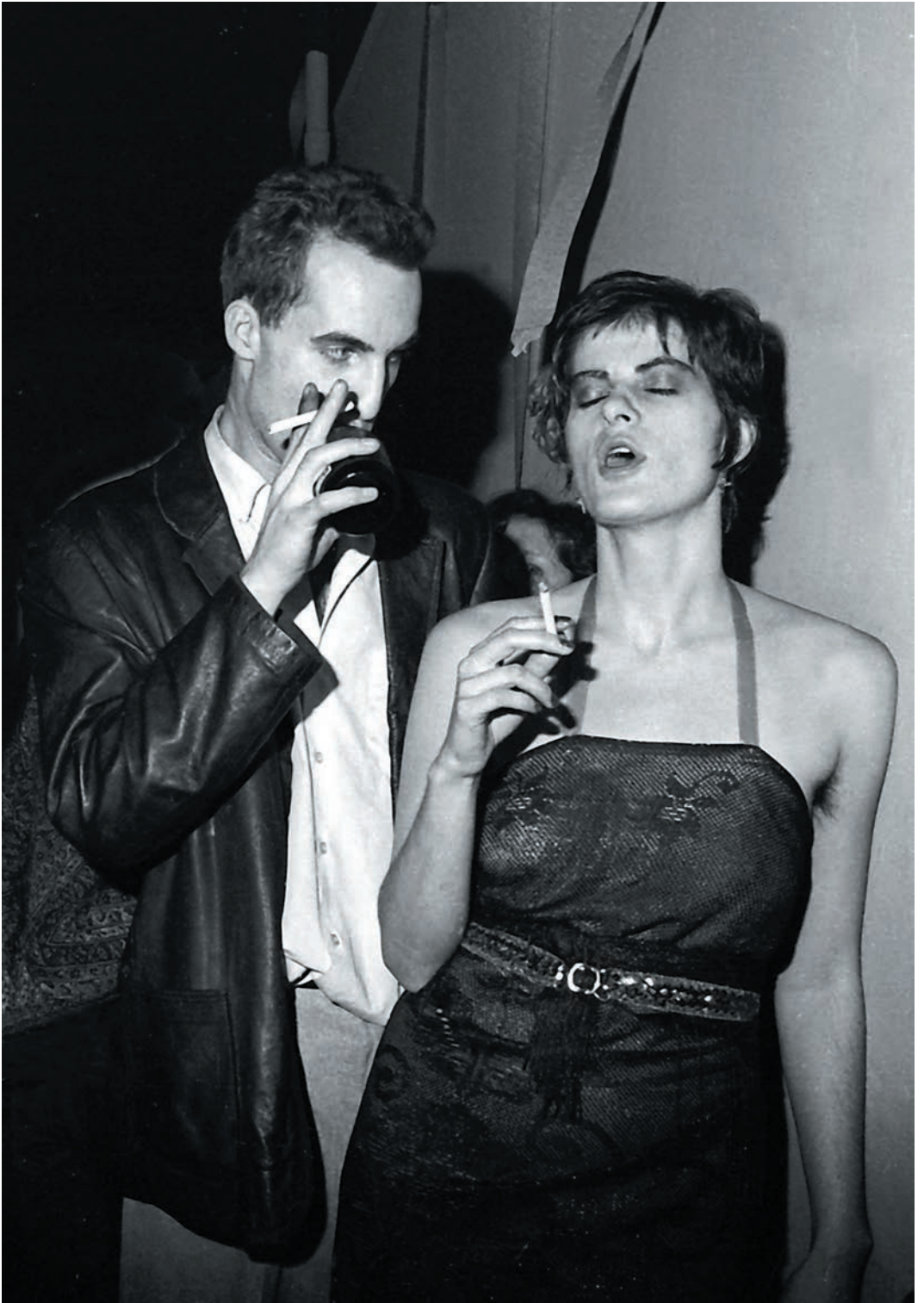
There was something wild about them, magical – they had depth & fervour – they draw the most intense response from people. Elementary feelings at any price. The mainspring of the photographer: obsession, curiosity, eroticism, the uncontrollable urge, digging to the very core of things – in a face, a street scene, a pose.

Ilse's photos from the '80s salute the rock'n'roll lifestyle as a flaming torch, dedicating to its protagonists a monument of beauty, of rapture, of lasciviousness as a creative impulse, of vice as a revolutionary aesthetic act, the universal energy of the rebellious spirit, incarnated in the sultry gaze of lecherous Gabi Delgado, "As if it were the last time." In the green incandescence of Nick Cave as an eternal "junkyard king" perishing in beauty. In Christiane F's mortally wounded look in the peepshow scene in the film *Decoder*.

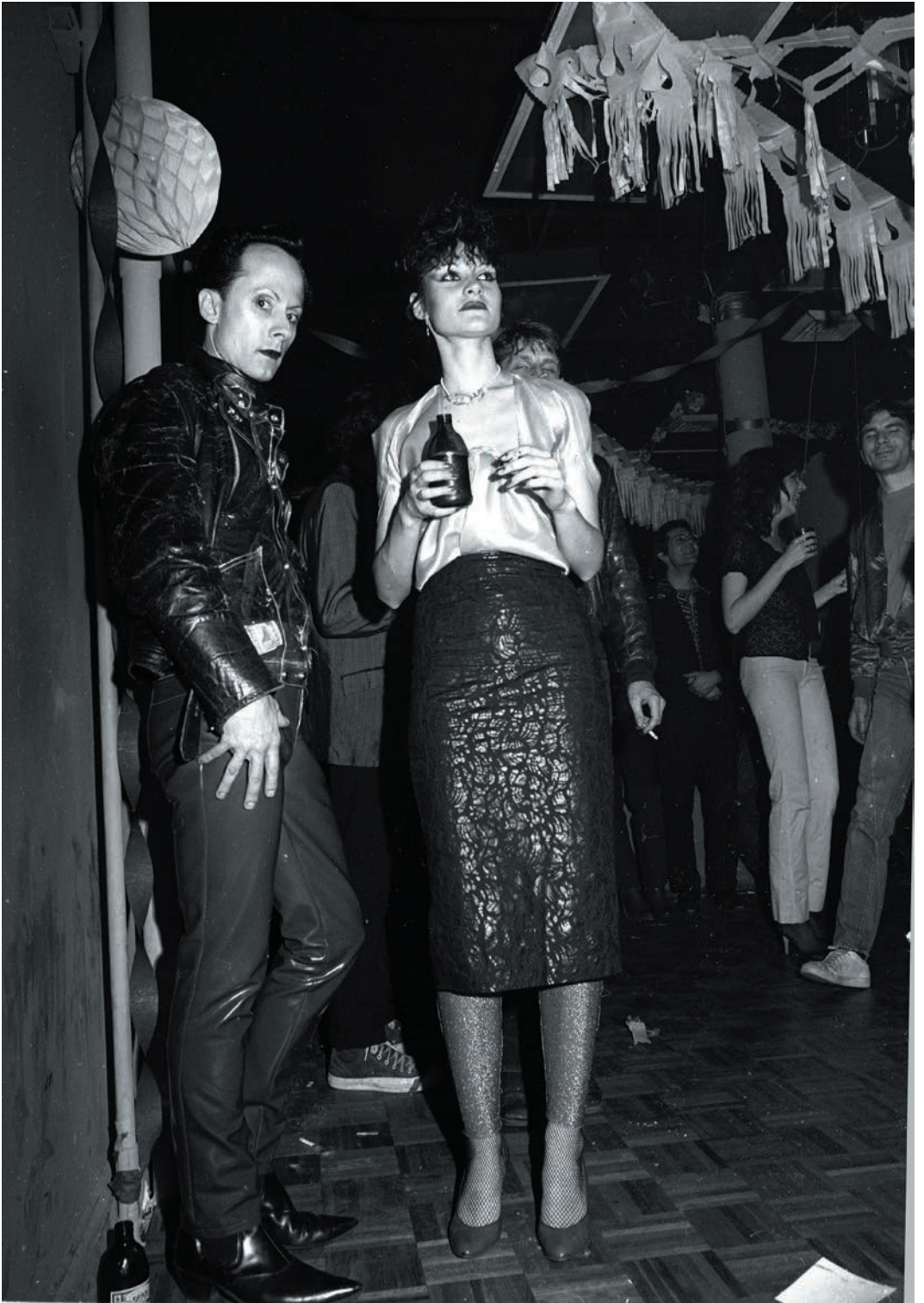
Kodak whores – strike a pose!

It's all in the pictures.

Merci ■



John Lurie with unidentified woman at the Mudd Club, 1978, by Ilse Ruppert.



Klaus Nomi & Karin Luner at Mudd Club, 1978, by Ilse Ruppert.

**Suicide, est-il une
solution**

Alan Vega?

Louis Armand

THE NIGHT I SCREAMED LOUDER
THAN ALAN VEGA
IAN WRIGHT

1978 – I spent several months at the end of the year in New York City hanging around the exploding Punk scene there at the time. I stayed in the small town of Weehawken in New Jersey just at the other end of the Lincoln Tunnel because even then Manhattan was too expensive for my tight budget. I worked (illegally) days in a small garage as a tire fitter & just longed for the nights & especially the weekends to be able to jump on the bus through the tunnel to the Port Authority bus station near Times Square & then take the subway downtown. I spent most of my time in the East Village & the Lower Eastside which was then a rough & often dangerous neighbourhood. To get to CBGB's you had to literally step over winos to get in. Every weekend I would go & see bands play at Max's Kansas City & CBGB's. It often did not matter who was playing I would just go. Out of all the Rock 'n Roll & Punk bands there was one that stood out like a sore thumb.

Suicide was a band like nothing I had ever seen or heard before. A duo with vocals & accompaniment on an old organ with a rattling cheap drum machine. Martin Rev's pulsing, hypnotic, monotonous sound hit me with such force that I was mesmerised & rooted to the spot. On top of that was Alan Vega's blood curdling screams & demonic whispering. They were part of the evolving Punk scene but their music had very little to do with the trashy guitar sounds & shouty vocals of the others. They just took over the room & I felt this must be some kind of soundtrack for hell, as Alan Vega was all wired up & living through the hell that were his lyrics. The song "Frankie Teardrop" live was a very scary experience & you could see people at the front back off as it became more intense. As if Alan Vega was about to hurt himself as he channelled the horror & pain of the song. It was an inspiring moment because whether you liked the music or not, here were two people doing something original that they believed in & not paying any attention to what was going on around them.

Fast forward to West Berlin 1979 – Suicide played two gigs at the SO36 club a couple of days apart & for some reason I was unable to go, probably not being able to afford it. Money always seemed to be in short supply back then (still is!). But in-between those concerts I got word that they were doing an unofficial gig at the club called Dschungel (Jungle) because they were friends with some of the people running it. Dschungel was a place I had been spending a lot of time at because the crowd was interesting & I liked the music they played, but no live bands. It was not a very big place, a bar area with a balcony upstairs & a small dance floor. Suicide had set up what gear they had, which was not a lot, on the dance floor & were plugged into speakers for the dance floor. There was no stage so the people who were there just formed a semi circle around them & they started playing. I was standing in front just an arms length from Alan Vega who was extremely high on something, he was pumped up, jittery, with a nervous smile on his face & eyes darting all over the place. The sound was great & they played really well with conviction & zeal. They were enjoying themselves & the crowd too, it was very intimate. The drum machine sounded like a machine gun, the keyboard was pumping & the vocals were sometimes spine chilling & sometimes almost joyous. It seemed like we were all in it together. At one point Alan Vega was screaming into his microphone & because of the proximity of the audience held out the mike for people to join in. Most backed off as if afraid he would suck them into his nightmare & a couple of people made half hearted efforts. I don't really know what happened next but as he stood in front of me I just leaned over & gave out the loudest most blood curdling scream of my life. Alan Vega was visibly shocked & froze momentarily before jumping back & looking me straight in the eye with a nervous twitchy smile. I think he was pleased. He quickly moved on but I could see he had been taken aback by the ferocity of my scream. I was taken aback. I don't know where it came from but it came & it is quite possible that this crazy, genius, insane fucked up music made me do it.

That was the night I screamed louder than Alan Vega I saw them again quite a few years later but the drugs & lifestyle had had an effect on Alan Vega. The urgency & vitality had subsided, but as he went through the motions it showed that the hunger & anger were gone. But those early live performances were a revelation. RIP Alan Vega. ■



WHEN I FIRST CAME TO BERLIN...

JULIA MURAKAMI

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On my first day in Berlin, I sat on my suitcase waiting for someone to open the door. We, my first flame & I, were invited to stay at a friend of a friend's flat near the underground station Voltastraße. It was an extremely hot day & I was wearing a woolen jumper, a miniskirt, tights with runs & laced boots, all in black. For some reason, my boyfriend had decided to hitchhike from West Germany to Berlin while I took a car sharing ride. Now, I was waiting for my boyfriend, too.

Still on my suitcase, fighting with my skirt's bad habit of rolling upwards, a man in his mid-thirties approached me. He was wearing loose bell-bottoms & a close-fitting shirt, as if he had popped out of a time machine. Intruding on my territory, he knelt down, smelling like a not-the-first-of-the-day-beer.

"You know, you look exactly like my girlfriend!" he said, quickly adding, "ex-girlfriend."

My brain immediately started to rattle, "Now be clever, get out of this situation," while the guy persistently went on telling me that he & his ex-girlfriend were regulars at S.O.U.N.D.,¹ & what a

smashing time they had had back then. He inhaled deeply on the smoke of his self-rolled cigarette & gazed into the non-existent Berlin distance.

"Any idea what to do on a nice day like this? They've just released me from Tegel..."² he said flicking off the butt. I felt uncomfortable; my skirt was still disobeying.

"Listen, was nice talking to you..." I said, grabbing my suitcase, which seemed to be filled with stones. No wheels on the thing. But just seventeen, I was too vain for a rucksack; same with wearing glasses (dopey), winter coats (bulky) & walking in public with toilet paper (super embarrassing). Wheels on suitcases were still a thing of the future. Humankind always pretends to be on top of things, but if you take a look into a washing machine, you'll find a stone inside it – cement, if you want to be concrete about it. Somehow disturbing; like discovering that the powerful Wizard of Oz was only an old man behind a curtain. It panicked me to find out the world was much more backwards than I ever thought.

I felt a bit sorry for the hippie guy, but I knew

¹ "Sound," the self-proclaimed "most modern discotheque in Europe," was a large-scale Berlin club in the '70s & '80s.

² Justizvollzugsanstalt (JVA) Tegel, prison in the northwest Berlin district Reinickendorf.

that people are strange when you're a stranger³ & that they could turn into complete psychos from one minute to the next. There were a lot of those species around, especially in Berlin. To get rid of him, my plan was to walk once all around the block, turning on my heel four times left. Good plan: I was actually already walking around, turning abrupt corners like I was pacing out a square with a heavy suitcase & an increasingly bad mood. Alone with my naughty skirt, getting too much sun for a "nightshade" like me & cursing like a sailor. Curses, like the ones that will spill out of my mouth only a few days later, when we get nabbed without a ticket on the Berlin S-Bahn on our way to the next indie record shop.

"Your identification papers!" the controller demands.

"It was our first time... honest!"

"That's what you all say!"

Something beyond my control takes possession of me. I feel hard done by with the controllers. Somehow I expect a grace period. A buffer zone for first-timers. Maybe a little bit of humanity. With an air of pomposity, the controllers write down our personal data, hand us the fare-dodging tickets & edge away into one of those little shacks for railway officials on the middle of the platform, which becomes the focus of my attention. My juvenile hatred agglutinating into a massive black hole cries out for justice. Impudence! Rage! Stars, hide your fires, as Macbeth would say. Controllers, fines & shacks – spaghettified & devoured!

I move towards the shack, clumsily kicking at it, then throw myself to the ground like a stubborn child, thrashing about on the platform, foaming at the mouth, screaming, "I'll shit in front of your fuckin' shack!"

My friends, still clinging to their fines, look at each other. Assuming the worst (I might have lost my mind, or be suffering from a viral disease that had caused an inflammation of my brain), they decide to take me away, fearing that I might make good on my threat, while I am still screaming "Get outta your damn shack, you bloody cowards!"

When I arrived at the same spot where just minutes before I had been sitting on my suitcase, my recently released friend was gone. His cigarette butt was lying forelorn on the asphalt. Again, I rang the bell, & finally the door opened.

My boyfriend arrived two days later. He had had problems at the GDR border control. The East German border troops thought from the looks of him that he was a punk girl, & that he was carrying someone else's passport. After midnight, when he finally arrived at the outskirts of West Berlin, a biker offered him a ride over the last stretch. The

guy would have carried him directly to Wedding (a district in Berlin) if his motorbike hadn't been cut off by two cars with screeching tires, one from the front, the other from behind. Four plain-clothes policemen jumped out of the cars. It started pouring. Seconds later, they were also surrounded by the SEK (Sondereinsatzkommando; a special task force) in full gear, recklessly frisking the boys, knees in their backs, carelessly tossing their belongings onto the rainy street reflecting sparks of light.

"Whatever happened, I'm innocent! I don't even know the guy. Look at my passport, I just arrived from West Germany!" my boyfriend shouted, while the police tied him & the biker to the trees, like in a Cowboys & Indians film. Each to his own tree. Left & right, each on his own side of the street.

The cops rifled through the biker's plastic bag. It yielded a package of Kaba cocoa powder. It was filled to the brim with a white substance that later proved to be cocaine. At least half a kilo. Both suspects were taken into custody & carted off to Moabit,⁴ where they were put into steel cages, the backs & fronts with bars, the sides with green metal walls separating the arrested, like hamster cages in a pet store. The Berlin police were prepared for the May Day demonstrations & had set up numerous mobile cages in a gymnasium-like hall, waiting to be fed with human flesh. The atmosphere among the officers was correspondingly tense. Two years earlier, on May Day, hundreds of police officers had been injured in the street battles.

While my boyfriend was reading the unsettling lines scratched into the walls ("You'll never get outta here!" & the obligatory "Scheißbullen!" [Fuckin' cops!]), a delegation of police officers showed up at our host's place to search the flat. In the end, the police came away empty-handed; they couldn't produce a valid search warrant. Our host was infuriated, muttering something about "deals between friends" & "used car radios," vengefully lying in wait for my boyfriend.

Twenty-four hours & a handful of Leibnitz butter cookies later (a last-minute food offering from the cops), he was finally released under obligation of registering on a weekly basis at a police station in his hometown over the next four months. An attorney from "Rote Hilfe"⁵ had offered my boyfriend help, quickly asking him for his name when they first met on the way to the interrogation. Suddenly, everything went quite quickly. My boyfriend could prove that he had just arrived in Berlin. For the first time. ■

⁴ JVA Moabit: detention centre/prison & a Berlin district.

⁵ Solidarity organization which supports the politically persecuted from the left-wing fringe.

*Portrait of Julia Murakami (opposite), by André Werner, for *Art Resort* magazine, 2010.

³ "People Are Strange," a song by The Doors.



"Superbia" (Pride), 2017: just a stone's throw from "Anders Ufer" & Bowie's former home in Schöneberg: the "Pudelsalon" (top); "Avaritia" (Greed), 2017 (bottom), by Julia Murakami.

THE BERLIN SERIES
THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS
JULIA MURAKAMI

SUPERBIA (PRIDE)

Harry Domela – Vagabond & Prince

Homeless, hungry & freezing, Harry Domela, a man in his early twenties, was strolling through the streets of Berlin. He had once again spent the night at the homeless shelter & then later hours in the waiting room of the station “Zoologischer Garten.” Walking down the boulevards, it was not the first time that he had noticed the humiliating glances. Countless times, he had applied for work, but jobs were scarce during the Weimar Republic & for him, a foreigner from the Baltic countries without papers, nearly impossible to find.

Domela had recently met a reckless-looking crook who had introduced himself as Otto Baron Lüderitz & who kept addressing him as “Count.” “You look like a count, ergo you are one,” he said, assuring Domela that he – with his manners, appearance & intellect – could have the world at his feet.

After a stay in prison, Harry Domela remembered Lüderitz’s words & decided “nevermore to descend into this world of smelly decay & debauchery.” People treated one better if one was somebody of distinction, henceforth he called himself “Count Pahlen,” “Prince of Lieven” & “Baron v. Korff” on his travels through Germany. Once introduced into aristocratic society, he received unsolicited money, clothes & numerous invitations to dinner with “important” people. Soon it was believed that he was actually “Prince Wilhelm of Prussia,” son of the former crown prince, who apparently wanted to remain unrecognised. Harry Domela enjoyed the attention, though he wasn’t unaware of the ambiguity & factitiousness of a society that still clung to the former Empire.

After being arrested for imposture, he spent his time in jail writing his biography “The False Prince,” which became an enormous success. People were enthralled at how Domela – now a media darling – had fooled society. A like-titled movie followed, in which Domela played himself in the starring role & which was screened at Domela’s own recently-opened cinema in Rostocker Straße 12, Berlin-Moabit. Harry Domela died as “Victor Zsajka” on 4 October 1979 in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

*Harry Domela, *Der falsche Prinz* (Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1981); Jens Kirsten, *Nennen Sie mich einfach Prinz. Das Lebensabenteuer des Harry Domela* (Weimar: Weimarer Schriften Bd. 65, 2010).

AVARITIA (GREED)

“No two ways about it, I’m gonna knock over the next gas station,” C. announced after returning from a one-week-odyssey of lovesickness, drugs & parties. No daylight. Pale & nervous. Wearing a suit, his shirt & trousers already fluttering around his emaciated body.

“I’d really appreciate if you wouldn’t take the 24h station opposite...” I said. My night station, sacred place. Essential to those who get up late & get going after night falls.

He looked at me through bleary eyes. “Are you out of your mind?”
Berlin, August 1993 (diary entry)



"Luxuria" (Lust), 2017, by Julia Murakami.



"Ira" (Wrath), tribute to Max Ernst, 2017, by Julia Murakami.



"Gula" (Gluttony), 2017, by Julia Murakami. I took this photo at "Zentralvieh- und Schlachthof", at a former slaughterhouse area. These days, it's abandoned, & most of the original buildings have been replaced by new town houses.

LUXURIA (LUST)

Schöneberg. Fischlabor. M. went to the emergency doctor, who gave him an injection to deliver him from his cramps, derived from his use of neuroleptics & antidepressants. When he returned to Fischlabor, he became all the more blissful & could even imagine putting on a yellow dress & dancing like there's no tomorrow.

Berlin, November 9, 1994 (diary entry)

IRA (WRATH)

"Bring me the siskin, & I will confess." Carl Großmann, Berlin serial killer

A tiny greyish-green siskin called Hänseken was witness of a series of gruesome murders which took place during the Weimar Republic. Hänseken's owner, the merchant Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Großmann, regularly invited homeless women, travellers & prostitutes to his home in Lange Straße 88/89, offering them work as a housekeeper. At that time, the police was investigating other murder cases: from 1918 to 1921, twenty-three dismembered female corpses were discovered in a canal near Großmann's home.

On 21 August 1921, neighbours reported hearing the screams of a woman coming out of Großmann's flat. Großmann was detained after the police found Marie Nitsche's mutilated body lying in his bed, covered with a blanket. In custody, Großmann strictly refused to cooperate. The murderer was more concerned about his bird. "Bring me the siskin, & I will confess," he demanded.

The next morning, Hänseken was brought to police headquarters. Detective Superintendent Werneburg was clever enough to let the murderer spend some time with his beloved creature. Later, Grossmann confessed to three murders. In July 1922, during his trial, he committed suicide in his cell. His "tiny feathered friend" remained with his renowned Berlin defense attorney Dr Erich Frey.

*Erich Frey, *Ich beantrage Freispruch – Aus den Erinnerungen des Strafverteidigers Dr. Dr. Erich Frey* (Hamburg, 1960).

GULA (GLUTTONY)

O had slightly turned her head, reading to her from "À une Passante" ("To A Passerby") from Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*. They both strolled across the cemetery & did lines on the holy water stoup in the church at Winterfeldplatz.

Berlin, November 9, 1994 (diary entry)



INVIDIA (ENVY)

Dear Universe!*

"Thus drowning their juvenile Weltschmerz in alcohol, the boys finally decided to take their own lives after killing Hilde & Hans Stephan."

"Steglitzer Schülertragödie," Berlin-Steglitz, 28 June 1927

*First line taken from Günther Scheller's suicide note

TRISTITIA OR ACEDIA (SLOTH)

a tendency to maintain momentum

At the beginning of the 90s, we were busy doing nothing. Yet we never had time. Lost in a continuous oscillation between lust & excess, self-inflicted tragedy & now & then moments of overboard creativity & natural sloth. Thus, a physician would probably have described us as objects in a state of inertia. At least, after waking up after all yesterday's parties.

Let's describe it as:

$$J = \sum_i^N m_i r_i^2 \omega^2$$





"Invidia" (Envy), 2017 (opposite); "Tristitia or Acedia" (Sloth), 1995/2017 (above), by Julia Murakami.



INTO THE BLUE
FRAGMENTS FROM THE TV GENERATION
ANDRÉ WERNER

Around 1986, André Werner & Wolfram Odin started a series of anonymous public interventions in the art world. Subliminal messages popped up under the label A&O, *incompatible reception systems*. Eventually A&O became a gallery space in the center of Kreuzberg. The program covered a wide range of disciplines, from conceptual art to lectures & screenings of video art, mainly from Berlin & New York, partly in cooperation with the Mike Steiner video gallery (the only TV broadcaster solely dedicated to video art). The former mom-&-pop store served as the base for many art events & live video performances that would take place in other galleries, abandoned buildings or in the streets.

In 1994 Cosima Reif & André Werner started to develop a film entitled *In the Eye of the Hunter, In the Heart of the Collector*. It was an attempt to recap & concentrate the reflections on mass media that triggered all the happenings surrounding A&O. The film was never finished but in retrospect the script may be read as a manifesto from that time.



"contra punkt," André Werner & Wolfram Odin, video performances (above & opposite), 1987, A&O work space, Gallery Zindel & Grabner, Oranienstr., Berlin, Kreuzberg.

It was never about cinema, this country for old men. It wasn't even about video. It was about the final step into the holy grail. To enter the blue box, to finally become one with the pale blue rays.

The video camera was the key to Aladdin's cave, & we thought we could gain control, reclaim our part of this beautiful intangible instant.

We expected an X-ray blue palace. It turned out to be a rabbit-hole.



"stay hungry," André Werner, 3-channel video installation, gallery A&O, 1990.



A phone rings, the collector of images (faceless):

Yes, I've received the letter.. Let me try.

Hold on, that's no longer the issue.

Take an analogy: We've created the infrastructure for a new sky. Satellite by satellite. Nothing but a new habitat for the gods, perfect, by all our chances.

Now we have to leave it to the higher beings.





The collector of images:

We all have at most nothing more than a function of a priest. Each one is to consecrate himself to a small portion of images, trying to figure out what he can do for them. I myself collect images that lie. With a view to making them lie better. You have no idea to which extent pictures today have lost their ability to lie.





The voice of Dr. Hershey, reading a letter to the collector of images:

Dear collector of images, do you remember Lacan? Lacan states that the mirror initiates the process of the formation of the Ego – the “me.” Like the female dove, only reaching the reproductive age once she catches sight of the cock dove, the self-awareness of man is only formed through the perception of his own reflection. Cognition of the “me” is followed by its defence, self-assertion & individualization.

Nothing is more fragile than the “me”: All his life, man will search for expanded reflections, other people, his photographs. And all the other photographs he examines on a daily basis in search of himself.



Stills from “Das Leben ist in Farbe” (Life is in Color) with Mariana Alcoforada, 1990.



A letter arrives in an attractive workroom. A female hand breaks the seal on the envelope & a male voice reads aloud from the letter.

Dear researcher of imagery, what is behind the mirror? Half my life I have asked the pictures what goes on behind their backs. Little did it help. They admitted next to nothing.

This is the situation: Once we've looked into the mirror long enough, we realize it lies. It lies because we lie. We only show the mirror what we want it to see. Like we do with the camera, once we are accustomed to it.

Indeed: the art of lying is to tell a story better than truth can. Better, more sparkling, more comforting or more disturbing. In any case, the truth is in an inferior position to the lie if men decide what they want to believe. A sundown by Turner is more expensive than any photo wallpaper because it tells a lie so much better.

I could almost feign fervour while lying, my good lady.

I miss the lie in images. Visual artists in the 90s are barely able to show the truth, then their art is over.



Stills from "Reflecting Images," live video performance with Xesa Li, 1988.



Cut. A fax arrives at the collector of images. A female voice reads it:

Dear collector of images, I still don't know why we are photographing ourselves to death. Let us suppose the image is still the reflection we attempt to become like. Through television we find ourselves in a ubiquitous house of mirrors. An international mafia of images imagines they are able to illustrate our dreams. They broadcast the images enough times around the globe until we believe they are our very own dreams. A woman is broadcast into living rooms 10,000 times. What is the result? In the end, every teenager looks like a supermodel. Go out on the streets. See for yourself. It's like television. The daily routine has been repealed to such a degree that television is forced to invent banality. What got lost on the streets may find its museological refuge here in the four-cornered frame.





Dr Hershey: *A simple rite of passage. Pay the admission & you are allowed to poke your way in the dark. A Sunday image-devouring ritual.*

The collector of images: *Photographing is thus also a ritual. What is overlooked in the process?*

Dr Hershey: *Trespases. Passages. Change. Transformation. Approaching other people. Invading someone's private sphere. Photography was invented to make this digestible. Photography became significant; remember the heart-warmingly stiff images of the 19th century, with holiday pictures, wedding photographs, images of confirmations, school enrolments, & lying in state. There are not many more passages, watersheds in the life of a person.*

The collector of images: *Love. First job. First woman. First broken heart. First losses.*

Dr Hershey: *One dies, becomes another. How dreadful if one completely ceased to be. Look at old class photos, I promise you'll suffer.*

The collector of images: *But video? Does it still hurt?*



Dr Hershey: Video was made exclusively for this decade. A certain rite of passage is slowly becoming essential: A millennium is lying on its deathbed. We can hear the death rattle. In spite of techno music, the death rattle permeates everything. Therefore, we put the video camera to our eye, drinking, swigging & guzzling in advance of ourselves?

The collector of images: We are afraid of living in a year with three zeros. The faster the turn of the millennium approaches, the more hectically we photograph time.



Dr Hershey: My God! Our elixir of life is dying. Time is coming to an end. The last exercise is to photograph time.

The collector of images: Did you ever wonder why the glass screen of the television picture tube is so impenetrable? You'll need a bigger calibre to shoot through it.



Dr Hershey: *Well, it's guarding the sanctum. A sacrament. For example, pornography*

The collector of images: *The substitution of the final transition. The greatest of all passages. But here we can feel free to dive deeper: We are obliterating sexuality by photographing it. We try to keep it alive by staging it, but only in its domesticated form.*

If we shoot sexuality in all its ordinariness, we do so solely because we cannot cope with its blatant ordinariness anymore. If we shoot it, we obliterate it. We have it in the can. In the dollhouse of life.

Dr Hershey: *To be watched. Behind bulletproof glass. ■*

*All dialogues & video stills (unless otherwise stated) are from the (unfinished) film *In the Eye of the Hunter, In the Heart of the Collector* by Cosima Reif & André Werner, 1994.

"Skin Deep," SX 70 polaroid tryptich, 1988.



"Love," SX 70 polaroid, 1987.

BERLIN IN SEVEN PENETRATIONS

KENTON TURK



PENETRATION 1

Keep it low. Dostoyevski's *Notes from the Underground* & *The Double* in a single volume, Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*, re-readers. Some pictures: *Paintings of Hieronymus Bosch*. *Teach Yourself German*, a slim blue paperback. A guitar, the twelve-string blonde with electric pickups; also a leather jacket, black second-hand Brando; an army coat for winter cold (& as a blanket), moss green; some basic clothes. Socks, all of them black, save one pair red. Underwear. Music on cassettes, yours, others', stuff that has saved your life before. The Shure-58 microphone. A handful of bucks-turned-marks made working late & split shifts in Toronto bars & restaurants. Friends give Woolf (*The Death of the Moth* & *Other Essays*) & Grass (*Headbirths, or The Germans are Dying Out*) just before the trip to the airport. The plane will land in the Frankfurt on this side (there is another Frankfurt in East Germany); from there, it will be a cross-country train ride to the border.

I am physically ahead of the others I have talked into doing this. A void-seeking Euro-reconnaissance mission under my belt not long before does it. 500 square kilometres of concrete scar tissue, this is it. Other cities, quickly sized up, open my eyes, but this one I simply don't *understand*, not really. A definite pull. This time not alone; Angela goes too, a sibling-comrade in this particular stab at the world, heading for this & that city. A *Transitvisum* will be issued to allow passage across the DDR, then come the watchtowers: West Berlin.

Photo: Looking over the Berlin Wall, by Kenton Turk.

Who is coming a short week behind us are two guys still across the ocean infected by me with the idea of living a real band life deep behind the Wall. Very, very few people are taking this step, even for a visit. I don't know any. Before leaving, there are handshakes & backslaps in watering holes & clubs, lubricated exclamations of "Really? *West Berlin?*" from the London or Paris or elsewhere or nowhere bound.

The reasons for coming are vague but potent, scraps of brain fodder that float in cerebral trenches. Dietrich, that amoral cool in *The Blue Angel*. Historic, not dated. David & Iggy's escape to Hauptstraße 155. Romy Haag, maybe. *Christiane F*, the needle-pierces-skin close-up notwithstanding. Adrienne in the heroin sci-fi *Liquid Sky*: "We'll go to Berlin, baby." Rotten pre-Lydon ripping his throat out with "Over the Berlin Waaaaaaahh!" Could be. Nina Hagen, rasping insistence, "Give it up, Smack Jack!" None of the foregoing vital, but they choose the right places to install themselves in my subconscious. The gut feeling is "Yes! Yes!!!" Some are not Berlin-specific, but Berlin-feel: DAF (Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft), "Die lustigen Stiefel" or "Der Mussolini" burning deep into my bones & psyche. Helmut Berger's insolent "Scheißdreck!" in Visconti's *The Damned*. Hypothermic Kraftwerk on the *Trans-Europa Express*. Xmal Deutschland. *Zeitgeist* in spades. Topping the list is this: Shed your skin. Deliver something. West Berlin is the deepest penetration into the East-West divide achievable. London & Paris remain the expected Euro-destinations; some hit Latin America or Southeast Asia, but West Berlin remains off the map.



I am going to live here & not be a lie.

The guys & I will set up camp & make music; we've started already. We are not *startbereit* – new recruits will be needed. No waiting. I need out. Temerity & gung-ho in liberal proportions will open doors for us.

Coming by rail is jumping from the audience into the action of a Cold War thriller. The shakedown by DDR officers once the border is crossed is thorough, theatrical, even. Books, yours, are leafed through at time-consuming leisure. Then another border, the entry back into the West, a breakaway island of it. Soldiers, *Volkspolizei*, watch everything from above. Military planes & helicopters are omnipresent. You can feel lonely here, but alone, no.

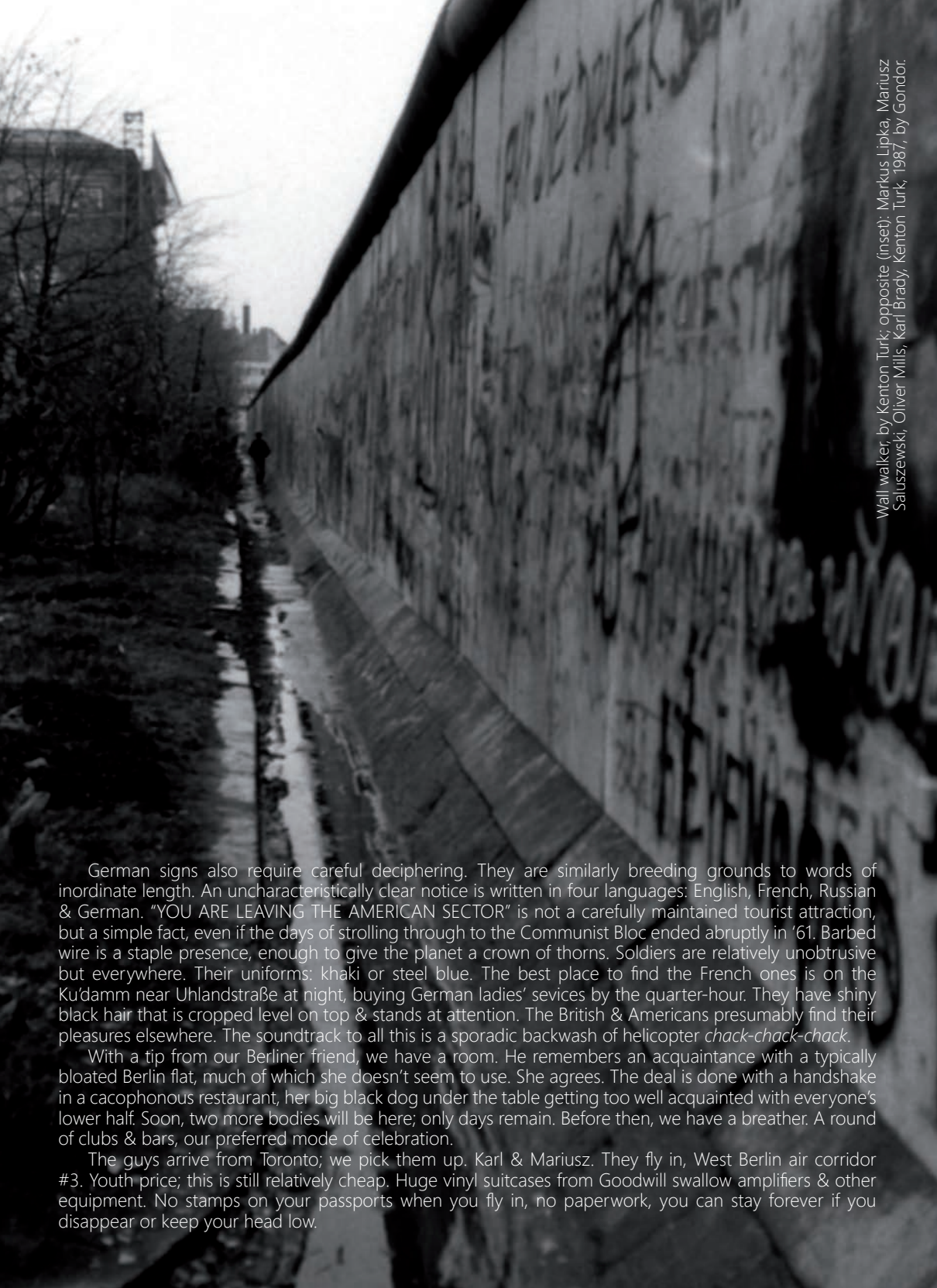
Last stop. The train pulls in: Bahnhof Zoo. Downstairs with guitar & other unwieldy stuff, into the first taxi there, a shock of studiously unruly white hair waiting at the wheel. The sun beats down like a crazy man attacking us, great. Sunglasses down over our eyes, heads down to get into the car. We have an address, a cheap place to stay. "You in a band?" the driver asks. A girl, maybe 25. Pulls out into traffic, thick here. "So am I. I just drive days. Play at night." It is tight in the car with all our stuff. I have no real plans, either to stay or return. The window is rolled down; for now, I hang my head out. It's a protected zone – I've got the bullethead on, enough hardened hair slick to stop a speeding projectile. Inside it, there is a looped groove, "Volks...tanz!" chasing another, "Wenn-die-Bettelleute-tan...zen! Wenn-die-Bettelleute-tan...zen!" Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft. A twist on the Soviet-soaked original; what a name for a band.

PENETRATION 2

I know only one guy here, barely, a guy I met in Paris. His "I am from *Berrr-lin*" is rich in tone & self-assuredness. So I call him up. ("Just call," he said.) He is unrecognizable when we meet: short-shorn, unlike the Jesus look he had in Paris. Turns out he cuts his hair only once a year. Skinhead or hippie, depending on the time of year you meet him. Loves Metaxa, calls it "*phan-tas-tisch*," drawing out the word to a preposterously sensual length. We get him a bottle & go to meet up with him. Feet first into West Berlin.

My job: set things up, fast. Apartment first.

It turns out there is a lot to learn, pitfalls to sidestep. Lessons learned: "Wessies" (say: "Vessies") are West Germans, from the faraway *Bundesrepublik*. Strange animals in the eyes of those within the Wall. Our Berliner warns us not to take the "Wessie seat" on the bus (upper level, front), a humiliation he likely couldn't bear. Of Wessies, he says, "You tell zem you are from *Berrr-lin*, ja, & zey say, 'Oh, I want to touch you!'" This is not *Berliner Schnauze* (the Berlin eat-shit attitude), just the cocky confidence of someone who knows his situation is special, or better, unique. Another lesson: the accommodation thing cannot completely be solved with a dictionary. There are tricky euphemisms. *Abstandszahlung* may translate as compensation fee for furniture, but really means you may have to pay thousands of marks for worthless contents just to get the lease. The tongue-twisting *Wohnberechtigungsschein* (mercifully shortened to "WBS") is a piece of government paper you might need to get a particular place. There is less to think about in the bars at night, so we do that a good deal as an equalizer.



Wall walker, by Kenton Turk; opposite (inset): Mariusz Saluszewski, Oliver Mills, Karl Brady, Kenton Turk, 1987, by Gondor.

German signs also require careful deciphering. They are similarly breeding grounds to words of inordinate length. An uncharacteristically clear notice is written in four languages: English, French, Russian & German. "YOU ARE LEAVING THE AMERICAN SECTOR" is not a carefully maintained tourist attraction, but a simple fact, even if the days of strolling through to the Communist Bloc ended abruptly in '61. Barbed wire is a staple presence, enough to give the planet a crown of thorns. Soldiers are relatively unobtrusive but everywhere. Their uniforms: khaki or steel blue. The best place to find the French ones is on the Ku'damm near Uhlandstraße at night, buying German ladies' services by the quarter-hour. They have shiny black hair that is cropped level on top & stands at attention. The British & Americans presumably find their pleasures elsewhere. The soundtrack to all this is a sporadic backwash of helicopter *chack-chack-chack*.

With a tip from our Berliner friend, we have a room. He remembers an acquaintance with a typically bloated Berlin flat, much of which she doesn't seem to use. She agrees. The deal is done with a handshake in a cacophonous restaurant, her big black dog under the table getting too well acquainted with everyone's lower half. Soon, two more bodies will be here; only days remain. Before then, we have a breather. A round of clubs & bars, our preferred mode of celebration.

The guys arrive from Toronto; we pick them up. Karl & Mariusz. They fly in, West Berlin air corridor #3. Youth price; this is still relatively cheap. Huge vinyl suitcases from Goodwill swallow amplifiers & other equipment. No stamps on your passports when you fly in, no paperwork, you can stay forever if you disappear or keep your head low.

Low indeed. Being here is being nowhere. West Berlin is not officially in any country. Rough-edged, dirty – people are actually paid to move here. A lot of places look like the War ended yesterday. Hess is still here, spared noose ballet in Spandau Prison. The smell of coal is in the air, streets, buildings, your clothes. And it is walled in. Coming over means cutting connections with all & sundry across the ocean. You may not see any of these people very soon. Nothing but truncated metallic calls made from a post office or corner telephone with alien German coins that don't buy much time on the display, the numbers clicking by like a determined Geiger counter. *Hi-I'm-all-right-is-everyone-OK-yeah-we-got-a-place-to-play-down-in-a-basement-somewhere-hope-you're-OK-will-call-again.*



Discoveries in the first days: currywurst (sausage with curried ketchup), *Pommes-Rot-Weiß* (fries with ketchup & mayonnaise), döner kebab (shaved lamb in flatbread). Unmarked cans of bland food, denizens of supermarkets' lower shelves – excess production of emergency rations in case of another Soviet blockade. Also Berlin's newsprint Bible, a semi-weekly rag called *Zweite Hand* – this is the place to find everything. An ad goes in: drummer, guitarist both needed. My experience with this method back home produced a revolving door of the bizarre. I hope for swifter luck here. We are living on saved cash, not a lot; we need to get gigs without too much dicking around.

It goes fast. In countable days there is group. Five guys. A quick rundown: Karl (born Carl, I suggest the "K" for Euro-effect) escaped a one-traffic-light outpost in Ontario; he is a love-slave to Hank Williams & early beat obscurities. Ex-sea cadet Mariusz has defected from Poland; an improv jazzman behind the Iron Curtain, he jumped ship one night to an organized flight in a waiting car. Karl & I scooped him up in Toronto. The Germans: Oliver, ex of the later legendary band *Jetzt!*, a wunderkind student of percussion at the HdK who has played for & peed next to Bernstein; he is still in his teens. Markus loves dark metal & Bach, hates punk & electrowave. Not a talker. Plays us something he's done called "Der Greuel" ("The Abomination") & is in. With me, that makes five. My angle: making words & music that fit abstract pictures in my head. No real narratives. No choruses. Sometimes no words. Instruments: voice, sometimes guitar. Started in with theatre & killed that to be in a band – something cathartic but safely distant about spilling your guts at 100+ decibels. A more disparate crew is hard to assemble. We go at the thing with a name that means nothing, with proud intention. It is ripped off the *Berliner Morgenpost* logo atop the Europa-Center, then given a twist. A two-parter with a hyphen. An uncommon word: recognizability, a ubiquitous one: free advertising. Ready to do the deed. Three of us live in a spare room (oversized flats are still available for a song in West Berlin) of an all-smiles, marginally employed woman who has a penchant for hand-jobbing her large black dog, who sits stock still & erect during these sessions. This achieved with red wine in the other hand. She dances almost every night at a nearby disco with the oddly sober name Golgotha. It is on a hill in Viktoriapark. We dance too, sometimes, but elsewhere. Different music.

PENETRATION 3

Night, darkness, lots of it. Ticking gadgets kill lights before you can make it up the stairs to your flat. Everything practical closes at 18:00 (6:00p.m.) during the regular week (save *Langer Donnerstag*, the weekly Long Thursday, which stretches things back to 20:30); on the weekend this is moved forward to 1:30p.m. We almost never wake up before 4:00p.m. But the endless bars & dark clubs remain open as it suits them, often all night, free of *Sperrstunde*. They can feel like the bottom of an ashtray, smell of yesterday's beer & today's bladder relief. I am pulled to these holes, although I constantly forget their names. Wee-hours spots. Many are quiet, with drinking a serious nightly occupation.

Other attractions lurk out there in the night. Solitary Russian soldiers guard the Soviet monument on "Straße des 17. Juni" on the West side of Brandenburger Tor & the Wall, silent silhouettes in the dark on a boulevard named after the stone-throwing uprising against their political grip. Enclave within enclave, a piece of the East in the West in the East. You can call out a greeting in their direction, but they will not answer. It is a bit risky, as you can be told (in Russian) to leave that side of the street, which is actually off-limits to civilians (& likely to non-Soviet Bloc soldiers). I experience this at least once, German Shepherds roaring disapproval into the cold night air. It is near somewhere better yet, my go-to spot to wander in the dark: the broad empty assembly field in front of the Reichstag, monolithic & unlit, like Ayers Rock with architectural extras. I will walk here alone many nights, local history throwing up menacing pictures. Surely no one will ever use this place again.

West Berlin can be an oddly quiet place at night. Quiet & dark, unlit. Besides the Reichstag, there are



countless disused areas, piles of rubble, dead corners. Any commercial lighting tends to be a cold blue, a colour Germans clearly go for in a big way. This can make you feel hollow when you are lonely, but those days are ahead at this point. The pervasive darkness is alien to someone raised on excessive lighting, but welcome too, a kind of frozen anonymity. The contrast to places spitting light at you, places with music & activity, is then greater. Both win at each other's doorstep.

Before the others get in from Toronto, let's see what's up & running. Our Berliner volunteers for service. An unflagging night companion, he drags us from den to den. We go awake & willing. "You look like a girl from Kreuzberg," he tells Angela; this seems to confer approval. We want to drink & dance, but it is not so easy with the tall Berliner. Tonight he decides to toss his approval at Turbine Rosenheim, somewhere around Eisenacher Straße, a walk-down club that houses benevolently glowering guests lining a bar counter. They are turned to you as you walk past on the way to a tiny dance floor that has bodies convulsing in epileptic spasms to dissonant distractions. We hit this one only after a series of near-misses, our to-the-core Berliner guide dismissing clubs one after another with a quick glance in the door & a rejection invariably worded, "Not my style."

We walk down. From the dark into the dark. The jivers are doing justice to "No Tears" (ageing but fresh, Tuxedomoon). Creatures of the night, oh yes. The sound is crunched into a contained explosion, "No-tears-for-the-creatures-of-the-night-uh-uh-oh-no-uh-uh..." The thing is to get to that little floor & fast;

some sounds won't let you wait. A girl is all shakes & twitching, a big-framed lass with a grin like a rip in a bag of stuffing. The guy next to her dances, jumps, but jazzy cool, unfitting but fitting. The music is a kind of avalanche, a blessed burial in an abrasion of saw-toothed tones. You can't stop moving in a place like this. At least tonight won't let it happen. Drinks turn up; the calories get flung out of your system while the effect multiplies on itself. For some reason, I like to close my eyes when dancing, a kind of reflex that might have to do with holding the pleasure in. I dance & sweat hot & cold between black walls, & the night goes on & on & on. It is fully light when we get out. The apartment still hasn't happened; we trek back to our Kantstraße *Pension* (guesthouse) which seems to have an endless stream of quite old, half-dressed gents moving between rooms, white-towelled from the waist down. Details like this do not get much attention when you are dead from a night of hijinks. The mission of the moment: expire, let sleep in the door. No trouble at all.



Around 11:00 there is a brisk knock on the door. "Time to go!" says a commanding German voice. The sturdy proprietress. Counter volley: "Actually, we were planning to stay another day..." A gruff & unequivocal answer in a deep voice you'd do better not to ignore. "No. I need zuh beds." No choice but to scramble into clothes & sit in the painfully bright light of day in a small (& rare) parking lot on Kantstraße. What now. Too exhausted to think of finding a new place to check in & sleep. Angela & I wander over to Savignyplatz for a change of scenery. An old man in the park offers a crumpled paper with his address. She can stay with him, it says. The first offer of the day. I am somewhere between today's predicament & last night's swath of tones & libation. My tongue is parched, but what I hear in my head is directed elsewhere. Tuxedomoon again: "My! Eyes! Are! DRY!"

PENETRATION 4

How not to drink in East Berlin:

There is another side to this city. Angie, Oliver & I cross into East Berlin, formal title: "Berlin, capital of the DDR." (The other side they refer to as "Westberlin." It is a blank white space on their maps.) I have done this before. Even managed to steal a picture going through Checkpoint Charlie, a definite no-no. The camera is a Praktica, as solid & heavy as a miniature anvil, ready to do double service as a lethal weapon, if necessary. Made in the DDR. Guards at the crossover point are characteristically solemn. Slate grey uniforms, no verbal extras. When this Westerner is spied with this minor pride of East German technology, one ventures a sentence in English: "Good camera." More is not exchanged. That day, it is raining. Most memorable is the empty inner city (I know enough German to translate "Stadtmitte" at a disused U-Bahn station as "City Centre") & the uniformity of cars – Trabants, or "Trabis," all of them, & all milky grey, with very few exceptions in pale blue. The picture I steal here is on the way back: an elderly woman has come to bid farewell to a day visitor (you must return to the West by midnight), & waits behind the barriers, held fast in East Berlin, until the out-of-towner is out of sight. The girl is her granddaughter, it turns out, a young woman from Chicago full of unconcerned American vigour. I get her to give me the lowdown as we re-enter West Berlin. The sight of the old woman standing behind the barriers is one of those *Life* magazine moments. I have to get it. I take it with my Praktika hidden under my jacket. I get the address of the American girl to send her the picture, but never end up getting it to her. The address, scribbled on a slip of paper, turns up years later; a search shows me she has become a lawyer. I try to make contact with her. No answer.

You can reach the other side without entering it. West Berlin trains slow & pull through the East sector on their way back into the West – the area around Unter den Linden is inserted into West Berlin's side like the prong of a jigsaw puzzle piece. Darkened stations, armed guards. Corrugated barriers flank elevated tracks, blocking your view as you cross Museumsinsel, then you arrive at Friedrichstraße. Mariusz's friend from Poland visits; the two, Karl & I journey one day to the lower platform. He is in abject terror. Downstairs it is the West; go a flight up & you are in the East Bloc. The friend, a night-run defector like Mariusz, sees a KGB hitman behind every pillar. We tell him his jitters are unfounded, but 100% sure we are not. What he knows or might have done is unknown to us.

This time, Angie & I cross at Friedrichstraße. Oliver is coming with us; as a West German, he cannot cross at Checkpoint Charlie. The others are busy in West Berlin. When we enter, we find once central areas largely dead, like a studio back lot. We are in a loose mood & play silly street games & laugh at this & that & think to take a picture here & there until we hear a rap at a window four or five floors above ground. We are still quite near the Wall from the other side. An arm extends & a forefinger waves back & forth like a miniature



Woman at Checkpoint Charlie, 1985, by Kenton Turk

windshield wiper. The camera is put away & we walk in relative silence towards the more populated Marx-Engels-Platz & Palast der Republik.

We are dressed in our usual gear: black shirts, leather jackets, jeans. Moving around, we get not a few sidelong looks. The minimum exchange is 25 Deutschmark (no "S" in the plural, I learn) against 25 Ost-Mark (simply called "Mark" over here), plus an Ost-Mark charge for the one-day visa, an additional five. It is almost impossible to actually spend the money. There is a bar in "Honecker's Lamp Shop," the Palast der Republik, an (as it turns out) asbestos-filled structure with copper-coloured mirror-glass outside & endless Ikea-style lighting fixtures inside. Seat of parliament with some earthly distractions. We duck into a bar, look at the drink list. Shots for prices lower than is credible. Great; we start in on some rounds, treating each other. It is easy to be generous here. We still have a fistful of Ost-Mark each. Quickly, they are transformed into alcohol.

It does not go well. Despite the prices. The barman mutters this & that; Angie & I are oblivious, but Oliver is German & catches it all. Soon there is a discussion going on that we two are left out of. Hazy-happy from schnaps, we pester with questions: "What is he saying? What are you two going on about?" It turns out to be a discussion not unlike the Nixon-Kruschchev "Kitchen Debate." *How terrible in the West, everything so expensive. Ah, don't forget, we earn more. Wouldn't want to live there. Wouldn't want to live here.* Soon the bartender is speaking above our heads to other guests, gesturing derisively in our direction. Some of them

respond with chuckles. Not even cheap schnaps can save this particular drinking party. He is clearly fuzzy-headed, the result of drinking too many misunderstood orders, presumably. The drinking continues, slightly more sombre. Then our barman leans in towards Oliver & whispers something. The drinks don't haze our curiosity, & Angie & I want to know what it is about. "Later," Oli says. The lowdown comes outside. Our barman confides that he might speak quite differently, but not here. He is being watched.



PENETRATION 5

"What's the name of this place again?"

Going in. "Don't know. I never know place names. It's outside somewhere."

"I'll read it next time."

Faces don't turn as you enter. Who's here. Tonight it looks like only four, plus the barman. Two here near the door, two at the bar. The latter women hunched over glasses with crests, some German logos. One is coughing. Fits interrupted by pulling on a cigarette.

"...is doch wahr, sag ick dir! Sieht jeder!"

"Na, sagst DU."

"Klar, sag ick doch! Und nochmal, wenn'de willst!"

Getting near the bar now. Taking a table.

"Ach, ihr seid es!" The barman calls out with bland welcome. "Na? Bierchen?"

Oliver orders for the two of us in German. Still out of my grasp. "Paar vom Fass, Meister."

This is going to take time. About eight minutes for "ein gutes Gepflegtes," a beer drawn properly so that the head starts at the line marked on the glass & rises to a formidable dome. No problem waiting. No rush here at somewhere between 3:00 & 4:00a.m.

"... Na, was haben wir denn da?" She turns only a bit; an elbow still rooted to the bar.

Pools of grey make up the place. The illumination is spare, greenish, like a sick joke told in fluorescent lighting. Grey corners fight intrusion near the counter, partly thwarted. We zero in on a table there, across from the bar. Not in the dark.

This night, most nights, it is Hopperesque, many more stools & chairs than needed. Several tables between us & the other one occupied. We wait on the beer with a strategic view of the counter. Nods in that direction.

Two reptiles at the bar, the women, 40, 50. Or thirty-something, possibly, but with some mileage. The couple in the darkened corner unverifiable. "Kommt doch'rüber, Jungs!" Oli looks at me; I say nothing but return a quizzical look signalling approval. We move over to the bar as ordered.

The beer makes its appearance, placed in front of us wordlessly. Golden even in the freezer-burn light. A wink from the barkeeper.

Our music comes up on the speakers. A little ritual – the proprietor has a demo we gave him; he puts it on at some point whenever we stop by.

Our mistress of the moment gives an us earnest look while her companion gives herself to the two-fold task of drinking & smoking. Drag follows gulp, then reflection before the same double action.

Reptile #1 speaks. A raspy warm voice. Full of nocturnal charm.

"Na? Schon wieder so spät unterwegs?" I ask Oliver for a translation.

"Ach, you don't speak German? You English? From Canada?" Her glass has long since disappeared; the wait is on for the next round.

"So vat do you boys do? Ach! You play in a band, ja?"

The beer goes down again. I like the bitterness. "Yeah. Mm-hm."

"Mm-hm." Turning to the bartender: "Aber det Bier bekomm' ick noch, ja?" Looking this way: "Vat kind of music you play?"

"Stuff like this. It's playing. That's us right now."

"Ziss is you?" Her beer arrives with a theatrical flourish, she nods appreciation. A swill makes its way down her gullet. Cigarette to mouth, inhale, hold, exhale. "But vat kind of music is that, vat do you call ziss kind of music? Ziss one is, weiß ich nicht, I dunno, kind of... I don't know vat you call ziss."

I tell her. Only a title. "After vat? After Suprematism? Ja? But vat is zat? Vat is zat to sing a song about? Vat do you say? God in black triangles? Echt, ja? But you would be happier with a boy-girl-type song, or?"

The beer goes down fast now. A good one; it is easier to get much worse. No satisfying answers for the



Opposite (inset): Angela Turk, from *Ausgang*, dir. K. Turm & S. Wolf, 1990. This page: Kenton Turk & Mariusz Saluszewski (Karl Brady, Markus Lipka, Oliver Mills hidden), at Alte-TU Mensa, 1987, photographer unknown.

lady's questions. She goes for another tack.

"Was? Vat? Was für eine Post? 'Maven-Post'? Vat is zat, ziss sounds like a newspaper. You know, zere's a big newspaper here viss a name like ziss, *Berliner Morgenpost*, you can see ziss big neon sign, ja, MORGENPOST in big letters, you know ziss?"

"Sure. Kind of got the name from that."

"Ach, was!" She takes the glass & lets her lips unfurl over the edge. Takes a good swig. Her friend, sitting on her far side, has turned our way. The two in the corner silently keep the shadows company.

Number One swivels from facing the bar & I see she has scales. All over. A crocodile drinking lager. She grins, all world-wise friendliness.

A long, greenish tail extends from under her skirt. Muscular, scaly, it taps about tentatively before snaking its way around my barstool & pulling me a little closer. Her eyes flash yellow. My companion looks down but says nothing, consuming his second beer in curious silence, his eyes narrowed to focus on details in the shadows below us.

"You can sit closer. No problem, *oder?*"

I look away from her to a spot behind the bar. "*Jetzt erfrischen!*" glares back, a resolute commercial message from a red refrigerator. Number Two looks up from her drink. She turns her gaze towards the barkeeper's back. He is leaned over a newspaper, reading. She inhales, holds, expels a cloud of fumes, clears her throat to speak.

"*Wie heißt denn nochmal dieser Schuppen?*"

PENETRATION 6

Swing is pitched at an angle across from the 1907 film-palace-turned-dance-hall Metropol. Frau Riefenstahl surely cruises the dark recesses – seeing a matinee here, Nollendorfplatz, pulled her (for better or worse) into film. The boy bars of West Berlin, midcore, hardcore, places to get it fast, they shoot out from this spot. Café Swing (the full name, most abbreviate) oversees it at the top of the street like a sentry at an open gate. Days go to *Kaffee & Kunst*, caffeinated brew & edgy art; here, the full name fits better. Nights, less so.

Swing has this odd approach to live acts: one band a week, Thursday night, show start 1:00a.m. Why so, no idea. National chart-toppers (Rainbirds, others) do shows here, but others, off-label, off-beat bands, fresh meat, can also get the spot, if selected. No opening acts. We get the nod based on a demo cassette hand-delivered to proprietress Doro while still sight seen in this city. Playing there is only our third gig in West Berlin. It is mid-January & bloody cold.

The city, this side of the Anti-Fascist Protective Wall/Death Strip at least, is still a city of Berliners. *Mauerkinder*, action artists, academic-hopefuls, H-junkies, WWII widows, cabaret drags, *Bundeswehr* draft-dodgers, *Antifas*, freaks, *Deuschtürken*, *WeißBerliner*, *SchwarzBerliner*. The language is German, broken or not. Turkish can take the upper hand in Kreuzberg & Neukölln. Still, Berlin is home, not a hip backdrop. Newer arrivals, the few that come, are here to be Berliners of some stripe. The people of the city are undeterred by weather adversities when it comes to bar-hopping & clubbing. It is not about giddy fun. They go about it with Neo-Prussian determination mixed with *Endzeit* fervour. The last trains going out weekend nights are the first ones boarded in search of what the night will offer. The first trains around 4:30a.m. bring earlier flaggers homeward. The crowd that comes out to see us on this weeknight chokes the place & surprises us back into a nervousness dropped after the first gig, where Mariusz maniacally fed new strings into his bass, missed the holes & penetrated his fingers, bleeding all over the fretboard. There is no way to get to the railed stage but through the crowd, & no other way back afterwards. A cozy one-night lock-up.

We get in place. The ceiling is coming down at us in epidermal strips. Cold air, smoke & sweat mix into an inhalable cocktail. Getting close, wanting to kick at the last lap. Outside, there is evidence of advance legwork, posters, a still from *The Damned* rotated to make it look like Ingrid Thulin is giving Dirk Bogarde the kiss of death, hand-made. In German, ironically exotic on posters here. The short-term lead-up looked like this: morning: transport of equipment; afternoon: radio interview in what looks like a munitions factory, early evening: sound check, 10:00p.m.: leave Swing for haircuts (we cut each others'), night: back here to do the thing. We go into the set like military men of passion. A Berlin band without a Berliner in the lot, all escapees of elsewhere. The guys look deadly serious, as always. Button-up, suspenders, ties – deadpan dandyism, no discussion or agreement, it just happens. We are backlit, so I am not completely blinded. I





see eyes open & close, heads kick back & pitch forward, hear German shouts & calls ("*Spielt noch einen, ey!*") but otherwise I don't register much. The whole street front of the place is continuous glass, & a crowd stands outside pressed against it, watching what's going on. In the cold, edging towards 2:00a.m. It is January 1988. Thoughts of this city being without a surrounding Wall & death strip are not on anyone's horizon.

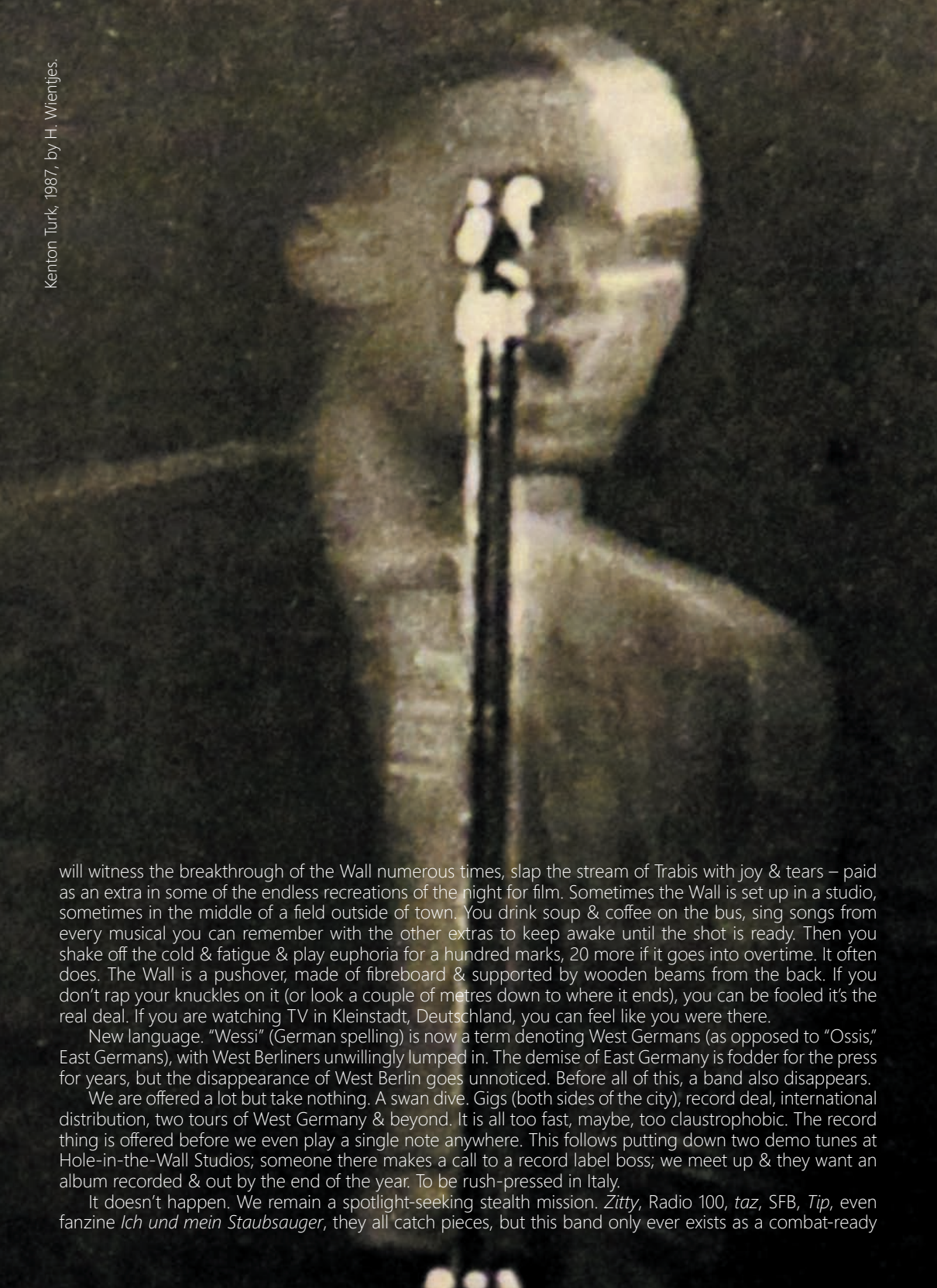
Now we are assaulting people in the dark with amplified angularities. New songs penned in Berlin. "*AM – I – FALL – ING – DOWN?*" – I am barking this into the Shure-58; yelps come back at us from the dark. Two guitars do a gruelling call-&-response at blissful-painful decibel levels, *wah!-wah!-wah!!!-chack!-chack!-chack!!!-wah!-wah!-wah!!!-chack!-chack!-chack!!!* Karl, Markus. "*Divide*," this one is called, the two sides of everything, falling apart, the human or any other variety. It doesn't occur to me until years later that this is about this very city, maybe a cry of premonition from the Wall itself. No surprise, the ambiguity. I like songs you can flip. This way, I can give it something whatever the mood of the moment. "*Bravery Rises & Falls*": sex in war, war in sex. "*Good News From a Far Country*": call to euphoria or suicide. I also go for the tangled or intangible. "*After Suprematism*": God hiding in paintings. "*Face Downward*": self-breeding questions, a spiralling loop. "*Resolve*": primordial mess giving birth to an unfathomable order. Put this on a driving bass & backbeat. Titles are only indirect clues; lyrics morph without warning. No breaks between numbers. Words & sweat spill out, "*...you move for the last time, on your slimy berth...*," things from my own private maelstrom going out to people who likely can't make them out & may have no need of them, German-speakers mostly invisible in the dark; well sure, you reckon with this. In any case, it does something for me. "*I-am-occupied!-I-am-burning-in-headlong-flight!*" & my lungs get emptied. Adrenaline rush.

The end. We make our way through a crowd yelling for a *Zugabe* (encore). "*Zu-ga-be! Tsou-gah-BUH!*" The place is still in darkness, the throng is tight. This all takes some time. It is quite an experience. We are not an encore band; we have never prepared one. There is instead a long outro tape playing, a kind of getaway manoeuvre, the oppressive din of gargantuan bells, a forest of Big Bens competing for your eardrums. The soundtrack to King Kong's hangover. Doro comes at us in the makeshift backstage area (a tight squeeze behind the bar); she asks why we don't go back & play more. *Macht doch!* This is a great response, she tells us, from a usually jaded Berlin audience. *Ach, so.* But we leave it at that. Getting back to the stage would take as long as getting away from it took. Our few local pals, Michael (say "Misha-ELL," later DJ Mijk van Dijk), band members' girls, a couple of others, are there as well, & drink later with us while we pack things up. We have no manager or game plan for touring West Germany or beyond, so when we are offered both that night, there is no shortage of self-produced dopamine. Cloud Nine for a night.

PENETRATION 7

The mistake is that Berlin without a Wall is a more interesting place. Yes, no, yes, no. No. People come in droves to look, but local deities leave in droves. There is a feeling that Berlin is over, at least for now. Barcelona, later Dublin, become new places-to-be for these types. This happens fast. Drag divas & other human diversions disappear from the Ku'damm, wide eyes & stone-washed denim replace them. Kreuzberg 36 is crushed by even cheaper playholes in Prenzlauer Berg on the East side. You could drive a fully-armoured tank through O-Straße on weekend nights in the early 90s & not hit a soul. Bars & clubs of local legend falter & die – Drama, Orpheo, Risiko, Ex'n'Pop. Turbine Rosenheim. Swing. The wobbly-kneed ones are extinguished fast, the brave ones flicker. God bless Roses, if not the new crowd there. Here in Berlin, not a few on both sides cry out "*Ich will meine Mauer wieder haben, und zwar zweimal so hoch!*" ("I want my Wall back, & twice as high!") in this uncomfortable quickie marriage of nations & sensibilities. The sentiment finds its way onto T-shirts & more, none of which turn up at flea markets in years to come. This pairing is uncomfortable, at least at ground level of Ground Zero. Two puzzle pieces are forced into a fit.

More changes. The revolution is fought on freedom of thought & won on freedom to shop. Supermarket shelves go begging for wares. Shaving cream to be ordered two weeks in advance. Polish consumers come in filth-encrusted buses & stock up on what will likely sell well on the black market back home, sleeping in front of bulk-buy stores until opening time. Trabants, those grey East German cars, disappear within a year. Shiny *West-Autos* replace them. The relics do service elsewhere, when the Wall comes down again & again. I miss the event, travelling to London for a visit (Angela is now living there) two days before, but I



will witness the breakthrough of the Wall numerous times, slap the stream of Trabis with joy & tears – paid as an extra in some of the endless recreations of the night for film. Sometimes the Wall is set up in a studio, sometimes in the middle of a field outside of town. You drink soup & coffee on the bus, sing songs from every musical you can remember with the other extras to keep awake until the shot is ready. Then you shake off the cold & fatigue & play euphoria for a hundred marks, 20 more if it goes into overtime. It often does. The Wall is a pushover, made of fibreboard & supported by wooden beams from the back. If you don't rap your knuckles on it (or look a couple of metres down to where it ends), you can be fooled it's the real deal. If you are watching TV in Kleinstadt, Deutschland, you can feel like you were there.

New language. "Wessi" (German spelling) is now a term denoting West Germans (as opposed to "Ossis," East Germans), with West Berliners unwillingly lumped in. The demise of East Germany is fodder for the press for years, but the disappearance of West Berlin goes unnoticed. Before all of this, a band also disappears.

We are offered a lot but take nothing. A swan dive. Gigs (both sides of the city), record deal, international distribution, two tours of West Germany & beyond. It is all too fast, maybe, too claustrophobic. The record thing is offered before we even play a single note anywhere. This follows putting down two demo tunes at Hole-in-the-Wall Studios; someone there makes a call to a record label boss; we meet up & they want an album recorded & out by the end of the year. To be rush-pressed in Italy.

It doesn't happen. We remain a spotlight-seeking stealth mission. *Zitty*, Radio 100, *taz*, SFB, *Tip*, even fanzine *Ich und mein Staubsauger*, they all catch pieces, but this band only ever exists as a combat-ready



Marvin-Post (Kenton Turk, Markus Lypka)
at Café Swing, 1988, by Gonder.

unit behind the Wall. When it falls, we have already left the building. All the gigs we do, a handful, actually take place within a three-month span. We don't make records, leaving a trail worthy of Poirot or Holmes.

An Ian Curtis finale might have been more spectacular, but this expires for no graspable reason. My immediate band-aid: return to Toronto for a bit, clear any mental wreckage. Some fan mail comes overseas, making me think of what could have gone down with this group of unmatched guys, & where. Records in Japan. Maybe they would have been good. Maybe not.

In a parallel universe, it all comes to be, but none of us has the spacecraft to get there. You can look up at the distant stars & speculate how it went.

Earth is easier to get around. In quick succession, my movements look like this: Berlin-Toronto-New York-Toronto-London-Hamburg-Berlin-London-(the Wall falls)-Berlin-Paris-Berlin-Prague-Berlin-Berlinberlinberlin. Berlin wins me over long-term, despite some uncomfortable shifts in the sand.

The rest, those hide-&-seek enticements, they all come into close range at some point, without forcing it. Sushi & clubbing with Nina Hagen & her array of demonic voices. Romy Haag sings from my lap on her TV show. I join & tour with another formation, Markus's brainchild Rossburger Report (four, then twelve electric guitars, a new Wall, this time one of sound); two members are ex-Xmal Deutschland. One, now passed on, asks me to form a band with him. I talk to someone at a party for half an hour before realizing it is *the* Christiane F. I don't live that ill-defined lie.

Up & on to other things, the principle of sharks. Photography. Experimental film. Other kinds of writing. Pen & paper prove reliable in good times & bad. No money down, no collaborators. Writing opens up, dropping the musical aspect & the hatchet trim. You can kill your quill in some cities; Berlin is full of stories. People on the trains carry them on their faces or expurge them in actual words, whether you get them or not. Just write what you see, add some you don't see. Music quakes your stomach, but words can bushwhack your brain. You can stay alive this way.

Part one in the can. *Nächste Einstellung*. Also for Berlin. The voluptuous, voracious monster has a special talent for swallowing up its past. It licks its great lips & devours this episode in a single gulp. No records, no trace of having been, save a scrawled name in once-wet concrete steps hiding in a Kreuzberg *Hinterhof*. Still there. ■



* PENETRATION 1: *Transitvisum* = transit visa (issued as permission to cross over the GDR without entering); *DDR* = Deutsche Demokratische Republik (GDR, German Democratic Republic); *Deutsch-amerikanische Freundschaft* = German-American friendship (variation on *DDR* slogan "German-Soviet friendship"); *Scheißdreck!* = Shit! (lit. "Shit dirt!"); *tartbereit* = ready to start; *Volkspolizei* = People's Police (GDR); *Bahnhof Zoo* = central train station of West Berlin (actual name "Zoologischer Garten"); *Volkstanz!* = "Folk dance!" (DAF, from *Die kleinen und die Bösen*, Mute Records STUMM-1, 1980); *"Wenn die Bettleute tanzen!"* = "When the beggar folk dance!" (DAF, as above). PENETRATION 2: *Bundesrepublik* = Federal Republic (of Germany); *Berliner Schnauze* = Berlin attitude of brash arrogance; *Ku'damm* = popular abbreviation for Kurfürstendamm, upscale main avenue of West Berlin; *Zweite Hand* = "Second Hand"; *hDK* = Hochschule der Künste (College of the Arts). PENETRATION 3: *Sperrstunde* = mandatory closing time for establishments serving alcohol; *Brandenburger Tor* = Brandenburg Gate; *Kreuzberg* = Bohemian district of Berlin with high Turkish population. PENETRATION 4: *Palast der Republik* = "Palace of the Republic," the parliament building of the GDR; *Honecker* = Erich Honecker, 1912 - 1994, General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, 1971 - 1989. PENETRATION 5: "... *is doch wahr, sag ick dir! Sieht jeder!*" = "...but it is true, I tell ya! Anyone can see that!"; *"Na, sagst DU"* = "Yeah, so YOU say"; *"Klar, sag ick doch! Und nochmal, wenn'de willst!"* = "Sure, I say so. And I'll say it again, if ya want"; *"Ach, ihr seid es!"* = "Ah, it's you guys!"; *"Na? Bierchen?"* = "So? Have a beer?"; *"Paar vom Fass, Meister!"* = "A couple from tap, guv!"; *"ein gutes Geflügtes"* = a well-poured beer, with the head starting at the glass's content demarcation line; "... *Na, was haben wir denn da?"* = "Well, what do we have here, then?"; *"Kommt doch rüber, Jungs!"* = "Come on over, boys!"; *"Na? Schon wieder so spät unterwegs?"* = "Well, then? Out & about so late again?"; *"Aber det Bier bekomm' ick noch, ja?"* = "But I'm gonna get that beer, right?"; *"Echt, ja?"* = "Oh, really?"; *"Was für eine Post?"* = "What kind of a Post?"; *"Ach, was!"* = "No shit!"; *"Jetzt erfrischen!"* = "Refresh yourself now!"; *"Wie heißt denn nochmal dieser Schuppen?"* = "What's the name of this joint again?" PENETRATION 6: *Kunst* = art; *Mauerkinder* = "Wall children" (West Berliners who grew up in the Walled city); *Bundeswehr* = "Federal Defense" (armed forces of Germany); *Antifas* = members of "Antifaschistische Aktion," militant far-left organization; *Deutschtürken* = German Turks; *Weißberliner* = white Berliners; *Schwarzberliner* = black Berliners; *Endzeit* = end time, final days before the end of the world; *"Spielt noch einen, ey!"* = "Hey, play another one!"; *Macht doch!* = Go on, do it! (pl.). PENETRATION 7: *O-Strabe* = Oranienstraße, central street in Kreuzberg 36, nightlife area; *Prenzlauer Berg* = then hip district of East Berlin, since gentrified & integrated into district Pankow; *West-Autos* = cars from the West; *Kleinstadt, Deutschland* = Smalltown, Germany; *Zitty, taz, Tip* = various Berlin press publications; *SFB* = Sender Freies Berlin (West Berlin radio service); *Ich und mein Staubsauger* = "I & My Vacuum Cleaner"; *Nächste Einstellung* = (Ready for the) next shot (film set); *Hinterhof* = courtyard, usually concrete, typical in continental European cities.



Chris Hughes & Alexander Hacke, 2008, by Robert Carrithers.

CROCUSES

AZALEA SO SWEET

"Ah want to tell ya 'bout a city..."

Some of you reading this may recognize that I'm modifying a line from one of Nick Cave's more famous songs. Cave himself won't appear in this story, but this particular song ("From Her To Eternity") you may have heard in the Wim Wenders film *Wings Of Desire (Himmel über Berlin)*. A dark, poetic, haunting film about love, life & angels – fallen or otherwise – it has a magical aura that enters the soul of anyone who sees it.

I was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1972, but I didn't actually start to live until about 1990. Before this nothing really existed for me – just the monochrome landscape of communism, a desert of grey conformity & soul-crushing boredom. The autumn of the previous year had seen the collapse of the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe. It was quite soon after the "Velvet Revolution" of November 1989 that I met my first big love.

Everything was changing – culture, the economy, modes of social behaviour – & people (if they wanted to) could finally express themselves freely. Not only this, but they could cross the border & visit the west for the first time since "Normalization". Drugs & depravity, sex & rock & roll! The very things our teachers & leaders had been warning us about for all those years. It was a restless & exciting time, & I'm glad I was able to play a small part in it.

The guy I fell in love with – it took about twenty minutes, actually – was a handsome young guy called Radek. He was the drummer with a local band called Lunch Time & I went to see them play at the local pub. The experience made such an impression on me that I immediately accepted his kind offer to let me give him a blow job in the toilets. Well, I'd never done anything like THAT before!

Soon afterwards, I moved into his flat. I'd fallen head-over-heels in love, & it's thanks to him that I discovered "alternative" music & culture. He introduced me to a lot of other things too. Drugs & 'weird' sex for a start, two other activities that changed my world forever. I'd even go so far as to say that thanks to him I discovered life itself.

I loved everything about him – his eyes, which changed colour from blue to ultraviolet & his long, dark hair – this combination I found extraordinarily attractive. Even his dirty way of speaking seemed cute, together with his gentle face & his gallows sense of humour. Of course, he didn't make any money playing music – he was actually a highly skilled goldsmith – but to see him bashing away on the drums, his long hair flying & his muscular arms hammering out the beat, that was really something. I was besotted, ready to do anything he wanted, go with him any place he wanted to take me. And the fact that he used to make beautiful jewels from gold & silver, this seemed incredibly romantic to me. Later, the gold & jewellery were replaced with drugs, self-harm & criminality. But that's another story from another time, & this is a story about Berlin. So let's go there together right now...

It's 1990 & I'm sitting on a train, headed for Berlin with Radek. He's invited me along to see his favourite band, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds. I've heard of them, but I don't know anything about them. Radek, of course, knows everything. And once we're off the train, he wants to walk around Kreuzberg & Schöneberg, because these are the neighbourhoods where Nick once lived, where he played music, hung out & partied. I don't protest & I don't make a fuss, because this trip is totally thrilling for me. Just travelling on the U-bahn is a perfect adventure. *Kreuzberg, here we are!!!* Radek shouts out as we walk down the steps at Görlitzer Bahnhof. Even today, twenty five years later, this station remains an orientation point for me.

All the beautiful pre-war houses, the bars with their neon lighting, colourful adverts & shops filled with products, pubs, kebab joints & sidewalk bistros. Lots of strange-looking people too, musicians in the streets, punks with studded belts & coloured hair. Remember, I've just come from a post-communist country, where men with long hair & blue jeans made in Poland are considered the height of eccentricity.

It was like stepping out of a black & white movie into a Technicolor version. Yeah, I felt like Alice in Wonderland, transported to another dimension, walking on air in a place where nothing was familiar. I couldn't stop staring at those cool-looking people dressed in their radical chic. Radek & I were quite original back home in Czechoslovakia, but here we were totally boring. There was simply no way we could compete with these alien creatures.

Most of them looked as if they had just jumped off a stage. Or perhaps they'd beamed down from some interplanetary spacecraft, like in Star Trek. Colourful dresses, stockings & boots... Boots like these I'd never seen in my life! I felt really deprived, looking at all those original outfits made from shiny materials – rubber, spandex, PVC – totally crazy creations that I fell in love with immediately.

But at least my hair was okay. I'd dyed it orange & backcombed it into a bouffant, like Robert Smith of The Cure. But Robert's hair was black & mine was orange, & it made me look as if my head was engulfed in flames. When I came home one day with this on my head, Radek was absolutely astonished. He kept repeating over & over *This is an Inferno, an inferno...* And he wanted to touch it again & again – he couldn't believe that I wasn't wearing a wig! And the very next time his band played, he sang on a new song that he'd written with the vocalist – the lyrics of which sounded to my ears like *Oh, you're burning my baby! You're burning! And I'm coming, yeah, I'm coming!* Later I found out that the melody was dangerously similar to "Sonny's Burning" from The Birthday Party, but – honestly – who cared? I loved it! So, yeah, my hair was fine, even for Berlin.

Radek, meanwhile, was dragging me around from pillar to post, looking for the flat where Nick had once lived, or the bar where Blixa Bargeld had worked, or the recording studio where this or that song had been recorded. It started to rain, but he didn't allow the bad weather to dampen his enthusiasm for sightseeing. This was his escape from the dull routine of Brno into the rock & roll funhouse of Berlin. Naturally, he wanted to make the most of it. Gold was in his pockets & jewels were in his eyes, everything was touched with magic. Finally, as evening closed in, we started to make our way to the venue where The Bad Seeds were going to play. Maybe it was Tempodrom, maybe it was Columbiahalle, I really don't remember. Like I said, I was living in a dream. I followed Radek into the night like Alice followed the White Rabbit down the hole into Wonderland...

Now we're at the club, quite a large one in fact. I'd been expecting the dirty back room of some obscure pub, which seems quite funny in retrospect. I suppose it was because rock gigs in Brno always took place in the smelly back rooms of pubs.

Anyhow, more & more people are coming into the hall. We're determined to hold onto our positions at the front – the stage is only two or three meters away, we're in the best possible place to watch the gig.

Suddenly, three or four guys walk out onto the stage. One of them is checking a guitar, another is testing the microphones, another is sitting behind the drums. It looks as though the gig is about to start! So I'm watching these guys, but especially the drummer, who has now stood up & is pacing around the stage in his shiny black pointed shoes. He's inspecting various parts of his kit, tapping the snare drum skin with his fingers, adjusting hi-hats & cymbal stands.

He fascinated me even before he hit a single beat – his movements were rapid, like he knew what he was doing, yet in spite of this he seemed quite confused. I've always had a soft spot for confused-looking guys, which is probably one of the reasons I'm with Radek. Don't ask me to explain the whys & wherefores – it's just the way things are.

Suddenly something strange happened. This confused drummer looked out into the audience & stared directly at me. There was some connection between us, I felt it right away, & my eyes got as big as saucers. *What????!* I yelled at Radek. *Nick Cave is playing the DRUMS???*

I can still remember his reaction to my incomprehensible question. He just rolled his eyes & slowly shook his head, then replied dryly, *No, my dear, that isn't Nick Cave – I think it's the drummer of the support band.* I repeated his words & turned them into a question...*support???* *band???* which made him roll his eyes again, as if he were appealing to heaven for help.

But I have to admit, his answer disappointed me. I'd have preferred it if Nick Cave HAD been a drummer! But this support band when they finally started to play... Well, I'd never seen or heard anything like them! They blasted my ears with waves of reverberation, my senses were at the point of collapse. Their sound was enormous, cavernous, HUGE, & the foundations of the building seemed to be shaking. I expected the roof to come crashing down at any moment.

They looked like creatures from another planet, a real bunch of weirdos. But in a totally different way to the "models" we'd seen posing outside. The singer was a giant of a man with an incredibly strong voice, deep, rich & resonant. He gesticulated dramatically, like a madman or a preacher, & his wild hair reminded me a bird's nest. He was the kind of character you could never forget, even if you wanted to. But in this case there was no reason to ever want to forget. He gave us everything he had, he told us the truth with his words. I could feel it, I

could hear it, though I understood almost nothing of his lyrics.

And oh, yes, the drummer. As I say, he looked confused, even a bit chaotic. Yet he played incredibly well, & in a way I'd never seen anyone play before. He didn't use "straight" conventional rock beats – everything was somehow back to front & in unexpected places. I don't mean he was out of rhythm – quite the opposite, in fact. But his flailing arms seemed to be everywhere at once, around the drums & over his ruffled black hair. In fact he complemented the singer's wild gesticulations perfectly. Not only were his arms flying, you could see his black, pointed boots too, how he kicked his feet out, this way & that, while playing the bass drum & hi-hat. I'd never seen anyone play like this before! Quite simply, the guy blew my mind. And not only me, but Radek too. He fell in love with this incredible drummer, following every movement that he made, his eyes wide with amazement.

The third person on stage was a tiny boy seated behind an electric piano. He was deeply immersed in his playing. But whenever there was a part of a song without any piano, he looked so uncomfortable that I thought he would stand up & run from the stage. He kept scratching his hands, his face too, & seemed totally out of his depth. But he stayed there till the end of the show & did his job perfectly.

The fourth musician was playing bass, & in contrast to the others he looked totally normal. This made the whole thing even stranger. I can't remember what he looked like, but I found out later that he wasn't a member of the band, only their guest. Apparently he played guitar with The Bad Seeds & was just helping out.

This support band didn't play for very long, but it was the most intense musical experience of my life. When they finished, I stood there with my mouth open, unable to say anything except *What the fuck was that? What was it?* Radek was as overwhelmed as I was, but unlike me he wasn't shy. And as he definitely *needed* to know more, he started to ask the Berliners around us what the group was called.

It turned out they were a local band, though originally they came from Melbourne – ex-pat Australians (like Nick Cave himself) who were living & playing in Berlin. The band was called ONCE UPON A TIME & the singer's name was BRUNO ADAMS. This was the only information Radek could obtain, it was all anybody knew. But for that one night they blew the Bad Seeds off stage, they "stole" the gig from the headliners.

Nick was excellent too, of course, & I became a militant "Caveist" for several years. Radek was right when he'd told me I would love them. Unfortunately for them they had to follow this amazingly wild support act, & well, you know... At that moment

nothing – not even an earthquake – could have impressed me.

After the gig we walked around the streets, which weren't empty of people like they would have been back home. We walked & talked & laughed & fought, still buzzing with adrenalin from seeing this brilliant concert. Suddenly my head was full of ideas, most of which I was unable to express. But I did tell Radek he HAD to buy some pointed shoes! We were due to leave the next afternoon, but before we went to the train station he bought his first ever pair of cowboy boots. He found them in a second hand shop in Wiener Strasse, I remember it as if it were yesterday.

But before that, in the middle of night, we'd stumbled into a pub, not having the money for a hotel room. There weren't any places like this in Brno. There, the bars closed at 10p.m., after which the streets were deserted. You might see a man out walking his dog, or a lone drunk stumbling home. Today, of course, there "non-stops" everywhere, even in Brno! But at the time the idea of an all-night pub seemed absolutely amazing.

And in fact, it was amazing. Take only the name – *Ohne Ende* – it fit with our mood perfectly. We ordered beers & sat down in the corner next to a window. The bartender looked as if she'd been working for the last three days & nights without sleep. But she was really nice & friendly when she learned we were from Czechoslovakia. Then Radek pulled out a little paper packet, put it on the table & opened it. It was filled with white powder & he used his old army knife to chop out two lines. Just like that, right on the table in front of everyone!

I figured it was speed & started to protest – like, *what the hell are you doing, man?? Do you wanna get us arrested??* I found out later he'd bought it before the gig, when he'd disappeared into some park to take a piss. Or at least that's what he'd told me at the time. Now he was laughing at me, saying *nobody cares, Kitten. I already tested it & I'm telling you it's damned good stuff. You know I'd never offer you something if I thought it was bad or dangerous. And anyhow, you don't wanna waste time by sleeping, do you? So come on, get with it & sniff a line with me, I promise you're gonna love it...* And with that he passed me a rolled up banknote & I did exactly as he said.

Yes, it was my first ever line of Berlin speed! And as we sat in our dark little corner, Radek reached down & unplugged the table lamp. Now the only illumination was from the streetlights that were shining in through the window. The woman behind the bar was nodding her head & smiling, as if to say *Go ahead & do it, you can do whatever you like here.* And after that first line I felt like I understood everything – for the first time in my life I felt

absolutely free. Not only that, but I had to tell Radek all about it IMMEDIATELY!!!

His eyes were shining like stars, he looked absolutely happy. He allowed me to talk for maybe 15 minutes, then decided ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!! Suddenly he pushed my head down into his crotch, because it's difficult for a girl to speak with a hard cock in her mouth!

So that's how we spent our first ever night in Berlin. From the pub that never closed we went to get some breakfast, then picked up those cowboy boots & caught the train to Prague. But we knew we'd soon come back, & it turned out to be the first of many visits.

EPILOGUE

It's twenty five years later & I'm sitting on a bus, going to Berlin. *Nach Berlin!* I can feel tiny shivers of excitement inside & my heart is beating so fast I'm sure the other passengers can hear. Berlin – city of ghosts & angels, where little flakes of crystal meth are carried on the wind. Even the rain is poetic in a way – not drab & depressing like in Prague. I'm not sure if my feelings are caused by the city itself or my intense experiences & memories. Probably it's a bit of everything mixed in.

Radek died in April 2010, in Australia, as it happens. Almost exactly one year before, Bruno Adams passed away in Berlin. He's buried in an overgrown cemetery, not far from where he lived in Kreuzberg, & in spring the ground is carpeted in crocuses. Family & friends have left him little gifts – a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of slivovice, a faded photograph. On his headstone is written a line from "Planetarium", one of the most beautiful songs I ever heard: *You'll always be a star in my mind's eye.*

As for poor Radek, all I know is that he's buried somewhere in Australia. I guess it's what you'd call an ironic twist of fate, but at least he died with his boots on.

Berlin has always given me its best, even when it felt like the apocalypse was coming. And just in case you're wondering... Angels really do exist there & sometimes I can even hear them talking.

Dedicated to Radek "Stagger" Trejtnar (RIP) & Bruno Adams (RIP) of Once Upon A Time & Fatal Shore. ■

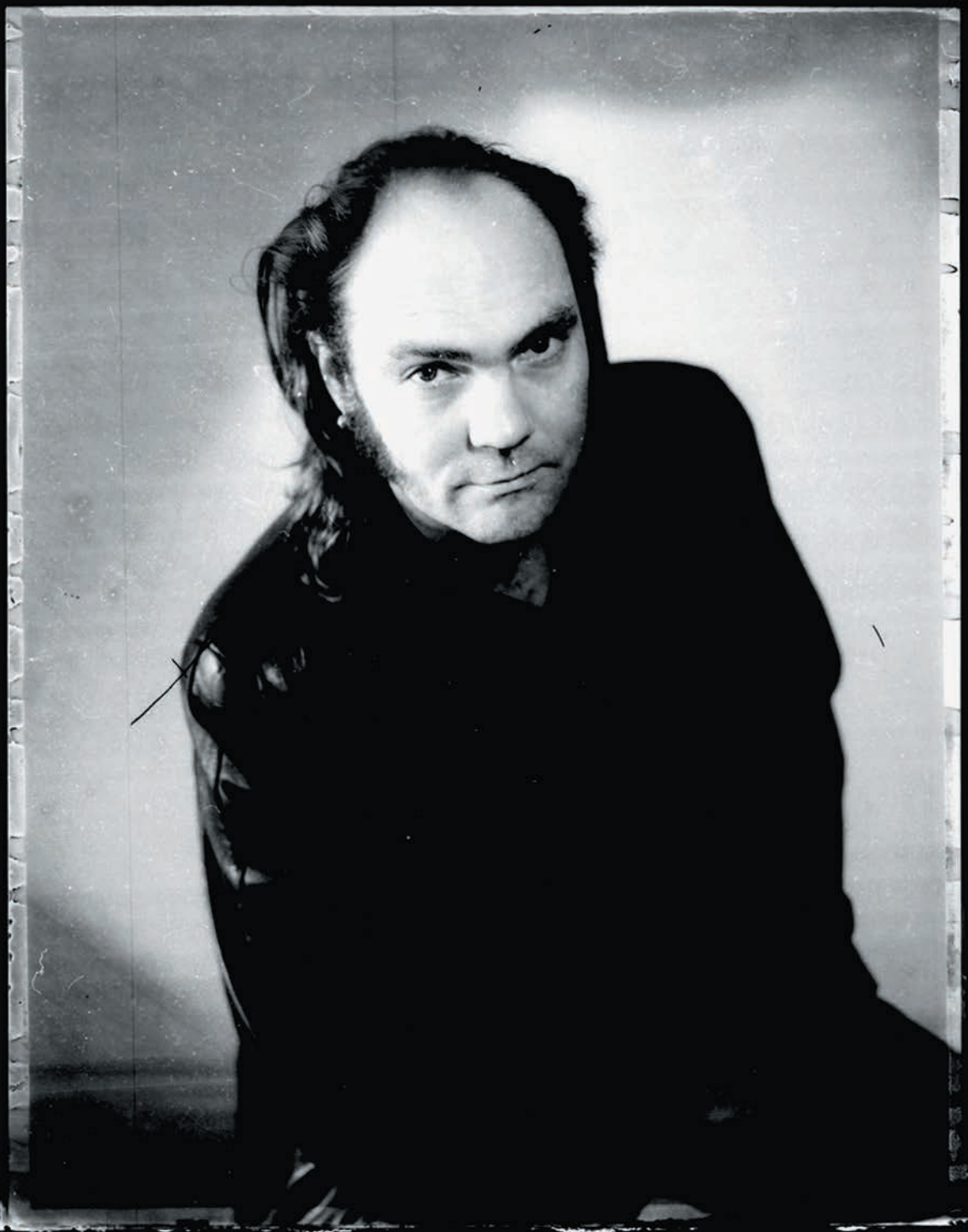


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Fatal Shore (Bruno Adams, Phil Shoenfelt, Chris Hughes), 2002, by Roman Černý.

Bruno Adams was the singer, guitarist & frontman of the Berlin-based band Fatal Shore. Born in Bacchus Marsh, Australia, September 2nd 1963, Bruno was an active member of the Melbourne music scene in the 1980s. During his formative years he played with such luminaries as Mick Harvey, as well as musicians from The Saints, The Laughing Clowns, & Crime & The City Solution – all stalwarts of the same Melbourne scene from which Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds emerged. In 1984 Bruno formed Once Upon A Time, whose psycho-industrial-blues rapidly made them favourites on the Melbourne club circuit. In 1990 Bruno & the band moved to Berlin on a permanent basis, supporting groups such as Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds & Swans on European tours. The band released three CDs before splitting in 1996. That same year, 1996, Bruno formed Fatal Shore with Prague-based Englishman Phil Shoefelt. Australian Chris Hughes, the former drummer of Once Upon A Time, joined shortly afterwards, & the line-up was completed with the addition of Berliner Yoyo Roehm on bass a couple of years later. Fatal Shore released three CDs, & were notable for their wild & unpredictable live shows, as well as the quality of their song writing. Based in Berlin, the band toured back & forth across Europe for 12 years, until in 2008 Bruno became too sick to continue. Diagnosed with colon cancer in 2004, Bruno battled the disease for five years in a way that can only be described as heroic. Even though it was a losing battle, he never gave up or succumbed to self-pity. He continued to write songs & play concerts, though frequently in great pain, & his natural talent continued to shine through. Notable for his classic Blues voice, his highly original guitar style, & his song writing talent, Bruno was also outstanding as a human being, a big man with a big heart & a warmth of soul that was truly magnetic. No one who ever saw Once Upon A Time or Fatal Shore perform will forget Bruno's highly charismatic & extrovert performances. On April 24th 2009 Bruno finally lost his protracted battle with cancer & died at home in Berlin, surrounded by his family & friends. He leaves behind his wife Kateřina & three children: Conrad, Natalie-Rose & Edward Lee. – Phil Shoefelt, obituary for Bruno Adams

I was working on a documentary about the band Fatal Shore from 2005 to 2008. I was motivated to do this firstly because of the band's music, but also because of the unique characters of the three musicians. I had filmed them in Prague, Berlin & Vienna. I had known Phil from the early 1980s in New York, when he was in the band Khmer Rouge & we had many mutual friends. At one point he went to London & I did not see him back again in New York. In the early '90s, I had been living in Prague for about five years & I was walking down the street when I passed someone in a long black leather coat. We stopped, froze, did a double-take & even though many years had passed, we instantly recognized each other. It was Phil! As fate would have it, we had both ended up in Prague for similar reasons & have been in contact ever since. He is the one that led me to Fatal Shore. When Nick Cave moved to Berlin in the early '80s, other Australian musicians followed him over. Chris & Bruno's former band Once Upon A Time came to Berlin from Melbourne, & went on tour with Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds as the support band. Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds went on to great success, but the other Australian bands that followed in their wake have either gone back to Australia or remained in Berlin. There were, however, quite a few who stayed on, an outpost of exiled Australian musicians who still live in the city. Phil & Bruno met in Prague in 1996, at one of the last concerts of the original line-up of Once Upon A Time. I saw Fatal Shore play & got to know Chris & Bruno. I could see that something magical was happening with friendship, music & creativity. I spent a lot of time filming all three of them & trying to capture their personalities & combine these individual portraits with their live concerts. Chris became a lifetime friend. He was known affectionately as the "random factor" of Fatal Shore, due to his free-wheeling lifestyle. A manic but inspired drummer, there is no separation for him between art & life. He plays constantly with up to seven Berlin underground bands at any one time. Then there was Bruno Adams, & for me he was the anchor of the band, the man who held it all together. Here was this big strong man, this poet with an open heart & a huge appetite for life, who managed to keep things together through the most difficult of times. I hope to one day complete this film. Many people expected me to have completed it a long time ago, but so far I haven't been able to obtain the money I need to edit it. I've been too busy doing other projects in order to survive. I would like to emphasize that for me, Fatal Shore somehow managed to combine the energy & spirit of both Prague & Berlin. Their music & lives have been intertwined with both cities. Phil lives in Prague whereas Bruno & Chris lived in Berlin. Phil married a Czech woman while Bruno & Chris married German girls, & fathered children with them. Later they both married Czech women & had children with them too! Below are some excerpts of an interview that I did with Bruno in his kitchen in 2007. I can still hear his voice, & his infectious laughter still resonates. In memory of Bruno Adams. – Robert Carrithers



Bruno Adams, 2002, by Roman Černý.

We moved to East Berlin not too long after the wall came down. The flat we moved to was in Prenzlauer Berg¹ & we lived there on Lynchenerstrasse with some friends & then we moved into our own flat. There were people from all around the world moving to East Berlin at the time, all of the refugees from the normal world! Fluchtlinge!² There were a lot of available flats because everybody had gone. There was this friend of mine, an American guy, he collected MZ East German motorcycles,³ which he'd find by going into the hofs⁴ & having a look to see if there were any bits & pieces of old MZs lying around. He'd knock on all of the doors & ask the residents who the bikes belonged to, & they'd usually say something like, "Some guy who used to live here left it when he moved away five years ago," or whatever. Later this American guy would come back under cover of dark & nick them. So, he had about twenty of them that he'd built from cannibalized pieces & he'd made functioning bikes out of them. So he had like five or six MZs going at any one time, & we'd all go riding off on them & go to the lakes that are dotted around suburban Berlin. They were all totally unregistered, the bikes, but the volkspolizei⁵ didn't know what the law was anymore. It was complete anarchy! There wasn't any law because they were too frightened to enforce any law. They were scared themselves that they'd be put in jail & shit like that. So basically, you could do anything you wanted.

People would open bars in their houses, usually on the ground floor because all of the bottom floor flats were rotting away & were basically uninhabitable. They were the closest to the ground so of course they got all the moisture & damp. I mean, they weren't livable places, so you had all of the ground floor to turn into a club or a bar, or whatever – the start of the free market economy,

¹ Prenzlauer Berg: Since it's founding in 1920 until 2001, Prenzlauer Berg was a district of Berlin in its own right. However, that year it was incorporated (along with the borough of Weißensee) into the greater district of Pankow. From the 1960s onwards, Prenzlauer Berg was associated with proponents of East Germany's diverse counterculture, activists, bohemians, state-independent artists & the gay community. It was an important site for peaceful revolution that brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the 1990s the borough was also home to a vibrant squatting scene. It has since experienced rapid gentrification.

² Fluchtlinge is the German word for refugees.

³ MZ's history dates back to pre-World War II days under the trademark DKW. MZ was a former East-German manufacturer, & like all former East-block countries have now switched to Western life-style motorbikes.

⁴ Hof is the German word for a courtyard.

⁵ The old East German police.

ha ha! People would just put a bar in there & it would become known around the neighbourhood, & they'd sell drinks in plastic cups to all the locals. They'd put on music & bands would play there or they'd put on performance pieces, or whatever. I remember there was an old bus that somebody bought & drove around. It was called The Bus Bar & it would drive around to different places & you'd have a bar there. We would ask, "Where is the Bus Bar today," & they'd answer something like, "Oh it's at Kollwitzplatz!"⁶ And we'd go there. It was in a different location every day, always moving.

I'm trying to remember all the people who lived in our flat. There was me, Chris Hughes & Chris Russell, Gaby Bila-Günther & Polly Newsome. And then various hangers-on, like people who had come from Australia to visit & stuff. And also family & friends stayed there of course. It was so easy then to get a flat! You'd just go in there with a hammer, drill & a few other tools & that was it! You could even pay rent on it, if you wanted to, you just had to paint the number on the door. Under socialist law, if a flat was empty, you could take it legally. You would then get the key from the hausmeister⁷ & then you moved in, on condition that you painted the number on the door. But we never paid the rent anyway. Nobody ever came to collect it, so it wasn't necessary.

I remember the first time that we went to Prague with our band Once Upon A Time. Somebody organized a gig for us in Prague. We played in the Rock Café. It was very strange. The PA system looked like a bunch of fruit boxes with some transistor radio speakers stuck in them. If you hit a bass note the whole thing would vibrate & feed back because all of the screws were loose in the wood & the speakers would just vibrate to fuck! So we fixed that problem by getting all of the cutlery from the kitchen at the Rock Café & putting them in the cracks of the speaker cabinets. So you had this PA system that was like some sort of modern art sculpture with all of these spoons & knives sticking out!

Then the second problem was when you turned up any channel on the mixing desk, everything came buzzing out of it – the bass drum, guitars,

⁶ The Kollwitzplatz is a city square in the Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg, district of Pankow. Where a lot of squats & bars were at the beginning of the '90s. The square forms the center of the so-called "Kollwitzkieze." On October 7, 1947, it was named after the German graphic artist & sculptress Käthe Kollwitz.

⁷ The guy who looks after the houses, cleaning them, repairing stuff, etc. Every house in Berlin had one back then & now not that often.



everything! What's the point of having a mixing desk in that case? The sound engineer there had some weird sort of way of dealing with the all the EQs,⁸ he'd do something to highlight certain things in each channel. I don't know how that's possible, but anyway that's what he did. Very creative! Remember this was 1990 in the former Eastern Bloc.

338 | There is a definite connection between Berlin & Prague. First of all, they are geographically very close. They are both sort of Bohemian cities. There are a lot of artists & those that claim to be artists living in both cities. At the penultimate Once Upon a Time gig in Prague, Phil Shoenfelt turned up. It was the first time I had met him, though he & Chris Hughes already knew each other from somewhere or other. He told me that he was originally from London, a friend of my sister Bronwyn, who plays violin with Crime & The City Solution. She'd been living in London during the late '80s & early 90s & they'd known each other then. All of this made me very wary. I was surprised to meet him. Every

line on his face told a story. He was that sort of character. We got to talking & he told me he was about to do a tour of Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of some charity organization thing – Cultural Aid to Former Yugoslavia, or whatever, sponsored by George Soros. God knows how Phil had blagged his way onto that! Anyway, it sounded interesting, & we decided right there & then we'd do the tour together, as a duo I mean. I came back to Prague a couple of weeks later & stayed with Phil & Jolana, & we knocked up some cover versions that could be played on acoustic & electric guitar, without bass & drums. We chose songs by Robert Johnson, Jaques Brel & Howlin' Wolf, among others, songs that we could perform as a duo. Then off we went to Mostar & Sarajevo, along with the Czech alternative band Dunai. It was a double bill. That tour was quite an eye-opener. It was right after the Dayton Peace Accord, & there were still snipers in the forests & unexploded landmines lying about. After the tour finished, we got together with Chris Hughes back in Berlin & this was when Fatal Shore was born.

– Bruno Adams ■

⁸ EQs means the equalizer on a sound mixing board for concerts.



ONCE UPON A TIME IN BERLIN

CHRIS HUGHES

1990 & by a wildly convoluted set of circumstances I am 25 years old & living in East Berlin. The Berlin wall has come down & the cold war is officially over for the time being. Apartments are scarce as hen's teeth in West Berlin, but in the former East there are vast tracts of deserted houses: decrepit, decaying, unpainted yet potentially habitable. | 339

As I explore & wander through this mysterious eastern sector, with its faded communist-era signage, bullet hole ridden facades & derelict houses & long barren streets lined with wrecked Trabants, I shudder as a certain sense of irony & déjà vu overtakes me. I first laid eyes on this crumbling locale as a shocked but fascinated eight-year-old Aussie brat almost twenty years ago & nothing here seems to have changed, as if time had stood still. But now I am back as an adult & with a totally different guise & mission.

I had arrived from Melbourne in West Berlin with my then girlfriend Gabi Bila in December 1989 & the rest of my band arrived soon after. As the base in Europe from which to record & tour, Berlin made far more sense than London, where Australians weren't always welcome, the scene was more style-obsessed & commercial, & everyone was struggling to pay exorbitant rents. So, our entourage consisted of myself, singer Bruno Adams (brother of Bronwyn Adams, who also lives in Berlin & played in Crime & the City Solution) Chris Russel pianist, & Polly Newsome.

Attempting to settle down in West Berlin had proved harder than initially thought. We had contacts such as Hugo Race (who I was also playing drums with) & Alex Hacke (from Einstürzende Neubauten), & the twenty-four hours anything goes bar culture (as personified by the Ex'n'pop) was Bacchanalian & health-endangering. Accommodation was tighter than ever & the squatting scene was almost over. It was actually Alex Hacke who initially suggested that cheap rents or squats in the East could be a good option for us. However having no contacts there, it seemed at first a grim proposition...

Berlin being Berlin, surprisingly, contacts amongst the underground scene in the East where established



very quickly via a series of late night forays into house parties full of young East German Punks & artists in Prenzlauer Berg. The border points were technically still in operation & you had to show your passport to obtain a 24 hours visa stay. Pretty soon we were part of burgeoning scene of squatters, which composed not only of young East Germans (such as Olli Peters, Once Upon a Time's future bass player) but English, Irish, American & Italian expats.

What seemed at first a rather grim & desolate environment soon proved to be unexpectedly exciting. Within the vast tracts of empty decaying buildings in Mitte & Prenzlauer Berg was a no-man's-land open to experimentation, creativity & willfully embraced chaos to which likeminded types from around the world began to flock.

The first squat of sorts that we managed to secure

was in Lychener Straße, in a large two bedroom flat, which at least had a working toilet & kitchen. The entire entourage was crammed in, up to five of us sleeping in one room at a time. To decorate & proudly furnish our temporary flat was no problem, there were containers & rubbish skips up down the streets full of discarded GDR-era furniture, archaic electric appliances, Russian military clothes etc, that had been dumped in the mass exodus to the West by former residents. I remember acquiring several blue-yellow striped mattresses & realized by the designs they dated back to WW2, the same ones used in the Billy Wilder film *A Foreign Affair*. Unfortunately some members of the household contracted some weird form of lice after sleeping on them.

Having come fresh off a Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds support tour of Europe in spring, & returning



to the squalid glory of Prenzlauer Berg squats, Once Upon a Time had a notoriety & reputation that preceded us. The music itself had a darkly hued melancholic sense of grandeur & space. Some songs had a classical film noir edge, others leapt at a frenetic intense speed as if our lives depend on it: whatever audiences we played to in squatter houses around Mitte responded enthusiastically & with an electric sense of rapport, as if what we generated was capturing the atmosphere of the times, the "Zeitgeist."

One such venue we played regularly in was Café Zapata. It was part of Tacheles, a sprawling six story edifice that was once a department store complex, left derelict & half ruined after the war. Immediately after the fall of the Wall it was put on the historical buildings register & was transformed into the

motherfucker of all creative squat houses.

Its sheer size allowed for an incredible in-house diversity: action theatre by performance collectives, such as Ram Theatres, metal sculptures, art installations including fire & scrap-metal spectacles by "DNNTT," even Russian war planes were piled up in the backyard as anti-military art statements by the Mutoid Waste Company. You name it, someone had a space doing it. A variety of up to twelve nationalities could be found living & working there at once. In the words of Heiner Müller, it became the "Real symbol of unified Berlin, not the Brandenburg gate." There was a sense of history & politics breathing down your neck, a palpable tension between past oppression & newly found creative liberation, & we were very much a part of it. ■

WHERE IS IT AT?

GABY BÍLA - GÜNTHER

I will tell you

It's at the club that states Hippies use back door at that bar in
KREUZBERG in Wienerstrasse

It's at dim lit stairs

My eyes trampled on by an overweight burlesque beauty with tittle
tassels

And love handles bulging over the border of her corset

Welcome to Wonderland where everything is big, luscious, tattooed
& sexually titillating

It's at fake eyelashes puking charm & innocence all in one jar

Filled only with fake dollars, hell money I call it

It's at site-specific conversations about ones dim or bright future in
the music business

Or on the stages of spoken word worlds.

Can I collide with both without losing my head & keeping my heart
above all waters?

It's at getting your only one Euro coin that burns inside your pocket
& flick it over to the barmaid for your last beer.

It ain't easy seeing the last coin leave the crack of your wallet &
landing on the sticky bar to be exchanged for a cheap Polish
beer as sweet as salt & spicy as mud

But what the hell it wasn't the last time it came to that

So let the drinking festival begin. With one beer. That's where it's at.

But not before it's at swapping drug stories with the only French
straight chap at the bar

And it feels so good to reminiscent about sniffing elephant lines at
the gravestone in PARIS

But not of Jim Morrison because it was too crowded with wiping
fans

And you glance over to the groupies of the dead rock star who
flagellate themselves with memories & lyrics of their dead idol.

His bust long gone but not forgotten

But what the hell. That's where it's at.

Where? Oh yes, talking about lines, being awake all night long at
our friends wedding somewhere in romantic Paris

It's at heading a procession of Wedding freaks throughout the
famous cemetery & being warned about having too much fun
there amongst all the famous dead people.

It's about later on being at the squatted gym for the wedding
reception

The groom wearing an orange football on his head while his bride
tossed a metal screw over the magic of her wedding finger
A gift from their best man
The rich guy from Wembley with the posh accent polished enough
to impress the French & the Germans all at once while he is
apologising for not finding the ring fast enough to complete the
ceremony of matrimony.
But what the hell. That's where it's at.

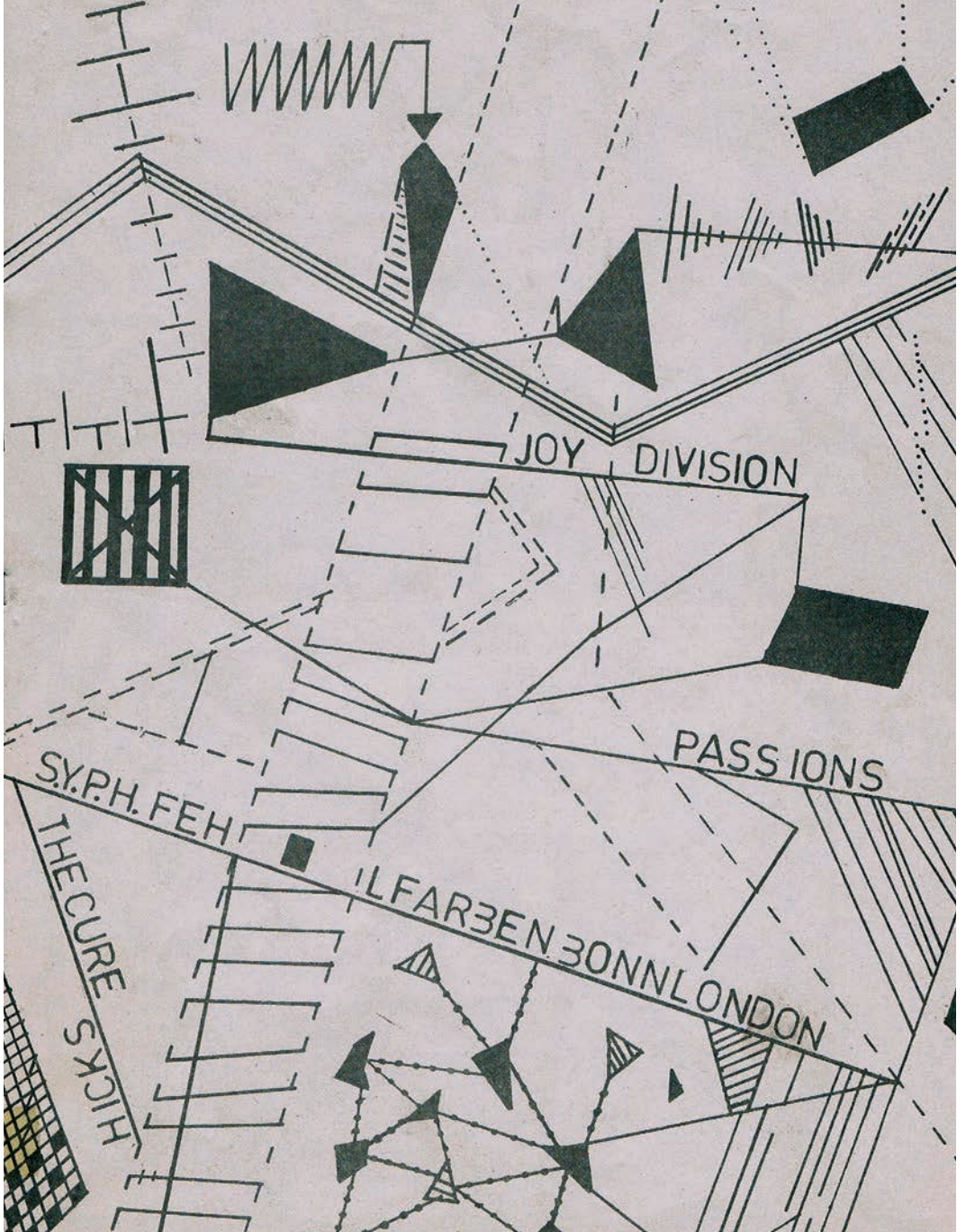
It's at Paris with memories like that, not chewing on fashionable
baguettes or crunchy croissants with speed-ridden teeth &
appetite
It's at the stairs of Sacré Coeur coming down from it all, twittering
madness & paranoid plans to kill all people who looked you in
the eye or up & down
But pleased that you stole that hoodie from the only famous, cheap
department store in Pigalle.
But what the hell. That's where it's at.

Its at driving back to Berlin in a trashy Citroen fit for five but
crowded with seven that even offended the French who kept
showing us the way out of their country roads, eager for us
to reach the German border, after refusing to treat our smoky
engine.
It's at midnight hour & the bar gets filled up with dancing queens &
queers. It's at facing a toilet without toilet paper before you are
just about to do number two.
What the hell. That's where it's at.

Its at drip-dry & shaking the last beer drops & hoping they wont
stain your undies with wetness,
It's at stop flirting with that joint that's not coming your way.
It's at stop wanting more beer you cant afford
It's at stop spending money that doesn't exist
It's at keeping a future hangover at bay this way, home lady gaby
Its at going without staggering because tomorrow you might even
remember everything great that happened to you at the party
at this bar.
What the hell. That's where it's at.
After all I'm just a ripped shirt.

1.60

DATENVERARBEITUNG NR 4 JUNI/JULI 80



Cover of issue 4 (June/July 1980) of *Datenverarbeitung* fanzine, edited by Oliver Schütz.

I grew up in Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Germany in the '60s & '70s in one of the many post-war blocks of flats with thin walls behind an unadorned façade. The nearby American Embassy sector had been a main attraction to us, & the sons & daughters of the German administration as well as diplomats from all over the world have been a familiar sight for me & my town. My father was a marine corps officer employed in the Ministry of Defence & in its effect I wasn't allowed to enter the Warsaw Pact Member States as it would be too dangerous for me. So when my left-sympathising tutor took my class to Prague in 1978 to show them the "beauty of the eastern block states," I couldn't go. Instead I spent my free week from school at home rectifying the curriculum I had missed learning because I'd been a rather lazy type of schoolboy. The main reasons for it were that I had been much more interested in the only two popular leisure subjects, pop music & football, along with feeding my dream of being a pilot, splicing Airfix planes, than in any school topic, but my mother was rather strict so there was no escape from the tutor. By the time my classmates returned from Prague they were all enthusiastic about its voluptuous architecture, gothic façades & dark alleyways, while my world vision still revolved around neat housing rows & modern satellite towns, an influence of LEGO & an architectural post-war clearing, which was for the want of a more Bauhaus-influenced architect uralgeneration who saw their chance to finally replace those outdated German historicisms with light clear lines of concrete, a futuristic attempt at modernity, functional & practical. This de-mystified post-war architecture of apartment blocks & pedestrian zones embedded in the offshoots of an industrial revolution & German *Wirtschaftswunder*, mixed with the Ruhrgebiet coal & steel industries, have been the perfect backdrop for the Düsseldorf-Solingen punk & electronic connection, think Can, NEU, Kraftwerk, DAF, SYPH & numerous other bands, which evolved around the bleak, neon-lit Rater Hof from 1976 to 1981. It'd been the answer to our own post-war youth, & the No-Feelings attitude of Johnny Rotten worked just perfectly in Germany as well. Soon the whole country was flooded by new bands & bars that paid tribute to this new but impersonal style, replacing all of a sudden the outdated hippie attitude of red-wine, love & candlelit-understanding. The eruption of punk fell right into my coming of age & so my search for personality had been a harder task in a time where positivism was replaced by negativism, an anti-establishment attitude merged with

introversion, & role models consequently went down the route of drug abuse. The music of Einstürzende Neubauten, The Birthday Party, Gun Club, Iggy & the Stooges, & the Ramones was most influential, yet their protagonists made clear that they put their lives at risk in order to be adored. They were the last stars to get away with it, outlaws in a society where success is based on fitness & mental health.

By 1979 I co-published a local fanzine called *Datenverarbeitung* that went nation-wide & I have seen every German & English Punk & post-Punk bands that toured the Düsseldorf-Cologne-Bonn area. I had been extensively listening to & taping any John Peel radio shows when I was travelling to London to trace the holy grails of Punk & New Wave. In summer 1980 I arrived in Peckham in a typical but scruffy English house & instantly loved the atmosphere of an old, run down England. It felt so much more real than the clean & well organised capital of Germany where I grew up. This feeling of No Future made much more sense in an English late-'70s environment, while in Germany the unemployment rate was just about to kick in from 3.8% in 1980 to 9.1% in 1983. It also felt just right to have been introduced to another new sound coming from New York entitled Suicide, or No-Wave in general.

After my miserable A-levels, having been too busy running a school café, coaching a successful football team, organising school parties, cutting layouts for my fanzine & riding my skateboard to prepare for the exams, I instantly moved from my familiar & straight-forward wealthy neighbourhood of West Germany's capital Bonn to the then gloomy, poor, melancholic West Berlin. I had an interview to do with Joy Division's successor New Order, the first German interview for a still young *SPEX* magazine, & I instantly fell in love with West Berlin's happy sadness. It wasn't all so miserable. At night you could drown your cheerless existence in numerous bars without end, or, if you could prove yourself as some sort of creative persona, you could find access to the more snobbish environments like Dschungel or Risiko. The walled-in city felt quite a home with all its eccentric & cranky characters. All the kids whose behaviour been too erratic for their dull hometowns seemed to've gathered here. Their sharp wit & tough manner weren't everyone's cup of tea, but this was exactly set them apart from the tourists & "Wessis." Speed was the drug of choice, & many hung in there for too long to remember the night before. Life in West Berlin was an everyday trial, provocation, invitation & postulation at once. It was the coolest



Foetus DJing with Alex Hacke at Ex'n'Pop, 2002, by Oliver Schütz.

place in Germany, a scene mixed with all kinds of styles, hippies, punks, Ted's, nihilistic existentialists who shared most of their money, drugs, belongings, rage, love. Sharing a room was standard as there was a serious housing shortage, while most of West Berlin's buildings still told the story of a lost war, looking neglected, run down, semi-demolished, melancholic... This was the perfect backdrop for the Berlin "Untergang" scene, the pale-dark, alien-styled Goths with their groomed, currycombed hair & pointy leather boots. "Live as if every day is your last day & the world will follow its demise" been the idea, the 1986 incident of Chernobyl just a logical presage of what will be following soon.

What followed soon was the unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall – while I got stuck in France trying to get a cure for my bad white powder habits. The monumental curator of West Berlin's well kept blue melancholy tumbled over night & gave way to the next generation's sunny, positive but mostly dumb & stupid age of techno, a perfect agenda to turn masses into willing consumers & eradicate all character & personality in order to sell happiness in the form of a mass produced, synthesized pill. The new foundations of rich & poor were laid in a mass-culture where a few got rich & the rest danced to it's ever only promising beat. Up to today you

will only attend well organised events, marketed via global channels to squeeze highest profit out of it & sponsored by brands bare of spontaneity, wit & environmental or simply social danger. Underground became entertainment & the internet equals everything to bits & bytes. If I think about it my head explodes.

Compared to when I grew up life today is just plain too comfortable. All information is sucked from a hand-held device, the infotainment industry will not let you go at any hour. When I got the chance to fly from France to New York City in late '89 I didn't think long about it & just did it without caring much about anything. I had some dubious connections, a drug-free organisation which was to pick me up at JFK, but when the flight arrived with a mere six hour delay in the dead of night there was no one waiting. Also, I had no money except a few French francs with me. I had to cadge a lift into Manhattan & slept a few hours in a doorway on 52nd street. The early morning sound of a garbage truck woke me up & New York City's surround -ound made me feel alright. *Hey, this is New York City* I thought, *this is cool!* I made it to where West Berliners had always talking about going to. I strolled down Hudson River Greenway when all of a sudden my eyes spotted the towering front-end of the aircraft carrier *Intrepid*

with the two massive, lurking titanium exhausts of a Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird on top of it, my long forgotten airplane-heart was jumping. I swore to come back the next day to explore what was parked on its deck, when I saw a street sign saying 42nd street. Alright! Straightaway I was approached by some serious looking dudes asking me "if I needed something..." Ah No? I replied & just strolled on to a deserted Times Square, no lights & no traffic at that time of the morning, just some paper trash fluttering on the street. So, that's New York I thought, empty & pale, uncertain & alone, while I felt strangely free.

At least nobody knew where I was. And I mean nobody. No friends of mine, not my parents or anybody else. I had no address & no way to track me in the late '80s streets of Manhattan. I enjoyed walking down Broadway up to central Park only escorted by those high skyscraping buildings, how they slowly stood out & grew up until they dropped out of sight. Money seemed to become a prompt problem, but I resolved it by strumming my guitar in front of Tower Records from day two on. Ok, you might think that's out of reach, a tale its been told, but just because I forgot to mention that I brought my shabby old Hoyer acoustic with me doesn't mean its fake! Nonetheless fake is that I spent my first nights at the YMCA. I had the time of my life wandering around central park in 1990 eating my banana & talking to all kinds of people until I payed the drug-rehab-orgs a visit. They took me back to their house in Queens & a week later I got flown to Canada to help cure crack addicts in a small abandoned, far out ex-monastery in the ever empty landscapes of Quebec. My drug addiction had been upset somewhere in-between & all I did was watch the vapour trails 8km over my head. I wanted to get back to where I came from, go back to Berlin to catch up with what I left behind & see what'd happened there in meantime.

In 1991 July the 7th I was having cake & coffee at West-Berlin's famous Kaffee Kranzler balcony on Kurfürstendamm with Dimitri Hegemann awaiting what he called "the greatest movement in the world." A minute later the first sound systems on wheels came along, circled by an endlessly cheering, dancing, yelling mob with funny glasses, short cut hair, muscle shirts & crooked smiles. This is loopy anarchy I thought, disguised as fun. Because everybody can take part & be an attraction nobody will matter in the end, except the dealer, the DJ, the label, the bank. Germany was reunited & techno served as the best adhesive for ecstatic, whistling, yodelling masses. And just while the world went nuts around us we, a generation of already has-beens sat in the old Ex'n'Pop listening to Hank Williams over tepid Jever beer & smoking another joint to Alexander Hacke's Jever Mountain Boys version of

"Ace of Spades." At least those nights were dark enough to link it to a blue-coated '80s memory, black-clad men in suits & more self-confident women became it's residents when thankfully some new input came in the form of a second wave of Australian musicians fronted by Hugo Race & Bruno Adams, with his band Once Upon A Time. I became friends with Bryan Colechin of the True Spirit & Ash Wednesday, another Melbourne-rooted dude with some serious musical background who arrived at Ex'n'Pop in the early '90s. While Ash was soon working with Nina Hagen or Ralph Droge on his chart success *Luciletric*, Bryan, being the bass player of the True Spirit, gave me the opportunity to accompany the band to Prague, mostly because he used one of my guitars, having my first experience of the "beautiful city" I was told about when I was 18 on a grim night in a narrow bar off Seifertová with hardly anyone talking to me, which added to its mystique & attraction.

But it took almost another 10 years for me to return to Prague, this time on the invitation of my then girlfriends friend, who got married big style. We were located somewhere near the castle & after a Russian-orthodox service at St Cyril & Method the party moved on to a baroque hall, the Hall of the Prague Castle it might have been, or at least something similar. It's that big contrast that always attracted me, from the run down housings of Peckham & West Berlin to the upper-class culture I have witnessed in Prague, Bonn or Istanbul if not high raised buildings of Manhattan.

Today I'm more familiar with Prague's backstreets than New York of course. Prague is much closer to Berlin than NYC. But then Prague also feels much more a sister-city to Berlin than New York or any other German city today as NYC felt back in the '80s. It might be that Prague's still intact architectural mix of Gothic, Baroque, Neorenaissance, Jugendstil, also defined Germany's cities but were often bombed during & replaced after the war. I even remember me spontaneously stopping by a street construction worker repairing one of the many sidewalks' cobblestones & shaking his hand thanking him for his hard labour keeping such a great city as Prague is intact. I bet he had not understood a word I was saying but at least it freed my soul. It also might be because Prague is fairly connected to Berlin by various musical strings, something that pretty much ceased between New York & Berlin after the Wall came down. But being here or there, cities like Berlin seem to become expensive retirement villages where nostalgia soothes & inspiration diminishes with skyrocketing rents where every last hideaway gets transformed into an overpriced luxury affair. It's the kiss of death to any kind of revolution. ■



Mona Mur, video shoot "Snake" for the compilation *Berlin Now*, Summer 1985, by Ilse Ruppert. The video shoot took place in front of the Gropiusbau Museum Berlin, former Gestapo Headquarters & "topographie des terrors."

THE DRUG BUCKET
OR HOW THE SONG "120 DAYS" WAS CREATED

MONA MUR

God was I glad. FM appeared on my call for help almost immediately, with a large travel bag, just in case. I had hardly any clothes, so we could quickly clear the field in the Y-strasse. X had become reticent, before my eyes that didn't see, before my brain, which didn't understand. The winter came. I didn't understand H, didn't recognize the plague signs. Not my turf. To vomit & fall asleep didn't meet my idea of a party. We were too young, we were too old. I had to get going, on the spot. Traded in FM's unit laundry room. Hauptstrasse 150. One room, bed-sized, a mattress with a clothes line above it. No problem. From time to time, FM or Mrs. Bibi, these lovely & beautiful friends, came in & hung their laundry on me when I was still asleep, with excuses.

What more do you want.

Young, crisp, forthright, high on energy – a meteor out of Siberia. I was in Berlin to promote the band MONA MUR. The chamber had a small window. Of course, we all had breakfast together, always around 5p.m. December, not much daylight. Feed my ego. Klackklackklackklackklaaack. The Adrian Sherwood mix of the Neubauten speed anthem thundered without a break. And Foetus – *"Today is the 1st of September... I'll meet you in Poland, baby!"* The floor of the 2-room apartment was made of bright-metal wrought iron. FM sported aircraft safety belts over orange overalls, Neubauten at their peak. "Half-man/Halber Mensch" emerged on the horizon. Mrs Bibi looked delicate lurking in a shredded silk-kimono, white skin & bright-red cocky hair. She built stages, designed stage costumes, painted large intimidating images, & provided Bavarian beetroot recipes for the cohesion of the soul, mind & body, as the basis before the substances drew into the young flesh. I was allowed to stay for a month. "I am a poor relative..." "Slowly the longing dies – like a flower in the cellar..." FM & I were singing & laughing.

We would usually leave around midnight.

For Flugplatz Tempelhof, first at the pub "Zum Rollfeld." The station before the rehearsal tomb. There we, the puppies that we were, boozed on quickie shots. Minus 12 degrees Celsius outside. Then it went onto the aerial waves, playing with MONA MUR. "Practicing we despise!" Nikko, Stern, the Friese, Hacke, FM & myself. It was loud, very loud. Tough, very tough, slowbeat, morbid. Afterwards, at about 4a.m., off to the RISIKO. I had the best boys in the band, the heftiest, the most beautiful, the hardest, the most emotional. I loved them all to death. We played THE BALLAD OF THE DROWNED GIRL, SURABAYA JOHNNY, & invented our own hymns of pain, anger, & hunger for life.

We wouldn't do it for fewer than 120 DAYS.

I had subletted my Hamburg apartment to be free for the Berlin winter. That tasty chick didn't pay the rent, as I found out later. Instead, I had to dispose of about 30 empty champagne bottles, tons of Kleenex & myriads of small notes with telephone numbers & imploring requests. "Call me... I want children with you..." Previously, I had been able to spend the summer in Paris, in a pink lacquered flophouse on Rue Mouffetard. But the hard real music was not happening, only nightly adventures, when I was going out alone on the Boule Miche. La vie en rose. Nothing for me. An Intermezzo in LA – *I was no california girl*. Berlin. Here all hell broke loose.

The guys were already waiting.

I fled from a secure serious relationship – "Honey, here, 4-room-flat, Halensee..." he was leaving town OUT!! for three evenings at the Schaubühne, with the colleagues from FLUCHT NACH VORN, BLIXA BARGELD, RIO REISER & MARIANNE ROSENBERG. After that it was over.

I never came home again.

Moved from friend's to friend's. At X, luxury, friendship, generosity, until the heroin zombies returned. I noticed that she gagged her little bulldog, then stared with wig & strangely sedated into the open refrigerator & sneered in front of herself "...all my friends just want my money." It broke my heart. I had to leave.

Hauptstrasse was heaven, friends put me up, a family, shared their tight space.

The songs "120 Days," "Snake," "Mon amour," came into being by being cut out directly from the film, which surrounded us & which we produced, Berlin in the winter of '84, THE WALL OF SHAME & THE DEATH STRIP in full function.

We, on foot, the night a polarnight of the icecold war & punk-poetrycraft. BARGELD pushed me a waterglass-large vodka over the bar, with contempt for death over the risk. I cannot remember what I gave him for it, whether anything, & where it came from, I was completely detached from the bustling existence.

It is all sunk in amber-coloured glow.

In hammering, screaming, scraping, rattling, pleading, & whispering. In deathfucking guitar thunderbolts. In the sounds of Leathernun, Throbbing Gristle, Ministry & Laibach. Lydia & Siouxi. DAF. Neubauten & Foetus. Nick Cave. The most extreme form of flight. "We are the kings of the night & we never pay."

February, minus 20. I landed with another friend on a mattress in the Bergmannstrasse. Under the kitchen sink there was space for me for 4 weeks. One room, kitchen, no bathroom.

The phase was exhausted. This was when the drug bucket came into play. The toilet on the halfstair frozen. On the fourth floor lived two girls, who supplied an exclusively good portion of Southern Germany with white powder. They had everything.

"Huhu gals – what do you need?"

Then the bucket came down to us on the first floor. We were rather harmless, cigarette papers or a bit of weed was what we gave back in return. The bucket worked wonderfully.

The MONA MUR band had a gig at the LOFT in March. Until then the job was to survive.

120 DAYS¹

When you go
It remains cold
It remains dark When you go
It remains dark
It remains Friday When you go
It remains dark
It remains Friday It always remains December

From my house Streams are running
From my house Streams are running My blood is running
From my house Streams are running My blood is running On the street
To you

120 days for one night
120 deaths you made for me 120 knives as sharp as glass 120 pierces straight to the heart

Paradise takes nothing more than a warm gun.

– Mona Mur, January 2017 ■

Translated from German by David Vichnar & Tim König.

¹ Lyrics: Mona Mur. Music: F.M. Einheit, Alexander Hacke, Nikko Weidemann, Thomas Stern, Siewert Johannsen, Mona Mur.

SCHAUBÜHNE AM LEHNINER PLATZ

Marianne Rosenberg

Rio Reiser

Blixa Bargeld

Mona Mur

Flucht nach vorn

Eine Veranstaltung der Flucht nach vorn Enterprises
in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Senator für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten und dem SFBerat
Mit freundlicher Unterstützung
der C. Bechstein Pianofortefabrik



26./27. OKTOBER 1984, 21.00 UHR

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Miron Zowin, 2015, by Nico Anfuso.

I was born in Karlsruhe in southern Germany. I grew up the first 6 years with my grandparents because my parents were both working & lived in a very small apartment. I grew up in a suburb, which was rather gloomy & dark. It still showed traces of the Second World War with traumatized widows & crippled veterans. The sanitation at my grandparents place was very poor. They had an outhouse next to a rat infested hutch & no shower. And except for the second floor where my aunt lived there wasn't much sunlight coming into the house. If you wanted to go to their little garden you had to pass through a half dilapidated barn that would have been kind of spooky for any kid. So the first six years of my life was pretty strange. When I moved to my parents later into their newly build house the living standards were much higher, but I felt rather estranged. I think for my future life this was very important because I felt isolated & very much on my own. And my parents kind of respected my distance without putting too much pressure on me. My imagination was able to flow without someone telling me all the time to do this or that. I could develop my own interests. I could choose more freely than many other kids which influences I would except or reject. That might have been a disadvantage in school since I only listened to what I was interested in but it was a big advantage in terms of my independency & my inner freedom, passion & individual way of development.

My first passion creatively was literature. But I felt I needed a lot more experience. I didn't want to produce empty words or repeat other people's thoughts. And I didn't want to exhibit my inner self. I was much too introverted. I was still searching & I wanted to know a hell of a lot more about life before I would start writing. My second passion was film, but I got rejected in two film schools. I was living in Berlin since 1975 & my girlfriend at that time was studying photography. Since I needed some creative outlet I borrowed her camera & went out into the streets looking for outlaws, rejects, homeless & freaks.

My first impressions of Berlin was... well... very dark, anonymous, gloomy, rough. Lots of wastelands, ruins & neglected buildings. I did not start out with the nightlife or whatever you might associate with Berlin. I had to survive & lived from many underpaid temp jobs. I worked at assembly lines, in a liquor factory, in warehouses & supermarkets, did demolition, construction – & many other stupid jobs for five Deutsch Marks an hour. It was pretty rough, but at least you could always get a job. I mean anyone could get a job

in Berlin in the '70s. I was living in Moabit in the neighbourhood of the harbour. There was a large temp agency there & next to it was a 24-hour bar. So whenever I showed up there at 6 or 6:30a.m. or even earlier to line up for work, there were always some drunks from the bar ahead of me in line. You just couldn't beat them. Because nobody from the temp agency gave a shit about anything. Anyone that would show up, even if he was just able to crawl into this office would be sent off to work. You had no other choice than to except or reject a job, they would tell you what job was available & gave you the address. Some of these jobs were so fucked up I didn't last for more than a couple of days sometimes just a couple of hours. I would say that 80 percent of it I either quit or I got thrown out before the end of the stretch. I knew from the beginning that this was just an episode to survive. I knew sooner or later I would do something worth my effort. I didn't give a shit about a reference or a decent profession I could rely on as a backup if things wouldn't work out for me. I wouldn't have lasted at a post office job like Bukowski for more than a couple weeks. I didn't give a damn about a future that would put me into a



Bruno S, Berlin, 2002, by Miron Zownir.

straightjacket for the sole purpose of security. From the beginning I was arrogant & cocky enough to think I would do it my way whatever the outcome.

I frequently went out into the streets & made photos. No one was doing really hardcore documentary at the time anymore. Especially not without an assignment. This was something that you weren't supposed to be able to live from. In the school where my girlfriend was studying photography they focused on still life, portraits, architectural photography & fancy technical know-how. They would have rejected me there as well as in any other photo or film school. There wasn't anything they could teach me I was interested in.

I moved to New York in 1980 because I felt it was a time for change. London was kind of a step towards America. New York from the very beginning flashed me. It was unbelievably interesting, exciting, crazy completely different from Berlin or London which of course, were interesting cities too. When I first arrived in July it hit me how hot it was. It kind of embraced me & carried me off as if I had wings. I went from the airport to Grand Central Station put my luggage in a locker & thought "Here I am I'm ready for anything". I had the phone number of

someone I didn't know & I couldn't connect with. I didn't know where I was going or where I would end up, but I felt good, strong & adventurous. I was basically on my own but I didn't care & ventured all over the city.

Finally at one point, when I was completely exhausted, I ended up at Central Park. I was falling asleep on a bench & I woke up because of some kind of noise & all of a sudden there was a rat crawling out of the garbage next to me. Since I have a rat phobia, I ran away. New York City with all his craziness & energy didn't intimidate me in the least but a fucking rat was chasing me off a bench. All of a sudden I felt restless again & couldn't find another place to rest that seemed to be rat free. Somehow I ended up at the West Side & walked down to the piers. I didn't know at the time they were called the fuck piers of course, but all of a sudden I was there & I saw all of these hustlers, transsexuals & S&M freaks on the streets & I said, "Wow this is really like Walk on The Wild Side!" It was dawn & the early morning light was unbelievable & since I had my camera with me I started to make photos. It was my first 24 hours in New York & I immediately hit the spots, which I later always went back to document,



Berlin, 2011, by Miron Zownir.

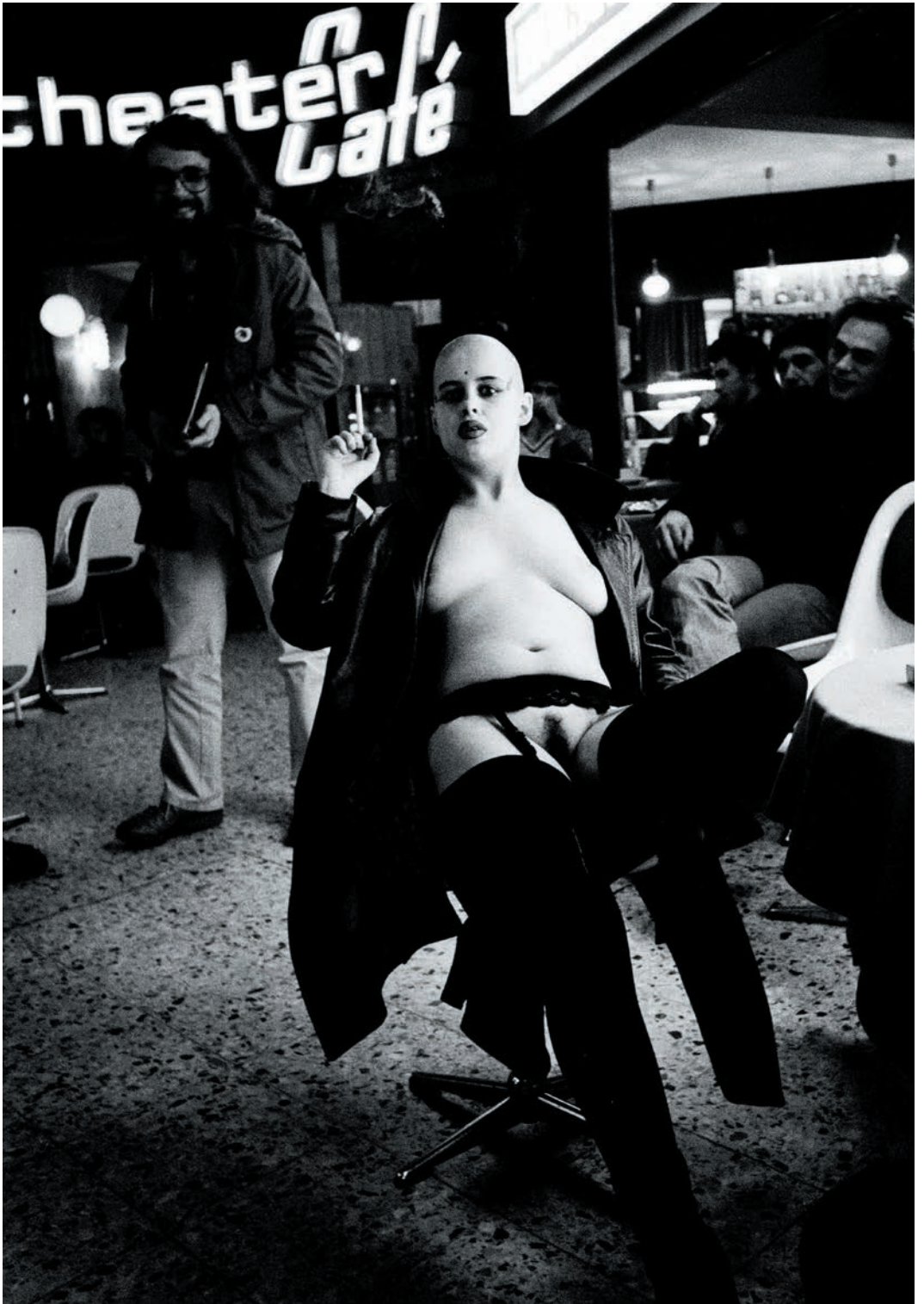
as you can see in my photo book *NYC RIP*.

I just hooked up intuitively in the right area. If I went in the opposite direction I would have ended up in Harlem. In Berlin I was looking for people who lived off the main track outside of society for my photography. Basically that is what I was looking for in New York too & you didn't have to look too hard in New York! Most people didn't dare to photograph it or were not interested in it. Some things you could see & other things you had to dig into a little deeper. No one would go inside the piers unless you were gay. I wasn't gay but I went anyway. Out of curiosity & because I didn't have any prejudice. I always ventured or dared to go into strange places, which most people didn't dare or didn't want to associate with. There were areas in New York that were fucking dangerous & many people were afraid of getting mugged or whatever. You went maybe to your clubs & events, but most white people didn't go to Harlem beyond a specific point or a place like Alphabet City. They just didn't go. There was an outlaw kind of situation in New York. You had the feeling that anything would go but you had to watch your back. Life was cheap if you crossed the wrong track. Everything was loose of any restriction

including crime. I ventured everywhere, even to Alphabet City but only with a hidden camera because it was really fucking dangerous! There was no two ways about it. There were people who had weapons & they were desperate & they went all the way. If you had a camera & went there, the chances that someone with a gun would mug you or kill you was at least fifty-fifty!

Even at the piers once a fucking guy pulled a gun on me. When I was working the door at the Mudd Club a fucking Chinese guy pointed a gun at me. There were several times I got into fights venturing into areas with my camera or working in a club as a doorman or bouncer, but in a way I could usually anticipate danger. I was always aware of the potential of danger. I was almost always ready & I knew how to protect myself. I knew how to avoid certain situations. I was pretty confident at some point, but I would always be carrying a knife or some kind of a weapon. In terms of photography I got what I wanted out of New York & there is basically nothing I could do there now that could match what I did.

I did a lot of different types of jobs in New York. I worked at Danceteria, the Roxy & the Rutherford



Berlin, 1980, by Miron Zownir.

mansion as a bouncer. At the Mudd Club as a doorman. At Area as a demolition worker. I was writing for a telephone sex agency. As an escort service. As a model in different art schools, at an art storage place & I did some occupations I can't talk about.

In 1984 after the Mudd Club closed down I was working at the Roxy. I got the job through John the Greek. One night I am outside the door of the club as a doorman & a little black guy with a monkey on his shoulder approached me. Usually there was a policy that single guys wouldn't get in unless ladies accompanied them or they were really well known. Well that little guy & his monkey looked cool & I thought I was doing him a favour so I said to him, "Tonight, it's only ten bucks."

But he got completely hysterical

"I never pay!" he squeaked indignantly. "I'm Michael Jackson!"

All of these other doormen & bouncers were pushing me aside & gave that guy the real VIP treatment kissing his ass. That was the last day I ever worked there. I am not sure if it really was Michael Jackson. Maybe he was a good impostor & it was enough for them to give him the VIP treatment. Maybe some of those assholes pushing me aside were some of his bodyguards. Looking back I think it was funny maybe it really was Michael Jackson.

I knew Klaus Nomi through Danceteria. He would always approach me & talk to me in German. One day he told me there was a German party upstairs & asked me if I was joining him. I told him I couldn't because I had to work downstairs. He said that everyone had to offer some type of contribution to the theme of "Germany" & I asked him what his was & he showed me his stupid Adidas shoes. Another time he came to me & told me, "I am going to Germany for a big TV show that will be televised all over the world."

He was sure that this would finally be his breakthrough. That was the last time I saw him. Next thing I heard was that there was a benefit party for Klaus Nomi at Danceteria because he was dying of AIDS. It was sad. I remember not long after that New York had all these digital signs at the streets with the numbers of the people who had died of AIDS.

I remember one day it was fifty eight thousand & then not long after it went up to seventy eight thousand. Everybody in New York got scared & paranoid at that point & it changed the carefree attitude dramatically.

I had a publication in a gay newspaper called

New York Native. They had a double spread of my photos taken at the piers, but I didn't know that they would print my name & address with it. Anyway I got quite some response. One guy sent me a letter & wrote that he would like to have the experience being photographed by me & he included a photograph of himself masturbating. So I called him up & he invited me to his apartment on the Upper East Side. When we met he was very polite serving me tea & cookies but he couldn't keep his hands off his cock & was constantly masturbating.

He would later be known in the New York City Underground Scene as David Terrifick, he was a great performer & I cast him in several of my short movies. Once he did a performance at Danceteria where he was strangulating himself until he passed out. Howie Mountag, who was the host of the evening said; "Shit! The guy committed suicide! I can't fucking believe it." He was totally freaking out as they carried David off to the dressing room, but they revived him & it made quite an impression on everyone.

In the early '90s Terrifick had discovered that he had full blown AIDS. I was already living in Pittsburg with my ex-wife when he called me up & told me about it. He was very desperate & isolated. He said that he didn't trust the doctors in New York. That there were so many people suffering of AIDS here & that everybody had to wait in line until it was too late to help them. I told him that Pittsburgh had some of the best hospitals in the United States & that he would probably have better treatment here. So I drove my Dodge from Pittsburgh to New York. It was an eight-hour ride during a summer heatwave & I was pretty tired when I arrived. It took a long time until he answered through his intercom. I could hardly recognize his voice. It was so thin & lifeless. He buzzed open the door & I went up the stairs & saw that his door was open. I looked in & he was sitting in the kitchen in a blood stained robe. His face & his body were emaciated & he looked like a ghost. He was just staring in front of himself not saying hello or anything.

His apartment smelled as if he hadn't changed the cat litter for a couple of weeks. I was planning to rest there a couple of hours before I'd take him to Pittsburg, but when I saw his condition, his carelessness with all those tissues of blood piled up everywhere, & his cats who looked almost as emaciated as him. I said, "Did you pack?" He nodded. "Is anyone taking care of your cats?" "My neighbour." "OK David let's go."



New York, 1983, by Miron Zownir.

So, we drove back without a break. I was so fucking tired & David just stared at me the whole time from the side. It was like a ghost sitting next to me trying to cast a spell on me. I had the feeling that he hated so much that he was dying, that he wished that everyone else would die. He was totally apathetic but when I turned up the sound of the radio to stay awake he groaned as if he got stabbed. That ride was a nightmare for both of us.

He was spending two or three nights at our place until I got him into a hospital. They treated his pneumonia & some other minor problems & David finally started to feel hopeful again. Martin Sheen came by to visit AIDS patients & gave him a gift from Mother Teresa. The nurses were nice & everybody took good care of him. All of a sudden David thought that he would be totally healthy again & not have AIDS anymore, but it was just a delusion. When he got released he faced a life as merciless as ever & couldn't handle his own responsibilities anymore. Suddenly he realized that he still had full blown AIDS & there was nobody around to take

care of him as they did in the hospital. He couldn't cope with this situation, completely freaked out, had a nervous breakdown & ended up in a mental institution in Pittsburgh. He was feeling really mistreated & wronged, & rejected any contact with anyone. When he got released from the mental institution, I picked him up & drove him to the bus station. He looked so defeated, tired & lonely but I didn't know how to help him. He got on the bus & went back to New York. Two weeks later he called me up & asked me if I would end his life. But of course I rejected him!

A week later I got a call from his sister in Utah who told me that he disappeared & the police were looking for him. Everybody thought that he wouldn't last that long in his condition but I knew he was already dead. He used to throw his cats, after they died, into the East River. He probably committed suicide by jumping into the East River himself. But his corpse was never found.

A couple of weeks later his sister called me up again & asked me if I wanted the photos & films I



New York, 1983, by Miron Zownir.

shot of him, his computer & books. I told her no thank you. There was a cheque of ten thousand dollar written out in my name, but it was ripped apart. That would have been the money for taking his life.

Before I forget it, since we jumped straight to Pittsburg. In 1989, nine years after I moved from NYC to Los Angeles. I did not do any photographs there, because I was involved in a movie project that never worked out. It was a crazy time I wouldn't want to miss, but in terms of creativity it was the low point of my 15 years in the States – for reasons I don't want to talk about at the moment. I just went back to Los Angeles in the autumn of 2016 & did some incredible work there especially on Skid Row. I just couldn't stand the thought that I'd lived there for almost a year & hadn't produced anything, not even one single photo.

Pittsburgh was much too small for me of course & I moved back to Berlin in 1995. That's where I had met a couple of months before, Nico, my girlfriend. The same year we went to Moscow for three months

where I did a photo project known as "Down & Out in Moscow" published by Pogo books Berlin almost 20 years later. It was an incredible tough time seeing all that senseless suffering of people who couldn't adjust to the brutal change from Communism to Capitalism.

I guess I was always looking for intense situations, places, relationships. The intense time I had in New York of course strongly influenced me. Moscow influenced me; Berlin influenced me, Los Angeles, London too. Everything influences you from the first semiconscious moment in your mother's womb. I always had specific living conditions, lots of adventures & experience but there is also my imagination, my expectations, & my dreams, which are not related to reality. In my photography, I'm a hard core realist with a poetic touch of despair. But I'm not a photographer 24 hours a day! I'm a writer & filmmaker as well. And I have my own private life. You could lock me up in a closet & I would have enough material & imagination to create for the rest of my life.



Berlin, 1979, by Miron Zownir.

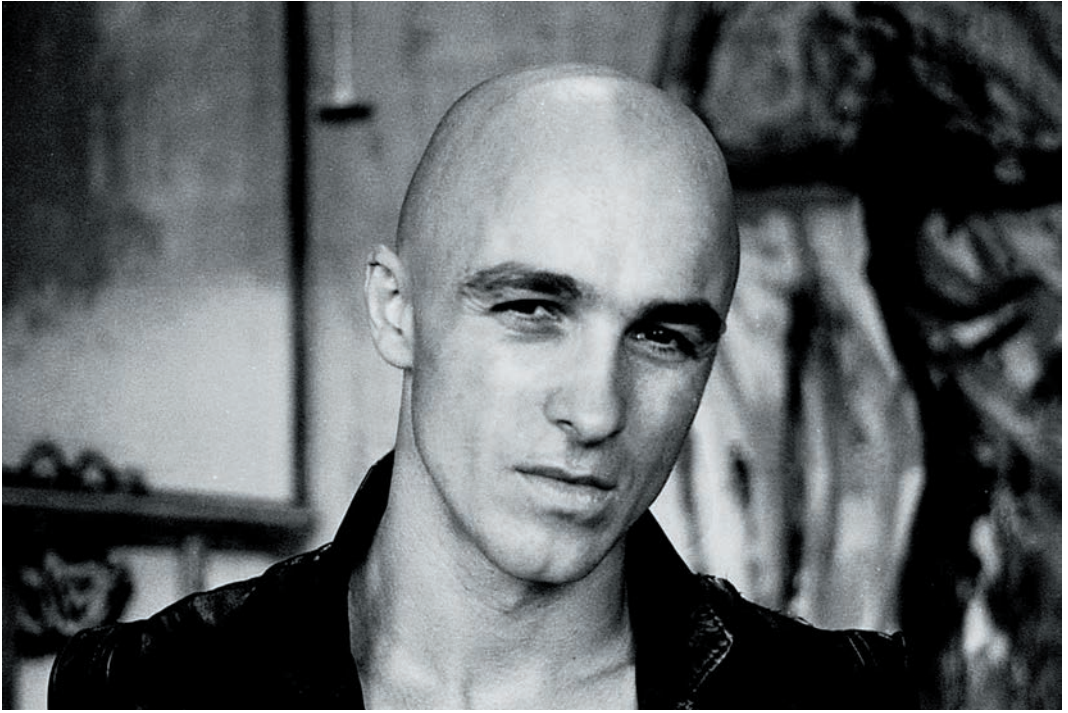
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Lots of people who can no longer afford the metropolitan areas in Europe or the United States are moving now to Berlin. One of the consequences are that it got more expensive, rents went up & yuppies invaded the cities. Berlin is still exciting but it doesn't have the energy of New York in the '80s. It is much too spread out & not as cosmopolitan or desperate. Manhattan is a very small island & just the dimensions of the skyscrapers is intimidating for any individual. The history of all its foreigners, newcomers & minorities, the struggle & violence between the establishment & the outcasts, the interaction between all of the different ethnic groups made it much more unpredictable, exciting & crazy than any other city in this world. Berlin has areas that are completely normal & tame. You don't have a Bronx in Berlin. You don't have a Harlem in Berlin or a Lower East Side!

In NY in the '80s there was a lot of endemic art happening & there was a lot of interaction between artists. In Berlin endemic art is still possible because artists can still afford reasonable rent. But Berlin is not the melting pot like New York City was before it got gentrified & cleaned up. This was one of

the first things that impressed me. When I was in New York in a bar, for example the St. Marks Bar, there would be bums & artists, academics, workers, heteros & gays, transgender, intellectuals, criminals & all kind of races. In Berlin you have your yuppie bars & your punk clubs your freaks & your squares. But maybe I'm wrong & Berlin is now much more open than New York is. But in the '70s & '80s Berlin was more tribal & the outsiders were so proud of being different, they had to stick together & show it. In New York it was more of a melting pot & more individual.

What used to be great in Berlin in the '70s & '80s were all of the wastelands & ruins because hardly anyone invested in new buildings. And nothing was fenced in except of cause the city itself. It was as tightly locked up as any modern day prison. But in West Berlin there were these incredible wastelands & behind it you had these really dark, obscure & sinister looking places. Everywhere you sensed conspiracy, anarchy & an antiestablishment attitude. It was magical & mysterious. Now everything is fenced in & locked up. You don't get anywhere anymore without trespassing. And every room



Miron Zownir, 1985, by Dea Cleavenger.

or building is restored for commercial investment interests. It's getting like every big metropolitan area in Europe or anywhere in the world. Of course Berlin still has its techno & sex clubs but everything is so fucking organized. It is typical German. There used to be all these freaks hanging around the train stations, decrepit ruins, at the Strasse des 17. Juni or the Tiergarten to get their kicks & meet their mates for some hidden sexual excitement & trying to hide from the vice squad. Now everything is so organized that any tourist-square feels welcome.

I am still doing whatever I have done. I photograph what I want I write whatever I want. But if I want to do another full feature film I have got to get a decent budget. I have already done two full feature films without money which is unbelievable. But I don't know if I could pull another one off without money. Since I break every rule, I probably won't get any institution to fund me the money to do another full feature film. We 'll see! I continue to write, make films & do photos. What else shall I do?

I'm no Nostradamus but I wouldn't predict a positive future. The world is overpopulated & the ocean is a dumping ground for industrial

garbage. Our politicians are acting parasites with ever decreasing importance. We're ruled by bankers, ethical castrates, hypocrites, technocrats & computer nerds. It's getting gloomier by the minute. Everything seems to collapse at once. It's getting so fucking corrupt & ruthless & blatantly capitalistic. We're approaching a potentially darker age than what we experienced in our life time. Isis, Saudi Arabia, China... The near East is a time bomb. Africa is a time bomb. The Brexit was so stupid. Europe is weak, Erdogan & Putin do what the fuck they want. They intimidate Europe & now there's fucking Trump.

What can we do about it? We've been so cocky in our save democracy heaven & now everybody seems to be so surprised that we all lost control. Everything happens against us, we're outnumbered & none of us matter. ■

*The preceding is a written self-portrait of the multitalented Miron Zownir. We put this together from an interview that I did with him in Berlin in 2016. I transcribed the interview & then Miron put it into the form of a self-portrait. I first met Miron when we had both worked in clubs in New York in the 1980s & I still have the pleasure to know him & see him in Berlin. – Robert Carrithers



Carola Göllner, "Untitled," 1984.

CHAPTER ONE 1970-79

Beginning with the move to Berlin after my parents' divorce. Childhood impressions & memories of the grandparents' apartment followed by school. The shock of all of the years in the backwaters of Germany. The big city is seen as strange, empty, & hostile.

Living with grandma in Berlin was nothing new. I don't know when I realized that this time it wasn't just another short visit but that from then on Berlin would be our new home. My grandparents' apartment was a part of a boring block, & most of the tenants were employed at the Allianz insurance agency – just like my grandpa was at the time. The apartments were all identical: it was dark just behind the front door, to the right was a tiny bathroom, then came a long, sombre corridor. Everything in the apartment was gloomily depressing with the exception of the bedroom. Perhaps this was all due to the hideous furniture, all of it supposedly new purchases made after their flight from East Germany, but I had seen similarly lumpy furniture in films from the 1940s.

The room in which I slept was occupied by nothing more than a massive sofa bed upholstered in a material that looked & felt like a dried-out mop. The armrests were of varnished dark brown wood & strung in basketwork. I could stick my fingers through the pattern of holes, the only fun option the sofa had to offer. After it was folded out with great effort to make a bed, it completely filled the tiny room, an explanation perhaps for why the room was furnished so sparingly in the first place. I discovered a new preoccupation that would last for the next ten years: the melancholic staring out of the window. From there I could sit & observe how a giant office building, a hotel, & several apartment buildings were erected on the other side of the street. A three-room apartment had been reserved for us in one of these buildings. It was to be on the fourth floor.

Back in those days parents usually were unconcerned with the catchment areas of elementary school districts, even though – as we shall shortly see – there were enough reasons for this to have been an issue even then. I was placed in the next-best available facility. What could possibly have been wrong with that? And so it was that in the middle of my third school year I landed in a school on the corner of Potsdamer Straße. The classroom, crammed full with forty pupils, was located in an old

building, & I was terrified of its old stone stairways & gloomy corridors. Even worse were my fellow pupils. Of course nowadays I have to admit that I really must have been asking for it considering my appearance: back in the sticks my mother had had only good experiences with sprucing up her children, particularly when it came to Sundays & holidays, & of course the first day of school more or less counted as just such an occasion. And so there I stood, a dressed-up doll with hat, pleated skirt, & a gigantic Nadia Comaneci-style taffeta bows – & not just in the hair but on the shoes as well.

This all meant that I was in for quite a thrashing in the schoolyard. The way home was even worse. There was a group of tormentors that all lived in the same block as I did, meaning they accompanied me the whole way home. This group of boys was led by a girl issuing exact orders concerning just what they were to do to me. She directed all of the shoves & determined who was to poke sticks into my schoolbag. This girl, Sigrid her name, lived directly across the street from me in a ground-floor apartment on the same side of the street as my grandma.

My mother had already selected her to be a friend of mine. After all, her father was a patent attorney, meaning it would be a relationship befitting our social status. My friendship with the terrible Sigrid would have to wait until her henchmen & executors had reached an age in which they found playing with girls – much less being commanded by them – just too embarrassing.

CHAPTER TWO 1980-87

After secondary school came the study of art & with it a new world opens up. One is no longer a stranger, feeling like they're among like-minded people. This describes the feeling of life in West Berlin in the 1980s. With the departure from the university began a confused time of reorientation. Painting in an apartment in the district of Wedding due to lack of space. A job at an athletic centre in the ultra-conservative district of Lankwitz vs. exhibition openings, parties & concerts mainly in Kreuzberg & Schöneberg – all the while concentratedly working on my art.

1980

Naturally, there was never a debate about me studying art. My mother absolutely wanted to make



Carola Göllner, "Family pictures & values: Blues 72," 1984.

me a doctor, be it either to show my father what she had done as a single-parent, or to compensate for her own uncompleted training as a doctor's assistant. Perhaps she had also overestimated my medical interest arising from pure hypochondria. I didn't care at the time what my father thought about my future occupation. But for my mother's sake, I went with her to a lecture about studying medicine. After only about half an hour, nothing could keep me in my chair, I ran out, mom behind me, & to this day, I can still see us screaming on Ernst Reuter Platz. The usual "Do it yourself, if you care about it so much." Who knows what would have become of me, had my art teacher not been; she encouraged me not only to study art, but she also took it upon herself to accompany me to the university to show my application portfolio to a professor. I proudly presented to Professor Petrick my drawings of fabulous beings & demons. My greatest dream at the time was to design a Cover for my favourite band Yes. Anyone familiar with album covers from the 70s could imagine in which direction that went. Professor P. was not particularly impressed, he said that it all had to go & that everything would have to be replaced by drawings from nature. Until the date of deadline to apply, there were still 14 days in which I drew everything possible – from views of the Tiergarten to my shoes. I wrapped toilet paper around my grandmother's head & portrayed her as

an old Dutch woman in tribute to Rembrandt.

While I was on one of my Interrail trips with Sigrid, the message reached me that my application portfolio was actually accepted & I would be admitted to take the actual test.

The test lasted three days & I was firmly convinced that I had messed it all up. While still being the 'art queen' at school, I now had to realize that everyone had talent & many creatively had a lot more going on than me. I couldn't decide whether I should properly follow the instructions, or try using originality to shine. Worst of all was the final meeting with the professors. Here I still had to explain & defend my mortised nonsense. After that I was destroyed; I thought it was all over. With the art & everything.

Then the next day came the surprise: My name stood on the list at the door of the university. I could hardly believe it! I was now an art student!

As an art student, I could no longer live with my mom. I searched & found for 100 Marks per-month rent: my own home in a rear courtyard in the district of Moabit.

DECEMBER 28, 1980

The ground-floor apartment has three external walls & an outside toilet I share with my neighbour M. He's the brother of the house's groundskeeper who

says his brother is not quite right in the head. I avoid any contact. Mr M. seems to find the renovated toilet cosy & spends half the day there.

In winter the apartment was so cold, I couldn't stand it. Tommy was living in the Stromstraße – not better, so we got drunk in a pub at Westhafen until we couldn't feel the cold anymore. When I got home, I saw Mr M. sitting immovably in front of his TV, staring at the test pattern. I always went to bed with a knife & my phone.

The bed was a gigantic specimen from the seventies & part of an orange bedroom set that my father had given me, plush rug & curtains included. For some balance I urgently needed to get myself some more furniture. I stole some garden chairs from a café in Tiergarten & rolled a pedestal from the traffic police from the next street intersection into my apartment, which was however unsuitable as a table because your legs didn't fit under it. I enjoyed my complete design freedom, I painted the doors black, hung gloomy self-portraits everywhere, & ate every day as a token of my self-determination toast bread with ketchup for breakfast.

I couldn't understand at all why everyone now lived in shared apartments; I was happy that no one was there when I came home, that no one else was there to care how I had left the place, whether I had done the shopping, or if I had cleaned the toilet. There was also enough going on, especially in summer – the visitors would come in right through the window & turned the record player on upon arrival. There wasn't much of a music selection: *Stranglers*, *Killing Joke* & *Roxy Music*. Buying records was a luxury, & every purchase needed to be well-considered.

After a large-scale police action to vacate eight squatted buildings on September 22, 1981, the 18-year-old political demonstrator Klaus-Jürgen Rattay is run over by a BVG bus & dragged to death.

The scene of this event was the Potsdamer Strasse, right on the corner from my university, & so all of the demos went past it. At some point, I found it too shameful to always just be a voyeur from the balcony of the university. I already had a complex, because I didn't live in a squatted house as it was expected of me – but primarily by people whom themselves lived in rented apartments or homes & would have liked to hear reports from the scene. I definitely at least wanted to protest the vacations & so I joined one of the demonstrations. Since it was my first one, I knew neither the procedures nor could I recognize signs of danger, & suddenly, out the blue of the sky, stones flew past me into the shop windows & shortly thereafter I was already in the mist of a tear gas grenade. "My eyes!" I thought panicking. I ran straight back into the bunker of my university & entrenched myself behind the easel –

where I preferred to go deeper into my work & temporarily abandoned any further political action.

1983

Professor H, whose painting class I had chosen after the basic study in the promise of the acquisition of solid painting techniques, had not been seen at the university for an entire year. He evidently found more artistic inspiration at his house in Greece. So I switched to Professor Petrick, who had already given me such good advice about my application portfolio.

The class of Prof. P. had a certain reputation; the students didn't talk to other classes, wore all dark clothes, which made them seem by those outside the class necrophilic or aggressive or both.

NOVEMBER 11, 1983

My studio neighbour, Fritz F, has strong mood swings that trouble me. He threw Heike R's radio out the window because the music annoyed him. Without music, I can't work. Fritz says Heike's music was the wrong kind. *Psychedelic Furs* & *Killing Joke* should be ok...

There were interesting personalities in the class: Ilona A. who painted her boyfriend as a giant water corpse on a raft, kept the remains of her Aunt Lisbeth in a small box. Heike R. took all her subject matter from a pathology book she got from the flea market – over which Prof P was glowingly envious. Bettina's the only student open to the paintings of the *Junge Wilde* movement; she was always in a good mood, running around our working space with a deckmop, her most important painting utensil.

The entire year I painted skulls & corncobs.

And when I wasn't painting, I went dancing.

MARCH 13, 1984

At the university, Stefan F. prepares for his master's examination by sitting in the hallway for a long time on a bed of car tires. Next to him is a radio stuck somewhere between two stations, giving out a deafening noise & crackling. I am very impressed.

For his actual master's examination, Stefan F. presented huge, old rugs painted with dispersion colour & sprayed with gold. He explained to the defence examination board that the work – to him – bore something "extremely human."

There was no avantgarde discussion in the class. Instead, P. recommended reading *Crazy* by Rainald Goetz & the *Psychiatry Report* by Ernst Klee, as well as Navratil's book *Schizophrenia & Art* & working with the artists from Gugging (a psychiatric hospital in Austria).



Carola Göllner, "Unittled," 1983.

My neighbor, Fritz F. hadn't returned from Hamburg, where he had supposedly ended up in a mental ward. P. was proud of every student who had been committed or at least in psychiatric treatment. He would get giggly telling stories about my classmate M. who set her studio place on fire to get attention.

P. invited the students to have a party in his studio – but first, we just had to clean it; P. worked in the Kulmerstrasse, anyway. For days, we ploughed through unimaginable filth & disgusting finds such as pigeon skeletons & rotten salamis in the refrigerators, which were already broken since forever.

Aside from us all getting hammered, our party lacked some kind of supporting framework. Thomas Lange suggested we have a battle with baguette bread. After a few injuries, we switched to dancing the tango. To underscore his role as professor, P. daringly hung himself upside down from the flagpole at the university, dangling 10m above the Grunewaldstrasse.

1985

At some point, I felt that in the P class I had learned everything I possibly could: how to intrigue, how to ignore, & how to make egg tempera. My friend Ilona & I decided to make a few new experiences in our last two academic years & to change our professor. And the only one who, besides P, still qualified for painting was Georg Baselitz. Unfortunately, a change also meant giving up our gigantic privileged places in the P. class to begin again with the tiny newbie places behind the door of the Baselitz class. But it was about to get worse. It turned out that there was no room for us in the class (later on, we were unpleasantly informed that we were completely unwelcome among the predominantly female Baselitz students). In a misunderstood correctness we had already submitted our farewell to Professor P, which was pretty much the same as being cursed. So, the change had to take place & we needed our own studio, & in a hurry! And all this happened at the time when housing in West Berlin was scarce, & studio space even scarcer. The situation became increasingly desperate & we began to pursue every strange rumour we heard, so also that someone from the Arts Council of the District of Wedding protruded who was exceedingly appreciative of art & was therefore willing to turn apartments zoned for living spaces into studios. So we quickly called the bureau & we actually immediately got a viewing appointment.

The house in the Plantagenstraße was not so easy to find – especially since the last time I had been in Wedding was to visit my classmate Dagmar

L in 1974. (The poor thing lived on the edge of town.)

The apartment to be visited was under the roof on the top floor & was originally not intended as an apartment; but was converted in such a way from a laundry room after the war. The first impression was the complete darkness, so that Loni & I could not imagine any artistic work without artificial light. The impression came from the darkly discoloured brick imitation wallpaper that lined the hallway. The middle of the corridor had a kind of archway, charmingly decorated with ivy wallpaper that had seen better days. It was as if the original thought was probably to imitate a romantic arbour, which by then only allowed an association with the *Heart of Darkness*. Also from the two-&-a-half other rooms, there wasn't one without patterned wallpaper; it was clear that we first had to turn the stuffy flat into a proper studio. In wild determination we hurriedly white-washed the structured wallpaper, which gave rise to strange, textured reliefs, which was anyway irrelevant, since we hung up our paperworks directly on the walls as presentation of our extensive & large-scale university research. We immediately tore out the kitchen stove, we stripped the ground down to the floorboards & painted them grey, just to bruise them again immediately with our easels & splash them with egg tempera & hare glue. Then there was also immediately the first exhibition opening & there were actually a few people who had dared the exotic trip to our district of Wedding, which at the time was known by no means as a "creative district" – but rather only as "ugly" & "dangerous."

And so it was that also our length of stay there was only limited to working hours. At ten sharp we met for breakfast & then we painted until we had a yogurt pause. Then we worked a few more hours – all very disciplined. Then immediately over Leopoldplatz – looking neither left nor right – then by subway to homelike Schöneberg.

Our fear that Professor Baselitz would never ever come here to visit his out-sourced students was unfounded.

He appeared punctually for the appointments made with his assistant Christa Dichgans. She not only had to chauffeur the Master, she also had to agree with his statements at regular intervals, as well as strengthen & encourage him. It looked something like this: I expressed a recent enthusiasm for Delacroix – immediately Baselitz knew that Géricault was the better painter. I suppose I furrowed my brow or something, which did not signal immediate approval – so he exclaimed: "I have a clue about art history. Right, Christa?" What was Christa supposed to say? For two hours he then remained in our studio in proper form, advising especially me that there was still "too much of Professor P!" in the pictures for me to apply for the Master's examination, & sealed

his views & remarks upon leaving by stubbing out his cigar on my painting pallet.

1986

"The Chernobyl disaster occurred on April 26, 1986 in Block 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, near the Ukrainian city of Prypjat. As a first event, it was classified as a level-seven catastrophic accident on the international scale of nuclear events."

Olli calls. He says that – in the face of Chernobyl – we must marry immediately.

I say that – in the face of Chernobyl – we should keep the windows closed.

OCTOBER 29, 1986

I think that a job should have nothing to do with my art but rather with something that I have zero interest in – so I can slip it off at any time & not have to think about it at the end of the evening.

The athletic centre was located in an area where almost exclusively older people lived. The younger ones came mostly from the day clinic & had disabilities.

The journey to the district Lankwitz was like a journey to another world. Once again, it was clear that Berlin was actually just made up from many little villages.

The boss, Mr F, came (luckily always brief, & only once a day). He had heard I was an artist; & he did not want me – while at work – to draw, or paint, or do anything of the like. (And, "oh, if I could not wear something more pleasant?"). The customers also asked me seriously if I was in mourning, & my colleagues called me "Zorro," when I showed up to work in black military pants & black buckled boots. That was on days I found it important to separate myself from all the other white tennis skirts.

I was now feeling rich & always going to concerts. Three times a week I was at the Loft or at the KOB. Killing Joke played at the Metropol, the Beatitudes at the Basement.

To this came extensive dance nights in my favourite disco, Linientreu. The name said it all. You could always rely on Spizzenergi or The Sisters of Mercy being played. At the same time, I worked hard for the Master's examination at the university. The giant formats, which came into being back then, barely fit through the door & weighed tons from their frames made of from unplanned roof boards & particle boards. Today their essential function is to make the cellar unusable. Luckily at that time, they convinced the examination committee. This life naturally brought on such an extreme lack of sleep that, during the hour-long ride home from my athletic centre job, I'd fall asleep & be woken

up from the subway personal at the final stop. Sometimes they overlooked me & then I would wake up distraught in the dark train depot.

The question in retrospect – whether the study of art was necessary at all, & whether one could not have taught it all to himself – never arose for me. I learned a lot about painting; though mostly through the other students. And it was for me back then simply incomprehensible to finally be among like-minded people & to no longer be the strange one. During my school years, I always felt like I had to disguise myself in order to belong. At a reunion 20 years after our graduation, it turned that there wasn't a governmental department or agency in Berlin where one of my former classmates wasn't employed. All at once, they said that I had always been "the artist." From their mouths it sounded like a lovable disability.

1987

At Crex in Kreuzberg. He's leaning against a pillar, wearing short lederhosen so that his naked, freshly burnt legs are seen. Somehow, we start to speak. The burns are from a performance he did with his friend the fire artist, Kain Karawahn. He calls himself "Käthe Be," & I'm suddenly entranced by his lovely, oblique & likewise shy nature.

Any further attempt to see him again failed. The very next night, I dragged my friend Zvoni to the Crex again... Then I went to Paranorm in the middle of the night totally in vain (I got the most obscure concert invitation via telephone). Nothing came of it, except that I was surrounded by a thousand photos of him I did not even dare to look at properly because my friend Christine said loudly that my "boyfriend" was hanging everywhere (& you couldn't tell her anything), & as I wanted to get her quiet, she only insisted more piercingly about her grandiose observation. Embarrassing...

Then into the music tent Power of the Night It was...good there with the Beastie Boys & Run DMC live & with West Bam DJing... But he never turned up. Not bad hysterically danced until 5 a.m.... And then I saw him again when I least expected it:

I had an exhibition in a central location near Berlin Zoo. During my shift in the gallery, I once went outside for a bit of fresh air – & there he was in a café sitting next to the door. And again I found myself thoroughly convinced by the power of fate, & this time I managed to keep myself from behaving like a complete idiot, as is usually the case, & we proceeded to exchange telephone numbers. I was even able to convince him to take a look at my exhibition. All in all it was a complete success.

The fact that I was at the time greatly influenced by expressionism led to Henri Nannen purchasing

one of my works for the Kunsthalle in Emden. Television & newspaper reporters came to my show. Back then, television was quick & easy, & after the interview was aired people spoke to me in the metro. But that was it. It wasn't like today. Nowadays all of the embarrassments that you once let yourself be carried away with are running on an endless loop on the web, forever available on some online channel where they work away at your reputation. And they call this a great service?

When I look at the newspaper articles from back then they now seem pretty silly. I suppose it was the awkwardness of the situation that made me babble on about "New York, the only real city other than Berlin." What a crazy thing to say. What other cities could I even claim to know? New York, sure, but only from hearsay.

I should probably mention that the United States – &, among artists, particularly New York – was a very fashionable destination in the 1980s, so when my friend Heike decided she desperately needed to travel to the USA & apply to study marine biology, I decided to seize the opportunity & make the trip with her.

Everyone offered tips or bits of advice. In the hallway of my Wedding apartment now hung a map of NYC. Zvoni made little crosses & stars to mark out all of the places he had been & where I absolutely had to go. With my Hawaiian shirt & bright red, patent leather shoes I at least felt as if I might make a fashionable appearance. Käthe gave me a stack of laminated postcard sized sleeves filled with coloured liquid for a photographer friend of his, a certain Miron Zownir. He in turn was to hand over his postcards to me. T, who was in Los Angeles for a year, sought out contacts on the East Coast & gave me the telephone number of a colleague named Dennis. Henri Nannen, a new addition to my circle of acquaintances, sent me a detailed letter & recommended I seek out two of his friends:

Visit my friend Serge Sabarsky if you'd like. He is the greatest as well as the most amusing art dealer in America. His focus is German expressionism, first & foremost Schiele (his apartment is full of his works), Klimt, & Kokoschka. A visit to Leonard Hutton & his wife Ingrid would certainly be fun, too.

Once we were in the airplane we finally opened Heike's guidebook, thought everything all sounded so confusing, &, in addition to the obvious destinations of NYC & LA, selected the other stations of our journey based on the sound of their names. In the end we came up with a rather unusual route – in those days at least – with stops in Nashville, San Antonio, Albuquerque, & Las Vegas.

Once on the ground in New York we turned to our guidebook, which recommended the subway as the best means of transport for penniless tourists as

well as the cheapest accommodations: the YMCA.

The subway was hardly recognizable as such due to all the graffiti. I was completely fascinated by this demonstration of creative rebellion; in Berlin even the tiniest of scribbles in the public transport system was considered vandalism & was punished as such. During the journey I tried to mimic the indifferent facial expressions of my fellow passengers – a ridiculous attempt to avoid being exposed as a tourist.

Safely ensconced our Christian hostel, we woke up in the middle of the day after a coma-like night of sleep only to discover what a creepy dive we actually had checked in to. We thereupon proceeded to stagger around the city completely robbed of our sense of time in search of the hotel that Käthe had described to us as one of his favourite places. This would pose something of a problem, for we had confused the street numbers with the house numbers, & we soon found ourselves in the Bronx. We were puzzled to discover that there were no hotels at all to be found in this part of the city, only sports ground after sports ground. It also seemed as if we were the only white people in the area. But finally my red patent leather shoes would receive the attention that I had so craved. A man was desperate to know where I had got them, & once he had heard the word "Berlin" & noticed our disorientation, he accompanied us all the way to our hotel.

Our new accommodations met all the requirements of a bohemian hangout – it was old, small, had colourfully painted rooms, & rickety furniture. Despite the easy-going atmosphere, however, the management made an effort to keep out all of the criminals, junkies, & other shady-looking characters. And so it was that the telephone rang: it was the front desk wanting to know if we were expecting a visitor. We were asked to come down & identify a certain gentleman. Once at reception I could understand all of the uncertainty, for waiting for me there was a bald-shaven man dressed entirely in leather with a sinister expression on his face (Note: back then fluffy, blow-dry hairstyles were the norm, & hardly anyone other than sect members & cancer patients went around bald.). It was Miron, who had come to exchange postcards. Curiously, he spoke with a Swabian accent & his mannerisms (as well as his studio, which I would later get to know) were as familiar to me as my old circle of friends from my university days under Professor Petrick.

What I didn't know back then was that Käthe was also an actress in Miron's films. These were always (& still are, in fact) set in abandoned factories, filthy dens, & gloomy dives. Alongside the real actors, who always played sleazy or broken-down characters, there were hordes of supporting actors who were notable for their conspicuous



Carola Göllner, "Bei Gitti," 1983.

appearances: transvestites, full-body tattoo types, & most recently, a certain Rolf X, whose lips alone were adorned with around a hundred piercings, but who nevertheless had a small speaking part in Miron's last film. Miron's apocalyptic scenarios were full of sex & violence, there was a lot of screaming, & there was at least one rape scene per film. And so one can see how Käthe, wearing a pink girl's dress & a blond curly wig, is brutally taken from behind by the main character (with the screen name "Terrifick") after having been tarred & feathered by the entire cast. I must admit that I thought a lot about this film in particular, especially once I had learned that the leading actor had been discovered dead in the Hudson River. The most plausible explanation was suicide due to his having contracted AIDS. At the time, however, I was unaware of all of these facts; I received touching & funny postcards from Käthe every day & was floating in the romanticist's seventh heaven, so to speak.

A meeting with a colleague from California. Dennis, a thin man around forty with the face of an intellectual, had come to New York to make it as an artist, just like in the Sinatra song (*If I can make it there...etc.*) Dennis had a studio in an old factory in Queens where he built enormous sculptures out of neon lights. He lived in a tiny shared apartment on Roosevelt Island, an island in the East River that could only be reached by aerial tramway. In order to pay for all of this he worked in a factory that made fortune cookies – which were also his primary source of nourishment. The fortunes & bits of advice kept him going when the mean streets of the city were too much for him to bear.

The time had come for me to play my trump card: the addresses Henri Nannen had given me. Although the Huttons were just about to head off on a trip, I was welcome to stop by Serge Sabarsky's on 79th Street. I had imagined an impressive gallery with a bank of windows & Serge scurrying spryly

about between Austrian masterpieces of German expressionism. It turned out, however, that the art dealer preferred to hide himself behind complicated entry codes in a large apartment on the nth floor of an upper-class residential building. The renowned art dealer, a small grandfatherly type figure, received me sprawled out on the sofa dressed in a cardigan & socks. All around him were Beckmann paintings that he had placed on the floor & leaned against the wall. This great display of nonchalance did absolutely nothing to put me at ease, & I had to make an effort to focus on my professional mission. I told him about Nannen & Emden, proudly showed him my 6x7 Ektachromes. He didn't even take a real look at them, & he didn't seem to be listening to a word I said. Instead he asked if I wanted to have lunch with him, & even though I felt sick at my stomach from all the excitement, I thought such a lunch was probably all part of doing business. I didn't want to make a faux pas, so I ordered exactly the same thing as Sabarsky, an expensive filet of salmon, for which I received a clear look of disapproval for my lack of humility. For me, having to eat despite nausea ranks just after pulling fingernails in the list of tortures. My struggle with the salmon required all of my efforts, & I can't remember a thing we discussed at the table. Details concerning the future of my career as an artist went unaided. Perhaps Mr Sabarsky didn't wish to speak about such matters in public. Finally he suggested I accompany him back to his living room office, & once there it looked as if he was making an effort to think about our futures. In the end he suggested I move to Munich where I would live as his housekeeper. Once again my memory left me, & I have no recollection of what I said in return or any other reaction. At any rate it left me stunned & outraged for days.

At some point & time it all began to fade away thanks to the experiences we had once we had hit the road. After a month of travelling to the cities on our route & another two weeks in Los Angeles, I was longing to get back to New York. I left Heike in some sleazy West Coast hotel & flew back to New York, where I found a place to stay at Dennis' apartment on Roosevelt Island.

Dennis was rather touching in how he looked after me. We took extended walks around his island & in Central Park, & spoke – as well as we could given my school English – about love, art, & philosophy. He praised my Ektachromes & I his neon sculptures. He was crazy about theatre, & he invited me to a play that was appropriate for my level of English: it was *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a play in which the actors crawled around the stage dressed as figures from a Hieronymus Bosch painting, & not a word was spoken. As Dennis had to get up early for his job in the cookie factory, he went to bed early.

And so it was that I completely missed out on the New York nightlife scene.

Although I thought Heike's belief that America's marine biology institutes were just waiting for to apply was pretty naïve (we had both scored below average in our advanced biology course), when it came to my very own American Dream my inherent naïveté was just too hard to beat. My ability to bounce back served me well, though, & I soon got over the Sabarsky debacle. I had a new goal in mind which was in no way any less modest – quite the opposite, in fact. I was aiming for the big hit, right out of the pages of *art* magazine: the Leo Castelli Gallery. I bullied Dennis into accompanying me & serve as my interpreter. He was extremely embarrassed by even the thought of doing so, but I was not to be dissuaded, & he actually did come with me (Many times I've tried to track him down & excuse myself for my behaviour, but he is nowhere to be found.). It was in this luxurious gallery that I finally came into contact with real professionalism: a highly polite form of getting rid of people. I was led through the spacious gallery rooms, spoke with a number of employees, even had the impression that they were happy to have me visit, & then at some point I simply found myself standing in front of the door again. I hadn't had the chance to tell anything about myself, & no one had even glanced at my Ektachromes.

Intoxicating & inconclusive: these are the two words with which I could sum up the entirety of my stay in New York. I had been absolutely certain that every corner of the fabled city was just teeming with opportunities; all I needed was more time. And so it was that I decided to come back the following year – & I never went back.

CHAPTER THREE 1988-93

The fall of the Wall is perceived with mixed feelings, not celebrated in any case. First joint exhibition with colleagues from the East. Another world. The East is opening up, suddenly there is land around us. Off to an adventurous discovery tour through the East sector of Berlin. The Wall remains in spirit nonetheless, for years, decades.

APRIL 29, 1988

Had an exhibition. On the way back. Mother is driving the van. We get lost & are suddenly standing close to the wall. Mother doesn't find the reverse gear & suddenly we are surrounded by US soldiers. *Where do we want to go?* Well, to Wedding. Staring in disbelief at our hardly festive outfits, in particular my painter's pants don't conjure up pictures of a wedding. But we seem rather harmless & beside

of ourselves with panic & confusion that they even turn around the van for us.

1989

Call from Hamburg from Mr P.

(Note: Mr P was the greatest collector of my art, he loved the idea of having discovered me, he liked to impress me with cash, on his business card it said "Society for European Communication." Correspondingly sophisticated was his attitude, I had never seen him without a cigar. Unfortunately this was also his fate & he died much too young. But that's a different story.)

Mr P. was unusually excited, he wanted a first-hand report. First I had no idea what he meant. Then it dawned on me: the Wall was open. Mr P. seriously expected me to have looked at the spot, banged on the Trabbis,¹ & maybe even embraced some complete strangers. He was now deeply disappointed & soon hung up. I tried to analyze my reluctance. When the whole world cheers, I just can't warm up to it. Was it nothing more than that? Was it because I didn't know anything else, me as a born & bred *Mauerkind*, a child of the Wall stamped with the same year of issue?

I could hardly give a name to my uneasiness. At this point the Wessis were still patronizing when the poor relations of the East came. The Ossis were still over the moon about the fact that the Konsum² is now open. There was allegedly a growing together of what belonged together. As if a 28-year-old rupture could simply be slapped together again.

1992

372 | I no longer know how I first acquired the contact. It was a request for an exhibition in the Lichtenberg Congress Centre. Behind the name Karin Müller Kunstconsulting were Mr & Mrs Müller, who, respectively, bore a striking resemblance to my Aunt Eva & Uncle Wolfgang from Merseburg. I soon discovered that the exhibition venue was none other than the former Stasi officers' casino in Normannenstraße. I was thrilled, for finally I had found the right place to display my painting *Das Verhör* (The Interrogation). Credit for the idea of

<2> The Trabant (a.k.a. "Trabbi") was a type of automobile built from 1957 to 1990 by the former East German automaker VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke in Zwickau, Saxony. With its body made of the magical material known as "Duroplast," the Trabant in many ways remains a beloved symbol of the former GDR. The vehicle – much like the state in which it was built – could not be described as the most efficient. It was also rather slow & its two-stroke engine made an unmistakable racket. Nevertheless, it was for many years probably the most desired object in the GDR, & potential purchasers were undeterred by the ten-year waiting list.

my making the interrogator, the interviewee, & the wanted person all one & the same individual can be put solely down to the vanity of my model, a certain F. He just could not bear to even imagine sharing a canvas with two other men.

Years later Mrs Müller would proclaim her very own concept of art on the internet:

"Art expresses that which we perceive as our sense of life & time. An examination of art is the same as an examination of our times. History teaches us that the things which are provocative today are the generally accepted ideas of tomorrow..."

Back to the exhibition. While unpacking my painting, Mr Müller certainly didn't seem to have been provoked by my work. Instead he seemed to be engaging in a form of self-hypnosis in an attempt to convince himself that everything was OK & that these things were now allowed, after all. I was amazed by his extensive knowledge of art history – & it was clear from his expression that he was desperately trying to fit me into a framework somewhere. Here was something more than the typical middle-class intellectual, for Mr Müller sincerely believed that art was truly important.

My East Berlin colleague B seemed to have been waiting for me. He wanted to know who he should approach for money & the commissions. I had no idea what he was talking about, but I didn't wish to seem unfriendly or uncooperative.

I told him everything I knew about hopeless shots at grants from the Berlin Senate, our disappointing professional organization, & the hermetic art market. I don't think he believed a word I said.

The new adventure playground was now East Berlin. Once again I realized that it was, for me at least, an absolutely foreign world. I mean what did I really know about East Germany? When we visited our relatives in Potsdam when I was a child, the adults were always jumpy during the drive there. They were afraid that we might have a breakdown on the road or that we might be stopped & interrogated. They suspected a hidden checkpoint behind every bush. When we finally made it to Aunt Lise's place or wherever it was we were going, we never left the house & the adults proceeded to drink themselves silly. On the way back everyone was so drunk that they forgot their fears. My grandma even started to get abusive & would hurl insults at the border guards, who, instead of arresting her, just waved us on. You could see the annoyance in their faces.

My class once made a field trip to East Berlin, & it all seemed to us like some surreal scene out of a movie in which the colours had all been muted for dramatic effect. Eventually we all met up again in a bookshop to buy books & get rid of the East German marks we had been forced to exchange. We all bought copies of Anna Segher's *The Seventh*

Cross. An easy choice, seeing as how there was a stack of them was lying up front & we wouldn't have to ask any questions.

Years later I went to another exhibition opening in a gallery in Prenzlauer Berg with my West Berlin colleague G, who everybody just called "Zonengeorg" back then, who spent a lot of time in East Berlin in those days, & he had a lot of contacts in that part of the city. He liked to tell the story of how he smuggled an East Berlin colleague's sculpture across the border by shipping it to the West as a Styrofoam model broken down into individual pieces. There the piece was reconstructed, thus enabling the artist to take part in the exhibition. Naturally G. drove a Lada, which was completely dismantled at the Bornholmer Straße border crossing. At some point I just couldn't take the hassle anymore, so I decided to make my way to the gallery on foot. By the time I arrived, the gallery opening had entered into the boozing phase. Cherry whisky, a.k.a. "Kiwi," was on offer. It was tasty, sweet, & had just a hint of headache about it. The atmosphere was fantastic. But by then I had to keep an eye on the time, for us Wessis had to be back on the other side of the border before midnight.

This was all just a bit too much hassle for my weekend trips to East Berlin to become a regular occurrence. I preferred to stay in Schöneberg or Kreuzberg. The trips to those districts with the subway took me through the East Berlin district of Mitte. The trains no longer stopped after the Reinickendorfer Straße station; instead they rolled through the old empty stations, also known as "ghost stations," with names such as *Stadion der Weltjugend*, World Youth Station. Sometimes you could even see the outlines of scurrying border guards or the transport police.

1993

No one went out in Kreuzberg or Schöneberg anymore. The only real options were Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg. The former ghost station Oranienburger Tor now spit out the creatures of the night in an unending stream. Everybody was heading for Tacheles, where you really could fall through the giant holes in the fireproof walls & into the abyss if you weren't careful. The walls were completely covered in graffiti, everything stank of piss, & everywhere somebody was trying to do something with art. The tourists loved it. Across the street a bar had opened in a former produce shop. It had become the new hotspot & was always filled to bursting.

In the years that followed, a number of parasitic restaurants, bars, & souvenir shops sprang up around Tacheles. All of them were fed by the constant stream of tourists drawn to the scene – a

fact that made death of the host animal all the more incomprehensible. Ever since its closure in 2012, the sad wreck of the building has stood unused.

JUNE 2, 1993

We crawled through the construction site in search of a particular hole in the wall. From there, tea candles lit the way down into the maze of cellars. The bar was furnished with fruit crates. The walls of the low-ceilinged room were raw brick. The only drinks on offer were margaritas, which made everything a lot easier. Strangely, we were addressed in English.

Occasionally we met up at R's place in Dunckerstraße. (Note: R had undergone an unusual metamorphosis. Whereas he had once been a part of the cocaine scene during the 80s & something of a big-headed dandy who hung around Dschungel, DNC, & Cri du Chat, by the 90s he had moved to Prenzlauer Berg where he hosted what could best be described as stoner séances. Everyone sat on the floor of his unrenovated apartment listening to fantastic records from Monstermagnet, Jesus Lizard, Mudhoney, Cosmic Psychos, Fugazi, as well as true pearls of the 60s garage rock scene. R's outfit had changed as well. He no longer looked like a Bowie clone but now bore a strong resemblance to Che in his Bolivian days.)

R had apparently become a guru of sorts. He was surrounded by his followers – all noticeably younger – who hung on his every word when he spoke of the owners' attempts to renovate his building & his dogged resistance to such changes. When the scaffolding was finally erected, the workers would peer through his open windows trying to determine if anyone really did live inside.

Later we went up on the roof, or perhaps I should say "roofscape." It was something I had never seen before. As there were no empty lots or new buildings, the stretch of rooftops had remained as a unique whole. It was like a cross between a garden allotment & playground. At that altitude, everyone seemed so relaxed & affable. The decay & improvisation all seemed so wild & romantic.

(Yet another note: if one would like to characterize R. as some kind of trendsetter, they can simply forget about it. According to the most recent reports, R. now does nothing more than hang around some West German backwaters sitting on the sofa with his girlfriend, a psychotherapist, spouting out xenophobic & misogynistic garbage & dressed-up esoteric nonsense. I could care less whether or not this has something to do with his earlier drug habits. I no longer have any contact with him.)

Present: Start of a new series of (hidden) self-portraits in Berlin subway stations. Stations that have to do with my own history...

Sitting in the kitchen, surrounded by the old diaries, calendars & photos. It's the same kitchen from the time the stove was torn out. Since then, it has been rebuilt & the unsalvageably stained floor covered with carpets, because this is now the apartment of our family of four. The studio is around the corner, on a factory floor. I'm worried how long it will go well with the rents here. The Wedding district is now hip & has changed significantly. I did get cracked on my skull with a beer bottle on Brunnenstraße the other day – but some young people who were clearly high school graduates & not from Berlin immediately rushed over to help me. The attitude towards life is also completely different. While the highly-subsidized West Berlin of the 80s gave some basic sense of security, everything is now not only uncertain, but it is also demonstrated with very open cynicism that everything that appears to be unprofitable is expendable...

This inhuman development finally enraged me so much that in early 2002 I started to get politically active. Now, I knew the ropes of meetings & demos very well... for years, I harboured a vague hope of achieving something, if nothing more than being accepted as a fellow artist by the precarious. But the profession is & remains exotic, always under suspicion of being survival on air & love, while others are forced to do more serious work.

In the 80s, painting was hyped for a short time through the "Junge Wilde" movement & traded in by many as though it were something on the stock market. Then it was vilified as an anachronism because suddenly "concept art" was the be-all & end-all in the art market. Now it is only allowed to show itself in silly disguise & poor execution. When I see pictures by Baselitz, the buzzword "fremdschämen" (feeling ashamed on someone's behalf) comes to mind.

My old Professor Petrick is also still around. He now dyes his hair & still talks of the same things he talked of in the past, & seems as a whole unchanged. But so many have died since then. Käthe for example. At first, everyone & his brother was screaming for appreciation of his work: museum exhibitions, catalogues, etc.. After two years had passed & still nothing had occurred, I wanted at least to arrange a film evening in the tiny Lichtblick-Kino. When I watched the films by Miron & Kain after almost thirty years, I was both touched & amused.

We were all so young, so keen on experimentation, so convinced of our own originality! For the first time, the humour with which it had been made was opened up to me. The few that flirted with death & morbidity in their youth are sad or gloomy people. The subject, now that it is becoming increasingly real, is no fun at all. Instead I prefer feeling alive by going out often, to parties, bars & concerts. At some time or another, I was once again standing in one of the subway stations early in the morning, & suddenly saw myself is in the mirrored signal box. Not a bad motif! How long it had been since I had painted a self-portrait... And so many subway stations that were also biographical stations! That would probably be a new series... The very next day, I started implementing this idea, beginning with the former ghost station which once spelled the adventure that was East Berlin, Oranienburger Tor subway station. ■

Translated from German by Mark Willard,
Frیده Mickel & Kenton Turk.



Carola Göllner, "Oranienburger Tor 2," 1983.



Romy Haag & Band in front of the Berlin Wall: Romy Haag, J.Lankwitz, J.Koli, A.Kraut, Nhoah Hoena, 1983, by unknown photographer.

It is 1984, I live in Berlin, in West Berlin. I'm 23 years old & play the drums in Romy Haag's first band. We play daily at 2:00a.m. for an hour & a half Her club, the Chez Romy Haag in the Fuggerstrasse, is always sold out. It is my second job as a professional musician, the first I had was as a drummer in Jane County's band, a Punk legend & icon from New York. Many exotic artists are drawn to West Berlin these days.

Playing with Romy is totally cool. I learn a lot, not only how to have convincing stage presence & to drum flawlessly, but also how to take life on the basic level. The audience is colourful, the bohemians of West Berlin & stars from all over the world who want to be there are pushing for a lot of money to get one of the small tables in the club. Everyone wants to see Romy's show & of course the fillers that run earlier in the evening.

After a six-month programme in the club we are booked for a tour. Among other things, we play in Cologne, where the scene is huge. We will be booked for another three weeks. On the weekends I go back to my friend in Berlin.

One day when I'm with my bandmates on the way from Berlin to Cologne, a young Belgian joins us in our compartment. We start chatting. He's pleasant & has a huge suitcase, which is completely filled with these really fancy cloth gloves. So many of them, in the "Marilyn Monroe" style & an incomprehensible variety of others. These are exactly the kinds of gloves that are so trendy with the girls in West Berlin & London. I think how my girlfriend will be over the moon when I bring her a pair of these, & given the number of gloves the Belgian has in the suitcase, it occurs to me I could even set up a salespoint. In Berlin, these things would sell like hot cakes, but I am now a drummer, a musician through & through.

Dani, that's the Belgian's name, wants to sell me some. I cannot decide. After a while he then comes up with a more pressing wish, claiming he has no more money, needs to get to Düsseldorf & at the end of the journey will spend the night outside, unless he finds someone who can give him money. So, what if I could help him & lend him some money? He says he needs 200 DM. That's an immense sum for me. My bandmates look suspiciously at the Belgian. I don't know what he's doing, but he's a very nice guy. Dani says his friend Sem from Antwerp would send

him money tomorrow. He assures me he would give it back to me tomorrow evening.

It is inconceivable, but I let myself be persuaded & lend him 200 DM, although he is already getting off in Düsseldorf & I am still going to Cologne. The whole next day I spend sweating for my money. How stupid am I? So much money! I'll never see that again! And then a miracle happens. I hear a voice call out in front of my hotel window & who's standing there? Dani, to repay me.

I am glad not to lose my faith in people. I walk happily with Dani to get a drink & he raves about West Berlin. Then he invites me to Antwerp, especially because I make music & that friend of his, Sem, would like to manage someone.

The thought of having an international manager makes my sleep over the next few weeks no longer peaceful. Of course I make my own music apart from the Romy Haag Band. The band is called Komedat Artist, there are three of us, two guys & a girl. We play the synthesiser, guitars, we sing & play everything else we can get our hands on. It's so totally cool hitting the streets in search of instruments. We've already had a mini-performance & that worked out very well. But to be honest, we have only three songs & although they are already recorded (on a four-track cassette recorder), they're still only three songs.

Nevertheless, without further ado, I get on the train & travel 9 hours to Antwerp. There Dani introduces me to Sem. Sem is an impressive man, he has two secondhand shops & wants to manage a band. He lives in the Jewish quarter of Antwerp & once he's heard my cassette, he is very enthusiastic, which dumbfounds me, since it isn't really earth-shattering. I am euphoric, an international manager, that is something in West Berlin! It's true that my hometown is abuzz with international stars, but a foreign manager interested in a Berlin band, that never happens.

Before I go back to Berlin, Sem pulls a cassette out of his pocket & says he has demos of another band that he's always wanted to manage, friends of his, who now have a record deal in London, & asks whether he can play the recordings for me. The demo cassette sounds rather mingy, there's a guy singing permanently in the falsetto, which gets on my nerves. Sem says that the band is called

Bronski Beat & I'll surely hear more of them. I think to myself: Hopefully, his decision to like my music proves he has better taste than this. Then I head home. As soon as I arrive in West Berlin, all the radios keep playing the band Bronski Beat, with a song I heard on the cassette, "Small Town Boy." I'm not only perplexed, I am also amazed at how well a production can sound compared to a demo tape. A few days later Sem asks me if we want to play a show in Antwerp, but says I have to do what one does in West Berlin, whatever that means.

Completely pumped-up, we get back to work on our three pieces. To play with Bronski Beat & another band at a huge hall in Antwerp, that's a blockbuster! We rehearse in Wedding & after a while we arrive at the conclusion that we cannot convert our demo recordings into live versions. With heavy hearts, we decide to make a full playback, to mimic everything & let the music come from the tape. The other alternative would be to cancel & that's entirely out of the question.

We secretly rehearse daily in the morning, because no one can be aware that we are not playing live. If the jig should be up we're done for, there's nothing more embarrassing for a band.

Then we're off to Antwerp. The main act is Bronski Beat, the hall with 800 people jam-packed & sold out. Right after the electronic instruments, the style of the clothes is the most important thing we've worked on. I'm wearing a sailor uniform & playing the accordion, Petra, the woman in our band, is wearing a self-made jumpsuit, singing & playing the synthesiser & our singer's dancing around in carrot-cut trousers & playing guitar. We are also equipped with welding goggles & respiratory masks.

We also have some "utensils," including a small hand circular saw. We plan to saw a little while during the show at the microphone stand. In Germany, especially in West Berlin, there has been a boom in making sounds with industrial tools thanks to Einstürzende Neubauten.

We are fairly tense due to the playback situation. Already after our first song someone from the audience calls out loud, "PLAYBACK!" This is the harshest diss you can imagine. Fortunately, I overhear it, but neither of my companions do. From the corner of my eye I notice that they suddenly act stiff like the robots. The second song is the song with the circular saw. Jan, our singer, plans to saw at the microphone in the middle part of the song, & if we are lucky he might also manage to produce some sparks. But somehow he collides with a metal

column that's standing in the middle of the stage instead, chopping into it with full force. We're lucky the tool doesn't jump right out of his hands & fly past our ears. He succeeds, however, in producing a 15-meter-long shower of sparks, which sweeps barely inches over the heads of the audience. If it had gone only a few inches lower, there would have been people blinded. After the song, there's the hoped-for raucous applause, that's West Berlin, fuck the fact they played from playback, this is the primal power we're hungry for from the city, & here're two guys & a girl on stage who almost had their faces torn-up, totally hot!

After the show, during which Jimmy Somerville sings like a young god & Bronski Beat deliver a sensational performance, one of the greatest I've ever seen in my life, Sem takes us under contract. Larry Steinbacheck, the keyboarder of Bronski Beat, offers to produce our first album, which we immediately accept in the enthusiasm of the moment.

Then pretty much right away we've got a record contract with Metronome, & get down to business with Larry Steinbacheck & Gareth Jones (engineer & producer of Depeche Mode) in the Tritonus Studio Berlin, & then mix at the Hansa Studio.

Even if our first single "Heaven" plays virtually nonstop at the Cha-Cha (the second buggeest club after Dschungel on the Nürnberger Straße), it becomes a sensational flop & we are immediately fired by the record company.

It is the 9th of November 1989. I come home from a rehearsal & before I jump into the showers (I lived on Stuttgarter Platz / Kantstraße), my girlfriend grabs hold of me in the hallway. She is hellishly excited. On the radio they apparently said the Wall was open! I wave her off & go for a shower, that seems hardly possible. I have a radio in the bathroom & a few seconds after switching it on it says "...the Wall has fallen & we expect people from East Berlin to start crossing tonight." I'm stunned, but when they say it on the radio!?! My girlfriend & I pack a bottle of champagne & drive in my heap over to the border-crossing on Invalidenstraße. Beforehand I call on some friends, but nobody wants to come, they're all are too cold on this November night.

Now we are here. There are perhaps five or six other couples besides us, without exception carrying bottles of booze under their arms, in the dark, in front of the glaring checkpoint to East Berlin. Nothing's happening, nothing is to be seen,

everything as usual. We freeze & look longingly at our bottle. Nobody has a radio. We wait for an hour & it's really cold. We open our bottle & start to drink. It would have gone well together with the opening of the border, but tonight nothing seems to be happening here. Then suddenly there's a scream. A beige Trabant, a single car, chugs slowly under the lights of the frontier in our direction, & as the car drives past us, I break into tears. There are actually four people wrapped in thick winter coats squeezed together in this little car & waving at us shyly. My knees & my girlfriend's knees are too weak for us. Unfortunately, this also means an immediate impetus for our small West Berlin reception group to also immediately cross the border in the other direction. For a West Berliner this is like a department store opening, if someone comes out we might as well go in.

Our group, which has grown to perhaps twenty-five, runs into the frontier soldiers. I'm confused. All my life I've lived in West Berlin, & I know about the soldiers & the danger of approaching them this outrageously. But I'm dragged along. Panicking, I notice that I have no identity card & check inwardly what it would mean if one were to close the border behind me, & I'm suddenly in East Berlin. Our squad then walks past the soldiers, armed with machine guns, rather quietly but unabated. Behind the immediate border there is a parking-lot of 100 vehicles, mostly Trabis. The East Berlin drivers crank down the windows & ask: "Is it still closed?"

We replied cheerfully: "No, we are from West Berlin! The border is open!" The news spreads like fire from vehicle to vehicle & it brings about cheering. We also cheer, bottles unfortunately empty. We walk up the Invalidenstraße & by the time we reach Friedrichstraße, our cheers are only a soft whisper. The streets are dusky, it's cold, there's no one in the street & the whole place seems suddenly threatening. I don't know what we've expected, maybe people hanging out the windows & throwing paper streamers?

We walk down the street & ask for directions. Where would the local citizens celebrate their newly-won freedom? Then someone gets the idea of walking to Alexanderplatz, but that is too far away in the cold. We decide to go to the Brandenburger Tor, from the eastern side. Our drinks are all gone & we keep losing people who prefer to go back the way we came. Finally, frozen, we reach Unter den Linden. We look to the right. The Brandenburger Tor is brightly lit, on the horizon on the wall there are

people who must be West Berliners. Everyone has a different idea: "Quickly out of here, quickly home, quickly into somewhere warm, quickly off to the people up there on the Wall." Then someone in our group recognises some people on the Wall & runs with cries of joy to the Brandenburger Tor. I remain shocked. There are soldiers standing in the way, I'll never run towards them, it's too dangerous! But the rest of our group don't think about that. They follow in the direction of the Tor. The colourful mob that's assembled atop the Wall all look in our direction & break out into cheers. Finally the East Germans flee towards the Wall! They want to get to freedom!

The Brandenburger Tor is guarded by some 30 border soldiers. They've got their arms hooked into each other, forming a human chain to stop the rush. There, however, too few of them to block the entire road & the West Berliners, who are not so easily intimidated, dodge the human chain right & left. The more the soldiers struggle to plug the gaps, the more their human chain breaks open. Two, three pseudo-fugitives still get sprayed with a water canon, which is quite unpleasant on a freezing night like this & for me it's a good enough reason not to imitate them.

By now the rest of the group manage to get past the soldiers, & they are lifted up onto the Wall by the West Berliners standing atop it. West Berliners save West Berliners in the hope of rescuing the fleeing East Germans.

These are the images going around the world for the next few days. No one asks about the truth, the pictures are too beautiful & what difference does it make? Even the soldiers could have recognised from our clothes that we weren't East Germans fleeing, but in the confusion of the night, everything just keeps happening like that. My girlfriend & I return to the border-crossing on Invalidenstraße. There are no longer any cars at the border-crossing, & only a few people trickle into East Berlin.

Meanwhile at the Kurfürstendamm the long-awaited celebrations are finally taking place, but back in West Berlin I just want to go to bed. I'm frozen, absolutely exhausted & emotionally so stunned that for the next three days I keep breaking into tears. ■

Translated from German by David Vichnar & Tim König.



Steve Morell, 2004, by Robert Carrithers.

Like every writer, you come in the middle of the story to the point where you have to jump back in time to make the reader more understand how it could happen that I am in a way married to two or even more countries! In this special case, I am talking not about my secret love the United Kingdom, in this case I have in mind a deeper love of a different country, I was to a certain point not even aware that I'm really deeper in love with the Czech Republic & where comes the reason for this deep love for the former Czechoslovakia? Here I have to jump back in time & ask the question, what makes a young boy in 1984 at the age of 17, his best years, leave his mother city where he was born, where everything was nice, good & settled & already fixed for his future. The future was sealed! He just had to follow the wishing words of wisdom of his so-called father & his future would have been probably for sure in a way much safer, & his road would be for sure paved with money, lies, corruption & tears. Tortured, damaged & raped by the bitterness of a man who cut the word love out of his mind & the structure of a small town he realized that he couldn't help his mother in any way, anymore. There was nothing more to discover, nothing more to experience than pain & anger! Everything was done here! Like his Icon used to say, "There is only one good use for a small town, you know that you have to leave"! To move overnight to Berlin, straight to Kreuzberg, was probably destiny as the law at the time was much different there to the rest of Germany! The courthouse claims & lawyers of his father didn't get him back as the tears of his mother were already frozen to ice when they arrived in the city of refuge! Everything was different there to teh way it was in West Germany & the rest of the world. Berlin stood with 50% under allied laws. Germans didn't have to serve in the army, bars & clubs were allowed to open 24 hours & they were allowed to keep a certain amount of cannabis or other drugs in your pocket for your own use & the Wall was all around us, which created a very explosive & apocalyptic atmosphere. Sometimes it felt like that the necessary & required laws of the Cold War somehow protected the whole nightlife scene. No need to worry, you're safe here, the coldest city of the country opened its warm arms & its windswept icy streets hugged you with the sound of Punk Rock & New Wave! Save for a brand new start like Mary Queen of Scots said, "In my End is my Beginning"! Save from being hurt, save from harm, save from too much protection, but not save from being alone.

What is the reason for so many, millions of people, not only artists who run from all over the planet to Berlin to find refuge here in a city that never sleeps, that opens its arms for you & keeps you warm? But it also makes you find out about its apocalyptic loneliness that Berlin mirrored back to me in the eighties a lot, that makes you discover that you are actually a no-man's child! A city built on refugees full of children without a land!

Where do you belong? Where do you come from? Where are your roots? And, where are you going? For years I wasn't aware that it was this one main question that was really preoccupying me. For years! I was just intoxicated with everything that the city was spitting onto my forehead & into my veins. Everything that made them stop thinking made them actually think more, even thinking in their sleep! Maybe this is the reason for so many other artists being here in Berlin as well, I can't say. The thinking is just making you crazy. The only chance to not go insane & find a possible answer is to project all that's been spinning for years in your mind into

music & art, into creativity, to find a way to express yourself & escape from the neverending thinking, before you totally freak out!

This is what happened to lots of us during the eighties, freaking out & losing ourselves! And then all of a sudden the unexpected happened. It was better before, it was dark, apocalyptic, bizarre, & everything & everyone was fine & peaceful. And then the Wall came down! "Is it really true, is this really happening, are they really going that far? What if the Russian tanks roll over this little island Berlin?" Sure, in a way I was happy when I first heard the news, but also a bit scared: who knew what really was going to happen? At the time I used to live at the "Rauchhaus," the former squat, named after Georg von Rauch who'd been shot by the police. Well-known bands like Nina Hagen, Ton Steine Scherben, The Lolitas, Stereo Total, used to practice there. I lived on the ground floor, just above the stage in the basement. There used to be parties & concerts on the weekends, no time to rest. And when I opened my window it was dark, because around 10 meters

away I was facing the Wall, at least 3 meters high, higher than my window. It was dark even at daytime, sometimes we heard gunshots, machine guns, while sitting together smoking & drinking. It became a routine as all streets led to the Wall. It even became routine to read in the newspaper the next day that someone had been shot while trying to escape across the Wall from the eastern side of town. It was like getting used to being handicapped or handcuffed as you couldn't do anything anyway. So you got wasted again, another shot, another drink, another smoke, another whatever, just to dull your mind. Another thing you didn't want to think about. And it worked quite well. I used to hang out at the Risiko, the Ex'n'Pop, & I opened my own Punk Pub "The Pink Panther." Until this point I was still making my living by playing records, DJing & making parties at Blockshock & the Trash Club as well as at Exstasy/Madhouse. DJing at Trash in those days was way different to today as the DJ shifts didn't go for two or three hours like today, they started at 10p.m. & ended on the weekends around 11 - 12a.m.! It was like you were in a vacuum, there was no question of how you could stand that as well as working from time to time in the secondhand shop "Made in Berlin" in Berlin's red light district in Potsdamerstr.! With certain kinds of drugs, everything was possible, & it worked quite well! Until a certain point! I remember the first time I went to Risiko. Someone took me from Club Lininentreu to Risiko, a bar beside the Berlin S-Bahn station Yorckstraße which Alex Kögler used to run & where Blixa Bargeld & Maria Zastrow worked behind the bar & I guess that was the first time I saw Nick Cave, without even recognizing him. He used to live at that time just a few metres away from Risiko at Yorckstraße. Risiko was my first impression I had of Berlin, & I went to the place again & again. "From Her To Eternity" by Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds. I never heard a piano played like this ever before, it hammered into my head like clockwork. Still when I hear the song & the record today it throws me in a time-lapse back to Risiko & Ex'n'Pop & I get the smell of speed & dirt, sweat & heroin in my nose. This record as well as stuff by Bauhaus, Sisters of Mercy, Joy Division, & lots of the music I was also playing as a DJ at the time & later, soundtracked the shivering & freezing I was carrying those years inside of me. But there is one record if I speak about Nick Cave's music that I have a very special relation with, "Your Funeral... My Trial"! I got it on tape when I came back from England after being on tour as a roadie with another band. I lost my room at a punk-rock flat-sharing community & moved into the "Rauchhaus." Joe (José Fernández) who lived next door left the tape in my room, it was winter again, & I couldn't stand the disgusting stench of the amphetamine

anymore, which'd slowly become annoying.

Risiko closed one month after I returned, so we always went around the corner to the Ex'n'Pop. Same scene, same smell, same people, it became my living room. I remember Nick in the morning at seven on the piano at the Ex'n'Pop playing & kicking with his feet against the wood & killing one whisky after the next. Everyone needed something slower & fresher than speed. All of a sudden heroin was everywhere & it took over the entire scene. It was brisk, fresh & vivid. I am not sure but I always thought that "Jack's Shadow" was written for Jack who later used to run the Ex'n'Pop. I think it was in 1986 when Joe, Carsten & I hung out at the Basement after we came from Chez Conrad or Dschungel, & Joe said all of a sudden "They're shooting a movie & we can get 50 DM plus drinks at the old Esplanade, we just have to go there, Nick Cave is playing with the Bad Seeds in the movie." It was for the filming of *Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders who I didn't know so well at this time. We arrived at around 2:00p.m., it was freezing & we met almost everyone we knew from the nightlife. Drinks & food were free. I think I remember that it was planned that the scene with Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds should have been shot in a few hours, but it took a few days. Nick was holding the whisky bottle between the scenes like a microphone. There was a piano Nick was playing between the scenes that you unfortunately don't see in the movie. I remember Kid Congo on stage as one of the gentlest, smartest & best-styled men I had seen in ages. It was a very honest filming, impressive in a way but freezing cold, I can't remember if we were excited, I guess we just were there because we knew all the people around us, we needed the money & it was all right. People were wasted but they were totally into the spirit. Wim Wenders captured in a few scenes in the movie how Berlin really was at this time. He delivered the whole spirit of the "City of Refuge." I think he knew what no one in the audience recognized at that time, that he had filmed music history during those days. The filming ended in the middle of the night & continued the next morning. I needed a week until I got "The Carny" & "From Her to Eternity" out of my head. I think, I will always connect these songs with those days of the shooting of *Wings of Desire*; I needed to sleep at least for a whole day. When I woke up I had again the sentence in my head from the song "Your Funeral, My Trial" thinking of my father & the world I left, "I am a crooked man, And I've walked a crooked mile, The stars all winked at me, They shamed a child, And trinket stars did smile, Your funeral, my trial." It was sure that there was no way back, no return. Until a certain point! Until you realize that you are turning in a circle & you have to stop something or you are going to

die the same way as you are watching some of your friends dying! The city was poisoned & full of speed & heroin, it was a circle! It was cold! But it was lovely! Until a certain point! I had to move out of the "Rauchhaus," where the love of my life in my twenties cheated on me a few times & got pregnant from a "no-go" heavy metal kid, because the drug use was too over the top & two years later I had to leave Berlin & I went to West-Germany & then London to get rid of what had made a creep out of me. No love was found in the City of Refuge, only the love of a city which touched with its embrace which I knew already that it would never let me out of & that it would keep me in, but I had to leave it & to come back at one point, back for good! I started doing Zen Buddhism, the drugs left me & I left Joe. "I Had a Dream, Joe," Nick Cave sang on his "Henry's Dream" album & the song turned into a little private anthem for me, even after I returned to Berlin around 1999 & met Joe again, I realized that drugs had torn my best friend from that time away from me & I will never get the sentence from that song out of my head "Where did you go, Joe? On that endless, senseless, demented drift, all dressed up in your ridiculous seersucker suit, I opened my eyes, Joe." As sad as life is sometimes, it can be exciting when you get a grip on yourself & turn your mind in a different but familiar direction. It is the change & only the change that makes you a different person, but you always have to make the first step into a more comfortable kind of life, no one else does it for you! You are the captain of your own pain; you are the one who is leading the ship into the right harbour!

Memories are like a burning cigarette, the more you suck on it, the smaller it gets. Music & writing are the only two things that can give you satisfaction, love & security; it's like a self-therapy & music can turn into an addiction, just in a more positive way!

So, I started the band Dust in Bass with Matt Eno, which was basically just the two of us, & also a part-time drummer plus a MPC, voice & a self-made steel drum. If the drummer wasn't available we also could, just the two of us make it work, as I had everything in steel & wood samples on diskettes & Matt was the perfect partner for me to operate live on the MPC! Everything we needed was the MPC, a few tonnes of steel, an effects board & a microphone. That's how we went on tour between 1998 & 2000. At the same time, I also started the band Metropolis with Matt Eno & Ragnar, which was less "Industrial" but more guitar, piano & string orientated, basically it was classic songs with a classic song structure. Actually this band was the precursor of the band that I'm performing in nowadays: Steve Morell & the Science of Doubt. Finally I could express myself; I could release what was dwelling for years

inside of my mind. I started doing more & more music, which I already did in Frankfurt & London, & because no Label wanted to release the music I was recording at the time, I started to produce my own record label. I called the label Pale Music Int., mainly because I didn't know anyone who was sunburned & from that day on I dived into this. These bands or constellations & the line-up were the very first Pale Music records, the start was completed! I think the next 15 years were probably the best days of my life so far, if I think it about it objectively! Back in Berlin I saw what was happening in the city, & again it became my City of Refuge, I was married already to the city, so finally I was home again! Techno was at its highest point, already over its highest point! More & more people got sick of it, more & more Techno wasn't intelligent new electronic music anymore, & it turned into a commercial parody of itself! But it had delivered great new possibilities to record music, computer programs, new drum machines & synthesizers. More & more people started to use those instruments to create something new. It was the birth of Electro Punk! A new kind of New Wave & Punk that was happening in the city! In the late '90s, new energies & new people flocked to Berlin. On the ruins of Techno, artists used the digital revolution's inexpensive & widely available tools to once again write "real" songs with lyrics. This style went with dressing in an extravagant, sexy & flamboyant manner; glamour & glitz replaced sweatpants & sneakers, & make-up & elaborate hairstyles made a comeback for women & men alike.

After my exile years in London I was once again ready to party all night in Berlin, so I moved back into my apartment above a brothel on Wildenbruchstraße in Neukölln. White Trash Fast Food opened at Hackescher Markt around the turn of the millennium & soon after I moved to Torstraße it became the epicenter of the new scene. There, Walter "Wally" Potts & Wolfgang Sinhart combined an American hamburger cuisine with punky parties, bizarre sex shows & extreme performances. It was the counterpoint to Techno's sterile male DJ culture. And the police came by almost every night.

I met lots of old acquaintances when I went there, so it was like a flashback to the '80s in West Berlin. DJ & bar legend Maria Zastrow came roaring into the club on a motorbike with her husband, & rock'n'roll stage hog Ghazi Barakat (a.k.a. Boy From Brazil) was also there. When Wally asked me if I'd like to organize parties at White Trash on Mondays or Tuesdays, I chose Tuesdays. For the next 3 years from 2003 to 2006 the Pale Music Tuesday Sessions were the hot spot in town! I did drag queen shows with Krylon Superstar from NY, booked bands which played little sets in the middle room or booked Techno DJs to play their favorite Punk & New Wave



La Petite Sonja at the Full Moon Fifth Anniversary Party, Prague, 2015, by Robert Carrithers.

tracks. Tables were often booked a week in advance & people like Kid Congo Powers, Slash, Mick Jagger, Duff McKagan, Fixmer McCarthy, Pete Doherty, Sean McLusky, Mark Moore & even David Bowie were streaming in & out, it was the place to be! One night I was playing New Wave & Punk Rock, & I followed up a Gun Club track with a Peaches song. Suddenly a wiry little woman next to me is shrieking excitedly, "Wow, you played my track after Gun Club! That's great! No one does that. That's exactly how I always wanted my music to be played!" It was the beginning of a long-standing friendship. Peaches is one of the most important musicians Berlin has ever produced. Her shows were groundbreaking. At her first gigs in the late '90s she stood on stage with her Groovebox 505, her guitar, hairy armpits, a tank top & hot pants, screaming obscene & feminist slogans. It was genuine Punk Rock, completely at odds with current standards of beauty & performing. It was a sensation in Berlin.

Another central venue important to the movement was Rio, which was run by Conny Opper, with whom Peaches soon started a relationship. The music was New Wave-y, but with a techno twist. Bands like Glamour To Kill played a mix of New Wave, rock & disco. And then there were people like Namosh with his sexy song & dance performances. Those were like live-stage orgasms. Suddenly things like that were happening all over Berlin. Because more & more people heard that I just opened a record label & gave me tracks, I thought, "Wow, it's blowing up again. It's high time for a compilation or a big event to bring all those people onto one stage." Through my old friend "Edgar Domin" who used to play bass in the German avantgarde post-punk band MDK (Mekanik Destruktivi Komandöh) I got introduced to Bettina Köster (singer with the famous German New Wave Band "Malaria"), it was love at first sight! We understood each other from the first moment, & until today we still do. We became like brother & sister, I can trust her in every way & we even used to live together for a while in the same flat. So, at the time I asked her if I should continue doing the label & also release other peoples music or just my own. Bettina was the one who actually suggested that I produce the Label in a proper way & go for the idea with the compilation & release other music as well. We had the feeling that the time was right!

And that's how Berlin Insane was created in 2003, featuring Alexander Hacke of Einstürzenden Neubauten, Namosh, Bettina Köster, Mocky, Peaches, Gonzales, Taylor Savvy, & many others. It tied together the old & new Berlin.

Wally & Wolfgang from White Trash were very enthusiastic, as well as Love Parade co-founder Danielle de Picciotto & Alex Hacke, whose queer burlesque events at West Berlin's Big Eden were as

influential as East Berlin's White Trash, so we had two clubs for the debut of Berlin Insane. Rosita Kürbis, who had managed the Love Parade with Dr Motte, took on the job of acquiring sponsors, which was not an easy task since sponsors were fixated on Techno events. Nobody wanted to openly support something that new & utterly insane. Even from the artists we got an equal volume of negative & positive reactions because the scene was pretty set in its ways, Punk Rockers as much as technoheads. But I had saved some money & wouldn't let it discourage me. I hired two interns & got cracking, DJing during the night & organizing Berlin Insane during the day. I was in my element.

There was, of course, the issue of transporting our guests from White Trash on Torstraße to Big Eden on Kurfürstendamm, which were several miles apart. We negotiated with the Berlin Transport Authorities for buses. I ended up paying-off those costs for one or two years, but I didn't mind because I knew it had to happen. Rosita managed to get an energy drink & a whiskey company as sponsors. The energy guys gave us piles of their drinks & the whiskey guys gave us 15 cases of whiskey, plus a double-decker bus so that we could at least save the rent for one of the BVG buses. We mixed the energy drink with whiskey in big containers & served it for free on the bus. It had quite an effect. One container per ride, then we had to refill.

There was no sound system on the bus, so Alexander Hacke gave a continuous performance, & he was really into it. The clubs were as crowded as the buses until 11 in the morning. Electronic music mixed with New Wave, experimental sounds, punkrock & rock'n'roll – it was back! After the party, the whiskey bus's central folding doors were unhinged & the furniture was half-ruined. Needless to say, Rosita totally freaked because it would have cost us a fortune to replace. In the end it turned out that the whiskey company had failed to mail the sponsoring contract, which saved our asses.

Two days after the event we all met at White Trash. Everybody thought it was a big hit & wanted to do it again. People still raved about Berlin Insane months later. We issued a call for bands to send us their music, & within four months we got around 600 CDs. I had boxes full of CDs in the back seat of my car & listened to them one by one while driving. Under the passenger seat I had a "good" & "crap" box. The good stuff was enough for a double CD.

There was hardly any press coverage of the first Berlin Insane, but for the second one in 2004 all we had to do was call to get articles in all the newspapers. We made the cover story of Berlin's city magazine, *Zitty*, titled "Punk's Not Dead." Even public TV covered us. They called it the biggest Indoor-Underground Festival in Germany! The event

was bursting at the seams. This time we spread our opulent programme over five clubs: Wild at Heart, Rio, Big Eden, Bastard, & White Trash. To kick it off, we took an afternoon boat trip past the Universal Records headquarters & the Bundestag to flip them the bird. Glamour To Kill had plastic machineguns, Namosh had an aviator cap & political rapper Splatterdandy had a baseball bat & a wrestling mask. There was also a screaming mob of people on the boat, right in the heart of the capital.

The police showed up to the press conference afterwards. They were shocked to see a boat full of bellowing people with machineguns passing the Parliament building & followed us to shore. They wanted to press charges for breaching the peace & illegal possession of firearms & intended to book me right away, but I had to do a sound-check. I showed them the guns were only plastic dummies, but apparently even if you're unarmed you're not allowed to go to the Bundestag & serenade the politicians. Somehow I convinced them to let me go anyway &, with support from the press, we got off lightly in court. Nevertheless, the whole thing completely ruined me financially. It needed a different venue after that & when I got a request from the Volksbühne (one of Berlin's biggest & oldest theatres) I simply couldn't refuse, what an honour!

During the fourth & fifth Berlin Insane at the Volksbühne, we played the whole house with about 40 artists from all kinds of genres in one night. It brought in a little money thanks to a couple of bigger sponsors, which was enough to bankroll the namesake, CD compilation Berlin Insane. After these accomplishments I felt it was time for me to turn to other projects. But the definitive highpoint for me when I was doing the festival at the Volksbühne has been N.U. Unruhs "Beating the Drum" performance. The percussionist of Einstürzenden Neubauten arrived with around 25 to 30 self-made drum tables at the theatre which we built in the foyer. We had to cover the historical window-front of the building with Molton because they were afraid that if around 70 people would drum in the night it would make the windows break into pieces! Even then, the police showed up & complained that the neighbours around 300 meters away couldn't sleep; luckily it was anyway just 5 minutes before the performance was supposed to end! I was so impressed by the performance & the drum tables that even today I still go from time-to-time with Andrew on tour all over Europe with the "Beating the Drum" show! It's a huge logistic challenge but it's also indescribable fun! And besides that, I found the best friend that I've ever had! Later on he joined my band for recordings & live gigs, playing glass & metal percussion. Even though the income of the festival hasn't made a rich man out of me it

was something positive which is worth a lot more. People often ask me if there will ever be another Berlin Insane. By now so many bands have made their interest known that I've got half a mind to do it as soon as my album is finished. Countless bands in the basements of this city perfectly represent just the kind of anarchist spirit we once turned against the establishment. Yes, there might be a sequel to Berlin Insane one day. The spirit remains unbroken.

During all those years, it was I guess the first time I felt loved, the first time I have ever felt accepted, you didn't need any drugs, the kick of life, the kick of being creative was much bigger & takes you much higher than any drug can do! Maybe I felt accepted as I recognized that lots of those people had probably the same past & suffered the same childhood as I had! Also one of the interns I hired was Emma Eclectic, who just went on the DJ turntables after work which were built up in the loft we already had moved into in Kreuzberg & I was amazed how good our music tastes fit together & from that moment on we were DJing together & we were called The Scandals & played shows all over Europe & produced between 2004 & 2008 around 30 Remixes & released a few own 12" inches & one album including works for & with Boy George, Marc Almond, Pink Grease, Peaches & many others. Musically we broke up after four years & went different ways. We had to realize as well that the relationship we had was more of a working nature than real love & so we split up & went our own ways!

In 2004 I got invited to bring Berlin Insane to Prague, which was the first time the festival went abroad. It should have become a point of inflection & changed my life! I went with Namosh & Mignon to perform at Club Mecca & Namosh as usual destroyed the microphone & I got into an argument with the engineer until Mignon came to me after a while & asked me if I had already taken care of our fee because I had to DJ soon. After rushing through the venue & asking bartenders & bouncers I realized that Borek the promoter, who had organized the night, spoiled our night & left without paying us & was not available anymore for the next month. We got ripped off, the first time in Prague, stranded in Prague without any money! Somehow we managed to get back home & around ten years later I met the promoter again & he paid me off! But at that night at Club Mecca, there were two guys & one woman at the bar & the woman tried to talk to me with a voice sweet like honey, while I was rushing through the club trying to find the promoter. It was not really possible to talk to someone after just getting ripped off, so they gave me a CD which I had for around 3 months in the car & one night on the way back to Berlin I found

that CD again & I put it into the stereo & I couldn't believe what I heard, it was the very first promo CD of Moimir Papalescu & The Nihilists! I grabbed my phone in the middle of the night & called them, waking up La Petite Sonja & told her that I didn't like the CD that she gave me, I loved it! Combined with a DJ gig I met them in Prague & released the first album of MP & The Nihilists in Germany & the rest of the world! I invited them to Berlin & later we played shows together where I was DJing after their live sets all over Czech Republic, & after a 5 page interview by Michael Nanoru for *Živel* magazine in 2006, Pale Music, The Scandals & me were known all over Czech Republic. They were the hottest band in Czech until they split up with Moimir in 2008 & started a new band called Kill The Dandies! I continued working with KTD & became more than friends with La Petite Sonja & Hank J Manchini. I can say that I have met two of the most wonderful & warmest people in my life, who will stay in my heart forever! I fell in love with the country & was wondering why I got along so well with the people, the city & the country? And digging more & more in my past I found out that my mother & grandmother came from Marienbad & Karlsbad in West Bohemia. I have Czech blood, that was the reason why I loved the people & the country so much; I was in my mother country! More & more I was playing in the Czech Republic & I went there as often as I could even when I wasn't DJing there. I discovered more & more bands in the country & was distributing more & more of them, from KTD, The Prostitutes, The Drain, etc. One time in 2008 after I was DJing a record release party of The Prostitutes & Kill The Dandies their light engineer Tomáš Suchomel asked me if I would like to play at his birthday party with KTD & Ritchie Success together outside of Prague, at Kravín, in Únětice u Prahy, but he could only pay my expenses! I asked Monika, who was doing Burlesque shows under the artist name Monique La Fleur with David Jahn's Prague Burlesque group, if I should do the gig & we could meet again as, for the past year, she'd shown up whenever I was playing in Prague. She said shyly, yes & that I should do the gig. As usual she came late & I had to DJ soon but all of a sudden the engineer played a Tango-like song & she asked me if I would like to dance. From that day on we were a couple for the following 6½ years. It was the deepest love I had discovered, finally I was able to give love to a person & I was able & open to receive love. As The Scandals split up a year before I was working already on new songs. I sat at the piano & my mind & my fingers created the lyrics for the following 12" single & one of the leading songs of the forthcoming album *The Life & Death of Jimmy Pheres & His Rise from the Underworld*:

*Lady Pheres asked Jimmy for a dance & I thought, I was dreaming
They danced in a trance & the room, the room was gleaming
I guess, people staring at the stockings on her legs
But she just looked in his eyes, ready for a request
Ready to play, ready to love
Style in her walk & little diamond hands were covered in gloves
The boy in the black Chelsea boots sat by her side
And Lady Pheres started to sing full of pride...
I am the one; I am your princess, come closer
And you can smell my love & feel my holiness
I'm the one, walk with me & take my hand & you will see
How I will lead you to the promised land
You're the one that I want, to come deep inside Because
I know, you're gonna treat me right.*

Monika moved 1½ years later to Berlin, started studying & became the female singer of my band Steve Morell & The Science of Doubt & we recorded the entire album together & started performing with an 8-member band. A few years later, we were just about thinking about getting married & we visited Lydia Lunch when she was performing at Wild at Heart in Berlin & I introduced her again to Lydia, as we spoke about probably getting married, Lydia spontaneously said, "Oh, hello then she's your future ex-wife"! Two years later, Lydia was correct. As we have to face the truth that nothing is forever I can say that I met the most beautiful & wonderful woman I had ever met & she is my best female friend nowadays & shoulder to lean on, which will stay in my life I guess until I die! With her I learned that only love conquers every evil, you only have to believe in it, love & trust is the only cure we humans have to hold on to! Love has been my motor, being always good to my next ones & this is what I was giving to the people around me! If you believe in love it comes like a mantra back to you! And if we share this with others nothing can do us any harm!

So, at the end the question remains, why are we doing what we're doing, what sense does it make, the music, the writing, the paintings, our art? Will anyone remember what we do when we die? I think if only one blessed soul will remember what we did, what we were singing, what we were writing down, if only one soul remembers after we're gone, then it will have been worth it! Then life will've made some sense!

– Berlin, February 15, 2017 ■

* Parts of the story are taken or based with permission on an interview by Robert Defcon, 2015, for *Electronic Beats*.



HOUSE OF SHAME

J. JACKIE BAIER

House of Shame is a queer party in Berlin that offers disco house beats & live acts every Thursday night. Every Thursday a new & different act – for the past 17 years without interruption.

Chantal is the organizer of this party – for all of the past ten years. Before that, she was a tranny hooker on the streets for 17 years. Chantal is transsexual.

And an underground legend.

For me, Chantal's House of Shame was & is Berlin's *Hole Lotta Love*: A hole full of love, the perfect party for the best time of the day – that which follows the end of days.

I've taken photographs there throughout the entire past 17 years, initially with major intervals in-between & later nearly all the time. I'm no party photographer. But excess & the end of the world are two good friends of mine. During this time, 100.000 or more negatives were made, both analogue & digital. 100.000 decisive moments, with emphatic reference to Henri Cartier-Bresson's concept of "the decisive moment" – or, at least, the attempt to catch it. Again & again – until we began making a film: *House of Shame / Chantal All Night Long* (2011, directed by J.Jackie Baier) which premiered at the 61st Berlin International Film Festival.

At that time, 1999, I was strolling through night clubs & parties, feeling more like a stray dog than a human being, & I mean what I say: transsexuals weren't always welcome to parties, not even gay – & not even to mention lesbian events.

I was looking for something but didn't know what.

I didn't trust in photography very much.

I didn't even go to the party to make photos. It was much too dark, too cramped, & certainly no one would have wanted his or her picture to be taken here.

Maybe I should explain that I am not born a woman, I decided to become a woman when I was a grown-up person.



(unknown) Backstage at SO36, 2010 (opposite); Cybersissy & BayBJane at House of Shame, Bassy, 2009 (above), by Jackie Baier.

There was a court order, & a surgery – & so I was officially “Frau Baier.”
But somehow everybody I knew then felt quite uncomfortable with the fact that they should address me as a woman. Even some of the other transsexuals I’ve met, were constantly afraid that we produced a somehow painful impression, as if our appearance as women was kind of arrogated – a travesty, without justification or dignity.

When I saw myself back then – I saw myself through the eyes of the other people seeing me, through the eyes of some “generalized other.”

Even more: I saw myself from a point of view I had left of my own free will.

There is a song by Lou Reed, sung by Nico – “I’ll be your mirror.”

Nan Goldin adapted the title of the song for her photo book about her New York ‘family’ of fairies. – After the book came out half a generation of documentary photographers seemed to have found their credo.

I didn’t have to judge that. – But I had to recognize that for me the approach didn’t work.

To hold a mirror – to society, or even to myself ! – wasn’t a possible action for me, because the subject of that action, the subject of observation simply didn’t exist anymore.

The point zero of perspective, was empty.

“I” – as in the Rimbaud quote – IS another.

The mirror, center of reflection, was broken.

I was blind.

Therefore I had good reasons to pick up my camera & see what the world looked like when looked at NOT THROUGH MY OWN EYES, but through the lens of a technical device.

I went to the HOUSE OF SHAME & got my old Nikon out of my pocket. The lady whose company I



was laughed at me: "What the heck are you doing with a camera! It's way too dark, there's no picture to be taken." I thought, *maybe*. But I didn't care. I didn't want a picture. I wanted to get connected.

Of all the transsexuals I've met Chantal was sure to be the first who was never afraid of being one.

I've met others later, others, who opened my eyes.

But here, at Chantal's, it surely all began.

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We are talking about the production of pictures with technical instruments, media. They may be analogue, digital or whatever.

It's about views, movements, relations, situations.

I walk past a room, look around me – it is dark & it is crowded. Music at full volume. A beer at the bar, further down a group of men at the soccer table, behind it – kind of a backstage room, but it's not worth the name, it's just a room behind a door with a curtain, unlocked since all the keys got lost somehow. But it is clear at all time that doors are useless without people walking through, & that is what they do largely.

There is no place to hide, no secret room, where you can arrange meetings for a portrait before or after the show. No more caves, no more silent moments. Everything happens in the middle of the public, every action is party action, everybody is rolling around, dancing, spoiling beer & vodka. Men are shouting to make themselves heard, people pushing forward, men who head for the urinal or for the toilets & the coke. Everything, every movement, even holding a camera in my hand & lifting it to the eye – it's all in the middle of performance.

Everything seems to be amorphous, the lighting disintegrates the forms. I throw myself into the revolving darkness & as I point & shoot, I desperately wait to be struck.

For years I lived by night. It was as if it weren't worth getting out the camera as long as it wasn't dark. And even when darkness finally falls, most subjects are too well lit when I find them. I'm looking for a story that hides in the dark. I imagine situations that aren't real anymore or not yet. – No matter if they ever were, or will be real.

The problem with light is mostly to avoid it. But with a little practice I find a way.

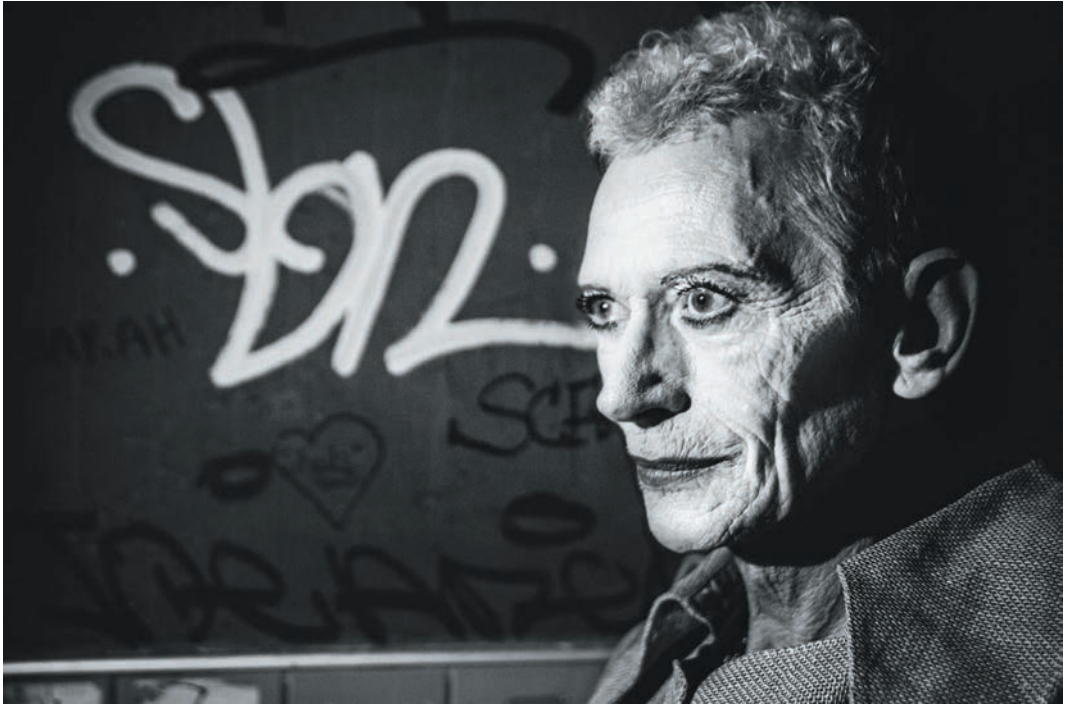
But the nights keep coming & going inevitably. ■



Miss Fish at Kinzo, 2006 (opposite); Samantha Stretch & Chantal at House of Shame, Bassy, 2009 (top); Christeene Vale (of Christeene) in the Hallway, SO36, 2015 (bottom), by Jackie Baier.



Shiaz Legs at Schwuz, 2014 (top); "Clone Fashion" model at Glamour to Kill/Petra Dos Santos Presentation, Bassy, White Trash Fast Food, 2010 (bottom), by Jackie Baier.



Rita Dieter Scholl at Eschloraque, 2014 (top); Petra Flurr at House of Shame, Bassy Club, 2009 (bottom), by Jackie Baier.



Absinthia Absolut at Ludvixxen, Ludwig Bar, 2016 (top); Larry T & Amanda Lepore at White Trash Fast Food, 2016 (bottom), by Jackie Baier.



Polly Private, 2014 (top); Shiaz Legs & Hungry at Schwuz, 2015 (bottom), by Jackie Baier.

1. THURSDAY, 23 JUNE 2009

Berlin. The ruthless light. Between two violent thunderstorms the sky opened, & the sun revealed itself over the city. Glass clarity. Depth of field. Breathtaking contrasts. No dust in the air clouded the spectacle of overpowering nature. He lowered the taxi's rear window to inhale the rainy air.

Traffic jam on the Alex. Traffic jam in the Torstraße. Jam at the Charité. Jam in front of the Hamburger Bahnhof. Destination: Galerie Arndt & Partner, Halle am Ufer.

The arte TV crew test Gilbert & George's patience to the max. Tarot cards were drawn with their assigned questions, always with the announcement that the next card would really be the last. The ritual took forever. On TV the second counts.

An interview can be like an industrial question-&-answer-situation. Gilbert & George wear grey tailored suits. Both have a pen in their breast pocket. George is wearing a light-green/dark-green chequered tie to go with the white shirt. Gilbert is wearing a red/orange plaid tie with his white shirt.

Question: "In a conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, you called for Christian churches to be sprinkled from the inside with desecrating graffiti."

Gilbert: "This is still our position today. Moreover, Christian art should be removed from the collections of the museums & displayed in separate exhibitions. These works of art are religious propaganda. The artists were either forced to create these works, or they had to sell out & collaborate. Imagine an anti-church work in the Renaissance! The artist would be imprisoned & the work would have been destroyed."

George: "The church used art to terrorize & intimidate people. They implanted fear within us with hell & sexuality, & they terrorized us with sin."

In the sky above the gallery a violent storm broke. The catalogue of the "Jack Freak Pictures" exhibition weighed 2.5 pounds at the price of 10 euros only. The motifs of the new pictures: Union Jacks, Gilbert & George, rosettes, monstrously deformed heads, branches, fantasy plans of London – all in the tried & tested black framework, which Gilbert & George call "the grid."

Fresh king prawns, prosecco, Sardinian white wine, mozzarella di bufala, spaghetti no. 12 (DeCecco), white bread, basil, San Marzano tomatoes.

2. WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY 2009

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Berlin, in his study. The opposite wall of the house is illuminated by the radiant light of a 300-watt lamp through closed blinds. This looks like an installation, & *I think of you*.

It is very late in the night or very early in the morning, depending on the point of view, & *I think of you*.

The world is so incomprehensibly multilayered, steeped in history & complex that it cannot be reproduced as a straightforward narrative, does not let itself be pressed between two book covers, neither can it be told as a film with a beginning, a middle & an end, & *I think of you*.

A present from the publisher Alexander Wewerka: *Michael Haneke in conversation with Thomas Assheuer*. Haneke: "That's why in philosophy & literature, the word has been getting around for a long time now that the fragmentary narrative can be the only one suitable for our abilities."

And I think of you.

Silently the BlackBerry hums. An SMS from the south of France: Claude Lanzmann has read Klaus Theweleit's text about *Tsahal* in the current *Spex*. *Please convey my thanks to Klaus*. A photograph hanging on a wall in Claude Lanzmann's study in Paris shows the gate to the Auschwitz extermination camp. Three Mirage jet fighters of the *Tsahal* fly over Auschwitz in formation-flight. The photo bears the handwritten dedication of an Israeli Air Force commander named Shkody: *Claude Lanzmann, the Israeli Air Force over Auschwitz skies. On behalf of the Jewish people & the state of Israel. Remember, & never forget. Depend only on ourselves*. Klaus Theweleit had written in *Spex* about *Tsahal* the following: "There is hardly an Israeli family without a war-related death. This is the starting point of 'Tsahal': the irremovable intermixing of the dead of the Shoah with the dead of the Israeli wars."

*And I think of you.*¹

¹ Little Annie, "I Think of You" (1991).

3 . FRIDAY , 24 JULY 2009

Dramatic mood, an early morning in Berlin-Neukölln. Dark rain clouds drown the Hermannstrasse in shade, while before him, standing on top of the hill, the city stretched out like a young girl in flower.

At the kiosk, V2 Schneider purchased the early edition of the *Tageszeitung*, a daily newspaper, & moved downhill to Hermannplatz, hoping that it would not rain.

Days of silence had preceded this morning walk. A personal invitation to Vienna had reached him via email. Peter Rosei, an Austrian writer whose hand he had long desired to shake, had written to him that they could meet at Bognergasse 5 in Vienna's first district, at the *Zum Schwarzen Kameel* inn. Next Thursday, & only then. The time, however, should be flexible.

Complete silence reigned. I could project everything into it.

That he was supposed to plan for more than a week in advance left V2 Schneider out of his depth, so he switched off his phone. He wanted to be undisturbed, at least for a moment, something needed to be formulated.

For this, he kept making notes. He always carried them with him in his right jacket-pocket in a small notepad with a soft cover.

The little book was filled with unresolved promises.

4 . SUNDAY , 2 AUGUST 2009

Dinner with Claude Lanzmann and Imre Kertész in a restaurant on the Kurfürstendamm, next to the theatre Komödie Ku'damm.

Imre Kertész had chosen the restaurant because he lived around the corner. Schneider sat to the right of Lanzmann and opposite Kertész.

The energy lines of the old Europe, that met at the table, were of such strength that one had to speak of an aurally charged place. Two aged Alphas were constantly assessing themselves as if duelling, discussing the credibility of their own remembrance, growling on the ground, & deeply fond of each other. Only the Serbian waiter, who pounded wine in giant water glasses with the remark that "the Frenchman would drink it thusly in Paris," did not notice anything. It is true that Kertész has been awarded his literary prize for his novel *Fateless*, formerly known as *Fatelessness*. But genuinely shocking, because he explodes all the rules & narrative techniques in it, is his novel *Dossier K – An Investigation*. The book disguises itself as something that it is not: as an interview. The book's form asserts itself to be a transcription of an actual conversation. In fact, it is fiction from the first to the last line, although that was already the genius & perfidy of *Fateless*, this fiction has acted through, & is primed by, autobiographical details.

Kertész's concept of art consists in the fact that in this never-heard dialogue, which he invented himself from A to Z, he deals with his own authorial position. Kertész tells his "opposite":

"Should I talk about everything I never wanted to talk about?" "Why did you write about it then?" "Maybe just to avoid talking about it." "Is it so hard for you?" "You know, it's like the interviews with the old survivors in the Spielberg series. I hate such phrases as: They drove us into the horse stable... We were forced into a farm... They took us to the brickyard of Budakalász, etc." "Why? Didn't it happen that way?" "In the novel, yes. But the novel is fiction."

Dossier K belongs to the contemporary novels of our day in that it poses the questions of style, form, authenticity, & dramaturgy. Were Kertész a tech geek, who knows, perhaps he would put his own blog on the net, like Rainald Goetz? Perhaps he would have there his reflections on his own deportation as a Hungarian Jew after Auschwitz, the fictional novel that pursues the subject of the "autobiographical virtuoso," & the subsequent reflection in *Dossier K*, which plays an even greater hide-&-seek game regarding the authenticity or dramaturgical necessity of the memories?

The Serbian waiter hurled cold plates with maltreated pike-perch fillets drowned in dill cream sauce on the table. Claude Lanzmann painfully hid his bewilderment, not to hurt his friend Imre, who insisted on inviting everyone. A lake of cream wasn't worth it. ■



Gudny Gudmundsdottir, artist, 2012, by Semra Sevin.

REFLECTIONS

SEMRA SEVIN

Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations...
The world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise,
it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.
– “Perspectivism” ... It is our needs that interpret the world.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

My sense of self is manifold, splitting into many different people: I speak four languages; I have lived & worked with international artists in Paris & Los Angeles; I grew up in Germany in a multi-cultural, universalist household. These experiences have allowed me to see the world through a prism of identity, reflected in a multitude of lights. And with the medium of photography, in the series “Reflections,” explore & share what it means to perceive from a multi-cultural context.

Reality is diverse, based on perspective & reflection, on the background & experience of the one gazing. In this regard, my photographs try to capture various levels of perception. Questioning the world & its meanings, “Reflections” enhances the singular view of reality & visually expands it to demonstrate variety.

Originally, the series began in 2008 as “Reflection Cities,” an attempt to capture iconic locations in internationally renowned cities. In 2011, continuing the theme of reflection, I began to work with portraits &



Daniel Kannenberg, artist, 2011, by Semra Sevin.

nudes, producing the respective collections, "Reflections Portraits" & "Reflected Bodies."

Coming from a commercial background & being accustomed to very regimented & controlled photographic production, I found the role of chance & accident a challenging element to work with, comparable to leaving one's home & finding oneself in a foreign land. But, I believe it contributed to the overarching themes of project, as they followed a pattern more akin to life.

Using photography, reflective surfaces, projections & focusing on in camera work; I have produced abstract multi-level images, creating softened & distorted representations of the subjects I shoot, comparable to painted work. In their layers & their motion, the pictures challenge a singular definitive explanation: they invite the viewer to partake in understanding, asking them to complete the interpretive process with all of the cultural backgrounds they bring with them. ■



Armin Boehm, artist, 2012, by Semra Sevin.



Alicja Kwade, artist, 2012, by Semra Sevin.



Gregor Hildebrandt, artist, 2012 (top); Kirsten Hermann, gallerist, 2012 (bottom), by Semra Sevin.



Christian Ehrentraut, gallerist, 2012 (top); Silva Agostini, artist, 2012 (bottom), by Semra Sevin.



ONLY THE STUPIDEST DOGS
SHIT WHERE PEOPLE WALK
SUSANNE GLÜCK

one thing is clear, I still haven't made it far.
only 233 km away from my birthplace.

no idea why my child-gob felt so smacked as I listened to my parents briefly deliberating a move to berlin. there I had to blend-in quietly & get to the bottom of whether there was something to be done. no, nothing.

a little later, in times still youthful, 8th grade, there was an exhibition about berlin-kreuzberg, surprisingly enough here in this provincial town, in the deepest eastern-times. incredible it indeed was. they even had a special sticker for this exhibition, probably printed in the west. such colourful stuff was not around there.

I went there alone. twas disappointing.

in any case, this sticker stuck to my schoolbag calculator & I spent many a lesson staring at it & thinking: I have to go there.

somehow this city managed to lure me very early on.

two years later it was time. berlin musicians came & played. the first contact was there & brought me straight into this city. where the most unconventional, the most beautiful, the most broken & freaky & yet the most relaxed atmosphere is to be found.

what I have suffered here, calmly. in how many parts of the city I've lived here. how many part-life buildings I now walk past without batting an eyelid.

here I had to have the strength for a long time to wallow in shit & with shit, in order to bump into that for which the whole shit is worth the while. for it all sooner or later washes out of the backwaters of the country, for which it has become too narrow, as well as out of all those who do not get along, or those who have never gotten away, among whom one can find the few with whom to make the impossible possible.

also for me it's still impressive that this city with its rhythm is somehow built so that for a year you don't have to or need to even accidentally meet a bloke who lives only 100 meters away from you & with whom

you really have something going on, whether for the good or for the bad.

how hard it is to meet a true berliner can best be seen at christmas time. half the city is swept-out empty. I recommend the tv tower on alexanderplatz during storms, which makes for the right atmospheric overview of berlin, turning by the spooned-out *ragout fin*.

every district has a different feeling.

the only thing that is the same everywhere are the trees. I have never seen so many trees in any other city. it doesn't get greener than that. even the city motorway is green. & what about playgrounds. en masse.

the smell of the subway, which one could sell as a brand, like haribo gummy bears that have had the same taste already for generations, & of course there's also the endless construction sites. everywhere. construction sites again & again. closed-off road sections here, closed-off road sections there. & again from the front. always. & ever & ever this amazed saying: I still haven't been here.

the proper bourgeois-precincts, but also the asocial-precincts are all here, also the precinct beyond the warschauer brücke, as you leave kreuzberg, the "not-really-knowing-what-the-real-spirit-is-but-wanting-to-be-modernly-young" precinct where I momentarily find prenzlauerberg at its most oppressive. the proud mothers & fathers push their helmeted offspring seat-belted in carts on the sidewalk. the AVs are also there under your car:

even the dog shit madness is on display here. it is removed by means of a plastic bag which may take over 400 years to decompose. while dog shit is gone within a week. only the stupidest dogs shit where people walk, the others have long sniffed out places where it's shittable. here everyone treads into shit & gets disgusted, albeit rarely. this skirt has for me been connected to berlin from the beginning. just as to inadvertently sully some freshly cleansed & perfumed, extremely handsome-feeling expensive designer shoes on the freshly rolled-out red carpet on potsdamer platz in disgust & then win a prize.

that the government has been moved in here hasn't done berlin any good. they would have preferred to come privately to meet & allow for their confusion in the positive sense. that would have been better for both sides. berlin BONNs itself increasingly. that's just sad. not that it goes so far that the only remaining berlin special would be currywurst. recently I was arrested by the police because I had thrown a cigarette butt out of the window. that was probably so irritating they didn't notice i didn't have my seatbelt on at all.

I knew other times here, after the wall, when everything went free & all clubs were permit-free, everything permitted. it was all just done. I remember walking once across a huge fallow sand surface, where there was supposed to be a really cool club. we had been wandering around in the dark for a long time till finally we found a porthole on the ground through which to descend into an underground bunker, into a total party with wild folks all dancing in stuffy air, kept warm by mobile radiators with gas bottles. they would have flipped you a bird, if you entertained some smoking ban notions.

everything becomes softer. I miss soft ice cream. for real.

& where are all the mysterious figures with their black parkers? one odder than the other, when once they came crawling out of their holes, because something noteworthy was happening on the spreewalder platz. there are those of self-appointed hordes, to be found on the chairs in front of the many cafes outside, now against nothing, who on the first warm spring day, like ready! steady! go! slurp their exciting special cafe varieties by the dozen.

fortunately I just do not live in these typical reverberating berlin rear yards anymore, where in the summer all windows are open & one has to listen to the theatrical fuck-moans. instead the foreigner-hater in the front apartment drools on your thigh as you sit forward on the stair. how boring. instead, I prefer this seemingly plushy, inconspicuous neighbour, to whom you say hello for many years, & who then suddenly gets dolled-up as a high-heeled now seven-foot tall tranny-periwig mammoth, & yet still greets you as always, hello dear.

if you want to do some relaxing shopping, come gladly to berlin. here they've built an extremely high number of shopping centres, which are expectantly awaiting people who want to buy the same shirt.

or if you are looking for some chic estate with air-conditioned underfloor heating. go for it. there's been a lot of new blockbuster houses, all jammed together in a totally dejectedly "modern" way.

but man! nevertheless there are & have been some real cool wohnlocations here. it's not for nothing that there are & keep coming here people who cannot believe to find something suchlike in the middle of a city. who live so uniquely. who preserve the beautiful mysterious berlin.

berlin can be extremely anonymous but also intimate. berlin is relaxed. really village-like. there are honest conversations.

written by a woman in berlin, september 2016 ■



TIMO JACOBS: AN APPRECIATION

ROBERT CARRITHERS

As much as I think the term “underground” has been overused, I do think the phrase “underground cinema” works. There is certainly a category of films that fits this title, & they differ from independent films in a number of important ways.

For me, underground cinema starts with Jack Smith & Jonas Mekas. They were the true pioneers of this art form. Jack Smith created his film *Flaming Creatures* with the idea of Hollywood B movies in mind. As a result, the whole idea of underground filmstars was created, & in this Smith predated Warhol by a couple of years. *Flaming Creatures* was confiscated by the New York City police department when it was shown at the New Bowery Theatre in February 1964 (along with Smith’s *Normal Love* & Warhol’s *Newsreel*), & was afterwards banned from being shown in public for several years. Smith considered it the biggest success of his career. Underground films, almost by definition, *must* shake up society & shock people – out of their apathy, out of their “comfort zones” – by any means necessary.

The Lithuanian-American filmmaker Jonas Mekas was heavily involved in the obscenity trial

of *Flaming Creatures*, & was actually arrested at the New Bowery Theatre screening. Mekas founded the Anthology Film Archives in New York. It is the world’s largest archive of avantgarde & underground films. His influence as a filmmaker, director of the archives & a champion against censorship is immense. He is ninety four years old now &, incredibly, makes one film per day on his website as part of an initiative called “The 365 Day Project.”

Andy Warhol was one of the underground filmmakers who followed in the footsteps of Smith & Mekas. Warhol created the infamous crew of anti-Hollywood “Superstars” who are now the darlings of the art world, though as mentioned above Smith’s idea of underground filmstars predated Warhol’s by at least a couple of years. This idea was continued & developed by Nick Zedd, who created his “Cinema of Transgression” in the early 1980s. Zedd maintained the tradition of shock value, rejecting all conservative concepts of society & accepted forms of behavior. Of course, speaking of shock value, I have to mention the name John Waters. He is one of my personal cinematic heroes.



MY BERLIN PHILOSOPHY
FOR MAKING FILMS
TIMO JACOBS

When I think of underground cinema in Berlin, I always think of Timo Jacobs. Timo continues the worthy tradition of Jack Smith through his humorous cinematic vision of modern day Berlin. He chooses his actors & actresses from the artists & musicians of various Berlin subcultures. In his films *Mann Im Spagat: Pace, Cowboy, Pace!* & *Klappe Cowboy* he has created the role of a modern day cowboy seeking justice & a better life in Berlin. Of course, he plays the part of the cowboy in a Chaplinesque slapstick way, while coming across characters that either fight against him or support him. Timo Jacobs carries the torch of European underground cinema in Europe &, with his work in Berlin, has taken it into the twenty first century. ■

Production still from *Mann im Spagat: Pace, Cowboy, Pace!* dir. Timo Jacobs, 2016, by Blanka Gomila (opposite); & *Klappe Cowboy!* dir. Ulf Behrens & Timo Jacobs, 2011, by Marcus Krauß (above).

Films should follow a personal vision & stay true to your personal beliefs.

If the money is not enough, you have to do it anyway, because if you run away from it, you will continue running away rather than getting to the point where you visualize your goal.

You will die in the end, like everyone else, but in this case you will die unfulfilled, maybe even with the creeps.

Don't waste your time running after people to give you money, having a lot of money does not make a film any better.

Go & work for it – & spend the money on your vision, if it is your money you will probably be careful to make it even better.

You must do the best out of what you can afford & create the style of the film with that. Everything is there in any case.

Berlin gives you all of the possibilities, I think the people here are grateful for anyone who is really burning for something, it is a city of visionaries & they have always loved films since the founding of the flip-book. ■

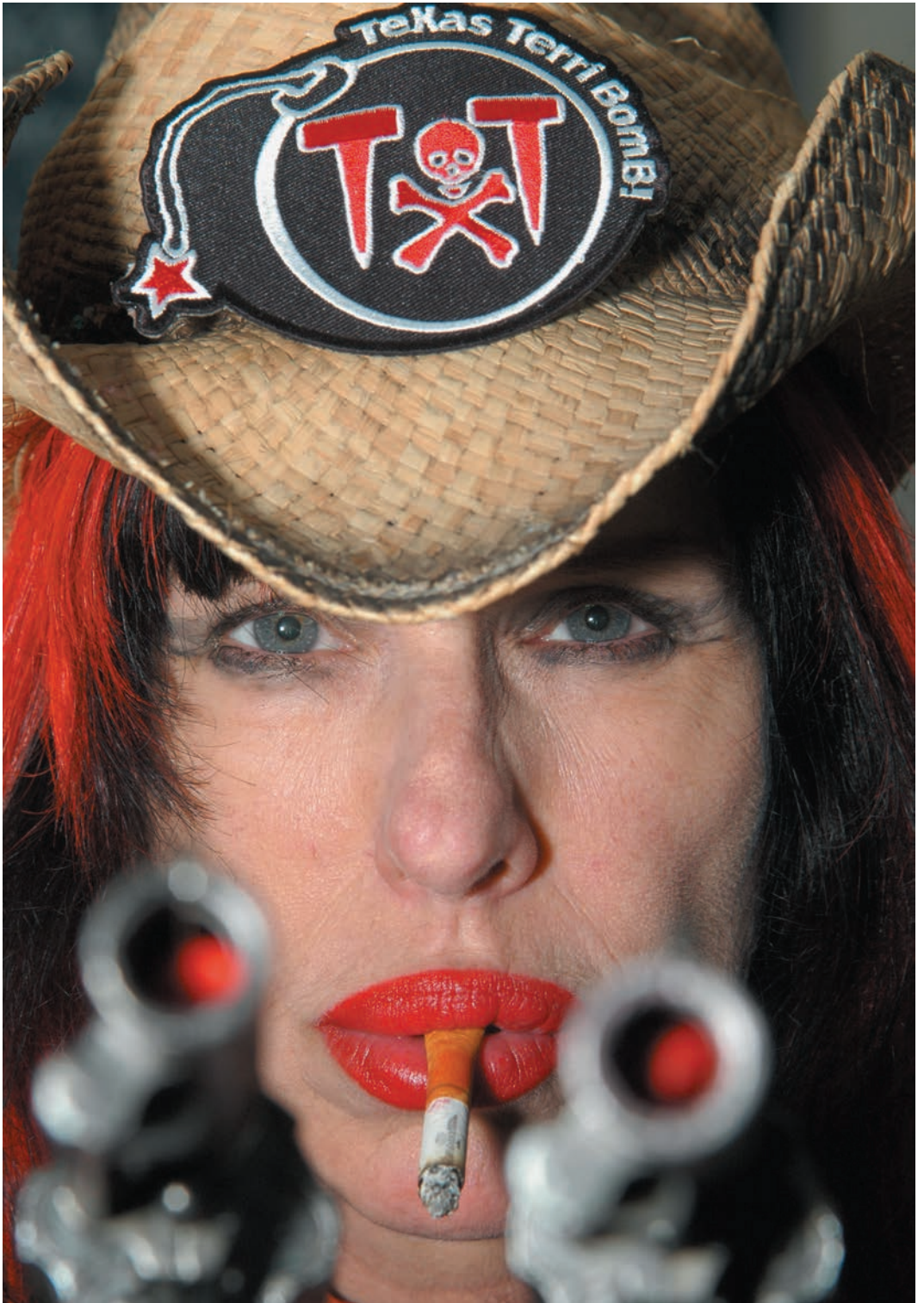


Production stills from *Mann im Spagat: Pace, Cowboy, Pace*, dir. Timo Jacobs, 2016, by Blanka Gomila.





Production stills from *Mann im Spagat: Pace, Cowboy, Pace*, dir. Ulf Behrens & Timo Jacobs, 2011, by Marcus Krauß.



Texas Terri in *Klappe Cowboy!* dir. Ulf Behrens & Timo Jacobs, 2011, by Marcus Krauß.





PRAGUE

ICONS OF THE PRAGUE '90S

ROBERT CARRITHERS

I first went to Prague in September 1990. I was supposed to go for two weeks & return to Berlin. I went back to Berlin two months later. It was then that Prague captured me. Prague is not always a good place for someone from another country to make his or her home. For some it works, but for many others Prague chucks them out & refuses to accept them for one reason or another. It does not work for everyone, but if it does, it is magic. I have heard so many complaints about Czech people & how unfriendly & cold they are. I have a son here by a Czech mother & I take it as a personal insult when I hear those complaints. I guess I have become Czech in some ways.

The foreigners who came here in the '90s either came to Prague to do business, be creative or to get drunk cheaply. There were also the men who came here to chase after Czech women. At one point there were over thirty thousand Americans living in Prague. The majority of them left & only the hardcore ones stayed. Some left only to find out when they went back home that it was no longer home & returned to Prague. Some got married, some are still drunk, some are successful in business & some still create.

Prague Post editor Alan Levy caught the Prague '90s moment with this quote: "We are living in the Left Bank of the '90s. For some of us, Prague is Second Chance City; for others a new frontier where anything goes, everything goes, & often enough, nothing works. Yesterday is long gone, today is nebulous, & who knows about tomorrow, but, somewhere within each of us, we all know that we are living in a historic place at a historic time" (*Prague Post*, October 1, 1991 – inaugural issue). Well the world has changed a lot since 1991. In the 1990s Americans were admired, but after George W. Bush pissed on that by opening Pandora's box in Iraq, that has certainly changed. We are living with the consequences of those actions now, which just shows how history is constantly being rewritten. Prague is still a very special place to live & I am inspired by it all of the time.



JOHN BRUCE SHOEMAKER

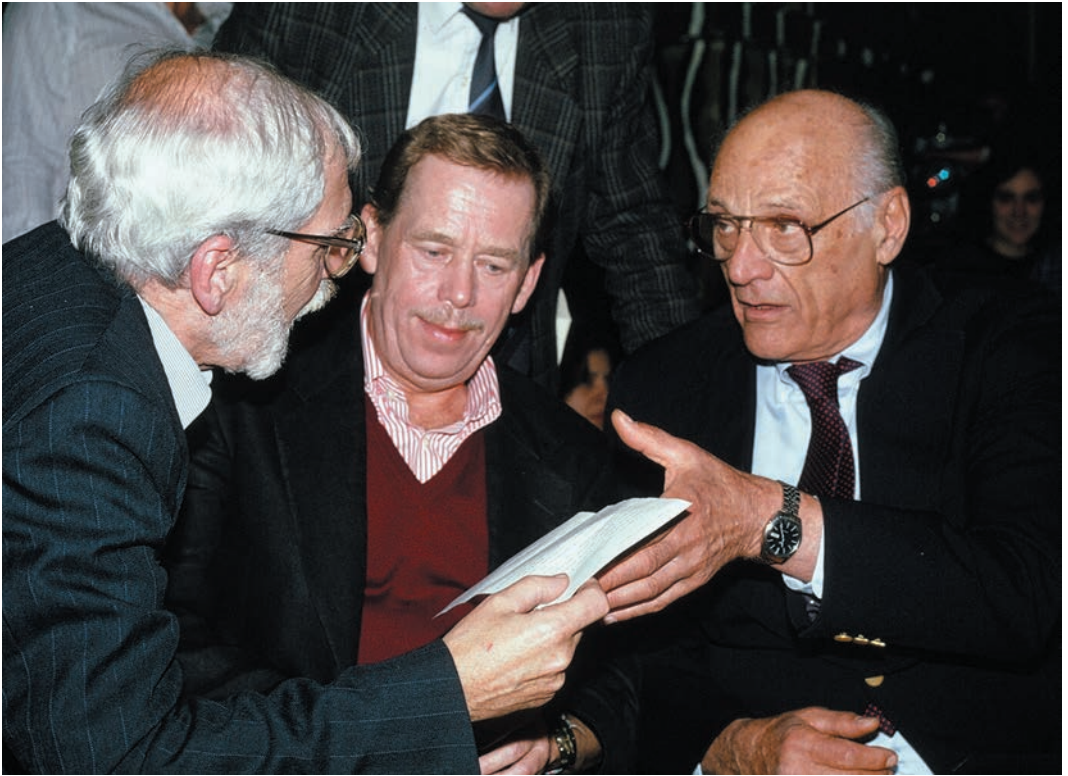
John Bruce was certainly an infamous character on the Prague scene during the 1990s. If you lived here as an expat Prague during those years you will certainly have a John Bruce story. Glen Emery, the Canadian writer & club owner, calls him "JB" in some of the stories included in this book. He was many things to many people, it depends on who you speak to. He was a former journalist, but once he made it to Prague he became a big wheeler-dealer & a club/bar entrepreneur. He was in the right place at the right time & made the most of it. The places that he opened all became legendary. He & Glen Emery had the audacity & the vision to open the Repre Club in the historic turn-of-the-century Municipal House, Obecní dům. The original Thirsty Dog & the Martini Bar were other successful business ventures. He went on to open The Derby & the equally infamous Marquis de Sade bar near Old Town Square. I had the pleasure of being in all of those places until the early morning hours, doing things I regretted doing the next day. Shoemaker had a crew of loyal friends, but also some rather shady ones. You knew who the shady ones were when you saw him speaking to them. It was better not to say "hello" to him at such delicate moments. He certainly dreamt big, lived life to the fullest & knew how to have fun. He left his mark on Prague, that much is for sure. Sadly he passed away in the US in 2010. I took this photograph of John Bruce at his then newly-opened bar The Derby.



ALAN LEVY

There is so much to write about Alan Levy, I do not know where to begin. For me he was a hero of Prague in the '90s, but his relationship with Prague went back much further than most of the expats who came to live here after the Velvet Revolution. His nature was that of a mentor, & he gave me the opportunity to work for the weekly English language newspaper *The Prague Post*, where he was the editor-in-chief. I did some photo portraits for the weekly profile he wrote about interesting people on the Prague scene – not only the movers & shakers, but artists, musicians & writers too. The thing is, he believed in me when others didn't. He had a way of doing that for many people back then. He did have the occasional temper tantrum, & at such times it was best to stay out of his way.

Alan Levy was born in New York & worked as a journalist for the *New York Times*, *Life Magazine*, & many other papers & magazines. He interviewed many outstanding personalities, including The Beatles, Fidel Castro, Richard Nixon & Václav Havel. He moved to Prague with his family in 1967 to collaborate on a musical by Jiří Šlitr & Jiří Suchý. While in Prague, he covered the Prague Spring & the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet forces & other Warsaw pact nations in. He chronicled these events in his book *Rowboat to Prague* published in the U.S. in 1972. This book was translated into Czech in 1975, smuggled



VÁCLAV HAVEL & ARTHUR MILLER

It was 1994 & I was asked to photograph the opening party for the PEN' 61 International Congress that was held in Prague at Radost. The theme for the conference that year was literature & tolerance. It was hosted by the Czech writer, playwright & poet Jiří Stránský. The president of the Czech Republic Václav Havel opened the conference with a speech & he participated as well. His opening speech was important then & especially even more now for the present time.

I had the pleasure to meet President Václav Havel & one of my all time hero's, Arthur Miller. What was amazing for that time was that although president Havel had his bodyguards & security with him, he was totally approachable & totally open to it. In fact, he encouraged it. He wanted to meet with people & communicate. This is a photograph of a time & place that could never be repeated.

into Czechoslovakia & was re-titled *So Many Heroes*. It became an underground classic. Afterwards, he & his family were expelled from Prague. They moved to Vienna where Alan continued his journalistic work for the *International Herald Tribune*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan* & many others. They returned to Prague in 1990 after the Velvet Revolution. Levy coined the phrase "Prague, the Left Bank of the '90s." His statement appeared in the *Post's* first issue & inspired thousands of young Americans to move to Prague & follow their artistic dreams. He was a well known & respected figure, not only within the ex-pat community, but in the Czech community too. Prague was his home. He always said that when his time was up he wanted to die here. Finally his wish came true. I took this photo of him in Karlovy Vary during the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. He loved this international event & used to go there as often as he could.

"Alan Levy chose to become active in our country during what was for us a very sensitive & important period – the time of creating a free, open environment for the media. Because of his human qualities & professional experience, he quickly became recognized as a not inconsiderable figure for whom I had great respect. What is more, I regret him leaving us at a point when a number of Czech media outlets are blurring the limits between serious & tabloid journalism" (Václav Havel).



ONDRÁČEK THE PRAGUE SWORD-SWALLOWER

I used to see this man sitting at the same place near Můstek & he would swallow a series of swords, then for an encore put long nails up his nose & hammer them in with one of swords. He was one of the popular street performers that you would see all of the time in the Prague of the '90s. Walking the streets of Prague then was a different experience. There was not so much traffic, there were no fast food places like McDonalds & there was a sense of optimism in the air. There was a large variety of street performers & musicians playing all over the center. This sense of optimism & all of the rest of it has gone to shit now. All performers & musicians now need a special license to perform in public & it is very regulated, but there was a time where you could walk & see this man swallowing swords every day. There was a sense of disorder, but you felt safe within it. Now there is more order & you see special Czech military personnel roaming around the center with large firearms & somehow you feel unsafe. I miss the sword-swallower.



ANTONÍN THE DEVIL MAN ON CHARLES BRIDGE

In the early '90s in Prague, if you wanted to perform or sell on Charles Bridge, it was just a question of getting there early enough to choose your place, you could be there all day for the tourists & make money. Most either performed music or sold Prague art, or artists would draw a picture of you, but there was one man there who was a bit different. He was there every day with a mirror in his hand along with a hand-held canvas. He'd grimace in the mirror with his tongue sticking out & would draw a self-portrait with himself as the devil. Sometimes he would wear devil horns & would sell these drawings to all who were interested. He would never draw anything else & became well known as the Devil Man of Charles Bridge. He became a local legend. It was said that he was once a brilliant professor who somehow gave it all up & became the Devil Man & stayed there till his death. In Czech fairytales, whether in books or films, the devils (rather than the Devil) were considered comical characters, not really evil. Although every December 5th on the day of Mikuláš, people dressed as angels, Saint Mikuláš & devils roam the streets of Prague. The Angels & Mikuláš give the good children candy, whereas the devils scare the small children who have been bad, & give them a cold potato or a lump of coal with a warning. I wish I had collected a series of Devil Man portraits. I would have an exhibition of them now.



BEEF STEW

Beef Stew started happening in the downstairs bar at Radost in 1993. It was initiated by New York poet David Freeling & ran every Sunday evening for ten years, during which time the readings were coordinated by a string of writers including Anthony Tognazzini, Jim Freeman & Willie Watson. It was a favorite venue for British & American journalists reporting on the New Bohemia. Freeling: "Everyone wants to find a great writer. We're all waiting for something to escape the pot." Beef Stew was variously loved & loathed by members of the international community & the media alike. For many involved in the Prague scene, Beef Stew was nevertheless – particularly in its early years – at the heart of a substantial English-speaking subculture. It was a gathering of mostly expat writers & poets getting together & doing readings of their work. There was a signup sheet & an open mic. Some took themselves too serious & some did not. There was the occasional music, there was talent & silliness & the expectations were high. Some went on to become serious writers.



DAVID FREELING

Literary evenings have a long tradition in cities such as San Francisco & New York. With the arrival of the so-called Beat Generation in the early 1950s, they grew in popularity. And of course nineteenth century Paris had its literary salons, where authors & poets would read their new works to intimate gatherings of aesthetes & socialites. David Freeling started the Beefstew readings in Prague in the early '90s. Mostly it involved expats, mainly Americans & Brits, but eventually Czech poets & writers got involved as well. It was held for a while in Anděl, Prague 5, but in 1993 it found a more permanent home in the basement of Radost FX, a restaurant & club in IP Pavlova. The readings were held every Sunday night with an open-mic session that allowed anything from poetry to fiction to improvised storytelling, as well as music & performance. When it worked it was magic & when it flopped it flopped. David founded Beefstew & other writers took the helm once he had left. The readings helped to create a foundation for an expat literary scene in Prague. I took the above photograph of David in front of a meat shop in the center, while he recited poetry in the spirit of spoken word, meat & Beefstew.



JAN MACHÁČEK

The first time I came to Prague was in 1990 & that is when I also first saw Jan. He also connected me with New York & Prague in a totally unexpected way. Some people took me to an infamous club called Újezd & we went down the steps into a dark & smoky basement. The room was crowded & a band was playing. I instantly recognized the song "Heroin" by the Velvet Underground. I looked around & saw all of these people dancing wildly to this song. At first I was very surprised by this – I mean the song "Heroin" is not exactly your average happy dance song, but then I looked towards the stage & saw a band that looked like clones of the original '60s Velvet Underground! With a woman that looked & sounded like Nico, & yes, even an electric violin was being played. I found out later that this band was called The Velvet Underground Revival Band, but it certainly was not a typical revival band. I found out that the guitarist & singer of the band was Jan Macháček. He has been in a very popular Czech band called Garage since 1985. He was also a member of the infamous The Plastic People Of The Universe, from 1983 to 1986. He is a former dissident & a signatory of Charter 77. After the revolution in 1989, he joined other people from underground publishing to create the first independent media outlet in the country. He was co-founder of the weekly magazine *Respekt*.



IVAN KRÁL

I first met Ivan Král in the early '80s in New York when he had played with the Patti Smith Band. One night when I was photographing at Radost I met him again after a ten-year period. He came back to Prague to do some music producing, to work on his own music & to reconnect to his Czech roots. This photo was taken at Radost in 1994.



JOSEF RAUVOLF

I met Josef at various music concerts in Prague & got to know him. He connected Prague to New York for me. He certainly had a lot of experience with New York history. He has been a journalist, but is best known as the Czech translator of American Beat writers such as William Burroughs & Jack Kerouac. He was the first one who introduced New York underground culture to Prague. His translations of Burroughs' novels *Naked Lunch* & *Junky* are popular & have sold thousands of copies. He has also helped make acclaimed documentaries on the underground culture scenes in New York & Prague. He has won numerous awards for his translations. He was the chief editor of the Czech edition of *Rolling Stone* & the Czech magazine *Instinct*.



MALCOLM MCLAREN

Malcolm McLaren was at Radost making the rounds promoting his newly released double-CD *Paris*, which was released in 1994.



THE FORMAN BROTHERS

It was 1994 & a friend enthusiastically pushed me into going to a marionette show. Czechoslovakia had always had a fascination with marionettes, but this was a new type of show for the Czech Republic. It was a comic performance called "The Farmer, The Devil & The Crone." I loved it so much that I ended up taking other people to see it. Later I found out that the two masterminds behind the show were Petr & Matěj Forman, the twin sons of famed Czech film director Miloš Forman! I took this photo after one of their performances. They have performed these marionette shows throughout Europe & also do performances on their riverboat in Prague. They are now have a theatre group without a permanent stage, a community of theatrical nomads. They were inspired by old wandering shows that had magicians, comedians, circus performers & dancers, as well as exotic animals displaying various anomalies & deformities. They have created their award-winning show "Obludaruim," where the audience is taken through a fantasy world then led into a tent with bizarre chairs. There they watch a special puppet show which has a life-sized wooden horse, flying fish & a dancing mermaid. The Forman Brothers are masters at recreating historical forms of theatre, combined with their own atmospheric visions. They create a special magic that no one else seems able to do nowadays, & they keep on doing it. Like long-lost performers from another century, they have entered the present time & invite us to be a part of their world. It's certainly a better place than the world outside.



DANIEL NEKONEČNÝ

I met Daniel Nekonečný at a party at Radost FX in the early '90s. He was supposed to be this crazy Czech superstar. I wanted to photograph him & we ended up in a park well after midnight. Somehow I got him to climb a tree. It was a time in Prague where it was easy & simple to meet people whoever they were. I later found out he was known in Prague as the Samba king. He has a band called Šum svistu. With his band he has had huge shows that have included Brazilian dancers. He has put on spectacles on Czech TV. He was very famous even then & I'm very proud that I got him up in a tree!



LUCIE BÍLÁ

I met Lucie Bílá through a friend of mine, Bara. Bara's father was married to Lucie at the time. Once upon a time, Lucie Bílá was known as a somewhat punky singer who fronted her own band. Since then she has moved into the mainstream & is now one of the most famous singers in the Czech Republic. She has starred in many big musicals, & is a true Czech superstar. She has won the Czech Grammy award as "Best Female Singer Of The Year" every year for the last decade! She has acted in many films & plays & is now a household name. But in the past she took many chances & lived quite an unconventional lifestyle. I took this photo at a fascinating theatre called "TA FANTASTIKA PRAGUE." It started as a black light theatre. The founder Petr Kratochvíl actually opened the theatre in New York in 1981. He moved back to Prague & reopened the theatre in 1989. It was a theatre that specialized in productions of fantasy themes & covered major novels such as *Baron Munchhausen*, *Don Quixote*, *Alice in Wonderland* & *Gulliver's Travels*. Lucie Bílá has been performing at this unique theatre for a long time. I was fascinated when they staged a musical interpretation of the painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymus Bosch. I wanted to know how it could possibly be staged. They did amazing things with it. Lucie Bílá had the lead role in this bizarre one-of-a-kind musical. I took this photo of her on stage just before a performance.



RADOST

I was the house photographer at the Prague club Radost FX from 1993 to 1996. It was a completely different place than it is now. It had the first good quality vegetarian restaurant in Prague & the first the cocktail lounge. It would change its décor every several months. The décor was always fun & usually a combination of '60s with that sort of futurism thrown into it. Next to the lounge at that time was a gallery that was really very innovative & happening at the time & downstairs was the club. Now it is primarily a dance club with DJs, but in the early '90s, it had theme nights & very exclusive parties where you would mix with the Czech & international celebrities & many of the cutting edge personalities of the time.

Having grown up with the New York creative club scene in the '80s I was naturally drawn to this place like a magnet. I got to know the owners Bethea & Richard Zoli. We hit it off right away. All of the people who worked there had a great look & were all interesting characters in their own right. Radost means joy in Czech & it certainly was. Bethea saw that I was taking photos at the club on & off & offered for me to be the house photographer for a year, which turned into three years. It all culminated into my first gallery show in Prague at Radost. The following are some memories & moments that I captured then.









Betha & Richard Zoli at Radost, Halloween 1993, by Robert Carrithers.

It's the opening night of the club, Dec 7th, 1992. I'm sitting in our VIP room looking at the newly elected president of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel drinking beer, smoking & eating cheesecake, probably for the first time in his life; eating cheesecake, that is. He looks up at me, our eyes meet, & I freeze, thinking I'm having a moment with the country's new, post-communist regime leader. What an epiphany! I could feel both of our intense thoughts like WHAT THE FUCK JUST HAPPENED; I was a nightclub owner, & he was the new president. He opens his mouth, & I brace myself: waiting for something profound he spoke & said, "I need to take a piss". Well, there went my special moment with the President. He simply needed directions to the bathroom. I guess you could say that he peed on my epiphany. I left Czechoslovakia in '68, in search of the American Dream & a good pair of Beatle boots. Now, I find myself back in the Czech Republic, sitting in my newly built nightclub, just short of losing my mind after having spent the last year of my life trying to put together a new business in a city where no one knew what the hell they were doing, myself included. Sitting in the club at the opening was a moment in my life I knew I would never forget. I felt like a young boy again, who left home in pursuit of a greater, unknown destiny. I didn't know what I was getting myself into back then, & I didn't have a clue about what I was doing right now, but I knew I had to do it again tomorrow. The DJ was playing House music I sunk deeper into my thoughts, my anxiety weakened only by the strong, dry Martini I was drinking. I had never owned a nightclub in my life, or a restaurant for that matter, & yet here I was. Sitting amidst it all, all the glory of a new, Western establishment, & deep in debt. Havel returned to the table, & I smiled. The more I learned about this man, the more I honored him. He was a true humanitarian. There is a quote, he would later say, which fit the moment perfectly: "We must not be afraid of dreaming the seemingly impossible, if we want the seemingly impossible to become reality." And so we did. Our dream became our reality.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Ending up back in the Czech Republic & opening a nightclub was not what I saw on my horizon. When I left Czechoslovakia in 1968, to escape the grips of a Communist regime, I was a late teen obsessed with the Beatles & the ideas of the West they brought with their music & style. I even played guitar in a Beatles cover band. I knew I had to get out, & no matter how difficult the journey ahead of me could get, I couldn't see it any other way. My destiny's pull was greater than even I could comprehend.

Leaving at that time I wasn't sure if I would ever see my parents again. But, I had to go. I needed to see what was waiting for me down the rabbit hole. For me America was like being born again. The late 60's was the time of a new revolution: free love, drugs, long hair, & wild & crazy American women. I had it all day & night. Always looking for the next girl, the next drug, & the next cause. I was addicted to my new life.



Bethea & Richard Zoli with Václav Havel, at Radost 1994, by Robert Carrithers.

MY NEW DESTINY: BETHEA

I traveled & lived in many states, but I ended up living in Manhattan working as a photographer for a few years. In 1972 I met Bethea, my future partner, my wife, & still my best friend. I moved out of New York to be with her in 1978. We were living in a small town one hour outside of Manhattan in rural New Hope, Pennsylvania, where we opened a designer boutique named ZOLI. Bethea already had a young daughter & eventually we had a daughter together in 1980. It seemed like we were on the fast track to the American dream, to the pinnacle of having it all. We were hugely successful with our store, eventually opening a second boutique in Princeton, New Jersey, & even starting our own clothing line with an in house designer. We even started making our own television commercials, which eventually lead to the desire of producing our own television show about fashion & culture. We had more money than we knew what to do with, & spent our summers vacationing around Europe, buying a gorgeous house & cars, & living a very comfortable, life. And that's where the trouble started with me. I was living

a suburban life. Although the fashion business was successful for us, it didn't feel like it was my calling, & I could feel that life in the woods wasn't going to hold its charm over me forever. In a twist of events, we found ourselves contemplating a career change. The excess of the 80's was wearing thin in the early 90's, & business wasn't what it used to be. With a deep breath & the unknown in our hearts, we jumped head first into the next chapter of our lives: creating Radost FX.

We came to Czechslovakia looking for factories to manufacture our line of clothing. Instead, we opened a night club! In retrospect, I would say we had a momentary lapse of sanity. But, like all things that are meant to be, sometimes you don't understand how you got to where you are, but it's exactly where you are meant to be, & it all makes sense in the end. Radost FX was a reality waiting to happen, a dream we didn't even know we had, somewhere deep within us. It was scary, intense, thrilling, & exhausting, but somehow we managed to build this dream from the dust up.

When we acquired the location for the nightclub & restaurant, it was through a series of connections that the perfect space fell into our laps. It was a concrete & dirt underground cave, with no bones or shape to spark our ideas, just massive amounts of space to fill & play with. On the street level we envisioned the restaurant/cafe & art gallery, with the nightclub constituting its own entity in the space below. We were naïve when it came to the conception & implementations of the space. Unaware of what it meant to get something done in Prague, what followed was a year of a construction bloopers. At that time, Prague was a city that was scrambling quickly to get a grip on what it meant to be Western. Numerous businesses had poured in since the Velvet Revolution, including a mass influx of ex-pats. It was an extremely exciting time to be in Prague. An untouched, medieval city, quiet & brooding, with an energy that captivated you. Prague cast a spell upon every new soul to enter her domain. It was magic. We were also trying to create magic for the city by introducing the first Western style club & restaurant, with vegetarian food (vegetarian in Prague, at the time, basically

meant any meat that wasn't red), & parties that featured International DJ's & bands, events like nothing the city had ever seen, & a style that was fresh & modern.

The hard part came when we tried to translate all of our ideas to the people who would help us build this dream. Most days, the construction worker's were too drunk to work, with the excuse of it always being someone's birthday or "name" day (every calendar day has a featured name, the celebration for which is equivalent to a birthday). Any new ideas we brought to the table that hadn't been done before were met with a resounding, "it's not possible". Nothing was possible until we rolled up our sleeves & fought to prove that it was possible. Radost FX took every last ounce of our passion & dedication to build. Almost every piece of furniture was designed & made for us. We paid attention to every last detail, pulling creativity from ourselves & a team of highly inspired young professionals, who were just as eager to create something new & exciting. We were pioneers of the time, setting forth on a journey that could take us anywhere, & we were curious & scared shitless to see where that was.

HOUSTON, WE'VE LANDED

When we opened the doors to Radost FX, we were met with a stampede of masses curious to see what the American's had brought to the still somewhat sleepy city. For decades, Prague had been starved of a taste of the West, & the hunger we were met with was ravenous. We established ourselves as not only a local sensation, but an international one as well. We even received sparkling reviews from international magazines & many times voted one of the top clubs in the world by numerous publications. Our success took us by storm. Before we could even see it happening, we were thrown into the midst of the chaos that a successful business brings. I don't know that we really slept for a good year or two... or 24.

It's hard to believe our doors opened so long ago now, & the business is still trudging ahead; not quite the steam locomotive it was in the beginning, more of a leisurely, trolley ride. Radost FX stayed open almost everyday for the next 24 years. The success of the club was unparalleled with anything like it's kind, & blew any expectations I had of the business's potential, out of the water. A parade of

internationally famous people went through the club over the years, & interesting characters of every kind. We hosted a long list of celebrities, DJ's, music videos, films, charity events, prestigious private parties, & huge production events outside of the club. There are far too many great stories that need to be told. If only we would have captured all of this on film, it would be an amazing reality show. Radost FX certainly found its self in a category of its own kind.

I am humbled by the opportunity & success Radost FX brought us. The people we met, whose lives we changed, & who changed ours, for the better. Radost FX was truly a special place for so many people, & that we were able to create this & offer it to this city we've called home for over two decades, is a gift & a pride that we will always hold close to our hearts. We thank everyone who participated over the years. And we thank Robert Carrithers for being there with camera in hand. ■



Michal Cihlář with his mother, U Stalina, 1962, by Josef Cihlář.

I was born prematurely in September 1960, three months ahead of Jean-Michel Basquiat, whom paradoxically I only got to know after his death. Jean-Michel was from Brooklyn, I from Prague. The equally old Kim-Ki-duk is from the South-Korean Bonghva & Tony Banderas from Málaga. Then there's Sean Penn, Jo Nesbo & Ivan Lendl... We're a strong year. However, in that age, of which I lack my personal memories, Roy Lichtenstein & Andy Warhol were already in their Christ years, both thumbing through comic books, fascinated. They both had the nagging feeling that the comic-book frame was worth multiple blow-ups, & they were happy to immediately oblige. Whereas here, round the same time, the nation-wide Communist Party conference announced its goal as having been reached. Meaning, the build-up of socialism in Czechoslovakia. The country's name was changed to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic & the leading role of the Communist Party was astutely anchored within the fourth article of the newly-accepted constitution. So this is what it was like fifty-six years ago... I'd hate to be accused of treating other lives, names & events like a parasite for my own gain, but I can't help it. Oftentimes I catch myself conceiving of myself as of an important glass wall in an aquarium, with significantly different goings-on happening on either side. What's important is not to break! What else can I think of when hearing that Steve Jobs departed at fifty-six, just as Tomáš Baťa, Albrecht Dürer & Gustav Klimt did? When I was six, I witnessed the tragic passing of my uncle, sculptor Karel Hladík. Almost fifty-six years of age... He died, like Klimt, of cerebral haemorrhage. I'm fifty-six now myself & I've long outlived my uncle. I'm still convinced, however, that the belief in elevating creativity, which I unwittingly sucked in at his studio, was together with my subconscious pop-art perception of everyday reality the most important basis for my future work.

Until 1962 our family including my grandma lived at a gallery house on Melantrich Street, a hundred metres from the astronomical clock. Today, a house next door features the entrance to the Museum of Eroticism... Toward the end of the war the house got very lucky. Following the sound of the alarm sirens, my ten-year-old mother & her mother hid in the cellar, while the American carpet bombing was hitting Prague from Radlice to Žižkov. The sky was overcast, it was foggy, the calendar said Ash Wednesday & by mistake, 2,500 Prague buildings were razed that day. The target of the B-17 bombers was Dresden of course. It occurs to me that had it not been for this fatal navigation error, perhaps the Dresden casualty list would have included the American POW, corporal Kurt Vonnegut, who up till that point had been terribly lucky & survived all the bombings of the city at Slaughterhouse no. 5, the razed POW camp... The destructive fire of the Old Town Hall on the last day of the war was not witnessed by my mother. The revolution guards had ousted people out of the cellars & ordered them to escape to Smíchov, otherwise the Germans would have used them as live shields in front of their

tanks. As mother & grandma ran across the bridge, Smíchov was invaded from the other side by the Vlasov army, while loudspeakers announcing the burning of the Old Town Hall. By the way, the Hall got a hit by German cannons positioned at Letná in the exact place where later the Stalin monument was to stand. But I digress... Of course I cannot recall that one-room apartment on Melantrich Street, but I firmly believe I've retained an impression of the wall next to which my cot used to stand. A white wall decorated with a deep pink-red pattern of rubber paint-roller. Perhaps I've subconsciously drawn inspiration from that ornamental impression till this day. Or at least I think so. And it makes for nice reading...

On November 19, 1961, my parents were allotted a co-op apartment in Prague-Strašnice, & so together with them I could witness the construction of our brick prefab block. Brick prefab is nonsensical, I know, but you can't see bricks underneath the plastering & its eight floors, eight entrances & ground-plan of a dwelling unit are strongly reminiscent of the classical prefabricated housing block in every respect. We moved in our new



Michal Cihlář, Strašnice, 1962, by Josef Cihlář.

440 | house at the beginning of October 1962, my room gorgeously sunlit. I really can't say a word against the prefabs that started growing on the Prague peripheries in the early 60s. As a child I was unaware of the mud, of the stereotype of the facades, of the absence of trees in these locations; on the contrary I was fond of the huge accumulation of people, of the endless roster of identical windows, & especially of the various rubbish windswept round the houses. Come December, on every third parapet there was a tied-up Christmas tree, & behind every fiftieth window there dangled a hare or a pheasant. I liked riding around housing estates, mainly Malešice, Spořilov, but also Prosek, on my child's Pioneer bicycle, which I later on pitifully lost when it got run over by a train at the Prague-Těšnov station, before the railway workers managed to load it as an express package. The neo-renaissance Těšnov train station was surely not to blame for it, so it didn't deserve to be shut down in 1972 & thirteen years later to be wilfully razed by the evil Communist urban planners. After all, Prague has got a tradition of liquidating irreplaceable buildings, in 1965 even the most monumental of Prague monuments was blown up... But more on that later, let's for now return to the housing development backdrop. Thousands of

families living in one place gave me excellent odds of finding, in the grass round the rubbish bins, some marvellous chewing-gum wrappers to enrich my collection. For instance, something from the almost "Western" Yugoslavia. I was a member of the Curiosity Items Collectors Club, & in socialist Czechoslovakia, a foreign chewing-gum wrapper was precisely such a collector's item. In the late 1960s, one shop near the Powder Tower began selling Dutch Donald bubble gum in fresh strawberry-coloured wrappers with an incredibly well-printed comic picture folded inside, but one swallow, as we know, doesn't make a summer. Later on, Donald was sold at the Tuzex chain-store (factory for black marketers), which was a luxury, since high-demand goods could be easily sold here without wrappers. In Bohemia, only chewing gums produced in the local Velim were generally available, sometimes also Danish, Italian & Greek ones. Compared to the Soviet Union, where chewing was considered a bourgeois impropriety, this was a sign of benevolence on the part of the Red Brother. During childhood, every walk on Wenceslas Square was accompanied for me by the feeling of excitement & hope that we end up turning towards Příkopy & make it all the way to that super-cool store where the Donalds scattered

behind the shop-window gave off their nice smell even through the glass. The store next door was also quite special, the only one in Prague to sell the East-German models of TT electric trains, so the peak of my bliss was whenever my parents gave me 2 crowns fifty hellers for one Donald & then, with a foreign chewing gum in mouth & a new picture in my pocket, I could stand in front of a shop-window with a miniature railway, watching trains pass through hyperrealistic landscape. It may easily be the case that the realism of the trains in station sceneries lies behind my lifelong sympathy for realist art. And the Donalds, on the other hand, inconspicuously opened the door for me toward pop-art... Around that time Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck influenced not only my generation, people customarily produced these Western icons out of wire & glazed tin, soldered them out of birch timber or broiled them into polyamide fibre as homemade "tapestry," all this just in order to make the interiors of their flats & cottages a little cosier. Goods in shops across the country was not only the same but also equally measly, so this DIY approach brought people an illusion of their own identity. Unlike Roy Lichtenstein, who blew up & freshly painted the comic-book frame with Donald & Mickey Mouse fishing (*Look Mickey*, 1961) on a canvass, the works of Czech handymen probably didn't have the right distance. Nineteen years later, Warhol too did Mickey Mouse (*Mickey Mouse, Myths Series*, 1981), but that was already part of a reflexion on the passing of the Disney era in the famous cycle of screen prints of American TV myths. But I never was dismissive of Donald & returned to the wonderful era, in which a single new chewing-gum picture found at a housing-complex rubbish bin made me happy, in 1989 in a six-colour linocut. A few years later this print was reproduced in the Czech version of *Playboy*, which for a man until recently surrounded by normalisation was akin to step into Moon dust...

But back to Strašnice. Oftentimes I would sit on the windowsill of our third-floor apartment, watching the street below, which was also a broad arterial road leading out of the city, with two bands of tramway lanes in the middle. Directly in front of our windows there was a small petrol station & although within eyeshot, I don't remember visiting it even once. It simply didn't belong to our pavement. The petrol station would faintly glow at night with a peculiar atmosphere, which I was reminded of in adulthood by two oil paintings by Edward Hopper (*Nighthawks*, 1942 & *Gas Station*, 1940). And also by the painting by hyperrealist Ralph Goigs (*McDonald Pickup*, 1970). Then I knew nothing of this, so I would simply take a quarto paper & draw the petrol station with crayons. I sensed that a petrol station

depiction was no ordinary motif, but it was only many years thereafter that it dawned on me that must have been my first pop-art drawing... Once, on a damp & cold day, a motorcyclist killed himself in front of the petrol station, probably failing to notice the tram refuge nearby & the pieces of his bike were scattered over the tramway lanes. Secretly I took pictures of the horror from behind the curtains, since a deadly incident right under your windows doesn't happen everyday, ashamed of myself, & yet it was stronger than me. Some fifteen metres away from the biker, on the tramway lane, lay the helmet with the head inside. The composition of the photos from such a distance was almost laughably obscure, a minimalism of sorts. I would sometimes watch the scenery cut-through by two bands of railway on the black-&-white reel of the negative, as I never brought myself to blow up the photos in the bathroom transformed into a makeshift photo lab. Those grey equally large frames of film with a stranger's misfortune, that multiplication of tragedy, that was my first subconscious encounter with the best Warhol paintings from the *Death & Disaster* cycle. To name but one, e.g. *Bellevue II*, 1963. I'll try to find the film by this book's deadline... In April 1964 I got a scooter & Warhol completed the hundreds of *Heinz*, *Campbell's* & *Brillo* box paintings for the New York Stable Gallery exhibition. Already in June he will discover a magazine photo of flowers by Patricia Caulfield & flood the world with them. The Czechoslovak communist censors regard not only pop-art as a dangerous bourgeois art, so up until the revolution works by Western artists will be hard to come by, in fact only illegally on a grander scale. That's why I was enraptured when in the early 1980s some anonymous arranger decorated the shop-windows of *Máj*, the second hugest department store in Prague, with large-scale reproductions of *Flowers*, probably in order to induce a spring atmosphere. It was beautiful not only for its cultivated cultural diversion, but also because said arranger simply stole Warhol's work. He simply redid what years ago Warhol had done to Patricia Caulfield...

What to Americans is the iconic design of the Campbell soup can, to a socialist citizen could be milk packed in a plastic bag. One litre of homogenised semi-skimmed milk was printed in blue, one litre of whole milk in purple. During breaks at primary school, as part of the Health-for-Schools activity, we were given half-litre bags & often ended up throwing them at each other. There was nothing funnier than to give the bag a good squeeze right under the nose of a drinking classmate. My youth in a bag. It was only in 1988 that I came to terms with these goods. Off seven original bags I washed off the print with toluene & replaced it with my linotype version of the print. Instead of milk I filled



Michal Cihlář, "Naše pumpa (Our Pump)," 1967.

442 | them with plaster & voila: an authentically Czech piece of pop-art. The number of the bags referred to the Magnificent Seven, none of whom survived the end of the film. By that time Andy had been dead for a year & Basquiat had two months to go till his overdose...

But let me go back in time by twenty-six years, into the time of the collapse of Stalin's memorial, the largest group monument of granite & steel concrete in Europe. It had spent seven years standing on the Letná plain until in autumn 1962 the communist party, on the bidding of president Antonín Novotný, had holes drilled into it for demolition bombs & ignited the safety fuses. However, all that fell off Prague's landmark no. 1 was the murderer's 40-tonne head. The sculpture was liquidated only by another series of further blasts. I've read that the construction of the memorial in 1955 cost 137,5 million crowns, which was equivalent to not building three thousand one-room apartments. The author of the memorial, outstanding sculptor Otakar Švec, committed suicide even before its grand opening, as both the twistedness of the work & incessant surveillance on

the part of the secret police had isolated him from all his friends & cast him out of ordinary life. With some apprehension, I found in my sculptor uncle's estate a list of fifty-four authors who exhibited in December 1949 their Stalin monument competition designs at the Žofín Palace. My uncle's name among them. Among the names of many good sculptors. I remember my aunt telling me about my uncle's reluctance toward the competition, how he decided to produce the worst possible design in order for it not to get chosen, & yet his horror at the possibility that the incompetent jury, presided over by the second communist president Antonín Zápotocký, might choose his design. Immediately after the exhibition, as fate began to wreak havoc within the life of Otakar Švec, my uncle destroyed his design in his studio... Yes, I know all this, & yet I find I simply miss the Letná monument. I cannot help but feel that my pop-art perception of icons, idols & celebrities received a heavy blow by its destruction. Does anybody object today to prestigious galleries exhibiting Warhol's *Mao Zedong* (1972), *Lenin* (1986) or Nixon (*Vote McGovern*, 1972)? Time, as far as I



Michal Cihlář, "Sedm nedopitých pytlíků (Seven Half-Finished Milk Bags)," 2006.

know, offers just the quality of the work. In this connection, I find it a funny coincidence that just around the time Charter 77 was being signed, Andy was completing his series of paintings of sickles & hammers, those most profaned of the communist symbols of power (*Hammer & Sickle*, 1976-1977). "The right to freedom of the speech is completely illusory in this country," the Charter declaration opened...

The largest numbers of sickles, hammers, Lenins & five-pointed stars were to be seen in the 1 May processions, when the city centre wrapped itself in the red flags of the Soviet Union, which today would probably give the impression of a successful Christo & Jeanne-Claude happening. What I think approximates this experience is the 2005 Central Park pink installation *The Gates*... For twenty years, the 1 May processions celebrating Labour Day headed out from the National Museum, gleefully shuffling down Wenceslas Square, along platforms with commie functionaries, partisans, militia & youth organisation members, all the way to Můstek. The shot-up Museum façade (courtesy

of Soviet machine-guns, August 68) & the huge pit of the metro-line construction works were probably the reason why, for many years, the procession moved away from Wenceslas Square to Letná plain. Today the National Museum is being renovated & improved, including its façade. Commemorating the August 68 events, at least the damaged pillar above the museum entrance will be preserved intact. Other than that, the whole museum from the cellar to the ceiling will become darned modernised. Heavy investments will remove the old dusty vitrines filled with faded stuffed animals with handwritten Latin-name tags tied around their legs. The magic, the genius loci of an authentic museum, will be gone for good... The times I went into its halls to watch in awe the thylacine, the great auk, & the skeleton of the fin whale will have disappeared. Never to reappear. In due course there'll be another interactive exposition with half-empty halls drowning in gloom & the media will be overjoyed... And in a hundred years it'll all repeat itself again. ■



Mark Reeder at the "Monument to the Soviet Tank Crews," Náměstí Kinských, Prague, 1983, by Alistair Gray.

I believe my first encounter with Czechoslovakia was as a kid collecting stamps. I hadn't the faintest idea where this country was, I was told it was behind some curtain, but wherever it was, the kids depicted on the stamps always looked really happy. All the stamps I had from the Eastern Bloc, showed smiling children & fascinating technological advances, rockets & space travel or high speed trains. Wherever Czechoslovakia was, it looked like it was a really happy place.

Then one morning, there was an grim announcement on the radio that Warsaw Pact troops had invaded this place called Czechoslovakia. My mother was very concerned. I could feel the anxiety ripple through the house. That evening, we turned on the telly to see Russian tanks with big white stripes being pelted on the streets of Prague by hundreds of angry students. Could this be the start of world war three?

In 1976, while on a trip to France, then Italy, I took a spontaneous trip to Zagreb in Yugoslavia. I just asked where the next train was going & jumped on. I never gave it a moments thought that I might need a visa. Luckily, I could get one at the border.

This was my first taste of a socialist state. It was as far removed from a relaxing holiday as you could get. Upon my arrival, my first initial impression of Zagreb was that it reminded me of someplace in a *Tin Tin* book, I couldn't figure out any of the signs as they were mostly in Cyrillic. I soon discovered I'd beamed down in the living pages of an Orwellian novel. Everywhere hung huge posters of Tito, their big brother figure, staring down over the town. I was impressed. The whole country appeared to be on manoeuvres, soldiers with full kit were everywhere. People hobbled about on crutches, or had bandages on their heads & arms in slings. Had war perhaps broken out?

I was told with a smirk, from a very large & scary looking Hotel receptionist - with a deep scar which ran from the top of his forehead, down through his eye & along his cheek - that there were no hotel rooms available in Zagreb, as there was a "Messe" (trade fair) on & with a sinister chuckle, he mentioned almost in passing, that a curfew was also in force

& everyone had to be off the streets by seven. His sweating, mountainous frame was squeezed behind a mini-reception desk & he resembled a gruesome Bond villain.

I had no place to stay & eventually, as the sirens wailed the curfew in, I ended up on the floor of an electronic shop drinking slivovitz all night with the shop owners, talking about Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin & Deep Purple. At one point, I saw a couple of black Milicia vans speeding down the street & curious, I risked a glimpse from the shop doorway to see what was happening. *Don't go out* I was warned. In the distance, I saw police jumping out of the vans wielding huge long sticks & they started to lay into someone. *So that was why everyone was in bandages...*

From that moment on, I was fascinated by these kind of otherworldly *Ostblok* places.

In 1978, I left Britain & ended up living in West-Berlin. I didn't plan it. I didn't *intentionally* move to Berlin, I just ended up here. I wanted to see the city because no one I knew had ever been there, or knew anything about it. All I knew about Berlin was what I had seen from Cold War movies like *Funeral in Berlin* or *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* & that Iggy Pop had recorded *Lust for Life* & *The Idiot* there & that Bowie had recorded the magnificently atmospheric *Low* & *Heroes* albums. I thought there must be something about it to make Bowie make such moody music like that. At that time I wasn't aware that he had also become infected by Cluster, Can, Kraftwerk & Tangerine Dream.

I just went to Berlin in the hope of finding rare & obscure electronic, Krautrock records that you couldn't buy in the UK. Things like Popol Vuh, or

Guru Guru. After experiencing both sides of the City, I was utterly fascinated & wanted to discover more, especially the Eastern Block.

It was a city nothing like anywhere I had ever been before. I thought Manchester was mad, but bullet riddled Berlin appeared to me to be a mixture of madness & mayhem, all teetering on the brink of self-destruction. The entire city looked like it was still recovering from World War II. I instantly loved it. West Berlin was open 24hours, as advertised by the diverse selection of drunks & drug addicts who staggered about the streets at all hours. At the end of the street where I lived, was a shabby little workers bar run by a six foot tall tranny in terror-inducing horrorshow make-up, & around the corner on the Potsdamerstrasse, an obese one-legged prostitute sat on the top of a traffic-light regulator box waiting for her clientele. While in front of Woolworths, waif-like heroin hookers hustled for hand outs from the supermarket shoppers. That was daily life in West Berlin.

I thought West Berlin was quite amazing, but once I had tasted the delights of the East side of the city, I discovered a completely different Berlin & I went there at least once a week. I couldn't get over the sci-fi feeling of being thrust back in time. It was like stepping into the 50s.

I was aware the East Germans viewed me as being *the enemy* from the capitalist West & so I had to be constantly on my guard. I believed the secret police were probably watching me. This gave every trip to the other side of the Berlin wall, a kind of *Great Escape* feeling. I became totally addicted to this feeling, which was a thrilling combination of fear, adventure & recklessness.

Naturally, this craving also made me very curious about how the other communist eastern bloc countries would be like too, & so one day I decided to finally take a trip to the Czechoslovakian capital, Prague.

The Czech Visa office was situated in their embassy deep in the depths of Dahlem in West Berlin. Dahlem was in the American Sektor & their main US Army base was also there. The Czechoslovakian residence was located in a huge old residential house, surrounded by a big wall with barbed wire & CCTV cameras. Inside this building was the visa office. The atmosphere inside was very stiff. It resembled the waiting room of a doctors surgery more than a place to pick up a holiday Visa. On one wall, hung a poorly printed poster of Prague castle. It wasn't exactly alluring. I was told I would have to leave my passport there over night & collect my Visa the next day. That in itself was quite unnerving because in Berlin it was still officially an offence punishable by death for not having your ID with you. I was given a small piece of paper

confirming my passport was being *processed*.

Once I was armed with my Visa, I went over into East Berlin & purchased a train ticket to Prague. No one asked me for my *Ausweis*. I just bought my ticket. This would eventually become impossible for westerners to do later on in the 80s.

The ticket for the Deutsche Reichsbahn looked like something out of Nazi Germany. A small piece of thick fawn coloured card, with the obscure abbreviated name of the station of my destination. Praha Hl. N. Střed.

I had no idea what I was letting myself in for.

A few days later, I went back over to East Berlin, this time with a transit visa, to catch the train to Prague. For certain, I was the only westerner on this train. The trip down through East Germany was exciting as it was fascinating, because as a Brit, I wasn't normally allowed to go beyond the city limits of Berlin & to visit other East German towns such as Dresden without a visa was impossible, but from the train, you could see this once-beautiful city (or rather what was left of it) reflected in the blackened burnt out classical buildings, the few remaining survivors of the unforgettable fire-storm of world war two.

The train weaved along the banks of the river Elbe, past one castle after another & villages that looked like time had stood still since the 1890s. As the train pulled into the station at the Czechoslovakian-East German border at Deczin, it passed what was obviously some kind of girls boarding school. My first indelible impression of Czechoslovakia was seeing two teenage girls standing at their dorm window flashing their tits!

I was told by the stern border guards to get off the train & change my hard western currency for worthless Czech Crowns.

I had to exchange DM30 German Marks for ever day of my proposed stay, at the official rip-off exchange rate of DM1 to 3 Czech Crowns. The unofficial black-market exchange rate I was soon to discover was 1:20!

The commies were such capitalists!

The train waited patiently for me to change my money, then off we went, travelling through some of the most spectacular fairytale countryside I had ever seen. Lush, green hills, small villages with their ochre painted facades. Castles on every hilltop.

I didn't want the journey to stop. It was fascinating. It was as if I was travelling even further back in time. The train passed a socialist cement Factory belching smoke & clouds of cement powder, everywhere was covered with dust & communist banners proclaiming some five year plan - the usual commie crap to motivate the workers. Then after hours of various sized hammer & sickles, crumbling buildings & grubby industry, I could finally make out

the romantic form of Prague Castle in the distance, perched on the side of a hill.

I embarked from the train at Prague's old main station, & was taken aback by the beautiful main domed entrance hall, which was baroque styled stained glass & utterly breath-taking.

A little old lady came towards me. In a strange & unfamiliar German accent she asked me if needed somewhere to stay & if I was looking for a nice room (*moechten zie een schiine zieemmerr?*).

I actually hadn't a clue where I was going to stay, I imagined I was just going to find a cheap hotel, so I asked her how much a room in her *pension* would cost, "DM20 Marks" she replied, I thought that's too good an offer to refuse & it was well within my budget. Somewhat suspicious however, I decided just to have a look. Although I was thinking this is probably a ploy, sending the kind & gentle little old lady to lure the unsuspecting western tourist into a feeling of false sense of security, just to get me into a compromising situation of some sorts... or worse.

We entered her apartment building on Wenceslas Square, almost directly next door to the prestigious Hotel Europa. Nervously, she showed me to the room. It was quite large & beautifully furnished, with wooden panelling, a threadbare carpet & a big old bed with fresh smelling linen. It actually looked really nice. DM20 Marks a night? "Nooo! a week!" she insisted.

She explained she would take care of the visa & registration formalities with the police. I had no idea what she meant, but found out later that as a private citizen, she had to register anyone staying with her with the police, especially western tourists.

I sat on the bed, opened my bag & took out some of the uneaten provisions that I had prepared for my journey, sandwiches, bananas, crisps, chocolate & some self-baked '*Reeder's Digestive*' hash cookies. The little old lady came in to bring me a fresh towel & then stood gazed, looking at the bananas. I could see her gaze, so I just gave her the whole bunch. A tear appeared & as she sobbed, she explained how she'd not seen a banana for decades. She was so happy. It was such a poignant moment. That something so common as a banana, that we in the West took entirely for granted, could be coveted as something so precious elsewhere.

I wished I had brought more.

After my train journey I was feeling a little peckish. At the corner of the square near the entrance to the underground, was a grubby looking self-service restaurant. This was a typical workers haunt, where you could get a half litre of Budweiser in a cracked glass & a plate of gulasch & knödel for a few crowns. The Czech version of all-you-can-eat. Unfortunately, it looked pretty disgusting, like school dinners. So I decided I would just have a beer

& then find a proper restaurant.

I ended up in the Hotel Europa next door & had my evening meal there. It was all very formal. It was a two star restaurant masquerading as a five star. The decor was similar to the place I was staying, all dark wooden panelling, marble topped tables & chandelier lighting. I felt like I was in some bygone age. Cheap Russian Moskovskaya Krim Sekt was on offer to the decadent westerner. I had a glass. It was pink & tasted like cherryaid. It was time travel at its best. After my meal, the nervous waiter whispered softly the quasi-religious salutation "Tauschen?" (i.e. if I wanted to exchange money). At first, I was a little uncertain not knowing the procedure, was this a secret police trap to entice me into participating in a black-market transaction? but then he briefly explained. I paid him in western currency & he would give me Czech crowns in return at the current black market exchange rate. I slipped him a 20DM note & he gave me hundreds of Czech crowns in return. With a smile, he said it was safer than changing on the street, & I could come back anytime & I was suddenly loaded.

I couldn't believe how beautiful Prague looked, it really was like a fairy tale. It was a mixture of medieval buildings, baroque & art deco. The atmosphere of the city especially at sunset was unique, as Prague was so quiet compared to Berlin or Manchester.

As I wandered around aimlessly every day, people walking past would quickly briskly utter the word "*Tauschen?*" as if it was a secret code.

I visited the Lenin Museum, with its impressive façade depicting the quasi-religious stations of Lenins sojourn to power, with it's emphasis on Stalin. I walked along the river bank, into the old part of the city to watch the soldiers stomping through the palace grounds, through the tiny cobbled streets which resembled scenes from *The Golem*.

Pausing occasionally to have a delicious cup of ersatzkaffee & sickly sweet cake, or some lunch of gulasch & knödel in a Skupina III (third class) dishevelled Restaurace where, everything would be washed down with lashings of Czech pivo.

I just loved the ambience. It was definitely another world. I could see now why the kids on the stumps looked happy.

Everywhere you went was full of cigarette smoke.

The waiters would come over to the table smoking & slovenly hand over a grubby menu that had been poorly duplicated on a banda-ditto machine, boasting dozens of delicious dishes, most of which were usually not available.

"Gulasch?" Ok, gulasch it would be. This would change when I became a vegetarian in 1980, then it was even harder to get something to eat. I would be offered cheese in breadcrumbs, pea omelette,

or knödel in some kind of white sauce. Worst case scenario would see me dining on a Gulag menu of bread & water.

Salt & pepper would openly reside on the filthy tablecloth in what looked like an old glass ashtray. Each meal was accompanied by a basket full of salty bread 'horns' which were dry & straight like a croissant-dildo, or slices of dried up brown bread & the ubiquitous aluminium knives & forks wrapped in a tissue thin serviette.

It was pretty basic fare & mainly it looked like slops & tasted dreadful, but it was just perfect to soak up the beer.

After seeing the some of the sites of the city, like the place where Reinhard Heydrich had been assassinated & the bullet riddled church where his assassins had hidden & consequently died. The bar opposite was a shrine to the successful commandos operation to kill the hangman of Prague.

During a stroll, I stumbled upon a small pivnice behind what was the big shoe shop, just off the Wenceslas square corner, quite near to where I was staying, & close to Národní Třída. This quaint establishment served fresh Pilsner Urquell, its temperature & alcohol content proudly emblazoned on the outside wall. Inside, it was packed, loud & very smoky.

A diminutive waiter who looked like Josef Goebbels brushed passed me carrying about twenty glasses of beer with two hands. I sat down at a long table full of shabby looking workers & ordered a pivo. It was my one & only order. After that, the beer just kept coming. As soon as my glass was empty, another full one appeared. At first I thought this was some kind of tourist trap, but then I noticed this was normality. To keep track of how many beers had been consumed, Goebbels would make a small mark on the beer mat. Obviously, being a foreigner, I was a figure of curiosity, especially once the gentlemen on my table discovered I was from *England*. They'd never met anyone from England before & wanted to know what it was really like. Was it true everyone was miserable & enslaved by the capitalists? That no one had a job? That people slept on the streets? I assured them it was. Out of pity they picked up my tab. Luckily, this bar was within crawling distance from my lodgings.

They suggested I try a place called U Fleků. Where they apparently had the strongest beer in the world. Yeah right. I thought that is quite a statement. The next day I went in search of it & found a small wood-panelled beer hall with a huge beer garden in the back yard, packed full of reeking Wrangler-clad East Germans. Again, it was as if time had stood still in the early seventies. Hoards of Eastie kids wearing desert boots, long hair, jeans jackets & moustaches. The guys looked even worse. Had they never heard

of punk? Obviously not. They were all Deep Purple & Led Zeppelin fans. I discovered it was *THE* meeting place, in fact the *ONLY* place where East Germans were allowed & tolerated. I squeezed in at the end of one of the long trestle tables. Within moments of ordering a pivo, I was being questioned by these inquisitive kids.

The speciality of this establishment was their traditionally brewed jet-black beer.

It was almost flat, like water with virtually no carbon dioxide. It tasted delicious though & the stuff just slipped down, glass after glass. Luckily, this place also served food, so in between the litres, one could stave off the hunger & inebriation with a plate of goulash & dumplings.

I visited Prague a couple of times after that, but it was starting to become an expensive occupation.

Then one day while visiting in October, I was standing in the pouring rain trying to take a photo of a poster for a forthcoming day of the army event, when I heard someone obviously laughing & making comments behind me. I turned around & saw two very tipsy looking lads holding a big bottle of what looked like banana juice. This bottle turned out to be fermenting young wine. Apparently, a speciality at this time of year. They asked me what I was doing & I explained that I liked the army poster's design. They thought I was completely mad & told me that they were celebrating the recent release of their friend from his national military service & if I would I like to join them for a drink. We got completely derailed on this sweet, young wine. At some stage that evening, I was introduced to an Olympic champion, who bought even more wine & beer & at one point invited me for a greasy mushroom omelette, which spent about 10 minutes inside me before ending up resembling a Jackson Pollock painting in the toilet bowl.

I have no real recollection of the events after this, only a vague one of crawling up the steps of the Underground station at Moskevka near where I was staying.

I discovered the next morning that I had exchanged addresses at some stage in the pouring rain & that my newly acquired friend was called David. It turned out he was the son of Marek Kopelent, the infamously suppressed avant-garde composer & a signatory to Václav Havel's Charter 77 movement. I was soon to be inducted into his close circle of dissident friends.

David wrote me a postcard, asking if I would like to come to his wedding reception & play a few songs. This turned out to be a secret concert, disguised as his wedding reception & my band Die Unbekanntes (The Unknown) would be the guests of honour.

I managed to smuggle a copy of our first 12"

single into Czechoslovakia as a wedding present. This single was already controversial in the West because of the cover design, which depicted three East German Border guards. If it had been found by the East Germans or Czech customs it would almost certainly have been confiscated. David was without doubt, the only person in the ČSSR to have this record.

The proposed gig was to be held in a former Hostinec, a long forgotten tavern, in a place called Lukov near Slaný on the old dirt road from Dresden to Prague. This was a Napoleonic era service station, where at one time, you could get a meal, sleep over & water your horses. It looked more like the Alamo. Since the main road had been built, no one travelled this route anymore & this place had fallen into disrepair. In fact the whole village had been abandoned & most buildings there resembled Xanadu from Citizen Kane, with broken windows & rusty wrought iron railings.

This little tavern belonged to an uncle of one of David's close friends & they had occupied it for the weekend. In the labyrinthine cellar they had stored a couple of barrels of delicious Budweiser.

With great pride, we were also shown a long kept secret, stashed in the barn.

The barn roof was held up by a huge 1912 Tatra & a 1936 Praga, both cars had been hidden from the advancing Russians since the end of world war two & no one had dared to reveal them. Now, they just served as pillars to stop the roof from caving in. They were in pristine condition. They also had a cannon from the battle of Austerlitz complete with barrel of gunpowder & a cannon ball. I was told they would fire this once a year at Easter as a game for the kids, who would then have to go & look for the cannon ball.

Through David, I had meanwhile befriended some heavy political Czechoslovakian dissidents, such his friends from the secret satirical publication *Revolver Revue*, (writers Jáchym Topol & Sasha Vondra) & some musicians like Petr Kůrmandez. They were all very politically minded, but had a scathing sense of humour & really liked a good laugh, even if it meant going to prison for it.

Thus, Die Unbekannten were invited to play this very private, very secret gig, deep in communist Czechoslovakia.

Anything to wind up the authorities.

Talk about the wild East, this party was a very wild affair indeed.

In reality, it was merely an excuse to get very very drunk & listen to forbidden west-music, but because of the people in attendance it became some kind of anti-state political statement.

For this gig, I had smuggled in cassette tapes of our sequencer & drum patterns & after countless

biscuits & beers, we eventually performed our set on borrowed equipment (a Czech-made Resonet guitar & Jolana bass) to a totally paralytic collection of Czechoslovakia's most-wanted. It was an amusing sight that resembled Dantes inferno with beer instead of fire. Untouched by any kind of western influences, we witnessed an amusing, almost free jazz style of new wave full-body dancing too. Indeed, no one had ever danced to our music like that before.

Another moving experience was witnessing this deprived bunch of Czech teenagers religiously singing the entire first Velvet Underground album in *English-ese*, capturing the sounds perfectly despite not speaking a word of English & basically making the "words" up.

A few days later back in Prague, we saw our pal Sasa Vondra lying in the gutter still pissed from the days before. A few years later he would find himself becoming the press spokesman for the dreaded Charter 77 dissident group & he spent the last months of Czech communism in jail with Václav Havel. After the fall of communism, he became the Czech UN representative & later their Defence Minister.

The trips to Prague were gradually becoming more & more expensive however.

The black market exchange rates were plummeting. I decided we needed to take drastic action.

On a trip back from Prague, I photographed my visa in the toilet. I had exchanged some money in the Hotel Europa & wanted to photograph their "bank" stamp which was on my visa. I didn't have much time, as the border & customs control had started & would be ended by the time we got to East German border.

Upon my return to West Berlin, I had the photos developed & printed up, then I went to a stamp makers & asked him if he could make me a rubber stamp. Dubious as to my intentions, he asked me what it was for. I told him that I was participating in a theatre production & it was an essential part of the play, as the image of the visa being stamped would be projected on a big screen & we wanted it to look as authentic as possible.

To my surprize, he actually believed me & made up the rubber stamp.

Next problem was how to smuggle it over three border controls.

I separated the stamp from its wooden plinth & wrapped it in plastic cling film. Then I cut up a bread roll, sloped loads of butter on it & embedded the stamp in the butter, on top of that, I placed cheese & lettuce & a tomato & packed it in a bag with my other travel provisions, the usual, hashish biscuits, crisps, bananas & chocolate. Once on the train in

East Berlin, I took a big bite out of my sandwich & placed it on the folding window table.

At Bad Schandau & Děčín, the guards got on, each in turn searched absolutely everything, but none of them even looked at my sandwich.

After that, travel to Prague was easy. We would get a visa for two days, then "exchange enough money at hotel Europa" to get an extension on our visa for as long as we wanted. Of course, this deception had to be kept totally secret. If anyone had found out, this would have meant a very heavy situation for all involved if we were discovered.

Swizzing the state bank would have probably resulted in a minimum of 25 years hard labour in some Siberian salt mine. David was highly impressed by my deception. This too, also meant we could exchange our Deutsch Marks for Czech beer vouchers with our friends.

Having pals who were politically active against the current communist regime also meant they expected you to help them in some way too. Smuggling music in over the borders was one way, but smuggling music out was a completely different matter entirely.

One day I was asked if I was up for an adventure. Would I be willing to participate in helping to smuggle out the latest tape of music by notoriously subversive Czech underground band, The Plastic People of the Universe. This wasn't on a cassette, it was a reel-to-reel tape.

Being biscuitized & reckless, I willingly agreed. Then I was briefed on the operation. I was told, the guy who was going to give me the tape was under constant surveillance by the secret police. I would wait in the entrance of a shop & he would walk past me & drop the tape into my pocket. I was not to acknowledge him in any way. He would just walk on by. It all sounded exciting, very romantic & clandestine, but I realised that this was pretty serious stuff. The Czechs took their music very seriously, especially anything that was considered anti-state in the eyes of the Stalinist Czech government, & the Plastic People of the Universe were *exactly* that.

The morning came for the secret mission.

It was a cold, grey & depressing day, quite perfect for getting caught doing something highly illegal. I was there wearing my trenchcoat.

I was told my contact had appeared in the distance, but he was being followed by a slow moving Lada, which was blatantly creeping behind him. I was told to go & do some window shopping. As I stood near the entrance to the shop, this guy brushed past me & hurried along without a word. My heart had stopped beating & I held my breath until the Lada had passed, & then I felt down into my pocket & as if by magic there was a small reel-

to-reel tape.

I was so excited.

We had to get away from this area as soon as possible though. We caught a tram & headed back to David's house to hide the tape until my departure.

That evening we got really pissed in Klamovka.

But that wasn't all. The mission was not yet over. I still had to get this bloody tape out of the country, over three very strict borders, each with rigorous customs controls.

I was confident that I could do it. Should I hide it somewhere on the train or on my person? I decided to hide it on my person, thinking they had never strip searched me yet on the train & I doubted they would this time too. It was a risk worth taking.

I was right too. Once back in West Berlin, I sent the tape to Canada to be made into a vinyl... & I'm still waiting for my copy.

I arrived in Berlin one rainy night after hitch hiking a lift from West Germany. The hippy-student asked me where I was going to stay & I actually had no idea, I would just find somewhere. He proposed that I stay in the house where he was living at 24 Winterfeldstrasse in a Schöneberg commune. He explained the house was due to be demolished & said I could stay there for as long as I wanted until they had to leave. I entered into a white marble hallway, with old paintings on the wall & a plush red carpet on the stairs. Compared to the council house that I had grown up in, this place was positively palatial. He gave me something to eat, handed me a skeleton key & then took me up to the top floor. It was a huge six room apartment with parquet floorboards, a white marble bathroom & a balcony. Everything worked too, electricity & gas. I was told I wouldn't have to pay anything. He gave me a mattress & a blanket & I had somewhere to sleep.

After experiencing both sides of the divided City, I was utterly fascinated & wanted to discover more, especially the Eastern Block.

Joy Divisons manager Rob Gretton (who I already knew) asked me if I would help to promote Joy Division's re-released 12" *Ideal for Living* single in Germany, *who knows, maybe they could get some gigs there?*

He sent me a box of 12s & I sent them out to all the possible West German & West Berlin radio stations & magazines I could think of, those who I thought would probably find this kind of music interesting.

I got absolutely no reaction whatsoever.

When Tony Wilson started up Factory Records later that year, Rob asked me to promote the first *Factory Sample* EP too. Again, I got no reaction, not even a thank you. Undeterred, I still carried on, even with the release of Joy Divison's *Unknown Pleasures*

no one was really interested. It was very frustrating.

I was told by my newly found new wave friends that Germans weren't interested in a miserable band from Manchester. The Berliners had discovered their own musical style – & *what* a style it was.

I thought, the Germans just have to see them live, *then* they will understand.

They will surely love them then.

Berlin was so far away though. In the middle of nowhere, stuck on the arse end of Eastern Europe. The Band eventually found a promoter for a tour of Holland & one German gig in Cologne was added, & I knew this was my chance & I told Rob that Berlin was a mere stone's throw away (it took about a day to drive to Berlin from Cologne), while at the same time I did my best to convince Conny the promoter at the Kant Kino, that Joy Division were the best band in the world & he just *had* to let them play there.

Their one & only gig in Berlin was a complete disaster. The sound was bad & the venue half full. The band were not in anyway perturbed. The thought it had gone down very well & were delighted just to be in Berlin, where they could finger the bullet holes of world war two.

For me, Bowie really put Berlin on the musical map. Before his arrival, Berlin was mainly known for being a political city. It was occupied by the four allied powers. It was full of draft-dodgers, trannies, hippies & weirdos, & there were constant student riots, the spectre of Baader-Meinhof, & protests of all kinds. It was seen as being the place where a military confrontation would obviously take place, which would ultimately lead to nuclear holocaust. Of course we Britons in the 70s had some romantic TV idea of what Berlin must be like, but that was a mirage of the Weimar Republic Cabaret-ized Berlin of Christopher Isherwood, & Berlin actually looked nothing like that.

I guess Bowie changed all that, sonically. He made Berlin *sound* interesting. His instrumental side of *Low*, which he recorded in Berlin, was otherworldly. I loved it & played it to death. *Warsaw* is for me, still my ultimate Berlin soundtrack. I discovered it sounded just how Berlin looked at that time. Bombed out & bullet riddled, confined & desperate. *Heroes* cemented the sound of Berlin even further & I think it was the pinnacle of Bowies career. I thought it was a masterpiece (still do). Iggy's records were somehow different, even though they were recorded in Berlin, they were a little more conventional & easily accessible. In their own way, they became a soundtrack for the city too, especially *The Passenger*, which you would hear almost everywhere.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Esther

Friedmann, Iggy's photographer girlfriend who was working at the Metropol theatre at the time & I visited both Bowie & Iggy's flats. Of course, their occupants weren't there though, Bowie had already left Berlin for Switzerland, or was it Japan? & Iggy was constantly out of town too, leaving the place in the hands of his friend from New York, Avis Davies.

My first trip to New York was in March 1984. At first, I really wasn't interested in going there to be honest, as I had been bitten by the Ostbloc bug & wanted to go to Moscow first, but the opportunity came up for my band Shark Vegas to play there, in the renowned Danceteria club, with two other Berlin bands: The Imperial Dance Band & Tennis Boy Blues as part of a Berlin-New York exchange between The Loft & Danceteria (Nightclubs of the Civilized World) & so I realised I had no option but to go.

Once I had come to terms with the trip, I actually started to look forward to it. We were going to be playing in one of New York's most prestigious clubs & it would also give us the opportunity to visit a few of the other legendary night spots too.

Then shortly before we were all due to leave, it transpired that we would have to enter the USA as tourists, as work visas were far too expensive, & we certainly had no money for it & the club wasn't willing to pay for them. This also meant we would have to travel without equipment & perform on borrowed instruments.

I wasn't too happy about that.

Reluctantly, I got on the aeroplane for the long 11 hour flight. Luckily, I had a tin of *Reeder's Digestives* with me to enlighten the journey & calm me down.

Before we left, we were told we would be picked up at JFK airport & taken to the venue, where we would have something to eat, then after viewing the club, we would go to the hotel. It all sounded very reasonable.

I arrived completely stoned at JFK. Red-eyed, drugged up & swaying. The border guard took my passport & politely asked "Purpose of visit?" I looked at him square in the face & blatantly lied "Tourism" then feeling a pang of paranoia, I told the him that it was my first trip to America & that I was totally jet-lagged. He just smiled, stamped my visa & wished me a nice day.

Waoow! America!!! It was actually quite thrilling. The airport was buzzing & somehow it was just like on the telly. Everything seemed strangely familiar.

Outside in the reception area, we all looked out for our pick-up, but frustratingly though, there was no one there to meet us.

After frantically trying to reach someone at the club to find out what was happening, a fed up Monika Doering, the mother of the Berlin scene & promoter of Berlins most prestigious venue *The*

Loft, decided we shouldn't wait any longer & that we needed to hire a couple of those flash, long limos which were lingering outside on the concourse, but once she discovered the fare was a hundred dollars, we all ended up being piled into one huge stretch limo, that in reality only seated six people.

After what seemed like an endless traffic jam, we eventually reached the club & we all tumbled out of the limo & onto the street, bags & all.

There still was no one there to greet us. Monika asked me to go inside & look for Ruth Polsky, or someone, so I went inside & checked out the club.

On the main stage, I found a small plastic dish with a piece of lettuce & a half eaten tomato drenched in olive oil. I thought, this was probably the remnants of our reception meal.

Then I heard some noises upstairs.

I entered into a bar area & there was a guy in grey overalls, sweeping the floor whilst listening to a very loud walkman, I walked over to him & tapped him lightly on the shoulder, he immediately turned around & I got the shock of my life.

It was my sister's ex-boyfriend, Mick!

I thought I was hallucinating.

We stood there flabbergasted for a moment, then we both said simultaneously "what are you doing here?" & I told him I was performing there with my band.

I asked him if he knew where our reception committee was & he laughed & said everyone was sleeping off last night. They had had an amazing party there.

We chatted for a bit & he told me how he had ended up there in NYC & also a very gory story about his workmate Jonty, who had fallen down the lift-shaft a week before but had managed to survive even after being hideously crushed by the lift. He knew I liked a good horror story. I would later meet Jonty DJing in Berlin decades later (but that's another story...)

Anyway, there was no reception, no food & as it looked, no accommodation either.

So now we had to urgently find somewhere to bed down & put our bags.

We found a totally shabby, cheap one star hotel near to the club with a view of the Empire State building. The view of this monumental building was such an impressive sight & it was made even more so by a huge inflatable King Kong which we could see climbing up the buildings spire. We discovered it was there to celebrate the 50th anniversary of King Kong.

It was the kind of place that always reeked of piss & puke, & the bathroom had a colony of cockroaches who scuttled for the drain the moment you put the light on. This definitely was no luxury accommodation.

Another thing which impressed us about NYC, was that the shops were open after six. In Germany, all the shops shut at six in the evening & to be able to go out & shop at nine or ten at night was utterly thrilling. We were like little kids in a candy shop. Our first experience in an American supermarket was like something from a scene of *Land of the Giants*. The shopping carts dwarfed us. Huge gallon bottles of Cola, Dr Pepper & Sprite stood towering over the entrance, big bags of crisps, & a display of orange juice that ranged from 100% synthetic to 100% organic lined an entire wall.

We bought a loads of crap to eat & took it back to our hotel room.

We had only been in the room for about five minutes, when the door quietly opened & a dodgy black face appeared, "oh sorry man, wrong room" he muttered, then we heard the same excuse next door.

That first night in NYC was quite captivating.

It really was bright lights big city. It wasn't like we had never seen city lights before, it just was the combination of lights & New York's atmosphere.

We went into the village to just look around & within fifteen minutes saw our first mugging. It really was just like on TV.

During the night we could hear a couple next door having a very violent argument, with lots of swearing & banging about. It was so cliché.

Like I said, it was just like on the telly.

We met up with two notorious New Yorkers, who a friend from the Human League had introduced me to, Lois & Dennis. They were friends of Joey Ramone & had originally been responsible for the Ramones' merchandise. I think they had been to virtually every gig in NYC since the Beatles. They collected TV toys... & people & they had fucking thousands of things. A massive Star Wars battle cruiser hung from their kitchen ceiling. A life size replica of the robot from Metropolis was their living room lamp. The walls were adorned with all kinds of music memorabilia. Dennis had a massive video & record collection & a fuck off stereo to play it all on. They were definitely music & film junkies. I guess that's why I could relate. Lois had many prized possessions, such as Gary Glitters autograph in her passport.

They kindly invited us on a slow-drive about town to visit all the record & video stores & toy shops. We curb-crawled the streets from one store to another, while taking in the sights at the same time.

We even visited Lois' parents. It was like a scene from *Eraserhead*. Her mother was a member of the blue rinse brigade & upon our unexpected arrival immediately insisted on cooking us dinner, while the grandmother sat motionless on the sofa, obviously living in another dimension, her father, who was a war veteran told us war stories. It was clear he was fascinated by the *Joymans*.

Her mother's house was cluttered with small porcelain figurines & hideous crap covered the walls. At an opportune moment while Lois was out of earshot, she quietly queried us on what we thought about her daughters weird collecting habits "I don't know where she gets it from" she exclaimed.

Our gig in the Danceteria was probably one of the best ones we had ever played. We were so psyched up for it. I had at least two hash biscuits & Leo our drummer was completely trollied by the time we got on stage & he disappeared the moment we got off, we suspected he'd probably hurried off to watch some sleazy porn down on 42nd street.

Because we had to play on borrowed instruments, we had to improvise somewhat. For example, the keyboard was literally gaffa-taped to an old ironing board. Yet it didn't matter, it was all so exciting & everything was made up by the club's wonderful sound technician, who was the kindest, most thoughtful I had ever encountered. He was so helpful, & he loved our music (which probably helped) According to the audience reaction, he apparently did a sterling job.

Now if you think that playing in the Danceteria was the high point in our coming to New York, you would be absolutely wrong. The real motivation for me, Leo & our singer Alistair, was the opportunity to visit the Paradise Garage.

We couldn't wait to go there.

As we neared the club, we walked past a line of very dodgy looking characters offering us every kind of illicit substance you could think of.

Mind you I didn't need anything, as I had brought my own.

We stood in line & then slowly realised, we were the only white dudes in the queue. The atmosphere in the line was polite & pleasant. No one bothered us, or made us feel like aliens. A really nice girl in front of us, turned around & asked us where we had come from, "Waow! Joymanie?" she said in a heavy

Brooklyn accent, & then she explained she would get us in. She uttered something to the colossal, giant-haystacks of a doorman & said entrance would cost us \$15 each, but once inside, everything was free.

It was to this day, probably the most incredible & exciting club experience I had ever had. Everywhere you could grab free fruit juice, fresh fruit or chocolate, as the place had no alcohol. Yet everybody was on something though. It was a mixture of music, love, sex, drugs & Larry Levan. The sound was unbelievably rich. We had nothing like it in Europe. The deepest bass ever, it made your trousers vibrate & your balls rotate. I noticed that most guys just had shorts on, probably for that reason. We saw one other white person in the club.

Most impressive though was to hear Larry Levan DJing. He played an incredibly trippy set. His booth was perched up in the gods of the club & you had to crawl up some kind of scaffolding to get to him. Leo & I tried to write down all the tracks he played, especially whenever the crowd reacted to something, we would keep asking them, *what's this track?*

The next day, we went into the village & scoured all the record shops in search of the records Larry had played that night & to our surprise, we managed to buy loads. ■





DAVID ČERNÝ

He is probably one of the best-known Czech artists internationally. This photo was used for the cover of *Reflex* magazine in 2010. It was his idea. We first recreated a small replica of a typical Vietnamese corner store in my studio. I did all of the artwork, which is on the counter. I was running around toyshops & model shops. I could not find Gripens. I couldn't find Pandurs because at the time it was a big story that the Czech government bought over priced armored vehicles called the Pandurs & Gripens from Sweden. They didn't buy the M16s & instead bought these Saab Gripens. When we came to the studio it was not right. We really did not have the budget to recreate this properly, so we went across the road, convinced the guy from the corner shop & gave him 500 crowns so, that we could use his shop. He had to close the shop. We were occupying his shop for 2 hours. It is a very political shot. I like it. I put a lot of effort into it. – Roman Černý

THE TURN OF THE SCREW
AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ČERNÝ

Every great artist has the sense of provocation.
– Arthur Cravan

I just enjoy pissing people off!
– David Černý

I have always admired David Černý as an artist & provocateur. For me these two roles go well together. Art should, & needs to, provoke people & shake them out of the stupor of their daily lives. I love it when art shakes things up, shocks people & makes them stop & think. David is a perfect exemplar, & in my opinion is probably the best living artist who does this. From painting a Russian tank pink in 1991, to the black babies crawling up the Žižkov tower, to his controversial sculpture Entropa, which satirized & scandalized the European Union. He is not a fan of being interviewed, but I was happy he made an exception in regards to this book. – Robert Carrithers

RC: One of my first images in Prague was a Russian tank painted pink. How did you get the idea to do this? What was the concept?

DČ: The idea was to actually screw this one girl. She was an aspiring actress from Slovakia. I'd met her two weeks before, on Charles Bridge, probably drinking, it was spring 1990 & we were drinking on Charles Bridge. There were two girls actually & both were doing the entrance exams for the acting school, DAMU. She was the daughter of a very famous Slovak musician, which I didn't know at the time. They were in Prague for two nights because the exams took two or three days. They were here & it was the last night & we ended up in a friend's flat. She was a virgin. She was seventeen. She was a beautiful blonde with fantastic tits! You can't imagine! She was like D or E, huge! And when she lay down they didn't change shape. They were the same. It was fascinating. We ended up in Kampa park together but in the end she said she didn't want to screw some idiot that she'd just met. She must have given me her address in Bratislava. There were no mobile phones or internet in those days. I wanted to write to her but I had to be really creative about it.

Was she a muse for you?

She was a bit of a muse for me, but I was with somebody else at the time. I think that she called me & sent me a letter. So, we could get in touch & so it worked out very well. Then there was this period where she was supposed to get a letter with the results of the entrance exams. It was then that I had had this bright idea for sending a fake letter! I had no clue if she'd been accepted to the acting academy or not, but I sent her a letter saying that she had to come to Prague for two days & that

she'd been accepted, of course. It was supposed to be for a preliminary weekend course! I copied the official DAMU letterhead. It was a perfect fake! At that time I could draw stamps. I was good at it. It was a perfect super beautiful fake explaining that she had to bring a pair of new underwear & the letter ended with an official thank you & that we are looking forward to seeing you. Yes, it was obvious. Two days before she was supposed to come, a friend of mine from Bratislava, who also knew her, called me on the phone, "It's you, isn't it?" He's like my brother & knew me very well. His name's Dalibor. He's a cameraman now, but he was in Bratislava at that time. He started to scream at me on the phone yelling, "You idiot!" I didn't know what happened. He then told me that she was the daughter of this very well known musician & that she was going all around Bratislava celebrating about having gotten into the big Prague acting school. And of course there were big celebrations with her family & everything. Now I was worried about whether she'd really been accepted or not. I had no fucking clue what would happen! Imagine, it was 11p.m. at night & she was arriving the next day. I had to figure out a plan & find out if she'd been accepted or not. I was 22. I thought to myself, who might know if she'd been accepted? She actually *was* accepted, but I didn't know it. What happened was, she got the letter about two weeks later, but the funny thing is that she came the day I told her to & it was Saturday morning. I gave her the address of the DAMU puppet theatre in Malá Strana. So, she came there. The door was locked & nobody was around. I watched her for about five minutes before she saw me & it was a shock! And then she realized! She stared at me & said, "No way! It's a bad dream." She then realized, too, that she might not've actually been accepted at all. And that gave her a double shock. But I'd managed to find out that she *had* been accepted. It was quite OK

then & we ended up having a bit more than just a celebration together. Two months later, we split up, but we're still friends. We see each other sometimes. She actually moved back to Bratislava. I saw her a year ago last time. And that's basically how the pink tank happened. There were a couple of other things going on around that time that helped make it happen, too.

Is there a story like that for every public art piece that you have created?

There are a few, yes.

What about the upside down Vaclav horse statue that you did in the Lucerna passage?

That was the time I was with Klara Issová. That was kind of a gift for her, but it was intense. She inspired me to do it. I didn't do it for her directly I mean. I am not sure if I told her. I was quite in love with her.

What about the crawling babies up the Zizkov Tower that you did?

There were quite a few women at that time, but it probably had some relation to doing that. That was the end of the '90s. That is why there were so many babies crawling up the tower. The tower was rather phallic. Then there was the hanging Sigmund Freud that I did. It was first near Malostranská tram stop on Karlov & then it moved to the center. There was an exhibition called *Respekt* organized by Respekt magazine & the sculpture was hanging in the air sticking out from the balcony. It was a big terrace & everyone could see it as they passed it by. The bar that it was welded onto was two six meters bars. And I had to weld it & I don't know if you ever welded anything, but it's difficult & it was really a hot summer. It was 1997. And I had to weld it outside because it was a twelve meters long bar. I welded it by laying those two bars on the terrace & it was six one meters weld for each one. I was wearing shorts. I didn't know at the time, but an art welder is actually producing a lot of UV. I was on my knees basically exposing all of the important things to the art. After one hour of welding I totally forgot about it & did not realize it. I did not hurt then, but the morning after, I woke up & I had big enormous burns over everything. I went to the doctor immediately. It hurt like hell! For the opening I was on some anesthetic & I ended on the roof of that house of the gallery screwing with one girl with my pain from the burns & the tiles started falling off the roof onto the gallery crowd down below on the street almost killing one of my best friends. So, that is the Sigmund Freud sculpture story!

What about the double-decker bus sculpture that you did for the London Olympics? It is now in Prague on public display, isn't it?

That only has a dick. It has a dick. It looks like a loose axel, but it moves when the motion goes back & forth. It goes up & down or in & out maybe. It's obvious if you see it.

How did people react to it when it was on public display at the London Olympics?

Nobody asked me about any Viagra or anything. I would say it was warmly accepted.

What about the controversial sculpture "Entropa" that you did for the European Union?

Well it was really weird. I got a plane from the United States. I have a pilot's license you know & I was painting the plane in different colors & I was working the whole day & it was a very cold day with a strong wind. And we were painting this plane the whole day outside. I was going home totally frozen & stopped by a girl's that I had been seeing at the time. I didn't eat anything from morning, but it's quite common for me. She had one salad that somebody had brought her in the morning. So I told her I am going to eat it if she wasn't. It was a salad with mayonnaise. The night was OK, but the day after I was ill & I couldn't keep anything in. So after two days I gave up eating. I had Salmonella. The bad thing is with Salmonella is you are really thirsty. If you drink anything, it is out in one minute. So you drink & nothing helps. After four or five days, I didn't take pills or anything, & it was really fascinating what happened after five days. I am used to hangovers. After those five days I got some weird bacteria in my body. From that moment & I remember it precisely, I could drink anything, when I recovered after five days, I could drink anything, any amount of alcohol & I did not need to eat. I was just drinking alcohol. Whatever amount of alcohol, I had no hangover. I remember I could drink five shots of vodka at 7a.m. & at 9a.m. I was going to the studio to work. Nobody even noticed that I had anything. This went on for a long time. It went for a year, till I broke my collarbone & I had to take antibiotics & it stopped. It was gone & I started to experience the hangovers again, but for one year I could drink anything & as much as I wanted. From that Salmonella, it was obvious I got some sort of bacteria, which actually worked as a disintegrator of alcohol. Nobody was able to out-drink me. I am not kidding. I was going to the doctors & trying to find out what had happened & they were saying that's weird, but it's possible it was something that

changed my digestive system. Alcohol changes into sugar in your body. It had an effect like I was in an electric power station. I got a lot of energy. I could drink anything. A year after that I went to deep surgery with my kidneys & the doctor said it was very suspicious that my kidneys are in enormously good condition sort of for my age & my lifestyle. She said that with my sort of lifestyle it did not fit. I told her I know it's weird & if she knew the amount of alcohol that I drank last year, which was a hell of a lot, she'd be shocked. I was an alcoholic in a way then, but the alcohol was gone in like two hours. It didn't matter.

In 2014, you did a sculpture of a purple "fuck you" finger with hand that floated down the Vltava in a boat pointed towards the castle for the Czech president Miloš Zeman. Could you tell me more about that?

Well, the funny thing about that is we were loading it in Smíchov & I had it prepared the day before in the boat. So, the finger was actually sticking out over the board of the boat about a meter & a half. I don't know what happened at night, maybe there was rain or something, but when we came at 5:30 am with all of the people because we had about forty people coming & helping us. The tip of the finger was broken. It was made out Styrofoam. It was hollow Styrofoam. It was easy to break & we

came there & said, "Oh Fuck!" And there was a special boat coming, which the people organized with the hydro lifts. It was precisely organized. We had found out that the finger was actually broken in the middle. We had about two hours to fix it. We had some foam so we thought we would try it since everything was organized. And of course all of the journalists were going to be there! So we put it together & moved it. So we had to raise it fixed with the ropes & the sticks. It was a long finger! But we got it to work & the fuck you sculpture successfully floated down the Vltava!

Let's talk about the Meet Factory. From what I see, I think you put together a very successful place. There are exhibitions, concerts, special events & you provide special artist residencies for international artists there. I think the Meet Factory contributes a lot to the culture in Prague. Do you feel like you have accomplished with it, all that you wanted to do with it?

Yes, I would say that the Meet Factory is quite satisfying. The beginning was quite tough. I spent a lot of money on it, my own money & since two or three years ago it's changed a bit, so I get a good feeling from it. With all the reconstruction all of the spaces work, the whole structure works. Yes, I feel quite satisfied with that. ■



David Černý, "Růžový tank," Náměstí Kinských, 1991.



PORTRAITS

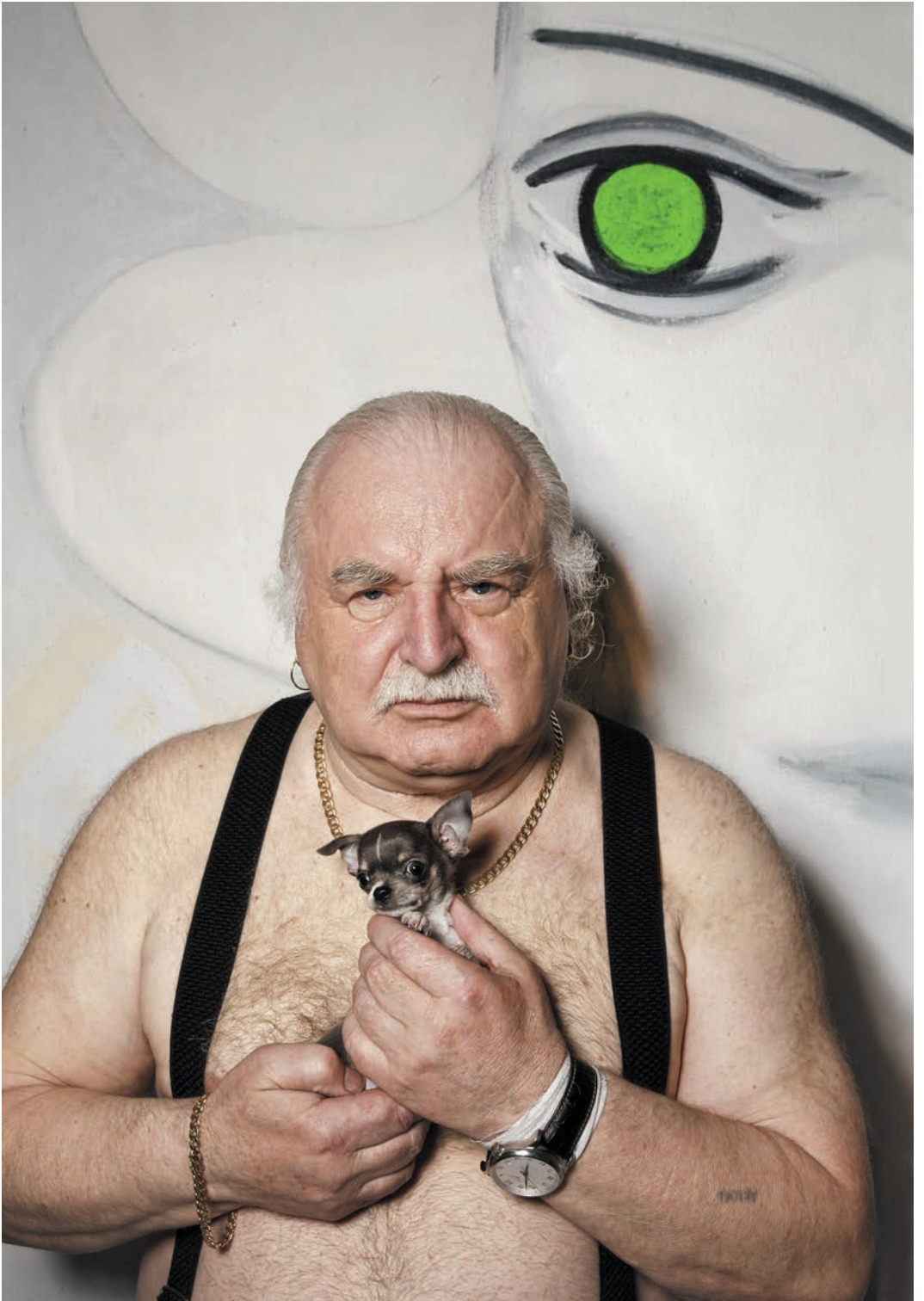
ROMAN ČERNÝ

Roman Černý was born in 1964 in Czechoslovakia. After finishing technical engineering college in 1983, he moved first to Austria, then, one year later, to Melbourne, Australia. Between the years 1985 & 1989 he studied at Sydney Technical College of Photography. From 1990 he worked as a commercial photographer for lifestyle magazines & advertising agencies in Sydney. A few years later he moved to New York, USA, where he continued his photographic work. He returned to Europe in 1998 & began to work in Berlin, Germany, & occasionally in the Czech Republic. Since 2002 he has mostly lived & worked as a photographer in Prague.

JAROSLAV RUDIŠ

He is an artist & writer. He did the famous Czech book about Berlin. He lived in Berlin & was inspired by the Wim Wender's film *Wings of Desire*. The book was called *Nebe pod Berlinem*. It was released in 2002. The book won the Jiří Orten Prize & was also awarded the Most Beautiful Book of the Year. The novel has been translated into seven languages. He also created a theater play from the book & an audiobook. He is also very famous for creating the comic book illustrated novel *Alois Nebel* & afterwards he made it into a popular animated film. His new novels *Národní třída* & *The End of Punk in Helsinki* are quite amazing & doing well. He certainly is very productive & sort of a genius. He has also done many screenplays. I took this photo for *Reflex* magazines with the theme of portraits of artists & writers & he fit into both of them. Also in this theme, the artist or writer would choose their favorite sport & I would photograph them doing it. Jaroslav told me that his favorite sport was sauna. So he chose one of his favorite comics *Vault of Horror* to read in the sauna.







VRÁŤA BRABENEC

This photo was taken at the famous café on Krymská called Café Sladkovsky in 2013. Vráťa Brabenec was still a member of the band The Plastic People of the Universe at that time. It took forever to do the photo shoot because he always wanted another beer. He had a good time. I brought two young women assistants & they thought he was great. He loved the attention. After many compliments being exchanged, we finally got the perfect photo of him out in front of the café. He was going to this café every day at this time. It was his second home. For those readers that do not know who he is, he is considered a special hero. He is & was a political dissident & musician playing saxophone for the band The Plastic People of the Universe. He is also a well-known writer. He was one of the members of the band that was imprisoned for his political beliefs in 1976. Afterwards he signed Charter 77 & in 1982 was forced to immigrate to Canada by the Czech state. He returned to the Czech Republic in 1997 to rejoin the band. He played with many other bands & continued with his writing.

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MILAN KNÍŽÁK

He is a Czech artist, musician & performer. From 1999 to May 2011 he was director of the National Gallery in Prague. I photographed him in 2013 in his apartment on the riverside. He was very nice & it was the first time that I photographed him. I have known him since I was a kid. He was a big hero of mine. I was warned that he wouldn't be easy. He was actually extremely nice, but as he is used to being photographed he wanted to be typically photographed sitting on a chair, backwards. I wanted to do more, so I asked him if it was possible to take a photograph of him with his dog & I told him what he was wearing was not right & I said, "What about if you take your shirt off?" And he said, "Whatever!" It was the last photo & he just wanted to finish the photo shoot. So he took his shirt off. He got rid of me after that, he was happy about that & I was happy as well with the results.

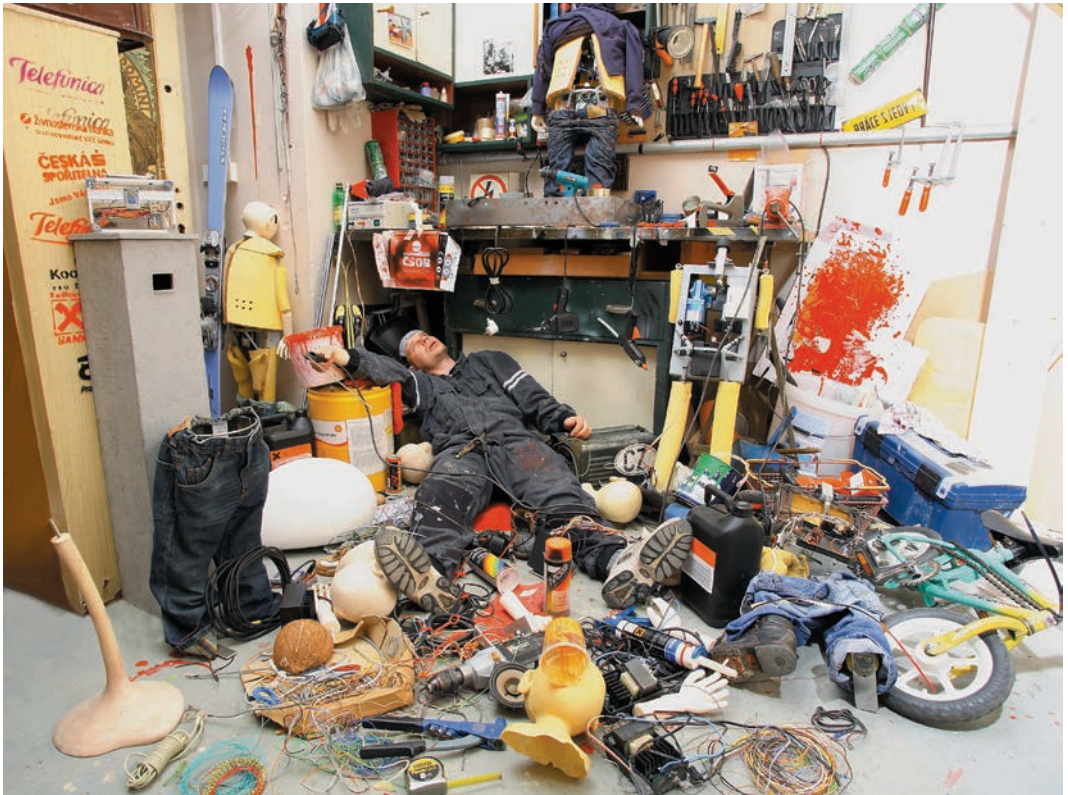


IVAN MARTIN JIROUS

Jirous was also known by the nickname "Magor." He was a poet, writer, art critic & the guiding spirit of the Czech underground, best known for working with the rock group The Plastic People of the Universe. Before 1989, he was imprisoned five times for his political views. He became the holder of the Jaroslav Seifert Literary Lifetime Award for poetry & Tom Stoppard Prize for his work *Magor's Swan Song*. I did this shoot with Magor a day before Christmas 2010. He died just a few months later. We had been coming to his place since Monday of that week. Every morning we came with two bottles of whiskey. We had a meeting point to meet at the Smíchov train station at the pub bar Oasis. He was a local guy & he was allowed to go there one hour before opening time. The bar opened at 8a.m., but he could already come there at 7a.m. & drink. Yes, at 7a.m. in the morning! He would start drinking beer, but he loved the whiskey. We came at 8a.m., but he always forced us to have a couple of beers. He lived across the street. Karel Schwarzenberg is a well-known figure in the Czech Republic. He came from an old noble family & had been a major figure in Czech politics, from being a diplomat, to several high positions in the government & he also was a former candidate for the Czech presidency in 2013. Karel gave him a flat that he could live in for free. It was a building that Schwarzenberg owned. That was like the Schwarzenberg support of the artists. Magor was able to choose out of the whole building what flat he liked best. He chose a flat on the first floor. This was always the best one. He was the only one living in the whole building. He had everything for free from Karel Schwarzenberg. We would drink with him till 10a.m. & at 11 & then we would go to his flat. Then we would drink the whiskey. By 1p.m. we left. We didn't have the interview & we didn't have the photos. He would then tell us to come the next day. The next day, the same story repeated again. Two bottles of whiskey & no interview or photos. I told him that I didn't want to push him, but asked if we would actually do the photos. He kept on saying that he would do it when it was right. Then we came back on the Wednesday & same thing happened. The fourth day, which was the 23rd, we said, "Enough!" He had to go on Friday to Vienna anyway! The day that we were going to finally do the photo there were live carps everywhere. Karel Schwarzenberg gave him several live carps. We offered to help Magor, so he could have this for Christmas dinner with friends & we were killing them & chopping them in his flat. There was blood everywhere. We only brought one bottle of whiskey this time. We knew two bottles were too much & he would get too drunk & we would get nothing done again. Finally a smart move & we did the photos! He got really into it. He played a song for me. He actually wrote a song for me. He did everything for the photos that I wanted. We did many photos, but here are two of them.







KRIŠTOF KINTERA

Czech artist & sculptor, photographed in his studio with his mess. He was almost electrocuted three times, so we tried to recreate the situation of electrocution & apparently it looked like this.

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OHM SQUARE

Ohm Square is a Czech band playing breakbeat & drum & bass. Their music has appeared in many Czech films. The original members, Charlie One & Jan Čechtický are still quite active & doing the band. They were one of the first electronic bands in the early '90s in Prague. Charlie One is British & she became quite famous in Prague & Jan is producing a lot of music for Czech films. He was acting in a lot of the films too. We did this photo in the hotel Chateau St. Havel in 2008. For some reason, there was a period of shooting bands in hotels. They always gave it to us for free because it would be promotion for the hotels. The only good thing in this particular hotel room was the bathroom. That's how this photo ended up. So they took off as much clothes that were necessary. This was the best photo that I think I took of Ohm Square. There were a lot of phallic symbols like the banana; the Czech porn magazine & then there was Charlie. I do not know if the band was proud of this photo though. Jan seemed unsure about it.



PAVEL KOHOUT

He was a very famous Czech theatre playwright. He was a very important political figure in the late '60s & during the '70s. He helped create Charter 77. This photograph was at his weekend house in 2010. I came there with no particular plan. We had a nice day with them sitting with him & his wife. I was looking around & trying to decide where to take the photo & then he had a suggestion & said, "Do you know the story of the book that I wrote where they buried the dog?" Which is also a Czech expression "where they bury the dog in the ground" & he told me the whole story about the dog. In the early '70s he left this weekend house for Vienna & they left the dog at the house. The dog was a dachshund. While they were away in Vienna, the secret police came to the house & searched the house & somehow they killed the dog. When they came back, they immediately noticed that the dog had disappeared & the neighbors didn't know where the dog was. They were suspicious that the police may have done something with the dog, but the police told them they did nothing with the dog. A year later when they were doing some gardening, they were digging in the ground putting some plants there & they found a skeleton of a dog, which they realized was their dog. They found out that the police actually did kill the dog & buried it at the very same place where this photo was taken. The dachshund that is sitting in front of Pavel is generation five of the dogs. The previous four, including the one that was killed by the police, have their burial places right there. In 1987, years after this incident, he wrote a book called *Kde je zakopán pes* or *Where the dog is buried* which is his memoir about the secret police in Czechoslovakia & Charter 77 & how it was created. It was a book that described everything happening at that time when the dog was killed. It was very important for me to do a proper photograph of Pavel Kohout. He is very special & was photographed many times. I am pleased with this photograph & what was more important, Pavel & his wife liked it very much & had it enlarged. It is now hanging in a frame on their wall.



LA PETITE SONJA & HANK MANCHINI

This was my first big shoot for *Time In* magazine. We did the photograph in Hoffmeister hotel in Malá Strana. We had to promise that we would not destroy the hotel. That is when they played with Moimir Papalescu & the Nihilists. The whole band was there & I wanted a photograph of Sonja & Hank by themselves looking like rock stars. The band was asking why just them & I told them that they go together & they look the most like rock stars. This was shot in 2005.



He founded the infamous Czech underground music group DG 307 in 1973. For me he was the absolute icon. I do not know if the Plastic People of the Universe were bigger for me or him. Actually meeting him was fantastic for me. I shot it at his apartment. One room was filled with artwork. We shot there & it was nice, but this final photo was in his kitchen. It just seemed right & in the photographs on the wall are of when he was younger with his children.

IVAN KRÁL & IGGY POP

I took this photo of Iggy Pop at the Colours of Ostrava festival in 2010. It was a pretty quick photo session with Iggy. He told me that I had ten seconds. I knew Steve McKay. He was playing saxophone with The Stooges at the time. I visited him backstage before the shoot & there was a fridge with alcohol. So we were drinking together from 2 in the afternoon & got really drunk. I had a small photo studio backstage there to shoot the big names at the festival & the only one I wanted to photograph that day was Iggy. I told Steve that I was there to shoot Iggy & he told me that I am crazy & Iggy never lets himself be photographed. The day before I had become friends with Iggy's manager. I told the manager why I wanted to photograph Iggy. I had told him that I grew up on The Stooges & that it's personally important for me. And he actually convinced Iggy to do it. He arranged with Iggy for me to photograph him after the show. But he told me that I had to be ready, that he did not have much time. So on that night when they had played, the manager kept coming backstage telling me to be ready every five minutes. It started raining & everything went wrong. All of a sudden there were a lot of people backstage & one of the conditions of the manager was there would not be any people around or Iggy would freak out. Everybody backstage was drunk & it was a big party. There were like sixty people back stage drunk on the sponsor's free alcohol, Becherovka! The manager suddenly runs up to me & says that Iggy is coming! Iggy came & I said hello. He had a glass of wine & he took his jacket off. He kept his glass & I told him it was OK for him to have his glass of wine. And he told me, "I will do whatever I want!" I told him to go into the light & out of the rain. He strongly looked at me & said, "You have ten seconds!" And then he started counting, "Ten, nine, eight..." When he reached seven, I quickly said, "OK, I'll start shooting!" I took six shots & I was lucky. Three out of them came out really great! He did several looks & I chose this one with his eyes wide. Then he was nice enough to have the rest of the band with him for three more shots. One day, Ivan Král came for his photo shoot in my studio. I had shot him many times. Every time he comes to Czech Republic he wants to have new photos from me. We had this photo from Iggy that we had taken at the Colours of Ostrava festival on the wall of the studio. He saw it & said, "I want to look like Iggy! He's a great friend of mine! We looked the exact same when we were both eleven years old. I want to look like him." Ivan forced me to do this photo of him looking the same as Iggy (see following spread). ■







Tobiáš Jlrous, Věra Jirousová & Sára Dvořáčková, in Staroměstská náměstí, Prague, 1977, unknown photographer.

*The cigarette's hot hiss,
its death actually,
it gives you a parting kiss
at the door of its crematory.*

Ouch! I stare at the blister that used to be my finger. I kept a poem-diary back then. Almost everyday, I called it Completed Diary. I stretched my numb legs twisted under my arse. I'd been torturing them like this for a few weeks. I smoked, wrote, succumbed to transcendence (I wish I could tell you what's there), I was in a situation where you try everything. Everything that promises to switch off your brain for at least a moment. Yes, I was miserable, & not even Zen meditation seemed to work. I needed to go back. I took out my mini-calendar from the inside pocket of my overcoat & looked up the day it'd probably happened. I wrote there JOHNNY in ballpoint pen.

He arrived from Berlin on a night train. He got off at the Main Station & breathed in the heavy oily air of the tracks. So, we're here, he said & she nodded, because there was nothing else to do. By all appearances she'd had enough of the journey. Johnny had wanted to show her Europe. He'd said it was important to discover one's own roots, but Berlin was all it had amounted to, & even Berlin had shrunk to just the square with the golden angel & a pile of fried sausages. That's where Johnny had also bought his first H.

Johnny had no idea what he felt like having, but the dealer who'd accosted him had nothing else on him. It was a small ball-like thing, the bloke just took it straight out of his mouth. To Johnny it seemed funny. They bought some chocolate, rolled a thin tube out of tinfoil & took a drag on the whole gram. Some of it got spilled, but still it was a decent buzz. Johnny said – This is like a walk on the Moon! You feel the Sea of Tranquillity? She didn't, she had a headache.

Heroin it's my life. Heroin it's my wife. Johnny loved the Velvets, MC5 & the whole gang that hung around CBGB's, all those angry fellas who knew how to kick out the jams. Berlin was different from what he'd imagined. The wall was gone. Nick Cave had moved. No Pink Floyd, techno everywhere.

You mustn't have such gloomy outlook on things, said Mandy & he answered, We've got to go to Prague, perhaps the last place with the genuine grey European atmosphere still intact. And indeed, the station looked like a scene out of a war movie.

The trains were wondrously dirty & the people on them had the expression as if something awful had just happened to them. Johnny watched with bated breath the glum faces. He wanted to get them all memorised.

Johnny wasn't happy. Mandy had changed. She was no longer the foxy thing everyone'd been envious of. Not that she'd put on weight, but she didn't want to go anywhere. For Johnny that was depressing. He got a dog. Exercising it required an enormous amount of time, the dog was good, even smart for a pit-bull, but the fun had gone out of it. He became interested in fine arts. He had new visiting cards printed, which clearly showed he was the man (for the visiting cards & perhaps for the arts as well), he bought a map of Europe, perhaps even an umbrella... He simply needed a change. But first things first. I've got to get back to the day in the calendar marked JOHNNY. I figure he paid for her drinks. Maybe not more than two glasses of white... The entire story would be embarrassing had it not happened to me & were I not to think about it all the time. They're sitting next to each other at a bar & she asks:

Where'd you leave that girl?

Mandy?

That's what she's called?

Yeah.

What happened?

It wasn't working out. You can tell best when travelling.

For real?

Yeah, exactly. You never really know what the deal is beforehand.

I was just smoking & staring out of the window when I noticed something was different. His visiting card lying next to our telephone. Tough, firm, self-confident, with lacquer & letters sticking out of the paper even the blind could read. Damn it! I walk into the bedroom to find her, & that's when it dawns on me. She was just taking off her bra. I'd seen her breasts so many times it didn't occur to me to look elsewhere. Two breasts. Nothing more. This time it was to be different. I enter the room & she turns away from me. It was in that movement, that slight pirouette. As if her bra had cried out – don't you

look! One hunter once told me how he'd killed a boar. His rifle had practically shot its head off, but the boar still kept on running. Was it a miracle? No, it was just that the boar couldn't admit it was dead already. It'd run 100 metres before it finally dropped dead. What was going through its head? I mean, in whatever remained of it...

I watched the chimneys, the snow-covered brothel, the dead-end meander of the river with the remains of the yacht club. The house was reminiscent of a well-tailored jacket someone's forgotten to pick up at the dressmaker's & it aged without being worn. Non-threadbare. Impersonal. Unlived, but bygone already. Before I wouldn't've thought of such matters. A port was a port. Everything made sense, even without too much thinking. What happened, all of a sudden? What's behind it? What did I not see before? During adolescence, at church, I enjoyed stripping Virgin Mary with my eyes, one veil at a time. It was the sculptor's girl anyways, she modelled for him, so what. Watching the piece of hollowed-out wood that could bring the believers to genuflect made me laugh. An untouchable statue, yeah, that's how I now viewed my girl. As if she were underneath some rind I just couldn't & didn't know how to peel off. How to reach out to her?

I tried the old bag trick. You take a midsize paper bag & cram it with everything the girl has ever given you. Photos, teddy bears, everything you can lay your hands on. (When you're short, torn T-shirts will do.) The more you cram into that bag, the better the effect. Or, at least it should be. She didn't bat an eyelid. You might ask yourself what kind of girl she was. I too used to think about that. After two lines of coke people will tell you all sorts of things about themselves, but her? Not a word. She didn't even smile, & it was super-clean stuff. I don't mean to say she was tough, just that in her case the usual procedure didn't work. I tried writing poems to her. This one felt the most appropriate:

*you lie, lie, lie
I
lie, lie, lie
we look in each other's eye
I'm ashamed
& you
silent as always
But I ended up sending her another one:
I used to love an inlay
a heart of marble
inside a granite sculpture*

*she was beautiful
only oil instead
of blood
perhaps it cooled her...*

But it was worth fuck-all. Not even Shakespeare would've managed with that line of his about the poet being the guardian of immortality & glory. *He hath nothing & never can gain more.* Had I not kept repeating that to myself, I'd probably have gone insane for real. (Thanks, Willy!) And then a Christmas card arrived, a few phone calls, & there I was in a blocky tramcar headed for Braník. Even though I knew it all was wrong, I still wanted her. To throw her on the bed & undress at lightning speed. I used to manage it real quick, the way one does after a few years of living together. I knew everything about the suppleness of her arms, I knew the length of her legs & how long it takes for her knickers to slide all the way down. Left sock, right sock... I'm sure she would've enjoyed the sex had the living-room telephone not rung & had she not risen to answer it.

Who was it? (I asked.)

It was... (She said his name.)

What do you mean...? (I repeated the name.)

That guy from Berlin... (She lowered her voice.)

That American from Berlin? (I raised my voice.)

Yeah. (She put on a sad expression.)

What happened? (I really wanted to know.)

You're not gonna believe it. (She said after a long pause.)

Try me. (I said immediately.)

But you absolutely mustn't tell anyone, is that clear? Promise? (She stared me in the eye.)

I won't, let me call this guy Johnny, is that okay? (I tried to avoid her look.)

It's really sad. Just imagine, they come here all that way... (She continued more calmly.)

What's sad about that? (I couldn't see.)

Somebody sold them something on the street & the girl didn't make it. (And it was out.)

You mean... (I didn't want to believe.)

Yeah. (But she did.)

No way. (What sort of a story is this?)

Have a cigarette? (She surprised me, having never smoked before.)

On Monday it was raining, on Tuesday as well, as if it was meant to be raining forever. Perhaps that's why people break up, for fear bad weather might never stop. ■

I snapped my fingers. Once, twice, thrice. I had a theory everything needed to be done in threes. I no longer recall if it had anything to do with conquering the saying, Once bitten, twice shy, or some other bullshit, but I conceived of it as order of sorts. Three spits on the pavement, three wishes of goodnight to mother, three turnabouts of the duvet... Sometimes I wanted to outdo myself & not finish the commenced triad, but I couldn't. I was neurotic. I didn't complain. In the world chaos at least I had some pigeonhole. Before I learned to speak, I stammered. But not even my stammer was an ordinary impediment, I was the stammer star. An unusual case written about in textbooks, but none of the clinic doctors had seen a living exemplar of. I would protract the voiceless consonants at the end of words. Back k k k. Fat t t t. Shit t t t. Sadly enough, after a couple of months it passed. Czech phonetics lost its *pièce de résistance*. I remember nothing of it. All my memories are spoiled by family tales. Never tell your children what happened to them in their childhood lest they lose the ability of their own recall. Their fantasy will conjure up stories completely different from those they really lived through. I could swear for instance I kept seeing a mysterious figure, igniting gas streetlamps with a long hook in the evenings. That was a signal of having to return home, but when I was a boy there were no gas lamps anymore. That was my mother's memory.

I was torn out of carefree finger-snapping by the obligation to commence my compulsory education. On September 1, the first day of war, I set out running down the hill on Školská Street. Seeing the other children jostling, throwing satchels, & shouting stupid nonsense at each other, made me retch. Without much further thought I turned into the courtyard opposite. In the yard lived a retired circus performer. Which wouldn't be of great interest in itself had this guy not owned a live donkey. No-one near or far owned such an animal, no furry pet was a patch on this beast. He fed him sugar cubes & wrapped its hooves in crumpled tinfoil. The donkey was grey & silver fitted him enormously. I looked for no further reason. I loved him. I calmed down & returned home contentedly. The decision never to enter the school building seemed irrevocable. The next day I ran out of the house with undisguised cheerfulness, not giving school another thought. I dashed toward the donkey. I was so elated I barely noticed somebody had caught me by the strap of

my satchel. What's that supposed to mean? Carefully I turned round to look at the cad. I couldn't see his face, my look ended with the red neck scarf. It was the school surveillance. They got me. I bit my lip & let myself be taken.

Get up! Sit down! Hands behind your back! Hands in the front! Make no noise! Don't move! Forward march! Divide up into pairs! Pairs! Even today this has the ability to wake me up from the deepest sleep. Where the hell is my pair partner? I'm fucked. What now?

I had no need for friends, no need to play with anyone. My games were private. I loved best just to arrange objects on my table. That was my passion. The point was not to tidy them up, but to find an ideal solution for them. When I grew tired of that I just stared out of the window. I distinctly remember I was never bored for a single moment. In this I emulated the pigeons. Just sitting around & eyeing the distance. In the evenings I returned to my den underneath the table. I sat down on the footrest & imagined it to be my house. Which reminds me I also playacted I was a spider. I would interlace my whole room with a thin bast cord. I began at the chair legs, moved toward the window, & then on my knees I went back. I crawled around the room for whoever long it took to realise that no-one could pass through. When I say the net was complex it's no exaggeration. Everything I did then I did with absolute meticulousness. Even our cat found it a challenge. Mother gave up & moved into the kitchen. My games interested her only when containing emotional charge. I saw right through her. All it took was paper & pencil. Everyone has got their foibles. My mother was affected by my drawings. My werewolf series she passed over in silence, but once I got into the guts & drew a pile of gutted intestines & ripped-off heads, I won. She broke down in tears. I have no idea why I thought that making her cry would make her like me more. But it worked. Where it didn't work was the school. Already at the entrance it was all wrong. The door was very heavy & opened with a heavy screech – See? You can hardly open me! The ten steps toward the clothes room showed me how small I was. The metal clothes room compartments were reminiscent of cages & the canvas slippers rid me of the safety & comfort of my leather shoes. No-one has ever escaped too far in canvas slippers. I felt school changing me. I said to myself – at no cost can you allow yourself to get distracted, focus!

It's nothing but an ugly dream. A long, abominable dream. And indeed, I began moving like in a dream. The somersault, which for me never presented an issue at home, became an unmanageable feat of acrobatics during P.E. Somersaulting simply didn't correspond to my idea of what I was supposed to be doing at school. I also felt there was never enough time for anything at school. How are you supposed to draw a decent picture in 45 minutes? Only by skimping on it.

I was dissatisfied & torn in half. I couldn't decide whether to be a samurai or a cowboy. I didn't want to be an Indian. That I knew clearly. From a historical viewpoint they blew it (was it due to their messiness?) & their tawdry fashion with all those fringes & beads was not to my liking. Worst of all were their hairdos, except for the Cherokees who tried to save the day by not being punk at all. I thought the hippies then ridiculous (knowing nothing about free love). Punk had an aggressive charge. The chains looked good & the safety pin in my opinion was one of the greatest inventions of all time. I had a whole collection of them. Also a few chains, which began to fascinate me following a TV reportage. I can't remember the details but the harness I'll never forget. It was called the bear. The prisoner had not only his hands, but also his feet tied up, & the whole thing was secured by a central chain across the stomach. It seemed perfect to me. The next day I could triumphantly parade myself in a similar model round my room. I had a new game. I was playing a convict. Cowboys & mysterious ninjas could suck it. I was embarking on a criminal career. It seemed to be quite easy. Everyone around me growing up ended up like that. Handcuffs & a car with emergency lighting. I wasn't afraid. Really. It was the greatest kind of attention imaginable. I actually thought it was all done for just the sake of attention. Someone got locked up, a call was made to a radio station abroad, people went on hunger strikes, signatures began to be collected & after a while everyone could start looking forward to an awesome celebration. The prisoners were back. Skinnier than Sid Vicious & with a perfect punk hairdo. Women were moved to tears. They would do anything for them. And so again chocolate & toothpaste began to disappear in parcels & instead of them letters came back full of love & fairy tales. We listened to them with bated breath as they were read to us before bedtime. We had to pay attention to every single word. The stories were pruned in order for them not to contain secret ciphers. But we understood them nonetheless. We knew every fairy tale has got to have a happy ending sometime.

I switched on TV. There was always something fascinating about vaudeville shows. Women dancers stood side by side in a row, holding hands

& alternately kicking up their left & right feet. Matzenauer asked me, Do you see them legs?

Legs, what about them?

They're something, right?

Boring, I answered. Women's legs were just legs & those women could put them behind their necks for all I cared. Breasts were ridiculous & I secretly pitied girls for having to cope with such injustice. They weren't so bad as to have to suffer these impractical protuberances on their bodies. Matzenauer smiled. I can see his eyes before me. They reflected the TV dancer with a peacock tail. I can't have been more than ten. I'd already read Arthur Gordon Pym, *Treasure Island*, & I was determined to conquer *The Carpathian Castle* as fast as possible. It seemed dangerously sumptuous. I realised there was richness in books. Every time the money had run out, & that happened fairly often, mother would take out a few books from our library & carry them over to the used-book store. I knew already that those with big golden letters embossed on leather covers don't stand a chance of enjoying a peaceful old-age with us. They were too beautiful to stay. Slowly, books disappeared from our library. One day, father disappeared with them.

In a drawer of his writing desk I found some run-down batteries (the dictaphone no longer there), the family seal ring & eau de cologne. Ooooh! Father must've been a real tough guy, I said to myself, slapping my frost-bitten cheeks. Small wonder I didn't drop the red-yacht bottle on the floor. A few drops, & such a pain! The batteries I exchanged for a kiss from a classmate. I wanted to know at last what it tasted like, & what all the boys' buzz was about. It wasn't a bad trade, but I came to appreciate that much later. I was sorry about the seal ring. Mother promised that when I grew up she wouldn't be afraid to entrust it with me. When the ring was gone I couldn't help asking, How am I to tell I've grown up? I wanted to be in the know about everything. Doubts disquieted me. I owned a pocketknife, an opera glass, a compass with a magnifying glass, & a real leather belt with the kiwi bird on the metal buckle. Only little was missing from complete satisfaction.

A few years later I caught myself staring bluntly into a display window of an antique shop, still searching for that ring. Engraved into black stone, there was a knight piercing through a dragon on it. The engraver depicted him at a moment it wasn't altogether clear how it would all end. I kept my thumb up for George, hoping he'd slay the dragon. That was also the only finger no ring ever slid off on me. ■

Prague has been very topical in the world media for the last 15 years, not only because of the so-called “Velvet Revolution” & the phenomenon known as Václav Havel, but also because so many nationals from around the world have come here & stayed for long periods of time. Some of us flew directly to Prague with the intent of taking up residence, most just passed thru & stayed, or came back subsequently to hang around the Prague scene. Not to toot my horn too much but I was one of the few people directly involved in building & creating part of that scene: whether Jo’s Bar in late ‘92, Repre Club & the Thirsty Dog at the Obecní Dům in ‘93, Jo’s Garáž in ‘96, & Železné Dveře in ‘98.

Back in the early 90s Prague was full of the adventurous types, unlike today how it is full of shit-grinning yuppies & sophomores on one-semester exchanges. When us originals got here, the country was still called Czechoslovakia, the currency was still non-convertible, money was changed with the Arabs in sleazy backstreet bars, piles of lignite coal lined the streets, every 5th car was a Trabant or some other 2-stroke aberration, the street-sweepers used brooms made of willow branches, temperature inversions kept the school kids at home, every 4th building was abandoned, there was no AMEX & no McDonalds, “9 to 5” was far off on the horizon, “mortgages” & “leasing” were not in the lexicon, none of the women shaved & nobody wore deodorant, *Cosmopolitan* had not yet taught the female population how to spurn men, the public transport smelled like low-tide, Mama Club was hip & the Bunkr was cranking, the tank was pink, there was not a cop to be seen & Havel was still smoking & drinking.

As far as I know, Jo’s Bar was the first legal expat owned bar opened in post-Communist Czechoslovakia, followed one month later by Radost FX. One month after that, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, breaking up into Czech Republic & Slovakia. I was one of the pioneers here setting up small business & I hope to portray in the subsequent collection of stories, some of the strange things that happened to us as we rode the wave of change in this time of great flux.

This is a collection of short pub stories that I have been re-telling for years either because of their comic value or because of their interest value or because of their sheer ridiculousness. I have tried to be a bit more descriptive than in the original versions to give any readers who have not been to this part of the world a little more insight as to what it looks & feels like. But nonetheless, I am not labouring for words, I am just telling my stories.

SEX ON MŮSTEK

Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society. – Mark Twain

I arrived in Prague by train from Frankfurt at about 7 in the morning on April Fool’s day, 1990, about 4½ months after the Velvet Revolution. The train ride was long & arduous. There were no seats available so I had to sit on my packsack in the hall at the end of the wagon near the toilets. I had a bunch of beers to drink & smoked like a hooker all the way just to combat the odours coming from the toilet. With the big hold up at the border the trip took about 9 hours. Fortunately, I met an Englishman who sat with me & kept me company. I told him why I was going to Prague & he told me why he was going. I wanted to experience a bit of contemporary European history & drink some good beer: he wanted to get laid & drink some good beer. We saw eye to eye.

We disembarked the train at the main train station in Prague & went into the big restaurant at one end of the station. The place was half full & everyone was drinking beer. It was just after 7 in the morning & everyone was drinking beer! We smacked our lips & grabbed a table. The waiter brought us two beers & a menu. As he stood there he overheard the Englishman say “ham & eggs.” He had mentioned to me that he would really fancy some ham & eggs. The waiter said, “yes yes,” & pointed to a certain line item on the menu. There was written “Hemenex.” We ordered two of them.

We sat there for a long time because we were quite worn out from the train ride. The restaurant was comfortable, the food passable & the beer outstanding. At around 11 AM we headed into the city to find somewhere to sleep for the night & to off-load our travel gear. We crossed Wenceslas square & walked down Vodičkova street. As we approached the Braník pub on the left side we saw two younger guys beating up an old man. There

were lots of other people standing around outside the pub drinking beers but nobody seemed willing to help. In fact all the others had their backs turned pretending it wasn't going on. The Englishman said to me, "we gotta help that guy." I agreed, we took off our packs & walked over to the two guys. The Englishman tapped the first guy on the shoulder & when the guy turned around the Englishman nugged him right on the nose. I heard that perfect crack as the nose broke. He flew off his feet onto the ground. I had grabbed the second guy in a head lock with my left arm & was punching him as fast & as hard as I could in the face with my right. I could tell he wasn't gonna fight back because he started to go a bit limp so I pushed him away from me to the ground. The two of them got up & took off around the corner into Jáma street. We turned around to find the old man had also split the scene.

We decided to take a beer while we were there. I went up to the bar, got two beers & went outside. We took the first pull on our beers & one of the guys who was standing outside turned to us.

"You think you did the right thing but you did not!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is that the two people you beat up were in the right... he was in the wrong!"

"Two on one is never fair!"

"Never matter!" The man came closer to us.

"Those two guys are brothers." He took a pull on his cigarette. "They just got out of prison... they were in there for 4 years because of that old man! They were planning on escaping from this fucking Communist country & they confided in him. He was gonna help. Instead, he betrayed them! He went to the authorities & grassed on them so that he could get a promotion in his job." He took a long pull on his cigarette & blew the smoke in our faces. "You see... not all here is as it seems!" He turned his back on us & continued talking to his friends.

We were, to say the least, a little bit confused... & a bit out of our league.

We put on our packs & carried on down the street. We ended up in the Kotva beer garden on Lazarská street. We had a few more beers & some lunch & then asked for the bill. The waiter came over & added up the bill. It came out to an exorbitant sum so I questioned him about it. He got really angry, started yelling & then ran off. He came back in about two minutes with two big fuckin cooks who stood on either side of him & started yelling at us again. The Englishman, who already proved that he could handle himself in a fight, looked at me with a smile & said, "Mate, one fight in broad daylight in one day is enough. Let's just pay the bill & get the fuck outta here!" We paid & left. On the way out we laughed thinking about our first experiences with the Czechs.

We found a place to kip for the night & headed out on the town. The Englishman met a girl on the street as we left a pub. He invited her for a drink & left with her. I never saw him again. I ended up on Žofín island in the beer garden where I ran into an American. He had arrived a few days before me & had somehow already rented a flat. He had an extra room so I moved in the next day.

The summer of 1990 came quickly & it was very exciting. It was the first summer after the revolution & the Czechs were partying in the streets. It was a euphoric time & was a special moment in world history. One thing I noticed was there were no police to be seen anywhere. They had such a bad stigma from being the enforcers of the Communist regime & from beating the shit out of the unarmed student protestors that they disappeared from the streets after the revolution. My Czech friend Honza (the Czech surfer) got his nose busted during the demonstrations & was left unconscious on the street on Národní exactly at the spot where the monument to those students now stands. Now he wears a suit & sells oil products to petrol stations.

There were no police & therefore it was somewhat anarchic... not that there was wanton unbridled violence going on but rather there was a sense of freedom in the air. We used to go down to Můstek at the bottom of Wenceslas square in the evening just to watch the goings on. On all sides of the square guys had set up makeshift selling counters by stacking up beer crates & running a plank in between. You could buy booze, smokes, porn, candy & a host of other goodies.

We would grab a few beers & watch the drunk Germans get ripped off by the Gypsies. It was like a cartoon where you see the character walk fully clothed into a stand of trees & emerge the other side completely naked. It was the same with the drunk Germans... they would stagger/stumble their way through a gang of gypsies & come out the other side looking very confused, rifling their pockets & pulling up their sleeves. The Gypsies would immediately scatter of course & change coats etc.

Another time we were standing in the middle of Můstek on a pleasant summer evening drinking beers, smoking smokes, & generally just loitering around watching the spectacle when a big show took place. I hadn't noticed this couple arrive but very quickly they started drawing attention because they started to strip down. They had arrived with a picnic basket, thrown down a blanket & proceeded to remove all their clothes.

Then they got down on the blanket & started shagging. They shagged for about 15 minutes. He was on top & then she was on top, doggy style, wheel-barrow, sideways, 69 & always when possible, one of them would have one arm in the air high-

five style & the crowd was loving it. Everyone was applauding & yelling encouragement & finally they finished up their business, got dressed, took a bow & ran away laughing.

O B E C N Í D Ů M

Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing can ever be made. – Immanuel Kant

The Obecní Dům or Municipal House of Prague is one of the most culturally important buildings in Prague, right after the National Theatre. It is therefore almost inconceivable that the Czechs would have let us, a bunch of rag tag drunken foreigners, rent half of it & subsequently turn it into a den of iniquity. Oh, the good old days!

John Bruce Shoemaker, otherwise known as JB, approached me one day in early 1993 at my bar with Joey Knuckles in tow & dragged me down to a sleazy little basement pub called Demínka to have a beer & talk business. JB was a guy that I knew from around Prague mostly from a little bar called U Vejvodů. This pub in those days was the place where a lot of the expats would congregate. A lot of partnerships, deals & plans were made there. Most of them came to nothing, some to fruition & the rest were stolen. I was never a big member of the U Vejvodů crowd because at the time I was busy building & then running my own bar but I made appearances once in a while.

JB was from Montana, about the same age as me & previously used to be a journalist for the National Enquirer. In those days he was quite slim & half handsome. He had long black hair & big bugged out brown eyes. He had the same sort of clothing style as me which I call "Klondike '88", boots, jeans, belt, flannel shirt & dark leather coat. He was quite a raconteur & a lot of fun to go out drinking with because of his great story-telling skills. He would gesticulate & spit & scream & roll around to emphasize his hilarious stories.

Joey was another American who was one of those guys you see in a Scorsese film. He wasn't a big guy, about 5'10 & lanky, had dark short hair parted on one side & a friendly face. He laughed a lot, had a good sense of humour & didn't say too much. His communication skills were a classic case of "low quantity, high quality." You knew when he was around though. He had a presence. He was lithe & when he spoke it kinda scared you. There was always a violent overtone. It was hard to put your finger on... even for an overly sensitive person like myself but Joey came across as dangerous to everybody he met.

He was half Jewish, half Irish but was raised by Italians... mostly by his Uncle "Scrappy." Joe had

done a little time for drug dealing, was a trained boxer & had just completed a degree in creative writing from the same Washington State college that Kurt Cobain had attended, Evergreen.

We got ourselves 3 beers, 3 shots of Becherovka & stood near the bar. I noticed that the dumb-waiter food elevator which went to the kitchen upstairs & was being used quite regularly, had a rodent guest hiding in the back. It took a while for me to realize what the movement was that was bothering my rods & cones... then, all of a sudden, the rat came in to focus. I mentioned it to the boys.

"Look, a rat!" I interjected while aiming my eyes at the dumb-waiter.

They both turned around to have a look

"It's our pal!" replied JB.

The rat disappeared into the shadows as the fat waiter with the dirty white shirt piled up some more dishes into the box of the elevator.

We all stared in silence so as not to scare the rat. We wanted to see him again. To see how he operated. He re-appeared slowly, his whiskers twitching. Then he stood up to get a good look at the plate, lunged forward & made off with some scrap.

"Foreshadowing!" said JB

We laughed, turned back towards each other & took pulls on our beers.

"It's like this" JB started, after we had gotten our most recent stories out of the way.

"Half of the Obecní Dům, the left half, is being rented by a couple of gay guys & they are about to get the boot. They haven't paid the rent in about a year & the building managers are gonna kick them out.

I saw where this was going. "So we raise some capital & take over the space!"

"Yes, exactly, but we're not talking about just some "space", we are talking about the ground floor, the balcony, the basement, & the Forman pub around the corner across from the Hotel Paris. Half of the fuckin building dude!" he exclaimed.

"Jesus Christ!" I offered. We all took hits on our beers.

"How much money are we talking about?" I inquired.

Well, the rent is 365,000 crowns a month. We need first & last months' rent plus one month deposit so... what's that... just over a million. & we need some cash to get the place cleaned up & to buy stock.

"Plus miscellaneous hidden costs," added Joey.

"So say we need about 1.5 million... about 50,000 USD."

"That would get us up & started, yeah"

"So what do you want from me?" I asked.

"Well, you have a legal company, with the proper paperwork & maybe a connection to some

capital. Last time we spoke you mentioned that you knew some investors."

"Yes I do." I said. "There are some venture capitalists who come into my bar all the time asking me if I have any interesting projects for them. They are young, & something like this might be interesting to them. Gimme some more info about the project, show me the space & I'll bounce it off them, see what they say."

"OK, lets head over there tonight & have a sniff around"

"Yeah, let's do that... Becher?" I asked as I motioned towards the shots sitting on the ledge, we picked 'em up & knocked them back.

That night we slowly made our way down the hill towards the Obecní Dům, stopping at all sorts of strange places along the way. In a rough little one-room wine bar on the Square we watched as a gypsy girl jammed a broken glass into the top of some drunk German's hand. He had pissed her off for some reason or other. A spurt of blood shot out with such high pressure that it hit the ceiling. This guy had the blood pressure of a giraffe. The middle-aged German "John" looked bemused by the whole spectacle & just looked at his hand with the huge shard of glass embedded in it, smiled & gibbered to himself. The blood pumped profusely out of the wound.

I realized that the guy was in trouble because she had hit a bleeder & I supposed that all the alcohol he had drunk was acting as an anti-coagulant. He was gonna bleed to death I thought so I ran outside & found two cops not a hundred meters from the wine bar. "Excuse me but there is a German in that wine bar over there who was just glassed by some Gypsy chic & you should maybe call an ambulance, I think he might bleed to death!"

"Fuck the Germans!" said the one cop

"Fuck the Gypsies!" said the other

I looked at them in bewilderment as they turned their backs on me & walked away. I went back to the bar, the German was gone, we drank up & headed out into the night.

We got into the basement of the Obecní Dům where these guys had a gay club. It was a skanky place & relatively empty... just a few lurkers in the corners. No business though, just some rent boys. We had a look at the space & all immediately recognized the potential. Our collective minds started conjuring. We parted company & agreed to meet the following day & discuss some more.

I got into my bar just after noon the next day & by chance ran into Frank Bruschetti, one of the young venture capitalists I knew. I sat down with him while he ate his lunch & told him the story. His ears immediately pricked up when I said Obecní Dům.

He was from an old wealthy American family that had ties to the Brewing industry in the US. Lots

of money & a good education; not much street smarts though. Nonetheless, he liked the idea & told me that he was in....but needed to do the "due diligence." I told him I would get back to him in the next few days.

At around 3 in the afternoon, JB showed up at the bar with his girlfriend Ola. He informed me that we had a meeting at 5 with the Technical Director of the Obecní Dům & asked whether I would be able to join him. "Of course" I said. First we had a few drinks while Ola told us about her mother in Poland who had been recently committed to an insane asylum. Then we drank up & walked over Charles Bridge on the way to the Obecní Dům. All the way we discussed strategy for our upcoming meeting with the management of the building.

Everything seemed fine until we got into the building & started walking up the stairs to the administration offices on the upper floors. I walked up the stairs behind JB & was looking at the back of his trouser legs. He was wearing really old cowboy boots that had worn out heels which were contacting the floor at a precarious angle. Then I noticed that his pant legs were too long for the boots, were all bunched up, dirty, frayed & had been like this for so long that they had become crusty. I thought to myself, "hang on a second here, something is wrong." I broke into a sweat.

I slowed down & incredulously observed the rest of his attire: his black leather flight-jacket with the un-tucked flannel shirt hanging out the back, the greasy long hair tied into a pony-tail, the boots, the filthy trousers & the fact that he, Ola & myself were relatively drunk. I stopped & said, "You sure you want to do this today?"

He stopped, turned, & with the tattered old plastic shopping-bag he used as a briefcase swinging around his legs he said, "Yeah come on it's cool, I know old Mr Pitter, he's a nice guy, he's gonna feed us wine!"

"Oh wine!" I thought resignedly

We continued up the spiral staircase to the top of the building.

We came into a wide hallway with many doors running down the left side. The right hand side was all windows & I could see the Prague castle in the distance up on the hill. I saw Mr Pitter's name written on a brass plaque on the first door on the left. We went to the second door & Ola knocked carefully. I heard a squeak & a roll, & then light footsteps as somebody came towards the door. The door opened & a pleasant looking woman greeted us. She obviously knew Ola & JB & was glad to see them. She also greeted me with warmth.

"Mr Pitter is waiting for you, so nice to see you, please come this way!" she said as she beckoned us after her towards the adjoining office. She swung

the door open & motioned us to enter. A large 55 year old man with a bald head & a stately stomach sat behind a desk at the end of the office near the windows. He immediately stood without pretence, smiled & walked towards Ola with his hands outstretched. "You have made it!" he said with an even larger smile. Ola did something of a curtsy, kissed him on both cheeks & then stood aside as JB walked up & rigorously shook his hand with both hands. Then he stood aside & let me shake his hand.

Old Pitter was a large man, well over 6 foot. He had an honest face & smiley eyes & looked fit for his age. Fit & healthy. He was wearing the standard communist attire of the brown suit, light yellow short sleeved shirt & a brown tie. He was wearing slippers, his shoes were in the corner on a mat. Even his socks were brown

"This is Glen, he's from Canada!"

"Oh yes Canada... we like to play hockey here," he said with a smile & a wink.

The first thing to run through my mind was, this is a nice guy...& he wants to drink wine.

After all the formalities, Mr Pitter invited us to sit down at the table. His secretary rhetorically asked, "Should I get the wine?" & promptly got up, went into the other room, out the door & into the hallway.

"Special reserve?" JB said to Mr Pitter with a smirk on his face

"It's not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you!" was Mr Pitter's reply.

Ich bin ein Hamburger, I wanted to say, to quote Dan Quayle, but stifled myself.

We sat ourselves around the long table that abutted his desk. This desk/table arrangement was typical & ubiquitous throughout the country at management level. His desk was at the end of the room so that his back was to the window & then a long table with about 8 seats, 4 on each side butted up 90 degrees to his desk. There was the requisite little doily, an ashtray & four small glasses in the middle of the table. The secretary appeared within 5 minutes with wine, more glasses, mineral water & an opener. It was an archived Slovak red wine from 1982.

"It's not an especially good year, but times have changed & we don't get it for free anymore. So now we have to drink what we have & this is it!" explained Pitter. We smiled in anticipation & JB added that it didn't matter, as long as there was a lot of it. Pitter nodded in approval while lighting a cigarette.

We talked about Canada, then the weather. Ola tried to get sympathy about her mother so we changed the subject to cars. Mr Pitter told us how he was sure that the guys he was about to evict had stolen his car. We got another bottle of wine. The secretary joined us & she told us about her lovely teenage daughters... Mr Pitter smiled & winked, told

us that he would set me up... the secretary agreed. Another bottle of wine. We talked about canoeing in the Bohemian forest & about the latest political scandal. Then after the third bottle of wine, we got down to business.

We started talking about the space that was up for rent. The first thing that came up was the fact that these guys were still in there & it was obvious that old Pitter was afraid of them. We told him point blank "don't worry about those guys...we will make it very clear to them that they are history & that it is over. We will make it more than clear that they have a deadline to get out otherwise we, the new operators are going to take over everything & throw the rest out on the street"

Then we talked about the price. This point was heavily debated because they were offering us only a one year contract... subsequently renewed on a month to month basis. We battled about this point heavily. Old man Pitter got so excited that he changed positions & was now sitting next to me at the table. He was on my left & JB was on my right. We started talking about making the contract 18 months long which he protested about because the whole building was going under reconstruction as soon as possible.

I was looking at Mr Pitter while he was talking at length about the building: that it was a national heritage site & that it had to be reconstructed completely to put it back into its full glory because it was intended to be a national monument to show the height of Czech culture & tradition etc., blah blah blah, when all of a sudden I noticed him jerk back in his seat, change his expression to one of recoil, turn a little bit sideways & start stuttering. I noticed him take a couple of looks past me across my midsection while he coiled backwards & trailed off his monologue. I followed his glance to my right & saw what it was that had sent him into a tailspin. JB was sitting next to me with his legs spread apart in a five-glasses-of-wine comfortable pose. I looked down; the crotch of his trousers was ripped open & his testicle sack was flopped out on the chair like a handful of wet tea-bags. No, more like a nest of baby rats.

I calmly motioned towards his crotch & said to JB, "Your balls!" He took one look, started laughing, instinctively put his hand down & tucked himself in & then crossed his legs. Then he grabbed his glass of red wine & said "Slovak wine bad!"

Yes, yes, Slovak wine bad, we all agreed. Mr Pitter unfurled himself once JB's balls had been put away & we continued our negotiations about renting half of the country's architectural crown jewel.

It turned out that Pitter wanted to get these guys out not only because they hadn't paid the rent for so long but also because they were a couple of evil bastards & were even threatening his life. That's

why he was sure that they had stolen his car... to intimidate him. He then went on to tell how he had gone into their offices to collect the rent one time, one of them pulled out an old powder gun, stuffed it with a lead ball while protesting about having to pay the rent & then shot it at the wall over Pitter's head. He did this to emphasize the fact that he didn't have the rent money & wasn't about to pay.

Jesus Christ we exclaimed! It was obvious that the old Pitter was afraid of the those two & we realised that this was our first order of business... to make it clear to them that they had to leave. JB turned to Mr Pitter & said outright, "Mr Pitter, don't worry, we will go to those guys tomorrow & tell them that we are taking over the space & that they must leave."

"They won't go that easily you know... they are not nice people."

"Don't worry Mr Pitter, we will make it very very clear."

"Yes but..."

"No, I insist that you do not worry about them anymore... Glen & I assure you, we will take care of them & they will never bother you again ok?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, 100%."

Ola & I both concurred.

Mr Pitter was visibly relieved so we changed the subject of the conversation back to the secretary's daughters. We drank for another hour or so & then made plans to meet again the following day after we had taken care of the bad guys... this was gonna be fun & I couldn't wait to tell Joey Knuckles about the job at hand.

The following day, JB, Joey & myself all wearing our "Klondike '88" standards walked into their offices. Joey knocked once & then opened the door before getting a response. He threw it open & then JB & I walked in up to the desk, Joey came in behind, closed the door & stood there with his arms crossed.

"Dobry den," I said & put out my hand, "my name is Glen, this is JB & him over there is Joey."

The man behind the desk hastily got up & shook my hand, "my name is Edouard, pleased to meet you... how can I help you?"

He was a bit shaken by our entrance, put a bit at ease from the intros but was still looking at us warily. I noticed the powder gun was sitting on an adjacent bureau in its decorative box... it was out of his reach & I noticed that I could get to it before he could.

"Well, we are taking over your side of the building from the first of April. You have been given an eviction notice by Mr Pitter already 2 months ago for non payment & now we just want to negotiate with you as to what you want to keep & what you want to sell to us."

"That eviction is not..."

"No, you don't understand, you have been evicted & we are not here to discuss that. You tell us what you want to sell us & the rest you take away otherwise we will throw it out onto the street."

Edouard's eyes flicked right towards the gun, we all noticed. JB walked towards it & said, "Jesus, this is nice!" he picked it up & asked Edouard, "Is it loaded?"

"No it isn't, it is just for decoration."

"But it works right?"

"Yes it works just fine but please put it down."

JB ignored him & turned around towards the back wall. There was a place above & to the right of the doorway where it seemed the volley shot over Mr Pitters head had made impact. JB cocked the hammer & before Edouard could protest, pulled the trigger. The hammer came down with a beautiful mechanical click.

"Very nice," said JB & then he replaced it into its box. He turned around to Edouard & said, "what was it you were saying?"

Edouard changed his tune & all of a sudden became really friendly towards us. He asked us if we would like a drink. We agreed & followed him into the adjoining room which was for entertaining. Edouard turned out to be OK, he helped us a lot & even took us out to his country house one day where we all got to fire the gun.

Within two weeks, Frank came up with money, we opened up the café, then the pub, & later the Repra club all in the most famous building in Prague.

THE SLAVIA

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live. – Henry David Thoreau

In early September of 1993 four of us, JB, Marek Gregor, Joey Knuckles & myself sat down to do some brain-storming about events in the Obecni Dům for the Autumn. The first order of business was what to do for November 17, the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. Joey knew exactly what to do.

"Let's take over the Slavia!"

"Yes that's fuckeen eet!" exclaimed Gregor as he leapt out of his chair. "Joey, you are brilliant!" Gregor started to chuckle

"Claire's father, old Provaan, he's the co-signer on the lease with HN Gorin isn't he?" I asked

"Yeah that's right, I'll get his number off Claire & let's meet him up," replied JB

"So what, we take it over & do what with it?"

"Let's just get inside, clean it up & have a party. Shit, have you seen what those Parnas assholes have done to the place?" said Joey

"It's that Indian guy isn't it... What's his name?"

"I forget but he's a dickhead, I met him a couple of times... Has a very high opinion of himself"

"Fuck him, look what he's done to our baby the Slavia."

"Let's just squat the place & see what happens. Provaan will give us some kind of blessing that will hopefully keep us out of jail. Anyway, everybody wants it open, so if we open it finally & then get thrown in jail... well at least it'll be a good story to tell."

"What, we're gonna get thrown in jail for opening the Slavia? Havel has pardoned a lot worse motherfuckers than us that's for sure!"

"All agreed?"

"Yes, all agreed."

JB & I made an arrangement to meet up with old Provaan. We got to his flat & discussed the idea. His eyes lit up when we said we wanted to take over the Slavia. He said that he was very embarrassed to be involved with the closure of the Slavia, one of Prague's cultural icons. He said he would help us. He had his own agenda of course which we were unaware of. He was the Czech director of the American company that had signed the lease on the Slavia & Parnas with the Film Academy that owned the building. Who knows what sort of underhandedness went on for them to have sealed the deal but I could only imagine the worst. Upon signing the lease, they had sub-rented the Parnas restaurant to the Indian guy & then shut the Slavia which was being used by the restaurant as a store-room & was full of garbage. Everybody in town was pissed off because it was the quintessential Prague hang-out.

The night of the take-over was surreal. We didn't tell anyone what was going on until the night of the action. We shut Repre early & then told the bouncers, the bar staff & the janitors that they had to follow us down to the Slavia. It was 4:30 in the morning. Over 25 of us walked down Na Příkopě from Obecní Dům to the Slavia. JB, myself, Joey Knuckles & six big bouncers led the way. We got to the front doors where Gregor had a locksmith waiting who was supposed to get us in. He was drunk & after 2 minutes of drilling into the lock his drill ran out of power. He staggered around for a bit until we realised that he was incompetent. Joey jumped up & got the bouncers going on the doors. He knew they could muscle the doors open. The big Czech guys put their shoulders into the door & the Nigerians followed. The door was bending but was a long way from opening. We all stood back & watched the goings on. I could hear the Parnas staff in the kitchen next to us. I told Joey that I was gettin nervous... we had to get the doors open immediately. The Moravians & the Nigerians were pushing as hard as they could when Joey walked up to the group of four who were pushing on the door & shouted,

"Listen you motherfuckers, how much do I pay you per night over at the Repre club?"

"900 Crowns," they replied unanimously as they were leaning into the door.

"Well you get this fuckin door open & I'll pay you 11 hundred a night!" Joey shouted.

The Moravians & Nigerians, upon hearing this, lunged forward & the door made a loud crack as it burst open. We were in!

We ran in & immediately started cleaning up. The place was a mess. The Indian from next door had turned our favourite cafe into a garbage pit. The guy ran 5 star restaurants all around town but couldn't look after his own backyard. It was November 17, the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, so we cranked for a few hours & at 9 o'clock in the morning, the Café Slavia was open once again!

We had a train of people running from the Obecní Dům down to the Slavia bringing supplies. They were bringing beer, soft drinks, coffee, tea, bottles of booze & the like. Everything was for free, we gave it away for free. We told our staff to tell the people that it was voluntary payment. Some people paid, some didn't. We lost about 250 thousand crowns on the deal.

To tell the truth, I didn't give a damn. The whole action immediately turned into a complete free-for-all. The Indian from next door showed up with some local cop who wanted to throw me in jail for trespassing. It was obvious that the cop was getting paid by the Indian because he kept whispering instructions in the cop's ear. I argued my case in front of him & about 10 Czech journalists with microphones. I was really nervous, didn't speak Czech that well & was surrounded not only by journalists with microphones but also by cops with handcuffs. I more or less collapsed. I couldn't take it any more. Provaan was inside & I went to him & told him the score. "Either you go & talk to these fuckers or I go to jail!" He came out & saved the day.

From day one it became a media bonanza. Gregor was our frontman from the beginning, we knew we could not do it without him, but the celebrity got to him & he completely forgot about us. Even the Czech intellectual Vaculík lost his way with Gregor. They went off together to form a non-profit organisation called the Friends of the Café Slavia. I chased after them & forced my name on the papers with them. Everybody got really greedy. Gregor lost his head with all the attention. We ran the operation for about two weeks of which each night I slept inside & then agreed to leave after we had forced FAMU to rescind the contract with HN Gorin. We created a lovely point in world history & had a good time doing it. To this day the Czechs have never acknowledged our role in this interesting cultural action. They knew we had something to do with it but preferred to overlook this fact. We did get our names on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* though... One column & 15 minutes of fame. Finally instead of reading the news, we were making it! ■



Interior of Tam Tam Club, 1994, by Christoph Brandl.

THE CIRCUS OF SENSUALITY
AVANTGARDE PRAGUE IN THE EARLY '90S
CHRISTOPH BRANDL

"So this is he," Curtis said with his big brown eyes all over me. "Hmm, I like him. I like them when they're fresh from the *Kaiserreich*."

"I heard about you, too," I said. "Pleasure to meet you." I offered him a hand, which he took to pull me close.

"The pleasure is mine." He looked me up & down & licked his lips. "I bet your pubic hair is red." A roaring laughter ensued, a contagious, resounding outburst of joy. "You can always prove me wrong."

Laughter.

The morning I met Curtis Jones I had signed the lease for the 2nd floor of the Slovanský Dům in Prague, where I planned to open a live nightclub called Tam Tam. Allegedly the building had served the Nazis as headquarters during their occupation of the country. But I never found out if this was true. I never wanted to find out because partying where Nazis had celebrated their atrocities with beer & pervitin would have felt strange.

I looked at Curtis. He wore white silk slacks, a white mantle of sorts & suede shoes. He was tall & slim, with his head shaven & a bronze make-up all over. His graceful fingers showed unusually long nails, which were polished golden.

A friend had told me I needed Curtis on my team. And that I had better make sure Curtis liked Tam Tam. If not he would trash it.

"Trash it?"

"Yes, or rather it's reputation. By simply not going there. Which would mean to cool people: Don't go there either."

That made me curious. Curtis sounded like someone with an ego the size of Texas, which I didn't mind. What worried me was the fact that he allegedly exaggerated the amount of drugs he could tolerate even exceeding any previous excess. Under the influence of substances Curtis would become unbearable, arrogant, insulting & verbally abusing.

So they said.

What I first discovered was Curtis' sharp mind. In the '60s he had worked in Chicago in advertising,

construing campaigns for Volkswagen. At least that was what he told me. Quick-witted slogans had been his business, quick-witted he remained. That was highly entertaining keeping countless "fans & followers," as he called friends & acquaintances, amused. But if he didn't like where an argument was going he would end it by cracking a joke at your expense & laughing his contagious laughter. It would drive me crazy because, depending on his mood or degree of intoxication, addressing issues rationally was not an option.

We often had differences in opinion.

It started with small things & it didn't end with philosophies or world politics. An example: Later we were driving around Europe with the Circus of Sensuality. Curtis, instead of asking me to stop at a restroom, would piss in an empty bottle of rum while the car was moving. Because his dick was too big to fit the bottleneck he would frequently empty himself on the carpet. No argument would stop him. On the contrary. He would call me petty bourgeois.

Laughter.

I hesitated. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to work with an addict. I was under the naive impression that we in Tam Tam needed to stay clean & sober, if we wanted to be successful. After spending the last seven years in New York City I should have known better though. I should have known that most people working in nightlife – or in the arts for that matter – were addicted to one thing or another. My staff was no exception. Neither was I.

But it was the spring of 1994 & it was Prague, the Wild East. I had lived here under Communist times & it is common knowledge what Communism did to freedom. It deleted it. Now it was the opposite: there were no holds barred. So I didn't mind anyone's addiction.

Big mistake.

Curtis said during our first meeting: "My talents are multifaceted. And unique." He glanced around Tam Tam. "And here is where I want to set up my office."

"Uhhh, let's see. If you want an office let's better



1 3 0 5



ILFORD PAN 400



ILFORD PAN 400



1 3



26A



27A



28A



30



21A



22A



23A



25

ILFORD PAN 400

ILFORD PAN 400

Fashion show, *Obývák*, Tam Tam Club, 1994, by Christoph Brandl.

1 3 0 5

check upstairs."

"I don't want upstairs, darling. I want right here on the dance floor!"

"On the dance floor."

"Of course. You do want me to work for you, don't you?"

"And what would you be doing, uh, on the dance floor?"

"Devouring boys."

Roaring laughter.

I said: "You sing & dance as well?"

"Of course, darling. That's my forte. I'd do it for you, too, if you can afford me."

"Why don't we have a look at the place?"

We exited the dance hall & entered a smaller room, which was to become a restaurant with a big television screen & gambling machines in the back. Curtis nodded.

He said: "Not bad, but it's all a little basic, isn't it? Where is that room people are talking about?"

I smiled.

"Follow me."

We crossed the large entrance hall. At the end of the floor we went through a glass door, thrust aside a dark velvet curtain – & there it lay: *Obývák*, my precious living room. Its intimate lighting arrangement & the thick carpet on the floor immediately invited us inside to sit down on one of the small tables with telephones placed on them. Curtis looked around. The walls were covered with plush & had small lights dangling from them. At the end of the room was a stage big enough for a Jazz band or a chamber orchestra. Put a few chairs on the stage & you'd have readings or discussion rounds. You could even install a screen to project films.

Curtis marvelled at the room. "I've never seen anything like it in Prague," he said. "Fabulous!" He looked as if he was already conceptualising his first evening here. As he was considering the possibilities of *Obývák* he got up. "I don't like the colour of the light bulbs. They're too brothel-ish. They need to be more yellow not red. Or do you want them to fuck on the tables?"

I was sure that something audacious & raunchy like the Circus of Sensuality was already shaping in his mind.

Before Curtis began to work at Tam Tam he & I set up ground rules for his job. This was his idea. I guess he wanted to show me some respect in return for the nice salary I offered him. Or maybe he was simply overwhelmed by my sported strictness.

The ground rules:

– Start work at 6 pm, earlier arrival would be appreciated, especially before & on the day of a show

– Don't show up overly intoxicated

– No sex anywhere in the open

– No dealing of drugs

– Three free drinks of Captain Morgan with coca-cola per evening

– Work ends at around 2a.m.

Curtis' work entailed: Meeting friends in Tam Tam as well as luring strangers in there, chatting them up so that they would buy him as many drinks he could possibly hold. Thus generating revenues for the club. If he performed on stage he would receive bonus pay, in which case he was responsible for the design of the flyers, the PR & all technical aspects of a show.

He said he didn't need a day off from work.

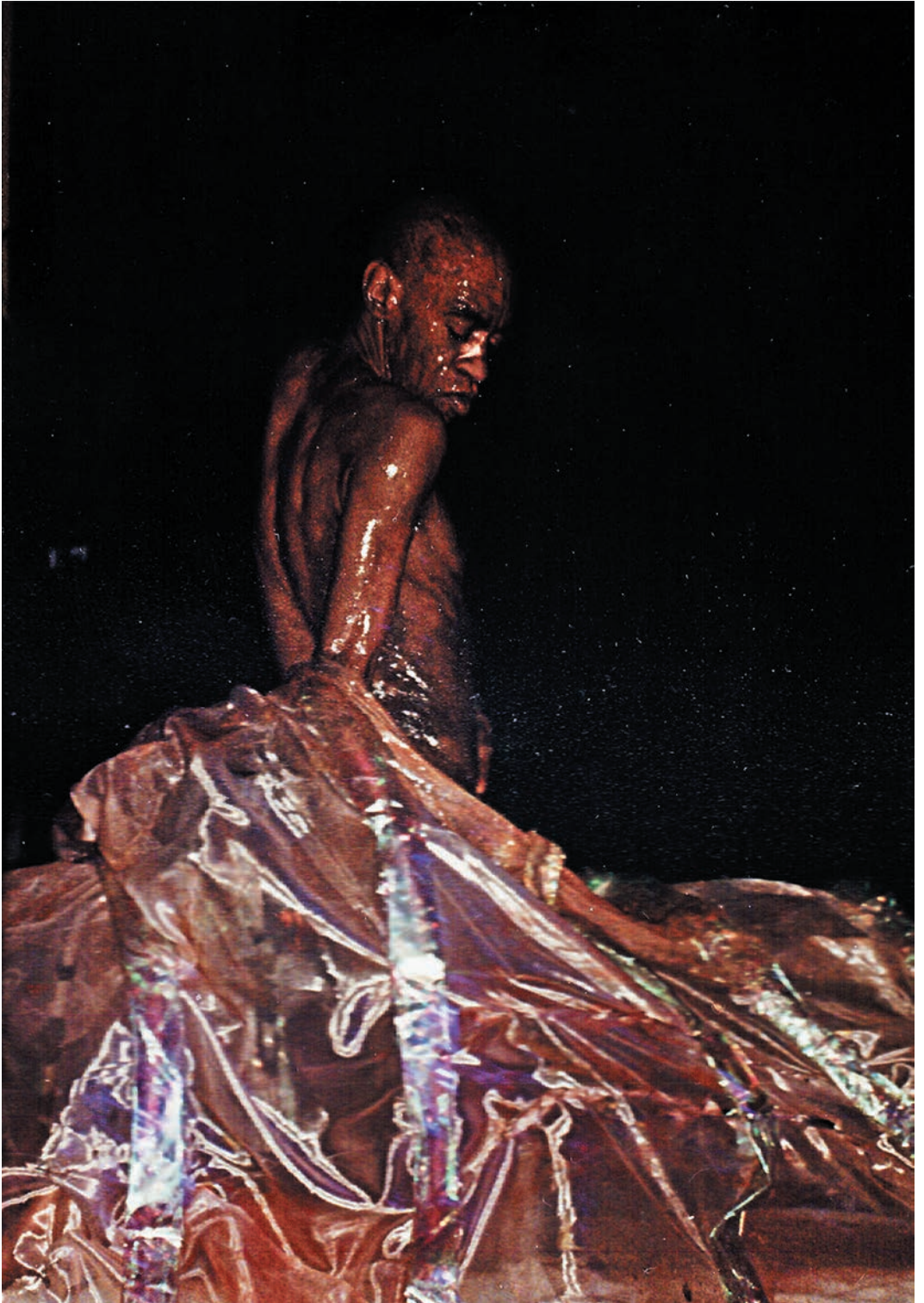
Pretty basic, I thought. And indeed, the first weeks he showed up on time. He was neatly made-up & brought in all kinds of individuals, among them many tourists, who he had picked up on the street outside Slovanský Dům. He would continue to publicly comment about my pubic hair. I didn't mind. I thought he needed to make these comments because they gave him control over something he would never get: my body.

Tam Tam flourished in the beginning. Expats & Praguers alike found the diversity of acts my team & I put on fascinating. One time Ira Cohen, a well-known poet from New York, read his latest works. Another time a Czech band named Support Lesbiens played to a roaring sold-out house. One of the highlights of the early Tam Tam times was the first Prague ever blood- & sperm-performance of GWAR, a punk-rock band from the US.

And then there was Curtis.

Obývák had become his stage. First he showed his films, or rather his filmic experiments in light & colour. Later he gave concerts with bands or just a piano player. He even staged fashion shows together with local designers. Everything he did was unusual. His films made extensive use of out-of-focus shots of who-knows-what. During his concerts he had a tendency to sing a little out of tune, catching a noticeable slip with a sort of a rap interlude. When he performed he often wore dresses supposedly from Egypt or Paris, with a golden seams, or not much of anything at all, & was made-up in garish colours. His performances were a foreplay, which often led to a climax in his dressing room with a bunch of young boys, who cherished him as if he was a dream come true. At the end of an evening sheer exhaustion blemished his gestalt beyond recognition. But no matter how wasted he was he tried to keep his grace. Anyone who heard or saw him for the first time was taken aback. Or appalled. No one was left untouched.

Soon exhilarated crowds celebrated the rise of a



Curtis Jones, Circus of Sensuality, Tam Tam Club, 1994, by Christoph Brandl.

“new star”: Curtis Jones.

Those were the good days.

One night after another resoundingly successful evening Curtis came to me.

He said: “We are doing too much of the same. I want to take Tam Tam to another level.”

I was surprised, because Tam Tam was working, creatively & commercially.

He said he had read about French vaudeville & wanted to create something in that style: performance, costumes, skin, flesh, sensuality, music.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“Well, yes, but how’s that different?”

“Oh, you. You’re being too Germanic again.”

“Enlighten me.”

“People, darling. People make all the difference.”

I had a friend, who had worked on Jan Švankmajer films. He said he knew a guy we might like, Monsieur Babakov. Monsieur Babakov was an impresario, old but still working with numerous different artists.

Curtis begged me to visit that man. I had no idea that this visit would tie him & me together for the next couple of years – on & off. And that it would eventually drive us apart.

Monsieur Babakov was Russian. Ominous circumstances had brought him to Prague in the ‘60s. He had lived in the same apartment in the centre of Old Town ever since he got there. Curtis & I rang his bell. Monsieur Babakov opened. He carried a long beard & was rather carelessly dressed. And he smelled.

He invited us in.

He said: “Sit down.”

We looked around. The place was beautiful. It was a luxurious 5-room apartment, old style, with stucco on the ceilings, wooden floors & oven-heating, no telephone. We looked closer, flabbergasted about what we discovered. The entire apartment was filled with the most amazing collection of figurines I had ever seen: Chinese dolls, ceramic mannequins, robots, automata & action figures made of wood. There were staged historic battles, love scenes from movies, fairy tales acted out. Being in that place was like stepping into a long lost period in time.

He said he represented the greatest artists in Prague. They would do anything.

Except for sex.

“I hope this is not what you are looking for.”

He showed us a catalogue with his clients for us to choose from. And there they were: Picture after picture, literally hundreds of extravagantly dressed, beautiful or wild looking acrobats, fire breathers, animal trainers, opera singers, contortionists, illusionists, ventriloquists, unicyclists & many more.

I was overwhelmed. In my mind I already saw all the performers do amazing things in Tam Tam with fire, magic & animals.

Curtis had a similar plan.

He chose a few lightly dressed artists, picked some more, selected others, dropped them again. He was on a mission. Very fast, very effective. It was exciting seeing it come to life right before my eyes: The Circus of Sensuality. With Curtis as its director.

The ones he picked were perfect, perfect for the confines of a nightclub & perfect to travel with to other European cities.

I said: “Are they expensive, Monsieur Babakov?”

The selection process of the real artists was equally fast. One day in Tam Tam Curtis had them parade in front of us in full costume & made them do their tricks. Some of the artists he immediately fell in love with. Others just like their agent, were from another time, a time where standing on the head wiggling with toes looked daring.

His final selections was:

– A half-naked Ukrainian contortionist

– A couple of Russian sensual dancers

– A juggler

– A black light theatre group

– A couple of knife-throwers, big guys, hairy chests, muscles

– A naked waitress of mixed race

– A naked boy, crawling

He himself was the master of ceremonies, half-naked.

Curtis said: “Just so that you know, the Circus is not for *Obyvák*. I want to put it on in the big hall. Next Friday. I need a spider web, costumes, different lights & posters plastered all over town.”

On Friday it was going to be his birthday.

I said: “What exactly would you be doing during the show?”

“Just wait & see.”

He looked at me. “It’s called: Curtis’ Circus of Sensuality.”

In that moment our ground rules were abolished, Curtis had started to operate on his own. It must have felt to him as if he was running the place. The entire town for that matter.

That was when things started to go awry between him & I.

Artistically, with the Circus, Curtis was at the peak of his Tam Tam fame, commercially he was not.

When the Circus of Sensuality happened for the first time, Tam Tam was not even half-full. People stayed away because it was too expensive. We had to raise the entrance fee to absorb the costs, which were astronomical for our circumstances, a fact Curtis completely ignored. I granted him many

Prognosis

WEEKLY

HOW CHRISTOPH LOST HIS CLUB

The Sudden Death
Of Tam Tam,
Downtown's
Largest Live
Nightclub

Article on Page 5

**GOLFING
FOR
DOLLARS**

**YOU CAN'T
FIGHT CITY
HALL
BUT JOHN BRUCE
SHOEMAKER IS TRYING**

**BOHEMIAN
49ERS
PAN FOR
PRECIOUS METAL**

**DAYS OF WINE AND ROSÉS
TASTING
CZECH REDS
IN MELNIK**

of his expenses, except when he demanded a wild animal to accompany him on stage, a white tiger or something of that nature.

"Not possible, tell him that," I told Curtis' assistant. He & I were not on speaking terms at that time. Instead of a tiger he would use a naked boy, who served just as well.

But aside from a higher entrance fee people were extremely apprehensive. Nobody had seen the Circus before, nobody knew what he was getting for his money: A bunch of nudies, doing what?

Still, there were about 300 hundred spectators present.

When the Circus began, Curtis hung head-down on top of a huge spider web. His task was to somehow crawl down the web & to avoid plunging from a height of 20 metres. This was especially difficult since he decided to welcome the audience speaking into a microphone while climbing down. Problem was, no one understood him, because of his slurred pronunciation, that's how drunk he was.

I was scarred.

Somehow he managed & when he landed on the stage on all four he remained lying down there for most of the evening, except when he went for a costume change. When he came back his body was covered with a see-through nothing made of plastic, his huge penis lying bare on stage. Surrounding him were "his artists" doing their tricks in half-dark.

There circus was raw, it had an archaic feel to it. The music was unbearably loud at times, the overall experience made you want to be in touch with your inner beast. You wanted to fuck or scream or get shit-faced or beat someone, preferably all at the same time.

I was amazed.

Later I heard people had indeed fucked during the show & taken pervitin in huge doses.

Curtis said. "How did you like it?" He knew fully well it was me who he had to convince if he wanted to continue developing the circus – at somebody else's expense.

"It reminded me of French 1870s black & white photographs depicting artists doing something on stage." I said.

Those pictures were often blurred, scratched, dark & sepia. The Circus was just as flawed & imperfect.

"Wow, that's deep. I knew you would like it. I thought it was wild myself."

A few days later Curtis would call whatever he did in Tam Tam no longer work but: Holding court.

Weeks after the circus' initial performance, & about six months after I had opened it, I had to close down Tam Tam. In a newspaper interview I

blamed the city for revoking my licence because of lack of cleanliness. I also said I was not willing to give in to protection money racketeers from former Yugoslavia. That was only half of the truth. The other half was: Not enough people came to the club & supported it. No hard feelings toward Praguers, but they didn't seem to get what we were attempting: To bring back the avantgarde to where it had been almost 100 years ago: the centre of Prague.

In addition, too many employees refilled their empty pockets with Tam Tam money to provide for their choice of drug. I was not blind, I saw what was going on. But I didn't want to install drastic measurements controlling everyone. Instead I talked to people asking them to be honest from now on. My naivety made them steal even more. When a huge number of liquor bottles disappeared I decided to close Tam Tam.

The end of it was the beginning of a wonderful time for Curtis & me. After Curtis had found himself out of a place, I invited him to live with me. He would sleep on my couch, prepare dinner, occasionally fuck on my carpet, but never when I was present. We would comment on each others nightly pick. He generally liked my choice of women; I, on the other hand, often thought his lovers were too young. When I told him that he laughed.

"What can I do? They go crazy about me."

We also had wonderful evenings watching films, inviting friends, talking about art, life – & what was to become of us.

He said: "Don't you think I deserve a little break after all I have done for you?"

We talked about going to Thailand together. We had plans. We wanted to enjoy life.

One day we sat around the dinner table. He was about to serve his favourite food, a *coque au vin*, with a lot of *vin*.

Curtis said: "I met someone. Frank is the owner of a huge Hare-Krishna club in Cologne."

Curtis said we could do the Circus there. Everything was going to be paid for, food, accommodation, transport, prints & advertising, we would be interviewed on the radio, perhaps even on TV, they would certainly all cover it.

"But best yet, we are offered a nice salary. 1000 Deutschmark! Every day! For six days en suite! What do you think?"

It was not the first time that Curtis had received a promising offer.

I began to carve the chicken. He continued to talk about this Frank. Somehow he sounded more real than the other ones. It was on me to decide whether we wanted to do it: meaning, if I wanted to invest in it.



CURTIS JONES

29 .07. 1941 – 11. 06. 2009

I nodded with my head.

Curtis said: "I knew you would do it. I love you."

The next day we started to work on our first international Circus. The artists were euphoric, so was Curtis, inspiring everybody with his positive attitude.

I, on the other hand, had serious considerations. The preparation, new costumes, new equipment, gas, salaries, etc., would cost me a fortune, I realised.

I said: "Are you aware that Cologne is the tough west, nothing in comparison to cute Prague? And that there are different rules in the capitalist world?"

"Darling, don't you worry, I'm from the West. We invented capitalism, remember?"

Laughter.

Eventually we set off for Cologne. Curtis & I went ahead, the artists followed with their equipment in a rental truck.

When we arrived in Cologne, Frank allegedly couldn't remember a thing he had promised. The deal turned out to have been cut on a dark night of heavy drinking & drug use. After serious arguing he at least granted us two days, but there was no hotel room & no food for anyone. The pay was 600DM in total. But worst: there was not any advertising. Not a single poster was hung, no radio or TV interviews. Curtis & I printed flyers ourselves & distributed them in Cologne's shopping malls. The weather was horrible, & no one took us seriously.

At least Curtis was happy. He said, he got a few hand-jobs out of flyering the town.

I dreaded the day of the show.

Sure enough. There were about 20 people present in a club that could hold 1000. Nothing worked. We didn't have enough lights available, there was no technician, no microphone, no music, no dressing rooms.

Curtis distributed the pay among the artists & kept some for himself.

Back in Prague he was deeply sorry for what had happened. He promised to involve me in the deal making from now on. Furthermore, he promised to cut the profits evenly.

If only there were profits.

I trusted that he was sincere & decided to give it another try.

The next gig took us to Amsterdam. Curtis had lived in Amsterdam before & had made his reappearance known. At least Roxy was packed. But again there was no money to be had. On top of it, Curtis was horrible to everybody, arrogant & obnoxious. Apparently he felt this was home & he was under special scrutiny. It was his birthday yet again & the show flopped again. Not so much creatively – Curtis & the artists did what they could

do best. But for the Dutch it was a yarn, a retro show from a little town in Eastern Europe, it seemed. They booed & many left early.

The last time we attempted to put on the Circus was in Berlin, where Curtis said, we absolutely needed to be.

I failed to understand why.

"Darling! Because of the history of Berlin! Don't you see?"

I didn't.

But because I wanted to check out Christo's covering of the Reichstag I agreed to take him there. Curtis was excited about seeing Christo's work as well, but when it was time to visit he was in no condition to be out in the public. A three-day party took its toll. I went anyway.

Later we drove back to Prague.

In Dresden we needed to stop for the night, because Curtis could not continue our ride home. In the bar of a motel we had a couple of drinks. When the bartender wanted to close the place, Curtis became so angry about him throwing us out that he wouldn't stop provoking the guy with sexual innuendos – to an extent where the poor chap pulled a gun to keep Curtis at bay.

Back in Prague we never talked about the Circus again.

After a while Curtis moved out of my place. I went to Lisbon & eventually moved back to Berlin.

Over the next years I saw Curtis on & off again. Once we met in Paris, later I found him a couple of jobs, organising the musical accompaniment for a wedding of a good friend of mine. He was to star in a couple of photo shoots, even a film role. I never knew whether any of these ever came to fruition.

For five or six years I heard nothing from him.

Then one day came a phone call.

"Curtis is dead," said Pavel, Curtis' closest friend through all those years.

He had died at the age of 67.

Rest in peace, my friend. ■



Varhan Orchestrovič Bauer, 2016, by Robert Carrithers.

FILM SCORE

INTERVIEW WITH VARHAN ORCHESTROVIČ BAUER

I first met Varhan at the Karlovy Vary film festival. I went to a special party & saw this man who looked as if he were from the distant past. He wore clothes in the style of at least two centuries ago. His hair, beard, mustache & facial features made him look devilish, an elegant gentleman alchemist transported from the royal courts of Emperor Rudolf II. Varhan is a very talented orchestra conductor. I also found out that he writes film scores. He worked closely with the film director Miloš Forman on the music for his film "Goya's Ghosts". He recorded it in Abbey Road Studios in London, where he conducted the London symphony orchestra. He embodies the soul of the Czech lands, past & present, & I hope that I captured some of this spirit in the following interview that I did with him in Prague in 2016. – Robert Carrithers

RC: You are known as a conductor of orchestras here in Prague & internationally as well. When did you first get interested in being a conductor?

VOB: When I was a child I listened to the music of films on TV & would repeat that, my hearing was very good, my ear was very good. So, I started studying piano & playing organ. When I was twelve I created several groups. I had three groups, rock & roll bands & later I was amazed by jazz & afterwards symphonic music. So, I created my own orchestra & I started to write my own music. I was very fascinated by film music I started to write music for movies,

recorded with an orchestra & played with orchestras at concerts. It took many years before I got to Miloš Forman to do a soundtrack for *Goya's Ghosts* It has been an interesting journey, I have lived in New York, California & Switzerland.

Was that your first soundtrack for a film?

Goya's Ghosts was my first American film. Before that, I did some films in the Czech Republic that are internationally known like *Nic víc než Praha* & many others. The most challenging film soundtrack for me was for a silent film *The Fall of the House*

of *Usher* from Switzerland made in 1928 by Jean Epstein. It was for the live concert-projection of the film in Switzerland & Germany. I had to compose it, produce all of the parts & everything & afterwards, I had to conduct it with a Swiss orchestra called the Basel Sinfonietta. They are an experimental orchestra in Basel. I like them very much. That was four years ago.

Was there a particular type of music that first inspired you?

My father was playing music in the car. We would listen to The Beatles, Tom Jones, *Jesus Christ Superstar* & Ella Fitzgerald. My father is a musician. He's still alive & plays Dixieland music, but at the time he was listening to all of this great music that influenced me, Ray Charles & Aretha Franklin! All of this beautiful music! And because of him I listened to that & found out that I hear very well & I would repeat it on the piano. It was very easy for me from the beginning to repeat something.

Do you read music?

Of course I read notes, but it took time. At the beginning it was based on ear. I was visiting this school for piano. I was cheating. I was listening & remembering what I had to do. I hated reading from the notes. I had to learn it because I had to communicate with the musicians from the orchestra.

You did not start with orchestras though. How did it evolve?

I played with rock bands. I listened to Mike Oldfield. I read on the cover of his record that he recorded almost everything by himself. So, I said to myself, "I will also do this!" But I didn't have the keyboards or access to any keyboards because back in communistic times it was very difficult for a young person to have access to musical instruments. I decided to replace the electronic equipment by live musicians. I created my own orchestra. It was the only way possible. I started from scratch, nothing. I had to write the music for the musicians. I had to learn the notes, to learn in the place when I want something different, to communicate with the musicians, to be a conductor, to show it properly what I want & to squeeze it & get it from them.

You were completely self-taught then?

Yes.

It makes me think of Punk musicians. They didn't know how to play & they just did it.

Yes, I did it in this punk way, but it was very beautiful at the time I started the orchestra. It was after the revolution; everything was easy because people were very hungry for being somewhere unorganized by the communist party. They could be free & they chose what they would like to follow. Many young people decided to play with me then. I learned, they learned some things & some of them have been playing with me for more than 27 years. And they came to me when they were 13 or 14. They became professional musicians & they now are playing in state philharmonics & other big orchestras, but they still play with me because it's like family!

How did it start with writing your own compositions?

It started when I combined classical music with jazz & rock because each of these musical styles has something that I love very much, but it is separate. I started with the music, which was for a moment jazzy, for a moment rock, for a moment classical & I tried to find out the similarities & also the differences about each genre & combine it together. It was very challenging! I loved doing it very much!

Do you have any specific favorite musicians who inspired you?

Frank Zappa, Miles Davis, Leonard Bernstein, Igor Stravinsky, Arthur Honegger a Swiss composer, Shostakovich, all are very dear musicians for me.

What do you think of Czech musicians from the past to now? Do you think there are any musicians that capture the atmosphere of Prague?

Prague was always full of people creating music. It's a very special place. I did a two-hour movie about Prague & there were many different styles, many different genres with big orchestras & small groups, string quartets. There was everything.

Are there locations in Prague that have inspired your music?

Yes, for example, the River Vltava. It is very special. I enjoy being on a boat in the river & to see Prague from that perspective. I composed many compositions based on that feeling. And of course there is a lot of history in Prague & I appreciate that. There is an area in the Czech Republic called the Czech Switzerland. It is in the north & there is a large forest there & there's not many people going in there. It's in its natural existence without being touched by people. It's on the border with Germany. I go there for mushroom picking. Usually there are

ideal conditions there for picking mushrooms. I went there several weeks ago & in one day I got 17 kilos. My wife uses it for the soup or with eggs or she puts it in sauces.

If you had to give someone a tour of Prague musically, how would you do it?

I would take these people to the places where there is the music. Like for example, to Obecní Dům/ the municipal House/, there is a big concert hall in there. And then to Rudolfinum of course, there are also a lot of classical concerts in there & then I would take them to a church with organ music. The evangelic church of Salvator ! There is very nice new organ reconstructed recently, which I have played many times. It is a very beautiful organ in a very beautiful place with a great sound experience. Afterwards, I would take these people to some jazz clubs. Clubs like U Malého Gléna, Agharta, Týnská or some other places that I like such as Kampa or the jazz sessions that are for young people at NAPA in Malá Strana. Then after that, some rock clubs like Wagon or Rock Café or Hard Rock Café. If these people would not be satisfied with all of this, then I would have to take them to some places with dance music or electronic experimental music which are in some small places. For example, Roxy or Blues Sklep has a lot of experimental music going on in there.

What are some of the most well known orchestras that you have been a conductor with?

I was a conductor with the London Symphonic Orchestra in Abbey Roads studio. There was a large studio in there for a two hundred-member orchestra. I conducted a 70-piece orchestra there & a choir, which had 40 people. We recorded the choir separately because of the sound, the film, the mixing, microphones & these sorts of things. It was definitely interesting.

I have heard that you work with a live DJ & an orchestra together in concerts. Could you tell me about that?

We did this special thing for some corporations. They wanted to make an event. So, I had a concert of film music & afterwards there fireworks. And with those fireworks we created a beat track, which was created by DJ Horyna which accompanied my original symphonic track & with the beats this DJ made, he connected it with the explosions of the fireworks. The explosions happened within the rhythms of the beats with the music & together with this audio that was played it was connected with the fireworks & at the same time I was conducting an

orchestra live on the stage. It was four years ago in Grébovka garden in Prague. Everybody was surprised by how it worked. So, I am doing things like this.

For me, soundtracks for films are very important. A good example of that is the soundtrack that Bernard Herrmann did for Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* or any soundtrack he did for Hitchcock were so powerful for setting the mood of the film & the atmosphere. When I remember those films I automatically hear the soundtrack in my head.

Definitely! There was a strong competition between him & Hitchcock. Hitchcock was very dominant & he didn't like that this musician was so powerful. And at the same time Bernard Herrmann was an anti-social person. He was a little bit crazy. He was not a classical Hollywood composer, smooth without conflict. He created lots of conflicts. He was very strong-willed & really a passionate person, of course he wrote such interesting music & he couldn't be different! He had a fight with Hitchcock & they broke up. That was very bad for the composer Bernard Herrmann & for Hitchcock too! And after that... for me, Hitchcock's film "The Birds" was not interesting. It was like sounds almost without music.

But Bernard Herrmann had such a large influence on Hitchcock. Hitchcock was under the dictate of the big studios. He didn't like it so, he created the movie "Psycho" with a low budget & that is why there was only a string orchestra. It was his first independent movie. Then his other movies like that came afterwards, before that the studios were forcing demands on him, telling him that he has to change this or that. He was very strong-willed & he knew what he wanted. With "Psycho" they wouldn't let anybody in the cinema if they came late to the screening.

What other soundtrack music composers have influenced you?

John Williams, Alan Silvestri, Ennio Morricone & of course Danny Elfman! They each have some specific thing that is special & they are symphonically educated. Like John Williams, the horn section is amazing, there are many layers & thoughts & many things are going on.

What films or things that you have done stand out for you personally?

Personally "Rite of Spring" is very interesting for me because rhythmically & harmonically it is unique. It has a perfect build up & then there are the symphonies by Arthur Honegger, the Swiss

composer. He did "Jeanne d'Arch au bucher," which is very big piece for a large orchestra, choir, soloists & even narrators. It was all in French & it is one hour long. It is very heavy & musical.

And what about what you have done personally?

I did a composition for a Swiss film that was based on Edgar Allen Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher." When I did that I stopped everything & I was working on it sixteen hours a day for nine months to create this score. It is sixty-five minutes long. I composed it on the basis of a very difficult cut, all of the movements, all of the themes & put all together to find a difficult cut. It was very challenging. It was very difficult! I almost died, but I survived it & since then I have no problem to create anything. I lost weight. I was fifty kilos. I almost died. Really!

How was it working with Miloš Forman?

It was inspiring in the way that he was always telling his stories & inspiring thoughts. It was from a different point of view than other people. He would inspire other people by telling these funny stories. I spent a lot of time with him in the editing room, where he was working with this English guy, Adam Boome, who was the editor & what they were talking about, for me was a lesson on how to create a film. I spent many hours with them in that editing room. I didn't have to do anything. I was just silently listening. I could have been in New York walking around, but I chose this. For me it was learning something new. To learn how to make films, basic information about what to look for, what they were trying to do with some feeling building up in a certain scene.

This was important for me because I plan to make films. It's very difficult to get into studios which are doing blockbuster films, so as a composer from a post-communist country it was special. I am thinking about making my own independent films with doing the music the way I want without anyone telling me how to do it.

Right now there is a trend to make the music so it's in the background & lost & what you hear instead are the special effects. And it's too much! It's not realistic for me. They're missing the feeling. The feeling is done by music! I would like to be the director of a film & make sure that I am surrounded by a creative crew of people who know how to do it. I am good at leading the ideas & taking them somewhere, which I do with the orchestras as a conductor; being a film director you are actually doing the same. You are conducting these people to somehow tell them what you want & they come up with the solutions of how to do it.

This book is also about New York & I'd like to make a comparison between Prague & New York, since I had spent some time there. Manhattan is very specific. I was in the city that never sleeps. There is a constant feeling of people living. Taxi drivers are always in the streets, always! So you never experience empty streets in Manhattan. It absolutely doesn't exist. Four or five in the morning, it doesn't matter. There is always something happening, which is so different from Prague. Also the energy on the streets is different. In Prague there can be all of these tourists. Prague is overstuffed with tourists. Usually there are not so many people. There is not such a large concentration of people.

I read something about you & the Czech national anthem. What is that all about?

Yes, I recreated the Czech national anthem. I used the old anthem & in that, I put the most famous Czech themes by Dvořák, by Smetana, by Janáček & at the same time you hear the classical song & inside that you hear Dvořák, Smetana & Janáček & they are all together in one song. I am trying to get it to be the official version.

You are also known for wearing unique clothes.

Yes, my wife makes my clothes. It is in the style of medieval & baroque. That was the time of deep thoughts, certainly a time where they were very important, unlike now. What I think & what I do & what is me is all connected together, which is what I like. ■



Jolana Izbicová & Phil Shoenfeld, 2002, by Roman Černý.

As a child I loved dressing up & I loved magical creatures. I liked reading fairytales about mythical beasts, enchanted forests, dwarves with long noses & horses with wings. I grew up under communism when everyone had to be the same – they dressed the same, they thought the same way, they watched the same TV programmes, they did the same sports & hobbies. Fairytales were my escape. They opened a door into my imagination & the beautiful costumes I saw in my fantasies gave me the inspiration to make my own clothes. When I walked through the streets of Prague, I saw people who didn't care about the way they dressed. No colour, no style, no individuality. In fact it could be dangerous to express your individuality, it aroused suspicion & hostility.

My aunt worked for a state firm called Tvorba, which produced clothes for the mass market. There was a Tvorba in every city. The name meant "Creation," which was a joke because there was no creativity involved at all. They just churned out the same ugly clothes, day after day, year after year. It was the same with food. The only supermarket chain that existed was called Jednota, & each shop sold exactly the same products. Private enterprise didn't exist, except on the quiet. The state decided what would be produced. You had no choice, you took what you were given. And if you did try to dress differently, people would give you hostile looks in the street. She's "strange," she isn't "normal," she thinks she's "better" than we are...

So my aunt was stitching clothes for this huge state firm, but she was also doing "black work" at home, making clothes for herself & her friends. During the day she worked at Tvorba, in the evening at home. She was smart & talented & made some beautiful clothes. This was in the mid 1960s when things were loosening up a bit, though she could still have got in trouble with the authorities. Her friends would get hold of magazines smuggled in from the west & ask her to copy the latest designs. It was the same with pop music. Near the border you could pick up Radio Luxembourg, & bands like The Matadors were quick to make records that sounded exactly like The Who or The Rolling Stones. This was a bit before my time, of course. During the '70s things got really heavy & repressive, the period of "Normalization," they called it. But my aunt showed me her photographs & told me her stories, & they inspired me as much as the fairytales.

I grew up in Beroun, an industrial town not far from Prague. Trucks heading eastwards from Germany had special permission to pass through, & there was this weird parking place in the middle of nowhere where the drivers were allowed to stop & rest up. I used to go out there on my bicycle & search through the garbage cans, looking for western

magazines & music cassettes. Once I found a Coca cola bottle & that was a really big deal. I put it on the shelf in my bedroom & worshipped it like a god!

My dad is a ceramic maker, & for a while I was too, though I always preferred fashion. When I was eighteen I started selling the clothes & ceramics I'd made, mostly in galleries. I actually did quite well. I was making more money under communism than I do now! Believe it or not, my first dress was made out of a Russian flag. I couldn't find any material I liked, so I stole this big red flag. If you want to do something badly enough, you'll find a way to make it work, even if you have to steal. Better an eye-catching dress than a symbol of military occupation...

Finally I went to school to learn the techniques of sewing. It was more like an apprenticeship than a course in design, & was quite horrible because we had to stitch uniforms for metro workers & prison guards! I was actually very lucky, because one of my teachers thought I had talent & took me under her wing. She recommended me to the Eve Salon in Prague, founded during the First Republic & famous for its elite clientele. It was also associated with Barrandov film studios, & designed costumes for many well known Czech films. I was 18 years old when I started there, & it was one of the happiest times in my life.

After I moved to Prague I started to meet people & make contacts. For me, 1984 was a magical year. I used to see these young punks hanging out by the water fountain in front of Michalska & I made friends with a few of them. They dressed differently to everyone else, & had problems with the police, purely for that reason. One week you'd see them, the next they'd have disappeared. But for me they were a sign that things were changing. They listened to tapes of The Sex Pistols & The Clash & they didn't give a shit about Communism.

Somehow they reminded me of the creatures in my childhood fairytales. They lived in the tunnels & catacombs that run beneath the city, & were more



Jolana Izbická at Klub NASA, 1999 (above & opposite), by Lenka Hatašová for *Hustler*.

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like reptiles than humans. I was really fascinated by their appearance & went home & drew them. I was very naïve & I took these drawings to the fashion school to show to my art teacher. She was very conservative & of course it led to conflict. She didn't approve of these "degenerates" at all.

I love people who have their own style & identity, especially when it is connected with culture, literature & music. I have never been part of any tribe or clique, but I respect people who know what they are. Goths, punks, rockabillys, Rastas – I just love these creatures.

Things started changing for me very quickly after 1989. I was there at the big demonstration on November 17 when the police started beating the students. They threw a bunch of us into the back of a van & left us in a forest outside Prague. It was really scary, we didn't know if they would beat us up or put us in prison. I was still going to art school at the time. I made a poster with a picture of a broken lock & chains on it & it was plastered all over Prague. I was very proud of it! I loved that period after November 17 when anything seemed possible. I have so many friends from that time, & even though some of them have lost their way, what

happened in 1989 still binds us together.

Later I worked part-time in art galleries & made my own clothes & accessories, which I sold at the Kotva department store. I was also making miniature ceramics that I sold to tourists on the Charles Bridge. I'm actually in the *Guinness Book of Records* for making the smallest pot in the world. It's a milk jug & stands just 2.7 mm high. I made it on the wheel using a needle, & it's hand-painted & glazed.

I met an English musician called Phil Shoenfelt at the Shot-Out Eye in Žižkov, & that changed my life. I visited him in London & he took me to the Glastonbury Festival, which was where I first encountered the rave scene. There was this enormous tent with DJs & a couple of thousand teenagers dancing to Acid House & Techno. I'd never seen anything like it before, it was amazing!

London had an incredible fashion scene. So colourful, so exciting, so free! I walked around the streets for days, just taking everything in, checking out the styles that people were wearing. I felt like the history of fashion had been written there. I went to an exhibition of street style & cyber punk, & suddenly I felt like I understood the connections between all the various sub-cultures – Punks, Goths,



Skinheads, Rastafarians, Rockabilly kids. It was like I was seeing the creatures from my childhood dreams again, living & walking in the streets of London.

The street is my biggest inspiration for fashion. I could never deal with haute couture fashion, although I admire top fashion designers for their craftsmanship & ideas – people like Jean-Paul Gaultier for example. But Vivienne Westwood is my greatest inspiration, especially her provocative designs during the punk era. I wanted to do something outrageous myself, I was a bit bored with ceramics & art. I wanted to bring the energy & creativity of London street style to Prague.

So with this inspiration I started my shop in Prague, which I called “Faux Pas.” I chose this name because I feel that by making “mistakes” & not giving a damn, you can come up with something original. I made a dress for myself where the underwear was visible, for example. And these conservative Czechs would come up to me in the street & say, “Young lady, your underwear is showing. Please do something about it!”

I enjoy this kind of provocation. I feel that every faux pas I ever made actually revealed the true me. Faux Pas was my fashion label & faux pas was a

code I lived my life by. To be commercial you have to be “correct,” or at least you do in this country. But when a faux pas happens it’s unique & original & it happens only once.

I started Faux Pas in 1996. It became a meeting place & a hang-out for all kinds of strange & bizarre people, characters who didn’t fit in anywhere else. The important thing was that they all had a dream of something they wanted to be. I found that I could help them build new identities by designing clothes that allowed them to express their inner selves. I made corsets for Goths, I made jackets for punks, I made woolly hats for Rasta, & PVC clothing for people who went to techno clubs & fetish parties. Something for everyone, as long as it wasn’t boring & mainstream. Sometimes I felt like a doctor curing souls, I could help people find out who they really were

I started to do fashion shows around then too. My first show was at The Roxy in 1996 with a band from London called The Australian Stooges. The show was a combination of punk music & fashion, & featured my first collection of PVC & vinyl clothes.

Street style & music were my main inspirations. I hoped that these shows would push people to discover their own individuality. I did a fashion show

for the first Gay Pride event in Karlovy Vary, for example. I wanted to use my fashion as a wake-up call, to jolt people out of their lethargy & to break taboos. It was the main reason I was doing it, like a cure for the illness of society.

For a while I was categorized as an S&M designer, simply because of the latex dresses & PVC pants I made. But I hate this type of categorization, I don't want to be put in a box. S&M is just one style among many – you can dress that way one day, & the next you might feel like adopting a completely different identity. Some people have a need to put things in categories, they don't feel comfortable with fluid situations. I enjoyed playing with fashion & I always wanted to give people different possibilities.

As for the Faux Pas shop, I was always changing the décor & the style. Fashion should be like a river, always changing, always moving, I hate anything that is static & conservative. When something becomes too categorized I lose interest.

For the last fifteen years I've been working as a costume designer in the theatre. I've done a lot of plays, in regional theatres as well as at the National Theatre here in Prague. I love working in the theatre – it gives me another outlet for my creativity & I enjoy working with these dedicated actors, who can change their identities at the drop of a hat. But now

I feel the need to get back into fashion, & recently I've started designing again.

The fashion scene is very competitive now – there are over 150 new young designers in Prague, who have studied at academies both here & abroad. Sometimes I miss the craziness of the old days at the Roxy & Radost FX, the all-night parties & the wild young girls & boys who would do anything for a laugh. Everything is calculated these days, sponsors are much more careful about how they spend their money. They want to play things safe, they don't want anything subversive or dangerous that might damage their brand. But even so, I enjoy being connected with fashion again. I love interacting with people, & I'd love to put on a really wild show like those that Faux Pas did in the old days.

Vivienne Westwood went from punk fashion to high fashion, but she did it in her own way, & she said what she wanted to say. Maybe I never did, & maybe it's time for me to do that now. Fashion can be very powerful, even political, you can use it like a gun. Most people don't know that Hugo Boss designed the SS uniform for the Nazis, for example. We can gain power through the clothes we wear, they are like a second skin. They allow us to be whatever we want to be, & that is the essence of freedom. ■



Jolana Izbická, Phil Shoenfelt & Bruno Adams, Malostranská Beseda, Prague, 2000, unknown photographer.



Hank Mancini, 2015, by Robert Carrithers.

PRAGUE ROOTS
ŠIMON ŠAFRÁNEK

towards the beginning of the 2000s the only big adventure on my horizon was to get the hell out of the city. prague was suffocating me with all its centuries of cultural sediment. it seemed like everyone was tiptoeing around lest the plaster peel off the façades. clueless about what we were doing my girlfriend & i moved to berlin. from a 2x3m room we gazed out onto a concrete yard, the sun visible only in the reflections in other people's windows, but the air at least was fresh & we felt duly inspired.

i had no idea then i wasn't going to make it in berlin, unlike the girl i loved, who made it thru a university diploma.

but if before i used to look forward & away from prague, now i kept unwittingly gazing back, unable to cut the umbilical noose of that hundred-spired mother, where my cousin sonja had meanwhile started singing with the band moimir papalescu & the nihilists. their sound veered between retropop & arcane underground.

spring came & the nihilists needed to shoot a clip. sonja knew i was interested in film, having edited

my very first attempts in the late '90s on her ancient pc. their budget was tighter than a shoestring, but i was glad to help out & shoot something. i talked the taciturn minna from finland & honza foukal – now already a feature-film director – into holding the camera, my sister also lent a hand, as well as a bunch of other people. friends of the band, closed company.

the video was supposed to show the band playing at an ultra decadent party where all the guests are passed out, & sonja's voice wakes them up only to put them back to sleep again at the end. a dreamy decadence we wanted to create in a log cabin in krkonoše, the highest mountains in the czech borderland. my sister bought a load of melons & rustled up some crayfish, we threw everything into our cars & set out on a friday afternoon for krkonoše. one of the "guests" was andy camm, the owner of the best bar in prague at the time, bar zero, & adam holy, an outstanding photographer. everyone involved were friends of the band & beautiful individuals too. closed company.

we wanted to shoot the clip in the cabin's main

living-room, we couldn't have fit anywhere else anyway. we shifted out all the tables & armchairs & brought in bedframes on which the band was meant to stand, which was all we could manage with the low ceiling. we threw sheets of black plastic over the windows to block out the sun. rokytnice nad jizerou is a small village & the cabin stood on a backstreet, with only the odd motorbike passing by. our arrival was therefore bound to attract some attention from the neighbours: what're you folks up to?

we're shooting porn! a band member joked, come have a look!

the natives hightailed it.

mind if i put these here? the drummer asks me, putting his pads down in front of sonja's mic stand. i give him a blank stare & he shrugs: so i'd like to be seen, too, since i've come such a long way.

i send him & his gear to the back, when moimir the frontman whispers in my ear: hey, do me a favour & don't shoot the drummer at all. don't let him notice, but don't shoot him.

focus on his shadow on the wall, i advise minna.

it was towards midnight when things started going pear-shaped. first the crayfish. under the hot gel lights they'd began to go off. the smell had flies crawling all over them, making those supplicating fly gestures with their front legs like they were begging to feature in the clip. times like these a bit of perfume spray comes in handy, though i had to admire the band for pretending they didn't notice the stink.

barely have we got the crayfish under control when the drummer starts getting the shits with one of the dancing "guests." they start trading insults & the pretty soon there's drumsticks flying. moimir tells the drummer to can it, so next thing the drummer's diving fists-first at *him*. very quickly andy, two metres tall in a snow-white tuxedo, steps in & pulls them apart with the air of an extremely elegant bouncer. but ultimately even andy was unable to save the day. it was too late, it was all over.

somebody took moimir, with his head bleeding, to the nearest hospital, while the "guests" & crew packed themselves into their cars in a hurry & headed back to prague. it was midnight & there we were in an old cabin with a crate of rotten seafood & the smell of defeat all around us. all that was left of the band were sonja & hank. wordlessly we carted out the bedframes & went to bed. the next day we vented our frustration on the melons. we kicked them remorselessly. melon juice squirted all over the camera lens. eventually all that overripe squelching & splattering made the whole thing seem like a comedy. still, i knew we'd only shot the first half of the clip, the rest was in the hands of the gods. none of those beautiful individuals was coming back & who knew if the nihilists hadn't actually just broken

up. that'd would've fit their name at least.

i decided to go back to friedrichshain, to my new apartment, where by now i'd set up an office with no windows at all. i watched what we'd shot. i fidgeted uneasily. then i cursed myself very loudly, as i often do after a shoot. it happens almost without fail that all my meticulous preparations somehow get lost in the passion of the moment once i'm on location. sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. but here i was now, expected to make a whole video clip out of nothing but scraps. at least i wasn't the only one interested in seeing the thing through, the nihilists had replaced their drummer & were carrying on, & since a shadow on the wall has no face it ultimately wouldn't be a problem.

it was the first clip i ever shot, first of many, but the working method remained similar. something always goes wrong, but it all works out in the end because it has to. & because chaos is somehow innate to us praguers. first you're convinced you've struck gold, then halfway through it all turns to shoe polish. the prague law.

the more time i spent in berlin the more i felt myself being trapped inside a too-comfortable bubble. i started thinking about these roots of mine, this half-arsed nature of the whole "sky's the limit" thing, & realising my roots were still firmly planted among those pinewoods on the ridge in the czech anthem.

in prague everyone works 24/7 & all they do is save money. save money for the day they'll have their big adventure, finally get away from the city, preferably on a weekend, maybe in the mountains or, if it's summer, by the sea, or else in the woods mushroom-picking, or in their cottage garden, like happy little hobbits. we inherit this tradition of abandoning the city only to return to it with the diligence of undertakers. but even a travelling funeral service needs music...

there have been bands that stuck to prague despite all this, the nihilists, sunshine, prostitutes & a few others, & in the end i too have stuck to prague, tooth & nail, having lost everything in berlin.

so we shot a tonne of clips for those bands, on minimum budgets but with maximum effort, which usually turned into self-parody halfway. & i speak in the plural because even though the crazy ideas often came from me & i was the director & editor, i was never alone in it. film & video are teamwork. like everything fun in life.

then there were all the sleepless night in the cutting room, deliberating over how to touch up this or that, how to talk ourselves out of throwing in the towel & manage to salvage something at least workable. & most of the time it did work. thanks to some magic ability to improvise, to conjure life out of mud. at least in prague, which we diligently

escaped on weekends like all good citizens, except in our case with a camera & boombox. we occupied an old soviet army base not far from town, where we enacted a kind of post-apocalypse, burning car & tractor tyres, while nearby on an asphalt strip the locals revved their souped-up cars. watched over by abandoned prefabs with smashed-in windows & walls covered in cyrillic, we constructed a gigantic scarecrow & just as an airsoft brigade was passing by we set it alight.

hey what if i catch fire? complained adrian, the prostitutes' singer, while i was shouting at him to get closer to it...

more clips for the nihilists, who finally broke up for real on the day i finished editing their last video. it was the craziest studio shoot, against an eye-wateringly intense green screen, & i kept running around trying to convince the band to make fun of themselves, which every band loves, which everyone loves after all.

& also a video for sunshine, which we agreed upon when attempting, after a concert in bratislava, to drink the local brandy made out of beetroot. on the outskirts of prague, influenced by gavras' subversive *stress for justice*, i had a gang of kids terrorise the city & its superheroes, who happened to be darth vader from *star wars* & superman & also the czech tv bedtime story fairy. she gets set on fire in a tunnel. i always dug fire. fire & heights, though anything over 2m gives me vertigo. we had one day for the whole shoot, running around with the young tereza nvotová, today a successful director in her own right, behind the camera, then in the cutting room i got into an argument with the band about what the message was we were trying to get across in the video & it was so bad we only made up a few years later. whenever i'm shoot a video, there are two desires that compete within me: to honour the band & to trample it underfoot. to destroy & reconstruct. sometimes good things come of it, but perhaps it's a curse too...

it was around then that pavel kučera & i started performing as the fakes. we were standing at the bar in acropolis, complaining about the sort of music we were listening to; sterile, old, no electro, no fun. so we started playing the kind of stuff we liked & the older djs were dissing us for playing from cds not from vinyl & barmen were hassling us about sound meters, but we got into the groove at andy's zero bar, who was still going out with our mutual friend veronika who we were all in love with of course, & after that we continued at one of prague's oldest clubs chapeau rouge, where we had a regular monthly gig called clash. for a couple of years we surfed the wave of electro, dubstep, trap, we developed our fan base & invited over djs from abroad, including my favourites pelussje, a guy &

a girl who came to play twice & were awesome on both occasions, with mexican free-style fighting masks on their faces, people were over the moon. the second time they were over i dragged them to the club early & spent two hours running around them with a camera & stroboscope, because i'd always wanted to make a video with the warning notice at the beginning: "may cause epileptic fits," & the result was a clip where the editing changed with every two frames. & when i drove them to the airport the next day, the hungry eye kept blinking at me from the dashboard the whole way, & at every petrol station i kept telling myself it's okay, it's okay, i dropped them off at departures but failed to restart the engine, my volvo stalled right in front of the main entrance. so all the way down to the taxi stand & off to a gas station, then back, marching the length of the departures hall carting a red can full of petrol inside a billa shopping bag, & no-one bothered me once even while i was filling the tank using a funnel made from the top half of a plastic bottle. that was already prague 2012. or thereabouts.

that whole era... how did it end? by the gas running out in my tank? what really marked it was probably the greatest video we ever shot, when for once we landed a big money budget & for two days & nights we occupied the roof of the national museum, which had once been the socialist parliament, & with tata bojs frontman milan cajs we built a mock-up space rocket. it was the first czech 3d video-clip. those were the days! sunrise over prague. we felt like men on the moon walking towards an undiscovered horizon, hungry for what this newest gimmick would reveal. we riffed on the zero-gravity of slow motion, stuffed animals & beautiful girls. just for the feeling of riding through deep space, for a feeling that turned out a dead end, the expensive technology notwithstanding.

& perhaps that's how it was with prague as well. the city wasn't to blame, of course. but somewhere around the end of the decade it was time to move on from this eternal, though maybe not eternalised enough, castle backdrop against which one inevitably lives as if under a kind of dysfunctional lock & key. those mind-forged manacles, that constant denial of possibility, reconciled to the fact that the prague we've dreamt of will never come, as if we've turned from heroic erect penises into flaccid boyish dinguses once more, besprinkled by the holy water of public disinterest. we've become again a periphery without as much as a clouded peripheral vision to entertain us, knowing that at best it'll all blow over. ■



"Prague Dark Portrait," 2013, by Robert Carrithers.

LEONATO: Well, then, go you into hell?

BEATRICE: No, but to the gate; & there will the devil meet me, like an old cuckold, with horns on his head, & say "Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven; here's no place for you maids..."

– W. Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*

Rape. Murder. It's just a shot away... It's just a kiss away.
– The Rolling Stones, "Gimme Shelter"

PRAGUE – A young poet introduced herself to me at a literary event in Prague. She said she'd enjoyed the stories I'd read – but then proceeded to scold me over my repeated use of the word "rape."

I laughed. "What? Why? Is there something wrong with it? Did I go too far?"

She hemmed & hawed for minute... before telling me it was simply "troubling" that I had used the word so frequently. She seemed to be implying that by using the word, I was somehow endorsing the activity or supporting its normalization. One shouldn't mention things like "rape," she seemed to be saying, for it might be seen as condoning it & thereby encouraging people to commit it.

"Well, I am just a reporter," I said. "I am merely trying to relate a true vision of the world in which we live. That's the job description. Yes, I am a truth-teller..."

In the end, we had a warm chuckle & offered assurances to each other that, no doubt, we were both sophisticated members of the *lumpen-literati* in good standing. And I complimented her on the poem she had read, which had been a rambling affair about seemingly consensual vampiric love, climaxing with a doomed couple fornicating themselves to oblivion... yes, more or less a standard tale of our times, but "troubling" nonetheless, I thought, though perhaps not in the way she had imagined.

Looking back upon my reading, it seemed I had used the word "rape" five times. The first time was as a verb – to describe the political, economic, pharmacological & cultural assaults that corporations, Luciferians, intelligence agencies & other psychopathic mind-controllers regularly inflict on ordinary members of society (resulting in our increasingly confused & desensitized, even emotionally & intellectually deadened, populations). The second & third times were as a noun – to point out that the physical or psychical rape of an individual seems to be one of the things people seem enjoy watching & reading about most (along with murder, of course). The remainder of the mentions were in connection with a description of the 1980 Ruggero Deodato movie *Cannibal Holocaust*, in which Amazonian natives & a gang of

lying American documentary filmmakers take turns raping each other's women in death match in the Amazon "green inferno" (a contest that was won, it should be said, by the natives, who victoriously also gobble down the callow Americans).

Most people would probably deny that much of how we live revolves around rape & murder. It's not *positive* to say such a thing, after all. It's *troubling*. It casts humans in a *bad light*. Only weirdoes & creeps would say such a thing – at least in public, right? And make no mistake: Denial of the obvious is an intrinsic human trait.

But it can, & must, be said: Rape & murder constitute the major *facts* of our civilization. They're right up there with breathing, eating & sleeping. Rape & murder win out every time over kindness, generosity & forgiveness. You have only to *look* around you to see that this is true. You have only to *recognize* what bloody history & personal experience & current-day reports tell us: that the rapists & murderers are all around, in the streets & in the forests & in the citadels of government & corporate power. You have only to *observe* what sits before you in plain sight.

From what sort of person did our tribal chiefs & royalty arise? Was it ever the sweetest & gentlest exemplars of the community who led the tribe to victory? Has the caring individual who despairs over

the lack of social & economic justice ever successfully exercised life-&-death power over slaves, armies & vast swathes of territory? No, never. It's always been the cruel & cunning psychopath who wasn't the least bit skittish about littering the countryside with the bones of his enemies. It's the ruthless tyrant who builds his castle from the skulls of murdered babies, who drinks the blood of virgins drawn & quartered during orgies of animalistic pillage. It has always been the rapist & murderer who leads by example, who encourages his minions to do the same on his behalf, & who uses such *facts* to concoct a curtain of nightmares & taboos that persuade others to never challenge his rule.

It continues in the here & now. Look at the backgrounds of the folks who lead nations to war. Look at the folks who exercise monopolistic power. Look at the folks who rule the roost. Look at the politicians & celebrities linked to the global pedophilia & child-trafficking networks. Look at the folks who get assassinated.

This is how order & the profit system is maintained – our current technique of human development, if you will. Such is the ferocious & bestial nature of the real world that so many find “troubling” & don't wish to hear about – us ordinary, mostly decent people who struggle to remain sane in a system designed to enslave, stupefy & neuter us.

Rape & murder are apparently ineradicable. Alleged attempts to protect ourselves from these scourges have led to the formation of our police & propaganda states (which, yes, will inevitably backfire & are yet another form of rape). Alleged attempts to protect ourselves from these scourges have served as the launching points for our religions, wars & politics. Our books, movies, graphic arts, songs & cultural productions of every stripe – most of them, in some way, obtain their essential raw material & energy from the *facts* of murder & rape. Without these scourges, how would we spend our time?

Robert Carrithers' *Prague Dark Portrait* series is a vivid & suggestive feast that, at least to my mind, succeeds in conjuring the themes of rape & murder – & revenge – in a single terrifying & gorgeous package.

The clothing of the figure has been torn open & mysterious wounds are visible on her midsection. Yet she stands defiant, her legs shrouded in white smoke... as if having just erupted with a crack of thunder from another dimension to wreak havoc on this weary platform. What is she? A Satanic avenger? A murderous mutant? The location – in some hidden zone amidst hectares of railway cargo containers – points to bloodcurdling activities beyond the reach of prying eyes.

The curled horns & bared female breasts obviously invoke the occult deity Baphomet. The

Baphomet image, which supposedly dates to the Inquisition & persecution of the Knights Templar in the 12th century, is especially ubiquitous these days, often used to signify associations with Satanism, witchcraft & ritual magic. (In the United States, Satanists in 2015 even came close to succeeding in a campaign to place a nine-foot bronze Baphomet statue across from a marble slab of the Ten Commandments on the grounds of the Oklahoma State Capitol. The Oklahoma Supreme Court wormed its way out of the issue by banning religious displays at the capitol & ordering the removal of the Ten Commandments slab.)

But instead of Baphomet's goat face (with a pentagram on the forehead), the figure in the Carrithers photograph has a face of mirrored tiles. The face is simultaneously suggestive of the medievalism, a Viking war mask or some kind of sado-masochism bondage mask. But none of these are quite right. To my mind, what we have here suggests a robot – or, more specifically, a killing machine like the ones found in the *Terminator* movies. It is the face of the unfeeling, unstoppable, single-minded exterminator that will annihilate anything & everything blocking its path to domination.

The damaged yet savagely vengeful image of the *Dark Portrait* figure also, to my mind, captures something about the case of Jaroslava Fabiánová – the bleach-blond party girl whose *noms de guerre* include “Devil with an Angel's Face,” “The Killer Siren,” & my personal favorite, “The Pub Harpy.”

News reports uniformly state that Fabiánová², born in 1965 or 1966, was raped repeatedly as a girl. Who, specifically, did the raping is never spelled out. The reports say her parents separated after a series of ugly scenes witnessed by Fabiánová & her siblings, & Jaroslava was soon on the streets of the Northern Bohemian town of Děčín. She became the white girl who hangs out with the gypsy kids, once in a while committing a bit of petty crime & prostitution.

According to reports, there was an old pervert named Vladimir Z. who used to invite the young gypsy girls & boys over for sex games in exchange for money. The precise details, again, are not completely clear. But in October 1981, young Jaroslava was definitely hanging out in the abode of the 78-year-old Vladimir Z. Some reports say she was not impressed by the pederast's financial offer.

Vladimir Z was bashed in the head with a hammer. He was also stabbed twenty times, mostly in the face.

But Jaroslava was sloppy. The teenager left fingerprints all over the house as she searched for things to steal. She was captured & sentenced to seven years in prison. Because of her youth, she

served only 4.5 years. She was back on the streets.

Fabiánová was soon in Prague. Reports say she lived with a lesbian lover named Mary, who was allegedly a fellow prostitute-thief. It is said Jaroslava was a regular at the U Zpěváčků pub, a notorious drug & crime hotspot that was in its prime around the time of the fall of the communist regime & into the 1990s. Jaroslava was suspected of drugging "Bob," an American, & relieving him of cash & electronic gear worth more than \$10,000. "The Pub Harpy" was also suspected of drugging two Hungarians & relieving them of some 150,000 crowns.

Fabiánová also allegedly drugged a man who was in his 60s & not in the best health. "Mr Tibor" died as a result, & in 1996 Jaroslava was sentenced to ten years in prison. She was released after only seven years, however, in September 2001. The authorities, apparently wishing to prevent bad publicity that could impact Prague's booming tourist business, banned her from the capital city. But as there was no mechanism to enforce the ban, Jaroslava soon returned.

She was reportedly spending time loitering around the Florenc bus station in May 2003 when she bumped into "Augustín K." He's described as a former circus performer who was in his 80s. Augustín K supposedly invited Jaroslava for a beer, & afterward proposed that she come up to his flat to continue the meet-&-greet. Augustín K was found dead days later. He had been struck at least six times with a meat cleaver. A variety of items were missing from his apartment, including three paintings that had been snipped from their frames. Fabiánová was linked to the case when she was identified as trying to sell the pictures to art dealers.

Police say investigators were homing in on the blond hottie's trail, but "The Killer Siren" struck again before she could be corralled. In August 2003, Richard Sýkora, a 31-year-old who had a job & whose girlfriend was staying at a cottage in the countryside, reportedly bumped into Jaroslava in Prague. The precise details of their relationship are not known, but they reportedly were seen leaving a restaurant together.

Richard was found dead with 38 stab wounds in a flat on Průběžná Street. Six thousand crowns & electronic gear were missing from the apartment. Again, Jaroslava was sloppy – police found her fingerprints in the flat. When she was finally arrested, investigators reportedly found bits of Richard's skin under her fingernails.

In court, Fabiánová denied ever killing anyone. She admitted to knowing & even robbing some of the victims, but said "someone else" must have come in after she'd left & committed the murders. In total, Jaroslava was convicted of the murders of four

men – & she ended up earning an extra moniker, as "the Czech Eileen Wuornos," in honor of America's most famous female prostitute serial killer who was put to death by lethal injection for the murders of seven men in Florida in 1989-1990.

In 2005, Jaroslava Fabiánová became the third woman from the Czech Republic to be sentenced to life in prison (the first was an elderly woman who allegedly engaged in a conspiracy to murder her husband; the second was Dana Stodolová, who was convicted, along with her third husband, of murdering eight elderly people & stealing their valuables in a rampage from 2001 to 2003. Stodolová, who says she was raped while working as a stripper in Canada, has also denied killing anyone, saying all the murders were committed by her husband without her knowledge or involvement. The couple divorced in prison.).

I found myself fascinated by the fact that Fabiánová's last alleged victim was murdered in a flat on Průběžná Street in Prague 10. I am often in that area, not far from the Strašnická metro station, to play basketball & drink beer in the park on summer days.

Police say they're still trying to find out who dumped a newborn in a garbage bin in the Průběžná corridor in August 2014. The infant's body was found in a plastic bag. Police say the bag contained DNA from a female relative of the victim, but they have found no matches in their searches of DNA databases. The bag that held the body was from Dynamite, a Canada-based clothing store. Police say there are Dynamite outlets in Canada, the USA, Jordan, Saudi Arabia & Kuwait, but none in the Czech Republic or elsewhere in Europe.

There's no answer. There's no happy ending. Nothing can reassure. We revere & kowtow to the same powers that rape & murder us on a daily basis. The confusion & denial shall endure. It is indeed "troubling." The rapists & murders are in the streets. They are all around. ■



510 The homely street of corner of Rumunská & Legerova, standing there, when it first came to me: there's an Egyptian/Aztec/New Orleans/Prague mummy, & it's talking, & it's not a white-shrouded fiend but black-wrapped.¹ Typical raspy, larynx looping, hissing howling voice. It's alive, I'm dead; it exists, not me.

Soon after, the 10-year-old child calling himself Netopýr (Czech for Vampire Bat) stood with me in a post-Communist apartment living room along with a 17-year-old named Fatamorgana² & the Netopýr kid said "Hey, they have the finger." Audience wonders what kind of kid, black wavy hair & all, calls himself Vampire Bat, & why is he telling me about a severed finger. Then Fatamorgana, Moravian girl-woman man-killer, interprets: He's talking about the mummified finger of that "Alvis." Something like "Alveess."

¹ The music group BLACK MUMMY (later BLAQ MUMMY) was established circa 1998.

² Netopýr would grow up to be the bass player & Fatamorgana a singer/songwriter for BLAQ MUMMY.

Alvis the Teutonic dwarf loner & loser as ordained by arbitrary Valhallan edict?³ Reader rightly ponders why his finger's in Prague & why is a child telling me all about it?

Fatamorgana gathered up her laser beam eyes & Moravian diction, corrected: Not Thor-cursed Alvis, but *Elvis*.

That thing where you hear someone say your name in a crowd, but worse. How could Vampire Batboy know. About me & Elvis. The connection.

Nellis, an Air Force military base in Las Vegas, Nevada associated with the Combined Air & Space Operations Center, responsible for undisclosed experiments in unconventional, circular flying craft, associated with the nuclear bomb testing that sprayed cancer-causing radiation over the gambling addicts & Mafioso in the 1950s & '60s⁴ – this is where I was born.⁵ One day, feeling deserted when the familial station wagon failed to arrive at the Catholic primary school I attended, at the age of seven I did what I felt any responsible first grader would do & decided to walk home, under the uniformly oppressive desert sun, 17 miles down West Desert Inn Road, a long straight stretch filled with all the lost souls, ditched ex-wives, vaguely reptilian cowboys & other regular folk you'd expect in Las Vegas in 1969.

My mother sat at home, crying, praying to Mary the Mother of God as the sun rolled down to the edge of the sky like a roulette ball settling into its place in the wheel, thinking a Charles Manson had kidnapped her little boy, number nine of her ten children, Manson was gorging on my flesh, eyeballs bulging in sadistic whoopee.⁶ But no, in my St Anne's uniform & military hair cut, I was just treading dutiful steps down that boulevard, not yet old enough to have dead dreams. My older brothers & sisters set out in the family car looking for me.

Place: used car lot, Titan Motors. How to say it but to get it over with? No ordainment: A larger-than-life figure was there buying some long shiny

³ Alvis went to Asgard to claim the bride of the god. He was turned to stone as a result of talking too much & losing track of the sunrise; sunbeams turn dwarves to hard rock.

⁴ Atomic Liquors, a Las Vegas bar where the likes of Frank Sinatra & Sammy Davis, Jr. used to sip rooftop cocktails & admire the top of mushroom clouds in the distance, still exists to this day. Roof access is limited, however.

⁵ Nellis AFB covers over 5000 square miles (13,000 square kilometers), mostly restricted access.

⁶ The infamous mass murderer was temporarily transferred from prison to Mercy Hospital in beautiful downtown Bakersfield, California during the creation of this text in January, 2017.

car, & it was Elvis Presley. I went over to his white-costumed self & tried to see what the whole curious scene was about, or as I would learn to say later, what the hell was going on. Then Elvis saw me & said, "What's this kid doing here? Go on, get a move on, young man." And he pointed at me. With, of course, his *finger*.

And now living in Prague in 1996 & a child named Vampire Bat felt it was his appointed duty to inform me the amputated finger of Elvis was somewhere stored, or on display, or traded back & forth like so much bartered contraband within the confines of the historic, drenched, poor little Praha.

"Poetry is a collaboration between the demon who possesses the poet & the intelligence that studies it," – Andrei Codrescu.⁷

Pacify your demon, pacify your poetry. Enrage the demon, inflame the poetry. If there's a city more suited to getting irretrievably lost, getting inspirationally drunk, for vomiting bile on a cobblestone street... Yes puke mounds seemed to be everywhere in Prague at that time.⁸ During our finger quest, Fatamorgana, Netopýr & I had to make entire detours to avoid piles of half-digested chunks crowding out the central path of several narrow alleys, more than one passageway cum vomitorium. Another u-turn caused by a glaring skinhead, standing in the middle of the street, whose personal neo-Nazi-powered radar went off the scale at the sight of Netopýr. Late, misty & chilly, the three of us arrived at the first overblown sepulcher, the Church of the Holy Trinity on Spálená boulevard.⁹

The juxtaposition of incongruences is congruent to Prague. A corner inner vestibule of the historic gilded church had been turned over to an exhibit of the work of sculptor František Bílek, including a large mottled statue of a naked man.¹⁰ We were greeted by an elderly nun with the statue's penis above & behind her. This did not even seem strange. She brought us over to the relic—a mummy case, set into an elaborate reliquary along the western wall of the cathedral, a glass mini-coffin like a terrarium with a reclining skeleton inside, dressed in a red velvet robe, skull-head resting on an embroidered pillow, with the showing bones of the head & hands carefully wrapped in thin lace, a certain Saint Prosper according to the plaque above.¹¹

⁷ *Bibliodeath: My Archives (With Life in Footnotes)*, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-9838683-3-0

⁸ "The Czech people are really great, but I don't understand why they drink so much." Frank Zappa, Prague, 1991, as quoted by Václav Havel.

⁹ 50.079447, 14.419781. Features a Cubist enclosure around a statue of St Nepomuk in front.

¹⁰ Bílek (1872-1941) often dealt with religious themes in his work.

¹¹ Unclear whether this mummy was indeed a St Prosper or how the corpse ended up in Prague if so.

"There it is," said young Netopýr.

"That's not Elvis. Too small, not enough Memphis."

"Of course not," said Fatamorgana. "But there is the finger."

Along the edge of the case, near the knee of the bones of St Prosper, lay a little object, possibly also wrapped in lace, possibly just... decaying & ancient. Finger-sized.

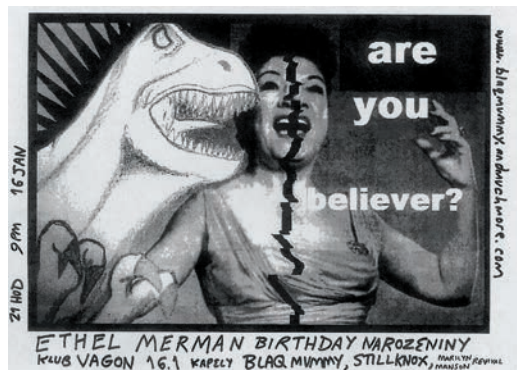
While Fatamorgana distracted the elderly nun with questions of faith I climbed up the wooden steps of the reliquary &, managing to get one hand inside the mummy case, I reached down & grabbed the prized object, placing it in the side pocket of my vest.

I came down the steps & the three of us made eye contact as the nun suddenly started to frown with her whole face. We panicked & ran out of the church down the street, the high-pitched calls of Sister Whoever trailing behind us out the door, turning left & left again until we were in the out-of-the-way spot behind the church known for nocturnal pissing & stealthy drug deals. Netopýr & Fatamorgana gathered around to spy the scary ill-gotten gain in the palm of my hand. They leaned in & peered intently as I unwrapped the tiny package, unveiling a desiccated, light-pink head of a rose flower that fell apart into tiny pieces under the intense vision beams of our eyeballs.

We were literally graverobbers with nothing to show for our sin but a disintegrating ancient rosebud that turned to dust as we watched.

Load of moan, no Elvis in the sacred house. This tale went on & on as over the city we roamed for several months on similar misadventures but in the end we found not a trace. Elvis, & the relics thereof, was like any saint: a figment.

Cheaters never prosper, but in the end – cheating or not – what worldly prospects count against the ledger of time? Put that in your crematorium & smoke it. ■





TIME TRAVEL

HONZA SAKAŘ

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Have you ever woken up on a Monday, feeling lost at a job you hate but cannot get yourself to quit? A year ago, this hit me hard – after 8 years in IT, I came to realize there is no future for me in any more. I have decided to turn my life around and put all the chips into the thing I love the most – photography. I rented a small space in the very heart of historic Prague, told my boss I quit and started working on my own portrait studio business. Using a historic technique called wet plate collodion process, antique large format cameras and lenses and a powerful strobe setup, I was able to set myself apart quite quickly and start making a living off portrait assignments and print sales. I am not much into motivational quotes, but the one that says the best things lie outside of your comfort zone definitely has it spot on – I have a year packed with great moments that would most probably never have happened without stepping out of mine to vouch for that. ■





"Somebody likes it on tin," Prague, 2016 (above); The Rock Cafe Project, Prague 2016 (opposite), by Honza Sakař.



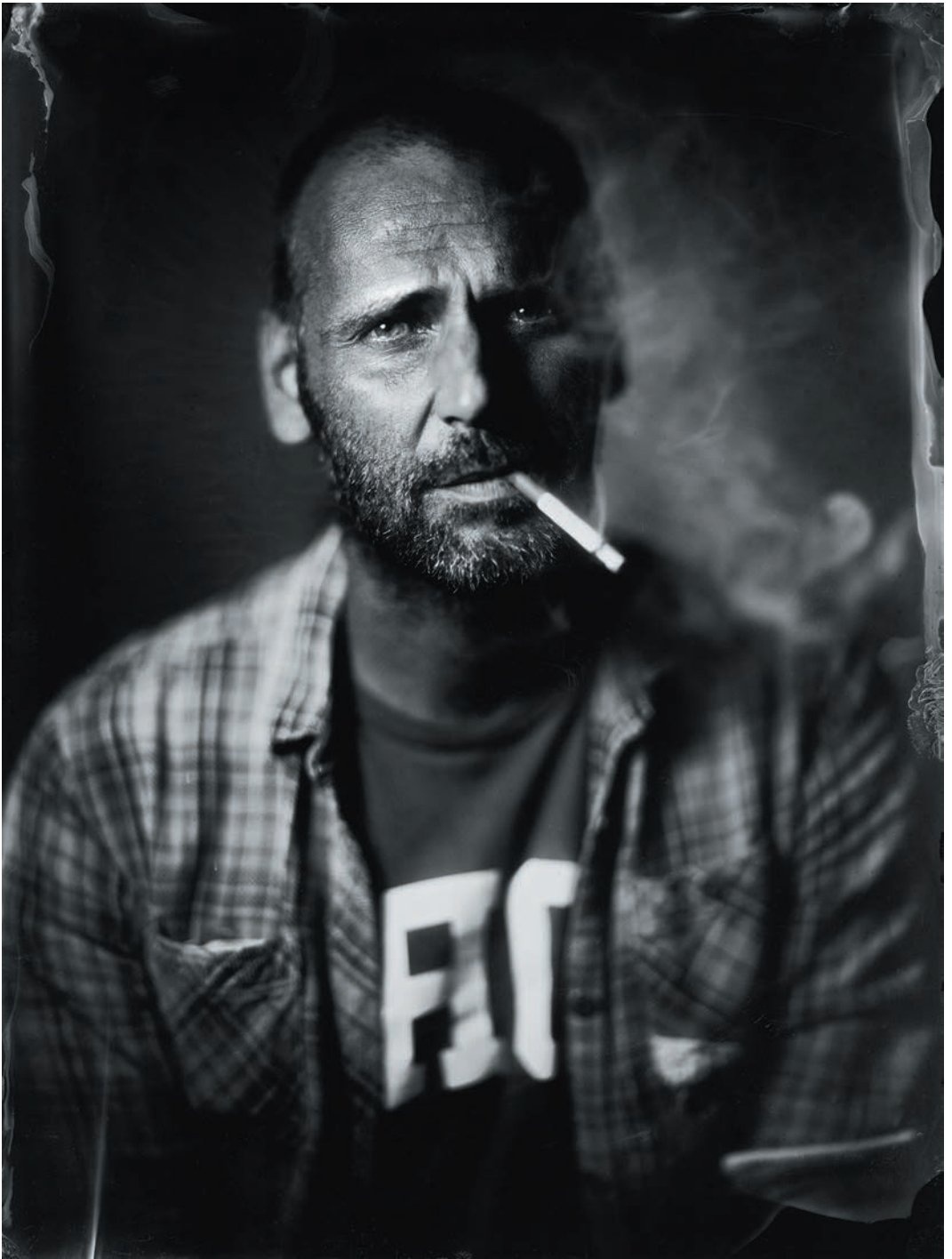
Juelma-Isabel, Prague 2016, by Honza Sakař.



Lena Brauner, Prague 2016, by Honza Sakař.



Fictious Narrative, Prague 2016, by Honza Sakař.



Marek, Prague 2016, by Honza Sakař.



Lili, Prague 2015, by Honza Sakař.



The Rock Cafe Project, Prague 2016, by Honza Sakař.



Afterlife talk

By Dave Zijlstra

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IT EATS YOU
DAVID ZIJLSTRA

Prague scared me from day one, March 8 2002, up to the day I never wanted to go back there, December 12 2008. It was Ben, my best friend at the time, who invited me for a trip from our hometown Amsterdam to the Czech capital. I refused at first. I was not in the mood to travel – I mourned – & Central Europe never attracted me much. I also knew from experience what Ben’s holidays were all about. Hanging out in gay bars. Having sex in saunas with locals & other tourists – at least three a day, no exception. Getting drunk & doing some sight seeing at daytime. Visiting Jewish sights mainly, with a hangover from the night before. The cruising Jew, we called him.

Ben & I had done his routine before in Berlin & Antwerp, & each city trip with him had a huge impact on my love life. After our first visit to Berlin, in the year 2000 – it was love at first sight & if I’m not mistaken Berlin loved me back – I went there for a whole summer, by myself. I lived in a student house & on the first night clubbing I fell in love with a blond haired & blue-eyed dancer. His features reminded me of a Leni Riefenstahl’s movie character; same haircut, same torso, but feminine. We met in the darkroom of Tom’s bar. In that dimly lit basement I saw his silhouette smoothly dancing on drum & base techno music. He seduced me – I was in trance, on a cloud, a wave – & he pulled down my trousers before I realised it. It took me minutes to enjoy his blowjob; worried he would steal my wallet & busy keeping dozens of greedy hands of me.

Artistically that summer was the best time of my life. 24/7 I felt totally free, confident, clear & inspired. One day, the hottest day of August, I dragged a

movie projection screen that I had found under a railway bridge, into the middle of Der Tiergarten. There I took self-portraits on Polaroid, bare-chested & with the white screen behind me. It hid the park & its diversity of trees, bushes, benches, used condoms & smudged tissues. At the time it felt like a statement. My Art school history teacher wasn’t impressed.

Two years earlier, July 1999, Ben introduced me to the Antwerp gay scene, where I found a summer love in the inner-city park. He was nineteen & to our surprise we shared the same name. Young David, as I called him, secretly showed me the hidden synagogues & bathhouses in his neighbourhood, which made Ben very jealous. We were David & David, a happy gay couple, until his older brother decided to make a man of Young David & send him to Israel to serve in the army. For over a year I recorded all news shows on videotapes, in case there was an item about a car bomb explosion or

1 INT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - PRAGUE - ELEVATOR HALL

In the elevator hall of a typically dark, mid 20th century apartment building, we see the silhouette of a good-looking young man (DEPRESSED MALE MODEL, 19).

The only light comes from his back: a beam of sunlight through a narrow window.

From the sound in the background we can tell there is an elevator coming.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL is waiting patiently. We can't see his eyes or facial expression clearly, but he looks depressed.

The whole picture gives a creepy feeling.

2 INT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRCASE - FLASHBACK

In a dimly lit staircase we hear the clear sound of someone walking down the stairs.

Then we see DEPRESSED MALE MODEL from scene 1. coming down at a fast pace.

3 INT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR HALL - FLASHBACK

With a rapid move, as if he's in a hurry, DEPRESSED MALE MODEL pushes the elevator button. The button turns red and we hear the clear sound of an elevator starting to move.

4 INT. PHOTO STUDIO - PRAGUE - FLASHBACK

In a big white room we see DEPRESSED MALE MODEL posing in his underwear. He seems to have mixed feelings about the shoot; looking both comfortable and uncomfortable.

We see and hear studio flashlights. After each flash, DEPRESSED MALE MODEL changes his pose and looks. It shows he's an experienced model.

5 INT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR - CONTINUED

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL enters the elevator and pushes number 5. The elevator starts to move after a rambling sound.

Jump cut to

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL stares at the passing floors. We hear the clear sound of the elevator and see sunlight coming through the windows of the elevator doors each time it passes a floor.

a collapsed floor at a wedding party in Jerusalem. Fast-forwarding paused images I checked all the faces of soldiers & victims. I never saw him.

"You need a break," Ben said.

He was right. I was depressed. Early 2002 my last grandparent died; my lovely grandmother from mother's side. On her deathbed she taught me how to speak without air. My aunts – in a circle around her bed – pushed me to say something. "She can still hear you," they promised. But she was already talking to me, in my mind. "It's okay to move on," she said. "You did a good job," I replied. The usual thing to say to someone who is about to die, I guessed, but I mend it; she had always been like a second mother to me. That night she passed away. I was at home, fast asleep, & woke up finding myself at her side, in the hospital room. Then my mother called. This all happened not to my surprise. These were common things in my family. By the age of six I knew all my ancestors ghost stories by heart. At birthday parties my aunts & uncles boastfully told me about their experiences with talking dogs, black magic & every day superstition. Once, at the clothing section of a department store, both my grandparents pulled down their trousers a bit, to show me their underwear. I didn't believe they wear it inside out. They did.

"To keep the bad spirits away," my grandfather said.

The next day I dressed the same & did it for decades to come.

Ben & I arrived in Prague on a Friday morning, by night train, at Holešovice railway station. We did what people had said not to do, to trust a friendly & handsome guy on the platform, get in his car & let him drive you to a hotel for a to-good-to-be-true discount. Ben arranged a great price, he thought. On the back seat of what seemed to be the Soviet version of a SUV, we asked ourselves if we really are that stupid. The man appeared to be no rapist or kidnapper – or had changed his mind on the way – & dropped us off at a small two star hotel in the centre of the old town. The rates were higher than negotiated, but I didn't care.

I slept the whole day & had several nightmares, one after the other – while Ben did a first check of the nearby gay sauna. The last dream of six was the

strongest & I can still remember it clearly. It started in a dark & damp tunnel, hidden under a medieval castle on a hill. I limped through it, barefoot, chased by haunting sounds. My surroundings were lit by some kind of light source above my head. The beam of light moved along with my sight – left, right, up & down – like the movements of a first-person shooter game. The tunnel, clearly man-made, led to a round-shaped door, with hundreds of mystical symbols on the doorpost. They were carved in rock, a long time ago; shapes I had never seen before. I pushed the door – it was firmly locked – checked my pockets, quickly, but I had no keys on me, which surprised me somewhat. Then there was silence. Then there was darkness. The next moment I was on my knees, looking through the keyhole. In my sleep I was aware of the fact that a part was missing here, as if a movie editor was editing me on the spot, using a jump cut. I couldn't see a thing through the larger than usual keyhole, but sensed a presence behind it. Suddenly something came out of the dark & touched me with a strong breeze of cold air. I took a step back & I was sure, without any doubt, that I had just witnessed the origins of evil.

I woke up soaking wet – not sure where I was at that moment – & then realised Prague was going to make my depression even worse. When Ben got back – full of stories about the filthy sauna & the horny old men on his tail – I suggested taking the first train to Berlin. He asked me why.

"Prague eats you, Berlin feeds," I answered.

The practically minded Ben convinced me to give Prague a second chance – we had just booked the hotel for a week – & to go to Berlin on our way back to Holland, six days later. The thought of going back to the place I love, lighted my days a bit, but meanwhile that historical city with its Gothic & Baroque gates didn't move me at all. I had always been a modern city person. As a kid – raised in both a northern province town, on a small island & in the port city of Rotterdam – it was my biggest dream to go to New York City one day. I had a panoramic size poster of Manhattan's skyline by night on my wall, next to Elvis. The Twin towers were on there. Years later, during the George W. Bush era, I protested against my childhood wish & deleted the city-that-never-sleeps from my to go list. I still haven't been

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL stares without any clear expression on his face. He seems to be in a trance.

6 INT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR HALL - 5TH FLOOR

When DEPRESSED MALE MODEL opens the elevator door all images and sounds we just have seen and heard, move back in time, as if the movie quickly rewinds to the beginning. Back at the beginning the movie quickly moves forward again, back to the moment DEPRESSED MALE MODEL is standing in the elevator.

Then it repeats: rewind, forward, like a never ending loop.

In between we see images of DEPRESSED MALE MODEL we haven't seen before. We see him standing in a window frame. It gives the feel he is about to jump.

Then all images and sounds move back to the moment he arrives at the 5th floor and opens the elevator door.

7 INT. APARTMENT - 5TH FLOOR - ENTRANCE HALL

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL walks in, takes of his jacket.

Jump cut to

He looks in the mirror at the wall. Again no expression on his face.

Then his lips are moving but we can't hear and tell what he's saying.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL walks away, out of frame.

8 INT. APARTMENT - 5TH FLOOR - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL sits on a sofa. The image (camera hand held) moves towards him. He looks at it with a smile, then looks up at the person filming. We understand its a small camera or a cell phone recording him. His expression is more relaxed than in previous scenes.

It is unclear who is filming him and what their relationship is.

Then the camera approaches him very closely, up to his lips. When the image becomes red (the redness of his lips) it fades to black.

to NYC. In 2009, the year after I fled Prague, I did go to Las Vegas & to the Hopi Reservation in Arizona – there’s no bigger contrast in the US, if you ask me. Speaking of Elvis & Vegas; at the age of ten I hit one of my sixty Elvis albums with a small rock into small pieces, peed on it & threw it in a river.

“Make sure it’s a streaming river,” my Grandfather said.

The uncle who gave me the album was haunted & his evil spirit might influence my soul if I decided to keep the soundtrack of *Viva Las Vegas*. My protective underwear can’t do the job alone this time, I realized.

I’m not making this up, by the way. I wish I did.

Days two to four went by like a blur – “A bulletproof blur,” I wrote then, in my black notebook diary. I felt trapped. The nightmares continued. In one dream I walked through the narrow streets of the Old Town, by moonlight. At first there was nobody else, then it got crowded with sad & similar looking faces. As if I was on a minefield, I started to jump criss-cross from one save paving stone to the other, for may hours, across the Charles bridge, up the hill, passing the castle & all the way back to the medieval astronomical clock on the Old Town Hall. Surrounded by tens of people, I felt shame, as if I was standing bare-naked. All of a sudden Franz Kafka – or someone who looks like him – was on the stone I was about to jump on. He looked like a hologram. I chose another safe haven, but there he was again. He multiplied himself several times, like Agent Smith did in the Matrix. I woke up, soaking wet again.

The longer we stayed & by shortage of sleep my mood became worse & worse. Everything annoyed me. The gay scene felt outdated – I wasn’t in the mood for a hook up anyway – & the Czech people I met were either unfriendly, unhappy or after my cash. Listening to my favourite band the Counting Crows, on my Discman, didn’t give me any relieve at all, as it usually does.

On day four, at lunch in a traditional Czech restaurant – we both didn’t finish our egg soup – I told Ben I was leaving, with or without him. He asked me to stay for one more night; there was still a sex cinema he wanted to check out & suggested to have a drink after. I agreed. He had been very patient with my bad moods those days, so I kind of owed him that urgent pleasure. Ben let me choose the bar. I looked at the Prague-gay-map – couldn’t care less – closed my eyes & put my finger randomly on bar number six.

“Let’s go there,” I said, “one drink only, then back to the hotel, pack & get the hell out of here.”

The next morning I wanted to stay. Ben had already re-booked our train tickets to Berlin, so we left anyway, at 11AM. Later that afternoon, back in the city I hoped to die peacefully in one day, I couldn’t think of anything else but go back to Prague, to see Pavel again. The moment I saw him in that basement of bar number six, a rent boys bar, he reminded me of Young David. Pavel was playing table soccer, alone, & had innocence written all over him. Over night he told me the life story of a homeless teenager & orphanage runaway – raised & abused on the countryside – who was about to live a life of sleeping in a different bed each night, with a fatty sixty-something sex tourist at his side, & waste all his hard-earned money on slot machines & marihuana joints.

On a bench in Der Tiergarten – my favourite place to write – I wrote: Her death makes me aware of my own mortality. If I had to choose one last thing to do in my life, then let me do this: make sure Pavel has a better future, make sure Prague is not going to eat him too.

A week later I was back. ■

9 INT. BATHROOM - 5TH FLOOR - CONTINUED

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL looks in the mirror.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL - VO
I waited for the elevator

Pause

Like many times before

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL washes his face with cold water.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL - CONTINUED - VO
Like any other day ... like any
other moment

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL looks back in the mirror.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL - CONTINUED - VO
By its time and sound I could tell
which floor it passed... third...
second... first... ground floor

10 INT. ELEVATOR HALL - GROUND FLOOR - FLASHBACK

We see an elevator door, hear the elevator coming down, and then all sounds disappear.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL - CONTINUED - VO
The moment I saw the elevator there
was no sound... only time

11 INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUED

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL looks himself in the eyes.

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL - CONTINUED - VO
I realized I have experienced it
before... They cut the sound to
make the movie scene stronger

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT - 5TH FLOOR

DEPRESSED MALE MODEL looks outside. Then he opens the window and climbs into the window frame. He looks down. We get the impression he is about to end his life with a jump out of the window.

Jump cut to

POV DEPRESSED MALE MODEL: we see his view, old apartment buildings on a rainy day.

THE END



A TRAM TO ANDĚL

RINAT MAGSUMOV

My grandfather Gaffar was a well-read man, who was interested in history &, instead of a car – a much coveted Soviet status symbol – had books published by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society at the end of the 19th century, for example. I don't know how he bought those books; he lived in a provincial town in Uzbekistan & that was long before Ebay or Amazon.

Grandfather Gaffar passed his interests on to me & then I came to the capital of the country that had fascinated me in sixth grade with Jan Hus & his martyrdom, the fight of Hussites & crusaders & with the glorious blind general Jan Žižka. I should also say that despite my interest in history I grew up in a provincial city in Russia that didn't have much history – it was only 15 years old when I was born. So, when I came to Prague, it felt like heaven.

There was one night when I was in the city center, & my mind was not was not on the rich culture of the city or its romantic atmosphere. I just had two thoughts, "Where is the bloody tram?" & "Friggin wind!!!!" It was a long time ago & I don't remember many details, except that I was waiting for a tram that would take me from Palackého náměstí to Anděl (Czech for "angel").

Then suddenly I saw something that made me completely forget the piercing wind. I saw a huge shadow of a chess knight on the wall of some building. For me it was astonishing. You see, I'd been racking my brain because of a certain personal problem. There were two solutions to it, one was very straightforward & the other was... how to put it mildly... more certain but rather devious.

Then all of a sudden, I see this huge knight. Now, a queen or rook can cross the chess battlefield in just one move & a knight is slow in comparison. However, a cunning knight can jump over obstacles & his moves are less predictable, some people even state there is a hint of treachery in the way a knight moves, & there is an idiom in Russian, "make a knight-move."

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Also, there was something mystical about this shadow. There was absolutely nothing on the square that could cast it. The square bears the name of a major figure of the Czech national revival – a historian & politician František Palacký – & there is a big monument with his sitting figure & there are trees. The trees just looked like trees, & the monument has some sculptures but no chess knights. That meant that either I was hallucinating or it was really some kind of supernatural mystery. Some kind of sign. Or omen.

Yet, I don't believe in horoscopes, numerology, apparitions, mediums, etc... Why, all of a sudden should I think that this unusual form appeared here especially for me? So, there had to be some natural explanation... But what could it be?

Then it dawned on me. The figure of a female angel with an outstretched wing at the top of the monument. It cast this particular shadow!

In conclusion, František Palacký participated in the Czech National Revival, & the purpose of this cultural movement was to revive the Czech language, culture & national identity. So, writing this story & doing some research made me think of my Welsh friend Dafydd. Allegedly, he once ran amok in a bar in Cardiff. He came there with a friend & the barkeeper told them not to speak their sheep shaggers' language in his bar. Dafydd resembles Woody Allen in appearance, & it's kind of hard to imagine an intellectual like him "wreck everything in that bar," but then who knows... When I asked him if the Welsh language could die out, Dafydd said yes. Maybe the same thing could happen to the Czech language, if it wasn't for the efforts of Frantisek Palacký. Perhaps, then Karel Čapek & Bohumil Hrabal would write in German. But maybe they wouldn't be the same Karel Čapek & Bohumil Hrabal... ■

When I was a child, we would pick up a ladybird from grass or a twig & sing it this song:

<i>Божья коровка, улети на небко!</i>	<i>Ladybug, fly to the sky</i>
<i>Там твои детки кушают конфетки!</i>	<i>There your babies are eating candies</i>
<i>Всем по одной,</i>	<i>All get one</i>
<i>А тебе – ни одной!</i>	<i>And you get none!</i>

You could also throw the ladybird up (Russians call ladybirds *God's little cows*), so that it would fly to the sky to its hungry, candyvorous babies. I recall this poem: looking at a ladybird & then thinking of a nice Mayday spent with a young Czech lady. She wore earrings that looked like ladybirds. Very simple, inexpensive, red earrings that looked very cute in a childlike way. I liked them very much. We met in The Globe, then we went for a walk – it's stupid to sit indoors on a fine day, especially in May. By the way, there is a tradition to kiss girls under blossoming cherry trees on the first of May. An old saying even goes that a girl who wasn't kissed on this day dries up before the year is over. But my story was long time ago, & I don't remember if the cherry trees were already in bloom. What I remember was our route. From the café we went for a walk along the Vltava, then we walked on the Charles Bridge to the left bank, then we returned to the right bank. It was a beautiful day in May, & we talked about a certain Gothic poet who on beautiful sunny days locked himself in a dark basement of his house in order to write dark, Gothic poems, & of an antifascist poet who in his death cell wrote optimistic poems to his son; of battles fought & blood shed on the Charles Bridge, of deceitful shopkeepers who were put in wicker baskets & forced to take a bath in Vltava, about St Nepomuk, a martyr of the Catholic church who was put in a sack by the king's henchmen & thrown off the bridge on which we were walking. So, we returned to the right bank, namely to Křižíkovo náměstí. My date asked me to look to the left. I looked, apprehensively; I could see the monument to the Father or the Nation – Charles IV, the bank, the Vltava & some part of the bridge. She asked me if I could see anything unusual. I didn't see anything unusual, I saw the monument many times, the Vltava & the part of the bridge I could see looked nice & normal. I replied apprehensively that everything was normal as far as I could tell. She asked me to look again. I looked again & replied that there was absolutely nothing that I could consider out of the ordinary. She asked me to have a really good look. I looked again & I said that I was giving up; she could tell me what there was that was extraordinary to see. She asked me to have a look at the midsection of the monument. I looked. Jesus! It looked like a semi-limp dick looking out of the pants of a King, dripping pre-cum. The lady told me that as a teenager she would come with her girlfriends to this monument & look at the King's monument from that point where we were standing & they would giggle. After that I walked closer to Charles IV, & had a look at him en face. Of course it wasn't his dick but a hand holding the List of Rights & Freedoms, granted to the university he had founded. Why I had been apprehensive when she asked me to look left? For one thing, I liked the lady. Then during our morbid conversation on the Bridge, she told me of her dream where she saw her city bombed & shelled. I had known that some building near Vltava was fired at by Soviet tanks, though I couldn't recall which one. Because of this I half-expected her to continue "Do you see that house; it was fired at by your tanks."

So it was a great relief for me when I saw the flaccid penis of the Father of the Nation. ■

YOU BROKE MY ART!

MARKÉTA BAŇKOVÁ

...ME MOR... a piece of neon sign shines on a house half-hidden by two Berlin towers. The asphalt channel of Ebertstrasse hemmed in by the jagged shores of modern houses gurgles with rain. I turn left on Potsdamer Platz. "Zubringerdienst gestattet." I don't understand German, and I drift down tapering lanes in a bubble of thoughts, one murmuring over the other, under a foreigner's waterproof hood.

"Wissen Sie, wie geht man..." I'm accosted, by a tourist, possibly.

I shake my head – the foreigner in his wet raincoat nods in understanding. Perhaps he too is looking for somewhere to hide from the elements. Wissen Sie – visa, visor, wiser, see? It's pouring more and more. In the delta of two streets there is a shop with a neon sign. The word ART flashes through. I reach the display window. It is dusty, and filled with books and old cameras. The door opens reluctantly, and I'm drawn inside by a warm swirl of pleasantly stuffy air.

There are photos and heavy velvet curtains along the walls. The floor is strewn with junk. I feel like back in Bohemia amid this mess, but only for a moment; those photographs hanging askew between the curtains are more the mark of a southern-type negligence. From underneath the curtain emerges a dry face, a shabby shirt, and a mass of dark wavy hair. The tiny inquisitive eyes in the setting of a dark complexion-ed face seem familiar.

"Ça va!"

A Frenchman! Doesn't even bother with German.

"Vous parlez anglais?" I try.

"Yes, ai speek angleesh."

He grabbed a chair, let some magazines slide off it onto the floor with a thud, gave the seat a wipe with his sleeve and beckoned to me.

I threw off my overcoat and sat down at a long table covered with analogue cameras. An ancient Flexaret, a Pentax, a pile of Nikons, a Graflex, Canons. A crooked battlement of lenses. Some of them had been taken apart, but most still seemed functional.

"You sell those cameras?"

"Oui, c'est des appareils argentiques. Ai sell some, ai ripair some. Ripair for biznis. Ai meik photo as well. Zis is for mai art."

"Aparei arzhtantik." Silver apparatus, has a nice ring to it. I picked up a big camera, a Mamiya, and

wound up the release. I struggle with the urge to hear the click of the shutter, but have no idea whether there's any film in the camera.

"Beautiful. Can I press the shutter?"

"Go on, but fokiss on mee, pleeze."

He sat down at the table, grabbed a screwdriver and struck a pose.

There's film inside after all, winding the shutter is an effort.

I snapped the Frenchman and rewound the release. He sat on the edge of the table, putting a hat on his head. He looked into the lens, relaxed, with an inquisitive smile in his eyes. Click. He leaned over the table, and suddenly I found myself on the edge of the territory of his leathery perfume, of the musty shirt...

"And nou ze detaay?"

... and sweet sweat and tobacco.

I focus onto the detail of the face with the eyes wide open. I focus on the eyelashes, suddenly feeling a light touch on the leg underneath the table. I put the Mamiya back on the table.

"Zatees shia, ze dog. Piérre. Ee is very nais."

My fingers comb the curly hair. A big black poodle, I guess, from the ridge visible to me underneath the table. The Frenchman takes advantage of my momentary distraction, and grabs the Mamiya, aiming it at me.

"Quelle beauté. No you will bee photographed. Bicoz art cashez memoree."

I gave the camera my most neutral of looks.

The Frenchman clicked a few times.

Under the table something, a sniffing muzzle, rubs against my leg.

"Arrête tout de suite!" the Frenchman shouts down at the dog.

He placed the camera back on the table and rose.

"Ai wheel bring mai wain. You wheel laik it."

"No, thanks," I objected, "it's too early for me to start drinking."

"It's gud for the picterz. Ai wheel meik your portrait. Red or whaaait? You wheel feel more relaxed."

I'm thinking of a way to object to that, rubbing the dog hair under the table. A glass appears in front of me.

The wine's excellent! The Frenchman is pointing

a lens at me again.

I smiled and leaned into the light of the display window. I tried shaking my hands up a little, for the scene to gain in movement. Then my fingers clutched the lower part of the armrest, in an imitation of a sleigh-ride. I imagined myself riding on a sleigh, in order to make my facial expression more lively... setting out now, going faster and faster, the white landscape swishing by – all of a sudden, a tree in front of me.

What?

"First teik off your clouz."

Did he say that?

"Teik off your clouz, it wheel look mash better."

I was astonished at how fast he got to the point.

"Why should I take off my clothes if you just want to make my portrait?"

"Oooh, peeple wizaut ze clouz look mash better in ze feis. You are so preti, mai art needz you!"

I shake my head, disappointed. He could at least have been more imaginative. A glass of wine isn't the most original trick in the book to accelerate the move from portrait to nude.

There followed a few more photos and compliments, which he uttered with the nonchalant, playful ease of a world-savvy comedian. The Frenchman flirts, but doesn't work too hard. He knows unshakeably that you've made the worst mistake of your life by refusing him, and watches his foolish guest with benign indulgence and pity.

A moist muzzle emerged from under the armrest, a warm tongue licking my hand.

"I remember when I had to wind up film into the rolls with my hands. I had to find the darkest place at home – and that was in my wardrobe. I had to get inside with my camera and the tank and wind it up there in the darkness just with my fingers, without looking at it."

"Ouiii, ai do it in mai uardrob az ue!"

He pointed at a wardrobe in the corner, a hanger with a jacket and trousers suspended from one of the knobs.

"Ai wheel meik som tee and meenwail you uaind zis film zer, oui?"

He pushed the Mamiya toward me, rummaging in a drawer for a tank and film reel.

"Good if you ken do it. Ai don't laik to do it. Ai get lost in ze uardrob."

He hesitated for a moment over the correct size of reel, then he pushed one in my hand. In one swift action he lifted the hanger with the jacket off the door and histrionically touched his heart.

"Pictorz and uordz, zat meiks your uord. You are razer orrible. You brok mai art!"

Then, unperturbed, he shuffled off behind the curtain. Judging by the jingling dishes and splashes of running water, to the kitchen.

I rose. All around it looked as if the wardrobe had just disgorged the content of its guts onto chairs, tables, shelves and other competing furniture. Clothes, belts, ties, jackets, socks lay everywhere, interspersed with boxes, bags and suitcases, writing utensils, notepads, and dog-eared books. I neared the wardrobe. The wooden door gave a screech, opening just a little, as if the wardrobe's jaws had opened, awestruck at the absurdity of my situation. To be here, climbing into the wardrobe of a strange man! Still, somehow this junk-filled shop inspired my trust.

The Frenchman's casually coquettish tone warmed me in this country of people so socially correct they make a woman feel as womanly as a piece of polystyrene.

The wooden door gave another screechy sigh when I opened it. For a moment I took in the dank scent with its tobacco overtones. It was a large double-wardrobe, a triple one in fact with another door, opened separately. Inside lay a boundless landscape of crumpled clothing. I climbed inside and closed the door behind me, draping it with a wall of shirts hanging from a bar, to create the pitch darkness needed for rewinding the undeveloped film.

For a while, I just sit there, waiting for my eyes to adjust. I gape around to make sure I haven't overlooked any tiny chinks through which a ray of light could get inside. And so I wait for five minutes. Maybe ten. The sound of a running bath from somewhere, perhaps from the apartment next door. A human voice. I can only make out parts of sentences, German, curt, melodic. Now there are two voices, female and male. The female sounds confrontational, accusatory almost, the male takes on a defensive tone. It was pleasant to just perceive the melody of these voices accompanied by the orchestral humming of the running bath. Pleasant to understand nothing, to see nothing, to sit in the wardrobe of a stranger in a shabby shop in a strange city with a dead phone. We all travel round the long-discovered, mapped and photographed planet in the footsteps of those who got there before us. Mount Everest? There's probably less traffic on Potsdamer Platz. The burbling of water has ceased.

My friends, relatives and duties won't find me here. Now the body in the tub is splashing. I imagine the warm water embalming the skin, climbing upwards as the plump landscape of a probably female body sinks like a ship doomed to tragic glory, until nothing but the knees stick out of the water, a broken stern and bow.

It occurred to me that I'd been in the wardrobe for a while now. What about the Frenchman? I opened the camera and felt the film. First I used a pair of scissors to round off the sharp corners of the film roll, to make it wind smoothly into the bobbin. I led it into the groove. It had been years since I last did it, but I managed first time. The film is sliding inside, I'm turning the two ends of the bobbin devouring the film like a worm. Done. I close the wound-up spool inside the tank and screw it shut.

From the apartment next-door comes the damped sound of a TV. Are they draining the bathtub? I can hear a female voice saying something that sounds like the Czech "Pojd'." Come!

I sit and gape into the dark, as if this could help me hear better. Then with some regret I decide to get out. I push aside the shirts hanging in front of me, reaching for the door. No, that's just some box. I get it out of the way and climb over the soft hillocks of stale-smelling perhaps-trousers of rough structure. I search for a way out, but all I reach are more hillocks and lowlands. I continue crawling through the dark, putting the camera and bobbin with the spool down beside me. I need both hands now. I bump against a tougher barrier of perhaps-coats smelling nicely of... hmmm... rum maybe? I keep going, until I fall into a soft crater. Am I going in the wrong direction? I lean my head against the hillside of the crater.

I found myself in a landscape of some woven things, sweaters perhaps. I entertain the thought of how pleasant it would be to fall asleep in this woollen nest. It reminds me of something so familiar, but I cannot recall what it is. No, it's impossible. I can't sleep in a stranger's wardrobe. I claw my way back up and away from the woollen stuff, but again fall back into ever-softer layers of textile, smooth like cotton. I sink until the path closes in front of me and now there are cashmere clouds of scarves, hats and socks swirling above me, layering over me like snowflakes.

Once, as a child, I was in just such a blizzard. I feel again its cold air and the pinching of the snowflakes, softly descending on cheeks aflame from sledging. The sleigh is running fast, dashing in fact, I've got to hold on to the seat if I want to stay

on. A familiar silhouette is pulling the strap of the sleigh. I know those shoulders, and the headscarf! I want to call out to her, but I don't know what name to call her. She turns. The picture now is razor-sharp, suddenly everything's alight, and I breathe, delighted; yes, it's her! I feel passionate tears of pathos, my eyes drinking in a familiar, again-sharp picture of a beloved face, whose visage has been blurred by years falling as fast as snowflake. The facial contours have been covered by the cotton-wool I now blow away...

"Grandma!"

"Hold on tight, or you'll fall," responds the white-haired woman, her eyes twinkling merrily from a landscape of wrinkles, turning round again and launching again into a march which was almost a canter in the blizzard among the trees. The landscape is so blindingly white that I nearly have to close my eyes.

"Kommen Sie," I can suddenly hear from quite nearby, fresh air wafting into the hollow in which I'm nestled. There's got to be a way out somewhere over there. I don't really want to leave this place, but I feel all this beauty is but an illusion, quite likely caused by a lack of air, I've got to get out of here...

"Kommen Sie hier."

"Viens ici."

"Which way? This way?"

"This way. There, there – this way."

I crawl out of the woolly valley, getting myself entangled in rags, falling and wallowing in them, and now I see they're words, soft stacks of meanings. In this landscape rags have got meanings just as, many thousands of years ago, meanings came to be gradually bestowed upon shrieks, the sounds of our ancestors' vocal chords. I creep through a bundle of unwashed, slightly stinky underwear and rough-structured shirts, seeing it's Latin, deposed material long out of fashion, but one by whose cut newer Parisian and Berlin models hanging on the bar here have been sewn. From the shirts comes a stale waft. I want to get out. Into the air! Fenestram! Fenêtre! Fenster! Hilfe! I feel slightly claustrophobic now. Phobia! Sprawling all around, historical models. And here, a newer phobia, phobos. I dig about in the hoards of rags trying to find nicer words, words evoking beautiful images... out of this wardrobe, I need Luft! Air. Aighre, as the Frenchman would gurgle, or rather sigh like the gourmet he is, for even just the word 'France' evokes the pleasures of life, doesn't it... but they are right to do so, aren't they, granny? To live life to the fullest, until you're

just a pile of words and images stuck in memory... la vie... that gourmet oinophile chaos is present in the French language, too, its grammar expressing the nation's haughtiness, full of exceptions and patches... numerals cobbled together... how else could they speak on a bottle of wine a day... darn it, how do I get out of this wardrobe... dehors... out, they are all around me, I claw them off in the effort to get out... sortie! All I find are words I don't need. Selskakhazyaystyenniy masheenostrayeetelny zavod – what the hell is *that* doing here?! Quickly, exit, exit, where exists? Suddenly a sweet scent dances in front of my nose, my outstretched arms feel helplessly in that direction and my fingers plunge into damp, soiled, silky-smooth amour, well-worn, multiply abused, this is the one I've been searching out for you, grandma, hope you don't mind how sweaty and threadbare it is...

Is that a dog barking? They're probably looking for me, while I'm here all muffled up in amour... I creep on, feeling around me with my fingers and crawling through a landscape of more shirts. Oh, caught in a trap – my hair's got tangled on a button. I try to extricate myself but I cannot, and so I crawl on, dragging a pile of shirts with my hair, one coiled onto another, getting heavier and heavier. I can't go on like this. Again I try to untangle the wad from my hair, but how do I do this in the dark? This damned shirt is such a *scam*! I tug angrily at the sleeve, till finally the seam bursts.

For God's sake, I'm ripping the *sc* off *am*, my hair will be relieved, but I'm all jittery, for I've ruined one of the Frenchman's shirts. How will I explain that to him? Quickly I search for a replacement, rummaging through the rags, what could come in handy... what about shrinkage? With one precise rip I take off its *sh* and shove it up the shirt sleeve, arranging it a little, it holds together quite well, yeah, it actually looks better than before! *Sham* sounds even better than *scam*, everyone has to admit that, regardless of their opinion on French fashion. The Frenchman will surely comprehend... I quickly rip *apart*, till I separate the *a* from *part* and then the *com* from *prehend*... *Apprehend!* Lovely! I marvel at my work, the Frenchman will definitely be impressed, Czech style is not to be underestimated. So I'll rip *compartment* some more... it would be nice to produce some trousers to go with the shirt. I rummage through the trousers, *produce*... I rip the *pro* off and try to swap it with *comprehend*, I grab the *com* and... hm, this combination won't go together well, will it. How about the other way round – *com* used to be

con! And *con* is a very nice match for *duce*! These trousers will certainly conduce to nice-feel wearing, and once they've been well-worn, they can always be reduced to shorts, since handles won't ever get out of vogue in any word-robe.

The Frenchman will be agape at how I've renovated his vocabulary. And if he doesn't happen to fancy it, most verbs can be given the decorative *un*-brooch, and that's that. Who could object to that? There's a similar *un*-brooch for adverbs. And no possible objections, from anyone, ever!

Then I shudder.

He doesn't speak Czech! "Neumí česky..." Me, chess, key. The key is to make ourselves understood. "Dorozumět se..." Zoom, yet, say? Without that what'll remain are shreds of torn-up syllables that don't make sense, mountains of stray suffocating phonemes. Ah, fuj, awe, full. I'm like a little mole, digging my way out of a huge literal and metaphorical darkness.

A sudden bump, light. I squint so my eyes don't get tearful. I roll over belly-down, rubbing my bumped back and shoulder. The concrete floor is covered with brown-red enamel. All around I take out wads of fluff that have fallen out of the wardrobe with me. Bundled together, waiting to be untangled, washed, sewn-over. In the light of the lamp I recognise them all – words that have come and gone through my life.

I rise, unwinding a clingy shawl of words of ancient dishonest praise off my foot, throwing it onto the pile. The cheap nylon sparkles, smelling of electricity, slowly falling through the air, catching onto the armrest of the chair and sticking to it with static. From within the pile I sort out tatters of ancient arguments, shirts of the slippery fabric of well-meant advice, careful criticism and words of support; I can see I can only appreciate this style today. And this black laced semi-translucent dress, that attracts looks that caress the body and are more beneficial to its health even than Thai massage... and this silk scarf of an ancient shared conversation, which I always carried when visiting them, I'm trying to remember who was it I spoke to about stars? I rub the dusty surface of the fabric and the silver threads of the texture give a little glisten once again.

Then, I pick up from the pile a wound-up belt covered with my handwriting:

"See you again? But what? Je ne t'aime pas!"

Again and again I read the harsh words written before me.

Did I say that? It really is my handwriting! So I

must have said it. Maybe it is just what was heard, when what I had coquettishly wanted to say in our heated little exchange was: "But watching your temper!" Perhaps I thought that blabbing the first silly thing that came to mind would give me time to think things over, what to say next... That it was going to be misarticulated and misunderstood was something I should have divined.

The room is cold. I wrap the shawl around my shoulders, looking for the Frenchman.

"Heeey!"

No reply.

"Is this wardrobe kind of your art too?"

I walk to the curtain and draw it aside.

"That was impressive!"

A kitchenette, some washed dishes next to a sink full of water and a mass of wilted foam. Those could be socks soaking in it. Suddenly I feel hunger. Where's my purse? And where did I leave the camera and the bobbin with the film?

I return to the room and sit down on a chair. Dusk is falling outside. I inspect the photos hanging on the walls – ordinary themes belaboured thousands of times by camera shutter releases – portraits, nudes, landscapes, the city. Isn't this one Prague by any chance? I rise from the chair. It was my peripheral vision that registered it. As I was bending over to disentangle my shoe from the rags on the floor, I clearly discerned the features of that face. I draw closer. Is this Eric? The photo is dark and the glass reflects my own face. I can hear voices in the distance.

I listen in, it's noise from the street. I look around. I take the frame off the wall and carry it under the table lamp.

That must be a fairly old photo. A self-portrait perhaps, he poses leaning against a wall on the Kampa island with a mild, forthcoming expression in his eyes. There's a camera strapped round his neck, a bag over his shoulder, no doubt with cassettes inside, although CDs were definitely already around by then. Yes, typical Eric, who during the twilight of the tape recorder era sends me cassettes from Marseille with his favourite music, which I never could listen to. Dark, dry face by the age of twenty, the following years desiccating it even further. Could this really be him? I draw my face closer to the glass, tilting the photo in the lamplight so far that it slips out of my fingers and falls onto the floor, sending shards of glass in all directions.

Oh, me, fool!

"I am so sorry, I broke your art!" I call out,

unsure of myself. No response.

I go looking for a dustpan and brush. I find a pair in the kitchen under the sink. I try to sweep away the shards, but there must, in all that old junk, still be sharp pieces remaining somewhere. I put the dustpan and brush back into the kitchen, which smells of garlic. I walk through the shop to look for Eric, then grab my coat and go out into the street. I feel a gust of wind. It's not raining anymore. The Berlin neons are flickering their Teutonic refrains. I recall and replay that ancient furtive friendship, which ended because of my idle stupidity. I try to recall all the mutual warm and playfully scintillating sentences, again ashamed of those hurtfully-sounding words, so easy to utter and forget, and then hide behind my own foolhardiness. Did mispronunciation mask a subconscious intention to take a step back? Words do not disappear, however, they only pile up. People don't meet by coincidence. Relationships with them ought to, perhaps, teach us something. Is it possible to alter or un-utter the uttered?

I turn around and briskly head back toward the shop. It's difficult to find one's way in the dark alley. Houses to the right peter out, it can't have been this one, the street leading on to a park. I can make out the shadows of dog-walkers in the gloom. Through the trees, flash the thinning headlight-lines of cars, passing by in the distance. Behind them, on the bridge, whizzes the S-Bahn. Its dazzling windows shout down the stars for a while as they flicker out in the skies, then the train dwindles away until its light vanishes completely in the distance. I've begun shivering with cold. It's dark, but half-hidden high up between the two towers in front of me is another half-legible neon sign... AIME PAS...

I keep walking down the street, pausing at every window. Which one was it? This one, perhaps? Yes, that's the one, the dusty neon is off however, the tin shutter is down, has been for many years it seems. Slowly, I wipe some dust off the tin groove. I wince. Behind me, someone has just emerged from the darkness.

"Wissen Sie, ist hier etwas offen?" I'm accosted, by a tourist, possibly. In reaction to my clueless expression he pulls an empty drinks can out of his pocket and looks into the deserted street.

I shrug.

"I'm sorry but everything is closed. It's much too late." ■



"Harvest We Sow," Sappa, Prague, 2014, by Antonio Cossa.

STREET

ANTONIO COSSA

Antonio is my partner in photography in the streets & nightclubs of Prague. We roam around looking for that perfect image. Antonio lives for such moments. I have never seen him without his camera & he is certainly the master of Prague street photography. I think he sleeps with his camera. He is originally from Mozambique. As a boy in Mozambique, he would take tourists to special sites & act as their guide. One tourist gave him a camera & it changed his life forever. He discovered a different world. He went on to document an isolated South African tribe called the Makonde. He captured the last generation of this tribe through their rituals, dance, craft & stories.

He got some recognition from this & went on to work as a freelance photographer with the Mozambican & international media, UNICEF & the British Council. It led him to document the "pain-&-faith" pilgrims of Fatima in central Portugal. Somehow he woke up one morning & found himself in the magical city of Prague. He thought he would be here for only a short period of time, but now it has become his home.

He has gone on to do portraits of the last survivors of Auschwitz. He is currently working on the frontline of the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. He started to document the refugees' journey from the Greek island of Lesbos, through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria & Germany & on to the infamous refugee camp at Calais. From here the refugees attempt to reach the "promised land" of the UK.

Antonio organizes lectures at universities & non-government institutions in order to share the stories & conditions of people who are the victims of poverty, injustice, ignorance & prejudice. His mission is to give a voice to those in need & at the same time sensitize the public to the problems we all face in our daily lives. By doing so, Antonio hopes to bring people together in order to find solutions through open debate & brainstorming sessions. He uses his photographic talents to make all of this possible. – Robert Carrithers ■



"We're Not Going Anywhere," Prague, 2015 (top); "Who Makes the Law," 2013 (bottom), by Antonio Cossa.



"I See You When You See Me," 2013, by Antomio Cossa.



"Where Are You?" 2014, by Antomio Cossa.



"The Power Belongs to the People," 2013 (top); "Predator," 2013 (bottom), by Antomio Cossa.



CzechTek, 29 July 2005, by Jan Zátorský.

FREETEKNO

JAROMÍR LELEK

1

The first sound systems were born in Jamaica. The musicians operating the sounds systems, the early “selectors”, arrived in town on their mobile rig, camped in the main square & whipped out their make-shift mixtables. These highly anticipated social events were distinguished for the innovation of the music being played (reggae, dancehall) & the influential fusion of DIY culture & music production.

The party was then exported to Great Britain,

that colonial HQ that would brew drum & bass.¹ Punk sprang up thanks to reggae which taught it the anti-colonial & anti-establishment message. The beats & rhythm patterns of dub, ska & rocksteady gave it swing. The crucial Jamaican influence was

¹ The label of the genre of drum & bass has many versions like Drum & Bass, drum ‘n’ bass, most often shortened to D’n’B, D&B, DnB, or simply dnb.

mixed along with hip hop, jazz, funk, Chicago Acid house & Detroit techno & this sound wave flowed back across the pond to England, & went on to water the soil from which hardcore & jungle grew. In the course of the late '80s/early '90s UK warehouse parties & pirate radios delivered this baby: rave music, kicking & screaming, born of euphoria.

A member of the legendary Spiral Tribe², contrasting it with the "three minute tale" of pop music, called the Acid House sets "a programmed voyage for the mind."³ The bassline of rave music was not moving & developing in the sense of harmony & melody; it was going around in a loop. That loop would not change in pitch but in frequency. This was the musical revolution of rave. Without getting into too much detail, around 1995 the "drum & bass" genre branched out as a specific fusion marked by breakbeats (150-180 BPM⁴) with heavy syncopation⁵, heavy bass & sub-bass lines, sampled sources & synthesizers. All the way from Jamaica, by way of GB, the freetekno subculture⁶ then arrived to the Czech Republic.

Sound systems from France & Britain set up the earliest free festivals. Among these, Spiral Tribe stood above all. From Spiral Tribe we draw the symbol of the freetekno subculture "23" which has been reoccurring in fringe movements ever since William S. Burroughs found the number – "the 23 enigma" – hauntingly meaningful⁷.

One fine day, the Spiral Tribe crew in conjunction with the Mutoid Waste Company packed a convoy of sound systems, buggies, scrapped East German tanks (which they picked up en route), & decommissioned MiG fighter jets & travelled to the

Czech Republic, where, to the astonishment of the locals, the Tribe folk threw a major free party (1994). This was the spark from which the fires of CzechTek were lit.

Subsequently Czech sound systems emerged & also started to play at teknivals. Between the years 1998 & 2002, Zdeněk claims, CzechTek was the most important event happening on the scene. The level of police suppression & political ill-will Spiral Tribe experienced at Castlemorton in 1992 the Czechs underwent in 2005 on a field near Mlýnec na Tachovsku. In short, the government crushed a dream. But more on that later.

The year is 2003, the place Tachovské náměstí 7, Žižkov. Žižkov is the infamous party quarter of Prague where you can find the best underground venues. Tachovské náměstí sits in the bend of Koněvova. The Koněvova street winds & climbs its long way along the Vítkov hill, where Jan Žižka sits, whose is the biggest bronze equestrian sculpture in the Czech Republic, & third biggest in the world. The legend has it that in times of dire need, Jan Žižka – who is an infamous Hussite leader who, right here, defeated king Sigismund in 1420⁸ – will ride out of the hill with his troops to the rescue of the Czech lands.

Tachovské náměstí 7 housed Matrix. The Matrix club played a saviour role on the underground club scene of Prague, offering a wide variety of genres & a vast space to rave. The space was an underground 600m² hall that used to be a cold storage room. Sandwiched between the refrigerator times & drum & bass times, there was a Roma discotheque.

Michal Tůma was the first one to take care of dramaturgy in Matrix. The focus was on "heavy riffs" & "dirty electro." There was a space to fill on the scene after such notorious names such as U Zoufalců & Bunkr closed down. Tůma kickstarted the party season with a host of events, e.g. Rock ride, Hip hop session, In da Techno, or Cheap Pleasures. On Mondays, people would bring their own CDs. On Fridays, there would be a regular dnb party.

Another bedrock of the alternative music scene was the Cross Club, located near the subway station Nádraží Holešovice. Back in the early days, you would have reading rooms, clay floors, a ditch in

² A free party sound system which existed in the first half of the 1990s, & became active again in 2007 & continues to host club nights & parties in the UK & across Europe. The collective originated in west London & later travelled across Europe & North America. According to one member, the name came to him when he was at work, "staring at a poster of the interconnecting spirals in an ammonite shell." The group had a huge influence on the emerging free tekno subculture. Members of the collective released seminal records on their label, Network 23.

³ *World Traveller Adventures – 23 Minute Warning – Spiral Tribe*, dir. Damien Raclot & Krystof Gillier.

⁴ Beats per minute.

⁵ "Uneven movement from bar to bar."

⁶ "Freetekno is the name of a cultural movement that is present in Europe, Australia & North America. Freetekno sound systems or tribes form in loose collectives, frequently with anarchist philosophies. These sound systems join together to hold parties wherever a viable space can be found – typical locations include warehouses (also known as squat parties), fields, abandoned buildings or forests. Because freetekno parties are usually held illegally this sometimes leads to clashes with the police, as was the case at both the 2004 & 2005 Czechtek festivals & many other, smaller parties around the world at different times."

⁷ The Burroughs & the 23 anecdote is quoted in the subsequent essay sketching out the symbolism behind 23.

⁸ "420" is another symbolic number relevant to the discourse. Urbanictionary.com expounds: "the term 420 originated at San Rafael High School, in 1971, among a group of about a dozen pot-smoking wisecracks who called themselves the Waldos, who are now pushing 50. The term was shorthand for the time of day the group would meet, at the campus statue of Louis Pasteur, to smoke pot. Intent on developing their own discreet language, they made 420 code for a time to get high, & its use spread among members of an entire generation." Now every pot-head in the world knows why 4:20pm is such a special time of the day.

between the stage & the dance floor & an aquarium inhabited by a carp. Michal says that “even back then,” the people over at Cross were “really out there.”

Especially the interior has always been unique, telling of a massive steampunk influence but transcending all attempts at categorization due to its organic & spontaneous growth. Cross was run by a group of young people around František Chmelík who poured their hearts into the project, whereas Matrix was always run by rather older gentlemen who didn't take much interest in the music & so a coherent development of the club only began with its transformation into Storm. Nonetheless the dramaturgy of Matrix was always great.

Next there was Punto in Smíchov. DJ Suki (Zdeněk Souček) said in our interview that “for a Prague DJ, to play in Punto on a Thursday night meant you made it.” DJ Pixie (Tomáš Mázdra) wrote to me in our interview that Punto was so dear to him that he couldn't help himself but to buy & run the place for a few years, dubbing the place Azyl (“Haven”). Another significant rave venue was Roxy which regularly brought & still brings world-class dnb names & takes great care of the club's facilities & visual aspect (though, in comparison to Matrix, the entrance tends to rise up). Another Prague spot that was famous for great dnb parties was Abaton in Libeň, which was a huge industrial space, & Wakata in Letná that shut down about a year ago.

Besides Prague, the mining city of Ostrava in the eastern part of the Czech Republic was a Mecca for drum & bass parties: the Dvoika.Troika crew, the “founding fathers” of the Ostrava scene: Sub.D.Visionz & Eklekt. Among the clubs the greatest legends are Fabric & TNT hosting parties like Future Breakz or Slim Slam Drum (SSD).

It was at the recurrent dnb parties in Matrix – like Faster (under BADPOINT crew), Ring for MC, DnB Xmas in Matrix, or Bassetix nights – that Zdeněk Souček, aka DJ Suki, & Michal Karmazin met. I sat down with these gentlemen to reminisce over the good old times. The interview took place in the Žižkov headquarters of the biggest dnb festival in Europe, Let it Roll, & of the club that developed from Matrix, Storm. Zdeněk has vivid brown eyes that bespeak solidity in dealing. Michal was less formal, with black yet blaring dnb T-shirt. He reminded me incredibly of Corey Stoll. The interview naturally turned into a conversation between Zdeněk & Michal.

Both Zdeněk & Michal agreed that back when they were starting (late 90s, early 2000s), the size of the fan base & the number of producers & DJs were rather scarce, yet the community was tight-knit. You knew where you would meet your friends this Friday. Both the interviewees concurred that the

atmosphere was exceedingly friendly, & when you went to an event in the early 2000s without a crown in your pocket, you were sure to meet your buddies or quickly befriend someone & be invited for a *pivko*⁹. Michal admits the vibe was of a traditional Czech hangout around a fire. But instead of the guitar & a tramp song, you'd get high on high-octane D&B.

Zdeněk Souček, or Dj Suki, started dj-ing in 1997. He has already been established as one of the legends on the Czech dnb scene, from both the standpoint of a DJ & that of a promoter & organizer. To pigeon-hole the music he plays is a bit misleading since he always said in interviews that he just plays good music wherever he can find it. He began with an interest in hip hop & techno but soon fell for reggae, jungle & drum & bass. Zdeněk has performed alongside such legendary DJs as Roni Size (UK) or Ed Rush (UK). He works as a partner & a promoter for Let it Roll & runs Storm. Invariably, he manages to bring to the Czech Republic some of the biggest names on the scene.

What Zdeněk plays most of the time is drum & bass or a mixture of its many subgenres – jump-up (“Skočky” in Czech), ragga drum & bass, techstep, drumstep, hardstep, liquid funk or neurofunk to name a few of the old drum & bass's subgenres. When he was starting, Suki was drawing heavily on the rich, rhythmical bass line of reggae & dub but sped it up drum & bass style; put plainly, Dj Suki's dnb swings.

In the intervening years, Zdeněk & Michal would produce parties at Matrix, calling themselves a band of enthusiasts rather than a professional crew. The very beginnings were a bit rocky; they fondly recollect the first ever party they threw at Matrix to which about 2 people showed up. Learning the power of promo, the attendance to their parties would not drop below triple digits ever again.

Zdeněk took over Matrix in 2013, after the previous owners rather let Matrix rot & become decrepit. Though the events were still taking place thanks to the producing vigour of Zdeněk, Michal & other *aficionados*. Some of the early DJs & producers on the Czech dnb scene included IM Cyber (Ivana Marcinová), DJ Katcha, Forbidden Society (Jindřich Brejcha), Philip T.B.C. or X.Morph to name an eclectic few.

What was most unique about Matrix was the vibe. The interior was not much, rather shabby really, with stuff hanging from the ceiling, dirty rehearsal rooms hidden deep in its bowels. A friend called it that “leaky, dim cellar.” The sprawling graffiti that covered the wall right beside the main stage,

⁹ A spoken-Czech term for *beer*. Not to be confused with *piko*, which denotes speed.

depicting a nuclear waste land, rather completed & went beyond this seedy but beautiful space. Zdeněk says that they used to call Matrix “that black hole.”

Matrix had soul – *has had* rather since the transformation to Storm, the club that came after Matrix, was one of refurbished equipment with the continuing tradition of top-notch dramaturgy & brilliant party atmosphere. Many claimed it had lost its soul in the wake of this transformation, but the club had just cleaned up its act.

When I asked Zdeněk & Michal about the underground/mainstream divide & if this took place when the venue was transformed from Matrix to Storm, they both dislike the question & say that long before they turned Matrix into Storm, the dnb parties had already been trying to appeal to a wider audience. Zdeněk & Michal agree that in the Matrix times, preceding 2013 when Zdeněk & others shaped it according to their vision, this dnb “disco” was a bit awkward, a bit dirty, with notoriously bad sound but that it had proved meaningful for the scene; it helped to build a community. Where Cross had dedicated owners from the beginning, Matrix had the producers, DJs & fans to bring in the heart.

Also, Zdeněk says that “it was the only place where a small time dnb DJ could get in.”

Michal talks about how the early audience lived & breathed the music, for instance on the example of the spread of information & the frequency of events. Now a junglist¹⁰ is swamped by an influx of invitations, posters, ads, or foreign artists performing every week which desensitizes enthusiasm. In the Matrix days people sought out information on their own because there weren’t that many parties, a visiting foreign dj was a “precious thing” & the media for disseminating info about the gigs were less numerous. Now the party market is oversaturated & it conditions the organizers to get more competitive. Zdeněk says that “whereas people used to look up the info on their own, now we have to force it upon them.” He goes on saying that there used to be designated spots to hang posters & fliers on where people knew they would find them, now he has to make sure the post(er) is eye-catching enough to stand out in the endless stream of a timeline.

When I ask if it used to be harder to become a DJ when they were starting, they both agree that it was so & complain how expensive vinyl records were & that there was nobody who would show you how to do it. The common practise among aspiring DJs was to simply stand behind a more experienced DJ while he or she was performing & then mimic their hand motions for hours on end until you were able to reproduce the same effect. Every DJ worth

her salt had to have at least 200-300 records with the going price for a vinyl about 200-300Kč. If you want to become a DJ now, you just type it in.

Michal says that DJs were using white label records which did not have a title or a tracklist – only a plain white circle around the hole in the centre. He says that there was a “magic” about it as you did not know what the arriving DJ was going to play. Michal reminisces dearly how well he knew his white label records – their every scratch – & what relationship he had with his records. He talks about a “cult” surrounding the white label vinyl records.

“D&B has truckloads of energy, moods, sub-genres... there’s something for everyone,” says DJ Pixie, Tomáš Mázdra, who won the Czech Drumandbass Awards’ DJ of the Year award in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012 & 2014. Tomáš concludes that dnb “just has oomph.”

Tomáš admits he had started out as a techno raver but once he heard Jumping Jack Frost at an open air at Proboštská Jezera, those glorious breakbeats made him a follower.

He quickly turned into a leader with the now legendary T2B sound system. He also manages the company Sound Support that in collaboration with Vice Audio offers comprehensive audio & visual solutions for concerts & festivals. And he doesn’t really like Matrix.

Then again that was the charm of Matrix; that it discouraged many. Similarly, the people behind Cross talk about a natural “filter” the idiosyncratic vibe of their club exerts. And with the poor sound equipment at Matrix, it is no wonder that Tomáš, a highly skilled sound engineer, disliked the place. He loves Storm though, & Storm is run by Zdeněk – DJ Pixie & DJ Suki have played together many times & form a brilliant duet.

All three DJs that I interviewed, Tomáš, Zdeněk & Michal, agree that if there is anything special about the Czech dnb community, it is the atmosphere at the events which has achieved worldwide renown. Both Tomáš & Zdeněk agree that only Slovaks rival the Czechs in making noise.

Tomáš, a true hall of famer, said he prefers the legendary Punto in Smíchov (which he ran for some time as Azyll) & Cross where T2B have been conducting regular DNB Sessions ever since Cross opened up for parties. Pixie was among the first Czech DJs to play jump-up style which he says had been rather new. This energetic sub-genre is symptomatic of Tomáš who plays, talks & writes with vigour. With techno roots, he then adopted Dubstep as well. Now he plays mainly Neurofunk (or neuro), which is a branch of techstep that the music critic Simon Reynolds, who coined the name of the (sub-)genre, depicted as “the fun-free culmination of jungle’s strategy of cultural resistance: the

¹⁰ A dedicated listener of jungle &/or drum & bass music.

eroticization of anxiety.”¹¹

While on the topic of anxiety, & back in Žižkov in conversation with Zdeněk & Michal, we turn to the topic of CzechTek,¹² an essential Czech freetekno music festival – a teknival – of alternative electronic music. A couple of points emerge: the electronic genres back then were much less distinguished, with the same community attending both freetekno & dnb gigs. The early freetekno sound systems inspired the creation of the first dnb sound systems like BASSBEAST, Bassetix, T2B. One of the significant fusion, transmission sound systems was Gardenzitty Sound System which covered most of the junglist genres like reggae/raga, dancehall but also hardcore/jungle.

CzechTek fought hard against legal issues ever since it grew noticeable (in 2003 some 40 000 people attended, with some 110 sound systems performing making it the biggest of its kind). Issues of illegal occupation of land, traffic jams, illicit drug use & noise complaints were becoming more & more pressing. Police presence at the teknival was already something commonplace. The level of police brutality that erupted at CzechTek 2005 however was unprecedented, at least in the young democratic Czech Republic.

“My first reaction?” Michal reacts to my question about his response to the 1000+ riot policemen & a helicopter that, at the direct order of the then Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Jiří Paroubek, descended on the attendees at a meadow near Mlýnec na Tachovsku.

“I was pissed off that there ain’t no CzechTek,” Michal admits. “And I really hated Paroubek’s guts.”

Besides premature cancellation of the teknival, severe injuries were inflicted on some of the more defiant ravers & also on some of the intervening policemen. Some of the court cases were being tried till just recently. Only a fraction of the attacked attendees won their cases.

The riot police used heavy, “less-than-lethal” equipment like batons, water cannons, a BVP military vehicle & tear gas; lots & lots of tear gas. Some of the ravers hurled round bales of hay against the policeman, reminiscent of the grass-root, guerrilla tactics of Jan Žižka.

“Then everybody was angry with Gross, who was in command.” Michal here mentions Stanislav Gross who together with František Bublan, the Minister of the Interior, who was directly responsible

for the carnage, celebrated the violent intervention. Paroubek said that tekno fans are not “dancing children but dangerous people.”

Michal says that “it smacked of communism,” a sentiment that was shared by the wide populace & by many dissidents, underground artists & even top politicians like the then president of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus. Nobody wanted to go back to the old regime with its hysterically repressive tactics.

The consequences were in a way devastating. The events of 29-31 Jan 2005 spelled the end of the cohesiveness of the Czech freetekno DIY scene & of the general rise of electronic underground subcultures. As both Michal & Zdeněk agree, ripples of this are still felt to this day. When they are organizing venues, they have to begin by stating outright:

“We’re not *that evil technopárty*, we’re a commercial, safe event.”

There has been a lot of hysterical & propagandist reporting on the event & on other freetekno parties. Michal says that ever since CzechTek, a normal Czech person starts panicking as soon as he sees speakers in the fields & suspiciously swaying youths.

Zdeněk concludes that in the wake of the CzechTek havoc the scene basically ended & that the community became much more fragmented & less autonomous.

This of course did not affect the Prague clubs to any worrying degree. Matrix, that dingy lair of exquisite dnb, was still swinging, eventually metamorphosing into the well-equipped, DJ-star-attracting Storm. Roxy still was & is bringing distinguished DJs to Prague from all over the world; Cross still grows its steampunk, moving sculptures & recently made headlines as one of the best 25 clubs in Europe. Let it Roll, the project of Zdeněk of Michal et al., has been steadily voted as the best dnb festival in the world.

When the Spiral Tribe started to travel again around England & Europe with their ever increasing convoy, having faced police brutality on many occasions, yet undeterred, they were handing out flyers that stated their philosophy, that through the power of music “We are here to reconnect the Earth.” The message to the authorities was clear: “You might stop the party but you can’t stop the future.”

¹¹ Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music & Dance Culture* (London: Soft Skull Press, 2012).

¹² The festival went through quite a variety of names & though the attendance grew rapidly the essential freetekno vibe never died. Some of the names included “Free festival” (1994), “Teknival/Tekknival” (1995/97), “Czech Teknival” (1998) & only since 1999 “CzechTek.”

From what I can remember Matrix was the place to rage. Matrix was the spot to unload to toke to drink to dance to meet to connect to rave mad to toke to dancefuck the speakers – the pounding beat of



CzechTek, 29 July 2005, by Jan Zátorský.

life – to vibe to glide through the rhythm to surf the wave smooth right before it drops to plunge deep as the sound rises back again to immerse wholly bound in sound as it swings on & on the mechanical monomaniacal monster rising from the sea of sound to command a following of committed lizard dancers with joyous ecstatic faces.

I move yo body di jump s'don't do it..."He's playing it! *Reload!* Jesus yes!" I cried. Nobody heard me but they all understood my rapturous face. And they felt the same – this was the bomb that has been gracing their Winamps & BSP Players. And here was the man himself a few feet away spinning the living soul out of the record. He loved it, they loved it. There was a sense of bursting euphoria. Earlier cultures had used drugs & music as the means to connect with their gods or to perform ritual festivities. Here, in the quasi-underground club culture of Prague, music & drugs themselves

were the gods: Pixie was Odin & Weed was Athena; Aphrodite was Bacchus, DJ Katcha became Venus; Shrooms were the nymphs, Ecstasy Hathor, & LSD Vishnu in the supreme form of Vishvarupa. Manifold trumpets crying out at the pace of a speed-freak rapping the coked-up language of the tune that unites crossed fellows, emboldens timid souls & breaks open the mind. They loomed tall & large. Dark mechanical undertones of an army of gigantic creatures powered by electronic hearts glow crimson, pierced with rusty cables & galvanic sparks. Sad burning eyes, they march robustly forth thus shake the Earth. Monstrous leviathans that echo straight out of Hades' fathomless chambers; the dark lord himself tapping gently his black long bloody nails against the throne of slaughtered skin in the rhythm of Netsky's Take it Easy. Jah! Emperor Selassie I, King of kings, Lord of lords, the Lion Prince of the kingdom of Judah, Jah! ■

LIFE IMITATES ART

PAUL PACEY

As an artist, life is full of clichés, many of which it would be hard to argue are sadly true. But there are none more personally truthful, nor worthy of my tombstone than that age-old adage that *life imitates art*.

To be honest, I have willingly, & often happily, prostituted my camera for almost 20 years. Hell, if you paid me enough, there wasn't much I wouldn't shoot: porn stars, presidents, CEOs, vagabonds, weddings, runways – you name it & I've shot it, but there was always something missing, something that never felt truly "mine," until that is, I began to approach the camera the same way I approach life.

Since then, my personal work (as my life) has been as full with heart ache & failure as it is with profound beauty & wonder. Fuck playing it safe! Give me a leap of faith, & like some adrenaline junkie, I'll take it all day. When I fail, I may fail miserably, but *oh*, when it works....)

And when it comes to wet plate, I may still be little more than a rookie, but it's unique imperfection & beautiful unpredictably appeals to me in every conceivable way, as both a man & as an artist. As always, the ghost in the machine remains my greatest collaborator. Seems we make a pretty good team. ■

ROBERT CARRITHERS

In the deep dark winter of Prague in 2016-7, I sat for Paul to do a wet plate photo portrait in one take & this is the result. – Robert Carrithers ■





Diane Lillig at Dave's Luncheonette, around the corner from Tier 3 & the Mudd Club, 1982, by Robert Carrithers.

EPILOGUE

For me, each city has a voice & a personality that fits its environment & its people. For this book I decided to focus on Prague, Berlin & New York because these cities have had the most influence on my own life. When I go back to New York these days, I still get this sense of an intense energy that can still sweep me up, even though it is no longer the city I once knew. When I lost the Tenth Street apartment in 1994 it was two hundred & thirty six dollars. The rent must be ten times higher now! I think the writers, artists & photographers included herein show life as it was then – & as it is now.

I still think back to my life in 1992. I had a summer romance in Prague with a woman named Lenka, & after I got back to New York I intended to stay in touch. When I got a phone call in September telling me she was pregnant, the decision I had to make was not too difficult. I was burnt out from New York at that point & felt that this was my destiny. I now have a 23-year-old son Michael here in Prague & it is still my home today. No regrets about that! This is a long story told short, probably the shortest story in this book.

Prague & Berlin are no longer the cities that I first visited in 1990. The world has changed, like it always does & it certainly has not changed for the better. Artists do their best to adapt to it, involved in their own private fights to survive & express themselves creatively.

Thank you for letting me be your guide & taking you on this journey, through the tales of these three cities with the writing, art, poetry & photographs of some people I admire & respect. It's always nice to travel with friends, people that you have something in common with. All of them help make this book very special because of their insights, originality & unique personalities. I hope that you have enjoyed the views & memories of those of us who have lived creatively in New York, Berlin & Prague.

Thank you to the creative spirits who are no longer here and who have inspired me. I could write a book with just the list of names, but ones who come to mind are Wendy Wild, John Sex, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Rees, William Lively, David Good, Ann Craig, Gerard Little, Daria Deshuk, Michael Smith, Brian Saltern, Edwige Belmore, Howie Montaug, Rockets Redglare, Arthur Weinstein & many more. For those I did not mention, You can give me shit for not writing your names when we meet again in the hereafter, but don't worry, I will do my best to be late!

– Robert Carrithers ■

Bruno Adams emerged from the Melbourne Punk/New Wave scene forming Once Upon A Time in 1984 before moving to Berlin in 1989 & supporting Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds throughout Europe on "The Good Son" Tour in 1990. He later founded The Fatal Shore with Phil Shoenfelt & Chris Hughes. Bruno passed away in Berlin on 18 April 2009. www.fatal-shore.de/brunoadams

Penny Arcade aka Susana Ventura is a performance artist, writer, poet, spoken word & theatre maker. She debuted at 18 in *The Playhouse of The Ridiculous* & was an Andy Warhol Factory Superstar, featuring in the film *Women In Revolt*. www.pennyarcade.tv

Louis Armand is the author of novels including *The Combinations* (2016) & *Breakfast at Midnight* (2012) & of the poetry collections *East Broadway Rundown* (2015) & *The Rube Goldberg Variations* (2015), as well as *Videology* (2015) & *The Organ-Grinder's Monkey: Culture after the Avantgarde* (2013). He edits *VLAK* magazine & lives in Prague. www.louis-armand.com

Dale Ashmun is working on his memoirs *The Luckiest Man in the World*. Ashmun's articles have appeared in *Screw*, *Psychotronic Video*, *Roadkill*, *Hustler*, *Film Threat* & *Kult of Kuteness*. dashmun@hotmail.com.

Johanna Jackie Baier is a photographer, television director & filmmaker. Her documentary *Julia* premiered at the 70th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematographica / Venice Film Festival in 2013. She lives in Berlin. fotografie.jackiebaier.de

Markéta Baňková's books include *The Magpie in the Realm of Entropy*, which won the Magnesia Litera Discovery of the Year, & *Minutia*. www.bankova.cz

Lina Bertucci is a visual artist working in photography, video, & film. Bertucci photographs of emerging artists in the 1980s & early 1990s were recently exhibited at the New Museum in New York. www.linabertucci.com

Mykel Board is a long-time punk provocateur. After 30 years of writing for *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*, he was fired for being too punk. The piece that appears in this book was originally written for that zine. mykelsblog.blogspot.com

Victor Bockris is an author primarily of biographies of artists, writers, & musicians including Lou Reed & The Velvet Underground, Andy Warhol, Keith Richards, William S. Burroughs, Patti Smith, & John Cale. In 1973 he moved to New York & became associated with Warhol & Burroughs & published frequently in *Interview*. He is presently at work on his memoirs, *Punk Writer: A Way of Life*.

Christoph Brandl is a photographer, writer, & mixed-media artist, who in pre-digital times he decorated New York subway walls with photo collages. In 2015 he received the prestigious Kenyan Photographer of the Year Award. www.brandlstories.de

Robert Carrithers is a Prague-based curator, photographer, video artist, filmmaker, silkscreen artist & painter who has also spent many years working in Berlin & New York, specializing in revealing portraits of unique personalities. "I seek out these people & do my best to capture them in photographs & to work with them in some way." His photographs have been exhibited internationally. www.robertcarrithers.com

David Černý is a sculptor whose works can be seen at many locations in Prague. He gained notoriety in 1991 by painting a Soviet tank pink. In 2005, Černý created Shark, an image of Saddam Hussein in a tank of formaldehyde. www.davidcerny.cz

Roman Černý has worked as a commercial photographer for lifestyle magazines & advertising agencies in Sydney & works in Berlin, Germany, in the Czech Republic, but mostly lived & worked as a photographer in Prague. www.romancerny.com

Michal Cihlár is considered to be the creator of the modern Czech linocut. www.michalcihlar.com

Antonio Cossa is a Mozambican photojournalist living & working in the Prague & has started to document the refugee journey from the Greek island of Lesbos, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austrian Border & Calais. antoniocossa.daportfolio.com

William Coupon is a portrait photographer based in New York who began documenting the city's subcultures in 1978 with a portfolio on Studio 54 & the Punk/ New Wave scene at the Mudd Club. www.williamcoupon.com

Steve Dalachinsky is a New York poet, collage artist & jazz critic whose books include *Loops & Language: A Post-Jazz Metaphorical Dialogue* (with Matthew Shipp & Lorna Lentini, 2008) & *Invasion of the Animal People* (2009).

Max Dax is an author, photographer, DJ & curator currently living in Berlin. He was editor of *Spex*. From 2011-2014 he was editor of *Electronic Beats*. He directs STRRR.TV.

Christoph Dreher is a filmmaker & video & TV producer. He was co-founder of the band Die Haut & worked with Nick Cave & Lydia Lunch. He teaches film & video at the Merz Akademie for Arts, Design & Media, Stuttgart.

Sara Driver is a filmmaker whose credits include *You Are not I* (1982), *Sleepwalk* (1986) & *When Pigs Fly* (1993). She produced Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984) & *Permanent Vacation* (1979).

Glen Emery arrived in Prague a few months after the revolution in 1990 & has operated several iconic bars & clubs in the city.

Vincent Farnsworth is the author of *Theremin: Selected Poems* (2011) &, as Reverend Feedback, is the frontman of the Prague band Blaq Mummy.

Roxanne Fontana is an Italian American author, singer, songwriter, musician, recording artist, poet, actress, and clothing and jewelry designer.

Thor Garcia is a writer whose books include *The News Clown* (2012) & *Only Fools Die of Heartbreak* (2013). His novel *Pink Alligator: The Testament of Captain Chip T. Walkner*, is due to be published in 2017.

Carola Göllner is an artist & she has had numerous exhibitions in Germany & abroad. Since 2008 her texts have been published in anthologies & literary magazines. She lives & works in Berlin. www.carola-goellner.de

Gaby Bíla-Günther, aka Lady Gaby is a Berlin-based spoken word & performance artist. www.soundcloud.com/lady-gaby

Susanne Glück is an author who has been living & writing in Berlin for the last 25 years.

Carl Haber has directed alternative & hip-hop music videos, Off-Broadway theater, downtown nightclub performance art & several short films. He founded & directs the Rome International Film School.

Anthony Haden-Guest is a British-American writer, reporter, cartoonist, art critic, poet & socialite who lives in New York & London.

Jex Harshman is a writer, artist & photographer from NYC.

Henry Hills is a New York experimental filmmaker whose work includes *Money* (1985), *Little Lieutenant* (1994) & *Failed States* (2008).

Nhoah Hoena is a Berlin-based music producer, composer & artist. He tours with Tangowerk & the Berliner Elektrosalon.

Michael Holman is a filmmaker, artist, writer & musician based in New York City. Holman founded the band Gray with Jean-Michel Basquiat in 1979 & wrote the screenplay for Julian Schnabel's 1996 biopic, *Basquiat*. www.michaelholman.com

Chris Hughes was a member of Once Upon A Time, Hugo Race & The True Spirit, & The Fatal Shore. He also played with the Berlin-based collective Snowcrash & The Methylated Spirits. www.fatal-shore.de/chrishughes

Jolana Izbická is an artist, clothes designer, curator & book illustrator. In the mid 1990s she operated Faux Pas boutique & started her own fashion label. www.fauxpas.cz

Timo Jacobs is a Berlin film director who began his career as a stage actor. www.timojacobs.de

Bethany Jacobson is a photographer & video artist. Her video work *All Exits Final* & *Raw Zones* were exhibited at the Museum of Moving Image, ICA, London & PS1, NY. www.bethanyjacobson.com

Tobias Jirous is a poet, writer & musician born in Prague in 1972 to a family of dissidents. His books include *Slova pro bílý papír* (Words for White Paper), *Zakončený deník* (Finished Diary), & *Než vodopády spadnou* (Before the Waterfalls Fall).

Julius Klein is an artist who has worked in many forms. www.juliusklein.net

Bettina Köster is a German musician, saxophonist, composer, singer, songwriter & producer. In 1979 she founded *Mania D* with Karin Luner, Beate Bartel, Eva Gossling & Gudrun Gut. In 1981, Köster & Gut started the Indie band Malaria!

Hubert Kretzschmar began his career as a graphic artist. He lives in New York & with illustration, photography, video, sculpture & computer graphics. www.hubertworks.com

Jaromír Lelek edits the literary magazine *The Word Addict* & co-edited, with Louis Armand, *PornoTerrorism: De-Aestheticising Power* (2016). thewordaddict.com

Lydia Lunch is the Queen of No Wave, muse of The Cinema of Transgression, writer, musician, poet, spoken word artist & photographer. Her numerous books include *Will Work For Drugs & Paradoxia: A Predator's Diary*. www.lydia-lunch.net

Steve Morell is a producer, musician, DJ, founder of the record label Pale Music Int. & the German underground festival Berlin Insane.

Mona Mur is a musician & singer & has collaborated with Einstürzende Neubauten, The Stranglers, Marc Chung & Alexander Hacke. She lives in Berlin. monamur.com

Julia Murakami lives in Berlin & works with many aspects of diorama art, photography & painting. She is a regular curator & artistic director for Directors Lounge Berlin. www.juliamurakami.com

Shalom Neuman is a multimedia artist & founder of Fusionism who divides his time between New York & Prague. shalom-art.com

Paul Pacey is a Prague based photographer. www.paulpacey.com

Puma Perl is a poet, writer, performer, producer, & photographer. Her books include *Belinda & Her Friends* & *knuckle tattoos*. pumaperl.blogspot.com

Rudolf Piper was at the helm of Studio 54, Danceteria, Tunnel, Palladium & other clubs. rudolfpiper.com

Rudi Protrudi was the frontman for New York band The Fuzztones. www.fuzztones.net

Gary Ray Bugarcic aka Gary Ray is a theatre professional & photographer, & founder of the 1980s NY performance club Darinka.

Mark Reeder has played in Die Unbekannten & Shark Vegas, & co-managed Malaria! He was the focus of Joerg Hoppe's documentary *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West Berlin 79-89*.

Marcia Resnick has photographed many figures in the punk music scene & cultural icons like Andy Warhol, William Burroughs, Johnny Thunders & John Lydon. Her book, *Punks, Poets & Provocateurs: New York City Bad Boys 1977-1982*, appeared in 2015. www.marciarensnick.com

Ingrid Rudefors has written & directed several short films, including *A Woman's Point Of View During Sex* & *The Art Of Flying A Flag*. She lives in New York & Stockholm. *Meanwhile on a Roof In Chinatown* is her first novel.

Ilse Ruppert is a Berlin-based photographer who captured the music, fashion, art, & lifestyle of the 80s, including The Who, Kraftwerk, The Ramones, Blixa Bargeld, The Stranglers, The Clash, Keith Richards, & Frank Zappa. www.ilserruppert.de

Šimon Šafránek is a filmmaker, music video director & writer. He is the author of a novel *Fleischerei 36* (2008).

Honza Sakař is a Prague-based photographer focused on portraiture & documentary. www.saki.cz

Oliver Schütz is a writer, composer, photographer, singer & songwriter based in Berlin.

Tom Scully co-founded Club 57 in New York in 1979 & has worked as a DJ in New York & Paris.

Semra Sevin is a Berlin photographer. www.semrasevin.com

Phil Shoенfelt has lived in Prague since 1995. During the 1980s he was frontman for Khmer Rouge & was later a

founding member of the Berlin bands Fatal Shore & Dim Locator. www.philshoenfelt.com

Marcia Schofield was a regular on the downtown NY music scene of the late 70s/early 80s, when she joined Khmer Rouge as keyboardist. After moving to London in 1984, she joined The Fall.

Peter Nolan Smith is a writer & an underground punk legend of the 1970s East Village. He is currently writing a semi-fictional book about hitchhiking across the USA in 1974. www.mangozeen.com

Mark Steiner is a musician, recording artist & studio producer, & runs Galleri Schaeffers Gate 5 in Oslo. staggerhome.com

Azalea So Sweet is a singer, musician, composer & lyricist for the Brno-based band Sidi Santini & The Decadents, & later for the Prague-based band Sweet Positive. www.facebook.com/azalea.sosweet

Kenton Turk formed & fronted the indie band Maven-Post in Toronto, before relocating it to Berlin. After a number of years creating texts for the Berlin Film Festival, he began working with Berlin-based Directors Lounge where he is currently artistic director.

Varhan Orchestrovič Bauer is a film-score composer whose work includes Miloš Forman's *Goya's Ghost*, which he recorded at Abbey Road, where he conducted the London Symphony Orchestra. He plays & records with the Instant Film Orchestra. varhan.cz

André Werner is a video artist who regularly cooperates with Vienna-based artist & random researcher Cosima Reif. artyesno.com

David Zijlstra is a filmmaker & photographer who currently lives in Rotterdam. www.davidzijlstra.nl

Ian Wright lives & works in Berlin as a sound man on film & TV productions. He played in the Berlin electronic band Mensch ist einfach & was a member of Din-A-Testbild.

Nick Zedd is a filmmaker & author who coined the term Cinema of Transgression in 1985. He edited & wrote the *Underground Film Bulletin* (1984-90) & directed many low budget films, including *War is Menstrual Envy*, *The Bogus Man* & *King of Sex*. www.nickzedd.com

Richard & Winter Zoli. Richard co-owned & operated Radost FX club in Prague from 1992 to 2015. Winter is an actress & writer living in Los Angeles. www.radostfx.cz

Miron Zownir was hailed by Terry Southern as the "Poet of Radical Photography". He is also a filmmaker & writer of crime novels. www.mironzownir.com



CITY PRIMEVAL

NEW YORK BERLIN PRAGUE

traces a cultural migration, from the defining historical moments of New York Post-Punk & No Wave, to the fall of the Berlin Wall & Reunification, to the Velvet Revolution & the Prague Renaissance. Assembled around Robert Carrithers's photographic odyssey are personal documentaries of place & time by key writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers, photographers, artists & performers of the New York, Berlin & Prague underground scenes, from the late 1970s to the present, including BRUNO ADAMS, DARINA ALSTER, PENNY ARCADE, DALE ASHMON, JACKIE BAIER, MARKETKA BANKOVÁ, VARHAN ORCHESTROVIČ BAUER, BERT, LINA BERTUCCI, GABY BILA-GUNTHER, MYKEL BOARD, VICTOR BOCKRIS, CHRISTOPH BRANDL, DAVID ČERNÝ, ROMAN ČERNÝ, MICHAL CIHLAR, ANTONIO COSSA, WILLIAM COUPON, TEREZA DAVIES, MAX DAX, CHRISTOPH DREHER, SARA DRIVER, GLEN EMERY, VINCENT FARNSWORTH, ROXANNE FONTANA, THOR GARCIA, CAROLA GOELLNER, ANTHONY HADEN GUEST, CARL HABER, JERE HARSHMAN, MICHAEL HOLMAN, CHRIS HUGHES, JOLANA IZBICKÁ, TIMO JACOBS, BETHANY JACOBSON, TOBIÁŠ JIROUS, JULIANA DA COSTA JOSÉ, BETTINA KOSTER, JULIUS KLEIN, HUBERT KETZSCHMAR, NORA LAWRENCE, JAROMÍR LELEK, LYDIA LUNCH, MONA MUR, JULIA MURAKAMI, SHALOM NEUMAN, PAUL PACEY, PUMA PERL, RUDOLF PIPER, RUDI PROTRUDI, GARY RAY, MARK REEDER, MARCIA RESNIK, VERONIKA RICHTEROVÁ, ANNE ROLFS, INGRID RUDEFORS, ŠIMON ŠAFRÁNEK, HONZA SAKAR, REINHARD SCHEIBNER, OLIVER SCHUTZE, TOM SCULLY, PHIL SHOENFELT, RENE SHAKHMATOV, PETER SMITH, AZELEA SO SWEET, MARK STEINER, KENTON TURK, ANDRE WERNER, IAN WRIGHT, NICK ZEDD, DAVE ZIJLSTRA, BETHEA & RICHARD ZOLI, MIRON ZOWNIR.

