

Pyramid Poop Susan Martin

Moving to 6th Street between A and B was a real disappointment. It was 1982 and me and Mike Gira couldn't afford the sublet on 10th, a much nicer apartment on a much nicer block. Of course, that's not saying a lot since Tompkins Square Park across the street was a kind of no man's land and "must to avoid." Skirt yes; traverse, no. So we traipsed over to our wrecked tenement apartment on a block with a social club, an athletic club, and a locals bar perfectly placed across from my digs.

I was a broke, crazy L.A. post-punk performance art/new music kind of girl. Mike and I met at a Hermann Nitsch performance that I produced in L.A. We fell in love in the midst of the cacophony and blood and guts of Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theater*. We decamped for New York motivated by Suicide and No Wave and Mike's nose for decay. We scrounged around for money, took acid, went to TR3 and other clubs with Kim and Thurston—following the noisiest, messiest, most transgressive people around town.

I thought everyone was an asshole except my friends and they were the finest and most passionate bunch of creators in the world to me. Lydia Lunch had recently asked me to manage her, though at the time, we were both completely unmanageable. I was looking for a place to put on Rhys Chatham and one of his ear-splitting guitar fugues. One afternoon, as I was strolling along Avenue A, I noticed a group of flamboyant people coming and going from a bar. I stumbled into the dark, stanky interior and met Brian (aka Hattie Hathaway) and that superbly beautiful soul, Bobby Bradley.

Of course they'd be happy to have Rhys perform. Of course, we could split the door. Of course we did blow in the downstairs office to seal the deal. The turnout for the show surprised us all and I staggered home from the Pyramid with \$600 stashed in my panty hose and a glass of the club's "cognac" in my hand. I say cognac in quotes because Pyramid cognac was mostly cheap scotch, but I didn't care: I'd found a home, and shortly thereafter, a job.

Bobby hired me to do PR for the club, my first client. Prior to moving to New York, I didn't even know PR was a job. And working with Bobby and Brian, it wasn't. It was an exercise in absurdity—a ridiculous expression of the creative juices flowing in the club. It was heady times: Reagan was President, crack was epidemic, Pat Buchanan was preaching hatred from his pulpit, Michael Stewart was martyred, Ed Koch was mayor, and AIDS—and the devastation and heartbreak it wrought upon all of us—was looming on the horizon.

The Pyramid was my muse and Brian Butterick was my partner in crime. I've been a publicist ever since and I have never been able to duplicate the magic—attitude, satire, and "voice"—of those press releases we wrote in the basement every week. We dedicated each release to a theme and riffed all around it. We addressed our audience directly: we harangued and harassed them. In other words, the releases epitomized the satire and social commentary of the club.

The entire month of September 1983 our theme was FISH "for no particular reason except a deep and abiding respect for their perseverance and friendship in the face of man's polluting and corrupting influence." We saluted "The Idiots of the Sea: scrod, fluke, sea cucumbers and urchins." That week alone featured more than 100 individual artists, musicians, and performers including Ann Magnuson as Alice Tully Hall, Tom Murrin's *Full Moon Show*, John Epperson, Christian Marclay, Ming Vauze, John Kelly, John Sex, and Johanna Went.

We poked fun at all the sacred cows. We equated the birth of the Pyramid to the birth of Christ. We parodied the big, slick clubs: *The Pyramid may just be the size of the a post-mortem Rubell bathroom, but we all know that bathrooms are the hottest spot at any club.*

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We stretched metaphors, attributing the club's appeal to Oscar Wildean humor and Richard Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: *In no other club in NYC is this concept of the total work of art as passionate vision of artistic genius, individual ecstasy, erotic sublimations and protest against alienation so evident.*

We wrote of Ethyl Eichelberger's *Real Pearls and Teeth of Marie Antoinette* that the stunning period piece included intelligent historical commentary, a be-wigged cast of thousands, and a rare personal audience with the Queen... The crowd went wild at the beheading and left convinced that in many ways 18th century France and NYC 1983 resemble each other more than a little.

We especially made fun of ourselves and our audience: *Rather than dwell on another year of pestilence, volcano eruptions, fashion wars at the Summit in Geneva, Hurricane Gloria's being such a bust, David Lee Roth's bald spot and Stephen Stills' inability to sing on key when you loved CSN so much...*

A release entitled *The Pyramid Wants to Be Your Eyeglasses—Even if You Don't Need Them* starts this way: *Our lives are but the briefest flicker in Time and in order not to squander one precious moment, the Pyramid advises everyone to think deeply about the CONTENT submerged below the stylish façade of everyday life. We don't like to READ you. The laundry list of terrors of modern day life are what bars are for: To comfort. To offer solice. To provide amusement. We know our place, but can't help being uppity. We like to make strong statements because it stimulates debate. We like debate because it stirs up ideas. Sound pretentious, you say? Too intellectual? Too boring for words? Well, when you've seen it all and done it all, remember, nothing is TOO SACRED to be spared the razor-sharp scrutiny of the Pyramid—not even YOU!*

Bobby eventually fired and then rehired me. Thank you Michael Musto for reminding me in *Downtown*. What I do remember is that we changed the name of the releases to Pyramid Poop deliberating using the Volume and Number system of scholarly periodicals.

This Volume sums up the spirit of my collaboration with Brian and Bobby and all the drag queens and poets and playwrights and musicians and bar dancers and artistes that changed my life. I offer it now as a taste of what this exhibition and those times meant to all of us:

Whitewashing the Picket Fence

Today there is a frightening, new unity in the vast morass of public opinion. The powers-that-be have tarted up the crumbling picket fence enclosing America by telling and selling you your own self-image. Your ideology is weight-trained by the laconic muscularity of Sly Stallone. Your sexuality is transplanted onto the gyrating hips of Jane Fonda and Jamie Lee Curtis. On the street, a dingy gay bathhouse gives way in three days to a neon-embossed girlie review. On TV, newspeak informs us that Mrs. Reagan won the day in her evening-wear from Paris. In print, *The New York Times Magazine* says renew your Visa card and you, too, can live the "bohemian life." Well, listen and learn! Thought isn't stifled. Style isn't dictated. Fun isn't dead. In memory of this encroachingly holy season, go back to your own Amerikan dream house and speak your mind! Tell us who, what, and where you are. Give us hell, complain, write that letter to the editor. Then, refreshed from this soul-searching endeavor, come down to the Pyramid where the partisans of the American cultural war are fighting for your rights. And on the way, pick up a can of white paint—so in one evening you can find out how to make your outside as pretty as what lives within.

The Editors, Brian Butterick and Susan Martin