

New Realism in Sculpture: LOOK ALIVE!

It is now ten years since the Sidney Janis Gallery astounded the art world with an exhibition of Pop Art. The New York art critics were outraged that a gallery as prestigious as Sidney Janis's should give prominence to a Pop culture movement that few of them took seriously. Claes Oldenburg's gooey cakes and yummy pies, they were willing to concede, were folk art, but definitely not fine art. Janis called this exhibition "New Realists," but he was jumping the gun on the *real* New Realists yet to come.

The real New Realists appeared on the art scene some four years ago with paintings so realistic they obliged the observer to ask: Is it a painting or is it a photograph? This winter Sidney Janis put on an exhibition of New Realist painters and included a handful of the even newer New Realist sculptors, whose work is so realistic that the subject looks alive. Once again, the critics howled with rage, *The New York Times's* Hilton Kramer calling the exhibition "yet another attempt to blitz the art market and make history." Janis called this exhibition "Sharp-Focus Realism," but in the catalogue introduction he wrote that "the title Post-Pop Realists seems clearer since it places them concisely within art and history." So the great Sidney Janis says the New Realism is art!

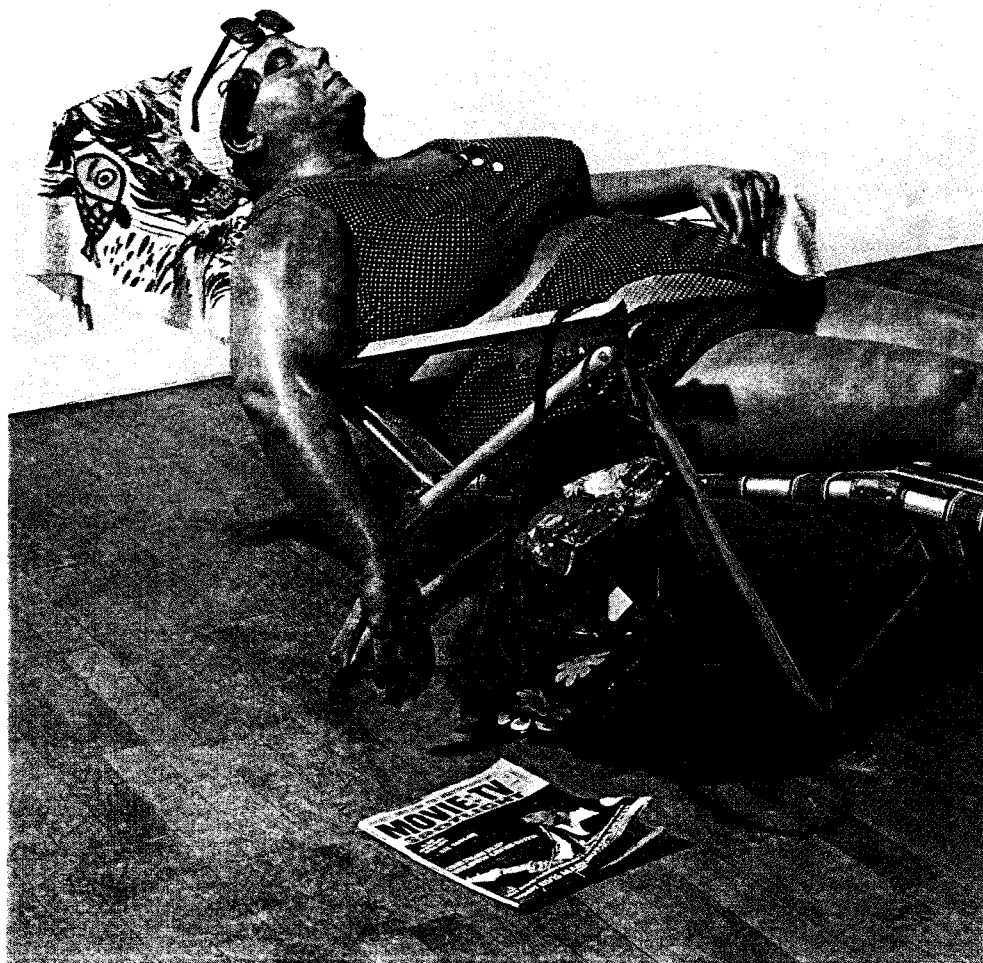
In the last six months in New York the sculpture branch of New Realism has forged ahead with a number of exhibitions of the human figure in the round, nude or fully and actually clothed, in papier-mâché, epoxy, fiber glass and polyester resin, stockinette and styrofoam—in every material except traditional stone or bronze. The New Realist sculpture did not, of course, appear out of the blue. George Segal is its most obvious immediate predecessor. Segal has been making plaster casts of his sitters for a decade, but he leaves them unpainted and rough-surfaced: His pale bus drivers and gas-station attendants are ghosts of themselves and their occupations. The New Realist life-size polychromed sculpture, however, is realistic to the point of shock. "More real than real," as one duly shocked critic put it.

One of the most realistic of the New Realist sculptors is John de Andrea, a

young Colorado artist who uses plaster casts of his sitters merely as molds for the final work in polyester resin and fiber glass, which he paints. "He's interested in a person in a rather ideal situation," explains Ivan Karp, cigar-chomping director of the O. K. Harris Gallery, who has done more than any other dealer to promote the New Realist painters and sculptors. At de Andrea's recent show his naked *Black Boys* frolicked in Arcadian innocence: Surely they could never grow into Black Panthers. The "ideal situation" in the case of his *Women* (realistic down to the pubic hair) would seem to be that of the Pretty Girl Next Door rather than her Ugly Sister. But de Andrea's girls are insipid. They would never make the centerfold of *Playboy*.

Duane Hanson, on the other hand, is interested in people in far from ideal situations. He would have given us the ultimate, undesirable Ugly Sister. (Hanson also works life-size in painted polyester resin and fiber glass.) His *Riot*, a black-versus-white confrontation on a sun-drenched Florida vacant lot, was indeed a shocker when first seen in 1968, as were his later *Motorcyclist* (dead) and *Bowery Bums*, which his dealer, Ivan Karp, considers one of his

Duane Hanson's convincingly lifelike "Sunbather" (below) was cast from a real person, then molded in plastic. The huge astronaut (opposite page) is part of Red Grooms's sprawling, three-dimensional moonscape, which celebrates the Apollo 15 landing.



Rosalind Constable, always among the first to detect new art trends, writes frequently for *New York* and *Book World*.

best pieces, "a totally unified three-part composition that has a degree of restraint that separates it from topicality and puts it in the realm of high art."

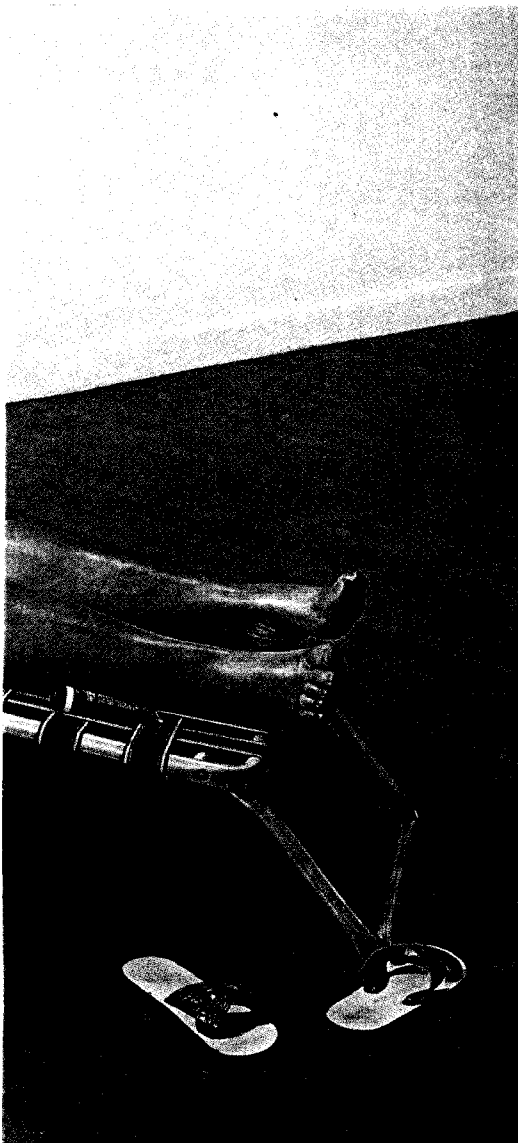
Writing about his own work in *Art in America* in 1970, Hanson said: "The content or subject matter of my sculpture is derived from my feeling of despair. Realism is best suited to convey the frightening idiosyncracies of our time. The purpose of my work, like the flashing road signal, is to depict some of the latent and explicit terrors of our social environment." Hanson's recent exhibition at the O. K. Harris Gallery included a seated, sullen, hard-eyed *Hard Hat*; an *Artist*, a life-size "portrait" of artist Mike Bakaty in Bakaty's own blue jeans; and *Sunbather*, a very fat lady stretched out on a beach chair sur-

rounded by the accouterments of leisure—suntan lotion, a movie magazine, and a tote bag containing potato chips and pretzels. Said Karp, stroking her solid thigh: "Even her relatives have never stared at her so closely. Sculpturally, she's interesting, because her volumes are right." The show sold out.

However, Hanson's *Tourists*, whose verisimilitude startled visitors to the Whitney Museum's sculpture exhibition in 1971, remains one of his most telling works: two American tourists looking up in total bewilderment at some sight-seer's dream—Giotto's Tower, perhaps, or Michelangelo's *David*. An aura of ancient monuments hovers over this dreadful pair, pathetically striving to understand whatever marvel it is they are seeing for the first

—and last—time. Like much of Hanson's recent work, its surface cruelty conceals an underlying compassion for its subject, and one wonders what happened to Hanson's "despair" of yesteryear. Says Hanson today: "My despair is not so overwhelming. The critical aspects of my work are still there, but in a more subtle way. I think the physical aspects of violence turn people off. They are still inherent in my work, but not so apparent."

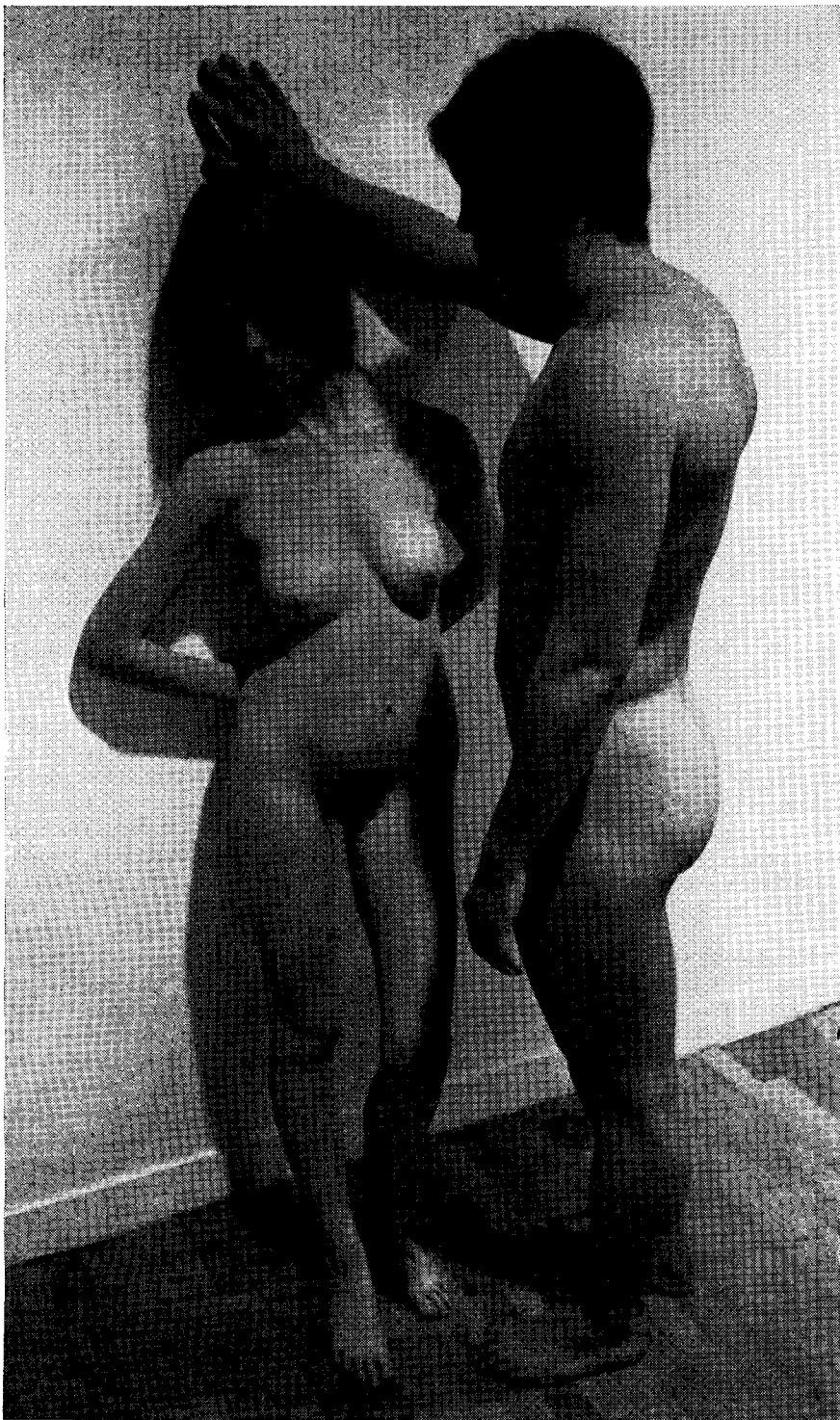
Over in London, California-born Jann Haworth (wife of British Pop artist Peter Blake) has been busy for a decade stuffing cloth with kapok and shaping and stitching it into such American archetypes as *Cowboy*, *Surfer*, and *Mae West*. Haworth first attracted attention with *Dunromin*





The art galleries are
invaded by produce
vendors, brawling men,
and youthful nudes.





A crowd of fruit and vegetable vendors inhabits Raymond Mason's ten-foot-high tableau (shown in detail, top left), which commemorates the closing of Les Halles, the famed produce market in Paris. At left, James Grashow's eight-foot-tall men are made of cloth treated with plastic. Above, John de Andrea's lifelike nudes consist of polyester resin and fiber glass.

(1963), a tableau of an old English couple seated cozily before a gas fire, surrounded by life's small trophies. Robert Melville wrote in *Art International*: "The face of the Old Woman is composed of skeins of colored thread as abstract as the scarification stripes on a tribal mask, but they achieve a fabulously vivid, macabrely beautiful impression of flesh wrinkled, discolored, and eroded by time." English critic Christopher Finch had this to say about Haworth's *Mae West*: "We look into the bulb-lined mirror of the star's dressing table and, beyond the glass, the star smiles back at us. The

'mirror' is, in fact, a sheet of clear glass, and the 'reflection' a three-dimensional figure behind the glass. We are accustomed to seeing Mae West flattened to two dimensions, and it is by a manipulation of this habit of vision that the artist has been able to complete the illusion."

Mae West (1965) was included in Haworth's recent exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, the artist's first in New York. But in her newer work she has abandoned down-to-earth subject matter for fantasy, which considerably diminishes the impact. New Realist sculpture largely depends on the shock of recognition. One is shocked by Haworth's life-size *Surfer* or *Cowboy*, with their built-in social comment, but one is not shocked by her *Snake Lady* or *Sorceress*, who are characters from fairyland and do not directly concern us. Haworth's work has been compared with the writings of Charles Dickens in the clarity of characterization, telling us, in padded stockinette rather than in words, all we need to know about her people. It would be a great loss to New Realism if Jann Haworth were to turn into Hans Christian Andersen.

Back in the early Sixties, Red Grooms was an active participant in Happenings. Most of the cardboard creations of those memorable days have long since disintegrated, but Grooms is still at it, putting together his slapdash, highly pigmented tableaux on historic and contemporary subjects. His *Chicago* (1968), a history, no less, of that vivid city, is now in the Chicago Art Institute. His *Discount Store*, a satirical comment on that contemporary phenomenon, installed in a vacant Madison Avenue store a couple of years ago, drew crowds as though to a fire sale—which it rather resembled.

Even more recently, Grooms participated in the Guggenheim Museum's "Ten Independents" exhibition with his version of the Apollo 15 moon landing. Freestanding, it is an eerie re-creation, lunar rover and all, of that historic event with David Randolph Scott twice as large as life (as, indeed, one feels he was) as he set his giant, immortal foot on the moon's rock-strewn and deep-shadowed surface. *Moon Landing*, completed in four weeks with the assistance of a sculptor Archie Peltier and six more helpers, has a solidity not generally associated with Grooms's work. "I still like the stagecraft kind of stuff," he says, "but I'm not quite as flimsy as I used to be. It was such a drag trying to fix them over the years." The critics have always been somewhat patronizing about Grooms's tableaux (which he calls "picto-sculpto-ramas"). But *Moon Landing* is Grooms's least satirical and most deeply felt work. Says he: "I was trying to be straight. The whole point

was to do their portrait. We went to the launching. The only thing that's satirical about it is putting it in the Guggenheim." Grooms is right: He has created a hybrid work of art that would be at home not only in the Guggenheim but in Disneyland as well.

Alex Katz was a landscape painter until one day in 1960 when, working on a painting of a figure in a landscape, he found the background lifeless. He cut out the figure, mounted it on plywood and, to his own astonishment, it became a real presence in his studio. Katz had created his first "cutout," or "flat statue." Later, he was to prefer the hard edge of aluminum and to paint his portraits in movie close-up style. Katz's work is eccentric enough to have attracted attention from critics who generally do not like representational art. Poet and dance critic Edwin Denby said of one of the many portraits that Katz has made of him: "Looking at it I saw not a flattering likeness, but the very person I catch without warning in the mirror. It was disconcerting." It is, of course, questionable whether obtaining a mirror image of the sitter should be the goal of portrait painting. But Katz at least offers one workable solution to the very contemporary problem of portraiture.

James Grashow's recent exhibition at the Allan Stone Gallery consisted of a roomful of eight-foot-tall men mauling each other. Grashow was in art school when Abstract Expressionism was in the ascendancy and insists that his work comes directly out of that art movement. "That's what I still believe in," he says. "I wanted to create figures that interact in space. I measured the gallery and was working for the congestion of the total space." Grashow approaches each area on which he is working as if it were an abstraction, building it up with small patches of many-colored materials that, when coated with polyester resin, "melt" into the semblance of paint.

Easily the most aberrant of the young artists who are trying a new approach to the figure is Nancy Grossman. Far from shocking us with the spit and image of a fat lady or a surfer, she conceals the faces of her subjects behind black leather masks, allowing only the nose to emerge. At her recent exhibition at the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery the highlight of the show was the massive figure of a man struggling to free himself from the black leather trappings into which he was tightly bound, sewn, and zipped, sexual organs and all. More than one admiring critic compared this piece with Michelangelo's slaves. No less striking are her severed heads, laced into black leather and rolling around like Rugby footballs with noses. All they are free to do is breathe. But in one instance the lower



Nancy Grossman specializes in male heads that are elaborately laced into restraining leather helmets.

part of the face is covered with a flap that unsnaps to reveal a soft-lipped face not unlike Lieutenant Calley's.

Nancy Grossman is a tiny young woman who lives on the Lower East Side and carves her work from huge beams rescued from the defunct Washington Market. She has been criticized by women's lib organizations for neglecting the female figure, to which charge she replies: "Whenever I do women, they begin to merge with the things around them and to give birth to other forms—to become landscapes." It has also been said that her work derives from the sadomasochistic "punishment outfits" that sell for some \$500 on the black leather market. To this more serious charge she reacts with mild surprise: "I use leather because I've always used it," she says. "I like it. If my figures are closed in, it's a state of being; it isn't perverse entertainment." John Canaday in a rave review in *The New York Times* said that Grossman's work was misunderstood, because black leather is associated with motorcycle gangs. "Her theme," he explained, "is man as the victim of forces that brutalize and madden him. . . . She is the least cruel artist alive."

For Raymond Mason's first exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1968, this English sculptor living in Paris showed a life-size tableau of a

French crowd that projected forty-eight inches from the wall. Recently, he showed *The Departure of the Fruits and the Vegetables from the Heart of Paris, the 28th of February 1969*, a huge tableau 122 inches high by 124 inches long that projected more than 53 inches (cast in epoxy resin and painted by the artist in acrylic gouache). One suspects that next time around Mason will have liberated his people from the wall altogether. In a recent article in *Art News* Mason explained what moved him to record the demolition of Les Halles—a march-of-progress event that had all Paris up in arms. Mason spent two years haunting the market, sketching the characters who worked there, whom he described as tough but gentle people "ennobled by the fresh beauty of the country produce." Mason sees Les Halles, over which towered a church, as a symbol of man's spiritual and earthly struggle. The market, he wrote, "was the last image of the natural in the city. It is now a Paradise Lost."

The New Realist painters have behind them the time-honored tradition of *trompe l'oeil* painting, which reached its apogee in America in the nineteenth century with William M. Harnett and John Frederick Peto. But the New Realist sculptors, George Segal aside, stem mainly from the nonart tradition of Madame Tussaud's and wax-works museums in general. Madame Tussaud's *Sleeping Beauty* (who breathes) and Duane Hanson's tired *Businessman*, who confronted visitors at the entrance to the Janis exhibition, have the same goal: to fool the observer, if only for an instant, into thinking they are alive. Furthermore, wax-works museums today are using the same materials as the New Realists. It is difficult (if not impossible) to see what makes one art and the other entertainment, and one is obliged to fall back on the now familiar explanation: It's art if the artist says it is.

However, not all the work discussed here is New Realist, in the sense of realer-than-real. Much of it consists of highly individual attempts to breathe new life into the figure—not with a pump as in the case of the *Sleeping Beauty*, but with the help of the creative spirit. Some of this new work defies classification. As James Grashow puts it: "I am in just as much of a dilemma as anyone. I don't feel like a sculptor, and I don't feel like a painter." Says Grooms's dealer John Bernard Myers: "We've always had a few artists who are bluebirds on the tree of art—Henri Rousseau, Raymond Mason, Red Grooms. They simply don't fall into any category." What we have seen this last winter in the New York galleries is a whole flock of bluebirds roosting on the tree of art. □

THE QUAD QUANDARY

RCA Drops the Other Shoe

BY IVAN BERGER

Last November RCA dropped one shoe in the path of Columbia's advancing four-channel record band wagon. A few weeks ago the other shoe dropped.

In November RCA's announcement of a new four-channel system looked suspiciously like an act of corporate petulance, another round in the long commercial warfare that began with the "battle of the speeds" in early LP days. RCA's system did appear to have some technical advantages, but it also had some admitted technical problems. RCA promised to work them out by June of this year, but such solutions are rarely ready when promised. Against all expectations, the first RCA releases are now promised for May.

As of November Columbia's four-channel record, dubbed "SQ," was almost ready for market. Discs were soon on the way from Columbia, Vanguard, and Ampex. Hardware was coming simultaneously from Sony, with Lafayette not far behind. Most important, SQ was the first four-channel record system backed by enough marketing muscle to offer a persuasive reason for the consumer to add additional components to his stereo system for rear as well as front sound sources.

Against this background, then, RCA's cry to stop the (record) presses sounded, at the least, premature. RCA had not even developed its own four-channel system (as Columbia had, in its CBS Labs) but had merely adapted a system originated by JVC, the Japanese Victor Corporation—a system for the most part ignored because of the technical challenges it posed.

To define the differences between the systems on which the two corporate giants are drawing new battle lines, it should be explained that SQ, and all other quadrasonic discs save RCA's, are based on "matrix" systems. The four quadrasonic audio signals are encoded into two, then partially retrieved again through precisely calibrated mixing and unmixing signals. The decoders for these systems work by comparing and contrasting the signals of the two resultant "stereo" channels to determine which portions of the signal should be directed to each of the four speakers. The same process yields a four-channel illusion from

stereo discs. And in the absence of true quadrasonic recordings in quantity, such enhancement had been the main selling point of the matrix systems that preceded SQ.

The RCA system does not utilize the matrix principle (and hence adds no such enhancement to stereo discs). Its decoder does not rely on audio signals alone, but is directed by high frequency information far above audibility in the range from 20,000 to 45,000 Hz.

Where SQ's mixing and unmixing all take place at normal audio frequencies (which can be conveyed quadrasonically on tape or disc, or broadcast in FM stereo), RCA's system works only if the transmitting medium can carry signals up to 45,000 Hz. In practice, this restricts RCA's quadrasonic system to disc records, and they may only be heard in four channels when played with special pickup cartridges whose response goes up to 45,000 Hz.

"The challenge," says RCA's Bill Dearborn, "was to develop a record we could play on ordinary stereo phonographs a hundred times and *then* still play well quadrasonically." RCA's problem was a double one: to develop a harder record material that would resist wear, and to develop a more sensitive demodulator that would lock onto high-frequency signals even when badly worn. Recent demonstrations give reason to believe that both difficulties have been overcome.

Aside from its long existing rivalry with CBS, RCA espoused the JVC system rather than accepting CBS's SQ because the technique offers a demonstrable advantage: increased separation. That is to say, its four channels of sound can provide to four speakers as much individuality of information as conventional stereo now provides to two speakers (hence, RCA calls the system "discrete," from the dictionary definition "separate, individually distinct"). SQ can match side-to-side separation, but its front-to-back separation is markedly less. In SQ each front channel contains phantom elements of both rear signals; each rear channel carries phantom elements of both front ones. "Logic" circuits partially restore this separation by instantaneously comparing channels and

reducing volume on the channels carrying the phantom signals; but the process isn't perfect. Technicians who developed the CBS SQ say that the ear requires very little front-rear separation in any case, but the makers of other matrix systems—which share the common dilemma—disagree.

The one RCA quadrasonic record I've really auditioned did seem to have more separation and a better-defined sound field than any SQ record I have heard. But without sampling a great many recordings, or the same material processed through both systems, the claims and counterclaims are almost impossible to adjudicate.

No RCA records were available in both stereo and quad for comparison. Nor will any ever be. RCA is committed to producing four-channel records only in the new discrete format and will market them at the same price as conventional stereo. They are also committed to a one-inventory policy, meaning that *all* future stereo discs will be quads. So RCA's discs may become more widely available in stores (while SQ discs, quadrasonically broadcastable, will probably enjoy more FM air time).

As far as the cost of conversion is concerned, the expense would be about equal for JVC or SQ. Both require an additional amplifier and two more speakers. SQ decoders cost an additional \$50 to \$200, and the first JVC decoders will cost \$100, plus \$70 additional for the four-channel cartridge. JVC equipment is promised for late July, two months after the first records.

And what about compatibility, that desideratum whenever technological change impends from contesting quarters? Both records can be played stereophonically on existing setups (Columbia, though, will still issue separate stereo records, because their four-channel discs cost a dollar more). Stereo systems can be adapted to play either system quadrasonically, at roughly equal cost, though the RCA/JVC system requires the additional installation of a new cartridge.

Questions of quality and the esthetic advantages of one system over the other, or both over stereo, remain to be demonstrated let alone resolved. □