

"THE PUMP HOUSE GANG"

BY ANTHONY FRAGOLA

Statuuuussss. Success, reeking instantaneous status. Love it. Relish it. Gloat in it. Above all, Enjoy! Enjoy it!

As Tom Wolfe, author of The Kandy-Kolored-Tangerine-Flake-Stream Line Baby, would assert, we, the Pepsi Generation, are in the midst of...no, not war in Vietnam, no, not crime in the streets...no, not cold war that is becoming hotter, but oh, it's too unmentionable...ah, here goes--Happiness Explosion.

In the introduction to the Pump House Gang, Wolfe equates happiness with the achievement of social status.

Unbelievable? To prove it to the jury--the reader--Wolfe brings alive the Hell's Angels; Hugh Hefner the founder of Playboy; Carol Doda, the silicone queen; the Pump House Gang; and Marshall McLuhan, each doing his or her "Thing". Wolfe would have the reader believe that each of these groups or characters has found the ultimate means to satisfy our eternal desire for ego extension.

WE ALL PLAY

Wolfe asserts that we all play the status game, only now we can win without fear of failure, without adhering to the arbitrary and prescribed rules of society.

"Community status systems have been games with a few winners and many who feel like losers. What an intriguing thought--for a man to take his new riches and free time and his machines and plit from communitas and start his own league. He will still have status competition--but he invents the rules."

Why have people dropped out of communitas and created their own statuspheres where they can enjoy their egos in the best terms--their own? Rebellion? No! Alienation? No! For Wolfe it is simple. People "just want to be happy winners for a change," in the status game. Simple...yes. Too simple.

Enter Carol Doda.

Ahh-h-h-h-h-h! Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h! There's Carol Doda, dancing on a piano in a San Francisco topless club, flapping and flipping her size 44's in front of the audience, doing the Monday, doing the Twist, doing the Swim. With the help of silicone injections--the main ingredient in nutty-putty, Carol Doda, an Italian girl, a cocktail waitress, became a success, doing her "thing", i.e., shaking her size 44 dirigibles to the sound of rock and roll music.

Carol is about the biggest thing in her statusphere--the "topless club". But Carol, like the rest of the instant status seekers in The Pump House Gang, seems to be desperately clinging for meaning,

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and even at the height of their triumph, they remain unhappy, insecure, and unfulfilled.

"SOMETHING BIG"

"Well, I'd like to have a big show. I want to be first class, in New York or Chicago or Miami, some place like that. I've had a chance to go to Nevada, to Los Vegas, but I am waiting for something big".

Even Hugh Hefner who created an empire with his Playboy Magazine is still socially unacceptable, in Society. So like a little boy who won't go out to play, Hefner creates his own world. If the boys won't come and play with him, he will play with the girls.

Hefner is "king of the Status Drop-outs". Twentieth-century technology has made it possible for him to control his entire statusphere with gadgets. Hefner retreats to his revolving bed, rarely leaving it controlling his every movement, "in ever-decreasing concentric circles, toward...nirvana, ambrosia, while following one's own perfect orbit, out there, for all to see... the Playboy beacon!" But ultimately, Hefner still remains the rejected little boy who has built his own cocoon, or is it womb.

WHERE TO?

Does this frenzied quest for success within one's own statusphere lead to happiness? No, not really, regardless of what Wolfe might have you believe in his introduction.

Take the Pump House Gang itself who attended the Watts riot like it was a circus show. They are just a gang of teenagers who spend their youth on the beaches near La Jolla, California, looking for the Big Wave. For them, surfing represents adventure, uncertainty, beauty, but their bubbly of happiness will burst all too soon, when old age sets in...25...and a member of the gang must fade out like a wave. What then? A new statusphere must be created with new rules.

Ultimately, the quest for happiness through the instantaneous creation of statuspheres is illusory subject to changes just as arbitrary as the rules established by society.

Nevertheless, from beneath the barrage of Wolfe's detailed reportorial writing and stylized brilliance, the final impression is not that of the cynical commentator or the cold, "scientific" sociologist, but that of the compassionate artist who commiserates with his fellow men in their quest for happiness. Wolfe makes himself the reference frame for the objective reality of these groups; he, views them from the outside, while simultaneously becoming one with the group or character he is treating.

ELECTION 1968: AN ANALYSIS

This year the United States Presidential election involves three candidates: Richard M. Nixon, Hubert H. Humphrey, and George Wallace. This article is one in a series of three that is designed to analyze three major candidates and their stands on important issues.

Richard Nixon, Republican Presidential nominee, has come a long way since his Vice-Presidential car was spat upon by Venezuelans in 1959 and his subsequent election losses 1960 and 1962. Today he stands as a dominant feature of American politics and has led the faltering Republican Party to the verge of winning the 1968 election. The noted Vietnam Hawk was raised in a family of poor Quakers, but served in the Navy during World War II. After his big break in 1952, when he was nominated Vice-President under Eisenhower, he gained his conservative reputation by parading around the world for eight years as a foreign diplomat.

Nixon then suffered two crushing defeats as a result of poor planning, in 1960 when running for President and 1962 for California governor. With the reputation as a loser hanging over his head, Nixon began rebuilding in 1966; after two years of organized planning and virtually no political boo-hoos, he has climbed to the top spot on the polls.

To many, the "old-Nixon", was a serious, hard-working politician whose mouth watered when the United States Presidency was mentioned. He was humorless and faltered miserably during the Nixon-Kennedy debates. As if his bad personality wasn't enough, Dick was hindered by his face (he's no Don Juan). Well, Nixon knew what to do because he now has a phony sense of humor and a new make-up crew. He has also managed to dodge every question and thereby keep out of hot water.

Tricky Dick, as he is often called, has quite a reputation as an opportunist politician. In fact, he can out-do anyone, except perhaps Hubert Humphrey in political dealings. Among his many attributes, Nixon has added a fresh, awesome barrage of ambiguous platitudes this year. Perhaps the best way to show Tricky Dick's political operations is by an example involving his Vice-Presidential nominee, Spiro T. Agnew. Earlier this year Agnew was an ardent Rockefeller supporter who organized a Draff-Rockefeller campaign; Maryland. Agnew decided just before the Oregon primary that Rockefeller who blew hot and cold, would announce his candidacy. Agnew made a big deal of publicizing a press conference during which Rockefeller, to Agnew's surprise, announced that he would not be a candidate for president. This event caused Agnew no

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