

INSECT TRUST GAZETTE

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FRONT COVER	ANNETTE RIDDLE	
BACK COVER	FRIEDRICH SCHRODER-SONNENSTERN	
TRANSLATION SCHRODER-SOMMENSTERN:	DANIEL MOORE/	
FROM: PANDERMA#5	STEPHANIE TRAMZ	
PERMISSION: CARL LASZLO		
PHOTO JENNIFER STEVENS	PAUL KAGAN	5
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TYPIST	JEAN BOHRD	

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 Address all correspondence to: R.Bassara, Box 1288
 Berkeley, California 94701



john fare

appearing at
the isaacs gallery
sept. 17
8:30 p.m.

Hardly a conspicuous notice on its small 8 by 10 inch card, and not very widely displayed: I saw only two. One was in the window of the Rendezvous Bookstore on Yonge St., and the other at the Edward Johnson music building of the University of Toronto. It is the same notice that Fare uses in all the cities, European and North American, where he has appeared, changing only the place and the date. The time -- 8:30 p.m. of a Friday evening -- is a constant.

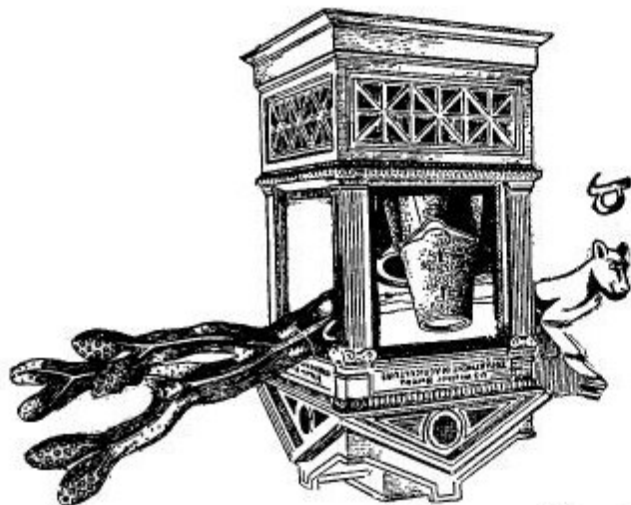
Yet despite the poor, practically nonexistent advertising, the gallery which is none too big was packed on the evening of the seventeenth with people willing to pay the price of admission. Fare has a peculiar underground reputation which does not run through the usual channels. The people who attended the Toronto appearance seemed completely unlike those who usually turn out for avantgarde events: there were quite a few who looked like businessmen (with their wives), clerks, and doctors. One wonders how, exactly, they got word of the appearance. Also, by listening to a nearby conversation, I gather that there is a group of hippies who follow Fare from city to city, trying to take in 'the whole performance... man, when he dies....' The type of audience is appropriate because Fare's 'appearance' is like nothing else on the contemporary art scene: resemblances and parallels abound, but no one and nothing else is like John Fare.

For instance. Cage, the American composer, writes silences that bring chance audience sounds into the music, employs electronic equipment, theatre and dance. The art-forms merge and join one another in a process of cross-fertilization. Scientific equipment and the mass media of popular culture dominate the atmosphere. Fare utilizes all these trends, but also something more: himself, John Fare, body and mind.

At 8:30 sharp, Fare entered the dimly-lit gallery which had been hung with large murals by Gilbert Andoff -- chrome plating, delicately tinted plastics and glass -- all designed to play on popular images of the laboratory or the space ship. Fare is a small thin man with wispy blond hair, and a shy but contented smile plays around his lips. He was dressed in a simple white silk robe rather like a surgical gown. While the audience, seated on folding chairs surrounding a cleared space in the centre of the room, watched silently, Fare and his two assistants (Andoff and Golni Czervath) brought in skeletons of metal, tubing, wires and heavy anonymous boxes and assembled the equipment, piece by piece, in the cleared space in the midst of the audience. Their movements, graceful and sure, and the subtle lighting effects created a weird atmosphere in the small gallery, added to -- not destroyed -- by the fact that the lights were operated in full view of the audience. It requires a good sense of dramatic timing to bring this sort of thing off and Fare succeeded, employing all the cliches of science-fiction (the mad scientist touch) and creating the performance right in front of the audience.

The completed equipment stood in the middle of the gallery now. It consisted of an operating table on each side of which were two robot-like structures, each with two flexible hands. One held a tray of surgical instruments. Both robots were attached to the table, beneath which was the power equipment and a control unit already programmed (minute by minute, cut by cut). The two assistants proceeded to strap several miniature microphones to Fare's wrists, neck and chest; the microphones were hooked up to speakers hung around the walls of the gallery and the amplified sounds of the man's pulse and breathing filled the room. Pulse regular, breathing regular. He was perfectly calm. The funny little smile still playing around his lips, Fare was helped onto the table and lay down; the assistants exited; Fare pressed a switch and the operating unit started up. A robot administered a shot of sodium pentothal and Fare became unconscious. The same robot sterilized the instruments (in a sterilizer beneath the table) and handed them to the other which immediately began the work. The operation scheduled for the evening was the amputation of Fare's right hand.

According to his birth certificate which was displayed under glass on a small table at the entrance to the gallery, John Charles Fare was born in 1936 in Toronto, Ontario. What other information I have about him I gathered from various contacts who wish to remain anonymous and from writing to the John Fare Vital Information Bureau on West 56th Street, New York. According to the Information Sheet I received from them, Fare attended Forest Hill Collegiate, Toronto, and then studied architecture in London, England. His family must be fairly wealthy. From London he went to Copenhagen where he began to experiment with different art-forms and developed his 'appearance' technique. I have heard that his first attempts consisted of such things as undressing in public; he was arrested several times and once committed to a mental hospital for observation. But then he met Golni Czervath the musician and electronics engineer. Together they developed the operating table equipment and, with the painter Gilbert Andoff, worked out the present performance, detailing each operation of the series. The schedule will not be changed. Fare and his assistants know when the final operation will be, but keep the information in strictest secrecy.



The first operation, in Copenhagen, was a lobotomy: the severing of the frontal lobes of the brain which results in a complete and unquestioning acceptance of the status quo, whatever that may be. In Fare's case, the status quo was the series of appearances he had already planned; the amputation of his mind sealed off whatever will he might have had to escape from that irrevocable sequence which is slowly transforming him with each part of his body that he loses.

The sound of his breathing became slower once the anaesthetic took effect. The robots worked slowly and efficiently, one doing the cutting, the other taking care of the instruments and applying the clamps and sponges. The robots also manipulated the lighting effects now, as if they were part of the operation: murky green, a dirt-tinged red. Thin beams of silvery light, coming from the robots themselves, played on Fare's body while blood dripped from the incisions into a revolving container of transparent plastic. The sound of cutting came across the speakers too now, faint and tickling for the skin, thick and dream-like for the flesh. The noise of surgical saw against bone is indescribable. Two members of the audience got up and left at this point, but quietly, still holding their breath. The rest hardly seemed to notice them; hypnotized eyes focused on the table where Fare lay.

And then the instruments were returned to the tray, the final stitches were completed -- even the sounds of needle puncturing skin and the movements of the thread could be heard amplified -- the operation was over and a flexible metal claw elevated the hand as the house lights came on one by one: the sickly pale fluorescent lighting. The hand dangled in mid air. The other robot produced a jar containing an alcohol solution into which the hand was deposited; the cap was screwed on and the jar handed to Andoff who had reappeared. He carried it to the table near the door. The operating complex had stopped. Nothing was heard from the one loudspeaker which had been amplifying the sound of Fare's right-hand pulse. Dead silence. Andoff and Czervath removed Fare onto a pushcar which rolled out from beneath the table and moved him out of the room.

In the course of the appearances to date, the thumb, third and fourth fingers of the left hand, several toes, a number of moles and both testicles have been removed and replaced with stylized metal or plastic facsimilies. I am not sure about the right eye, but I noticed it had a peculiar glazed shine to it. This time however, Fare had decided (had known since Copenhagen, June 1964) that nothing but an empty space was to be left where his hand had been. They say that amputees often feel a ghost limb in place of the real one that has been lost.

The sound equipment was turned off. The audience started to move, got up, put on hats and coats with a minimum of noise and filed out. Several people paused briefly to examine the hand floating in the jar, which will remain as an exhibit until Fare leaves town.

By then it won't matter. Fare is what is important, and on the third day after the operation, fully recovered, he was on the move again with a busy schedule ahead of him, travelling by train or car from Toronto to New York to Ann Arbor to Chicago to San Francisco, changing as he goes until he completely realizes the work of art which he planned out for himself before the lobotomy. He is a slow-motion suicide, or a human metamorphosis. Something is happening. For myself, I cannot honestly say why I paid the price of admission, but once in the gallery I felt completely free from the qualms of conscience. The reason for that must be the same reason why, apparently, there is no legal justification for the police to interfere in the appearances, to stop Fare from pursuing a course that must end in his death, at least his death as a human being.

Andoff and Czervath were dismantling the equipment when I left. On the side of the jar, standing beside the birth certificate on the small table, was a label:

john fare
right hand
sept. 17

