

Art has served the king, and when it has not served the king it has waited anxiously outside the palace; sometimes posing as a ferocious child, at other times, the wise neglected beggar.

Now science, the concubine of bourgeoisie society, has inadvertently created a toy that has the potential for being the base of a revolution in sensibility: the face we see is our own; the voices we hear are those of our children; the time we experience has the rhythm of our years, minutes and days; we hear our ignorance, we see ourselves in parody, frightened, surprisingly beautiful, ordinary, totally existentially present in the apparent flow.

How long will this age of innocence persist? This democracy of forms? It is not universal, to be sure, it is still a fragile network...But this frag-

Notes on the Evolution of Baltimore

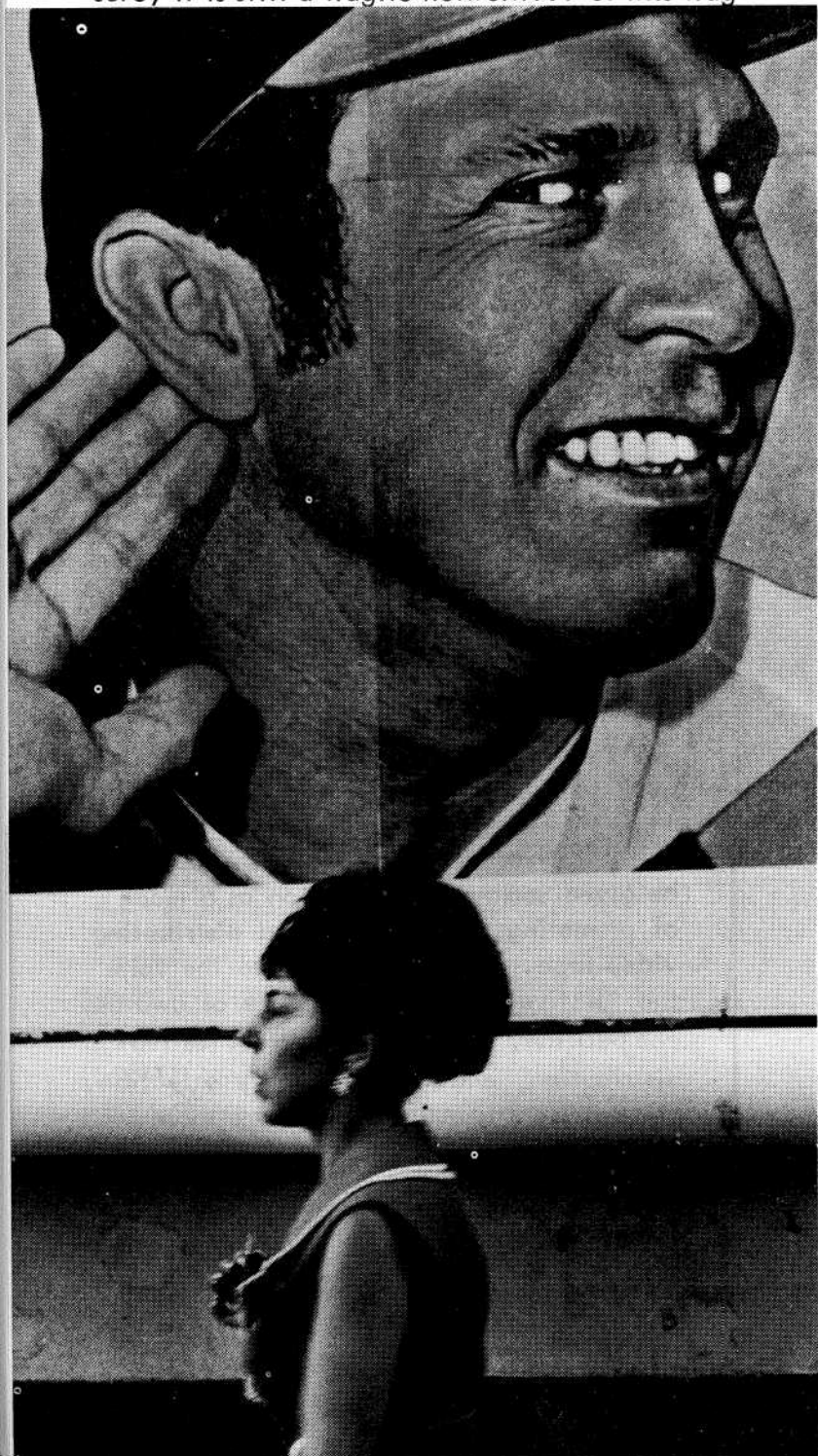
ility is already being hustled, hustled, packaged and sold. The huckster impulse, root of all American rip-off dreams, moves the mind that moves the instrument! Could it be otherwise? Already we see that contests are being held. What might have been the people's forum is becoming a forum for the egocentric, crowd-pleasing mask-making of the artistic mask-maker. This pleases the king. It puts the game back into perspective.

The entrepreneur and profiteer in art is threatened by video. Does this mean that excellence will be superseded by a marketplace of mediocrity? No - but simply that we have no right to use a prior notion of excellence, a preconceived idea of the marketplace...Yet, how impossible this sounds! How inappropriate! Perhaps the real visionaries have already pressed on to other places. Perhaps video is already over. Now it remains for the huckster to take command. Video kings and queens for a day will be created and their images will be consumed by those hooked on the consumption of approved merchandise.

But what if art could die only to be reborn more impressively and uniquely relevant to our human destiny than ever before? I see this happening in Baltimore! I see the flower growing cautiously and wildly out of the swamp.

The best tapes to be born in Baltimore have come out of the experience of the people of Baltimore, the people of Canton, the people of Fells Point, the people of Highlandtown, the people of East Baltimore, the people in the Charles Center.

Significantly, the content is judged for its entertainment value - the pain is remarkably photogenic;





the words that flow from the suffering make picturesque metaphors, laughable analogies, frightening but empty threats. The audience yawns; the hustlers are nervous: they search for the right words; the sales pitch varies but the end is the same: to exchange flesh for gold: to exchange pain for success: to make the victim palatable to the king.

We can own our masks: we can dare to playback our lives to the audience of ourselves. Out of this might come a powerful and uniquely revolutionary historical narcissism: for the love of ourselves we may seize control of our destiny. Can we expect that the vipers will allow this liberation to occur? Collectivism is already an arm of the law: whole armies of parasites now tend the wounded, slain, and insane losers. The busiest hustlers will try to sell us back to ourselves. Some say that it will never change.

I am an artist: I assert: I advocate: I find the territory: I call to the settlers: what will become of the territory?

robert harding

