

# ANTON PERICH: True Revolutionary

July 27, 2010



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Candy Darling, Photograph © Anton Perich

There's so much I could say about Anton Perich, but it's altogether too much for me to try to put it into words. I'll leave it to the incomparable Mr. Perich to do this better than I ever could.

**Your life history is fascinating! Please talk about your work running an underground film program in Paris in the late 1960s.**

AP: Thank you. I was making some super 8 movies then. All lost now, except one, "Le retour d' Eurydice", in which I was starring. Raphael Bassan directed it. An early French underground film, recently screened at Beaubourg. This was 16mm production, and well preserved.

Anyway, there was this wonderful villa with gardens on Boulevard Raspail, just a few short blocks from La Coupole. It was housing the old American Center, a complex of art studios and various music and theater activities. Later they tore it down to put the Carrier skyscraper. I saw there many international productions and created a few. But one thing was missing, underground films. So I proposed to show films there one night weekly, in a small studio in the basement, and sometimes in the gardens, on the grass. It was a success. I was making films and my friends were making films and there was no place to show them regularly in Paris.

Of course, we were all spoiled by La Cinematheque, spending days there watching classics and contemporary films. But there was no room there for our "little short marginal works". And of course, revolutions are always made by the marginals.

In the Sixties, the New York Underground cinema were well defined by Warhol, Mekas, Jack Smith, Brackage and others. A whole different scenario was happening in Paris. There was Godard and his gods reigning on the Parnassus, making a wonderful narrative movies, not much questioning Cinema itself. There was also Garell, Clemanti, And there was Etienne O'Leary and Michel Auder. The great Michel Auder, who questioned everything. In 1970 he abandoned film totally and converted to video. I screened his films there the very first night, and often afterwards. He supplied the projector that he somehow inherited from the French Army, I guess he knew de Gaulle, or was his nephew. Another great French underground filmmaker was Raphael Bassan. But the real revolution in Paris film world were maid in the Fifties by the last great god of the avant-garde, Isidore Isou and his prophet Maurice Lemaitre. In the early Fifties they made movies with the found footage, various acids and paints. They made the cinema discrepant, totally separating the sound track from the visual content, as if telling two different stories in the same time. Of course, most of the audience walked out. No one ever did it before. Debord took it all from them. Debord was Lettrist before he became Situationist.

Anyway, I screened some of those films too.

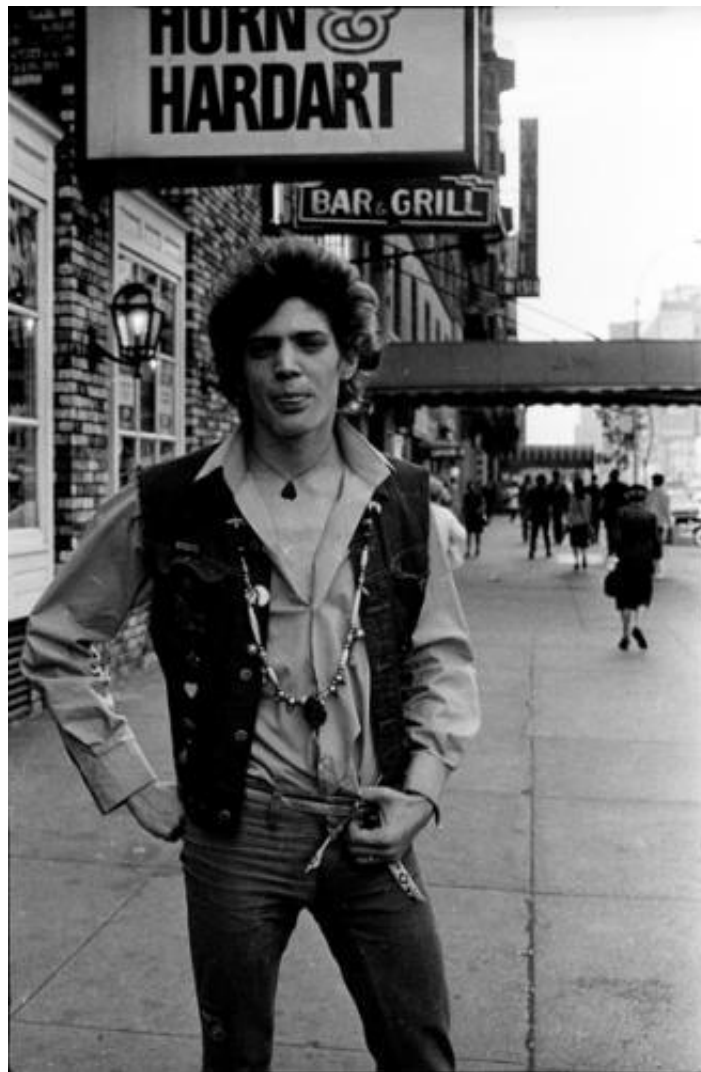
I was associated with Lettristes from 1967 to 1970. I worked with Lemaitre and Isou, painting, writing poetry, shooting films, doing the shows. Lettrism was my school. I was educated by the two greatest artists and thinkers of that time. Of course Isou predicted the 1968 revolution and went mad. We did some performances at L'Odeon, it was occupied, Non-stop 24 hours spectacle. I spent few nights there.

I think that the Revolution of 68, the Paris Spring is grossly misunderstood today. It was not the flesh and blood revolution, no guillotines. It was the revolution of spirit, of the young, so unique in the history of revolutions. It paved the way for other bloodless revolution in the Eastern Europe. Imagine, the Communism died the bloodless death. Tell it to Stalin, or Lenin.

I lived my own revolution there. I became something else at 23. It is difficult to transform oneself, only fantasy and revolution will do it. And spirit. And resurrection. And the fire in Paris streets. And "sous les pavés la plage". The greatest slogan ever written.

To get back to films, I did show some Warhol films, and Mekas.

The legendary Pierro Heliczer came from New York and introduced his films. Taka Iimura came there with his films as well, and many other underground filmmakers, French and international.



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Robert Mapplethorpe, Photograph © Anton Perich

**Why did you decide to come to New York in the 1970s? What was the city like back then, particularly for artists and radicals?**

AP: I came to New York in 1970. At that time I was interested in many things that were coming from New York. Underground films. Pop Art. Experimental theater. Warhol's Factory. Jonas Mekas. Julian Beck. John Cage. John Chamberlain. Minimal Art. Earth Works. All of that new, foreign to the Europeans, miraculous and fascinating. It was all so American. Paris didn't have any of that. It had a vacuum and suffocating atmosphere. They were mourning the revolution of 68 instead celebrating it.

In NY it was all celebration, non stop celebration of the young, creative and the free. Woodstock was a celebration. Max's Kansas City was celebration. Punk was celebration, music, fashion and attitude. NY Dolls was celebration. Transvestites were celebration. Taylor Mead was celebration,

Warhol, Factory, Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis, Wayne County, Andrea Feldman, John Waters, John Chamberlain, John Cage. Lou Reed. Forest Myers was celebration. His SOHO wall was much better than that other wall in Berlin. And it is there forever in the full glory. Smithson and Heiser were doing God's work, transforming the landscapes in the great vacuums of America.



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Andrea Feldman, Photograph © Anton Perich

**In 1973, you produced the first underground TV show which ran on Manhattan public access television. Please talk about your ideas about video art and how you made use of public access TV to explore them.**

AP: I quit film and was shooting video. I realized that it was the gun of the future. I realized that the freedom to bear video was the same as the freedom to bear arms. And with a such powerful instrument you dream of changing the world. You dream revolution. You remember I came to NY via Paris and brought a symbolic cobble stone with me, you remember: "under the cobble stones the beach..." Other so called video artists were showing their videos at the galleries and museums, the most safe places in the world. I never had a video show in a gallery or museum. I would be ashamed of it. Such bourgeois establishments. Suffocating the freedoms that video was to bring.

I saw the video camera as the most subversive weapon on the world, and you don't take it to the gallery, you take it to the American TV. There was Cronkite there and Barbara Walters, but you replace them with Taylor Mead, Danny Fields and Susan Blond. Naked aggressive and radical, hating everything the TV had to offer until that day. I did it on Public Access in January 1973, in the prehistoric times of video. I took my one hour weekly show "Anton Perich Presents" there.

I realized then that the free Public Access was like youtube today. As the matter of fact, like the Internet today. No one realized that it was so powerful, radical and transformative. TV was the last stronghold of American comfort and the superficial perfection. Clean as the soap commercials. But while the soap washed clothes, the TV bleached the brains. The absolute pristine color TV meets the badly produced black and white airings, badly filmed and with bad sound, badly dressed and badly behaved stars of the underground. The Television has never seen this content before. It was the first. Yes, I broke the ice. After me came the flood. Look at the cable today. Yes we made a revolution, single handedly. It was about freedom.



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Charles James and Model, Photograph © Anton Perich

**Please talk about the inspiration to start NIGHT Magazine in 1978. Why did you decide to get into publishing, and what was it like to produce print back in the days?**

AP: Yes, it was all about inspiration. It was about poetry of the photograph. NIGHT was this wonderful title idea for a new, oversized underground publication. I designed it and published it. Absolutely oversized, glamorous, elegant, sensual on a smooth almost a bed sheet-size beautiful white paper. It was in 1978. I was at the Studio 54 shooting every night fabulous pictures of the most fabulous people in the World. For me photography is an obsession, the white substance.

I was shooting for the Warhol's *Interview* magazine and for me that was not enough, so I had to self-publish, as it is called today. Well, it was marvelous to capture all this nightly energy on the pages of NIGHT. Hundreds, thousands of photos. From Victor Hugo to Patty Hansen and Jerry

Hall. Bianca, Esme, Carole Bouquet. All dressed on the covers of VOGUE and topless in NIGHT.

I wanted to publish every photo I ever took. It was the Facebook for the Studio 54 regulars. But my photography here is something else. It is celebrated now, looking so fresh and contemporary, as if it was taken today. All great photography is timeless, looks like taken today, and not yesterday. The dated photographs don't speak to me, cannot establish a communication with them. It is like yesterday's papers. The paparazzi work. NIGHT is not a yesterday's paper. It told the future over 30 years ago.

I still publish NIGHT today. It is my way of questioning the Internet. If we don't question it and if we don't doubt it we will end up in the near future having everything on our fingertips and nothing in our arms. NIGHT is not on your fingertips, it is in our arms, big beautiful, physical, not virtual. Hand-made, and not LED device.



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Model wearing Charles James, Photograph © Anton Perich

**Throughout this time you were also taking photographs of everyone on the scene, from Andy Warhol, Candy Darling, and Jean-Michel Basquiat to Patti Smith, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Tennessee Williams. What was it like to photograph celebrities and personalities at that time?**

AP: I didn't photograph much celebrities, they were mostly tourists. At Studio 54 and Max's. Truman was a regular, Bianca was a regular. I took only 2 photos of Basquiat, one published on the first page and the other on the last page of his giant Milano catalogue. I photographed Andy for the only one reason, to capture his shyness. I photographed Candy endlessly just to capture the tranquility of her eyes. I photographed Mapplethorpe to capture l'enfant terrible. I photographed Patti Smith to capture Rimbaud or perhaps to capture the rainbow in the darkest corners of Max's.

[www.antonperich.com](http://www.antonperich.com) (<http://www.antonperich.com>)