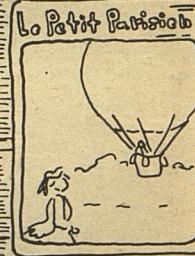
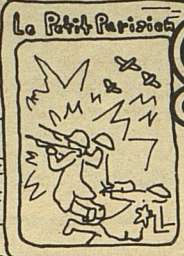
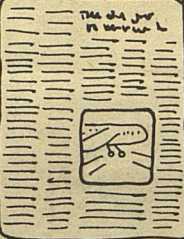
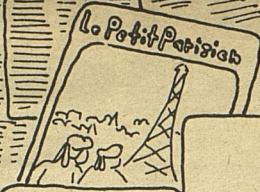
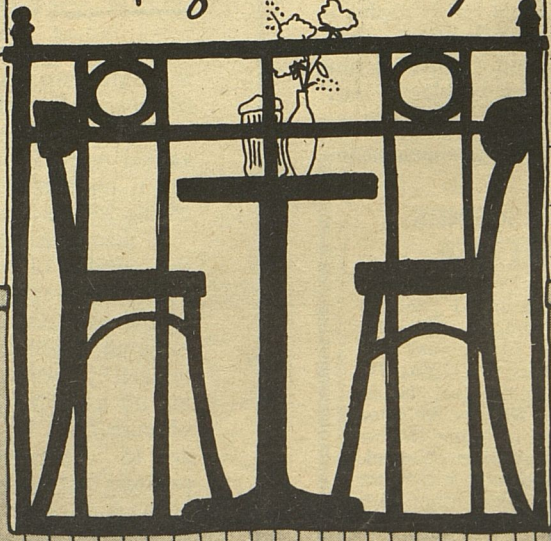
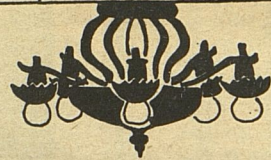


# OTHER SCENES

'figaro diary'



CMP

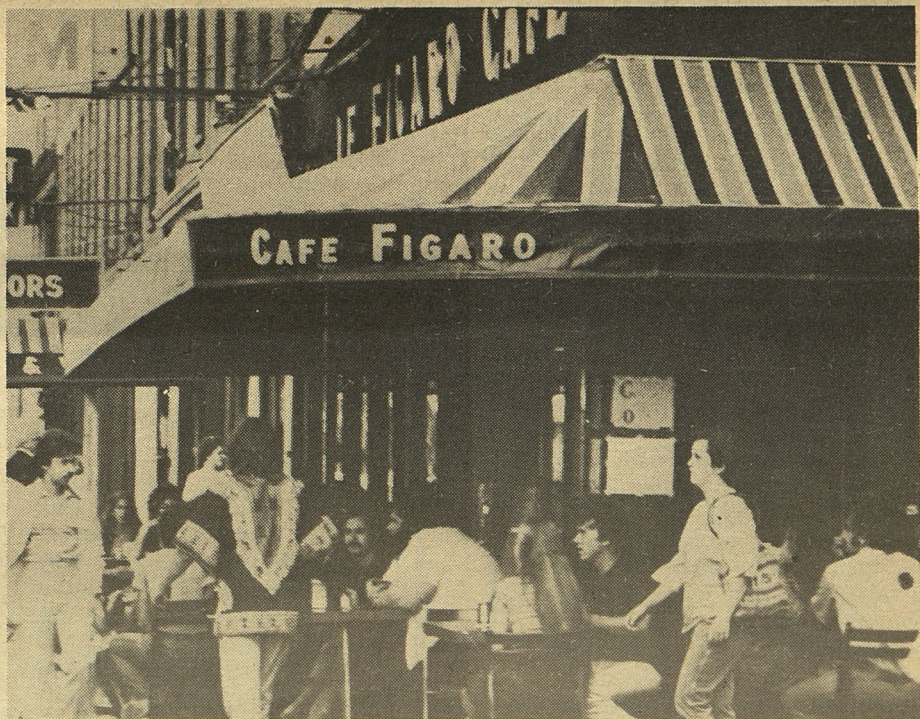
## FIGARO DIARY

**Saturday, July 10:** On my way back from Soho I ran into Lenny Horowitz, art critic and movie maker, and Charles Childs, writer and roommate of my favorite magazine editor Gay Bryant, outside the Safeway on West Broadway. "We've just come from the Figaro", Lenny said. "It reopened a week or two ago and all your friends are there." I had to admit that was good news. Since the Figaro closed, almost a decade ago, there hadn't been anything like it; no place where you could sit around over an espresso and rap, read, play chess or just bullshit with your friends. The Figaro was a legend. Started by Tommy Ziegler a block away from Bob Dylan's home on MacDougal Street in the early Sixties, it was probably Greenwich Village's single most important meeting place for the literati of its day and almost everybody I know has some memories of it. I read the galleys for at least three of my books there and at one time or another sat and sipped coffee with most of my friends. But the hippy revolution, an influx of fast-food operators and the general decline of Bleecker Street finally closed it down in 1969 and Ziegler headed out to Hollywood where he opened a new Figaro.

When I arrived at the Village version a few moments later I found it better than my fondest memories. Just like the old days: the same yellowing, lacquered copies of *Le Figaro* covering the walls, dark brown ceiling, stained glass window panels here and there, open air windows with tables both beside them and sprawling across the sidewalk, a front section of about a

dozen tables and a raised portion in the rear with about two dozen more, iron railings dividing the different areas. Only the Tiffany lamps were missing; in their place was an enormous many tentacled chandelier like an art nouveau octopus. Fantastic! Many of the old faces were there: John Filler, who celebrated his marriage to Mary Travers with a Figaro party; hoaxter Joey ("the cighthouse for dogs") Skaggs; Gene Maslow, last seen at Aurobindo's Pondicherry ashram; Dylan's friend Lola; photographer and stud-about-town Ken Van Sickle; film-maker Gloria Sylvestro. A dull New York summer has suddenly begun to look much more interesting.

**Sunday, July 11:** Most of the old customers are in seventh heaven and spend all their time walking over and congratulating each other on their good taste in coming back. Lenny says he's been coming here four times a day (on weekends it never closes and next week it starts opening all night, every night) and most of the old hands (male) are eyeing the pretty waitresses like connoisseurs. A dark-haired beauty who caught my eye tonight was wearing what at first glance looked like a black slip. I told her she looked "absolutely fabulous" and at first she looked a little startled, then smiled. Her name is Zoe; an art student at Pratt. The waitresses work hard for relatively little money, averaging about \$40 in tips on a weekday shift. The old Figaro's legendary policy of allowing customers to sit as long as they want over a coffee is still in force al-



though today the waitresses suffer much more from long-stayers who monopolise a table for an hour and leave a quarter tip. Maybe a discreet note in the menu should point this out. The last thing we want is for the place to instigate a minimum policy; undoubtedly such a move would provoke a riot. A middle-aged woman at the next table remarked to her companion that she hadn't been here since the mid-Sixties and so had only just realized that it had ever closed and this was a "different" Figaro. "It used to be just a cafe", she said. "It's certainly become more sophisticated."

**Friday, July 16:** The Figaro mystique has already spread from the customers to the staff who are now equipped in spiffy Figaro T-shirts, available at the next-door poster shop for \$3.95. Tonight I got talk-

ing to a young beauty in a big, floppy hat from under which popped masses of Little Orphan Annie curls. It seems that the major ambition of her life is to be a Figaro waitress and she intends to keep coming around as a customer until she achieves it. She looks about 15, but will undoubtedly take her place soon on this stylish stage set on which we all play our nightly parts. Figaro waitresses have a sort of legendary reputation as love goddesses about whom the customers fantasise constantly. I've been secretly in love with doe-eyed Robin, the only hold-over from the early days, for at least ten years. The other night on my first visit to the place during her shift she flung her arms around me and said: "Welcome home". Lenny said it was the first time in all the years he'd

*Lenny*

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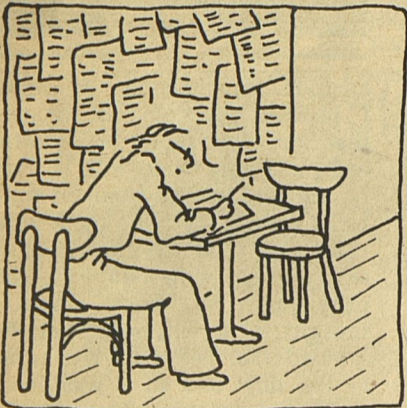
# FIGARO DIARY

Photographs by Joey Skaggs and Gloria Sylvestro Sketches by Chris Powers

known me that he'd seen anybody involve me in a public show of affection, a perceptive comment which I believe to be correct. (I have that typically English reserve about such things). Since the last time around—the Figaro closed in 1969—Robin has been married and divorced and now lives with a musician. I've admired her from afar for so long that if she ever became available I wouldn't know how to handle it.

**Sunday, July 18:** A black guy is on the steps next to the Cafe Borgia across the street. The Fig's famous operatic tapes are playing so loudly it's impossible to hear him but he's drawn the usual big crowd that lies in wait for any event on this corner. Johnny Redd's \$6000 chrome plated motorcycle with its fancy layers of filigree metalwork and hifi speakers has clocked the biggest mob so far this week, but the purple van fitted out like a plush, mobile whore house was a crowd-stopper last night. Blacks usually make the most dramatic appearances, with or without vehicles, and not the least of these are the towering giants who park their pimpmobiles beside the fire hydrant about two in the morning and stroll in with beautiful white ladies wearing skin-tight dresses. Couples from uptown are beginning to pour in, the witching hour being about midnight when they presumably get out of the movies and decide to finish off the day with a visit to the Village. **STOMP THE FAGS** had been scrawled on the men's room wall since my last visit and already somebody had appended to it: "If you're such a bad-ass, shout that out loud in The Spike (a notorious leather bar) on a Thursday night". The graffiti isn't up to Sixties' standards when an early scrawl—Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?—ended up as the title of an Edward Albee play after being in my Village Voice column. The late Bob Reiser obtained much of the material for his book on graffiti from the Figaro and ended up giving a New School course on the subject which included field trips here.

Thinking that maybe this batch of graffiti is liable to be wiped away soon, I decided to document some



of it while it was still available. "Life is a Walt Disney production" and "Take only the path with a heart" caught my eye first, and then the poignant: "Before I met you it was too early; now that I have it's too late". Most of the others are so-so: **Disarm Rapists.... Fuck Socialism.... Arm the Vagrants.... Bob Dylan's Gay....** I was a delegate here from NC to support bus-ing—none of these are actually show-stoppers. **Just like the old Figaro. Even the bad service. But at least the waitresses are still pretty** seems more apropos. Falling in

love with Figaro waitresses is an old tradition and Lenny says that in the old days there was constant competition between customers and staff for the waitresses.

**Monday, July 19:** I could hardly wait to get back to my familiar table by the window after a disastrous expedition to Queens to see a cow show in the local museum where over-dressed suburbanites were lining up for plastic glasses of imitation milk drinks. The only bright spot in suburbia was meeting collagist Ray Johnson, the subject of my first Village Voice column in October 1955 and with whom I've maintained intermittent contact through the years. Back at the Fig who should turn up but art writer Peter Frank who reminded me that our first meeting was at a Ray Johnson gathering in Central Park in 1968. I didn't remember this,



Peter

thinking that I had met him only last fall when I watched him in the lobby of the Whitney acknowledging the greetings of a constant procession of lovely women with all of whom he appeared to be on intimate terms. I introduced myself at that time, observing that I had rarely ever seen anybody who seemed to know so many people; it was amazing to watch. He was very modest about it but I determined at that time that I would have to read some of his art writings to understand what made him so renowned. Regrettably, I still haven't. Considering how many hours I spend sitting here, it's not surprising that I see a lot of faces from my past. Often I don't know who they are but over the years I've learned to pay more attention to familiar faces: yesterday's bit part in the drama of your life may well turn up playing a major role in some future scene. At any rate, this business of repeating one's cycles seems to be a pre-occupation of mine these days. The other night, for the umpteenth time over the years, I had my recurrent dream of being back at the oppressive boarding school I went to in the north of England. The difference this time, though, was that it was peopled by all the people I know now rather than the ones that were then. (What on earth happened to all the originals, I wonder?) When I mentioned this to Gloria she said it probably meant that I'd finally exorcised this dream (nightmare?) and wouldn't have it again. Nevertheless, I think I'm onto something with my insight into secondary encounters with secondary characters (i.e. people who played a relatively tiny role in your life the first time you met them). It made me wonder if when we die we pass down this endless corridor lined with all the people we've ever met,

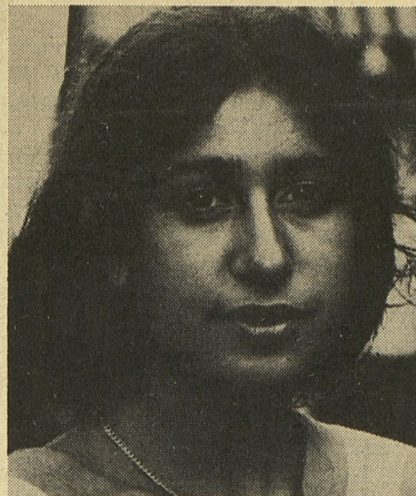
spending an infinite time with each to straighten out, correct or even repeat the relationship we had with them the last time around.

The clearest indication of how much of a club the Fig is becoming is that the waitresses spend almost as much time here off duty as when they're working. Janet, the baby-faced blonde beauty who usually wears tight jeans with the apron string bisecting her buttocks, was sitting in the back in a low-cut dress tonight. I always think of her as a prototypical California surfer girl and this time I told her so. It seems I was right.

**Tuesday, July 20:** I asked Zoe, the beautiful waitress who's studying art at Pratt (most of them are part-time actresses) if she'd copy the graffiti from the walls of the ladies' room for me and she went in and reported the following:

A hard man is good to find  
A hard find is good to man  
200 years of inequality is  
nothing to celebrate

She was just reading the last one off to me when along came Richie, a bearded freak who is one of the managers, and seizing her by the waist carried her into the ladies' room and locked the door. I've often noticed him fondling Jennie, another cute waitress I fancy, and this latest example of **droit de seigneur** pissed me off. I went back to the table and mentioned it to Lenny who laughed. The perennial subject of how hard it is to get laid these days came up (predictably) and Lenny went into his usual bit of how easy he finds it to meet women—a claim that I'm beginning to doubt. He does find it easier to talk to strange women than I do; I always get put down as some sort of a sexfiend or **imagine** that I will be and fail to act. But Lenny's approach seems to work although he can't explain it satisfactorily. He was the first to strike up an acquaintance with Elizabeth, a nightly regular who wears dark shades and a rhinestone **LOVE** pin around her neck, and once he'd introduced



Zoe

me I started to chat with her every night myself. She's an interesting woman; self-contained, clearly of independent means (source as yet undetermined) and with a fair knowledge of archaeology. About all I know about her so far is that she writes poetry and loves the Middle East whose memory she cherishes by hanging around the Lebanese coffee shops further up MacDougal Street. "Where is Elizabeth?" I asked. "She hasn't been in lately."

Lenny mumbled something non-committal, and the conversation turned to hookers.

After all, I mused, it would be nice to be friendly with a hooker: a regular weekly sex date could be arranged to the mutual satisfaction of both sides. It would not only be a money-saver, in the long run, but

would release a lot of time normally spent in the pursuit of getting laid. Do women ever have this problem? Apparently not. Just then, the guy behind the espresso machine erupted into one of his shouting tantrums and everybody stopped talking to listen. It was impossible to tell what he was getting angry about but he just went on and on. I've heard him do this before; it never inhibits him that every customer in the place tunes in. If anything, he seems to relish the enlarged audience.

Zoe confided that Israelis are "the horniest men in the world".

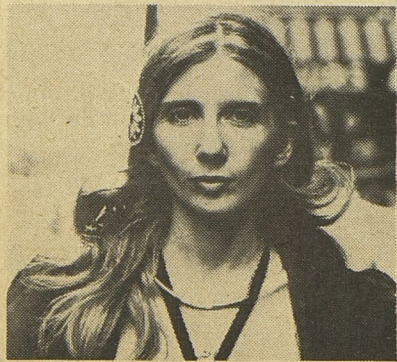


**Wednesday, July 21:** Elizabeth came in as I was scribbling some notes tonight and although I didn't mention Lenny's accusation to her, I did mention Lenny. She wrinkled her nose. "I just can't stand to sit with him for long", she said. "There are some people who tire me very easily." Well that seemed to explain Lenny's outburst. But it seemed like a good time to bring up the question of how to pick up strange women. I asked Elizabeth what she replied to the men who came by her table and asked her if they could sit down. "I've gotten very wary", she said, "because I've had some bad experiences. It's a pity really because after being turned off by one guy, I'm inclined to be very negative to the next guy who tries and for all I know he may be just the one I'd like to meet." Elizabeth was very pessimistic about the outcome of the current war between men and women and said she thought it would last for a generation or more. "The fact is that women are scared and men are confused and there doesn't seem to be any way out of it, communications have broken down," she said. I told her I got very annoyed that these days women seemed to be totally incapable of distinguishing between the good guys and the bad guys, and therefore they rejected every man who tried to strike up an acquaintance with them, no matter what the circumstances. How can a man get to know somebody he likes the look of without saying something? I asked rhetorically. And as long as women were going to categorically reject—and sometimes yell rape or merely snub—the man who made an approach, it didn't seem like things could get any better. We were still talking about this when Ralston Farina arrived. He glibly opined that Women's Lib was declining as a force because most of it had been bolstered by pressure from older women who sought an excuse for not having orgasms. Anyway, women seemed to have given up on sex today, we all agreed and somebody added: "It's easy to get along with them as long as you keep the discussion up in the air and don't suggest anything that remotely resembles a landing pattern." Gloria was furious when she heard this and called us all a bunch of male chauvinists.

**Thursday, July 22:** Somebody asked what the old Village was like and I recalled that in the Fifties it had been a lot quieter but that every-

# Figaro Diary

body had talked about how much better it had been in the good old days. "These are the good old days" interjected Wavy Gravy who had stopped by to chat after making some New York appearances promoting his Nobody for President routine. ("Nobody will get all the votes", he predicted). In the good old days, Wavy Gravy was Hugh Romney who played the Mac Dougall Street coffee shops for a share of what customers dropped into the basket. Since then he's turned into a clown, with more wisdom about that role than most people give him credit for. "A clown can be as provocative as he likes", Hugh says. "Try dressing up as a clown and see what you can do. Nobody hits a clown, man. Nobody." Ralston was observing the passers-by, the flotsam and jetsam of an evening in the Village. Maybe the good old days are past, he persisted. "Everybody is so shallow today. Nobody reads or listens



Elizabeth

to classical music or has any depth. Even in Soho nobody knows anything about poetry". I quoted something I had once read to the effect that the previous generation was brought up on movies, on immense images larger than life, whereas this generation was brought up on television where everything was in a little box and seemed smaller than life. This supposedly makes it easier to cope with, or at least less overpowering. There was a general discussion of what had made Greenwich Village bohemian—what had brought all the artists and the people with their beards and berets. It seemed to me that all the publicity about Paris in the Thirties had finally come back home and that the Village, which had always been a literary and artistic mecca, had benefited from America's need to have a bona fide bohemia of its own. Look at the sidewalk cafe phenomenon, I said; 20 years ago there weren't any, but now so many Americans had spent time sitting around in them in Europe the demand for sidewalk cafes here was almost insatiable. Just then everybody looked agape at a seven-foot man walking past and the conversation turned to basketball players. "Are they always tall?" I asked. "Are there small basketball teams somewhere?" If so, said Lenny, they probably have computerized baskets that adjust their heights according to the size of the pitcher.

**Friday, July 23:** Howard Smith came in tonight and we gave each other a wave across the room. Our relationship has been better since I returned to the U.S. but has been strained since the day we met on Eighth Street, about 1967 not long after he'd taken over the weekly column in the Voice that I had inaugurated with the Voice's first is-

sue. During my columning years Howard was always around at the parties and art events and we always chatted briefly. Then it was several years later as we met on 8th Street and I was putting out my own paper, Other Scenes, and Howard kept plugging undergrounds in his column. I said something like, "It's good to see you telling your audience about the underground papers and I wish you'd mention



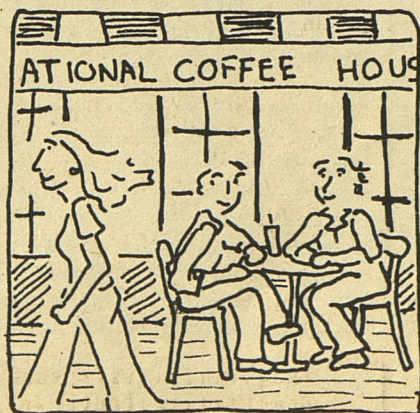
Lenny & friends

Other Scenes some time." He looked me in the eye and said, "I would never mention your paper in my column, or anything you did. I don't like you and I never have liked you. The way you treated Ed (Fancher) and Dan (Wolf) was disgraceful and they were well rid of you." I may not have recorded the exact words but it was something to that effect. I was dumbfounded. I said, "Howard, what on earth brought this on? I've known you for years and you never told me you disliked me before?" So he went on to explain what a miserable little creep I had been during my years at the Voice and that long-suffering Dan and Ed had only continued to run my column as a favor or a mark of loyalty or something or other. (They had been paying me \$5 a column most of that time, \$25 a column towards the end). Howard and I have met two or three times in the past year or two and always been reasonably polite but our discussions have usually concluded with his reaffirmation of how much he dislikes me and everything I stand for (whatever that is). In fairness I must add that it's mutual; I think he's a gold-plated phoney with the mind of a third-rate public relations man. His new movie, however, is supposed to be good and I planned to tell him so as he came by. As it happened I was talking to Elizabeth when he left so we didn't get to talk.

**Saturday, July 24:** Peter Frank borrowed my pen to annotate a statement he'd seen on the men's room wall: "WHEN TRUTH GOES FROM ART IT HAS GONE FOREVER—R. Farina". He wrote underneath: Oh Ralston, stop quoting yourself. When Ralston came in later (Peter had left by then) and found this, he erased the quotes from his quotation and said: "Well somebody once called Peter Frank 'the Alfred E. Neuman of the art world' ". Lenny suggested that maybe the "Woody Allen of the art world" was more accurate but Ralston insisted on the original description. That reminded me of the time Woody and I went to a psychodrama performance together many years ago when he was playing the Bitter End and very few people knew him. We had agreed that it would make me a column if I spent the evening doing something with Woody rather than merely quoting him, and although Woody (who called himself "Walter" to people who didn't know him) insisted we were merely going to watch, he

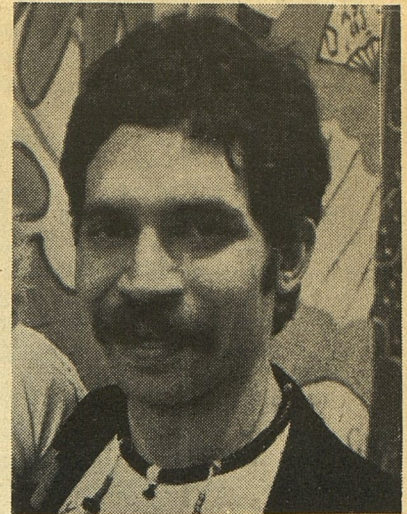
couldn't resist putting his hand up when the psychodrama asked for volunteers from the audience. Once selected, "Walter" agreed to try to re-enact one of his traumatic experiences with women—specifically the time he was trying to get a taxi after taking his girl to some Broadway show. It was a wet night, "Walter" explained, and between trying to cope with the problem and explain his ineptitude to his date he

was sinking deeper and deeper into his role as loser. He played the part so well that even in this make-believe situation his foolishness shone through and so aggravated his make-believe partner (who had been selected at random from the audience) that she got mad enough to reach over and slap his face. It was a stunning example of art transcending life. Nobody seemed to appreciate the anecdote very much but it got us back—again—onto the subject of what art is. "Well art certainly isn't theatre" said Ralston, quite categorically. I tried to argue with him, pointing out that our notions of theatre itself had certainly changed since the advent of the "Happenings" in the early Sixties and that the only theatre I liked these days was the sort of thing that was happening on the corner (of MacDougall & Bleecker Streets) right in front of us. Gloria, who hadn't said much, asked Ralston what sort of art he did. "My medium", Ralston replied, "is time. All my discipline, my meditation goes into painting the dragon—all but the eye which comes last. When I paint in that final eye, the dragon flies away. That's what I try to explore. Only artists see the whirr of the wings, the blurred lines of the dragon in flight. The public sees the nest it makes for itself". I didn't quite understand that but I liked the way he said it. And it did remind me of the only artwork of his I'd ever seen: a moment down at the Fine Arts Gallery when he'd told everybody to gather in one room at exactly 6 P.M. to watch his creation. On the stroke of six, Ralston came in with one of those plastic sprays (with which home gardeners "mist" their plants) and shot a fine film of water over a blank canvas already attached to the wall. As the moisture hit the blank surface a Japanese hieroglyphic, obviously pre-painted with "invisible ink", appeared, disappearing again when the painting



dried. It was impressive and I told several people about the event afterwards.

**Sunday afternoon, July 25:** Back onto the subject of the war between men and women today, with Ralston maintaining that today's society was like "Lysistrata without the war." Men, he said, were at all times merely obeying natural impulses that couldn't be changed or controlled, and women held it against them. My own feeling, I said, was that society suffers from the mass sexual frustration that's a holdover from the days when women were scared to fuck for fear of getting pregnant. The pill, it's true, came along and outdated that attitude to some extent, but it coincided with women's increased awareness of the way they were being exploited sexually thus making women less responsive to men's advances rather than more. I was talking about pick-ups and new relationships—or would-be relationships—rather than between men and women who already know each other. I gained an insight into sexual exploitation this weekend when I had a reunion with the only woman I ever got pregnant (she had an abortion) with whom I'd maintained a spasmodic correspondence over the intervening 12 years. She wrote and said that she had often thought about our "unfortunate encounter" and had decided that she would like to try it again, only this time there would be no unfortunate consequences. It was a straightforward sexual proposition from a woman, almost the only direct one I have ever had, and I jumped at it for the horny turn-on that it was. I invited her to come to New York for the weekend. Imagine my amazement to find, when we met, that I was unable to get an



Ralston

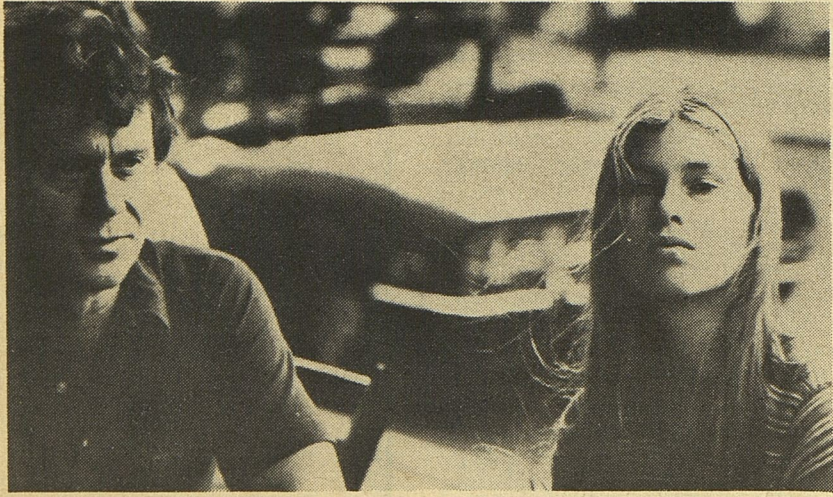
erection. Immediately, of course, I blamed psychological factors—that the long-forgotten abortion had something to do with it. Finally, she gave up and went off to the ballet leaving me lying there unsatisfied and with the rueful conclusion that she didn't want my company—just my body. And, I thought to myself, now where had I heard that before? I was stoned at the time and so it was one of those superficial insights that seemed very heavy at the time.

At least seven of us were gathered around one tiny table outside the front door and it seemed like everybody who came by was known to somebody or other. It was like a giant party. Bob Patterson was sat at the next table. It was almost the first time I'd seen him since the days when he used to write for the East Village Other. He once wrote me a story, about 1969, about the guilty excitement to be derived from fucking 15-year-old girls. It was quite cleverly done, more like a sociological report than a sexual memoir. To play safe I

gave him an academic byline: Dr. Robert Patterson. Judging by today's attitudes, 15-year-olds are veterans. To get the same impact he'd probably have to write about ten-year-olds. One of the passers-by was Maurice, the white-bearded veteran who's prowled Village streets for 20 years or more selling old papers and magazines. I persuaded Gene to tease him a little and the conversation went like this:

Gene: Maurice, is it true you have \$200,000 secretly hidden away in a parcel locker somewhere?

Maurice: I don't want to discuss that.



Janet & father

Lenny said that the difference between today's Figaro and the old one was that nobody sat around stoned in the old days. At this Bob Patterson got quite indignant and said that it just wasn't true and that lots of people used to deal dope out of the old Figaro. And today? I asked. He smiled ruefully. "It would be nice to even find any just now". (New York's undergoing its annual pre-harvest shortage). Rhona, my secretary, was talking to somebody here yesterday who said there used to be a lot of dealing going on in the garden. Gambling, too. There was sawdust on the floor and screenings of W.C. Fields movies in the basement. The garden had trees in those days, too, although the present management plans to do something about that soon, lining the fence with trees in pots. Today the garden seems to be the preferred spot for a crowd from the Chelsea Hotel.

Jane remarked she was so innocent in the old days that she used to sit around and get picked up by men and not know what to do when they took her home. I'd end up jerking them off or something", she said, "because I didn't know anything about sex and I was too scared to find out." Well, said Gloria, the Figaro really used to intimidate me; "I was new to New York and I thought all these other people around me must be so sophisticated and knowledgeable. I often look at the young girls sitting around today and wonder if they feel as I did then."

## OTHER SCENES

August 1976

Other Scenes, founded 1967, is the personal journal of John Wilcock and a \$10 annual subscription includes everything JW publishes during the year, beginning with the Witches Almanac each spring, and including the occasional travel newsletter, Nomad. To buy a subscription is to enter into a personal relationship with JW who answers all letters.

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Sunday night, July 25: I couldn't believe here we all were arguing about What is Art? again, just like we did all through the '60s. I said: "I think it would be beneficial if all the world's masterpieces were destroyed", a statement that I've used on occasions before and which has the advantage of being both provocative and logical, the logic being that art's main value is educational and therefore that first-rate copies or reproductions serve the same purpose. All the arguments about how you can immediately discern a copy or reproduction from the original are so much bullshit because even experts often can't make

that distinction as is proved by all the phoney masterpieces on display in the world's museums.

Predictably my statement was met with outraged denials, all of which I've heard on previous occasions when I've come out with this tried and true ploy to change the subject. Ralston and Lenny could not wait to interrupt each other to talk about how a true work of art has "presence" and "essence" etc. etc., and Ralston followed up with a blow-by-blow summary of how adding storage, insurance, commissions, resales etc. etc. to the paint-



Robin

ings original price inevitably pushed the value up. All of this, I said, merely confirmed my original point which was that any masterpiece is valued more for the monetary figure it represents rather than its intrinsic self as a work of creativity.

I mentioned how I'd once met this curator of some tiny museum in the Midwest and he'd explained to me how the only way a small museum could use its budget "intelligently" was to specialise, building up a unique collection in some obscure field. In his case he'd chosen to concentrate upon Dutch painters of the last quarter of the 18th century or some similar category. The result was that he had a valuable collection that covered about .00001 per cent of art history and the community people who patronized his museum learned almost nothing about art in general.

Monday, July 26: Could Ford really make it back to the White House with—of all people—John Connally? The papers I brought in with me to read are full of the two of them feeling each other up on the White House lawn. If this Texan finally gets into the White House it will make the fourth crooked vice president we've had in a row. Well, it's true that Rockefeller and Connally haven't actually been convicted, but most people I know think of them as crooks. Things seemed fairly quiet in here when I arrived and there didn't seem to be anyone that I knew. But after I stopped reading the paper a friendly face, name unknown, came by my table to talk about "the old days". Once fellow-customers, we find ourselves again exchanging amiable banalities—nothing deeper—a decade later. One of the only advantages about getting older is the opportunity that pops up occasionally to get deeper into a relationship that never previously got off the ground. One evening I stopped to talk to a woman I had known casually for years. One thing led to another (we went down to visit Mickey Ruskin's new bar together) and we not only ended up in bed—to the utter astonishment of both of us—but found ourselves in the middle of a hot and heavy relationship that was pressure-cooked by the knowledge that it was going to last only three weeks, after which time she would be sailing off to Morocco. It was interesting to ponder that had we not had this deadline hanging over us, we might never have really gotten into more than merely a one-night stand. It made me wonder whether it might not be advisable for all new relationships to begin with the same sort of pressure deadline. From a male point of view I find that women who were so popular last time we met that they'd scarcely give me the time of the day are now more sympathetic to my advances. They're older, perhaps not so much in demand, flattered to find that I admire them as much as last time around and—perhaps—more responsive to my own increased mellowness.

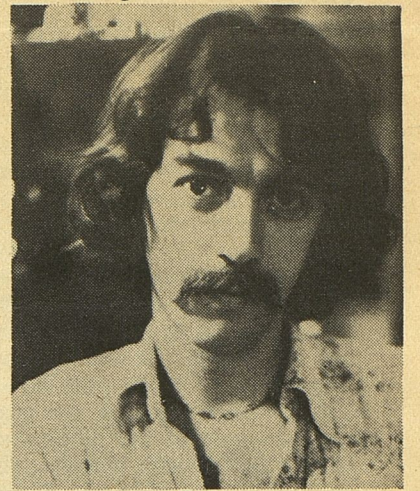
Tuesday, July 27: Today I finally went to see Jack Klein, notorious Soho landlord with whom I'd been negotiating to find an apartment. After reading an article about him in the Soho Weekly News which described how he refused to let his tenants profiteer over key money, I had thought of him as being a suitable landlord. For some reason I like to know my landlord, have a personal acquaintance with him, and Klein sounded like my type. He showed me a tiny L-shaped loft in his building half a block from West Broadway and at first I said I'd take it but when I thought it over \$400 did seem excessive rental for one room so I wrote and told him I'd



Ben

changed my mind. "Apparently he doesn't approve of people making excess profits unless it's him", Gloria commented when I told her the story. A friend whose anonymity I'll respect told me that the new Figaro's owner, Ben Fishbein, was a bit of a rip-off himself back in the mid-Sixties. "A typical Mr. Landlord" was how she described him, adding that he'd been very reluctant to make repairs, paint the apartments etc. "In 1965 he weighed a lot more than he does now, maybe 40 or 50 pounds more. He was super businessman, grey suit always. I'd see him wandering up and down Thompson Street in a dream-world. One day he wore an orange tie with his usual grey suit; it made me laugh because I could perceive the split in his personality, so much reality wanting to come out and being jailed inside that grey suit. In the early 70's he sold the building and when I saw him again he was thin, seemed different and didn't remember me. The guy across the street is great friends with him. They talk about girls together and joke a lot so I guess he's a different person now. Or maybe it was me that was really weird back then. Anyway he must have gone to a shrink; his whole aura is different."

Wednesday, July 28: It was almost 1 A.M. when I arrived and Robin suggested I sit outside with Joey Skaggs, fresh from the triumphal staging of his semen bank hoax for Alex Bennett's cable TV show. Elizabeth was just leaving, escorted by somebody into a taxi (is that her Mafia friend?) and whispered she'd tell me tomorrow about her disappointing date of the previous night. Robin was just finishing duty and came to sit with us under the guise of refilling the ketchup bottles. It



Joey

seems she just started making it with Joey—goddamnit, missed her again between men, and after I've been waiting all these years. A young lady who looked about 21 stopped by and asked if somebody would come with her to take a swim at the Carmine Street pool. "You have to climb over the fence at night" she said, "and I don't want to go alone". When we got over there a bunch of kids with a similar idea were being ejected from the pool by patrolmen in a police car. We walked around the block and returned in time for my companion to strip down to her swimsuit, do a fast three lengths and dress again without incident. Back at the Figaro, it was 2 A.M. and Robin was talking to Stanley Fisher who was with his usual crowd of women groupies. Joey nudged me excitedly. "Isn't that the guy who was always into orgies?" he asked. "I hate the bastard; he's a real mind-fucker." I had always been wary of him myself, recalling his Great Fear Press of the Sixties which propagated the notion that the fear of this planet colliding with a meteorite was the basis of every

human's insecurities. I remember thinking at the time that such a paranoia had never been in my mind until then but once aware of it, the logic was permissible. Fisher once showed a movie at Cinematheque which caused an uproar. I don't remember anything about it except how angry people got, booing and whistling for it to be stopped. It struck me as odd at the time that anybody could arouse so much animosity with some relatively nondescript images and now I was inclined to think of it as negative energy or, if you like, black magic. Ken Russell's movies strike some people the same way. Before I'd finished my recollections, Joey was up from his seat and over at Fisher's table arguing and yelling. "I've never seen you so angry" Robin told him later when she recounted what had happened. It seems that Fisher's technique, and that of his lady acolytes, is to zero in on whatever insecurities or vi-

Art & Production: David Clayton, Christine Powers

brations they detect and go immediately onto the offensive with comments like, "Why are you so nervous?" Robin, always cool and smiling, was able to counter it but Joey lost his cool and started accusing Fisher of being "another Charlie Manson". He later admitted it was probably jealousy. He and Fisher had once lived in the same building at 521 Hudson Street and Fisher, he said, had always been coming on to his old lady in the hall. Now it was eight years later and a repeat performance. Robin said it had been an eventful night because earlier an old lover of hers, Ken Van Sickle, had been chatting up Janet, the blonde surfer waitress and Janet's father—who was always dropping by to keep an eye on his daughter—had come on to her. "I think of Janet as being a young version of myself, just like I was when the Figaro began", Robin said, "so it seemed to me that somehow we'd completed a whole circle." □

## Dear Reader

*Figaros Diary  
Aug, 1976*

Other Scenes will be ten years old next year. In its short life it has been a newsletter, a tabloid newspaper, a magazine and a personal journal but more than anything else it is a way for me to keep in touch with a lot of people all over the world whom I now regard as personal friends -- even though I haven't met most of them. If you're a new reader, welcome, and I hope you'll subscribe and stay with us for a while.

OTHER SCENES

Blessed be!

\* L. AM. SER.

AAK 7870

*John Wilson*