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Correspondence

When he saw Edward Albee's play *Baby Alice*, Warhol's response was eloquent: 'It's tiresome', he said, 'because it's so long and drawn-out, but I love boring things. It appeals to me because it is absolutely without content. It doesn't say anything'. Similarly, the canvases and Pop Art films made by Warhol do not say anything.

In the film titled *Empire*, one side of New York's highest skyscraper is shown for six hours. In the film *Sleep*, the audience watches the stomach of a sleeping man for several hours. The films *Flesh*, *Trash* and *Kiss* are full of filthy scenes which depict with revolting naturalism the daily lives of drug addicts, prostitutes and the other flotsam of the city.

'This Narcissus', wrote the Paris weekly *L'Express* about Warhol's films, 'has placed his mirror in a urinal, and the characters which he contemplates are remarkably ugly'. Such too is Warhol's first play *Pork* (which in the author's original scheme was to last two hundred hours!) in which various tedious perverts talk about their sexual problems while showing their naked behinds to the audience. The London *Daily Telegraph* described this production as 'deadly dull'.

Removing man from art by any means available – such is Warhol's main aim. Why does 'the father of Pop Art' find this necessary? Primarily, to affirm in artistic terms the ideals of bourgeois society, to present the artist as the unthinking accessory of the present-day 'affluent and leisured society'. Warhol's smoothly-running 'factory' of modernism is a clear proof of the deep crisis in avant-garde art. □

Translated by Alasdair Beaton

This article first appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Moscow, No. 24, 14 June 1972. It carried one illustration with the following caption: "'The Father of Pop Art", Andy Warhol, in the soup can which brought him fame. What an expressive self-portrait!"



[The letter below, and the attached comment by Tim Craig were held over from earlier this year from motives of distaste, and for checking. – Ed.]

John Fare you well

Presently I am researching my thesis and badly require information on 'John Fahey' the American sculptor/performer who died knowingly as a part of his work, as I understand it to be: and all this is hearsay: together with an Italian cybernetic sculptor, Fahey built a computer-controlled machine that performed amputations. Fahey was the patient – the computer functioned in a completely random way. The performances were advertised and tickets sold at £5 a throw. These performances took place in England. In total there were 6 amputations on Fahey by the machine. The final one being his head.

Do you have any information about these performances (they took place two years ago, the death of John Fahey was mid-November 1970), John Fahey, his life and/or his work? Failing this could you please let me know of anyone whom you think may have? Failing that could you please print my request in your magazine asking for any known material on Fahey to be sent to me at the address given? I do hope you may be able to help.

GRAHAM BROWN
4 Cricketers Terrace
Leeds 12

Tim Craig writes: The Editor of *Studio International* has been kind enough to call my attention to a letter lately received from Mr Graham Brown of 4 Cricketers Terrace, Leeds 12. Mr Brown in his letter seeks information touching the life, work, and performances of 'John Fahey, the American sculptor/performer who . . . together with an Italian cybernetic sculptor, built a computer-controlled machine that performed amputations upon Fahey himself.' Questionless, Mr Brown has confused John Fahey, an American guitarist of surpassing technical skill, with the only person who could represent the real target of his interest: John Fare, Art's Gingerbread Man or, if you like, the Stepin Fetchit of self-slaughter. (Strange to say, each of Fahey's long-playing records has included the word *death* in its title.)

John Charles Fare was born in 1936 in Toronto, Ontario. These exciting facts were always made available to members of his audiences, for whose benefit Fare's birth certificate was always displayed under glass at the entrance to each of the theatres where, over the years, he conducted his 'appearances'. Portions of this document have been blatantly deleted, a circumstance which, in light of Fare's own highly edited state, I find very suggestive. It is more than simple tidiness, I think. As a theatre programme, it seems quite perfect. It says: 'I went fishing once, but tonight I cannot do that.'

Fare attended Forest Hill Collegiate in Toronto, and in 1959 he came to London, where for a time he remained as an imperfect student at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Disappointed, he left London for Copenhagen. Owing to his financial independence, a condition from which he was never perfectly relieved, he was free to spawn novelties, including the first of his 'appearances'. The notable events of his tiracinium are perhaps less well known than they ought to be. Nor are facts concerning this or any other period of Fare's career as generously imparted as one might be led to expect by an organization calling itself the John Fare Vital Information Bureau, West 56 Street, New York. A vital telephone call which I put through to them early this morning yielded nothing beyond the swirly gobblings of a certain 'Jenkins' who, possibly owing to the distance, resembled a ventriloquist in a Waring Blender, and an unidentified pre-adamite whose continual laughter sounded like pieces of iron thrown into a bathtub. As publicity agents, they are just one step ahead of the Tarbaby.

I have nevertheless been told by others that Fare's earliest 'appearance' gestures consisted in the public removal of his clothing, accompanied at times by such trimmings as the pressing of 'his bare arse' against the street-level windows of particularly genteel restaurants. These high deeds nearly always led to his arrest and/or hospitalization, if only because it never, apparently, occurred to him to avoid consequences, however predictable or

unpleasant. One might almost fancy that in these stunts, however amusing and informal, it is not impossible to discern a tinge of masochism as well as the slightly feminine tendencies to discard things and extort medical attention. (Any woman, for example, will throw away an arrowhead collection, and a survey conducted in 1968 indicated that in Harley Street 91 per cent of the customers are women.)

After a brief spell in the bughouse, Fare was again arrested when, early one morning, a frightfully Danish police constable found it impossible to ignore Fare's curious treatment of a parked motorcar. Fare had in fact already spent several hours fastening random objects to the vehicle in question with epoxy resin. These included: golf balls, milk bottles, brooms, unopened tins of food, one dead cat, his own clothes, old gramophone records, dozens of biro's, and over a hundred forks and spoons. While Fare sat quietly in the local stationhouse, the police officer waited patiently for the owner of the car to arrive so that it could be explained that a known lunatic had unfortunately made him the target of vandalism, but had been apprehended and would be charged as soon as the victimized motorist would be good enough to sign a formal charge. However, when the owner did turn up after an hour or so, he appeared not to notice anything at all unusual about anything. When pressed by the astonished officer, he suddenly declared that he thought there was something different and appeared to be highly entertained. He immediately arranged Fare's release and introduced himself: Golni Czervath, who was a cybernetic inventor, electronics wizard, and an accomplished musician. Together they began, almost at once, to develop a robotic operating table, consisting of two robots (each with two flexible hands), attached to the table, beneath which was located a power source and an ingeniously controlled programming system. Assisted by the painter Gilbert Andoff, they worked out a series of programmed 'appearances', which, if nothing else, ensured a very settled career for Fare and an end to the sort of trifling which had so far coloured his life and which parents so often find vexing. The series of amputations thus planned was still, of course, a kind of strip show; yet the difference between it and Fare's earlier disrobings is the difference between sculpture and election posters.

The first operation, a lobotomy, was presented in June, 1964, in Copenhagen. The time and day - 8.30 p.m., Friday - never varied in subsequent appearances. His mind thus abridged, Fare was more or less proof against any doubts concerning his vastation which he might otherwise have entertained.

By the time I was at last invited to attend one of Fare's appearances - at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto, 17 September 1968 - Fare was short one thumb, two fingers, eight toes, one eye, both testicles, and several random

patches of skin. Each of these scraps had been replaced by a bizarre metal or plastic facsimile, so that when he entered the gallery - a man who, in purely fleshly terms, was so small and faint that, thus refurbished, he seemed to beggar the customary initial enquiry in the game Twenty Questions - several memories were coaxed forward all at once: brass monkeys in winter, *A Rebours*, the whittling of Dr Moreau, the final condition of Bonny Parker, Nathanael West's curtailed heroes, a bird cage in Bradbury, 'Captain Carpenter', 'Johnny, I Hardly Knew You', and in the instance of the thumb, an eloquent rejoinder to Nazi bad taste in the field of interior decoration.

That night in Toronto, his entire right hand, previously unmolested, was scheduled to run out of luck. The gallery was hung with Andoff's huge, faintly Transylvanian murals. Andoff and Czervath assembled the operating table and its adjuncts in front of the audience, putting the whole thing together 'from scratch'. Fare stood perfectly still in one spot, smiling vacantly while lazy blond spotlights grazed slowly about the ceiling, as if in response to reports of leftover Messerschmitts, harmless in their old age, ever so simple to catch.

At length, Fare lay him down upon the assembled table, and his two assistants strapped a number of tiny microphones up and down his flesh, so that the highly amplified sound of his pulse, breathing, and mutilation could be laid on at will. At first, before the robots began the actual surgery, it sounded like whale music. Andoff and Czervath stepped into another room, and, as the four hands of the robots began all at once to move very energetically above the weird table and its stylized cargo, I was reminded for a moment of a xylophone recital I and a girl named Nellie had gone to about ten years earlier on the planet Neptune. Her last name was something like Fisher, only it wasn't Fisher.

One metal hand gave Fare an injection, paused, and began in concert with the other three to perform exactly as one imagines a competent surgeon and an assistant would. Alarming coloured lights began now to emanate from the robots themselves as they continued the job. Plague shades flooded the room, lurid crash pigments, a filthy Dallas crimson, shabby leper mud, a kind of frayed porky one, and a truly horrifying yellow that Winsor & Newton knew nothing about. The absurdly amplified noise of the bone-saw resembled huge panting elephant death yells played backward on too many tape recorders. People blacked out here and there, a few more during the sutures.

The operation over, one metal claw abruptly raised the hand and wagged it about horribly for a few seconds, as one would a found purse everyone had been searching for in a large field. It then placed the hand in a jar of alcohol, which Andoff, reappearing with the houselights, carefully labelled and placed on a table next to the birth certificate. 'What larks!' a pretty girl

of about seventeen said. Fare was wheeled into another room and three days later travelled by rail to New York.

'Dying is an art like everything else.' Since the evening I have described, Fare has made six appearances in various cities. Much of his audience has from the very start consisted of a hard core of mainly professional, mainly middle-aged people waiting patiently for the masterstroke. The date of that event has always been kept very secret.

They'll applaud until their tickets tear up the ushers. □

Encore du Barry

The context of my article about implied meaning in sculpture, including a literary dissection (annihilation) of Mr Dalwood's piece at the Royal Academy is understandably (as he says) not understood by him. (Dissection comes from dissect, a transitive verb meaning to cut in pieces.)

Why should he though, since the only claim he makes to 'ownership' of it is in the craftsman's sense of actually having put the pieces together, and referring to the 'loose' description of the title as making its content?

Simply, I did not like his sculpture. It lacked intention and was confused. It lacked 'truth to material' in that it could have been made from rubber for all I could perceive - rubber trees perhaps? (Perceive means to apprehend through one of the senses). It lacked a real size, looking rather like an overdone, puffed up pastry - I mean maquette just made larger. The painting softened almost to non-existence the underlying forms which raised the question of why those particular forms at all? (Form means visible aspect (especially apart from colour), three dimensional shape).

We stand now with thousands of years of cultural history behind us. Events have taken place which could not have been predicted before their time, or if they were only ideas in circumspection.

We are the richer, or the poorer, in conscious and unconscious moments for that. We are not always aware of these influences ingrained into our being and which condition our concepts and actions. Consequently our every-day decisions cannot be isolated self-created acts, they are part of this and past time. They are enacted inside a convention whether we are aware of it or not.

It (the individual act), is as much conditioned by group exchange of ideas as by the individual. The group conscious (now time) idea of the exchange of information leads to a collective conscious and more unwittingly to a collective unconscious. We are not and cannot be completely in control of the communicated alternatives that any statement we make may have. Linguistic logic perhaps is a science that gets closest to its study, but it can only in the end say that meaning, interpreted from any statement invested with a meaning by the transmitter, becomes clearer the more the statement moves away from the original