

Chasing Film

Like Rome, San Francisco is a city of hills. Nob Hill is crowned with jewels, such as Grace Episcopal Cathedral and the Fairmont Hotel. Not far away was another jewel, the Nob Hill Cinema. Opened by Cliff Newman, it was the City's gay-porn star. I hadn't been in the City long before I decided to check out Newman's Nob Hill.

Lady-Parking-Luck was with me. I maneuvered my pickup truck into a space on Bush Street, less than a block from the Nob Hill. I hoped another Poole classic such as *Bijou* might be playing. The old marquee out over the sidewalk said no-such-luck. I paid my money and went in. As soon as I entered the small auditorium I knew what the feature was. The triple-X action by naked men up on the big screen was not the main attraction. It was a catalyst. The critical mass of men cruising the aisles was the main event.

I saw a passage to a room behind the screen. I entered that room and saw men come and go, looking for Michelangelo's David. I had a follower. A young Castro-ite with mustache, crotch-worn Levi's, work boots, and plaid shirt had followed me into the back room. I ducked into an empty open alcove. Within seconds the young lumberjack was down on his knees in front of me, fumbling with my fly. Seconds later, I saw Mr. Toad. He too had sidled into the alcove and was about to get on his knees. I knew this would not work.

"Back up six feet!" I ordered. With my brown leather motorcycle jacket and close-cropped hair and beard, I projected an aura of authority. My young friend from the Castro looked up at me. My eyes said stay. Mr. Toad knew the order was for him. He backed up five feet and rubbed his crotch.

"Another foot," I ordered.

He backed up another foot.

“Get that cock out!” I commanded. “Now!”

Mr. Toad pulled his zipper down and his meat out. It was a large, handsome, uncut cock. At the same time, the lumberjack pulled out my equipment and went down on it. Mr. Toad started to jack off, watching the blow job. This was terrific.

“Did I tell you to jerk off?”

“No sir!”

“Stop!” I ordered. He quit jacking off. I waited a minute while Mr. Castro worked on my tool. He had his own cock out now and was stroking it to the rhythm of the blow job he gave.

“Start!” I ordered Mr. Toad. He started jacking off again.

Between “stop” and “start” I soon had all in sync. It was like calling out cadence for my college ROTC drill sergeant.

Mr. Toad came first. Then Mr. Castro made his deposit at my feet. I let out a rebel yell and released my load. I like this theater, I thought. I’ll be back.

The summer I was 17, I ran away to Milwaukee for the weekend. I saw Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. I saw Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*. I knew these were not movies. They were films. I was bitten by the film bug. Back in the day, before videos and DVDs, before the Internet, before Netflix, film buffs went to foreign and art film theaters. In most cities they were scarce. Not so in San Francisco.

San Francisco in the 1970s was the gay man’s paradise, the leatherman’s Valhalla, and the Elysian Fields for film aficionados.

One Sunday afternoon, soon after I moved to the City, Jack Fritscher packed four of us into his Toyota Land Cruiser. We headed for the Lumiere Theatre, at California and Polk, to see the work of Alejandro Jodorowsky. It was a double feature: *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*. Jack had told me about this Russian Jewish director, born in Chile, who worked in Paris and Mexico, but I had never seen any of his work before.

Jodorowsky, along with Fernando Arrabal from Spain and the French surrealist Roland Topor, were instrumental in initiating an artistic movement referred to as *El Panico*. *Panic!* It centered on terror and humor simultaneously. It alluded to the great god Pan.

“Why didn’t we get crowds like this at our film fests?” I asked

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while we waited in the packed lobby of the Lumiere. Jack Fritscher and I had collaborated on our own film fests in a Great Lakes college town BSF: Before San Francisco.

“You didn’t wear leather,” Jack quipped. The crowd, nearly all male, was overwhelmingly skewed toward leather. You could smell it. From the leather vests to the Levi’s with chaps, it smelled male.

El Topo, a Zen-surreal-spaghetti western, takes the viewer beyond the most vivid imagination of any early Eastwood. The scene of the Colonel’s collection of testicles in formaldehyde is not for the faint of heart. The second feature, *The Holy Mountain*, leads the cast through a series of scenes of ritual death and rebirth. The excrement of a thief is transformed by an alchemist into gold.

The cast journeys to Lotus Island for the secret of immortality; all ascend the holy mountain to confront their worst fears. *El Panico!* The immortals are shown to be faceless mannequins. We, the audience, see cameras, lights, and the film crew lurking just to the side of the film set. All are told to leave.

We left. Exhausted. Late that night, I migrated from reel to real at the Slot, a heavy-leather bathhouse on Folsom Street. I fisted two lovers simultaneously on the floor, while a military Minotaur squeezed their balls until they found the secret of immortality. Pan peeked in and then pranced on. San Francisco in the 1970s.

On 16th Street, near my bank, the Mission branch of Wells Fargo, was the Roxie Theatre. It was old and run-down. A small glass ticket cage was perched out by the sidewalk, where it would be easy to rob. The carpet inside stuck to the soles of your boots from decades of spilled drinks, popcorn and jujubes.

A five-dollar bill bought an annual membership. Films were 50 cents for members. It screened some of the hottest films in town. I walked by one evening and saw *Guernica Tree* on the sagging marquee that jutted over the sidewalk. I had seen Fernando Arrabal’s *Viva la Muerte* but never his *L’arbre de Guernica*. I went in.

Guernica Tree, set during the Spanish Civil War, opens with

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Count Cerralbo lecturing his black-sheep son Goya on the positive fine points of Franco and fascism. They share a glass of brandy in the baronial family library. While the old man lectures, young Goya masturbates into his crystal brandy snifter. He shoots his seed into the imported Cognac. He sets the snifter on his father's desk.

"What is that?" the Count asks in English subtitles across the bottom of the screen.

"That, Father, is a little bit of the only thing you ever gave me," Goya responds in subtitles.

Civil War in Spain during the late 1930s pitted fascist Francisco Franco and the Church against the Crown and the Spanish Republic. The film's anti-fascist imagery seems blasphemous to some. Arrabal allows his viewers to see scenes of anti-fascist forces smashing statues of Jesus, pissing on porcelain figurines of Christ, smearing semen on the lips of the Virgin Mother.

Dwarfs and midgets play roles in Arrabal's film, as they did in Spanish royal courts and Velasquez's paintings in the 17th century. Here they are neither companions for royal children nor clowns of the bullring. They are dressed as bulls and slaughtered in the ring by butchers disguised as *toreros* for the pleasure of Franco's gentry. Death in the afternoon.

Arrabal allows the viewer to peek at yet another scene: a naked child blithely playing in a room of human skulls.

I left the Roxie, stunned by the grotesque, surrealistic chaos of Arrabal's anti-war film. It brought to mind images of Buddhist monks torching themselves to stoical death and naked Vietnamese children running, screaming, in napalm pain. These images had recently played nightly on TV screens across America.

I got back to my flat on Clementina around midnight. Someone was lurking in the shadows of the stoop by my door.

"Can I help you?" I said in my deepest voice.

"Jim, it's Michael." Michael Monroe, the signature leatherman seen through the keyhole of my Keyhole Studios. The man pulling the logging chain from his ass. "Ready for the Catacombs?"

"Let's go up for a minute first." I had an idea. I unlocked the door and we headed up to my flat. The Catacombs was a very

private club in the cellars of an old Victorian house at the edge of the Mission District. It was founded by Steve McEachern. You had to be invited there by a member. Michael had first invited me. If you passed muster, you might be invited back by Steve. I had been invited back.

In the kitchen, at the back of the flat, I got down two thrift-store brandy snifters from the top shelf of the built-in breakfront. I blew the dust off them. I got out a small bottle of Courvoisier I had been saving for a special occasion. I poured two fingers in each snifter. We sat facing each other, I, in a canvas director's chair, Michael on a leather ottoman I bought in Tangiers.

I told Michael of the encounter between Count Cerralbo and his son Goya in the Arrabal film. I took out my cock. So did Michael. I was getting a hard on. So was Michael. I dipped the head of my dick in the Courvoisier. So did Michael. We watched each other jack off and shoot in our brandies. We exchanged glasses, drank to each other's pleasure, snorted a couple of lines, took a Quaalude, and headed for the Catacombs.

That night at the Catacombs I thought again of Arrabal when Dennis, an ex-monk dwarf, slid his thalidomide arms deep into the bowels of willing penitents who floated on a crowded waterbed in the underground chambers. We emerged with Orpheus as the sun came up. San Francisco. 1970s.

Sometime later, at a Roxie Theatre matinee, I saw *Iphigenia*, the last of Michael Cacoyannis' trilogy on the Trojan War. The film opens with thousands of naked Greek soldiers wrestling and cavorting in mock-military movements on a sandy beach along the Aegean. They wait for war. The thousand ships the faithless Helen launched lie listless in the sea, waiting for the wind. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's royal daughter, Iphigenia, must be sacrificed to raise the wind.

Cacoyannis employs a chorus of young Greek soldiers to advance the drama, rather than the traditional tragic women in black. It's breathtaking. The viewer sees the sacrificial knife meant for Iphigenia descend, but not her death. As in the ancient myths, the audience is left to speculate not only on her fate, but also on the personal sacrifices of all citizens vis-à-vis the state.

War was still very much on men's minds in the 1970s. Vietnamese boat people and refugees continued to stream into San Francisco.

When I left the Roxie it was still light. I drove out to Lands End for the rest of the afternoon. After following a rocky trail fraught with feral cats, I found the small patch of sandy beach in a little cove where men sunbathe nude. At first I thought I had the place to myself. I stripped and lay back on the coarse sand. It was then, when I was lying down, that I could see a naked man. He was only three or four feet from me, next to a depression in the sand. His eyes were closed. Rock outcroppings hid us from both the Pacific and the bay, but not from each other.

I lay down and, after a moment, I stretched out my arm to touch him casually, as if by accident. The second I touched his flesh I felt the iron grip of his fist pull my arm back behind me, flip me over on my belly, and straddle my back. I was pinned in the classic takedown I had been taught to avoid in high school wrestling class.

I struggled. Neither of us said a word. I could feel his weight along my back. From what I'd seen of him, before he'd pinned me, I knew he outweighed me by a good 20 pounds. I'd also seen he was uncut.

His forefathers must have traveled across time from Ithaca, on the shores of Ionia, to become fishermen by San Francisco Bay. His hands were rough and cracked. I felt his naturally lubricated cockhead enter. I struggled. A little. Then I relaxed into the inevitable as he bucked into my butt. I shot my wad along my belly pressed into the coarse cool sand.

I lay there panting lightly and stared out between two boulders. An aircraft carrier slid under the Golden Gate Bridge and headed for the open seas of the Pacific. It was the nuclear-powered *USS Enterprise*. It had been docked in Oakland. Had some Iphigenia been sacrificed so it could set sail to avenge an honor allegedly lost in the jungles of Vietnam?

I started to get up and realized I was no longer pinned down by Odysseus. I looked around. He was gone. I heard the engine of a small fishing boat putt-putting off into the bay. I put on my

pants and left.

During that interim, between my sojourn with Jack Fritscher on 25th Street, and moving into the “dump” on Clementina Alley, I shared an apartment on Noe Street for a couple of months with Sheldon, from Brooklyn via L.A. The apartment was close to the Castro and cruising. Sometimes we both felt the need to get away from the neighborhood for a while.

“Want to see a movie tonight?” Sheldon said.

“Why not? Got anything in mind?” He did.

“There’s a movie I saw in LaLa Land last fall. You wouldn’t believe it.”

“Where is it?”

“Out at the Surf.”

The Surf Theatre was way out on Irving Street in The Avenues, not far from the beach. It was an independent art theater that served wine, espresso, and pastries. It was not easy to get there on public transportation. Sheldon had sold his car in L.A. before moving to the City. I, on the other hand, had Nelly Belle, my pickup.

“What’s the film?”

“*Rocky Horror Picture Show*.”

“What’s it about?”

“That’s hard to say. You got to see it to believe it.”

“Let’s go.”

When Sheldon and I pulled up by the Surf Theatre on a Tuesday night, the street parking was plentiful. We were the only ones in the auditorium. Evidently the film’s reputation had not preceded it. It wasn’t until it moved to the Strand Theater, on Market Street near the Tenderloin, and was shown at midnight, did *Rocky Horror* take on its cult status that swept across the nation.

The genre-blending film that mixed horror, musical comedy, and science fiction in a gender-bending sing-along had snuck into San Francisco by the back door. By the time I left the City, in the early 1980s, there were lines down Market Street waiting to get in. By then the audience wore costumes from the film, memorized the dialog, and shouted it out in the auditorium. Once, a school-teacher waiting in line on the sidewalk was stabbed. Everybody

applauded, thinking it was a skit from the film.

The Clay Theatre was another art cinema in the Surf Theatre Group. I saw Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* there. Wertmüller, a Swiss-Italian disciple of Federico Fellini, was the first female nominated for an Academy Award as director. *Seven Beauties* was Wertmüller's fourth film in which she used Giancarlo Giannini as her male lead. Set in Nazi Germany, Giannini plays Pasqualino, a handsome young Italian deserter. He's captured and sent to a German concentration camp, where he catches the eye of the fat female commandant of the camp, loosely based on Ilse Koch, known as "the Bitch of Buchenwald." Pasqualino tries to convince her he is too weak from starvation to have sex with her.

"First you eat," she tells him. "Then we fuck. No fuck, kaput."

He manages to survive. After the war Pasqualino returns to his Sicilian village to find that his seven sisters, fiancée, and mother have all also become prostitutes in order to survive.

Lina Wertmüller's next film, *A Night Full of Rain*, also starred Giannini, this time opposite Candice Bergen, in a love-hate relationship. Filmed in English, it is set in Rome and San Francisco. It opened not at an art house as her earlier works had, but at the Regency, a first-run theater on Sutter near Polk Street. Some had begun to suggest Wertmüller was less than cutting edge, while others saw her as a misogynist; her films as sexist.

A Night Full of Rain had a special screening at the Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley. Wertmüller herself would be there for a Q&A. I decided to take BART across the Bay to meet her. The place was packed. I was the only man in the auditorium. After the screening, Lina Wertmüller, in her trademark white-frame glasses, came on stage for the Q&A. Most of the questions came from a feminist point of view and sounded slightly hostile. Wertmüller held her own. Finally, when the program was ready to wrap up, Wertmüller stepped away from the podium, hesitant. She then stepped back again.

"Ladies," she said, "I have a surprise for you." She gestured stage left. Out onto the stage strode Giancarlo Giannini, exuding his dark Italian masculine charm.

The audience was silent. Then, from the back of the room,

a woman, with a Janis Joplin voice, belted out “Lina, where did you get that hunk!”

The Castro Theatre was the crown jewel of San Francisco’s cinema world. On Castro Street, near 17th and Market, its large vertical neon sign announced *Castro*, welcoming the world to the gay ghetto as much as to the theater itself. The old theater looked like a movie palace should look. While watching the 1936 camp classic *San Francisco*, the audience would sing along with Jeanette McDonald and cheer on Clark Gable.

In late 1976 the Surf Theatre Group, under the management of Mel Novikoff, leased the Castro Theatre. In November they advertised for a new manager. I applied. So did Jack Fritscher. I had experience managing the thousand-seat Campus Theatre and organizing film festivals. Jack had taught film interpretation and organized his own film fests both on and off campus. One of us was bound to get the job. Neither did. The films at the Castro got even better, however, and the audiences grew. The Castro Theatre polished itself as an icon of the gay community.

Once I was standing in a long line at the Castro to get tickets for Rainer Fassbinder’s *Fox and His Friends*. The line consisted mostly of young men in Levi’s and Lacoste polo shirts sporting a tiny alligator. There was an elderly couple ahead of me in line. He wore a gray mustache and a wool herringbone three-piece suit that said “tenured professor.” She had her gray hair in a bun and wore a double strand of pearls. Her boxy wool-tweed suit and sensible shoes suggested a research librarian. They were discussing film.

“What most people don’t realize,” she said, “is that in 1935 Hitchcock’s *39 Steps* set the style for sophisticated banter between the sexes for decades.”

“But the *best* scene,” he said, “is where Robert Donat jumps off the train onto the Firth of Forth Bridge and escapes. It made my hair stand on end.”

“What little you have,” she teased, as she put her arm around his waist.

Just then a Pontiac Screaming Eagle Firebird pulled up and

stopped in front of the Castro Theatre. It was filled with teenage boys.

“Cocksucker!” they shouted out the open windows, then squealed their tires and were gone. The ticket line was silent.

“Oh dear,” the elderly woman said, “I wonder if they were referring to me?”

The ticket line burst into laughter.

Fassbinder’s *Fox*, although the main characters are gay, is more a film about working-class values versus upper-class values. It’s a film about the exploitation of love. The couple portrayed happens to be gay. Some thought the film homophobic, some thought it too pessimistic. Most Fassbinder films offended somebody. It was New German Cinema.

If burgeoning Political Correctness was finding Lina Wertmüller not the feminist it had hoped she was, and the gay Rainer Werner Fassbinder not gay enough, Political Correctness was absolutely horrified by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

The Italian film director’s battered body was found in Ostia, the ancient deserted seaport of Rome, in 1975. He had been murdered by a young male prostitute. Many thought the youth had not acted alone, and that Pasolini’s murder was politically motivated.

Pasolini had enraged the Vatican in 1964, with his film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. He enraged the Church plus nearly everyone else with the last film he made, *Salo or the 120 Days of Sodom*. Based loosely on the work of the Marquis de Sade, but set in the Republic of Salò in northeastern Italy during the waning days of Mussolini, *Salo* is roughly filmed in four segments similar to those in Dante’s *Inferno*.

Nine young men and nine young women are sadistically-sexually exploited for the pleasure of their captors, the reigning men of power in Salò: the Duke, the Bishop, the Magistrate, and the President. One of the most egregious scenes involved the forced feeding of human feces. Elliot Stein, a freelance writer for *The Village Voice* and a friend of Luc’s in New York, told me he had flown to Rome when *Salo* was being filmed to interview the young actors. He was curious if they felt “damaged” by the

scatological scenes. While he chatted with them on the set, they continued to snack on the faux-feces of chocolate and nuts. Stein concluded they did not feel “damaged.”

When first released, *Salò* was banned in most places throughout the world. In San Francisco the tiny Cento Cedar Cinema, near Geary and Polk Streets, had the courage to screen the film. To the shock of some viewers, they found themselves turned on by certain aspects of the sadistic sex scenes.

Paul Hatlestad, a friend of mine who saw *Salò* at the same time I did, returned from the lobby with popcorn and sat in the wrong row. Thinking he was sitting next to Steve Barnett, the man he came with, Paul reached over and placed a man’s hand on his hardening cock to indicate he was turned on by the film. But it wasn’t Steve’s hand. Steve Barnett thought it was a great pickup move.

One night I picked up a man at Allan Lowery’s Leatherneck Bar at 11th and Folsom. I brought him back to The Other Room. After we finished our fantasy—I forget now if it was Coach & Jock or Frat Boy & Pledge Master—we started talking film. Wakefield Poole’s name came up.

“Have you ever seen any of Poole’s films?” I asked.

“I sure have,” Paul said.

“I’ve only seen *Boys in the Sand*,” I said. “I’d love to see some of his other work, especially *Bijou* or even *Bible*.” *Bijou*, starring Big-Dick Bill Harrison, had been critiqued as having a certain sexual *film noir* quality about it. *Wakefield Poole’s Bible* was his only soft-core straight film.

“I might be able to arrange something,” Paul said.

I wasn’t quite sure what Paul meant. We exchanged phone numbers and drove down to Castro Street for early morning cocktails. We slipped into The Elephant Walk, a bar at 18th and Castro that had a beautiful large stained glass work over the bar. It was of a charging elephant, reminiscent of the Rock Hudson-Elizabeth Taylor film of the same name. It somehow survived the cops’ revenge attack on the Castro during the White Night Riots. I found out later it was the work of Michael Palmer, my roommate for a while up at the Russian River.

It was close to two weeks before Paul called. We both had been busy.

“Would you like to come over Friday night to see a Wakefield Poole film?” he said.

“Absolutely,” I said. I had read about Wakefield Poole’s films, read how this past-his-prime ballet dancer had moved behind the camera and turned gay porn into art-film-chic that even straights were lining up to see.

Paul gave me an address out on Fell by the Panhandle near Golden Gate Park. The place was the top two floors of a restored Victorian. To reach it you climbed a high narrow interior stairway past the first-floor apartment with its 15-foot ceilings. Paul was at the top of the long staircase. So were about 20 other hot men. I knew a few of them. Most I didn’t.

“Wake’s ready to start if everybody will come upstairs,” Paul said. Had Paul meant Wake as in Wakefield Poole? He had. I grabbed a cold one from the kitchen sink loaded with ice and Olys and headed up the last flight of stairs to the attic screening room. I saw Allan Lowery and sat down on the floor next to him. The film was about to start. Allan held a small brown bottle up to his nose and inhaled deeply. Poppers, I thought. He handed me the bottle. Not poppers. Coke. Good coke. I maneuvered the small bottle to refill the special cap and snorted. I did it again. Once for each nostril. I handed the treasure back.

On the large screen I saw a handsome young man packing things into boxes. I knew that guy. I’d had him over for a session when I still lived on Noe Street. In fact, I had taken some self-portraits with my fist up his ass. It was Terry Weekly. The screen credits called him Tom Wright, but it was Terry. Near the end of the film, Peter Fisk, the hot actor with the tattooed forearms, pulled his arm and a stainless steel ball out of Terry/Tom’s ass. Up on the screen, it rolled across the floor of the empty apartment and into the corner. We had just been treated to a private screening of Wakefield Poole’s new film, *Moving*.

The lights came back on. Barely. Men had started to couple-up, or triple-up, recreating some of the scenes we had just watched on the screen. I found myself with a lithe young redheaded dancer

from Eugene, Oregon, I had wanted for a long time. David's nipples were a perfect titty-pink, his ass a dusty rose. His freckled supple body could bend in any position I wanted it to.

I came back to the house on Fell Street. Several times. I finally met Wakefield Poole in person. He was Paul Hatlestad's lover. One night I saw all of Wakefield's films. There were just the two of us in his attic screening room. Fueled by Wake's free coke, the films went on forever. What a divine obsession. Wake would stop the film, we would each snort a couple of lines off an antique mirror, then he would tell me how he had shot the preceding scene.

Wake offered me work on *Mirrors*, a new film he was shooting. As carpenter, I made a three-panel folding screen for Mylar mirrors and rear-projection-screen inserts. Cal Culver, aka Casey Donovan, the star of *Boys in the Sand*, was filmed jacking off in front of the mirrors. Partway through the filming the mirrors were replaced with the rear-projection panels. Projected onto the panels was prefilmed footage of blond Lewis deVries, as Cal's chauffeur, jacking off. The Mylar mirrors didn't work the way Wake wanted.

As photographer, I shot stills of Cal Culver during the filming. I learned that Culver could go all night without losing his hard-on and then cum-on-demand. I also got to take home the white boxer shorts that Culver had worn during the filming. They proved a great turn-on prop in *The Other Room*. As a bonus, Lewis deVries agreed to a three-way at my place.

Unfortunately *Mirrors* was never released.

Two years of high school Latin did not prepare me for the film *Sebastiane*. The sound track was Latin. Fortunately Derek Jarman's version of Saint Sebastian's martyrdom-by-arrows had English subtitles. Artwork depicting the bound arrow-pierced nearly-naked body of the third-century saint has been the stuff of homoerotic fantasies for centuries. Not just in the West either.

Japanese author Yukio Mishima, in *Confessions of a Mask*, not only wrote of climaxing over a copy of a 17th-century Guido Reni depiction of the bound and pierced saint, but he also posed and was photographed as the saint himself.

Although the film caused riots in some cities, when it opened at the Cento Cedar in San Francisco it did not disappoint. The naked Roman soldiers with full-frontal nudity and erections were far superior to anything in the Hollywood gladiator genre of the 1950s. If you liked gladiator movies when you were young, you were in ecstasy over *Sebastiane*.

Shortly after Luc and I had seen *Sebastiane*, we were going through the Pink Section of the San Francisco *Chronicle* looking for a good film.

"Here's one," Luc said. *Robert Gets His Nipple Pierced*.

"Can't imagine what that's about," I said. "Anything playing with it?"

"Yes!" Luc said, all excited now. "*Salome*!"

"Is that the John-the-Baptist's-head-on-a-platter *Salome*?" I said

"The very same. They're playing at the Art Institute up on Chestnut."

We were off.

Robert Gets His Nipple Pierced proved to be a short, hand-held camera documentary of Robert Mapplethorpe getting his nipple pierced. Definitely an underground experimental film.

"Who's Robert Mapplethorpe?" I whispered to Luc when it was over and they were switching projectors in the film department's screening room. We were seated on folding chairs. No popcorn. No jujubes. Not even espresso or seed cakes.

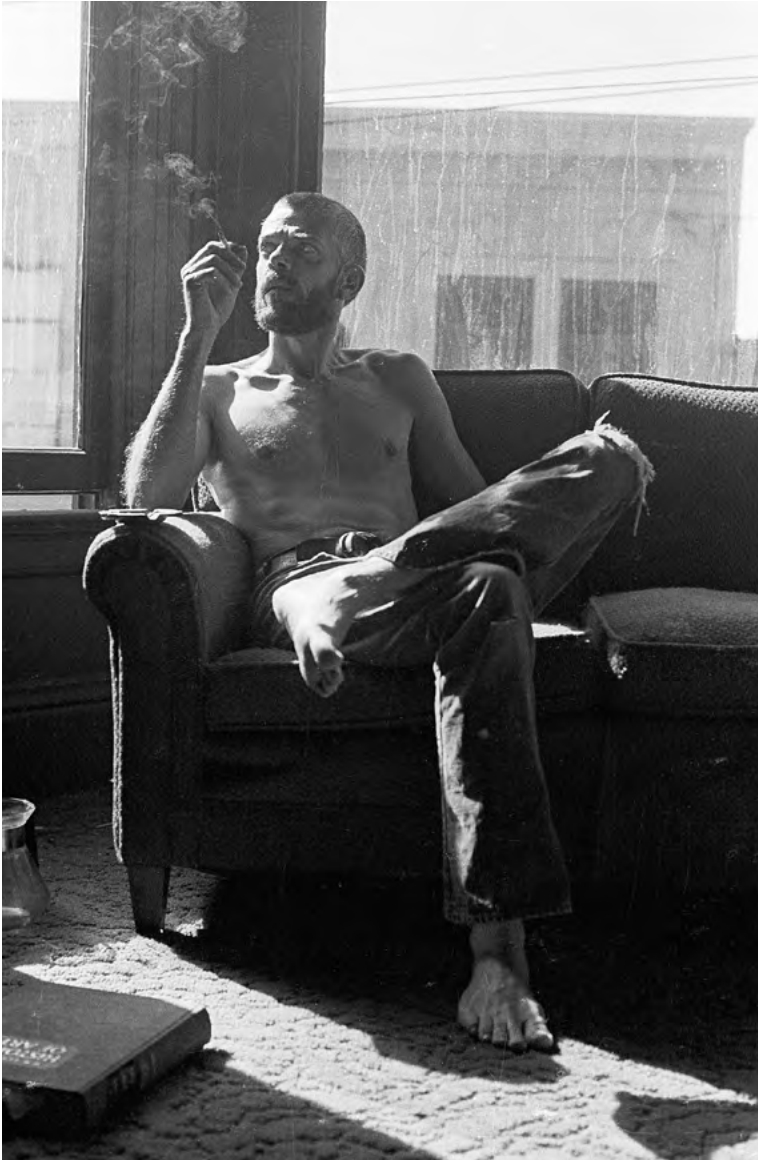
Luc shrugged. The main feature started.

Salome, a 1923 silent film, is an early art film shot in the United States. It is based on Oscar Wilde's play of the same name, a loose interpretation of John the Baptist and King Herod's daughter. The film sets matched the Aubrey Beardsley illustrations in the printed version of the play. Legend has it that the entire cast was either gay or bisexual.

At one point, as *Salome* approaches John the Baptist, the title for the silent action reads "Kiss me on the lips." The man of God refuses, and is sent off screen to lose his head. When his severed head is brought back on a silver charger, *Salome* lifts the lifeless head up by its hair and holds it next to her pussy. "Now kiss me

on the lips” reads the title across the bottom of the screen.

Luc was in Paris, visiting his mother, when Jack Fritscher brought Robert Mapplethorpe to San Francisco. I first met Mapplethorpe with Jack at Gene Weber’s place, thanks to Max Morales, a friend of Gene’s. Later the same night, on a party circuit, Max and I ran into Jack and Robert at a big blowout in Wakefield Poole’s attic. Who would have guessed this young Manhattanite-in-leather would become the heavyweight photographer who would soon scare the bejesus out of God’s right-wing bullies?



Jim with Cigarette

1977: auto-photograph by Jim Stewart at 766 Clementina Street. Chuck Arnett, David Hurles, Bill Essex and others once lived in building across the street, seen out the window.

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