

# Roger Calkins

Please come home

Art Johnston

1969

**Editors' Note:** Art Johnston is the former editor of the *South End* newspaper and disappeared into the West after his term of office ended last June.

SAN FRANCISCO—Journalism as novel. History as novelty. History as fiction. Our lives as fiction. Everybody else's life as a movie. *The Last Great Days of The State of California* as tomorrow's news today. *The Decline and Fall of Western Civilization* as a two-part Book of the Month Club Introductory Offer. An anecdote:

This is Detroit in exile. There are other people from Detroit out here; you run into them on the street; they are serving beer in your corner saloon; they turn up at your door unexpectedly. San Francisco/Berkeley is America in exile. It is the experience of our generation distilled, melted in a spoon, and run into your temples.

As I type, "Street Fightin' Man" explodes from our six-speaker Environmental Sound Concept that surrounds our crib (pat. pend.). There is fighting in the streets here. White youth fighting in the streets. "We're all niggers now!" a black student yelled from a tear-gassed crowd yesterday.

Many of the people who have lived here several years talk about the way it "used to be" on The Haight, or on The Avenue (Telegraph in Berkeley). In those days, it is said, you could walk down to Moe's or the Mediterranean any night and be sure to get an evening of good conversation, a bed and a lay.

People lament the death of the "love thing," the hippy thing.

"Where have all the flowers gone?" ask the tourists as they peer out of the tinted windows of their Grey Line Busses. They've been hassled by the cops till they moved to the mountains. They became anarchists independent craftsmen, or farmers.

Legions of runaway teen-age girls dribble through the streets. Like so much human saliva. Craving downers. Take one home for your buddies to bang, give her a dime, and turn her out.

Every revolution is preceded by a period of evangelical utopianism, and abandonment by many of the prevailing society; the sinking ship. The failure of the utopian promise results in disenchantment, increasing chaos and dysfunction. Timothy Leary is relegated to the back pages of your local underground paper.

The melting pot that was American society has boiled over here, and chrome, neon, vermouth, sequined panties and prescription amphetamine spill down the hilly boulevards of the Barbary Coast like avant garde goo oozing out of your double boiler all over your enamel-baked Westinghouse combo oven-incubator deep-fry self-cleaning char-broiler stove.

Art shops. The more fortunate of the disaffiliated have learned to sell their wares to the chic galleries and acrylic-delic fashion shops of Ghiradelli Square. Your standard West Coast long-term dropout has a couple kids now, drives the municipal street car (he's almost accepted, the way other Caucasian ethnic groups came to be accepted eventually), and quietly does his acid with friends in his Noe Valley flat.

On the streets, swarms of middle-management Nixonites, secondary characters in a Kafka movie, are lured into the cunt galleries of Broadway by the slick clean-shaven young barkers ("Step inside folks. It doesn't cost anything to take a peek.") to have their brains and their pocketbooks sucked off at \$4 a drink. Looking uncannily like

those caricatures of obese capitalists in the Daily Worker, wearing furs and bowler hats, the wealthy-looking, and just-looking and the just-visiting mingle in the North Beach streets with the long haired proletariat; their own sons and daughters somewhere in the stream of events: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS CHILD? ANYONE KNOWING THE WHEREABOUTS OF ROGER CALKINS, MISSING SINCE SEPT. 1956, PLEASE CONTACT HIS MOTHER IN KANSAS CITY.

Friday night. We stumble into the Berkeley Free Church, myself and a couple of itinerant musicians from Raleigh, N.C. A guitar, a conga drum, and a mouth harp. We're a choir, sort of. ("Is this some sort of progressive church, Unitarian maybe?") It's the consecration. ("Shhh!") A felt pen poster in the vestibule: "No smoking stashing holding dealing." There's a priest saying mass. a real priest, a freak.

Antonioni has just finished a film here. People are doing all sorts of beatnik type things, but with this spirit of well, reverence. A black-leathered guerrilla crouches in a corner, reading the Barb. "Berkeley at War!" cry the 72 point headlines.

The national guard has been mobilized. Cops from 17 states have converged on this once-quaint college town to get a piece of the action.

In this humble setting, we are really moved. Strawberry incense wafts through the air, harmonizing with the quiet tones of a guitar being tuned in the vestibule. Safeway's finest Mountain Castle Burgundy (\$1.39 per gallon) is transubstantiated into the blood of the Gallilean revolutionary Jesus.

"Take and drink. May the blood of Jesus liberate us." Soon, no doubt, it will be sedition to drink consecrated Mountain Castle Burgundy. Over the altar hangs the banner of the Central Strike Committee. The only icon is a poster of Huey Newton. This is the anniversary of Malcolm X's death, and the preacher man, Fr. Richard York, dwells on this trip.

Outside, roving bands of anarchists and student revolutionaries roam the streets, overturning cars, venting frustrations. The streets around the university have been cosmetized with Mace, tear gas, broken glass, and double Y chromosome blood.

Through the haze of gas on Telegraph Avenue, one can notice the large display in the window of Discount Records: The MC5. Perchance it is not typical of record stores across the land.

Meanwhile, we fortify our single Y chromosomes with the blood of Jesus out of earthenware chalices. History now is flowing in your veins brother. Some hungry kid, who probably hasn't eaten in several days, is gorging on Christ's flesh. Christ must have been made of sour dough French bread. The flesh of gods is good prole food for revolutionaries.

It wasn't a couple years ago these people would have been gaily bouncing around this same building in bilious paisley clothing and day-glo paint faces. Now, in army fatigues, they slowly chew their bread and chant "God is love."

This whole scene, this whole effervescent, bacterial Growth that is the West Coast is gonna fall in the fuckin' ocean.

We know. We've consulted all these geologicoseismological books, and looked at all their pictures of crumpled Mideastern towns, studied old city charts, thrown the I Ching ("You will go South. You will come up into an empty city."), and learned that our little white bungalow on the side of a hill, a home for between five and ten fugitives, thieves, and artists, is built on a shelf of rock which overhangs the San Andreas fault. We can survive an earthquake of 6.3 on the Richter scale. The 1906 quake was 8.6 on the Richter scale: existential dread.

One of the cats crashing with us, a dispossessed pirate with a gold ring through his ear ("Yea, It means you've been around the cape") lived through an earthquake in Iran. He said all the houses were built of camel shit, so they caved in, and the roofs fell in, killing all the wretched sonofabitches. Our house isn't built of camel shit. It's built of synthetic camel shit: that stucco plastic mortar indigenous to Spanish Missions and California bungalows.

Someday the irradiated, nucleated remnant of Caucasianism, Cholesterol Man, will posthumously reflect on the whole West Coast as a latter day Sodom and Gomorah, buried in tons of mud, vice, perversion, political deviance, salt water, semen and bad thoughts; and hermetically sealed forever by a ten foot thick oil slick, which will be perpetually fed by the 180 Union Oil Company off-shore wells raptured in the Great and Awesome Quake of '69.

In order to prevent the North American Continent from being subsumed under a sea of petroleum (a fitting death, perhaps, for technocybernetic civilization), the Department of the Interior will ignite the thick black cum,

and a perpetual and monstrous flame will ignite the Pacific night: a warning to all mankind to never again permit the decadence which thrived like vermin along our Western shores.

# fifth Estate

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