

"IT'S THE WHOLE ENCHILADA": DAVID LYNCH ON MEDITATION

JANUARY
2006

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BY BRIAN EVENSON



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-A-
JUG**

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DEW**
'IT'LL TICKLE YORE INNARDS!

**MOUNTAIN
DEW**

**Hello
sunshine!**
**MOUNTAIN
DEW**

BUGGIN'
1986
CHAMPIONSHIPS
**MOUNTAIN
DEW**
OUT

Oh shoot!
I need a
MOUNTAIN DEW

MOTO
CROSS

**MOUNTAIN
DEW**

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From left: Cast King, reviewed in C & D; a Dead Cities squatter, Syria; Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))) ; the Yellowman of Aleppo; Colleen.



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W. T. NELSON

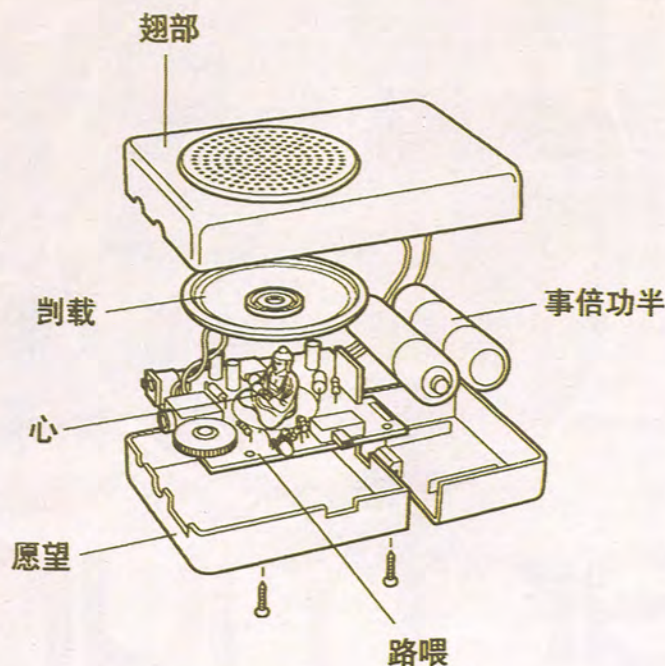
HOT TIP

Buddha Machine
fm3
(Staalplaat import)

This is an insanely brilliant device produced in China by fm3, a mysterious sound cartel who operate out of a triangular axis from Beijing to Hong Kong to Europe. The size of a small transistor radio, the Buddha Machine is a "mini soundsystem" that comes with nine built-in sound loops, a speaker, volume control, mini-jack-out, and 2 AA Chinese batteries. The sound loops are dark and melodic, electronic drones and acoustic piano mixes: soothing to the ears yet sinister in effect. The loops are maybe 10-20 seconds...they vary. You run one at a time.

It's such a simple idea and so practical that someone should have thought of it years ago, yet only the Chinese thought to use these things for prayer loops. fm3 hijacked that idea for their own use of sound and so it's actually a sound release—as in "a new record release"—in the form of a device: the Buddha Machine. Brilliant.

When I was first notified of the Buddha Machine's existence by email with attached photo, I immediately ordered 24 copies. I first experienced it as a novelty show piece at a party right after I got it. I took it around the room and showed people and sold 12 of them within five minutes. Everyone had to have one! (It comes in many splendid colors, which is an added



attraction.) One guy bought four from me and runs them simultaneously through a mixer and processes the sound. I like to keep it running in the house or office as an ambient soundtrack, playing it through the stereo.

Christiaan Virant of fm3 plans to release a compilation of artists using the device and has just asked me to participate. This will extend

the process of a new release which will finally appear as a CD but re-interpreted by other artists from the original recordings found inside the Buddha Machine.

And yes, I opened 'em up and my copies do have the little buddhas inside, just like in the schematic, except for one thing: mine are smoking cigarettes.

—Alan Bishop

More info: www.staalplaat.com

ARTHUR
CONTRIBUTORS

John Adamian is a writer and musician living in South Hadley, Mass. He is the managing editor of the Hartford Advocate.

Alan Bishop is a member of Sun City Girls, operates Abduction Records and Sublime Frequencies, and is also known as Alvarius B and Uncle Jim.

Daniel Chamberlin is a VGL SWM ISO SF N/S 420 OK. He enjoys listening to Prince, walking around in the mountains, vacationing with his brother in the Levant region of Southwest Asia and operating the website www.danielchamberlin.com

Byron Coley wishes each *Arthur* reader a safe and happy holiday season. May the new year bring us all good tidings and many new books and records of excellent and deranged design. Stay free.

Dennis Culver is a cartoonist who lives in San Pedro California. culver@funwrecker.com

Brian Evenson's latest book is *The Wavering Knife* (Fiction Collective 2). His latest (and only) CD is *Altmann's Tongue*, done in collaboration with Tamarin and Xingu Hill. He chairs the Literary Arts Program at Brown University where he's trying to establish the H.P. Lovecraft Endowed Professorship.

Henry Griffin, a fifth generation New Orleanian, is a writer and director whose films include *Mutiny* and *Tortured by Joy*. He organizes his books by color, trading organization for the pleasing effect of his shelves viewed from a distance. Since the storm, he is fresh out of blue books.

Tom Hart is slowly amassing a body of work that is far better than many people know.

Katy Horan is a New York artist/illustrator who can be found at www.katyart.com.

David Lasky is hard at work on his second 500-page career overview called *Who Knows Where the Time Goes*.

Kristine McKenna is a Los Angeles based writer and curator. Her exhibition "Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & his Circle," co-curated with Michael Duncan, is presently on a five-venue tour of the U.S. that concludes in 2007. She is working on a volume of photography by Wallace Berman, and a documentary film about the Ferus Gallery which will be accompanied by a book in 2006.

Jason Miles lives off the grid somewhere in the Pacific Northwest. He mills his own paper and grinds his own ink. He bought his brushes and nibs online but that was when he had a desk job.

Thurston Moore sold a buncha expensive records really cheap alongside Jim O'Rourke who did the same at the 2005 WFMU record fair. New Sonic Youth LP is being etched NOW as is solo bounce. Check out ecstaticpeace.com for flurry.

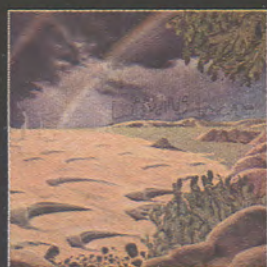
Pshaw works 'round the clock as a suburban robot who monitors reality. Common stock, shoves poles, etc. at www.pshaw.net

Douglas Rushkoff is an author. Both his new book about business, *Get Back in the Box: Innovation from the Inside Out* and his new comic book, *Testament*, were published this month.

K-Fai Steele has just begun transforming from the pink of youth to the sweaty, leathery, bill-paying hide of adulthood. k-faisteel.blogspot.com

Chris Wright seems to have disappeared. Chris, write us.





Landing
Brocade
CD SAA 37

Brocade is a turning point for **Landing**, one that harkens back to their roots as hushed drone rockers while journeying onwards into starkly minimalist, utterly cosmic terrain. Reverting inward after some of their sunny travels into headspace, *Brocade* touches on early Krautrock rhythms while delving into traditional psychedelic ambient music. An elegiac lament for **Landing's** past, and an introspective yearning towards a glistening new phase in their career.



Bright
Bells Break Their Towers
CD SAA 38

Fans of minimalist, melodic ambient rock rejoice, for leading lights **Bright** are back with *Bells Break Their Towers*, their most sonically taut and elaborately adorned recording yet. Drone and ambient textures, motorik Kraut rhythms and repetitious grooves collide with a tremendously melodic, almost pop sensibility, lending **Bright** a unique sound. This is improvised rock you can hum to while you drift into trance states.



Nels Cline/Wally Shoup/Chris Corsano
Immolation/Immersion
CD SAA 39

Immolation/Immersion is the inaugural recording of what will hopefully be more blasts of fury and filigree by three leading lights of improvised music – guitarist **Nels Cline**, saxophonist **Wally Shoup**, and young percussionist **Chris Corsano**. As hinted by the title, *Immolation/Immersion* is compellingly dynamic, capturing a full range of destructive force and quiet submersion.

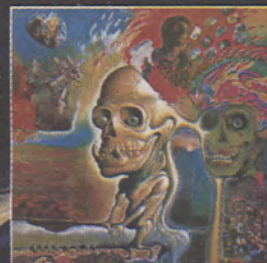


Flaming Lips
Hear It Is
LP PLR 111

plain recordings

The Lips' first LP mixed punk, country, psychedelia, goth, and pure bar-band rock into their own curious creation on classics such "Jesus Shootin' Heroin," "Trains, Brains, & Rain," and "Charlie Manson Blues." This masterpiece continues to influence bands to this day. White vinyl.

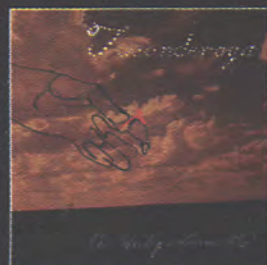
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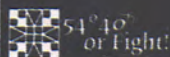
Flaming Lips
Oh My Gawd!!!
LP PLR 112

plain recordings

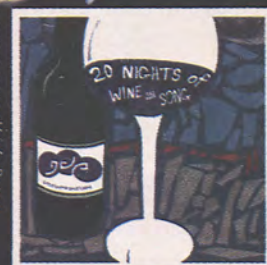
Further evolving the sound on their debut, **The Lips'** second LP finds the band mining the psychedelic aspects of their sound even more. New liner notes and new cover art by the band! Clear vinyl.



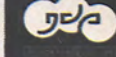
Ticonderoga
The Heilig-Levine LP
CD PLK 27



"Restless and tweaked much like a **Gastr Del Sol** composition, yet infinitely more user-friendly..." **Ticonderoga's** songs have a warmth about them – who couldn't love something that "weds twangy turbulence with breathy pop"? (*Philadelphia Weekly*). RIYL: **David Grubbs, Hood, Red House Painters, Tortoise, Pinback.**



Various Artists
20 Nights of Wine and Song
CD GDP 20



20 Nights of Wine and Song is a veritable roll call of **Greyday** artists past, present and future, presenting songs never before available outside of live shows. It is a mission statement of sorts – a plate full of the art made by our friends that is best served with a quality red wine, preferably a cabernet (but please listen responsibly).



Ocean
Here Where Nothing Grows
CD IPT 73



Over the last couple of years, **Ocean** has established themselves as an unparalleled current in the East Coast metal scene. *Here Where Nothing Grows* is their debut full-length album of three rogue waves, clocking in at a full 65 fathoms. This is a slow, ancient doom harnessing the deep low end drone of **Sunn O))),** **Burzum's** screams, the crushing heaviness of **Buried at Sea**, and even the art rock of **Mogwai.**



Electric iLL/Via Hemia
Split
CD SAC 1124



Long awaited, this split release collects two amazing EPs from **Viva Voce's Kevin Robinson** (as **k. Rza** presenting **Electric iLL**) and the **Siamese Sisters**-produced **Via Hemia** project! The stale same-ness of under/overground rap is sidestepped – joy and style have returned!



Licorice Roots
Licorice Root Orchestra
CD SPA 12



Licorice Roots are truly magical, a kind of "everyday supernatural." Recorded by **Kramer** and originally issued on **Shimmy Disc**, this 10-year anniversary re-release of **Licorice Roots'** first album includes the original 13 studio tracks as well as 13 additional demos. "Songs with a gentle near-orchestral eloquence which falls somewhere between **Daniel Johnston's** trembling 1990 and **Harold Budd's** soulful *Music for Three Pianos...*" – *Melody Maker*

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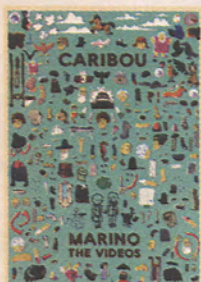
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DOMINO



SECRET MOMMY
Very Rec

A full length album based on recordings of recreational activity. A cut n' paste exploration of activity and movement, obscured by mild absurdism: 'nothing loops more than twice' anti-techno: an exercise in exercise.
"At what he's doing, Dixon is probably one of the finest in the world" - Lefttip.com

ACHE RECORDS



GOBLIN COCK
Bagged and Boarded

The debut from Rob Crow's (Pinback, Thingy) new band showcases his obsession with old-school Sabbath-esque Metal. It's classic Crow: incredible melodies, chordal intricacies, unassuming lyrical wit. Only now, he's turned up the amps and piled on the riffs. This is the best rock record you'll hear all year with the best cover...ever.

ABSOLUTELY KOSHER



CALVIN JOHNSON
Before the Dream Faded

These ten new songs from Calvin Johnson are a collection of collaborations, with a slate of guests living things up with their ideas about arrangements, textures and dramatizing all that is unholy in the Olympia underground schematic.

K RECORDS



THE CLOUD ROOM
The Cloud Room

One of the years most talked-about bands, The Cloud Room is receiving international acclaim with their much-talked about debut including the smash hit, "Hey Now Now".

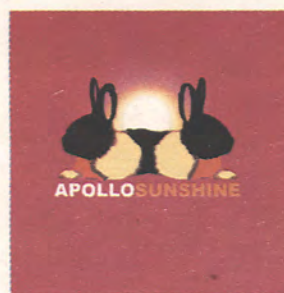
GIGANTIC MUSIC



ULRICH SCHNAUSS
Far Away Trains Passing By

The debut album that brought Ulrich Schnauss his initial rush of attention, with all the hallmarks that made *Strangely Isolated Place* such an engaging listen: the uplifting melodies, the mesmerizing marriage of shoegaze and electronics, the dramatic and dynamic arrangements. This package includes a special 6 track bonus disc of unreleased material.

DOMINO



APOLLO SUNSHINE
Apollo Sunshine

Apollo Sunshine's sophomore album runs the gamut from boisterous pop songs to blues licks to psychedelic jams, capturing the spirit of their frenzied live shows and inspiring dance parties everywhere.

SPINART



SHELBY
The Luxury of Time

"The *Luxury of Time* is filled with hook-laden tunes. We're six tracks deep on the album and I have a new favorite song every few days." - Matt Shiv, WOXY.com

GIGANTIC MUSIC

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NEWS FROM THE UPPER NINE

HENRY GRIFFIN GOES BACK TO NEW ORLEANS

"You are entering the city at your own risk. Police and fire services are limited. There is no 911 service. Traffic lights are out throughout the city. Observe a citywide speed limit of 35 mph, and proceed with extreme caution, especially around downed power lines. You are not permitted to go beyond your designated ZIP code area. Do not drink, bathe in or wash your hands in tap water. Standing water and soil may be seriously contaminated. Limit your exposure to airborne mold and use gloves, masks and other protective materials. Apply mosquito repellent and sunscreen. Bring sufficient food, water, gas and any medical supplies required to sustain you and your family, keeping in mind the curfew and store inventories may limit access to supplies. Gas stations are not fully operational. Fuel is limited."

—from a list of "tips" from the New Orleans Mayor's office for dealing with the "urban hazards" of life in the 9th Ward in September, 2005

I've long used the introduction "I live in New Orleans" to break the ice at parties. This usually cheers people up, often sparking memories of a particularly debauched vacation. "How can you people live down there?" someone would inevitably ask, meaning "How do you keep from becoming an alcoholic?" Now the same question connotes differently, more of a "How could you live in that city knowing that you were doomed by its very design?" Of all the tragedies of Hurricane Katrina, this hurts the most: our carefree lifestyle, our legendary tolerance—for alcohol, for iniquity and corruption—is now less a punchline than a cautionary tale.

You'd think from the apocalyptic prognostications of the national media that there wouldn't be much of a city left to return to. Not so. Some areas are straight-up ravaged, that's for sure. But your "average block" can be quite a mix, and even in the so-called "spared" neighborhoods, a hundred year oak may be splintered across some power lines.

My house is still there, a raised Creole cottage at the eastern-most tip of the upper Ninth Ward, three blocks north of the Mississippi river. I describe it this way, as that's how I first re-located it, via a satellite photo posted on the web, after the cataclysm. I found my neighborhood from space, then my block and then my house. It was easy to pick out: there is an 80-foot pecan tree leaning against the roof. The good news is that it hasn't fallen through and bisected the building. The bad news is that the tree has been there since July 5, a symptom of long forgotten Tropical Storm Cindy. In classic New Orleans fashion, it hadn't been seen to by the authorities by the time Katrina hit eight weeks later.

Three weeks after Katrina, I returned to find my basement apartment had taken three feet or so of water. It had dried out by then but waterlines and a veneer of detritus told the story: my life had been coated with waste, human and otherwise. To keep the effect from being entirely humorless, the Almighty had thrown in a few frogs, who were now living in my office.

My urban salvage operation actually

lightened my mood. Like most folks, I'd imagined losing everything I'd left behind. To get back even half of my stuff seemed almost unfair. I couldn't breathe the spore-clogged air or touch anything with my bare skin, but rescuing keepsakes from the rising mold was as thrilling as the prize-choosing finale of Wheel of Fortune. Things I'd owned and lost were now won back from oblivion. I was in such a good mood that first night that I almost

brushed my teeth in tap water, mistaking this for any other major American city. Spill bottled water on the brush, I reminded myself. Like you're in Haiti.

Some people suffered their share without losing a shingle. My friends Dave and Jennifer had to watch the whole storm from a vacation in Thailand (being late August, lots of folks were out of town). They returned to find their recent home purchase in fine condition. Then they noticed the stench out back. An unpleasant excavation followed, and a more unpleasant discovery: a visiting country's National Guard, after having barracked in a nearby Catholic school, had used these civilians' yard as a dump for the contents of the school's spoiled freezers.

Things could have been far worse. They could have had a pile of trash dumped on their lawn by the enterprising earth mover who was leaving his business card for the follow-up call to remove said pile to the lawn of his next unsuspecting customer). They could have been arrested for a curfew violation by the Utah National Guard or the NYPD, who've been patrolling New Orleans due to our

cop shortaending up behind bars at the bus station, which is Orleans Parish's prison since the real one was flooded.

They could have been blindsided by the hit-and-run driver I watched one night who speeds off, uninterested in trading insurance information without the rule of law. They could have had their house gutted by looters, or cops. They could have absentmindedly opened their refrigerator, exposing themselves to the breeding grounds of an unspeakable number of opportunistic maggots.

Those early weeks after Katrina, people were very well-behaved. Streets were empty and quite peaceful, passersby waved hopefully. The de-electrified environment and low population lulled us into a sense of temporary historical atavism. By which I mean, the neighborliness was positively Amish.

Imagine that all the things you loved about your home were taken away. Instead of food you get 24 varieties of MRE (avoid the Thai Chicken); drinking water comes in cans supplied by Anheuser Busch. Where your favorite vegetable truck used to park, now there's an upside down Volkswagen that had caught fire. Long tree-lined avenues like St. Charles and Esplanade have been given arboreal crewcuts by the storms, compromising the precious shade. Friends and neighbors aren't around too much, but you do get daily visits from assorted rescue workers, most double-checking that each house's spraypainted sigil is still accurate.

And, after a while, civilization returns, one service at a time. Electrical power! Gas! Cable! DSL! Sanitation! Could the

mail, once the invincible standard of civil service, be far behind?

The anarchic spirit of a functional ghost town couldn't last forever. As the population rose in September and October, the town got crankier. Four-way stops, once an opportunity to wave at a kindly stranger, now began to prompt the waving of just a single special finger. The long-awaited return of recognizable first world civilization tested the patience of many thousands.

And yet...Each restaurant or bar that reopened became an opportunity to rejoice. By Halloween, the city's Dionysian personality was returning in force, and celebration was beginning to become a goal in and of itself, which seemed familiar. What festivities there were spilled into the streets, as they used to do. For Halloween, the most popular costume was a refrigerator wrapped in duct tape, spraypainted with the address of George W. Bush or Tom Benson, the reviled Saints owner who intends to move our hopeless but beloved football team to San Antonio.

There were a lot of smiles, a lot of back-slapping and story-swapping, even among people who had just traded introductions. We all knew this one new thing about each other. That we would, and did, come back. Even redefined, this tainted city, one that wasn't exactly in mint condition when we got it, would be ours again if we want it.

If everybody doesn't return (and how could they all?), will New Orleans lose its most essential asset, its culture? It's hard to say. But maybe it isn't so tragic. Maybe it's the case that every person who doesn't get back is somehow happier somewhere else, where they have air conditioned schools, a lower murder rate and better jobs—that aren't in the tourist, service and gambling industries. Who can blame them? Who in their right mind would come back, to a city of corrupt politics, looting cops and dwindling protection from the elements?

The answer, of course, is those who can't imagine living anywhere else.

©



Greg Anderson
Stephen O'Malley

featuring very special guests:

Oren Ambarchi
Malefic
John Wiese
Wrest

Black One
sunnn
sunnn30 

Artwork by Jo Ratcliffe
Text by Seldon Hunt

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BUSINESS IS GOOD

Business is not the enemy. Not in itself, anyway.

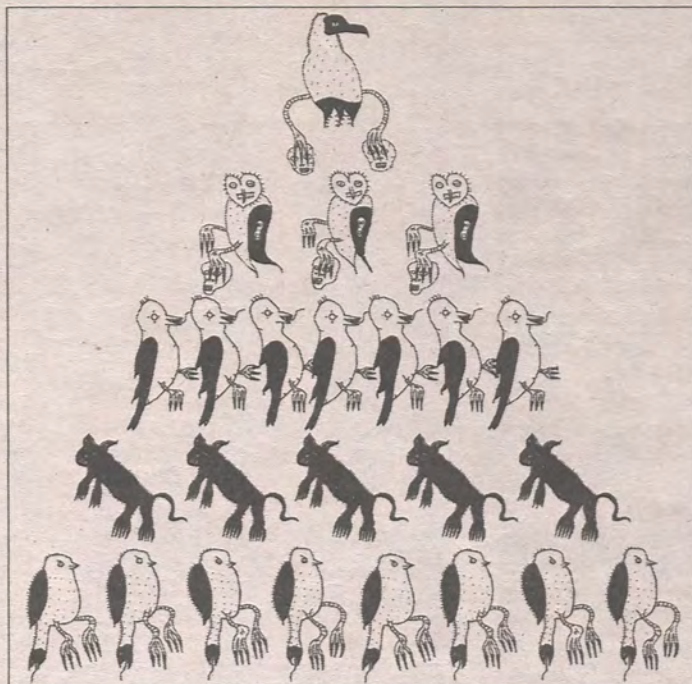
There's an often unexpressed, underlying assumption these days about the way power in America works. An extension of what used to be called "crude Marxism," the idea is that Bush and the NeoCons are brilliant propagandists, yet merely marionettes in a drama puppeteered by the true power elite: corporations.

I think that's got it backwards. As hard as it may be to fathom, I suspect Bush and his cronies really do believe in the God-ordained superiority of their ideas, the manifest destiny of America to rule the earth, and the holy sanctity of free market capitalism. And most people in business are simply trying to keep their companies alive in a global economy and cultural landscape increasingly dominated by these beliefs.

You can think of it this way: Fox News is intentional. The way that CNN, CBS, Time, The New York Times and pretty much every other reputable news agency have chased Fox News into the right-wing echo chamber in the last few years, wasn't. Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes' expertise is right wing propaganda for mainstream audiences, so it's appropriate they run just such a channel. The people running the other news agencies, however, didn't truly want to surrender newsgathering to jingoism—but what they saw as the necessity of the marketplace drew them off their own best course. These latter failures of purpose, integrity and most of all, I'd argue, competency, were the result of panic, fear, and the short-sighted need to compete for the viewers Fox seemed to be stealing from them. Instead of making their own product better, they aped the other guy's stuff.

By succumbing to this short-term hunger of an audience for newscasters' unquestioning allegiance to the administration and its neoconservative doctrine, these news companies exacerbated the problem for themselves. Now, all Americans are subject to the same party line, putting us in a world with only one opinion. In a sense, by joining their competitors in the endless assault of similarly skewed product, they've conditioned the public for even more of the same. Except for the few of us who've ventured over to the BBC or The Guardian on the Internet (or maybe Air America on the radio), there is really only one option.

It is not a problem of ideology, but of basic business confidence. News companies have traded in their journalistic expertise—the product they actually have to offer—to become part of the pandering chorus. The more war-skeptical, even marginally



PEOPLE WHO MAY ONCE HAVE BEEN PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING SHOES OR RAISING GEESE ARE NOW IMPRISONED BY SPREADSHEET-STYLE MANAGEMENT.

critical journalists and executives, from Ted Turner and Walter Isaacson at CNN to Gary Webb at the San Jose Mercury News, Phil Donahue on MSNBC, or even someone as mainstream as Dan Rather at CBS, have been forced out or made too nauseated to continue. As a result, the ability of any of these networks to correct course has been diminished.

The very same sort of problem has affected nearly every business in America and, in many cases, beyond. That's why I've written a business book: to speak directly to the businesspeople—from individual entrepreneurs all the way up to corporate chiefs—who I believe are surrendering what's left of their competency and common sense to the necessities of a marketplace and ideologies of a colonialism, neither of which are appropriate to the current situation, and neither of which make good business sense.

So, as I brace for what I fear will be the inevitable attacks from my friends and core readership for having written a book—*Get Back in the Box: Innovation from the Inside Out*—aimed at what we call "businesspeople," I'd like to explain where I stand on these things called "corporations."

In short, corporations aren't real. They're not these big, unstoppable, powerful menaces. They are merely social constructions—agreements between people to behave in a certain way. They are rules written down on paper—a list of commands, like a computer program, for how an entity should function. They are not conscious, they are not in control. For the most part, they have been improperly conceived as processes through which to do nothing but make money (generally over increments of three months or less), and they do that pretty well. Problem is, they don't do very much of anything else too well at all.

Most businesspeople watch on in powerless paralysis as the corporations they work for destroy lives, the environment, or even their own future profits in the name of short-term revenue. Meanwhile, those of us in more activist circles watch with horror as the goliaths of industry appear to wrest resources from those who need them, and bend law to serve their own purposes. It tends to make us all see commerce itself as a necessary evil—something we only want to touch when it's absolutely necessary to get a magazine published, a record released, or a few lentils on the table. Heaven forbid we

come in contact with a "real" corporation like Viacom, Procter & Gamble, or GM.

But in viewing corporations as unstoppable behemoths, we're making the very same mistake that the most rapacious venture capitalists are making: we are seeing corporate activity exclusively through the lens of the 15th century. That's when the very first chartered corporations were born into existence as a tool for the merciless expansion of European empires into new colonies. These corporations—like the infamous British East India Trading Company—were created for no other reason than to compete for the resources of Asia, Africa, and the New World. The models they developed—the zero-sum game of resource capture—is the model they passed down to companies, today.

Yes, the corporation was born as an instrument of state, as were most Renaissance-era reforms. The centralization of currency (and eradication of local currencies) served as a tax on the periphery. The philosophy of competition between individuals as the dominant and positive force of nature similarly served to keep everyone competing for approval of the monarch.

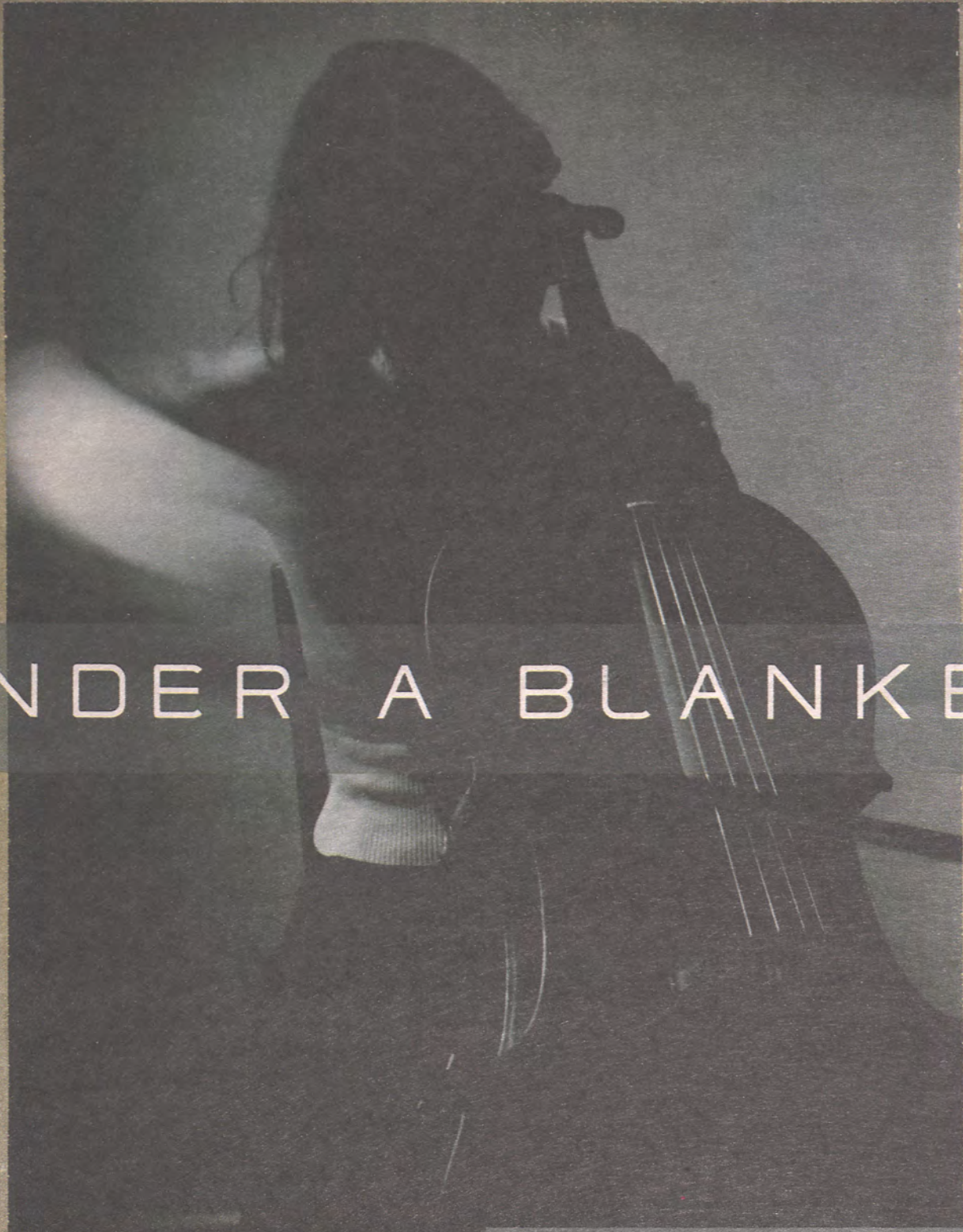
Once energized by the mechanics of the Industrial Revolution, the inhumanity of these reforms was exacerbated. Just as tall ships turned the world into colonies ripe for exploitation, the factory reduced human workers to mere cogs in the engines of industrialization. Mass production reached an apex with "Fordism," named for the assembly lines of the founder of American-style corporate fascism (and, incidentally, anti-Semitism), and what used to be called running a company became an exercise in resource management—maximizing efficiencies. So people who may have once been experts in and passionate about making shoes or raising geese were now imprisoned by the spreadsheet.

And spreadsheet management favors short-term visible revenues at the expense of the development of expertise, continuing innovation, values-driven decision-making, and, perhaps worst of all, fun. Businesses "outsource" key components of their manufacturing and product development, only to realize they're no longer the best at what they used to do. How could they be? They don't actually do it, anymore.

Today, even entrepreneurs who seem passionate about whatever enterprise they've chosen to pursue nonetheless go off-course once they become successful.

See, "selling out" has nothing to do with making money doing business,

(continued on page 56)



UNDER A BLANKET

Amidst the culled samples and loops of antique instruments, where in **Colleen**'s music is Cecele Schott?

BY JOHN ADAMIAN

Lockstep rhythms, heartstring-tugging melodies and overpowering volume can bring the masses together. People talk a lot about the communal and social nature of music. The language we use reinforces the connection: "groups" and "bands" play in front of "crowds." But some music—like that of the contemporary French musician/composer Cecele Schott, who records under the name Colleen—is intensely solitary, almost private. Not in the candid, pulled-from-the-diary, confessional sense, but in the I'm-alone-inside-my-head sense, holed up in a zone between headphones. In Colleen's music there are no words, and computers and effects create its blanketing layered feel. It's the music not of crowds, but of solitude.

My wife and I just had our first baby, Bernadette, a few months ago. Ever since we brought her home from the hospital we've had a lot of music in rotation in the CD changer. We've tried Bascom Lamar Lunsford, the Rolling Stones, Nina Simone, Raymond Scott, some old Brill Building pop, Vashti Bunyan, the Louvin Brothers, Art Blakey, Gary Higgins, new ones by the Clientele and Broken Social Scene, and lots more. A few records seem to go over well with the baby—a field recording of the Bayaka, forest people from the Congo, a couple of Glenn Gould playing J. S. Bach, William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons, two Elizabethan composers, and two discs by Colleen. The mix is pretty seamless and it creates a sufficiently womblike atmosphere for all of us, but Bernadette clearly prefers the Colleen discs.

Colleen's first record, 2003's haunting *Everyone Alive Wants Answers*, is made up entirely of looped and layered samples, snippets culled from her record collection; the music creates a cocoon from thrums and furious zithers. It might seem simply soothing at first, until it casts its menacing shadow. For her followup, this year's equally captivating *The Golden Morning Breaks*, Colleen (who had previously played only guitar) decided to abandon her method of using reprocessed bits from preexisting recordings and play all of the instruments (cello, music box, gamelan, melodica, etc.) herself. She then, in effect, sampled herself.

If Colleen's music feels hermetic, of its own world, it's not entirely coincidental. Schott, 29, works and performs almost exclusively by herself. She shuns collaboration. She doesn't see herself as fitting in with a group of like-minded musicians. And maybe she's right. Working for months at a stretch on her recordings, Schott prefers not to let anyone hear her work until she's entirely through with it. She doesn't exactly reveal herself through the music of Colleen as much as she loses herself in it. She avoids traditional touring because of the frantic travel from one city to the next without time to soak anything up.

I spoke with Schott twice by phone

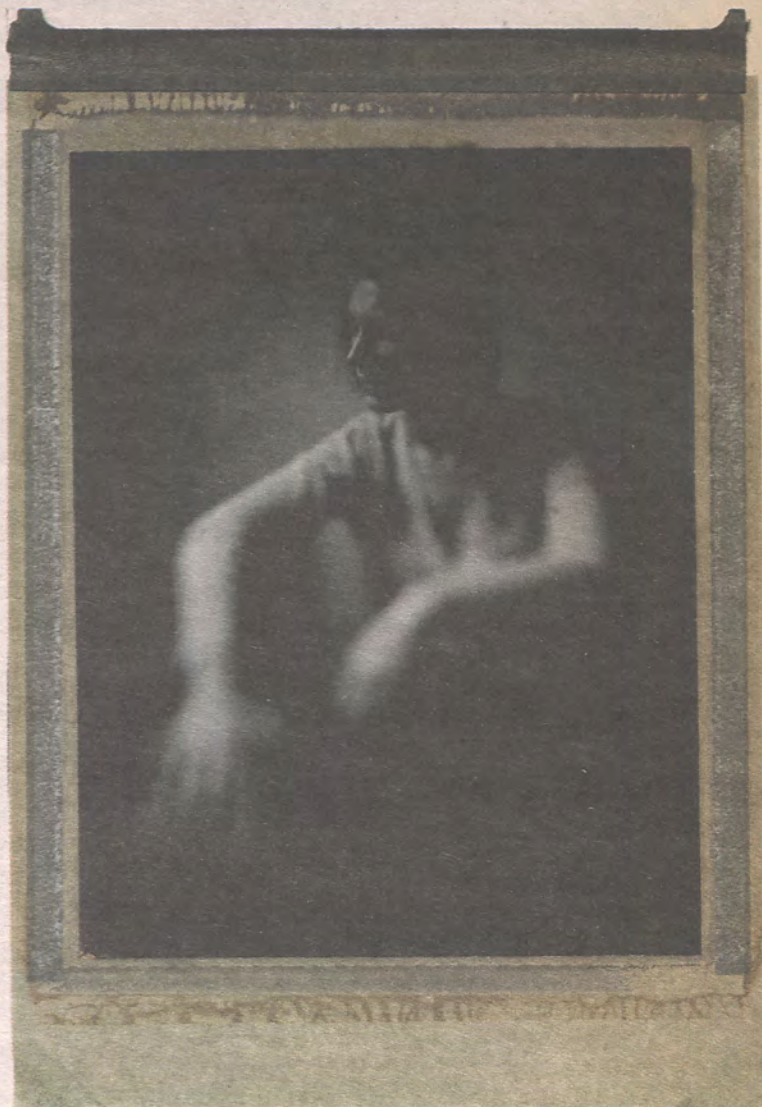
about her work, once from her apartment in Paris and once just after a soundcheck for a show at a London museum. As a part time English teacher at a high school in the suburbs outside Paris, Schott isn't a recluse, but she cultivates a kind of scholastic quietude that seems almost monastic. It was only relatively recently that Schott's pupils and colleagues found out about her other career as a musician, and she didn't necessarily want them to. "Somehow I felt that this wasn't something that I wanted my pupils to know about," she says. Schott appears inclined to maintain a distance between herself and the world. Even her stage name seems to be another buffering layer, but she says it's more elaborate than that.

"Basically I have a problem with words in music. I think it's hard to have good lyrics and sing them meaningfully. I have the same problem with song titles and even band names. I've always found it embarrassing to have to find a name, and I wouldn't want to use my own name because I think it's quite boring, and so I wanted something simple. I had this phonetics dictionary—I knew the name Colleen, so I'm not actually referring to the names of people, but the noun, the Irish word meaning 'young girl,' like the Scottish word 'lass.' I like the look of the word and the sound. The name itself is full of curves with the C and the O, and there's also repetition with the double L and the E, so I thought it kind of looked like my music. Also if you say it in French, colline is the word for hill. Again that sounded really nice, this image of natural curves."

Natural curves sounds about right. Colleen's music has a kind of organic undulating quality to it. It's music that maps out a certain slow welling up, an ebb and flow, a liquid flux that requires time and patience to take in. Plucked on strings or tapped on chimes, gracefully simple patterns course, separate and reconnect. The elegance is in the unfolding.

With its music-box plinkings, plangent strings and percolating drones, Colleen's work is often labeled as ambient, but she resists the tag. "I don't really like the word ambient. Somehow it seems pejorative. Like you put it in the background, and it's like a nice wash of sounds, and I don't think my music is." When asked how she imagines her ideal fans listening to her music, Schott replies: "In bed under a blanket. Hopefully they wouldn't fall asleep before the end of the record."

On her website Schott writes enthusiastically about the five years she spent reading Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, the enormous cookies-and-memories work commonly known in English as *A Remembrance of Things Past*. Proust, who famously holed up in his bedroom to finish his novel, was pretty fond of his personal time, too. The book starts with an extended meditation about lying awake in bed. It's something



Eric Madigan Heck



**EVERYONE IS RUNNING AROUND,
MYSELF INCLUDED, BUT I THINK
YOU HAVE TO FIND THE TIME TO BE
ALONE, IN YOUR ROOM, LISTENING
TO MUSIC IN YOUR BED."**

Schott can relate to.

"Being alone in your room, listening to music in your bed, you have to have time for that. I have a feeling at the moment that time is the most precious commodity, and that everyone is running around, myself included. I think to listen to my music, you definitely need lots of time, and the bedroom thing, listening on your own, is kind of a symbol of having to find time in your own life to do this sort of thing."

Schott relishes free time not for indolence or leisure, but because she's trying to accomplish so much. Now, as she begins work on her third record, Schott has set a few humble goals for herself. She's teaching herself piano, studying a bit of music theory, taking up the clarinet and planning to begin lessons on the viola da gamba, a 17th century ancestor of the cello.

We have the eclecticism of the lending libraries of Paris to thank for Colleen's hypnotic music. Born and raised in Montargis, a small town south of Paris, Schott came to music relatively late. "I had no musical background whatsoever," she says. "My parents weren't really into music." In high school she played guitar in what she describes as a noise-pop band. She then studied English at the university in Dijon, before going off to England for two years, where she worked odd jobs in Winchester, Manchester and Liverpool. In 1999 Schott came to Paris to get her teaching certificate, and there she started exploring the vast musical holdings at the city's libraries. There she discovered the music of Elizabethan composer John Dowland ("I just liked the idea of guys playing the lute," she says), the tumbling glassy phrasing of

the West African kora, the clangor of Indonesian gamelan and the freedom of jazz and other music whose spirit infuses her work.

The transition from guitar player to sample cobbler and back to performer on exotic and rare instruments was a roundabout one. "It was a long development," she says. "After I stopped playing in this noisy pop band, I got a four-track tape recorder and tried to make stuff on my own, but I had nothing other than a guitar. I would bang on things. I would definitely try to make 'experimental music' with just the guitar and not even one single pedal, so it was really hard, and I got really discouraged."

Then a friend gave her a computer with some music-editing software, and Schott had a revelation. "I thought, that's what I need to create my music from other people's music, but it's going to be mine, and I'm going to be independent, and I won't have any problems with gear, and it's going to be easy. All I need is CDs, and all I need to do is look for the sounds and assemble them."

Sounds easy enough. And it's a familiar line of thought for just about anyone with a musical idea in their head, a CD collection and a computer. But Schott did it.

On *Everyone Alive Wants Answers*, insect sounds flutter in the background while what sounds like the superhuman hammering of a dulcimer floats by. An arterial pulse churns behind the sound of a child's voice further buried under a wisp of bowed strings. "Babies" sounds like the inside of a giant wind chime. Airy skeletal samples

are gathered into cycling patterns on "Your Heart on Your Sleeve." A marching, Sun-Ra-worthy Moog sound boings through "Long Live Mice in the Metro." Sounds emerge and recede.

"I'm okay with things sounding a bit—*Oh, where is this coming from?* Maybe it gives you the feeling of some natural thing rising," says Schott. There's no singing, no drums. But the songs, many of which clock in at under four minutes, have a subtle rhythm and hummable melody.

The success of her computer-pastiche music created a new challenge for Schott: how to make her music for a live audience. Initially, Colleen embraced the switch from sampling records to generating her own sounds using acoustic instruments—the technique she used on *The Golden Morning Breaks*—because she didn't want to be a laptop auteur. Not on stage at least.

"I've actually never been able to perform the older material," she admits. "I decided to go back to playing instruments because I wanted to do live shows, but I didn't want to bring a laptop. Originally the main impulse was because I thought there's no way I'm going on stage with a computer and pretending to do something when I'm not. To me it's more a question of whether the person is really doing something live, because that's what it's supposed to be. I'm not saying that all people who perform with laptops don't do anything, but from what I know, a lot of them are just going to press play and do a couple of things. But I wouldn't call that a live show,

and I'd be bored on stage if I had to do it."

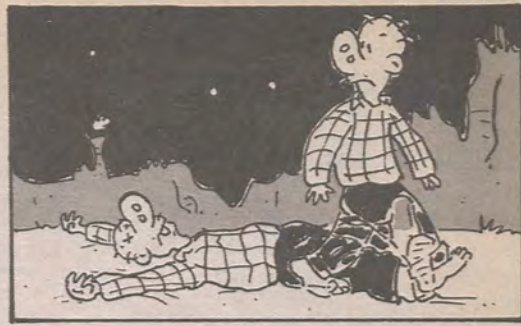
Despite the change in approach between her first and second recordings, the results are surprisingly similar, and they demonstrate a single-minded vision working its way through both efforts. With Colleen playing all of the instruments herself on *The Golden Morning Breaks* (which takes its name from a Dowland piece), the music gained a warm glow. In addition to cello and guitar, Colleen's instrumental arsenal grew to include a toy gamelan and a rare instrument called a glass harmonica. "It's not mine, unfortunately," says Schott. "It belongs to a friend of mine who used to sell antiques. He used to sell mechanical instruments mostly. This isn't mechanical. It's kind of like a glockenspiel, but it has glass blades and some small beaters made of tortoise shell and cork at the end. It's from the early 19th century, just amazing."

Now, if she wants to do a gig, she just has to figure out how to lug her gear. "I do everything on my own, so mostly I need a cello and a guitar, and now I have a clarinet, and I have a melodica. I have music boxes. If I play and someone can help me carry stuff, then I try to bring some more stuff. I have guitar pedals. Mainly sampling pedals, and I sample myself live, that's basically how it works."

Schott stresses that she's not a specialist in any of the subjects that fascinate her, whether it's baroque musical practice, composer Pauline Oliveros's idea of Deep Listening, music theory, or the non-Western traditions that inspire her. Intuition characterizes her mode of composition. Sometimes spending months on a single track, she works and composes in a kind of isolation, but solitude allows for practice and study as well.

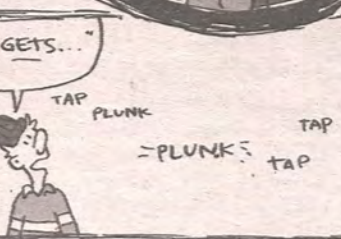
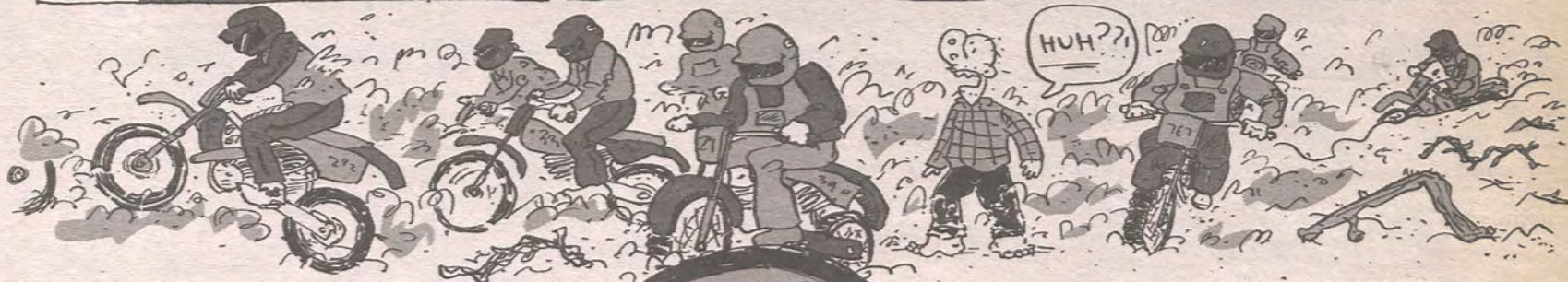
"It's not that I want to be a solo performer for the sake of being a solo performer, but I love learning things, and I would rather learn something and at first make pathetic sounds rather than leave it to someone who can do it better than me, because then it's them and it's not me; I'm the one who enjoys the pleasure of learning," she says. "Also I do find it very hard to work with other people. Often in the world of music, people seem to expect it to be very natural and easy to collaborate, but I think that in any human interaction there's going

(continued on page 56)



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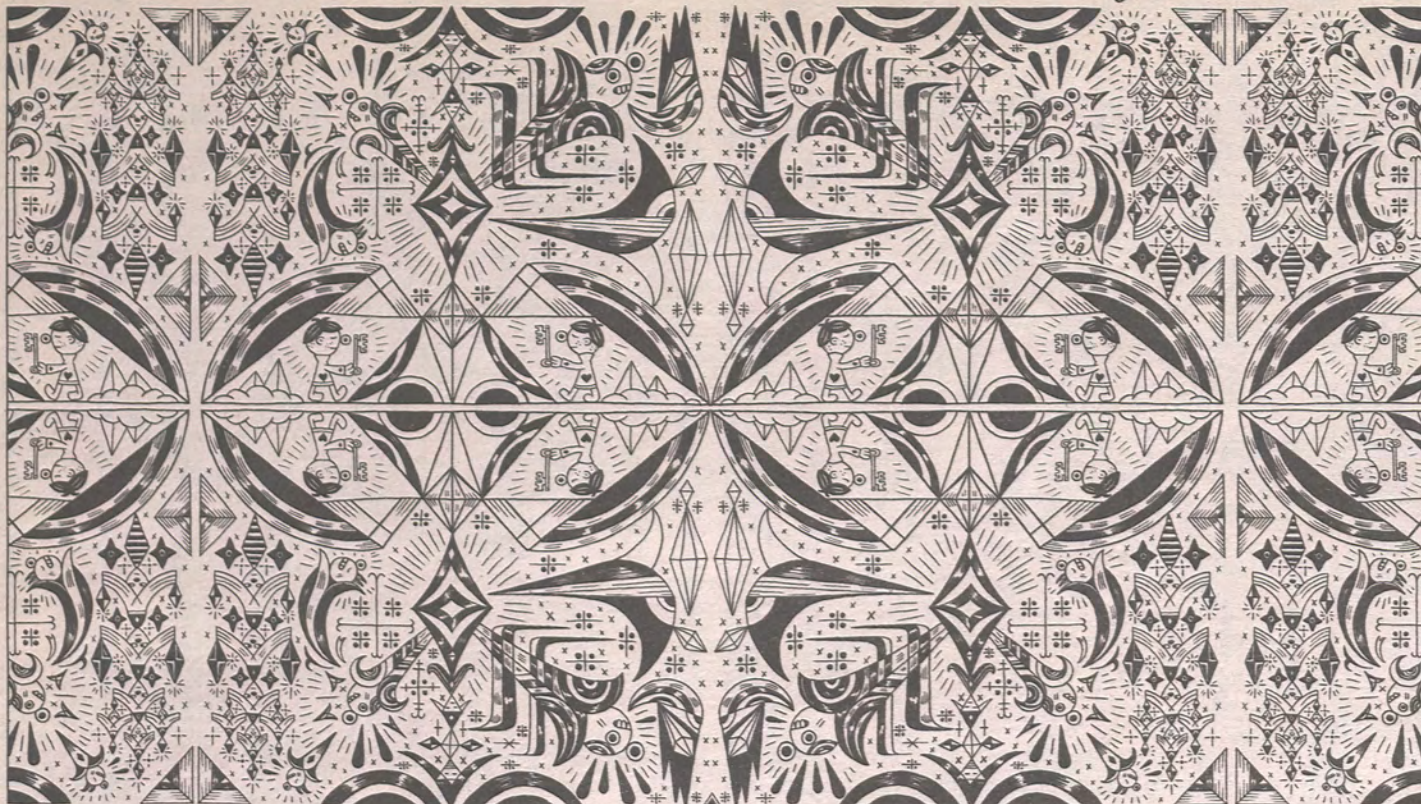
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Basil Assad: "We hardly knew ya." A poster from Aleppo, Syria.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF DR. MOUSTACHE AND THE EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN

An American traveler spends three weeks
in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.

REPORTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DANIEL CHAMBERLIN

In Parts 1 and 2 of "Dr. Moustache and the Egyptian Gentleman" (presented in the previous issue of Arthur), a dispirited Daniel Chamberlin left his Los Angeles home for a three-week July-August tour through the Middle East at the invitation of his brother Paul, a graduate student spending the summer at the American University in Cairo as part of his study of US-Arab diplomatic relations. Ignoring warnings from family, concerned friends and the American government, our man Dan and his brother made their way from Cairo's markets and funereal tomb-squatter communities to the liberal-minded party scenes of Beirut and the Hezbollah gift shops of "Liberated South Lebanon." They are joined by Paul's friend Blake, a political writer in his mid-20s who has recently expatriated to Cairo. We join them as their travels take them into the friendly, cosmopolitan Baathist police state of Syria...

PART III: SYRIA

The journey to Syria from Lebanon begins with a hijacking.

Paul and I order a taxi from a service that my friend Kate, a Beirut-based freelance reporter and producer for PBS' *Frontline*, said may be helpful at negotiating our passage into Syria with the border guards. After a few minutes of the taxi drive—I'm just settling in, taking in the sights—our driver suddenly stops the car under a freeway underpass, where some Lebanese fatsos are chilling. In broken English he lets us know that these guys in their sweaty Chevy sedans will be taking us on the hour trip to Syria. For more money, of course. Our guy had hoodwinked us: he was not

really part of the service that he had said he was when he picked us up at the hotel.

In the yelling that ensues I am useless. The only Arabic I know that conveys my frustration is *muhahafa*, or car bomb, so I end up saying variations of "bad, not what I want!" Paul knows a few heavy curses like "May god destroy your home in a wave of hellfire," but you never know when something that sounds funny in translation might come across as a bona fide threat, and it wasn't so long ago that Westerners were regularly kidnapped here in Beirut, so we yell our "no good!" phrases for another round and then pay the guy.

The ride to the border is uneventful, which gives me plenty of



Colorful bus. Damascus, Syria.

time to worry. Tensions between Syria and Lebanon have been high since the assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister Rafik Hariri, an outspoken opponent of Syrian influence in Lebanese politics, in February. There have been widespread allegations of Syrian involvement in his death, which of course Syria denies. Also, we've received conflicting information about getting Syrian visas. The Lonely Planet guidebook and some of Paul's contacts say there's no way for Americans to get visas at the border. But Kate travels across the border all the time, and she says that since Syria has such a close relationship with Lebanon, we should be able to pass through with relative ease—as long as I don't indicate that I'm a journalist on my entry card. Syria is an authoritarian police state with strict media controls and if I let on that I'm writing about my experiences it's possible that I'll be delayed or assigned a minder. So starting today I'm a high school English teacher. I come up with a list of authors to talk about if somebody decides to quiz me.

It turns out that Kate was right. As I shift fitfully under fluorescent lights in the hot, dirty border security station, the guards stamp our passports and ask us for the Syrian equivalent of \$15. Nobody asks me to expound on Ernest Hemingway.

The actual border security checkpoint is a real mess. The line of commercial semis, cargo vehicles and taxis stretches back for miles. Pomegranate juice vendors with giant silver canteens work the crowd. Our driver is getting fed up waiting and gestures for us to walk with him through the cars to the actual border checkpoint. We wonder if maybe he "knows a guy" or something. He presents us to the Syrian border guards and then says to Paul, in Arabic, "Talk to him." It becomes clear that our

driver wants us to negotiate with this Syrian soldier for permission to walk through the checkpoint and hail another cab on the other side. We're of the same mind with the soldier: No thanks. The idea of trying to find a cab and negotiate another fare in the no-man's land between these two countries is not an attractive option. After another hour we make it through the crossing. We descend from the Anti-Lebanon mountain range onto the plain below where Syria's capital Damascus sits beneath clear blue skies.

Damascus is full of Asads. The cult of the leader is in full effect here. There were a lot of pictures of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, but it's nothing compared to Syria.

The rule of Hafez Asad, which ended with his death in 2000, is synonymous with Syria's stability and domestic safety, and its sense of itself as a defender and champion of pan-Arabism. Asad's reign was also characterized by massacres, censorship, repression of dissent by the secret police and state control of the media. Asad was a Baathist, as was Iraq's Saddam Hussein, but he was neither as decadent nor as brutal a leader. He was also an Alawite—a member of an Islamic minority often viewed with suspicion by both Sunni and Shiite Muslims. His rule was generally secular and socialist and although he expanded the civil rights of oft-persecuted Syrian Jews, he also remained staunchly anti-Zionist: Syrian forces played a considerable role in both the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars which, curiously, Syria seems to believe they won. In the photos that sit in shop windows Asad is a genteel, gray-haired old man; in the poster-size portraits atop buildings and overlooking intersections, he's a crafty deal-maker with kind eyes.

Upon Asad's death in 2000, his 34-year-old son Bashar inherited

THE MORE WE TRAVEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE MORE WE UNDERSTAND THAT EGYPTIANS ARE REGARDED AS THE BACKWOODS HILLBILLIES OF THE ARAB WORLD.

the presidency. This was not the way it was supposed to happen. Bashar's older brother Basil was being groomed as Syria's next dictator, but he died in an automobile accident in 1994. There are pictures of Basil everywhere. You gotta admit he looks right for the job, in combat fatigues with a Pete Townshend beard underneath his aviators. It's easy to imagine a nationalist fantasy of this bearish soldier-president leading tank divisions to recapture the Golan Heights area lost to Israel in 1967.

But Bashar? This Arab dictator is a would-be ophthalmologist who returned home from school in London to take over the family business when his brother died. Even in the propaganda images meant to bolster confidence in his regime, he looks every bit the pensive nerd: a sad, chinless fellow in a drab suit who would rather be outfitting patients with contacts than negotiating mutual protection agreements with Iranian ayatollahs. His pictures are as common as his father's, and you get the sense people are pulling for the guy. One image has his melancholy face surrounded by purple hearts. There are even sparkly red Bashar decals that people stuck to the windows of

their cars.

Damascus seems mellow, and not at all European like Beirut. The cabs in Damascus are all new and yellow and while the traffic is still chaotic, it's not nearly as deadly as Cairo. Even the cab drivers agree. When we tell them that we've just been in Egypt, their eyes get wide and they make jokes about hash-crazed Egyptian cabbies. They poke fun at Paul for speaking Arabic with an Egyptian accent. The more we travel, the more we understand that Egyptians are regarded as the backwoods hillbillies of the Arab world.

The Damascus souk is closed on Friday when we first walk through, Friday being equivalent to Sunday in Christian cultures. It's a beautiful old market that blends in with the residential portion of Damascus's Old City, which is possibly the oldest continually inhabited human settlement in the world. We pass by Roman columns and huge fortified doorways in the former city walls. The souk is covered as well, which means it's a welcome refuge from the heat of the day. There are bullet holes in the arched metal roof, apparently from French airplanes



suppressing an anti-colonial uprising in the 1920s. The light that pierces through from above makes lovely patterns on the pavement.

We spend the day eating fattouch salads and cheese pies and smoking flavored tobacco from ornate water pipes at a café set in the courtyard of an old Damascene house. The walls are a dazzling pattern of black and white bricks and there's a fountain in the center of the dining area. A huge antique mirror sits on one wall, and partway through our meal a lute player descends from somewhere within the house and completes this lush fantasy of an Arab luncheon by strumming away on a balcony. The rooftops of the surrounding buildings overflow with gardens and a sunshade is pulled out three stories above us, diffusing the light into a sleepy, soft glow.

The third most holy site in the Muslim world is the Umayyad Mosque, which is here in Damascus. We head over there after our leisurely noontime meal.

Paul finds the marriage of culture and religion in Islamic societies to be remarkable, but his enthusiasm for Arab culture has little spiritual dimension. The Koran, he tells me, is a very dull, repetitive book, and he's tired of touring mosques. "Portraying people or other living things in the artwork is forbidden in Islam," he says as we wander into the mosque. "With such limited subject matter, Islamic religious art gets boring pretty quickly."

We're dressed appropriately for a tour of the mosque, but in case we weren't—in other words, if we had a bare ankle or forearm—there's a guy at the entrance gate dispensing brown sackcloth robes. Some French teenagers have taken the robes and fashioned them into hippie skirts over their cargo shorts. The marble courtyard of the

mosque gleams in the afternoon sun. Families are gathered to worship in the prayer hall and to enjoy picnics in the shade. Children play.

The prayer hall of the mosque is adorned with thousands of Oriental carpets. Shoes aren't allowed, so there are shoe-racks all over the place. One is full of combat boots, and a squad of young soldiers sits nearby. The curious pilgrim can visit the tomb of Saladin, the great Muslim military commander and bane of the Crusaders; the shrine of Hussein, the son of Ali, the founder of the Shia sect of Islam; as well as a box allegedly containing the head of John the Baptist. This box sits in a larger enclosure, illuminated by nauseating green lightbulbs. There is a grate in the front through which the visitor is encouraged to push donations, correspondence or pictures of loved ones. This is one of several locations in the Middle East where one can observe a box containing the alleged head of John The Baptist. I'm wary of my message not making it to the true skull of John, so I decline to make a contribution.

Besides the pilgrims praying or reading the Koran, there are a lot of sleeping men lying around. I guess it's a lot like an American church: kids play outside, mom chills with the ladies while preparing some food and dad snoozes in the sanctuary. Sleeping is a real problem here—the hundreds of ceiling fans create a soporific hum—so the mosque employs stern bearded guys to wander round the hall with paddles, smacking the walls to keep people awake. If that doesn't work, they start whacking the sleepers directly. When I try to clandestinely take a picture of one guy who's really laid out—snoring, legs splayed, belly peeking out from his shirt—one of the mosque minders gives me the stink eye, and then really lays

**PAUL WONDERES WHAT IT MEANS
THAT WE'RE SO COMFORTABLE IN
A POLICE STATE. NEITHER OF US
HAVE A SATISFACTORY ANSWER.**



Basil Assad: the rock and roll
Assad. R.I.P. Aleppo, Syria.

into the poor sleeping oaf. I head for the door.

Later than night, we take a cab north of the city, into the foothills of Mt. Qassioun. Near the summit, cars line the streets. There are scores of people gathered here to take in the view of the city. Teenagers run around in groups. Two little boys slide down the grassy hillside to retrieve a large Styrofoam container from the underbrush. They hold hands and walk up the dirt path that leads back up here to the street. A family sits at a card table playing a game and smoking water-pipes. One of Paul's friends points out landmarks. "The mosques have green lights on the minarets," she says. "The churches have blue lights on their steeples." A woman and her father sit down next to us and crack open a big bag of potato chips.

We like it here in Damascus, almost as much as Cairo. Paul wonders what it means that we're so comfortable in a police state, and neither of us have an answer.

We end up talking to more people in Damascus than anywhere else. Everywhere, as soon as we identify ourselves as Americans, people want to talk politics. The conversations—whether with taxi drivers, pizza restaurant owners, students or old men sitting in the street—follow a distinct pattern. They tentatively ask what we think of Syria, and seem a little surprised at our enthusiastic response. This is followed by a similar outpouring of enthusiasm for Americans. Once our mutual admiration is established, the question "What is up with your President Bush?" follows. This conversational sequence occurs in all the countries we visit, but in Syria, it takes on a particularly urgent character. Syrians seem concerned about imminent American aggression. One cab driver who speaks hardly any

English puts it this way: "Iraq. Syria? Iran?" We reply with "no good" "no way" and "Bush is crazy."

Such exchanges reinforce the eerie feeling that we're interacting with the kind of people who would be the inevitable "collateral damage" in a U.S.-sponsored regime change. And yet we feel no hostility from them, and they get none from us. In fact, of all of the places on our itinerary, Syria is the place I'd most recommend that Americans visit. It's widely considered to be the safest country in the Arab region. A secular, Baathist dictator is nominally in charge, but at a certain day-to-day level, how much does that really matter? There are women architects on the covers of magazines, there's plenty of food in the stores and water in the faucets, and the cigarettes are subsidized by the government. Unlike Iraq, there are no car bombs in the streets or U.S. soldiers taking pictures of charred bodies to trade for Internet pornography.

And Damascans know all about what is going on in Iraq, because the city is a destination for those Iraqis with the wherewithal to flee their homeland. There are plenty of first-hand accounts here of the chaos and violence that has plagued the country since the U.S. invasion and subsequent occupation. If the people here were curious about American-backed democracy initiatives before, they're much warier now.

Before heading north from Damascus to meet Blake in Aleppo we decide to take a day trip to visit Quinetra, a bombed-out ghost town at the Syrian border with Israel that's just a stone's throw from the world-famous Golan Heights, a series of strategically important hills that overlook the Israeli settlements to the south. Visiting Quinetra requires same-day government permission, so we rise early and take a cab to the offices of the Ministry of the Interior.

Once somebody has your passport, they basically have your balls. Paul doesn't mind this so much, but every time I hand over my passport I imagine the dude looking it over, checking a computer and apologizing as he tell me that they'll just have to hold onto this for the time being—at which point I will be stranded in a foreign nation with only my Los Angeles Public Library card in terms of official identification. At the Syrian Interior Ministry offices we turn our passports over to

AK-47 sporting youths in T-shirts and jeans. They disappear behind wrought-iron gates, through a door beneath a portrait of Bashir. One dude comes back out with a bucket and a rag and, ignoring us, starts to wipe down the new Mercedes parked out front. Paul and I start to get nervous. Paul is a budding young Arabist scholar over here with U.S. government funding. If one of us is of interest to the Syrian government, it's him. Maybe they're going to need to question him more. Maybe he'll have to pat dry the Mercedes. It's hard to say. We run different scenarios, until, eventually, we're approved and our passports are returned.

We head immediately to Baramke, a transportation hub near the center of Damascus, to catch a microbus to Quinetra. We have to fill out a lot of information into the driver's log book; Paul thinks this is because the government is keeping tabs on people, trying to catch would-be draft dodgers. We are the microbus's only passengers.

The drive to Quinetra takes us past the cinder-block housing developments that are ubiquitous in each of the countries we've visited so far: the Levittowns of the Near and Middle East. We ride past tree farms, olive orchards and fields of wheat tended by farmers in red keffiyeh headscarves, driving ancient tractors spewing clouds of black exhaust. Goats try to cross the road on their own.

After driving through a bustling farmer's market, I see my first Syrian record store. It has a huge Nirvana poster in the front window.

This is the same road that Israeli tanks took after smashing the Syrian forces in the 1967 war, a drive that put them within shelling distance of the capital. There hasn't been any shooting here since the Syrians launched a surprise attack against the Israelis, setting off the 1973 war, but there are a lot of UN soldiers around anyway. Though the Syrians somehow count the '73 war as a victory, their army and air force were humiliated by the Israeli forces and their US-supplied arms, and Syrians make no secret of their desire to eventually retake the Golan Heights. They've taken no direct action in over 30 years, but they're still technically at war with Israel, and the government provides haven to several militant Palestinian groups and supports the activities of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

At the outskirts of Quinetra we stop at a final checkpoint. Our

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driver delivers us into the hands of a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair, a deep tan and dressed completely in black. He asks for our passports and we oblige. He looks them over and puts them into his pocket. This is our guide—most likely a military intelligence officer, according to Paul's friends in Damascus. Paul introduces himself in Arabic. The man in black raises his eyebrows and nods, smiles and pulls a cigarette out of his pocket.

Quinetra was a Syrian city of considerable size that was lost to the Israelis during the 1967 war. They occupied the city until it was ceded back to the Syrians as part of a cease-fire agreement following the 1973 war. The Israelis had used Quinetra as a military command post in the interim period, and they demolished what remained upon their withdrawal. Syria has not made repairs to the ghost town, instead maintaining it as a sort of propaganda theme park and monument to the suffering of Syrians at the hands of Israelis. Our guide leads us in a circuitous route through its ruins. We stop in front of a rubble-filled church and

our helpful minder sets the tone of his minimalist commentary, saying to Paul, in Arabic, "This is a church." There are several checkpoint-type buildings that I am not allowed to photograph, presumably so as not to give away the positions of Syria's teenage soldiers who all seem busy making tea and listening to pop music on portable radios.

We walk past the local UN compound to a destroyed hospital. A sign out front reads in English, Farsi and Arabic, "Golan Hospital: Destroyed by Zionists and changed it to firing target!" Every surface inside is chipped and pocked with war damage. The walls are full of thousands of indentations from bullets, the floor is strewn with glass and broken concrete. There is obscene graffiti on the walls of several of the hospital's rooms, the most interesting being a crude rendering of a nude woman's torso, seemingly drawn by a man who has not seen naked breasts since the day he was weaned.

We wander through more bullet-marked buildings. Some are half-collapsed, others completely bulldozed. Quinetra's main street

leads to a strange café that faces the Golan Heights to the south. Our silent guide indicates that we'll be stopping here for something to drink. When the Israelis occupy land, they cultivate orchards (or take over the orchards of the former owners) and set up military surveillance stations. When the Syrians and Lebanese occupy land, they build cafes for their citizens to sit and watch the Israelis. It's a sort of tourist surveillance station. We drink coffee and the guide offers us his strong Syrian cigarettes. He orders us a pair of field glasses and we take turns studying the Israeli positions on the Golan Heights and the UN trucks that drive back and forth in the mined no-man's-land on the other side of the barbed wire. A trip to the bathroom leads through a huge banquet hall with leather-bound chairs and guns and animal hides displayed on the walls.

After a while, we continue our tour. The guide hasn't done much "guiding" so far, more just silently leading us down the road and shaking his head every time I point my camera at Syrian military personnel. Now we follow him away from Quinetra's main street. We walk for a good half mile through a monotonous landscape of completely demolished and bulldozed concrete buildings. It's a beautiful day with big white clouds scattered over the dry prairie. It's not clear where we're headed and our guide is still holding our passports. He's silent and still smoking. I know we're fine, but I keep thinking about how this must be what it feels like just before getting disappeared. The long walk to nowhere with the dispassionate executioner.

We approach a small white building and a gate lowered across the road. In the distance I can make out a fortified blue and white building and a massive yellow gate. "Welcome to Israel" is painted on the wall of the building. There's another UN base in between the two border control checkpoints. More teenage Syrian soldiers, spindly and acne-ridden, smile at us. Their lieutenant, a slick guy in his 20s, emerges from the checkpoint and the guide presents us to him for consideration. He speaks perfect English and asks us strange questions. How would we feel about Syria re-taking the Golan Heights? Aren't they beautiful, these hills? He's excited that Paul speaks Arabic and asks him convoluted questions about whether or not he's visited a certain river. "It's very beautiful

there," says the Lieutenant. "You're sure you've never been?"

He asks me about my job as a high school teacher. I count for him in Arabic, and feel like a dog doing a trick. I'm happy when the conversation wanes and we stand silently looking across the "DANGER! MINES!" signs toward the Israelis. Awkward small talk picks up again. Are we married? No. Girlfriends? No. According to official policy, there are no homosexuals in Syria. My long hair suggests that perhaps we're illegally sexually oriented. It's unclear whether we're free to leave or not, so Paul and I exchange glances and force handshakes out of our hosts.

"The lieutenant was asking me if I'd ever been to Israel," Paul tells me as our guide leads us away. "He was trying to get me to admit to visiting the Tiberius River, which is just over the border." Had Paul answered in the affirmative, it's not clear what would've happened. Just as with Lebanon, it's Syrian policy to deny entry to foreigners with Israeli stamps on their passports, or any other sign of having visited Israel. Syrian citizens who clandestinely visit Israel are subject to imprisonment and worse.

The guide takes us back to the main road out of Quinetra, hands us back our passports and hails a passing microbus for us. We thank him and he does what he always does: nods and drags on his cigarette.

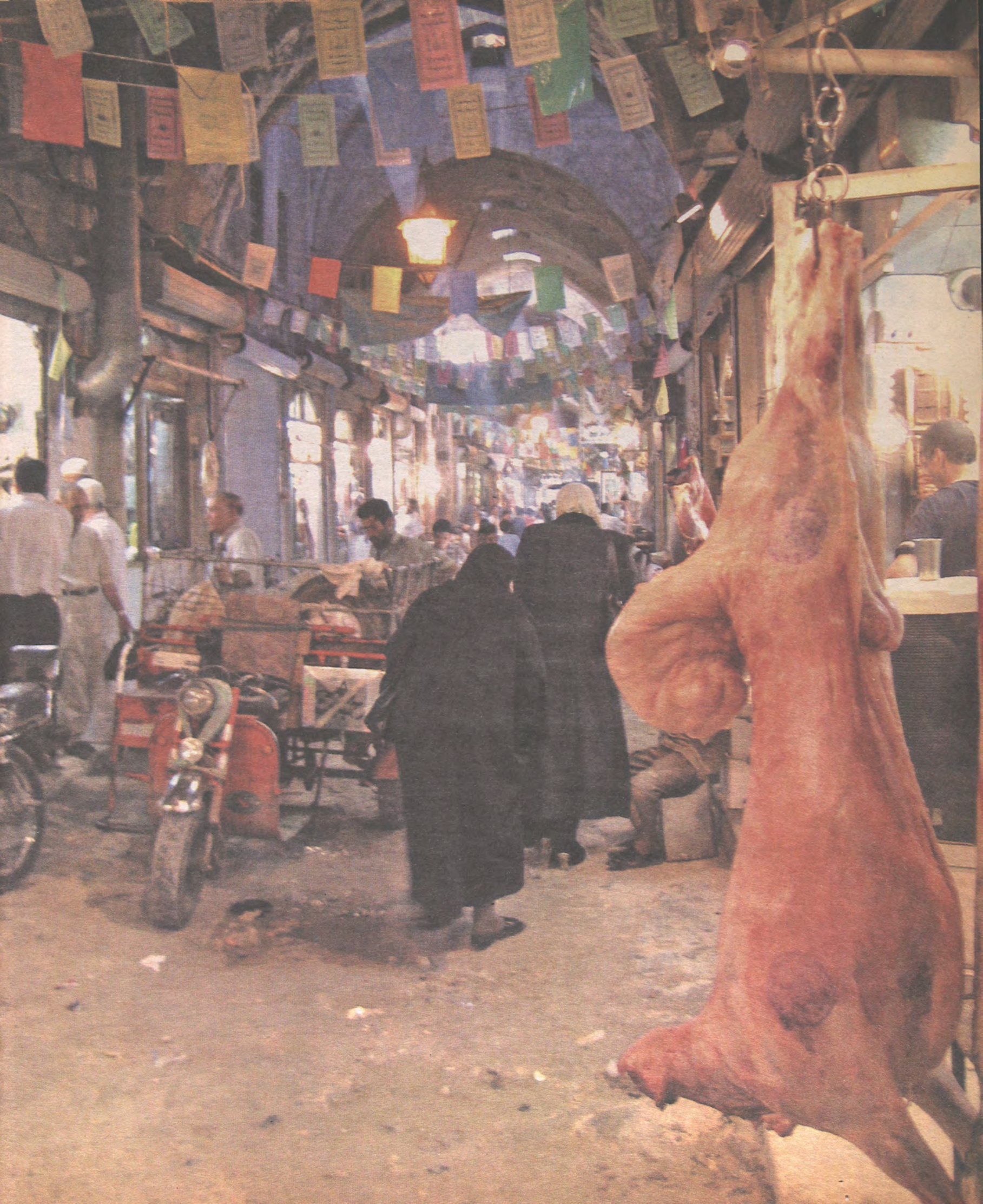
The ride back to Damascus is strange and goofy. Paul gets to ride up front with the driver. He is a rude and very funny Syrian man with a buzz cut and a big moustache. He is absolutely delighted at Paul's halting command of Arabic and takes advantage of this by instructing Paul in the pronunciation of handy words like "penis" and "vagina." I ride in the back making casual conversation with a Syrian law student. The rest of the van is full of a couple Syrians and a handful of other travelers on their way back from Quinetra. The law student is from Quinetra, and asks us what we thought of it. I say it's a sad place, that it reminds me of the ghost towns I've visited in the American Southwest. He asks what I think of Syria. I run through the stock response of enthusiasm. His responds by loudly announcing "I hate Syria. Just look at these people," he gestures to the other Syrians in the vehicle. A young woman in a light blue head scarf. A

A SIGN OUT FRONT READS IN ENGLISH, "GOLAN HOSPITAL: DESTROYED BY ZIONISTS AND CHANGED IT TO FIRING TARGET!"



Bombed out hospital hallway. Quinetra, Syria.

In the Aleppo souk, Syria.



dapper old man in slacks, a dress shirt and a keffiyeh. I tell him they seem nice enough to me. This is the first time any Syrian we've spoken to has disparaged the country. "I'm getting out of this country as soon as I can. Even if it has to be done illegally!" My new law student friend's lack of discretion is making me nervous. He keeps looking to me for reaction. "It's good to move around sometimes," I say. "Damascus is so dirty," he says. "The Syrian people are selfish and deceptive."

After we return to the city, the law student offers to walk Paul and I back to our hotel. Along the way he talks more trash and says he wants to move to the Gulf States where he can make more money. Paul offers him a cigarette and he declines, one of the first people I've met who doesn't smoke. We part ways outside the hotel. He gives me his mobile number. "Maybe we can share a hubble-bubble later on," he says, using the cheesy British term for the water-pipe.

We order some flatbread pizza-like things from a bustling storefront across from the hotel and head inside. We both wonder if our law student pal was some kind of intelligence agent, or a provocateur. That's the fun thing about vacationing in a police state: You just never know.

We take a bus north to Aleppo in the morning. It's a long ride and there's a TV on the bus playing a low-budget Syrian sketch comedy. Aleppo is Syria's second largest city. Its souk is supposed to be the least touristy in the region. According to some assessments, Aleppo is a depot for young Saudis and Egyptians who want to fight in Iraq. There are several famous radical mosques in the city, and the highway is a straight shot to the volatile Iraqi border.

The cab drivers that wait for us at the Aleppo bus station snatch our bags and run off to their cabs. A small argument ensues while Paul attempts to wrestle his suitcase out of a cab in which we do not wish to ride. There's more honking here than any other place. The streets are choked with cars and they all honk together, all the time. We drop our bags at our hotel and take a walk through a large public park just a few blocks away. It is cut down the middle by a black river that stinks of sewage. It's mostly men in the park. Paul and I are both tired and Aleppo feels mean. "I'm ready to go home," says Paul.

He's tired of getting stared at all the time, as am I. I'm also



Bashir Assad poster near the Golan Heights Quinetra, Syria.

WE WONDER IF OUR NEW SYRIAN PAL IS SOME KIND OF INTELLIGENCE AGENT, OR A PROVOCATEUR. IN A POLICE STATE, YOU JUST NEVER KNOW.

tired of the all-guys-all-the-time atmosphere of so many public places. With the exception of Lebanon we've not interacted with any non-Western women. No waitresses in the restaurants, few female cashiers in the stores. We sit on a decrepit bench and watch lottery ticket vendors walk from bench to bench. A booth in the middle of the park rents water pipes and blasts high-pitched, droning Arabic music. Soldiers spread out on the grass, exhaling clouds of perfumed smoke.

The travel is starting to wear both of us down. The pollution, anger and desperation of the Arab world seems more evident here, albeit in subtle ways rather than outright violence. There is much to be celebrated here, of course, but I'm sick of sheisty cab drivers and having the same conversations with everyone we talk to. Yes, we like Syria. We're glad you like Americans. We hate Bush too. I'm annoyed at the European tourists here—the only Americans we meet in Syria are students that Paul already knows—with their ugly shorts and short-sleeved shirts. But I'm also annoyed that conservative Muslims here are so deeply offended by something as benign as a pair of shins. And I'm depressed again at the repressive tactics the Syrian government uses to keep those easily offended religious radicals under control. Why are humans so endlessly horrible about everything? And why won't anyone wear a seat belt?

We meet Blake that afternoon at the hotel bar for a much needed drink. The Baron is the nicest place we've stayed so far. It was built in 1911; T.E. Lawrence's bar

bill is under glass in a wall display, and they say Agatha Christie wrote part of *Murder on the Orient Express* in one of the antique-filled rooms. Syria is the only country on our itinerary that doesn't import American-brand-name products like Coke or Fritos. Same goes for the liquor, so I order the first off-brand scotch since my college days. We find Blake in a stuffed chair drinking Arak, the Syrian variant of the aniseed-derived Ouzo. I order another scotch. The soundtrack here, and everywhere we go in Aleppo, is heavy on soft rock hits from Bryan Adams and Whitney Houston.

The local economy is somewhat depressed apparently. Aleppo reminds me of other second cities—Lyon in France, Manchester in Britain, Chicago in the United States. We walk around in the souk. I buy a tablecloth. The Aleppo souk is rumored to have the most flagrant of Syria's clandestine gay scenes, and our travel guide says not to be surprised should we get cruised while we're here. There are some creative shopkeepers—one sidles up to me with the common, but very funny come-on of "Your English is excellent!" And it's still Paul and Blake's theory that my long hair definitely implies that I'm homosexual. "It's probably kind of confusing with the beard though," Paul says. "Like that cab driver back in Cairo was saying: You've got long hair which women don't even flaunt like you do. But you've also got a big beard. I think you're confusing, sexually, for a lot of people."

After walking through an under-construction mosque at the edge of the souk, we're invited by a

teenage guy to join him for tea at his store around the corner. He's friendly enough and we're tired of walking in the heat, so we agree. His store is air-conditioned and comfortable and his younger brother goes out of his way to act like a wisecracking queen. He's dressed in a pink Polo shirt. When we're asked to guess his age—he's 17, I guess 20—he rolls his eyes, raises one hand to his face and sighs, "I guess I forgot to apply my foundation this morning." They ask our ages. I'm 30, I say. "I would've guessed at least 40, but that's just me," he snaps. There's a giant Oscar Wilde poster on the wall in the back of the store. After declining to buy hand-made silver jewelry or \$3,000 carpets, we make our exit.

We head across the street to visit Aleppo's citadel, a huge Muslim castle in the center of the town. It's an interesting in the way that all well-preserved castles can be with fortified walls, towering keeps and dank underground passageways. "I think you have to be kind of sadistic to be into Medieval Studies," says Blake. "Those guys are always describing castle walls in relation to the manner in which hot oil was poured off of them." We make our way from the amphitheater on top of the structure down to the dungeon. It's dark down here, and there's a musty stench. There's a short line to view the cistern, an even darker pit. A guard stands in front of the stairway that leads down even further under the Citadel. We take our turn gazing down into the darkness. The

guard cracks a weird smile. "Abu Ghraib!" he hisses, and takes a step back, bugging his eyes out. We decide to skip the rest of the dungeon tour and head back up the stairs and across the street to a café for cheese pies and chocolate milkshakes.

From Aleppo we head south to Hama, Syria's fourth largest city and a place that will be all over the news if the U.S. ever attempts to rationalize military action against the Asad regime. Hama is a conservative town and has long been a source of resistance to the ruling powers. The French had plenty of problems here while most of Syria was under their control, and little changed during the coups and counter-coups that eventually put Hafez Asad in power in 1970. During the early '80s, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood organization was gaining considerable ground in the city, and their resistance culminated in February of 1982 when rooftop snipers attacked Syrian soldiers patrolling the city. This was followed by a full-scale uprising during which the governor was besieged in his residence and scores of Baath party officials were killed. Asad responded by sending his brother Rifat to subdue the rebellion with his tank divisions. The bombardment of Hama continued for weeks, and though there was no official accounting of the dead, various estimates put civilian casualties in the range of several thousand to tens of thousands. Bodies and buildings alike were bulldozed over and a new city center was constructed shortly afterward. On the way into town Paul had a conversation with a first year medical student on the bus. The student asked Paul what he knew about Hama. Paul said he knew "about what happened in 1982."

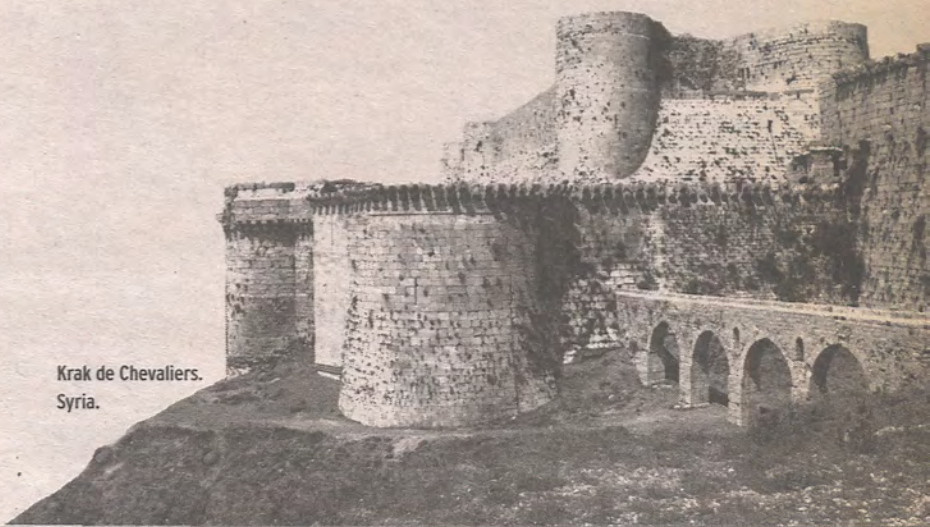
"That's the problem," said the student. "But nobody wants to talk about it." Then he said goodbye and got off the bus.

Hama is also famous for its *nourias*, water wheels in the Orontes River that have helped irrigate the surrounding farms since 500 AD. It's also an inexpensive base camp for exploring the ruins that are hidden

throughout the mountains to the east. It's a good place to unwind, a slow-moving refuge that Paul and I have both been ready for for a few days now. Its friendly streets and family values make me think about American truck commercials. Kids climb on the *nourias* and jump off into the water. Parks line the river and families relaxing in the grass stare at my sexy transvestite Jesus hairdo a lot. Crying children stop and gaze in wonder. I rarely make it more than a half hour before tying it up in to a tight bun.

Our first destination is Muysaf, a stone fortress that is said to have been an outpost of Hassan i Sabbah's notorious Ismaili assassin sect in the middle 1100s. According to legend, Sabbah was the original "old man of the mountain," a kind of Medieval Osama Bin Laden who directed a far-reaching network of intensely loyal assassins—dubbed *hashisheen*—who would die at his command, assured as they were of reaching in death the Islamic paradise that they had already tasted briefly in a drugged state during orgiastic rituals at Sabbah's castle headquarters in what is now Iran. Most of the facts of this legend are impossible to verify, but Sabbah has been a beloved and inspirational figure to many Western radical liberationists in the last two hundred years, among them Aleister Crowley, Brion Gysin, William S. Burroughs, Robert Anton Wilson, Hakim Bey, Patti Smith and Bill Laswell, especially for the "Nothing is true—everything is permitted" epigram that is often attributed to him. (The best account of the historical Sabbah is *The Assassins*, by Bernard Lewis.) We spend the morning exploring the castle, which is a powerful sight to behold, rising high over a tiny mountainside hamlet. There's not much to it inside though: several crumbly hallways and the obligatory expansive views from its ramparts. No ancient hookahs are to be found, though this does not stop Paul and Blake from channeling their extensive knowledge of Arab history into stoner-friendly humor: Paul and Blake Go to Ismaili Castle.

The most spectacular of the ruins in this area of Syria is undoubtedly Krak de Chevaliers,



Krak de Chevaliers.
Syria.

a 12th-century fortress that lived up to every expectation that I have ever had for a castle. The feeling of returning to some vestige of European culture was a surprise, and an unexpected relief. It sits on the edge of a range of mountains with lovely contoured terrace-style farms. Though the houses are still all made of cinder blocks, things look decidedly "country" here.

The castle feels like *Lord of the Rings* and the Crusades and the old Lego castle building sets all at once. We follow along with the guidebook at first, but soon cast it aside. There is enough space here to really get lost. More than once we wander off down dark passageways where it feels like nobody has set foot since the days of Saladin. The views from its towers give me the undeniable feeling of ownership of the land. We comb over all of its hallways, chambers and staircases and I hanker for a sword to brandish. Later, we walk around its exterior searching for a supposed secret entrance. Paul and Blake discuss battle strategies like a pair of

Medieval John Maddens. We are three little boys here.

The Dead Cities are the last stop in Syria. They're also the first place we've been so far that has me wishing I could just wander off with my backpack for a few days. Living in California in such close proximity to profound natural beauty has spoiled me for much of the rest of the world. Lebanon's Mediterranean coastline has got nothing on the sequoia-studded cliffs of Big Sur. The treeless, overdeveloped peaks of Lebanon's Chouf Range pale in comparison to the Sierras. I wish we'd made it deeper into the Egyptian desert, but the brown skies and blowing garbage in the dunes near Giza leave me cold after spending time camping in the Mojave National Preserve. But the Dead Cities are different.

The Dead Cities are Byzantine ghost towns. Limestone houses, taverns, temples and tombs that were built in the fifth and sixth centuries and then abandoned when trade routes shifted. They're unmarked and only



Dead Cities squatter. Serjilla, Syria.

half-explored. The first one we visit—Al-Bara—is just outside of a dusty little nowhere town. This is the first place, tellingly, where we have trouble finding bottled water in any of the stores. The huge gray buildings rise out of miles of olive orchards and fig trees. Their architecture is unlike anything I've ever seen, but again, I'm reminded of the abandoned mining settlements and cowboy ruins of the American West. The rest of the tourists don't find these buildings as compelling as I do, and the driver is in a hurry. But I want to wander over the hillsides by myself. I walk a ways off into the olive tree orchards. The dirt is red. The call to prayer from the town echoes over the hills, followed by a passionately delivered sermon.

The next Dead City is Serjilla. It's the largest and most well-known, and there's even somebody here to collect a nominal entrance fee. It's the same style of buildings as Al-Bara, but it's spread out over a blasted heath. Serjilla immediately brings to mind the treeless rock-strewn Eiran Isles off the coast of Western Ireland. There's a family squatting in one of the ancient buildings. They ask us if we want to see their sheep.

We've been eating the same food since the beginning of this trip. Every meal but breakfast is mezze: hummus, baba ghanouj, shanklich, fattouch salad and sometimes this spicy mashed up pepper stuff. Since my brother's vegetarian and our meals are communal, I only occasionally indulge in a chunk of chicken or sheep. For our last night in Syria we eat at a riverfront restaurant that we choose somewhat randomly. Tired of pureed and smashed vegetables and legumes, I go out on a limb and order the house special. It sounds good, like some sort of meat pie. But it was more like meat pudding, a mixture of lamb and rice and some sort of creamy greasy stuff all on a bed of some Frito-like chips. I have the distinct impression that the concoction had already been digested, perhaps by a cow. I ended up horning in on Paul's hummus which is, as usual, quite delicious.

EPILOGUE

During our overnight stay in Beirut on the way back to Cairo from Syria, I tune the TV to Melody Arabia again. A video from Los Angeles rapper The Game comes on. The shots of the Los Angeles skyline make me homesick and

apprehensive about going back. The helicopters flying over the sun-baked sprawl of segregated housing, the wide-open freeways with their orderly procession of vehicles, the home town pride of West Coast hip-hop: they're all things I love about Los Angeles but also things that make me wonder why more people aren't terrified of Americans.

We have two days and one night to pass in Cairo before Paul and I both return home—him to Ohio State University in Columbus, me to Los Angeles. We stay in a great old residential hotel in the Garden City district. The only other resident is a batty old ex-pat, a woman dressed in flowing robes with a scarf tied around her head. She smokes a lot, and we make small talk about a soccer match on TV.

Paul and I sit on the balcony of the hotel drinking cans of watery Egyptian beer, keeping an eye on a small garden and the nearby freeway on-ramp. As with any open patch of vegetation in the city, the grass in the median has a few people sleeping on it. A few other people are there, enjoying an 11 p.m. picnic. Cars drive by honking in tandem, usually the sign of a wedding party. A horse-drawn carriage blasting Egyptian pop tunes heads under an overpass and up toward the freeway. The people inside are throwing firecrackers at passing cars and everyone is laughing. "I feel like I'm home," says Paul.

The next morning we take a cab from Cairo to the south end of the Egyptian pyramid field. The pyramids start at Giza and extend 40 miles south. The southernmost pyramid complex is at Dahshur. Supposedly it's usually quiet there, even though its pyramids are older and as well preserved as those at Giza. Our cab driver—a guy in his mid-20s named Osama—has never been there, and is as excited as we are to make the drive.

Dahshur is indeed empty of tourists, as expected. Just blowing sand, the locked gates of a nearby military base and a squad of five tourist police. Their commander approaches us, his arm raised in greeting. "Greetings Dr. Moustache!" he hollers at me.

Mohammed the tourist policeman is as gregarious as anyone we've yet encountered here. He slings his AK over his shoulder and tours us around the temple complex on the side of the Red Pyramid, the main attraction at Dahshur. "This is original," he points to a piece of rock wall. "Very old."



THE DEAD CITIES OF SYRIA ARE REMINISCENT OF THE ABANDONED MINING SETTLEMENTS AND COWBOY RUINS OF THE AMERICAN WEST.





Peace in the Middle East from the guardian of the Red Pyramid. Dahshur, Egypt.

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARABS DON'T HATE YOU AMERICANS, IT'S THE THINGS YOUR GOVERNMENTS DO THAT WE OBJECT TO."

"This is not original," he points to a restoration built with mud and straw. "Not so old."

After the tour we walk back to the camp—a tiny gas stove surrounded by two camels and four more guards—and our guide asks me, "Dr. Moustache, do you have any sugar for Mohammed?" He's after the customary baksheesh tip for showing us around, letting us illegally climb the side of the pyramid and for taking our pictures. I give him the remaining small bills I have in my wallet—the Egyptian government can't afford to mint very many coins, and small bills get passed around a lot. They're usually warm, damp and falling apart, so not something I'll be bringing home as a souvenir. He spies a few American dollars. "How about some American souvenirs, too?" he asks. I pass some bills to him, and to his camel-riding companion. Now he's worried that I might feel taken advantage of. "You're okay now, Dr. Moustache?" he asks. "Perhaps you like whisky in your tea?"

I decide to try a joke, and in the low, gravelly voice Paul uses when impersonating Egyptian cab drivers I say "Haram!" Forbidden! Mohammed laughs and we pass around a glass jar full of sugary tea.

Osama, Paul and I decide to climb the staircase that leads to the pyramid. A guy sits at the top, making sure everyone who goes in comes back out. We duck down low and descend along a sloping ramp that leads to the burial room antechamber. Inside there's graffiti torch-burnt onto

a wall from the 1800s. The burial chamber is up a short staircase. Paul and I stand there feeling the weight of the building all around us. The absolute silence makes for a very intense Indiana Jones moment. Egypt is fucking old, dude.

On the ride back to Cairo Osama tunes the radio to the local rock station. "Love Me Two Times" by the Doors comes over the speakers. It's the first American rock music I've heard in three weeks and it's awesome to hear as we fly by irrigation canals leading from the Nile to cornfields and forests of date palms. Children see us in the car and wave. Chickens play in the side streets. Caravans of camels hauling palm fronds share the road with tractors and other cars. Osama pulls a lever underneath the dashboard, engaging his car's customized horn. A loud "moo" emanates from somewhere under the hood and we all laugh.

We spend the afternoon in Cairo wandering around an eight-story mall packed with wealthy shoppers. Paul considers buying some clothes, but instead we check out *Private Alex*, the first attempt by Egypt's huge film industry to branch out from slapstick comedy into the "thriller" genre. Predictably, it's as boring as most Hollywood big-budget thrillers. The mall is full of wealthy Arabs; we're still covered in the dust of 4,000-year-old pyramids. I feel weird and I look it too: when I check myself in the mirror in the men's room, I see a frazzled traveler. I'd never

think of going shopping looking this raggedy back home.

That evening, as Paul and I watch the sun set over the Nile, a young, preppy-looking guy and his girlfriend approach us and want to know where we're from. We stand and talk and the guy tells us some racist jokes about Jews and Japanese. He tells us about how his wife doesn't like his new girlfriend, but she'll have to deal with it because soon this new girlfriend will be his second wife. I try and talk to the woman standing beside him, but she doesn't speak English and he won't translate. He wants to know if I believe in God. I would hate talking to this asshole in California, so why am I humoring him now? Just because he's Egyptian? I want to go home.

The guy asks me and Paul to join him for dinner on a felucca. We decline and head to the Mohandiseen neighborhood, where we have some world-beating fuul at Paul's favorite restaurant.

There's a store selling textiles and perfume next to the hotel where we had stashed our luggage for the day. The proprietor, a nattily attired man in his 50s, is sitting out front with several other men. We stop to check out some of his wares—we've still got time to kill before our flights home—and in keeping with the hospitality we've been shown throughout the Arab world he offers us some tea. This man is a descendent of Egyptian Bedouins and, in addition to his retail business, he's made money capturing rare snakes for Israeli herpetologists and leading handicapped-accessible tours to remote desert oases. He laughs at Paul when he tells him his major: History. "Your country is so young! You Americans don't even have history yet. Your history is nothing more than a yesterday." Paul clarifies that he studies the history of US-Arab diplomacy, so he's here studying Egyptian history as well.

"It's important that you understand that we Arabs don't hate you Americans," he says. "We don't hate the Israelis either—I have Israeli business partners and Jewish friends. It's the things your governments do that we object to." We nod in agreement and fumble with the hot glasses full of boiling water and tea leaves. I say something about the disjunction between the people who live in a country and those who lead it, and he nods. "This gap between government and their people, this is something we understand

quite well here." He gives me his card and suggests we get together the next time I'm in Egypt. He has a very strange novel that he's written about "people of all nationalities transported at once to a remote location in the middle of the Egyptian desert." It's unlike any book ever written, he says, and he'd like some help translating it into English.

"You are welcome in Egypt," our host says, and we make our goodbyes.

On the ride to the airport we pass over a bridge that's under construction. In another country, there might be three guys with jackhammers doing the work. In Cairo, it's 30 guys with ball-peen hammers. "That's what I love about Egypt," says Paul. "It might take a while to get it done, but they're working on it. Don't worry. They're working on it."

Paul and I are both worried about crossing back through US Customs with the small cache of Hezbollah swag we picked up in South Lebanon. We're not aware of doing anything illegal, but so many key chains adorned with turbans, beards and AK-47s might take a little explaining.

Once I'm on the ground at LAX, it doesn't look like anybody at US Customs is going to search my luggage. The official at the "nothing to declare" line looks at my passport and his eyes go wide. "Egypt, Syria and Lebanon," he says. "These are certainly some interesting choices of places to visit," he says.

"Yes they are," I say.

He holds on to my passport and gives me a very serious look: "Why did you go there?"

I smile back. "My brother was spending the summer in Cairo, and he invited me to come visit him."

"All right then," he says. He hands me back my passport and I walk out of the airport and into the sunshine and smog of Los Angeles.

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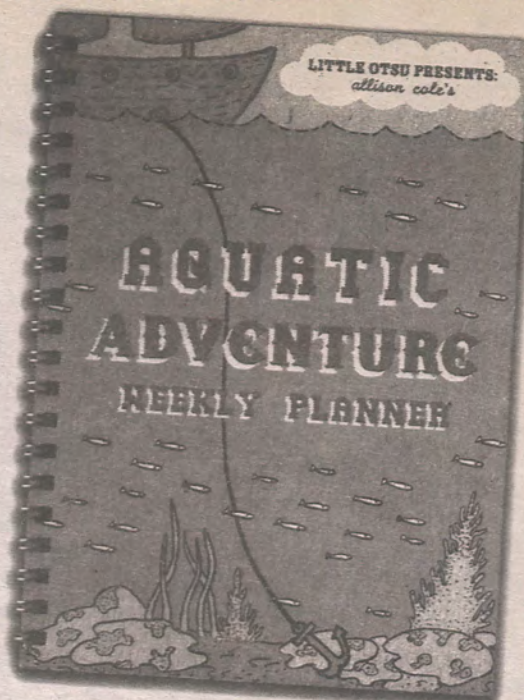


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- NOW Magazine, Toronto

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bedsit poets

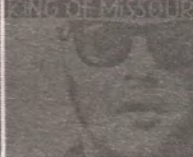


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CINDERPOP
their skies are beautiful

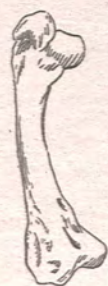
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A DEEPER SH

How do the drone-metal b
get something ou

BY BRIAN

EARTH BLACKING OUT

In 1993 the Olympia, Washington-based band Earth released their second album, *Earth 2*. No drums, no voices, two guitars, nothing else. It was ambient music done by a demon on downers—highly lugubrious, with slowed-down underwater metal riffs. *Earth 2* traded in the glam, stagy evil of classic heavy metal for a brooding darkness, simultaneously adescent into hell and a sort Buddhist chant pushing you toward either Nirvana or nothingness (you choose). It was the kind of wandering super-vibrating music that makes your leg tingle where you'd broken it ten years before. Not only was it something you couldn't dance to, it was something you couldn't move to. It slowly shut you down. And with each of its three tracks over fifteen minutes long, by the time you'd finished the album you felt like you'd never start back up again.

Earth 2 is the ur-album of drone metal (it's probably not a

coincidence that their name is the same one originally used by Black Sabbath). It's nothing at all like the grunge stuff—Nirvana and Mudhoney for instance—that their then-label Sub Pop was putting out then. But after *Earth 2*, the band—really just guitarist Dylan Carlson and whoever he wanted to partner with at the time—moved in different directions. *Phase 3: Thrones and Dominions*, a hard-to-find album from 1995 that you can pick up on disk for around \$90 (or at iTunes for \$9), added one more guitarist and, for one track, a drummer. 1996's *Pentastar (In the Style of Demons)* was still drone-y but just a hair away from being a rock album: cleaner sound, drums on all the tracks, deliberate shapes to the songs (most of which ran around five minutes), and even some vocals.

Earth was never a very visible band. They never played many live shows, and the few they did were in odd circumstances and spottily

attended, remembered both fondly and with a trace of fear for how jarringly loud they were. Attempts to record these concerts were often less than satisfactory to the band. So when Earth disappeared altogether after *Pentastar*, amidst rumors of low sales, legal problems and out-of-control drug use, it was hard at first to notice, since they'd been hardly visible in the first place. Except for a bizarre appearance in Nick Broomfield's contemptuous 1998 documentary *Kurt & Courtney*—Carlson was a close friend of Kurt Cobain's—that unfortunately raised his profile in all the wrong ways, Carlson seemed down for the count.

Not much was heard from him until 2002 when Philadelphia's No Quarter label re-released *Sunn Amps and Smashed guitars*, a collection of demos which featured a pre-*Nevermind* Cobain singing on one of the tracks. This seemed to kick Carlson into a higher gear. In early 2005, Troubleman Unlimited

released *Living in the Gleam of an Unsheathed Sword*, a two-track live album, with the title track running over an hour. They also put out a remix album, *Legacy of Dissolution*, which instead of offering the usual metalhead suspects serves as a meeting ground for the likes of Earth acolytes Sunn O))) [see right], Sonic Youth collaborator Jim O'Rourke, experimental musician Russell Haswell, electronica artists Autechre, and Scottish post-rockers Mogwai. Since Carlson was the one to assemble the list of remixers, the album both testifies to Earth's cross-genre interest and to his own changing musical sensibility. Earth—now an instrumental duo with Carlson on guitar and Adrienne Davies on drums—even started touring.

Hex; or Printing in the Infernal Method, released last month by Los Angeles doom metal label

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A DE OF DOOM

bands **Earth** and **Sunn 0)))**
of nothingness?

EVENSON

SUNN 0))) HEARING DOUBLE

At first it feels great to be imitated; it makes you feel relevant, necessary, important. But if it goes on for too long it can start to feel a little creepy, like your imitator is trying to become you, to take whatever claim to originality you possess. Ultimately, having someone around who acts like you makes you wonder who *you* are. It erodes any firm foundation of identity. And if he becomes you, then what exactly is left for you to be? That's the problem, French philosopher René Girard says, with doubles. They're at once the same as the thing that they're doubling and weirdly out of focus, at once something and nothing.

Most of the time it doesn't get that far. Most imitators are polite and controlled, respectful of the person or thing they're modeling themselves after. But sometimes there's a ritual aspect of imitation that seems to be trying to short-circuit the way we perceive the world. Take Elvis imitators: the

best ones are not interested in being so much the next big star as in—by repeating his vocal patterns and gestures—bringing Elvis back to life. Through a process of ritual and repetition they open their bodies up to the King's energy: the whole process is about getting to that brief moment where both they and the audience forgets that they're not Elvis, where the repetition of a certain flick of the head and a signature gyration of the hips take them out of their bodies, leaving a kind of Elvis aura behind. When this happens—and it only rarely does—it's uncanny as hell. It feels like time and space are being cracked wide open.

Cover bands and most tribute bands end up fitting into the polite and controlled category. The ritual is there—the repetition of certain vocal patterns and repeated notes—but you never get to that point where the musicians are transformed into the music. The ritual of repetition isn't leading

anywhere, identity is neither built nor eroded, and the experience at best is a pseudo-faithful version watered down with nostalgia.

Real artists, on the other hand, often transform someone else's song to such a degree as to appropriate it and shift it into an entirely new space: there's enough difference between Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix's versions of "All Along the Watchtower" that you can enjoy both without feeling like you're betraying one or the other. The same is true of Bowie's "Let's Dance" and M. Ward's "Let's Dance." But how often do you find a band that's able to remain slavishly faithful to their mentor and still get anything done? Such a band would, like a double, be in that strange space between being and non-being. You'd feel what they're imitating almost constantly. Their act of ritual and repetition would be at once destructive and transformative: something that builds and builds

so that by the time they reach that thirtieth signature gyration or signature chord, something suddenly happens that makes the air buzz.

If anybody comes close to doing this, it's Sunn 0))).

Sunn 0))) started in 1998 as a side project for former Burning Witch partners Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson in honor of the band Earth [see left]. Both Anderson and O'Malley had witnessed Earth live in the '90s, and repeated playing of Earth's two albums turned them into diehard Earth fanatics. Sunn 0)))—pronounced Sunn, the "0)))" is silent—named themselves after Sunn amps, Earth's preferred amps and then set about paying tribute to a band they felt had changed musical history.

Sunn 0)))'s first two albums sound like, well, Earth. O'Malley and Anderson learned their lessons well from *Earth 2*, taking

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**"I THINK THE PHYSICAL IS
A MAINFESTATION OF THE
SPIRITUAL," SAYS CARLSON. "THE
TWO ARE INTERCONNECTED."**



(continued from page 32)

Southern Lord, is the first Earth studio album in nine years. *Hex* has a relaxed, desert quality to it that you'd be hard pressed to find in Earth's earlier work. Something definitely changed between *Pentastar* and *Hex*, though with Earth having dropped off the musical map in between it's hard to trace the path that leads from one to the other. Intrigued, I contacted Carlson for an interview, which we conducted by email.

Hex's subtitle comes from William Blake's 18th century prophetic poem, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and refers to Blake's method of illuminated print. The full quote reads, "First the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged: this I shall do by printing in the infernal method by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away and displaying the infinite which was hid." In other words, printing in the infernal method is a way of both working against the Cartesian notion that the body and soul can be separated, and a way of revealing the infinite that (according to Blake) hides in all living things.

Carlson says his use of the

quote "refers to a change in the philosophy behind [Earth's] music. When I was younger, I was definitely held in sway to a sort of abstract dualist/Manichean world view. That the material world was wholly and irredeemably evil and corrupt, and that there was a world of the spirit completely separate and hidden within the material.... I guess I am now a monist instead of a dualist, I think the physical is a manifestation of the spiritual. That the two are interconnected."

We've trained our senses in such a way that we don't always see the things that are there, partly due to the way that European thought privileges vision over all the other senses.

"The spiritual is only hid within the physical because of our inability to perceive it properly," says Carlson. One of the ways we perceive improperly is always relying on sight, to the exclusion of our other senses. Music is able to escape the mistakes of the eye and physical sight. We can hear the continuum of the physical and spiritual in the drone."

This notion—the body is not distinct from the soul—became part of Earth's music itself, both in terms of musical history and on the level of the sound itself.

"[T]he small colorations of different genres that are on the surface of the music could be likened to the body, and the drone that is within and behind it all considered the spirit," he says. "On earlier Earth projects there were the more 'metal' figures or riffs and on this album there are more 'country' type figures or riffs. I have begun to see music as a continuum—especially the American forms such as blues, country, and jazz—and am situating myself within that continuum instead of apart from it."

Both *Hex* and *Earth 2* push through to something infinite. In *Earth 2*, that melting is achieved through repetition, drone, and feedback that somehow punches, after a kind of overload, through to something really sublime. *Hex* definitely doesn't operate by overload. There's a sense of space and openness and landscape, and a stillness not really present in Earth's earlier work.

"There is a greater sense of stillness to this record that helps invoke the infinite," says Carlson. "Also I am using 'cleaner' guitar tones than previously, which create a purer sense of the note. The notes are not hidden in oversaturated distortion. The spiritual is being manifested

instead of hidden, as it were."

Along with the spiritual dimension, there's a decidedly Western feel to *Hex*, which pays tribute on its sleeve to *Blood Meridian* (author Cormac McCarthy's grim high-literary rewriting of the old West) and Neil Young's *Dead Man* soundtrack. The music itself is shot through with the ghost of the godfather of the Western soundtracks, Ennio Morricone. McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, with its incredible intensity, real sense of landscape and amazing passages of violence, seems especially apt. What was it, I asked Carlson, that he wanted to capture in that novel?

"The sense of the American continent being a place of extreme beauty, but also extreme violence and tragedy. Also, there is so much revisionist bullshit written these days portraying the conflicts of the emerging culture on this continent as the all-evil white man versus the all-good and benevolent natives. *Blood Meridian* paints a varied and realistic portrayal of the savagery that existed in all communities on the American continent at that time."

On *Hex*, there's no singing, but

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SUNN O)))'S WORK GIVES YOU PERMISSION TO STOP BEING YOURSELF FOR A WHILE.



(continued from page 33)

full advantage of the aesthetic space Dylan Carlson created. Sunn O))) acted like a fairly well-behaved tribute band, remaining faithful to a particular moment in Earth's career. They were very good at capturing both the mood, the feel and the sound of Earth. It was enjoyable stuff to listen to, but you had less the feeling that musical history was being made than that musical history was being repeated, that the albums weren't quite reaching the point where the ritual was releasing the more intense energy of transformation and negation.

But something changed around the time of their third album, 2001's *3: Flight of the Behemoth*. The music wasn't that different, but Sunn O))) no longer seemed to be looking quite so adoringly at Earth's past. Instead they were looking farther along a track that Earth discarded in favor of their very different evolution today [again, see left]. It was like as if Sunn O))) were imitating the Earth songs that had never been written.

This shift was audible in the tracks Japanese Noise-drone veteran Merzbow mixed on *3: Flight of the Behemoth*. "))) Bow 1" and ")))

Bow 2" play like metal run through a noise ringer, moving a purer and crueler sonic attack straight out of the Noise tradition and then back out to metal again, with occasional pounding, dissonant piano. In the two albums that would follow, 2002's *White 1* and 2003's *White 2*, there's still an incredible faithfulness to early Earth's doom/drone, but there's also different kind of attention, a sense that Sunn O))) were starting to hear an imaginary future. The difference, perhaps, was due to Sunn O))) becoming a collaborative exercise involving outside musicians—O'Malley and Anderson had figured out a way to bring other people in to the mix, not so much as add-ons but as catalysts to mutate the band's sound.

What's amazing about Sunn O))) is that the changes that have occurred feel almost like micro-adjustments. For someone who isn't that familiar with Sunn O))), the similarities between the albums is likely to far outweigh the differences; it's only on repeated listening that one hears the progression slowly welling up. So, the ritual of imitating Earth demands also from the fan an almost ritualistic listening with greater and greater care,

a real desire to find the strange and almost microscopic gaps where deviations both reveal a new direction for Sunn O))) and reinforce their connection to Earth everywhere else. That's the twist that makes Sunn O)))'s later work like a double: it's at once like Earth and slightly out of focus.

Sunn O)))'s *White 1* (2003) goes on record as the only album that's ever inspired me to go out and buy new woofers (it's also responsible for blowing out a lot of headphones). Because you're listening for minute changes within a soundscape, the louder it's played, the better it sounds. If you can locate the right spot a few decibels before your ears bleed and your speakers self-destruct, you begin to experience the uncanny.

I have a fond spot for *White 1* since it's the first Sunn O))) album I heard. A few years ago a reader my fiction writing got in touch with me; one of the first things he asked was whether I knew about Sunn O))). I'd never heard of them but went out and bought *White 1*. I was prepared for a metal band, but what surprised me was that I immediately could see connections between what Sunn O))) were doing and what artists in other genres—noise,

experimental, drone, ambient, and krautrock—were up to. It was the first metal band that I could listen to without feeling nostalgic, and also the first such band that I felt had a sense of negativity and nothingness and ritual that my own fiction was very sympathetic to. I felt like Sunn O))) was emptying themselves out to make way for Earth, and I felt that the repetitions gave me permission to do the same as a listener. *White 1* gave you permission to stop being yourself for a while.

On *White 1*, O'Malley and Anderson were doing the solid slow-motion metal riffs that they'd done on earlier albums, but they'd added a few guests: former Melvin Joe Preston and guitarist Rex Ritter embellishing O'Malley and Anderson's roiling sonic sea; Julian Cope reciting a narrative; Runhild Gammelsaeter singing a traditional Norse poem. They moved away from metal and toward experimental music in the last of the three tracks on the album. Instead of taking the drone away, they augmented it, throwing other things into the mix. "At one point," says O'Malley, "we had to decide where to take it, so we started inviting people to perform on a song, perform live,

(continued on page 37)



**"NO MATTER WHAT EARTH DOES,
THE TEMPOS WILL ALWAYS
REMAIN SLOWER THAN MOST,
AND THE DRONE WILL ALWAYS BE
PRESENT."**

(continued from page 34)

drums throughout, and lap and pedal steel as well. Reverb still interests Carlson; distortion and fuzz do not. He's switched to a Stratocaster, and the drone is purer; it becomes part of a structure of the song itself, something to create a sense of openness and emptiness instead of something meant to blow your eardrums out. "My choice of guitar speaks to stripping down and making plain as well," says Carlson. "I use a Fender Telecaster, the first guitar designed from the ground up as an electric guitar, rather than an acoustic with a pick-up added. The Telecaster produces a very pure tone, you can really hear the wood and metal in its sound. Also it has definite parameters in which it allows you to work. When people speak of 'Tele-players' it's almost

the same as saying someone is a Buddhist or Catholic—it is almost a creed. I think that pureness of tone and purpose helps strip away anything unnecessary and allows the music to will out."

Add to that the clear influence of country/western virtuoso guitarists and you're into territory that would make any but the most confident metalhead a wee bit nervous. Southern Lord, best known as a doom metal label, would seem likely to be nervous as well.

"Southern Lord has been nothing but supportive," says Carlson. "They gave me the time and budget necessary to fully realize this album. Recently I was setting up at a show we did with Sunn0))) in L.A. I was using a 2x12 Ampeg combo, and I made a comment about feeling strange to not be

setting up a mountain of cabinets. [Sunn 0))) member and Southern Lord chief] Greg Anderson said that I had been there and done that and had nothing to prove. It was incredibly liberating to be treated with that kind of respect."

In any case, even if *Hex* is a real departure, it's not completely unexpected. Earth has stayed in motion over the years, changing styles from album to album. But is there something that ultimately connects all these albums together, a common factor that allows Earth to go in different directions but still be Earth?

"The albums are each different surfaces but what is inside them is the same. I think no matter what I do that there will always be certain constants. The tempos will always remain slower than most. The drone will always be present."

If you can bundle all the cues the album and Carlson are giving—Blake, McCarthy, the old West, the notion of being part of the continuum instead of outside it, the physical as a manifestation of the spiritual—you being to hear differently: you start to hear what's there rather than what you expect to hear. And what you hear is that Carlson's figured out the hidden connections between drone and the guitar work of the American folk and country tradition. *Hex* creates a fragile bridge between the two.

Does this mean Earth has mellowed out? And if I like it, does it mean I'm growing old and soft? Have I become the kind of person who likes to sit on the porch listening to country music? Well, not quite yet. But has Carlson?

(continued on page 38)



"SMOKE AND ROBES MAY SEEM OVER THE TOP, BUT IT'S A VERY DIRECT SET OF TOOLS TO EVOKE THIS VIBRATIONAL ENERGY, TO STEP OUTSIDE THE EVERYDAY."

(continued from page 35)

etc. It's very comfortable for us to try out different things and move in directions we like. The character of the people doing it is really the tone of what happens."

I've never seen Sunn O))) live, but everyone I've talked to who has suggests that it's uniquely powerful in the same way the recorded music is, using a combination of effects to try to get to that moment in which reality is transformed. The performers wear hooded robes, and in some cases have their faces hidden. There are candles and rolling fog, and a decidedly ceremonial feel that combines with the dirge-like drone to loosen your joints and make your body vibrate.

On the one hand, it sounds like watching the Stonehenge sequence in *Spinal Tap*; there's

something comic and over-the-top about it, something silly. Sunn O))) also never perform sober which, admittedly, is part of a long rock tradition, but in this instance seems to have a more serious, consciously ritualistic component: it is an attempt to get outside of oneself. O'Malley and Anderson are both smart enough to see the potential goofiness of their performance and I think that taking the risk of being considered goofy is part of the performance for them, a way of becoming vulnerable. If you are willing to go along with it, the ritualistic quality of the performance and the music allow you to become part of something much more amorphous.

For O'Malley, it's less like a religion than learning how to be part of a rhizomatic sound machine:

"We are tagged with the words camp, ritualistic, ceremonial, cheesy, theatrical, etc. These all could be valid as a point of view of the live performance. In the best-case scenario the audience is part of the experience, part of the vibration and the altering of space. Aspects of trappings like smoke and robes/costumes may seem over the top, but to me it's a very direct set of tools to allow the actual method of evoking this vibrational energy to step outside the everyday and individualized aspect. All people in Sunn O))) at that moment become subservient to the sound itself, not to the humanity of the people creating or accessing that sound. I strive to have an experience in a different perspective of space and time with every Sunn O))) event."

Selfhood dissolves. Your body

and mind is transmuted into an annex of the sound. The audience, watching O'Malley and Anderson move into that vulnerable space, watching them give themselves up, is willing to become much more vulnerable themselves.

Both live and on their releases, Sunn O))) is playing up this uncanniness more. While the recently released *Black One* has a healthy dose of the drone and feedback of 3: *Flight of the Behemoth* and *White1*, it incorporates additional elements and takes new risks.

The short opening track is especially surprising in this regard; it plays like a mood piece. Says O'Malley, "The idea with the first track was to make a framework for the album, like those black metal

(continued on page 38)

(continued from page 36)

Or does he still feel an affinity for the kind of music, like Sunn 0))) , that seems to have spawned from *Earth 2*?

Says Carlson, "I respect what Sunn0))) is doing and other bands that are working in similar areas—I view them all as unique and important to music...." But at the same time, "Country is the genre I have the most interest in at this moment, mainly from a purely technical guitar-playing stand point. It uses a lot of drones (as pedal tones) in banjo rolls and oblique bends (bends against static notes). It is also one of the genres in which the Telecaster guitar has dominated and become most associated with. I have never considered Earth to be a genre band, although many seem to consider us metal or ambient or noise/experimental, so if people want to call us country too [because of the use of lap steel or banjo on *Hex*], that's fine. Maybe having one more genre added to our output will hopefully help out in sort of a niche-marketing kind of way. I used to tell people when they asked me where I saw myself in 20-25 years that I would be playing electric guitar or pedal steel in a little country group in some bar somewhere like Oklahoma."

Hex, to be fair, is still a long way from being the kind of music you can see in a bar in Oklahoma, even though Dylan has appropriated a lot of instruments commonly associated with country. It still has the moodiness of *Earth 2*, but there's a landscape being built up as well. It's much closer to the latest moody Dead Hollywood Stars EP than to doom, but the doom connection is still there. The darkness is more sober, calmer, but it's still there, and it builds slowly and compellingly. Sometimes, like in "An Inquest Concerning Teeth," it takes a momentary upbeat turn before slipping down again. The darkness is given a setting that lets it breathe rather than making it claustrophobic. Rather than the more aggressive and flailing darkness of *Earth 2*, *Hex* has an occult feel to it, like a spell, with full knowledge and with open eyes. The results are at once haunting and incredibly listenable, the sounds rich, rather than oversaturated.

And though I'm a huge fan of *Earth 2*, an album which I only discovered a few years ago due to Sunn 0))) , I'm convinced *Hex* is the best and savviest of several very strong Earth albums. *Hex*

is one of those few albums that make me think about music I thought I knew in a radically different way. It not only makes it possible rethink everything that Earth's done before; it allows a glimpse at the hidden connections between diverse musical styles that have always been there but have never been so masterfully revealed. It makes me hear music differently. Carlson catches the hints of drone that have always been in country-western and makes me listen to them, starting to reveal the mysticism buried in the history of the West. Earth has moved from blowing out eardrums to rearranging the musical world I thought I know.

ⓔ

(continued from page 37)

records in the early '90s with intros and outros that use completely different instrumentation from the rest of the album." The first piece on *Black One* was composed and performed by experimental musician Oren Ambarchi and is what O'Malley calls "A blatant attempt to drive into a cinematic space: '70s jungle cinema, voodoo, dark tribal."

Black One has a very filmic feel to it, more of a sense of cohesiveness than previous Sunn 0))) albums, as if each song is a different scene within an overall theme or storyline. O'Malley managed to get the album's genre listed as "Soundtrack" in on-line music stores, something which on one level is tongue in cheek but on another level gives listeners a clue about how to approach the album.

There's still plenty of drone and doom on *Black One*, though the sound is slightly cleaner, and several of the tracks, such as "Bathory Erzsebet," cross borders between metal and experimental music, shuttling back and forth between the two territories. Perhaps this isn't surprising, since one of O'Malley's favorite labels currently is Mego, the Austrian home of experimental musicians Kevin Drumm and Hecker. An experimental music festival that Oren Ambarchi runs in Australia led to the opening of a lot of musical doorways for the band. "It's funny who you end up meeting on tour and festivals that you are connected with," says O'Malley, right before he tells me about getting in touch with the Finnish electronic band Pan Sonic, who are not exactly doom metal, but do things with static and fuzz that Sunn 0))) feels connected to. It's this willingness to look for allies in unexpected places that's allowed Sunn 0))) to move from being a tribute band into being an uncanny double.

Black One has more of a vocal element than any previous Sunn 0))) album, but the vocals are screamed, distorted and buried in sound. They're very difficult to actually hear, something that ties the band to black metal and doom metal music, but goes beyond, as if the voice is being used to embroider the drone and guitarwork. At the same time all the vocalists are actually performing lyrics: there's a narrative quality, a story being told, a song being sung. A syntax is operating, but it remains mysterious and partly hidden, something that can't be

extracted completely from the music. In that sense, like some of the most interesting fiction writers working today, Sunn 0))) is dealing with abstraction, with the shimmer that comes in that ambiguous space between something that has all the structures of meaning but remains just out of the perceiver's touch.

O'Malley says, "Live, we've done a lot of vocals with Attila Csihar, a Hungarian guy with a love of Indian music and opera. He has a physiological appreciation for being a vocalist, the way he uses his body to project his voice." Vocals are an obvious way Sunn 0))) can change their sound, but they've done so by choosing vocalists who express themselves in a way that's very instrumental. This attitude plays very well with the cinematic quality the album is after.

Sunn 0))) has a penchant for putting numbers into their album names is perhaps in part an homage to *Earth 2*. *Black One* recalls *White 1*, Sunn 0)))'s breakthrough album. Should it be seen as a kind of darker side? For O'Malley, it's more a "phonetic connection, slightly a joke. The White albums are very shadowy. The word 'black' in this album is more the void, no light, absence, negative space." While most doom is searching merely for darkness, Sunn 0)))'s original relation to Earth has allowed them to understand nothingness in a way that very few bands do.

The fact that some of Sunn 0)))'s more recent stuff is stretching it for doom metalhead guys has enabled Anderson's Southern Lord label, which releases Sunn 0)))'s work, to expand their range and include, for instance, the newest incarnation of Earth. And Sunn 0))) has served as a kind of reverse doorway, bringing non-metalheads who are interested in noise, ambient and other kinds of drone to doom metal.

Says O'Malley, "Doom stuff gets to a regressive state of mind, stepping back into a more subconscious, primitive state of mind. But there's a lot of different ways you can enter that state of mind. Drone is probably one of the more natural forms of music, in terms of what exists in the world." It's Sunn 0)))'s ability to walk the line between the void and the natural world—not to mention the lines between originality and imitation—that make them the real thing.

Or maybe it would be better to say *the real nothing*.

ⓔ





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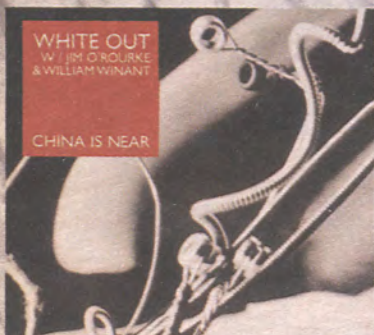
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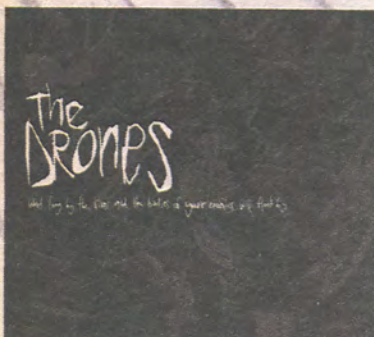
White Out
China is near

"Here again able to boldly pilot their freeform clamor toward distant alien horizons." / Pitchfork Media. "For those interested in hearing what it would be like if Sun Ra and Miles Davis jammed TODAY with Pauline Oliveros and Supersilent." / Other Music. "White Out breaks bread with the Sonic Youth unsold at shopping malls." / Stylus Magazine.



Bardo Pond
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Wait long by the river and the bodies of your enemies will float by...

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YEAR OF THE MOTHERFUCKER

JACKIE-O MOTHERFUCKER ON ATP/R



Jackie-O Motherfucker
Fig.5

"One of the most breathtaking junk-histories of American music in recent memory" / Stylus Magazine. "Giving those who still hadn't heard the album a chance to see what all the fuss was about" / Almost Cool.



Jackie-O Motherfucker
Liberation

"Best Avant-Rock record for 2001" / Wire. "The consistently amazing quality of Jackie-O Motherfucker is their ability to color experimental music and noise with more candor and emotional sophistication than most turtle-necked troubadour" / Pitchfork Media. "Recommended", 4/5 stars. / All Music Guide.



Jackie-O Motherfucker
Flags of the Sacred Harp

"JOMF have crafted something wholly, wondrously, their own from the raw materials of their heritage." 4/5 Stars, Underground Album of the Month) / Mojo UK. "JOMF have further proved their abilities to capture a mood to build on and slowly away from seamlessly...Classic JOMF." / Just For A Day. "A phantasmagoric career high." 4/5 / Uncut



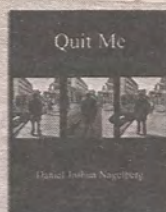
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BULL TONGUE

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Explore the voids of all known undergrounds.

August Born is Hiroyuki Usui

and Ben Chasny. Hiroyuki you may know
as the Japanese chap who has recorded
under the name L. There was an L record on
VHF a few years back that was astounding.
Beautiful, home baked organic spirit folk-
sonik drone breeze. The self titled *August
Born* (Drag City) is the first in a purported
series of "music by mail" sessions Hiroyuki
has been involved in. Not email but snail
mail, a slow process, which shows in the
careful and gorgeous strains which this
recording delivers. Simple and haunting
vocal lines with classic Chasny guitar
moves, expressive of his work with both Six
Organs of Admittance and Comets on Fire.
There's an August Born track on the *Bread,
Beard and Bear's Prayers* CD that Comets'
Ethan Miller compiled for this mag's Bastet
imprint. A perfect winter sound.

More Ben Chasny finger-scorch news
is the junk burn collaboration he's done
with squelch lord and fellow Comets creep
Noel von Harmonson called *NVH/CHASNY
PLAYS THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS* on the
Folding label. It truly howls and is just one
of the amazing new releases on this long-
standing cassette label. Folding comes out
of the Northwest and has always delivered
some of the more confused and beyond-
the-unknown explorations of the lost
universe. Along with the NVH/Chas tape
is an awesome foray into sound devilry
by someone/something called *Telepathe*.
Their tape "I" which features Mick Barr
is one of the swingiest kosmo-jungle
reverb from God's ass recordings we've
been priveleged to hear this year no
doubt. One more killer Folding jammer is
the *Child Abuse* cassette which may be
a goddamned lame name but is saved by
the nutso retardo sleeve which has some
little dude hand tethered to a stick looking
very pissed off. It's horrible yes but so
ridiculous that you can see MAYBE where
these mofos are coming from (answer: we
don't know). Child Abuse is a drum/organ
twisted nut of a session and pretty damn
fucked and really doesn't audibly portray
the sad violence of their moniker. Which
is OK and adds new depth to their motive.
What the fuhk.

A couple other great tape labels are
Jyrk and *Sloow Tapes*. Jyrk is from the
Bay Area and is infamous for unleashing
the force that is *D Yellow Swans* who have
been on a tear lately. The "D" standing for
something "D"ifferent on each release
(Dead, Destroyed, Disabled, Deaf etc.).
They are consistently happening in their
electroacoustic amps and wires noise/
hum concertos and anything they release
is gonna be worth your while. A young
woman named *Inca Ore*, an associate

of D Yellow Swans has a Jyrk tape called
Milky Petals of the Solar Meadows and by
that title you can bet she's got something
to say. And she does but in some strange
other-planet tongue. What seems like a
sensual loop of vocal matter gets entwined
with live barbed wire ululations and comes
at you like a repetitive salivation machine.
Heavy move and we want more. Sloow
Tapes out of Belgium has been releasing
small numbers of fine rips by the likes of
My Cat Is An Alien and others. One of the
latest is certainly one of their greatest, the
Slingshot Feud Vol. 2 cassette by *Family
Underground*. Real sex-surround sound
and dusk to dawn huzz. All yours.

Four hot new(ish) poetry journals of
the sort that burn with modern energy
and multi-levered thought/rock, roll/sexx
prayerz-on-fire sensation have hit our
desks recently and we feel the need to
share the word. *Mirage #4/Period(ical)*
is on its staggering-to-believe 120th issue
which we guess is not so staggering-to-
believe as it's a single stapled one-sided
xerox read which is really its minimalist
charm. It's edited by Kevin Killian and
Dodie Bellamy out of San Francisco. Killian
is an interesting playwright, poet, critic,
novelist who supposedly has a book being
published all about Kylie Minogue, whether
in verse perspective or in perverse
invective remains to be read. Dodie has
written some of the most astounding
beyond feminist lit of the last decade. She
created a helluva stir when she wrote and
published an amazing fem take-off on the
Burroughsian cut-up technique called *Cunt
Ups*, which is must for any progressive
library shelf. Their po journal has new and
ongoing work by young writers who catch
the editor's eye as well as a few surprises
such as this issue's print of a great
1959 poem by the deceased homo-beat
legend John Wieners. Next up is the
irrepressible *Industrial Sabotage*
out of Toronto, Canada.
Edited by the non-stop



D Yellow Swans

archivist, poet and all around good guy **J W Curry**, this is the foremost publication of the ongoing history of Canada's amazing concrete/language/etc lit scene, primarily jumping off and around the wonderment that is **bpNichol**, an artist/poet who died in 1988 and left behind a living trove of experimental and loving word-work. Curry has been involved with archiving thousands of items of A list to ephemera of bpNichol's output for well on 30 years now and has yet to exhaust his endeavor. If you think record collecting is deep dirt digging, then try to get into avant garde post war poetry. His mag is awesome, multi-hued and a great glimpse into what is one of North America's strongest literary scenes since forever. Speaking of which it's exciting to see the folks at St Marks Poetry Center in NYC making a fresh move with the first issue of *The Recluse*. Whether this mag is taking the place of the long running Poetry Center journal *The World* or will co-exist alongside it is anyone's guess. Regardless, it has the cool passion aesthetic of young, serious, touch-the-sky poetry that the downtown New York scene has always exuded: a dynamic of voices multi-psyched, daring and thoughtful. Last, for now, is another mag outta the SF scene, a new one called *jouissance*. First ish has not only rad poemz by the abovementioned Kevin Killian, but also some from the ass-slapping mind of **Dennis Cooper** (one called *THE JPEGs* is about a Ray Romano/Bernie Mac sex-mail exchange). The mag has good interviews with Jamie Stewart of Xiu Xiu and novelist Scott Heim (whose book *Mysterious Skin* is being made into a film by Greg Araki), as well as writing by Dodie Bellamy. Cool shit.

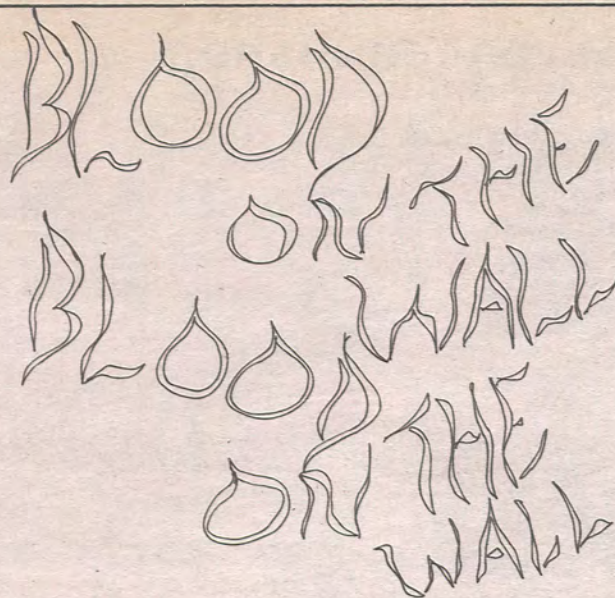
While he has laid hand and/or hip on more record-projects than almost anyone, **Calvin Johnson** has not previously released a solo album. Dunno why this is exactly, but *Before the Dream Faded* (K) is really a good one. Calvin's dark voice is probably known to some of you from Beat Happening or Dub Narcotic Sound System or somewhere, but it's really a rumbling rose here, because it's the album's one constant. The instrumentation and arrangement techniques wiggle around like a hot can opener on god's ass, but there is a foghorn in the night. Hooray! Songs go into all the hoped-for hoops and come out smelling great. As a note, when heard on CD, from the next room, one local thought this record sounded BOGUS. However, heard close up and on vinyl, she agreed it rocked like a berry. On a Calvin-related note, have been digging

the curves of the new *Old Time Relijun LP*, 2012 (K). Must be the sixth or seventh by these Olympia mutants, but the *Spotlight Kid* vibe is so strong this time, I feel like we better pull out all their old records and give them a thorough sequential listen. Another record ripe with not-entirely-expected Beefheart sprong is the eponymous, posthumous MLP by **Selten-Ubel** (ABC Group). This Knoxville, TN group existed for only a couple of shows and broke up in '01. But the five songs here have a very swank post-core blump into the shadows of a Magic Band.

Was going through a pile of books and realized we somehow forgot to plug the two latest books from Montreal's *l'Oie de Cravan*. First of is *Schmo*, the second volume of drawings by **Jeff Ladouceur** that they've issued. Like his last book, *Ebola*, Ladouceur's black & white drawings look like they've been drawn from models who were inflated with mashed potatoes or something—they're lumpy but smooth, hollow but full, all that stuff. It's lovely. As is **Nadia Moss's** *Mr. Non Pigeon*. Ms. Moss has done some illustration work for Godspeed and related groups, but this is her first book, and it's a very nice combination of scratchy, obsessive sketches and more full-blown assemblage/illos. A very nice piece of work and highly commended (as is ALL Cravan material, natch.) In other friendship club news, there's a brand spanking HOT volume of *Pretend I Am Someone Else*. Editor **Lauren Naylor** has more of her own stuff in this ish than usual, and it all reads/scans as sweet as hot buttered rum—the theme seems to be dreams this time, and it's clear SHE'S HAD PLENTY OF THEM.

Awesome spook noise party jamz from, wouldn't you know it, **Nate Young**, central monster of Wolf Eyes. His first solo LP is called *Hatred* and, appropriately, is the premier release on Carlos Giffoni's No Fun label. Nice burbling scuzz and hardcore stain. Get it. Super weird left field garage shapes made by Japan stylerz **King Brothers** on their *Blues* CD (In The Red). Nipponese garage core can definitely have a bit more of an experimental edge and the King Brothers deliver it nonstop. In *The Red* continues to plumb the ultimate bowels of rock n roll earth for the best, most far out ho dang. Soothing hell soundz erupt in felching drizzle sput from Michigan madman Roach and his boys. They're called **Dirty Dynamite Gang** and you can hear them squirm n' growl on the "Roach = Animal" one-sided LP (American Tapes). Edition of 100 with twisted nightmare collage cover art by **John Olson**. Boss. Speaking of Olson, is he the monstermind behind *Guam River*? Y'know, probably, and if it ain't then whoever it is has laid out a long super-spooked groan noise psycho-journey of a one-sided LP on the always intoxicatingly beautiful **Ultra Eczema** label. It's called *The New Maps Of Hell* and label

Calvin Johnson.
'nuf said.



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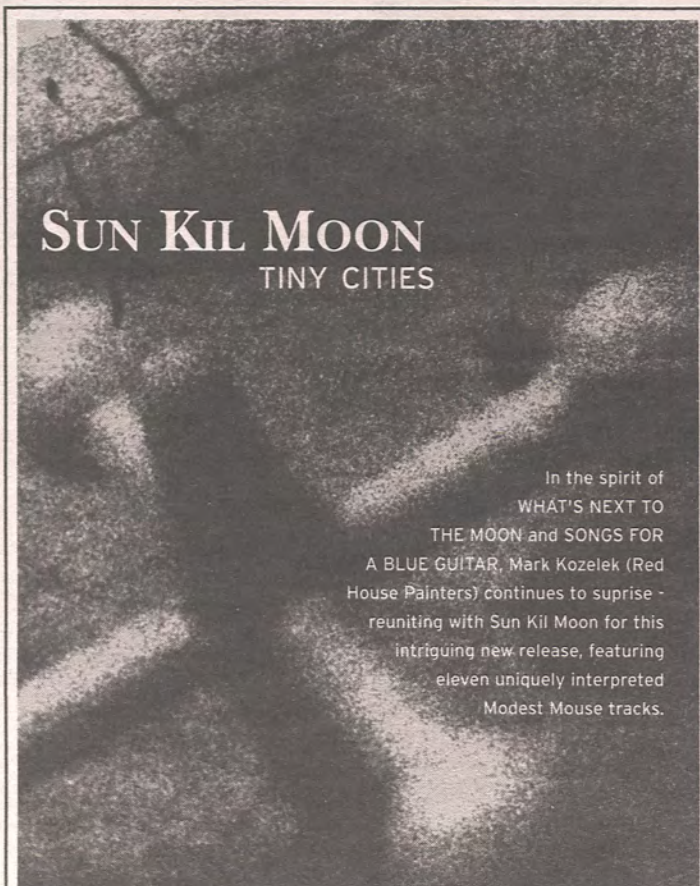


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boss **Dennis Tyfuss** delivers a hairy beast silkscreen on one side which, when played, sounds like a sick cousin to the groove side. This label is hands down amazing with its art/noise hybrid and you better get yr ass movin'. Also ass-movin' is the return of Tom Lax's legendary **Siltbreeze** label. The *Dig Yourself* LP by Columbus OH's **Times New Viking** is a beauteous slop bucket of DIY raunch of the sort one finds on In the Red-flappy gal/guy vocals traded like Swell Maps trading cards, unctuous guitar riffs, instrumental melt-downs of all sorts, etc. This is art punk, motherfucker. Grab yr ankles!

A new **Double Leopards** LP is always reason enough to buy a new hat, and *Out of One, through One and to One* (Eclipse) is no exception. The different layers of drones these Brooklyn goblins are now able to assemble, improvise into, and then blow away like smoke, is ever more impressive. The tracks here (two or three of them depending on how spaced you are) include some new tinkling intrusions, not like anything they've quite done before. But it's the quality we're talking about, and this has that. Spanked! Hats all around! And this is as good a time to admit as any that we somehow missed the boat on a record released at the beginning of this year, that features Mike and Maya from the Leopards, plus the twin geniuses of Mouthus. The group is called **White Rock**, the LP is called *Tarpit* (Troubleman Unlimited) and it is an eerie aesthetic configuration that captures both the tone-length of the Leopards and the cluster-fuck-freedom of Mouthus without sounding like either. It's a strong and mysterious record, with distant tongues licking equally at finger and nip. Another grass-snake on Troubleman is the eponymous split LP by **Jana Hunter and Devendra Banhart**. This is old school DB, stripped of the Hairy Fairy and comported in his best bedroom Bolan manner, with other proto-glam tricks hatching out every sleeve. The Jana side is very similar vibrationally, and one assumes they had their paws all over each other's tracks. So there! And they liked it! And so do we.

On the New England freak scene front, there's the full length self-titled debut LP by **Shackamaxxon** (HP Cycle). A collective involving various (although more or less un-named) members of Son of Earth, Double Leopards and Magik Markers, the drone here is interspersed with all kindsa small pieces of gristle. There is nothing very pure about the rainbows they create, but they still sound pretty bitchen-quivery, wet and radiant. Another eponymous Valley release is the **Feathers** LP (Feathers Family), which documents this octet's expansive acoustic horizons. Easy to hear bits of '68 ISB and their ilk in the mix, but the overall brunt is not actually very English. Dunno exactly how they pull that off, but they do. And it's what you'd have to call a sweet trick. LP also comes with a poster that almost makes me not not-

think of the one that came with *Galactic Zoo Dossier* (the record, not the 'zine). And that's a damned nice near-thought.

Also one more poetry note, we can not recommend enough the latest **Kent Johnson** book from Effing Press titled *Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz*. One of the strongest, and by far the strangest, anti-USA imperialistic swashbucklery tomes we've come across. Mind jabbing and king idiot stabbing. Kent brings in the lit world to create scenarios of hilarious debate re: war pig Bush and fat fuck friends.

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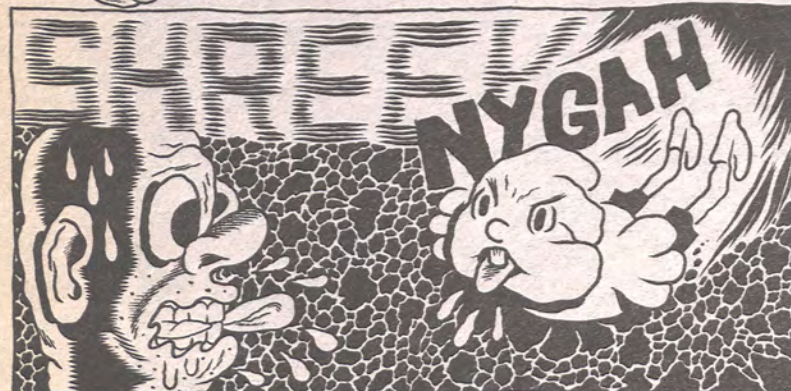
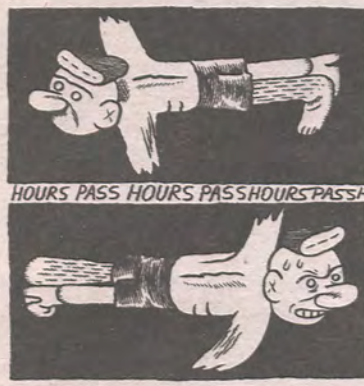
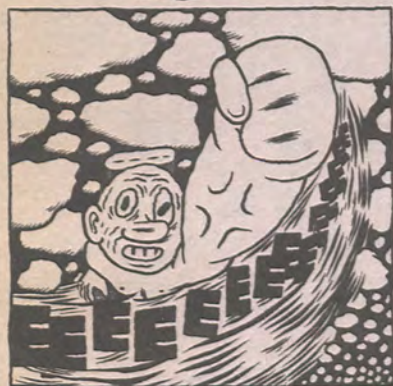
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C and D

Two guys bicker about new records.

Note: C & D is a dialogue presented as a series of record reviews, and intended to be read straight through...

TV on the Radio Dry Drunk Emperor (Touch and Go)

D: I've listened to this probably a hundred times by now, and I still find it overwhelming. It's a devastator.

C: For those out there who haven't heard it yet, this is the song TV on the Radio released in the wake of Katrina, free to everyone via the Touch and Go website [tgrec.com]. This is what they said at the time: "We were back in the studio thinking and feeling again and made this song for all our everybody... in the absence of a true leader we must not forget that we are still together.... hearts are sick ... minds must change ... it is our hope that this song inspires, comforts, fosters courage, and reminds us... this darkness cannot last if we work together. let us help each other... heal each other look after one another ... the human heart is our new capitol.... this song is for you.... us....we....them... it is free. pass it on. TO THOSE AFFECTED BY HURRICANE KATRINA: NEW YORK CITY'S HEART IS WITH YOU... STAY STRONG! WE LOVE YOU."

We don't usually do this sort of thing, but this is a special case. Here are song's lyrics:

DRY DRUNK EMPEROR

*baby boy
dying under hot desert sun,
watch your colors run.*

*did you believe the lie they told you,
that christ would lead the way
and in a matter of days
hand us victory?*

*did you buy the bull they sold you,
that the bullets and the bombs
and all the strong arms
would bring home security?*

*all eyes upon
dry drunk emperor
gold cross jock skull and bones
mocking smile,
he's been
standing naked for a while!*

*get him gone, get him gone, get him gone!!
and bring all the thieves to trial.*

*end their false promise
end their dream
watch it turn to steam
rising to the nose of some cross-legged god
gog of magog
end times sort of thing.
oh unmentionable disgrace
shield the children's faces
as all the monied apes
display unimaginably poor taste
in a scramble for mastery.*

*atta' boy get em with your gun
till mr. megaton
tells us when we've won
or
what we're gonna leave undone.*

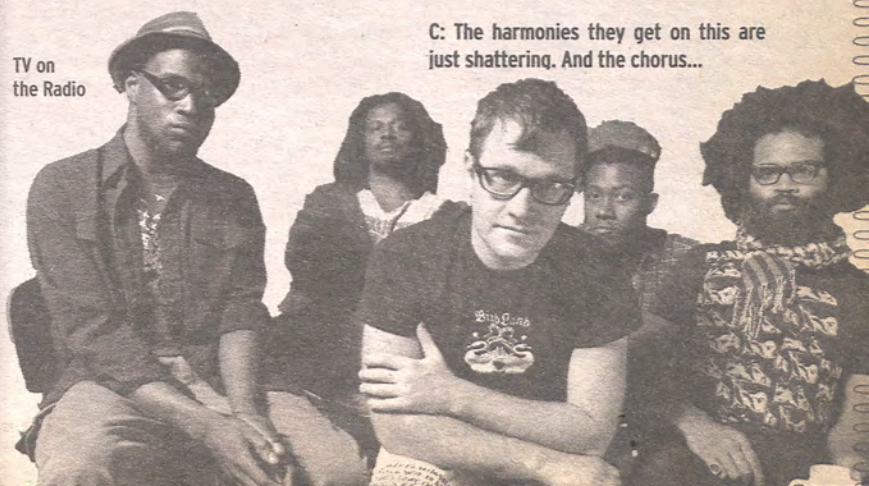
*all eyes upon
dry drunk emperor
gold cross jock skull and bones
mocking smile,
he's been standing
naked for a while.
get him gone, get him gone, get him gone!!!
and bring all his thieves to trial.*

*what if all the fathers and the sons
went marching with their guns
drawn on Washington?
that would seal the deal,
show if it was real,
this supposed freedom.*

*what if all the bleeding hearts
took it on themselves
to make a brand new start.
organs pumpin' on their sleeves,
paint murals on the white house
feed the leaders LSD
grab your fife and drum,
grab your gold baton
and let's meet on the lawn,
shut down this hypocrisy.*

C: The harmonies they get on this are just shattering. And the chorus...

TV on the Radio



D: This is soul, with zero retroism. That's not supposed to be possible anymore and yet here it is. Pure righteousness.

C: I find this song overwhelming too. Not just for the song itself, but for the spirit in which was recorded and offered to the public, and the immediacy and selflessness involved. That's what being an artist is about, in times like these. They get to something really tragic about the current situation: all those poor idiots who have been buying the Bush balderdash since 9/11... because they did that, now we are all paying for their mistakes, and will do for decades. And I'm broke, man. My pockets are empty. And I've got it easy. Think of all the unnamed, uncounted dead civilians in Iraq, all the dead and mistreated in New Orleans, all those detained in the secret torture prisons in Poland...

D: This song is so good I can't believe somebody made it. The build and release, the chorus, the singing, the lyrics, the fife and drum...

C: It's a call to imaginative action, for less talk and more walk. This is prime Fela Kuti-level stuff, seriously: talking truth directly to power, giving comfort and uplift to the powerless. I've never heard this song on the radio, yet it's exactly the kind of song radio was made for.

Cast King

Saw Hill Man
(Locust Music)

C: Debut album from 79-year-old white fella. Recorded in a shack in Alabama.

D: Seniors rock. Look at this guy. I think our friend T-Model Ford might have some new competition!

C: He recorded eight songs for Sun Records in the '50s. He had a touring country and bluegrass band, Cast King and the Country Drifters, but it didn't work out and he never released an album.

D: Sweet baby Jesus, what is wrong with this country?

C: I find myself wondering that often these days...

D: The first line of this song is "I don't care if your tears fall in my whiskey."

What more do you need?

C: The guy's voice is so rich, it's a pleasure just to hear his singing. The sadder the lyrics, the brighter the music. The songs are clever, catchy, simple. How could nobody care for three decades? This nation is so cruel to its artists.

D: There's some Johnny Cash here for sure.

C: To our modern ears, of course. But I'm starting to wonder. Who came first? Not that it matters as much as, well, just how many other guys are out there still who are this good, who we've never heard? Maybe it's a lot more than we think. People who got skipped over by accident of history or circumstance. That's the lesson of the reissue culture that's so strong right now—the Numero Uno label's releases, the stuff they talk about in *Wax Poetics*, all the rediscoveries of people like Vashti Bunyan and Gary Higgins and Simon Finn—all of this teaches us that actually the cream doesn't always rise to the top. It often sinks to the very bottom.

Nina Simone

The Soul of Nina Simone dual disc
(Legacy/RCA/Sony BMG)

C: You're not going to believe this, either. A new dual disc release: one side is a greatest hits run, the DVD side is vintage live footage. Deep vintage.

D: [Reading from scrolling text on screen] "By the end of the '60s, the civil rights movement was in a shambles; its key leaders were dead, and race riots had erupted in several U.S. cities. 'It felt like the shutters were coming down on anyone who dared to suggest there was something seriously wrong with the state of our country,' said an angry Nina Simone. A ray of community hope appeared in the summer of '69, when the Harlem Festival—called 'a black Woodstock' by its producer, Hal Tulchin—came to Central Park. Crowds of up to 100,000 flocked to six free concerts. The stars included Sly and the Family Stone, Stevie Wonder, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King, Gladys Knight and the Pips and Simone. These excerpts from Simone's performance have never before been shown in America."

C: I've never even heard of this festival.

D: Me neither.

C: How is that possible? I thought we knew our shit. My god. Are they saying this footage has just been sitting there since 1969? Listen to her go. Listen to this band. Look at that set, look at this audience. Look at the songs she's playing—"Revolution," "Four Women," "Ain't Got No—I Got Life" and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black." Look at the setting. Look at the situation in which this was performed.

D: This is right before she went into self-imposed exile.

C: She looks absolutely purposeful.

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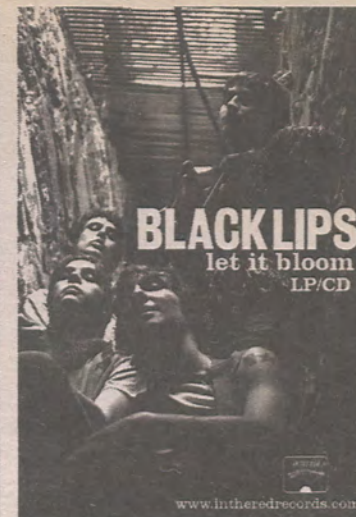
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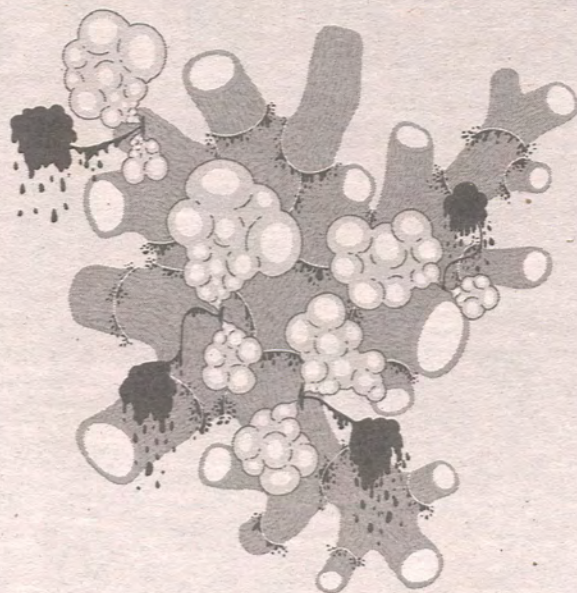
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JAN. 19, 2005



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Um— Can you tell me your name again?



Janelle. And your name is...?



I'm horrible with names. Me too. But in the early morning, names aren't really necessary.



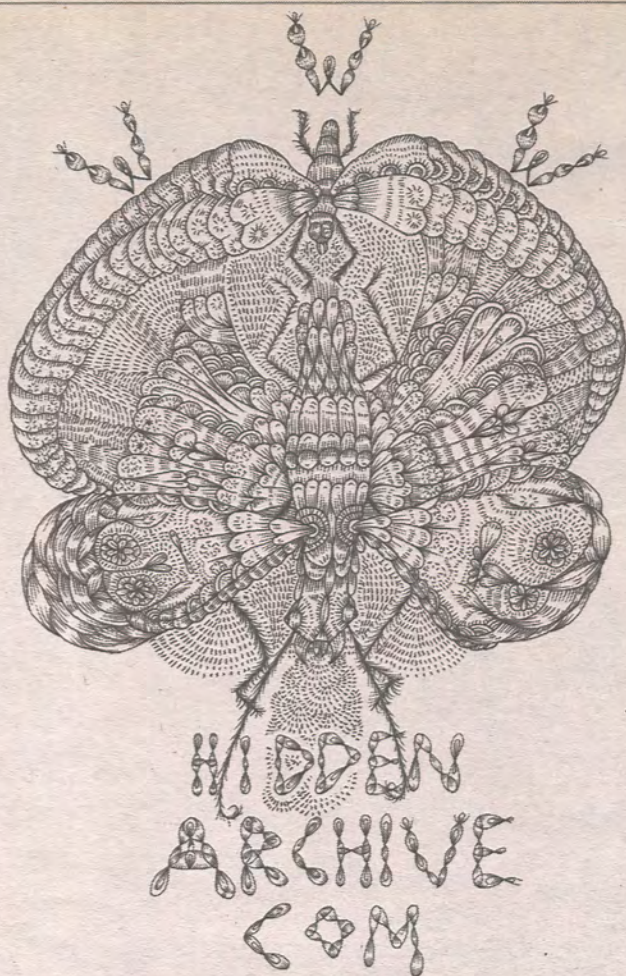
Well, thanks... Janelle.



Have a good day—



DAVID LASKY SEPT-OCT 2005



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There is a resolve in her voice, in her comments to the band and the audience, in that gorgeous face of hers as she sings that is just absolutely... She looks like a woman about to leave, because she's been wronged. You know she's gonna slam that door.

D: No whining. "My life has been much too rough," she sings. [Listening to "Ain't Got No—I Got Life"] Listen to the band swing! Unbelievable.

C: She's holding back tears for the entire performance... She finally breaks—just a bit—on "To Be Young Gifted and Black."

D: I think this is the greatest single live performance I have ever seen.
 C: Especially when you consider the context. This is just extraordinary. Le Tigre and other no-skill apologists who say technique is irrelevant would do well to watch this. The reason people are listening to what she has to say is because she had skills beyond even her conviction.

D: It's an absolute travesty that the American public hasn't seen this footage until now.

C: Can you imagine what the rest of this festival must have been like? Look at that lineup. Sheesh. We've got to ask again: WHY HAVEN'T WE HEARD OF THIS UNTIL NOW? Where are our cultural historians? Why do we know about Jimi liberating the national anthem and not taking the brown acid and all that other Woodstock jive but not about this? It's criminal.

Niger: Magic & Ecstasy in the Sahel
 DVD by Hisham Mayet

(Sublime Frequencies)

C: And now for somebody who knows how to document and distribute important stuff immediately, rather than waiting for 36 years...

D: [Spills beer in joy] YES! The mighty Sublime Frequencies strike AGAIN!

C: Seventy minutes of footage of hot blast from the streets of Niger, one of the quote poorest unquote nations in the world. Oil can drum duos, one-stringed instrument maestros, harmonizing ululators, invocation dances. Divination ceremonies and informal nighttime initiation rituals, Taureg trance funk at the end.

D: Absolutely riveting.

000100

[Untitled]

(Thrill Jockey)

C: New album from project featuring Yoshimi who is in Boredoms. Don't really understand the provenance of this album—recorded in 2000 but only released this year. Weird vocal calisthenics, big tribal drum thrusters, chimes and flutes and birds and trumpets, synthesizers, tablas,

loopage and harmony chants, the best album booklet I've seen in 2005—it seems to illustrate a place directly midway mushroom wonderland of the Allmans' *Eat A Peach* album centerfold and the post-toxic landscapes of Lightning Bolt—and check it out, here on Track 7: straight-up female Tuareg ululations!

D: Sometimes I think Bjork gets all the attention for trying to do what Yoshimi is already doing.

Pearls and Brass

The Indian Tower

(Drag City)

C: We really shouldn't be reviewing this til next issue cuz it's not out til January 24. But excuse me, I think I need to turn this up.

D: Cream covered by Kyuss?

C: It's actually three young dudes from Pennsylvania.

D: These are some pretty knotty riffs.

C: Thorny stuff, but they still give you a riff. Here, have one.

D: Why thank you.

C: Total air guitar and drum practice CD. "The Face of God" is the face they make when they play, I bet. And there's the vocal harmonies, and the fingerpicked acoustic blues

D: This is bigrig truck driving music.

C: Forty-wheeler stuff—for the poor dudes trying to forget about the price of gas as they drive the nation's clogged freeways. If it's time for a *Convoy* remake, then this is the soundtrack.

The Fall

Fall Heads Roll

(Narnack)

D: The Fall is now at its best since the '80s, and I can say that with some authority.

C: This is the kind of spare, rocking Fall we all want. I like the words—Mr. Smith's is still a totally idiosyncratic lyrical approach—but sometime I think just hearing his caffeinated bark against a good beat is enough.

Tarantula A.D.

Book of Sand

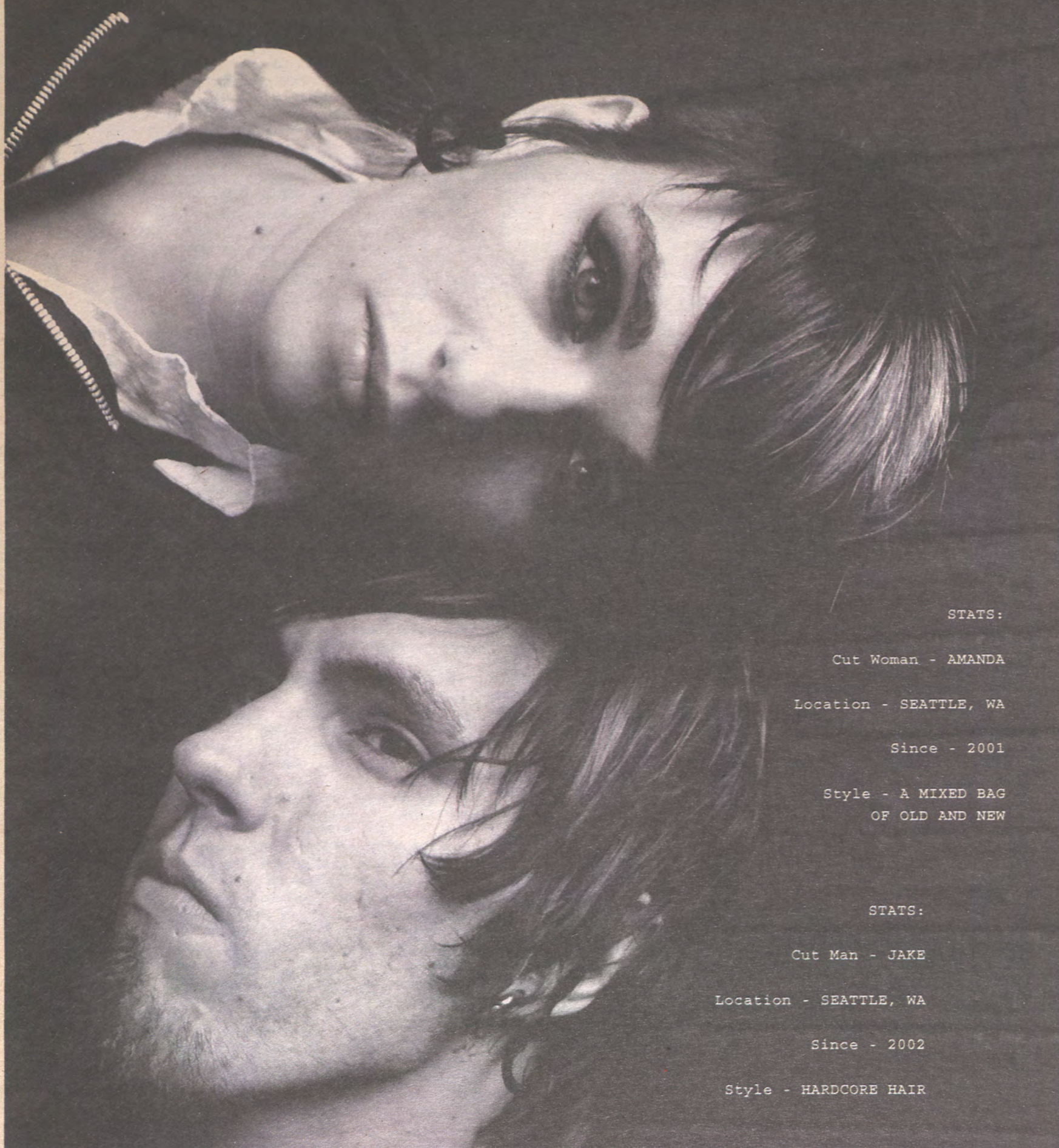
(Kemado)

D: Classic early King Crimson sound. Excites one's nerves, doesn't it?

C: If Marc Ribot likes them, that's all I need to know. But yes, this does get the blood racing down the alleyways. "The Century Trilogy II: Empire" is power metal Crimson, cello beautiful acoustic guitar, hugely romantic pastoral, hugely alarming screech and crunch. I don't usually dig something that has such a self-consciously stark, exaggerated dynamic.

Yoshimi





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Since - 2001

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But both parts are pretty tremendously great in and of themselves, on their own terms. Maybe it's those kinds of times now, eh, where the loveliness, the absolute beauty and love can exist side-by-side with total horror. As the Irish philosopher Mark Patrick Hederman said, "Singing is a way of proclaiming a better world, a refusal to give in to the grimness of the past." [listening to "The Century Trilogy III: The Fall"] Whoa... like Jeff Buckley in his full, abandoned gypsy mode and his secret sisters fronting Godspeed You! Black Emperor.
D: They are equipped with maximal music range.

Mi and L'au
Mi and L'au
(Young God)

C: Like old weird Tom Waits fairground songs sung by a Finnish waif in the key of air. And accompanied by a humble-voiced post-Nick Drake haunted gentleman from France. These are closely recorded, delicate songs—that is there's tape hiss and falling rain and throat-clearing—written to each other, based on a lived natural intimacy.

D: Reminds me of Mojave 3, when Rachel sang...

C: Mi and L'au apparently lead quite the reclusive, romantic life together in the Finnish woods. Life beyond electricity. This seems to be happening a lot lately: younger musicians and artists retreating, or withdrawing, to rural settings, refusing to engage modern civilization except when necessary. Little Wings, Brightblack Morning Light definitely. But nature is also providing the setting for more promotional films and photographs: see Cat Power's live DVD, and Sleater-Kinney's *The Woods*, and Growing's work, and Six Organs of Admittance and Devendra and Feathers album covers, and stuff from the New Energy movement people, and these photos of Pearls and Brass.

D: I think she's whispering along with her singing. A secret recording technique that I think Jim Morrison did sometimes. Or I like to imagine he did.

Bjorn Olsson

[untitled album with lobster on the

cover]

(Parasol)

C: We're almost out of time so we gotta make this quick. New album of vaguely Morricone guitar and et cetera instrumentals from Union Carbide Productions/Soundtrack of Our Lives co-founder. That first album on Omplatten was a keeper. Frosted goodness, magically delicious.

D: I think he has long ago retired from this world.

C: If this was the soundtrack to your life, what would your life be like?

D: More candles. More seaside town time. More fish. Probably more wine. More chopped parsley, more diced onion. More time riding horses and picking buttercups. Less inner rage...

Biff Rose

The Thorn in Mrs. Rose's Side/Children of Light

(Runt)

C: Nicely done reissue of 1968 and '69 albums by long-forgotten bright eyed groom of the psychedelic morning dew piano roll: Biff Rose, a white fella from New Orleans best known as the guy who wrote "Fill Your Heart," covered by Bowie on *Hunky Dory*. He's a Randy Newman, incapable of cynicism; a Beefheart for kindly eared folks, a goofball master punster writing advice songs about human and animal and god follies and foibles. A whimsical male Mary Poppins, singing at an anti-war saloon or a soup kitchen. *Free to Be You and Me* for adults.

Lavender Diamond

The Cavalry of Light four-song EP
(lavenderdiamond.com)

C: Lessons in harmony (of all kinds) from the love and peace actionists who stole the show at ArthurFest: four songs in the key of love, reviving the lost tradition of the uplifting psychedelic pop. All sung by one of the most charismatic women I have ever witnessed.

D: Supremely gorgeous music. I might not be at DefCon 5 all the time if I listened to this regularly...

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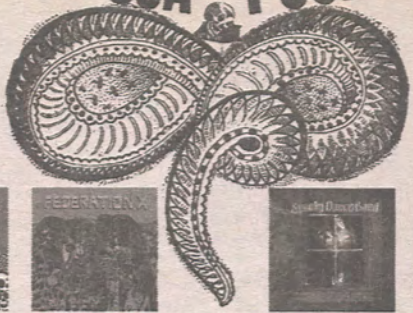
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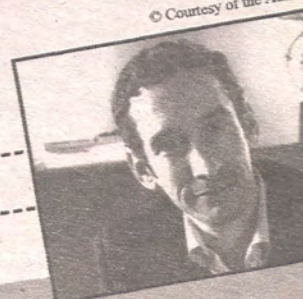


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(continued from page 11)

and everything to do with selling off the entire enterprise in order to make money, instead. Sure, if you're really bored with the business you've built, go ahead and get rid of it. But remember, the minute you sell your company—and this includes going "public"—you're no longer a shoemaker, muffin baker, or airplane designer. You and the company you built are the asset of a group of shareholders. And believe me, most of those shareholders don't even know or care what you do or believe. They just want your shares to pop so they can sell for a fast buck. And you've signed paper promising to do what they say.

So goes corporate capitalism. It's why so many companies have little or no idea how to design or build better products—only how to market them. In fact, the reason I became aware of this whole dynamic is that, as a media theorist, I'd been called in by dozens of CEOs asking me to help them "think outside the box" about their companies, and help them come with new "branding ideas." When I'd suggest that rather than rebranding, they might consider innovating from the inside-out by creating better products, they'd invariably stare at me with horror. They didn't make their products, anymore, and wouldn't know where to start if they had to.

These companies don't need to learn how to think "outside" the box; they need to figure out how to get back *inside* it. Instead, victims of their static template for what a corporation must be, they remain paralyzed.

The amazing thing is that most CEO's don't quite realize that this outdated Industrial Age model and the rules of business it prescribes are not set in stone. The landscape has changed. Unlike neocons, who must stick to the Bible as written, businesspeople are free to rewrite their corporate charters, and free to do so in new ways. Google, for one, is attempting to be a corporation that "does no evil." Companies from Honest Tea to Patagonia have been built from the ground up not just to generate cash for their owners, but to distribute genuinely quality products and make the world a better place while doing so. They source materials from local agriculture, support workers in their communities with education scholarships and public parks, and think about every action in the context of its environmental impact. Even General Electric—a historically notorious polluter—has turned something of a new leaf, and now openly hounds the Bush Administration for not recognizing the threat of global warming and the need to move away from petrochemicals. Is this the only way to make a buck? No—but it's certainly a more fun, rewarding, and inspiring path leading to greater motivation, a more deeply committed consumer community, and a more sustainable business model. Corporations, created for the financial

(continued from page 14)

to be—not necessarily trouble, but compromise and adjusting to each other."

For me, Colleen's story brings on a nod of recognition and the spark of inspiration. Having played for years in a noisy pop band, spent more than a decade trying to teach myself piano, gone back to school to study and perform non-Western music, wanting nothing more than vast stretches of days in which to read and practice, Schott's attempt to carve out enough time to fuse all these threads sounds familiar. By making deep music from an eclectic record collection, tinkering with recorded loops of oneself, and insisting on the importance of solitude and study, Schott strikes me as being both a quiet revolutionary and entirely of the times. Maybe that's why her music seems right at home in my life.

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benefit of the few, can just as easily exist for the purpose of benefiting the many.

Not that there's anything wrong with making money. It's just that—unless you're working at the Mint—this is not a true core competency. Making money should really just be a happy result of contributing to the world what you do best. The minute you sacrifice that intention for short-term gain, or that you go against the grain of your own value system out of fear of the competition, *that's* when you're selling out.

Rather than confirm businesspeople's sense of inadequacy by maintaining some angry, counterculturalist posture, I'm instead inviting them to reorient their businesses from a place of passion and concern rather than timidity and terror. What I'm trying to do with my book is show that these failings are ingrained into our business mentality, but are not essential to commerce, itself. Inherited, maybe, but not inherent.

And yes, finally, I wrote my book because that's my own core competency. I believe that commerce, enacted mindfully, can liberate itself from the neocon mythology that it currently serves, and instead turn both our labors and economy toward serving needs instead of a central authority that—quite frankly—does not exist. I suppose for the sake of counterculture street cred I could pretend I don't know or care about business. But for me, *that* would be selling out.

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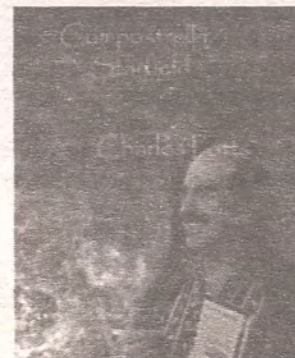
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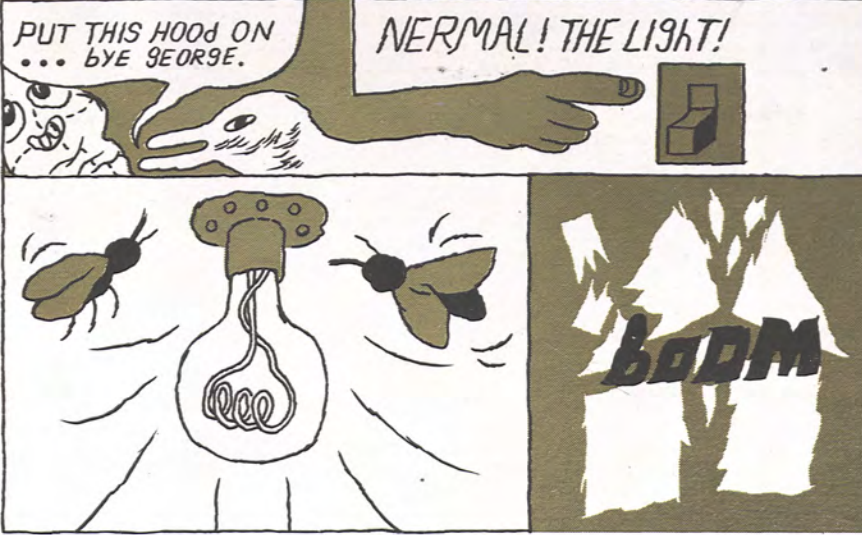
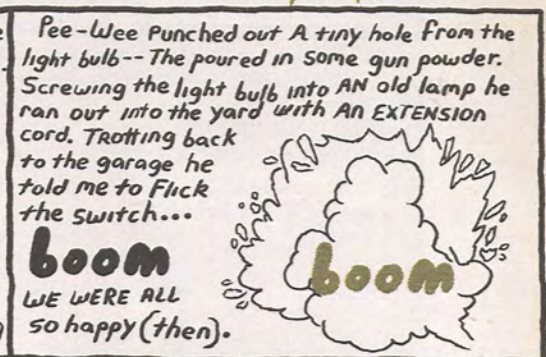
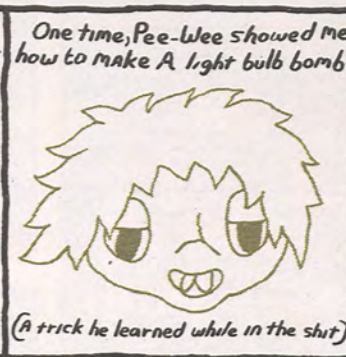
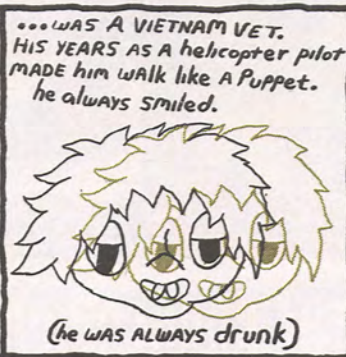
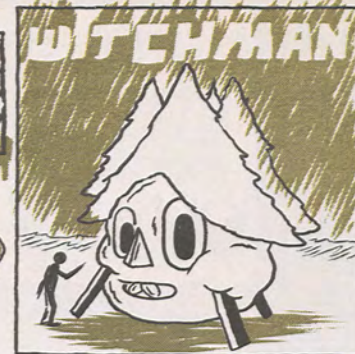
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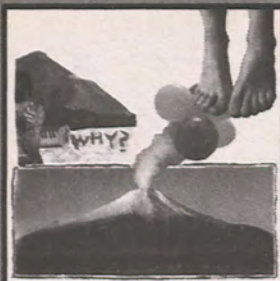
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Katy Horan

(continued from page 62)

got the whole weekend ahead with all your projects that you're looking forward to doing.

There are many types of meditation; why did you pick transcendental meditation?

I lucked into it. My sister was doing it, then one day she mentioned it to me and I don't know why—maybe it was the sound of her voice and the time that I heard it—but bang! I said I've gotta have that. Transcendental Meditation is the way of the householder in that it allows you to stay in the world. Some people like the recluse way and want to go into the cave, and there are mantras that will take you right out of activity and put you into that cave. But Transcendental Meditation is a way of integrating these two worlds and activity is part of it. It's like dipping a white cloth into gold dye; you dip it and that's meditation, then you hang it on the line in sunshine and that's activity. The sun bleaches it until it's white again, so you dip it and hang it again, and each time you do that a little more of the gold stays in the cloth. Then one day that gold is locked in. It isn't going anywhere no matter how violent the activity, and at that point two opposites have been united at a deep level. In the West people think yeah, like I'm really gonna give up my dental practice and go to the cave, but you don't have to quit dentistry. Meditate before you go to work and you'll start liking the people that come in and you'll start getting ideas about dentistry. Maybe you'll invent something and get into the finer points of a cavity and honing that bad boy. Things get cooler.

If you were running the world what's the first thing you'd do?

I'd get people going on consciousness-based education. Stress levels in children are going way up and there are so many bad side effects to stress. Kids are on drugs, they're overweight—they are not happy campers and being a kid should be a beautiful thing. Kids take to meditation like ducks to water. The so-called knowledge we try to cram down their throats is useless and that's why there are things like cheating—it's all a bunch of baloney. It's a sick, twisted, stupid world now. It's ridiculous.

What's America's problem?

It's locked in an old, ignorant way of thinking. Things are pretty low right now but lots of people are working to enliven that field of unity in

world consciousness. John Lennon described meditation as "melting the iceberg," and when that heat starts coming up some people love it, but it can be too much for some people and they fly apart. So, it's gotta come up gently—it has been coming up pretty gently, too, but the bunch running the show here in America are working overtime in a negative way.

How did you interpret 9/11?

You don't get something for nothing and America's been up to a lot of nasty business for a long time. But Maharishi [Mahesh Yogi, founder of the Transcendental Meditation movement] says instead of fighting darkness you should just turn on the light, so let's turn on the light and start having fun.

What makes you angry?

There's an increasing amount of censorship in America and that is not a good sign. It really makes you wonder what's going on with this country.

Is man on the road to extinguishing himself?

No. Quantum physics has verified the existence of the unified field and Vedic science understands how it emerges—in fact, Vedic science is the science of the unified field.

There's a whole bunch of trouble in this world but the way to get out of it is there; just enliven that field of unity. It sounds like magic but it's science—it's the real thing and the resistance to it is based on fear. But it's not something to be afraid of—it's us.

Your beliefs are deeply optimistic, yet many people find darkness in your work; how do you explain that?

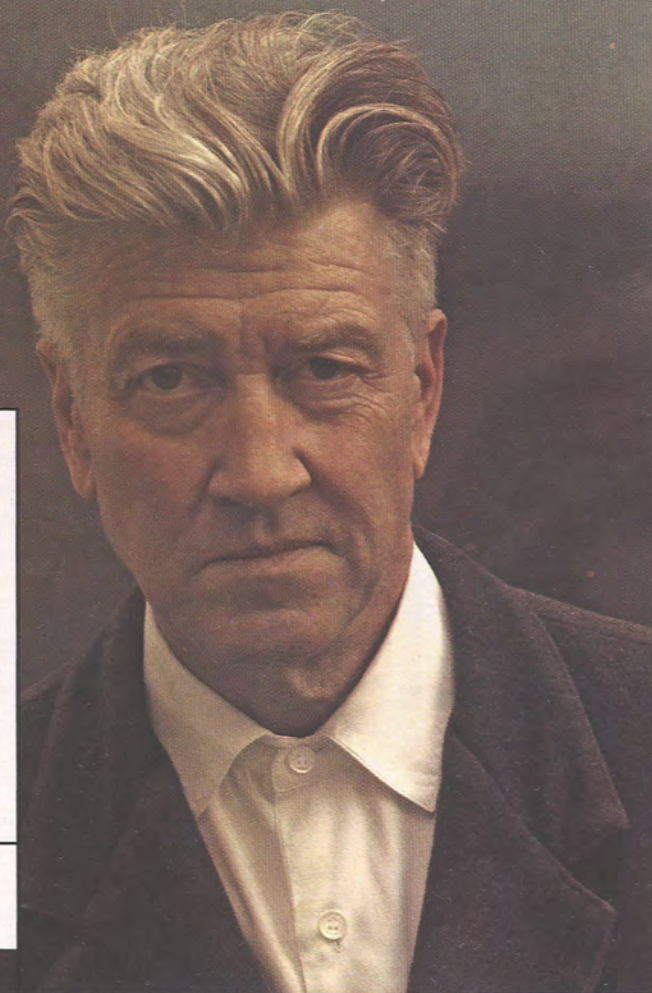
Films and paintings reflect the world and when the world changes the art will change. We live in a world of duality but beneath it is unity. We live in a world of boundaries but beneath it it's unbounded. Einstein said you can't solve a problem at the level of the problem—you gotta get underneath it, and you can't get more underneath than the unified field. So get in there and water the root then enjoy the fruit. Water that root and the tree comes up to perfection. You don't have to worry about a single leaf if you get nourishment at that fundamental level.

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THE WHOLE ENCHILADA

David Lynch was 27 years old and depressed. Then he started meditating...

BY KRISTINE MCKENNA



In person, David Lynch bears only the vaguest resemblance to the image most people have of him. He is, of course, an artist of extreme complexity, but he's not a weirdo, and the people who work with him adore him because he's respectful and appreciative of their contributions to his art.

Lynch has been working under the radar on his latest film, *Inland Empire*, for quite a while; it commenced principal photography two years ago in Lodz, Poland, and features Polish actors Karolina Gruszka and Krzysztof Majchrzak, along with Laura Dern, Jeremy Irons, Harry Dean Stanton and Justin Theroux. It will be his first digital film, but it won't be his last as he loves the freedom digital affords. "Film is over for me," declares Lynch, who's thus far handled the financing of *Inland Empire*, which is being produced by his longtime partner, Mary Sweeney.

I've been interviewing Lynch semi-regularly for 25 years now, and each time I see him I'm struck by his ability to retain the best parts of his personality; he remains an enthusiastic, open and very funny man, and he never fails to tell me something useful and inspiring. I spoke with him this past summer, ahead of his fall speaking tour of universities to promote the work of the new David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace...

You've said in the past that your daily meditation practice is what enables you to maintain such a high level of creativity; What was going on in your life at the point when you were able to commit yourself to meditation?

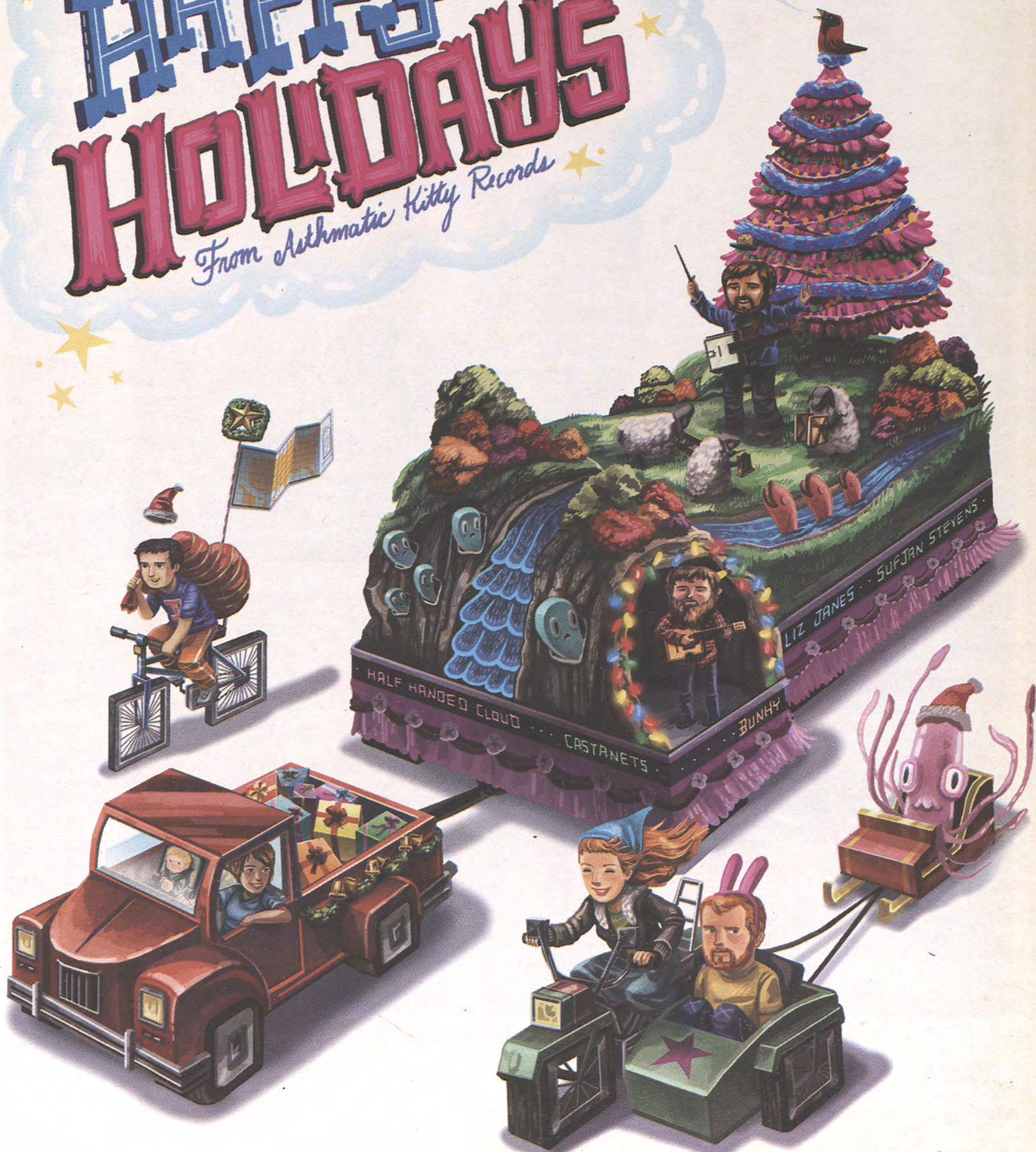
I was 27 and I was in the middle of the first year of *Eraserhead* and things were going great. I had this unbelievable place to work—the stables at AFI—I had all the equipment I needed, I had people helping me, I had money to do it, and it was like a dream come true, yet I wasn't happy. That saying 'happiness comes from within' started making sense to me and meditation seemed like a good way to go within. I'd always thought yogis sitting cross-legged in the woods were wasting their time, but I suddenly understood that

all the rest is a waste of time. Meditation is the vehicle that takes you to the place where you can experience the unified field and that's the only experience that lights the full brain. It's a holistic experience and it's not a foreign place—it's a field of pure bliss consciousness and it's the whole enchilada. People think they're fully awake when they wake up in the morning but there are degrees of wakefulness, and you begin waking up more and more when you meditate, until finally one day you're fully awake, which is the state of enlightenment. This is the potential of every human being and if you visit that unified field twice a day, every day begins to feel like a Saturday morning with your favorite breakfast, it's sunny, and you've

(continued on page 61)

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

From Asthmatic Kitty Records



Bubblelicious.

A Cubana on the Lower East Side,
store manager Vanessa tries on
this sample of thigh-highs we made.

They're a stretchy knit, and we're
thinking of doing a few versions:
solids, stripes all the way down,
and the three-stripe, as seen here.
Tell us what you think of this
potential style:
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