

*The commercial assault on the senses has come a long way since Mike Todd, Jr.'s smell-o-vision (which, as we recall, lasted for only one movie, a strange and silly olfactory chase film with Peter Lorre). The old sf favorite, the feelie, is not yet available, but various off-beat clubs and the theatre of participation offer something pretty close. What's the next step? Read on.*

## LORD OF SENSATION

*by Leonard Tushnet*

JOE ROLAND WAS A MODEST man. He disclaimed any great genius as the cause of his phenomenal success. "I merely saw the trend and I capitalized on it," he said. "After all, I grew up in the generation that did its homework to the tune of rock-and-roll. And don't forget—more than half the population is now under thirty and the percentage of young people increases by leaps and bounds."

But a genius he nevertheless was, if a genius is one who builds the germ of an idea into an overwhelming craze. After graduating from M.I.T., instead of going into a very safe and highly paid job as a biologic engineer, for

which he was trained, Joe borrowed money from everyone in his family to start a business of his own. He set up a small laboratory on Canal Street and then prowled the cafes and basement coffee houses of MacDougal and Bleecker Streets in Greenwich Village until he found a combo and a singer that pleased him. The Murderers, who had cut only two records, neither one a success, were willing to cooperate.

Joe revamped the Moog synthesizer. He rewired the electric guitar, the vibraphone, and the drums, and made mysterious alterations in the amplifier. A month later he knew he had

made it. The Murderers moved from the dingy Sour Grapes to the larger, more prestigious quarters of the Spotted Dog, and Joe took out his first patent. He also became a majority stockholder in the newly incorporated and very grateful Murderers, an idealistic group whose motto was "Poetics, not Politics."

Their music was loud, louder than any group had dared to use before, and it had another quality. It vibrated. It sent waves through the young people who flocked nightly to crowd the Spotted Dog. The Murderers became more popular than the Beatles but without the Beatles' charisma. No girls shrieked when they appeared; no boys imitated their dress. It was the sound that sent them, the sound alone. And the sound lost none of its quality when it was recorded or taped.

Asked why the Murderers turned them on so much, the youngsters were vague and inarticulate: "I dunno . . . It's just groovy, that's all . . . The sound gets into you . . . It's like it's my own thing . . . It's where I'm at . . . I feel all good inside, you know, when I hear it . . . I can't explain. I just dig it . . . It's almost like smoking grass, I get so high . . . It does something to me. It's like I'm with it. . . ."

Joe was less emotional than the kids. "There's a simple explanation. Music is not homogeneous

sound. It consists of harmonics, overtones, sound waves that vary subtly in amplitude and frequency. Add tempo and decibel changes as additional variables and you get dead marches, martial airs, Phrygian modes, popular songs. What I've done is to use new techniques that add still another factor—ultrasonic vibration, waves that are unheard (like a dog whistle) but that nevertheless have an effect on the auditory apparatus."

That effect seemed to be confined to adolescents. Those unfortunate adults exposed to the fortissimo sounds and the wholly unintelligible words fled the room. Not so their children. They jerked and gyrated, their faces blank with ecstasy.

After the second golden platter was cut, the family loans were repaid with handsome bonuses. Now totally independent, Joe, against the advice of his lawyers and over the howls of the Murderers corrupted by the fleshpots of Egypt, gave out licenses to other groups for the use of his devices. The Murderers no longer had a monopoly. "I know what I'm doing," Joe said. "There's a limit to this operation. These kids'll grow up and away from the sound as their auditory apparatus matures. The youngsters coming up now will have heard it so often they'll be immunized, so to speak, against it."

The money rolled in. Joe paid no attention to the protests of parents, educators, and music critics that he was tampering with a delicate adolescent balance, that he was encouraging a premature response to sensual stimulation, and that he was weaning the younger generation away from classical music. He could not ignore, however, the rising clamor from the physiologists. They reported that the surveys of young people addicted to pop-rock, folk-rock, and rock-and-roll showed damage to hearing; a large number had actual hearing loss. Worse for Joe, several teams of investigators found permanent injury to the organ of Corti in those youngsters who favored the groups using Joe's devices. A series of public health ordinances promptly followed the publication of the reports. The devices were banned.

Joe shrugged, looked at his bankbook and at the teenage scene, and went back to his laboratory. The Spotted Dog (which he now owned) and Wendy's (an uptown discotheque, also his) introduced a new strobe light. The colors no longer shifted in more or less random patterns; they were synchronized with the beat and were reflected back and forth from the slightly concave-mirrored walls. The kaleidoscope of colors cast by the hidden projectors was pretty; the

effect was spectacular. The dancers moved in a dreamlike trance and walked out at closing time glassy-eyed and dazed. To the Spotted Dog and Wendy's, Joe added the Heavenly Lites and the Aurora Borealis, both specializing in what he called "photodances." The teen-agers spread the word, "It's like a mind-blowing trip." Joe raised the admission prices to his places and happily counted the receipts.

He could not patent his method, however, and soon every youth rendezvous put on photodances. Those of the Coruscators in San Francisco and the Illuminati in Pittsburgh were the most famous. Joe claimed to be the originator of the idea and started suits against them to try to collect license fees, but the courts held against him. By the time he was finished with the legal battles, the strobe fad had run its course, and the American Ophthalmologic Congress belatedly decried the deleterious effects of the light on the optical systems of juveniles.

"They can't do a thing to you," Joe's lawyers told him when he was sued by several irate parents because their darlings now needed eyeglasses for utility, not fashion. "You're lucky your demands were held invalid."

Joe took off for a prolonged honeymoon with Miranda, one of the original Murderers. The

couple traveled across the country and then spent some time in England. Miranda gave Joe his next inspiration. "Ears, sight—why not taste and smell?" she asked. "There can't be any harm in stimulating those senses. The kids always look for something new."

"Spray the air with perfume?" Joe shook his head. "Let chocolate soda drop like the gentle dew from heaven? It's too banal. It won't work. And it's not patentable." But Joe was restless. Compound interest was not enough for him. He wanted capital gains, and quick. He sat down and took thought, which, although it added no cubits to his stature, in a short time multiplied his fortune.

Joe invented (and patented) a novel dance device. Introduced in a converted mission in the East Village and advertised in the underground press as the way-outest, the Whirling Dervish was an immediate success. The dance floor, dimly lit by gas jets inside clear glass globes, was mounted on a turntable with varying speeds of revolution; from tiny apertures in the walls came intermittent air-streams scented with pine, peppermint, and lilac; at irregular intervals from above floated down a fine aerosol mist flavored with vanilla and strawberry. The combined stimulation of mild vertigo,

pleasant odors and tastes, flickering lights, and rock rhythm induced a mild, relaxed, semi-hypnotic euphoric state. Labor costs were cheap; rock groups were even willing to pay for the privilege of appearing at the Whirling Dervish.

"The Whirling Dervish is the absolute end!" raved the pulp rock magazines. "A new and extended sensation that must be experienced to be believed!" editorialized the slicks that catered to the college crowd. And *Subterranea*, the high school hand-sheet, ran out of obscenities in describing the Nirvana joys of the Whirling Dervish.

St. Mark's Place had to be closed to traffic because of the crowds that jammed the street nightly, willing to pay any price to get into a session at the Whirling Dervish. Joe was visited first by a sober delegation of entrepreneurs and then by a flashy representative of the Mafia; both wanted a piece of the action or at least franchises to open Whirling Dervishes in other cities. Joe had no trouble with them; he reminded them that the physiologic effects on the youth had not yet been studied and that killjoy bluenose doctors abounded and that his previous experience with such characters had not been happy. The potential investors left in a hurry; they wanted a sure thing, not speculation.

Joe himself wanted to take no chances before he expanded his operation. He gave a grant (tax-deductible, of course) to an Ivy League university to study what happened to the devotees of the Whirling Dervish. The preliminary reports were amazing, and he promptly authorized their publication. The physicians said that no harmful effects were noted unless a loss of appetite for sweets was harmful. The psychiatrists stated that the post-Whirling Dervish zombie state lasted only an hour after the session and that thereafter the youngsters were affable and nonaggressive; indeed, a general improvement in social attitude took place, manifested by fewer arguments with parents, more docility in school, and greater respect for authority figures. The sociologists' conclusions from their survey were the kicker: Teen-age drunkenness disappeared. Users of marijuana, speed, and barbiturates cut down their doses, and the more frequently they went to the Whirling Dervish, the less they resorted to drugs until eventually they stopped altogether. Furthermore, the Whirling Dervish syndrome apparently acted as a sex-surrogate; teen-age marriages and illegitimate births were almost unheard of in Whirling Dervish enthusiasts.

He quickly proceeded to franchise Whirling Dervishes in

every large city. The research team's reports effectively undercut any opposition from the older generation. Fathers bellowed about the expense; teachers grumbled about low grades; record shops bewailed their loss of business. But who dared openly to criticize such a socially beneficent enterprise as the Whirling Dervish? In a year Whirling Dervish spots covered the country and Joe was a millionaire many times over.

Then he retired. He set up a public corporation, Amusement Unlimited, which bought the patent rights from him for an enormous sum and which became the battleground for the gamblers on Wall Street and the legitimate front men of the underworld. The stock rose faster than Xerox or Polaroid. At its peak Joe sold on the market every share he owned and took a much needed vacation with Miranda and his two children. He went to an undisclosed location (some said Alaska, some said Nigeria, a few finger-to-nose knowing ones said Irvington, New Jersey, for who would look for him in Irvington, New Jersey?) and lived the quiet life of a retired paterfamilias until the storm blew over.

The storm came (and with it the closing of the Whirling Dervishes and the bankruptcy of Amusement Unlimited) when a

couple of bright young men dug up and published the final reports of the research team deposited in the archives of the university. The findings of the preliminary reports were not disputed but shocking additions, based on more extended study, were made: Physicians announced a rapid increase in malnutrition and vitamin deficiency diseases in Whirling Dervish fans; psychiatrists noted failure of emotional maturation, sometimes regression to an infantile psychological state shown by overeagerness to conform to Establishment mores and by lack of spontaneous initiative. Paradoxically, along with that, sociologists discovered increasing social alienation, a peculiar form of anomie, in which the youngster was willing to give up societal norms (like bathing, family visiting, social contacts) if he or she could spend hours at the Whirling Dervish. The team members unanimously concluded that the Whirling Dervish habit was as bad as the opium habit in its effects.

Joe comforted Miranda when she wept after reading the story in the papers. "It's not so bad, honey," he said. "No permanent damage was done to the kids. As a matter of fact, good came out of it. The gangsters and the promoters got their fingers burned. Parents won't go along with teen-

age fads so easily now. They'll watch more carefully what their children do and where they go. Public health authorities will be on their toes. Government, not private enterprise, will finance research on the problems of adolescence. Not enough is known about the effect of tight pants on boys, for instance, or ironing the hair on girls. All's turned out for the best."

Joe listened to himself. He resolved never to go into any future undertaking without long preliminary studies on its possible far-reaching effects. He was basically an honest man obsessed with the Puritan ethic. Monetary success was proof of God's approval; idleness was of the Devil. Joe became increasingly ashamed of doing nothing.

"I don't mind going to the park or the zoo or museums with the kids," he told Miranda, "or seeing plays or listening to concerts or traveling. But sooner or later all that gets boring. A man has to do something in this world. He just can't sit around in the sun. That's for old men—and bums."

To keep Joe busy, Miranda suggested that he set up a fully equipped electronics laboratory to play around in. Joe was not a player. He got to work. Work in the field in which he felt himself to be an expert—that of sensory stimulation. He read textbooks

on medicine, psychology, and physiology. He restudied his physics. He searched through technical journals.

At last he had an idea, a basis on which to start experiments. First, he built a one-room building at the far end of the Long Island estate he now owned. Then he installed powerful electromagnets in each of the four walls. He recruited biologists, physicists, and psychologists and supervised their work on the animals he kept in the building. He started with hamsters, then white rats, then pigs, and ended up with a rhesus monkey house.

Satisfied after two years that his idea was practicable, he got rid of all the animals, converted the building into a simulated dining room complete with fixtures, tables, and special dinnerware. Attached to the first building he constructed a restaurant kitchen, a bar, and a larder. He hired a bartender, a short-order cook, and a busboy. He advertised for volunteers, men and women over twenty-five, preferably couples, to eat one meal a day in the laboratory-restaurant and to be subjects for his research team.

Joe had profited (not only financially) by his former experiences. This was going to be no trial-and-error job. He had planned every step of the testing. His painstaking efforts bore fruit. In a month he knew he had

succeeded. Every volunteer gained weight and didn't care that he did. Man and woman, they came away from their dinners exclaiming about the quality of the cocktails served and about the culinary masterpieces they had partaken of. Joe smiled to himself when they sadly said good-bye at the end of the experiment. The hard liquor and wines he had offered were the cheapest he could buy; the cook, no *cordon bleu* to start with, did the best he could with the third-rate provisions on hand.

"Nothing to worry about," Joe assured Miranda, who still remembered the social consciousness with which the Murderers had started. "No patents, no licenses, no franchises. Just a chain of restaurants serving good food. I put a lot of money into this, but we'll make it all up and more in no time." Miranda wanted to believe Joe, whom she loved, but she wondered why she and the children never had a meal in the laboratory-restaurant.

Joe bought a building in the fashionable Fifties near Madison Avenue. He converted the ground floor into an intimate eating place. He supervised the installation of the electromagnets behind the walls of the dining area and then let a firm of chichi decorators do what they thought would please a select clientele. He bribed away the

*maitre d'hotel* from a famous French restaurant and employed a staff of expert waiters and bus-boys. He hired a manager, a man who tore his hair out at the inexplicable actions of his boss.

He expostulated, "Why do you spend so much money setting up this place and then want me to order the cheapest meat and the lowest quality of vegetables? And you got a chef from a Bowery employment agency! The only place he ever worked in was a greasy spoon diner! And those undercooks! They don't know how to boil water! And your menu, if you can call it that! Four items! Even in French hamburgers are hamburgers and ice cream is ice cream! You won't last a day! And your idiotic rules for customers! I never heard the like! If you hadn't guaranteed me a year's wages, I'd quit right now!"

Joe said soothingly, "Wait. You'll see." The public relations firm he engaged got to work with its notes planted in the gossip columns about the great new restaurant about to open. Invitations were sent out to all the professional gourmet writers and to a small number of glamour personalities to attend "a novel epicurean experience."

The manager hid in his office opening night. The *maitre d'* swallowed hard and put on a bold face. The waiters calculated

where they could get new jobs. The guests snickered and then openly laughed when the check-room attendant pointed out the sign: "Please check your wrist-watches and other timepieces. The management is not responsible for damage during period of service."

They came to jeer and left to praise. Keith Kermit of the *Times* wrote next day: "The decor of L'Aimant is interesting but not unusual. The chinaware is extraordinarily heavy, and the knives and forks rather cheap looking. But the food is divine! Not three but six stars are necessary to characterize L'Aimant, a place on a par with—no, far superior to—any of the vaunted Parisian restaurants. The menu is limited, but who cares? The Gods on Olympus dined on only nectar and ambrosia, and that is what is served at L'Aimant." Celestine Battlemore flatly stated, "I have never eaten in any restaurant in the whole world a meal better than that I ate last night at L'Aimant." Diana Kovacs and Juliet Kind gave special interviews, vying with each other in their rave descriptions of the cuisine. The *bons vivants* were unanimous in their agreement that New York would become the Mecca for gastronomes just because of L'Aimant.

The staff huddled together in disbelief over the newspapers.



They could not understand. "Pay-off!" sneered a waiter. "Black-mail. He must have something on these people," said another. "He slipped dope in the cocktails," said still another.

Joe came early that night and took the manager into his confidence. "I am going to double your salary and give you a percentage of the profits," he said, and before the other could recover from the surprise, went on, "because from now on you run the place. And if this one goes well, I plan to open other restaurants like it all over the country. You will be the general manager if you keep your mouth shut and hire discreet subordinates."

He took the manager down to the locked basement and showed him the controls for the electromagnets. "Start them up a half hour before opening time." He explained the reason for the blue dinner service, the special iron-and-nickel alloy eating utensils, and the medallion on a chain every guest was given to wear when he was seated. "Briefly, every time a guest moves he induces an electric current in himself. The medallion, the alloy in the forks and knives, the cobalt in the china all intensify the current. What he eats or drinks makes no difference. His gustatory and olfactory sensations are heightened in the direction of maximum satisfaction. We don't

need fancy dishes or extensive menus to please our customers. All we have to do is fill them up. That's why we serve only lettuce salad, hamburgers, French fried potatoes, and ice cream. From now on our *prix fixe* will be \$25 per guest, and that will not include a prepared cocktail and *vin ordinaire* with the meal. Now it's up to you to make L'Aimant a success."

The manager gulped. "I'll try to. But there's one thing I'm curious about. Why did you name the restaurant 'The Loving One'?"

"Not 'The Loving One'," Joe laughed. "L'Aimant. French for The Magnet."

The manager had no regrets. L'Aimant became *the* place to go. Reservations were made months in advance. Its fame spread to France; a special inspector for the *Guide Michelin* came over, and when his glowing report was cabled to the home office in Paris, his superiors were sure he had been suborned. Another inspector was sent to check; his report was equally enthusiastic. The Bureau of Tourism suppressed both reports, but the word got out anyway.

Joe kept his word to the manager. He opened a chain of restaurants: L'Aimant de Chicago, L'Aimant de New Orleans, L'Aimant de Los Angeles, and a dozen others.

No one complained about the constant hum in the dining room or about the absence of music. No one objected to wearing the heavy chain and medallion. No one murmured against the NO CHILDREN rule. Everyone ate the soggy lettuce in peanut oil and white vinegar, the greasy hamburgers, the half-done potatoes, and the artificially flavored ice cream, and only sighed that they could not eat more often at L'Aimant. Top executives and other expense-accountniks persuaded the managers to open for lunch as well as for dinner. The menu was the same. The income from the L'Aimant chain rose steadily.

Miranda was unconvinced by Joe's argument that he was performing a public service by making people happy with his meals. "I can't tell you why. I just feel it in my bones that it's morally wrong to fool someone into thinking he's had a Lucullan feast when he could have had the same food at a drive-in stand. It's like getting money under false pretenses."

Joe was impatient with Miranda. "Tell me," he asked, "what would be wrong if a guy slept with a five-dollar hooker and thought he was with Cleopatra all the time? This is the same, only it's food, not sex." Miranda dropped the subject.

The conversation gave Joe an-

other idea. He was restless again. The money kept pouring in but Joe wasn't interested in money alone. He had enough. He had the scientific itch. He wanted to try something new with the electromagnets.

Without telling Miranda he bought an empty warehouse on Second Avenue, just where the luxury apartments were creeping up on the tenements. He put in his electromagnets and got a large supply of heavier and longer chains with bigger medallions. He let it be quietly known that he was up to something really dramatic, a discothèque for the over-fifty crowd, even for senior citizens. Joe theorized: if the electromagnetically induced current increases sensory stimulation of the olfactory and digestive systems, then why not of the genital system? Even if the effect were transitory, even if the grand passion of youth were not revived, if the man thought it was, that would be sufficient.

As a public-spirited individual (also to establish a tax loss and to safeguard himself legally), Joe charged no admission to the discothèque, which he called the Ponce de Leon. The innuendo was obvious and alluring. Unlike other discothèques, the decoration was at a minimum, the lights were steady and bright, and the disc jockey played only waltzes, rhumbas, fox trots, cha-chas, and

an occasional merengue or tango. Only the men wore the chains; they were shamefaced, but carefully attached them like belts with the medallion looking like a codpiece.

Joe congratulated himself. Right again! And far better than he had expected. Besides the initial erotic stimulation there developed a two-day period of increased libido and performance. And this time he had wasted no time on preliminary research. He was pleased at the money he had saved.

Tears of gratitude in their eyes, men came up to the disc jockey or the ushers or the floor manager and pressed bills into their hands. The discothèque, originally scheduled to be open only on weekends, was opened nightly and even then had to turn away disappointed crowds.

Joe decided philanthropy had gone far enough. After two weeks, the admission charge was ten dollars for a two-hour session. Throngs still packed the Ponce de Leon.

Big Herbie, a notorious gangland satrap, visited the Ponce de Leon to check the possibilities of muscling in. He acted like a regular customer, staying the full two hours and dancing. A couple of days later he came back to see Joe. "I'm only sixty," he said, "but I was no good any more, if you know what I mean. But now,

Mr. Roland, I'm like a kid sixteen. Any time you want a favor, let me know. Anybody bothers you, call me up right away. You oughta get the Noble prize or something."

Alas! While Joe was getting estimates on new Ponce de Leons in the other boroughs, the news began to trickle in. Joe had made a mistake in bypassing the preliminary research. Vigor and potency, even fertility, returned, it is true, to men with flagging powers. But then—almost like a cutoff, within six weeks they were back where they had started, sometimes worse, and they developed what the doctors called premature senility. Prostates enlarged, cataracts formed, bones became fragile, tremors and wrinkles and strokes were commonplace. Joe promptly closed up the Ponce de Leon.

Not fast enough. Big Herbie sent two of his henchmen to bring Joe to him. Big Herbie's jowls had shrunken, his spine was bent, his voice quavered. "A fella like you is a menace to society," he said. "A fella like you is like a guy giving horse to a baby just for the hell of it. A fella like you is only out after a buck and don't care what happens to poor suckers what fall for what you're selling. You got no social responsibility."

Joe tried to explain that physiology was not an exact sci-

ence, that the biological effect of electromagnetically induced currents was a gray area, and that the disothèque was purely a well-meant experiment.

Big Herbie cut him short. The beady eyes glittered from their

shrunken orbits. "That's just what I mean. Nobody's got a right to start something he don't know how it'll end. You deserves to be shot. Nobody'll miss you."

He was wrong. Miranda and the children did.

