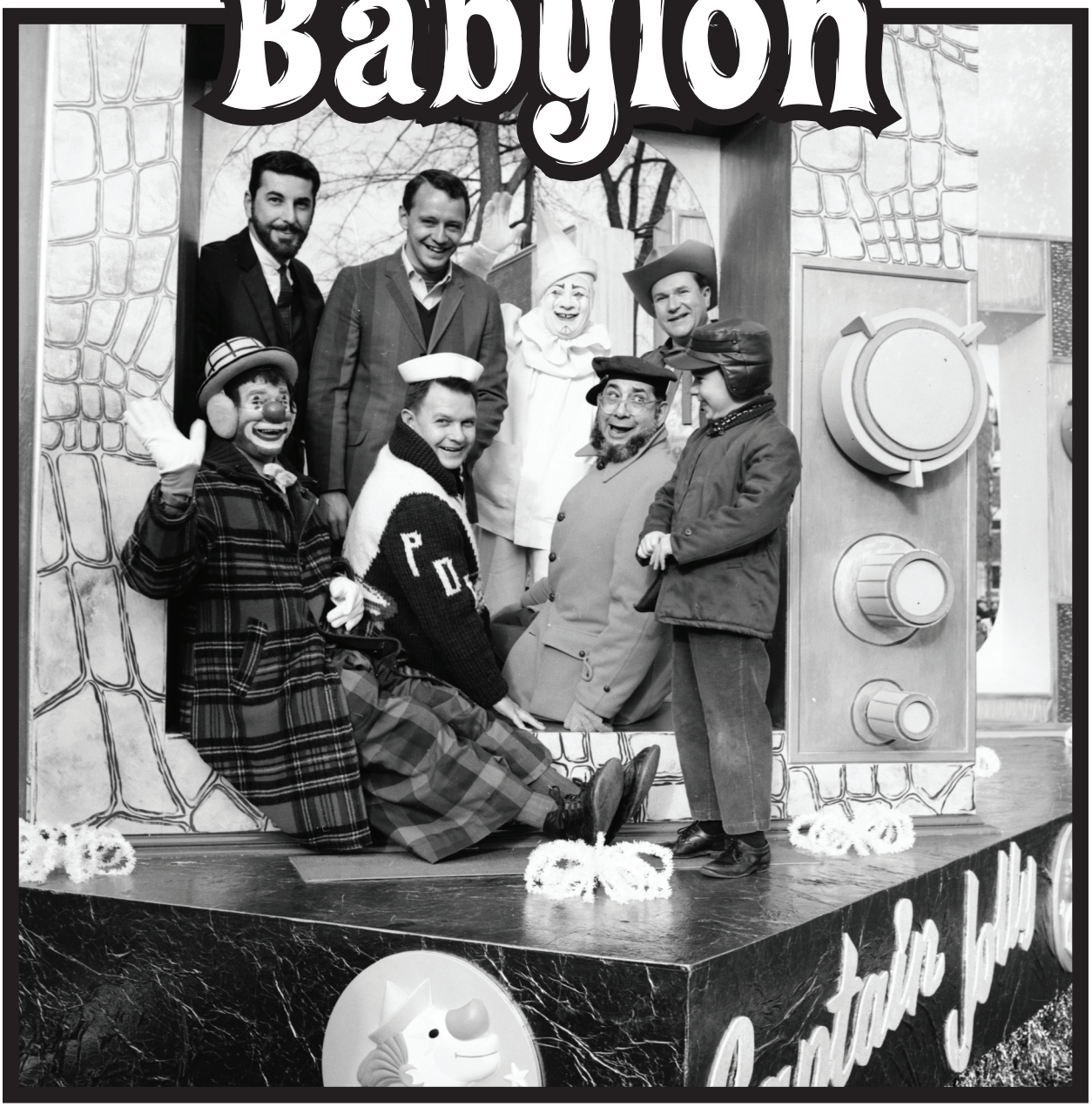
# Boofland Babylon



Installation by Cary Loren & Michael Zadoorian

Photographs by Norman Zadoorian


Captain Jolly

## Random Musings on Boofland Text by Michael Zadoorian

Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1962. It's the J. L. Hudson's Christmas Parade. My father, Norman Zadoorian, is photographing the parade for Detroit Edison. He takes a photograph of his five-year-old son posing with seven children's television show hosts on a float shaped like a giant TV set.

On the TV float. Top row: Larry Sands, Jerry Booth, (Jingles in Boofland, The Larry and Jerry Show), Milky the Clown (Milky's Party Time), Sagebrush Shorty (Sagebrush Shorty's Fun Ranch). Bottom row: Ricky the Clown (Action Theatre), Poopdeck Paul and Captain Jolly (Popeye and Pals), Michael Zadoorian.

I remember almost nothing of this day. I do remember the hat that I'm wearing.

I'm sure that I was prompted by my father to get up on the TV float. He needed to take a photograph and knew it would be a better picture if these guys had a child to interact with. Good idea, except for the fact that Captain Jolly is the only one that even acknowledges me. Everyone else is looking at that camera, as if it were their own personal TV eye. These guys were stars, the giants of Detroit kids' TV.

Larry and Jerry look strange up there. Like, why are we the only guys without costumes?

It had to be a thrill meeting people that I had watched on television. I look happy that day. I don't have my usual furtive, worried look. Even though I'm mere inches from one of the most terrifying beings to ever walk the earth with giant shoes: Milky the Clown.

Look at Milky. The frozen grimace, the slash lines on the evil kabuki face. While it's true that he was the official spokes clown for Twin Pines Dairy and his face was on the side of every carton of milk in this era, should he be this white? Every inch of his outfit is white from his size 18 brogans up to the tip of his Klan hat. Fifty years later, this clown is still scary.

Sagebrush Shorty looks half-taxidermied, half like he's trying to hide. Little known fact: he owned the Sagebrush Shorty School of Dance, Music and Affiliated Arts in Centerline.

In On Photography, Susan Sontag said that just by virtue of being photographed, most subjects are touched with pathos. I may perceive this photo differently because I'm in it, but I'm just as tarred with the pathos brush as Sagebrush Shorty. I've had it up on the wall of my living room for the past fifteen years as a kind of novelty. It's a photograph that people of a certain age react to in an intensely nostalgic way. But it's also something that could be considered "ironic" these days: an old picture of a dopey little boy with a funny hat standing on a float with clowns and freaky men in costumes?  Hilarious. Even I see it and I'm the dopey little boy.

Larry Sands (top left) is the only person on the TV float who's not really smiling. He looks thoughtful, almost professorial, the only one who looks truly out of place, as if he's thinking: "What in god's name am I doing here?" On Jingles in Boofland, he did the voices of two puppets: Herkimer the Dragon and Cecil B. Rabbit. After he was fired from Channel 9, he would move to California where he would write for a lot of well-known television shows. He would die in a helicopter crash in 1974.

"Life is in color, but black & white is more realistic." -Wim Wenders

Both of the clowns are waving in this photograph. Their hands frozen in the air, but not moving. Being animated is an essential part of clowning, I imagine. Either way, it adds to the eerie quality of the photograph.

Hats were an important part of every kids' show host's costume. I fit right in.

I can't help noticing that Poop Deck Paul has an official PDP sweater. Only in Michigan did the kids' show hosts have winter garb. Even Ricky has a plaid wool overcoat.

I remember my mother talking about Milky the Clown after she and I accompanied my father to some sort of Edison-sanctioned kids' event that he had to photograph. She thought he was drunk. She called him an "old soak." The idea of a drunk clown made an impression on me. It made me realize that there was a real person under the make-up.

Hmm. On second glance, maybe I'm not so relaxed after all. I'm anxiously twisting my fingers into my right hand. I was such a little rule-follower, I was probably

worried about getting arrested for jumping on one of the floats and would end up in jail.

“Everything else you grow out of, but you never recover from childhood.” -Beryl Bainbridge

It’s not visible but I’m assuming there’s a giant rabbit ear antenna on the top of this float.

Captain Jolly and Poopdeck Paul hosted Popeye cartoons and introduced the cartoons using sailor’s lingo. I remember that Captain Jolly had massive biceps like Popeye. Did he bulk up for the role?

Ricky the Clown is supposed to have short pants. He’s a clown. What’s my excuse?

John Burger said, “Fear of the present leads to mystification of the past.” Which seems to tie into the idea of creating an art installation around a childhood photograph from fifty years ago. It’s a chance to look at one’s childhood through a different lens. By giving this photograph a totemic quality, we’re better able to understand how we ended up where we are. It gives us something to hang our generational selves on, a way to contextualize our lives through our origins. American lives are filled with of this kind of detritus: parades, creepy kids show hosts, photographs of food, horrible songs, dumb hats, boring tweets, internet lists, mind-numbingly bad movies, tooth-rotting soda pop, pornography, ultra-violent video games, nostalgia. These absurd fragments make up our lives. These are our ruins.

I’m not sure why there’s a welcome mat under Ricky’s feet. Did the float stop so a hundred other kids could get their pictures taken with all these guys too? Suddenly, I feel less special.

“Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees.”- Paul Valery

Little known fact: Seven years after this photograph was taken, Milky the Clown would appear at the Cosmic Circus rock festival on the same bill as Joe Cocker, Iggy and the Stooges, Grand Funk Railroad and the MC-5. I can’t even begin to imagine how surreal that would have been.

I wonder what Captain Jolly said to me to make me smile. He seems like a good guy.

I love the trompe l’eoil alligator skin around the television screen.

Four years after this photo was taken, Poopdeck Paul was indicted for his role in a pyramid scheme. He was turned in by Captain Jolly.

“Truth, like light, blinds. Falsehood, on the contrary, is a beautiful twilight that enhances every object.” -Albert Camus

After Jingles in Boofland went off the air, Jerry Booth opened a small amusement park in Windsor. It closed after a year.

I feel as though Captain Jolly was ahead of his time, wearing his captain’s hat sideways.

Though this would appear to be a happy nostalgic photograph, it’s hard not to think about the stories of these men who make their livings amusing children. Were they happy? Miserable? Was Milky actually an alcoholic? Did these guys hate each other’s guts? How many of them went out and got totally fucked-up after a day of waving and smiling and posing with brats on a float shaped like a giant TV set? Who would blame them? They couldn’t have planned for their lives to turn out like this.

I’m wondering if I went home that Thanksgiving day and told all my friends that I had met Jingles, Milky, Sagebrush Shorty, et al. Were they jealous? Did they wish they were me? Were they impressed? Or did they not give a shit?

Exactly one year to the day that this photograph was taken, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

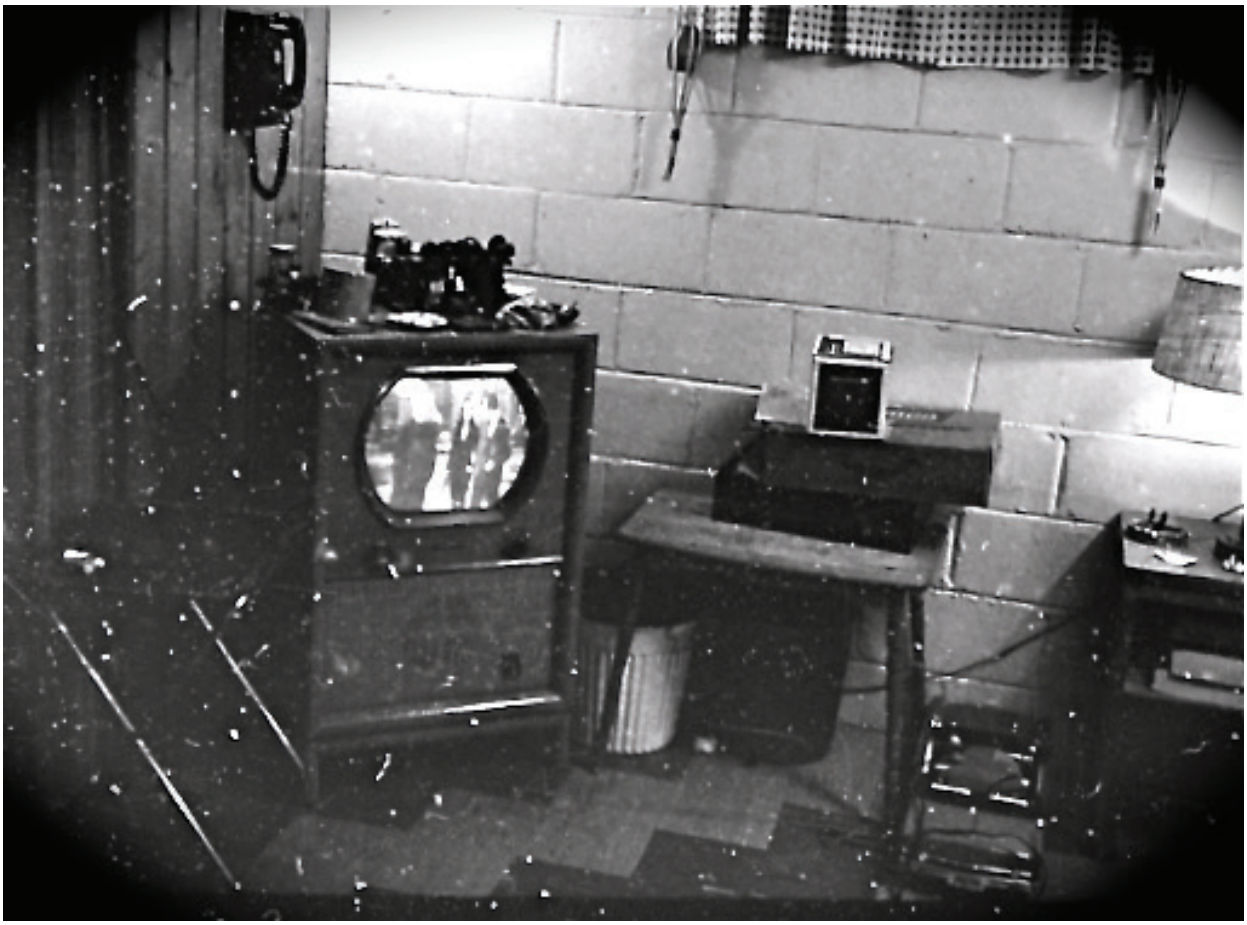
Sagebrush Shorty was a bartender at the end of his life.

“And the glory of children forever is that they have not begun to perceive that adult human strength depends mostly on forgetfulness. - Jack Kerouac

I want Ricky the Clown’s hat. I would wear it right now.

Susan Sontag also said, “All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.” All these guys are dead now, except for that kid. It’s like when you look at a photograph from a hundred years ago and see someone holding a baby. You can’t help but to think: even that baby is dead by now.

“Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long.” -Walker Evans



## The Interruption by Michael Zadoorian

I don't remember what I was watching. I was four years old, in our basement one afternoon when suddenly the television screen went silent, a moment before exploding into a jagged black & white supernova of horizontal lines and static. I had no idea what was happening. One minute I'm watching TV, and the next, nothing. Just as abruptly, the static cleared and a slide flipped on the screen: a cartoon boy, a stick figure with a brush cut, leaning against a cartoon television set shaped not unlike the one I was watching. The words PLEASE STAND BY were on the cartoon TV screen in dancing type, surrounded by little lightning bolts of static. A click, then an announcer's voice boomed through the tinny Motorola speaker: "We are currently experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by."

This cartoon PLEASE STAND BY slide was probably intended specifically for children's programming. One might think that a four-year-old like myself wouldn't particularly mind the introduction of a new cartoon character in the middle of his show. Fun! Who's that? Except for the fact that this cartoon stick figure boy was hideous. With his vacant stare and death-mask smile frozen in place, he looked positively demonic to my young eyes, a hell-vision that had invaded my once safe place in front of the TV. I had no idea what PLEASE STAND BY meant or what technical difficulties were, I knew only that this interruption was not supposed to occur. In my tiny, still developing unconscious mind, something snapped. I ran upstairs screaming bloody murder. Running from the television, my best friend, my provider of cartoons, of Soupy Sales with his shaving cream pies, of Captains Jolly and Kangaroo, of Bozo, Jingles, Milky and all the rest of the clowns. Upstairs, my mother is just walking into the kitchen. I throw myself at her legs, weeping breathlessly, hysterical.

"What's wrong?" she says. "What happened? Did you hurt yourself?" I don't look hurt, I'm not bleeding. I am simply insane with fright, clamped to her right leg. She extricates me, then kneels down and takes me in her arms. "What happened?"

Still weeping, nose running by now, crushing my face to the shoulder of her blouse, I try to tell her, between muffled sobs, about PLEASE STAND BY, but she doesn't quite seem to understand.

My father walks into the kitchen wondering what all the fuss is about. My mother looks at him with wide eyes, then shrugs. "I think something on the television scared him."

I saw the PLEASE STAND BY slide a few more times. I reacted similarly, though not quite as intensely. The local station must have eventually retired it. I never found out if I was the only child that it terrorized. All I know is that for years afterward, well into my teens and even my early twenties, whenever something I was watching on television was interrupted by technical difficulties and the words PLEASE STAND BY popped up on the screen, I would be filled with a deep and inexorable sense of dread.

It has only been in the past few years that I have come to understand what happened. Why seeing this jagged cartoon of a crew-cutted boy, with body

of sharp sticks and a mouth grinning emptily, was so terrifying to me. This boy, this skeleton, was a kind of vision of death, the inkling of a knowledge that I could not have comprehended at the time. The interruption.

I believe I was trying to understand. I was a kid full of nightmares, what my parents euphemistically called “bad dreams.” “Did you have a bad dream?” they would ask me when they came into my room in the middle of the night, after I would wake up screaming and panting, hair plastered against my forehead. During this period, it was a common occurrence in our house. I now imagine my parents in their room, exchanging looks when it would happen, as if to ask each other, “Okay, which of us is going to talk to him this time?”

Today, I don’t remember any of the dreams, just the feeling of the dreams. The frantic, abject fear; that sense of inescapable terror. Not surprising that I wouldn’t remember these dreams considering that I can’t remember the dreams I had last night, at least not without writing them down. I just remember the feelings and my parents seeming kind of annoyed that they had to do this every night, possibly regretting their choice to have what was then considered a late-in-life second child.

The interruption. What are nightmares but a manifestation of the idea of mortality. For a child, the introduction of it to a still-soft brain. The body whispering to the mind. The mind letting us know that there will be, at some time, at some point, an interruption.

# Notes from a Boofland Diary Text by Cary Loren

**Part one: The giant marshmallow baby, Detroit culture**

The silkscreened culture map of Detroit is folded as a web-press Art Gazette newsprint give-away– w/ cut-up biographies.

Novalais: “Dreams protect us against life’s monotony –they liberate us from seriousness by the delight of their games.”

Modeled after the National Dopester. Motel Apocalypse. Hypno-disk on a giant spinning wheel. (Motel Hell). The Vacancy sign blinks – Kandinsky reproductions in florescent paint: the forbidden cave. Sound of static, electric crackles at the shuttered door. No admittance signs. The sculpture is a blob with hair and slimy eyes, viewed through a peephole

A Motor spins the sculpture. Eyes, octopus and squid projections. The Baby Marshmallow absorbing images, smashing glass baby bottles against the walls. Peephole to the past, walls dripping milk. A dominatrix whips the marshmallow, while reciting crimes of childhood shame.

The Eurekaistic Church: colored lights can hypnotize “a radical hypno-high, smoother than any trip!” --the laughing farmer Vincent says. Up front, the heads are on a rotisserie.

A budget of chickenwire, garbage bags, foamy stuff, rotisserie spikes. Mannequin heads, wigs, peepholes. Fan strobe for a freak-light.

“Kitsch is the absolute denial of shit.” --Milan Kundara

Part two: Motor City Follies with the Hudson’s Thanksgiving Day Parade float or Boofland Babylon a collaboration w/ mz.

Flowers are both life & death.

Pre-recorded narratives. Heroes and dysfunctional stars are cardboard standups on the Sargent Pepper stage. CKLW jingles, Faygo commercials, Detroit low memories.

1. TV screen project past recordings. 2. Mannequins, clowns and figures destroy the ego. 3. the bandstand as altar, as frozen action.

"The thing itself is one; the images are many. What leads to a perceptive understanding of the thing is not the focus on one image, but the viewing of many images together."
-- Rudolf Steiner

Bandstand, props: old pizza box, broken refrigerator, pink carpet for band, cabbage patch dolls, a stack of toilet paper, trophies, flowers spelling life and death. Dirt that holds memories of the past, the funeral dirge, old family photographs.

A background banner of heads, Captain Bob-lo leads the parade.

Ed Wood, Jack Smith, Morticia, Che Guevara, Dracula, Nancy and Sluggo, Basil Wolverton, Ed Sanders, Jerry Lewis, John Sinclair, Vincent Price, Nico, Rat Fink, Batman, Superman, Elmore Leonard, Gilda, John Lee Hooker, The Sheik, Andre Williams, Bozo, Soupy Sales, Suzi Quatro, Captain Jolly, the Vernor's Gnome, Sir Graves, Alice Coltrane, Iggy, Marvin Gaye, Vampira & Tor, Chuck Berry, Bill Kennedy, Aretha, Oz, Johnny Ginger, etc. The heads grow from crystals, earth, vines, flowers, the sacred geometry. A 1960's splurge.

Two banners flank "Thanksgiving Day parade float".

1."Earth & Water", a nature banner: material collections, archives, Michigan travels, woods and lakes, family, buildings, toys and models that were played with, food that was consumed, objects from the physical world.

2. "Fire & Air", a spirit banner: imaginary play, cartoons, radio airwaves, comics, airships, Night sky, space exploration, horror, objects and characters floating, an imaginary, non-physical heaven and hell. WWII firefights, Buddhist dream world with cupids and angels. Backgrounds made of gumball tokens, marbles, toy cars, other collections. Hypnotic sound waves, transitional and illusion, the physical made spirit.

Vitrines hold added commentary and collections: photos, books, small items, relics of personality and time.

A pyramid of photos by Norman Zadoorian: the camera as existential release, passage through hell, the miasma of war, island culture as heaven. Bunny ear

antenna, TV vs the street, the lunch counter, noir films, “8 million stories in the naked city”, Monroe street in the rain, the thing, blob from Nudie Follies, relics of paranoia set in Plasticville, the family  train set. Rain reflections. Coffee shops. Baby Elephants.

Mid-century photographs are the “hidden exhibition” from the basement, a sideshow behind the cut-outs. The real exhibit is unearthed, discovered slowly, dug up masterworks from the root cellar.

Quotations about nostalgia hang above, leading into Boofland. The viewer’s future is an imagined past. The bardo-hell of baby boomer pop-cult ruins.

Flowers that spell snake eyes.

Automobile club of Michigan
DETROIT AUTOMOBILE INTER-INSURANCE EXCHANG
Miller SQUARE DEAL JEWE


SHOE
REPAIR


FEDERAL
SHOE
REPAIRING
SHOE
REPAIR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## 3 Shots From A Diner Text by Michael Zadoorian

There are three separate shots of a particular corner in downtown Detroit that my father, Norman Zadoorian, photographed. It's from what looks to be a window seat of a small diner. I'm not sure where this corner is located in Detroit, other than across the street from the Federal Shoe Repairing shop ("While U Wait") and across the intersection from a National Bank of Detroit building. The only thing I can be sure of is that this corner looks entirely different now. This is Detroit, after all. The buildings are very possibly gone. It may not even be a corner anymore. What was once a shoe repair store across from a diner may now be a parking lot or these days, a glistening new skyscraper. Or nothing. Detroit is capricious that way.

I have no idea why he took these three photographs. He may have just been bored and decided to knock off a few shots of the street while he had a cup of coffee or he maybe was just finishing off a roll of film. Though the latter seems less likely, because all the shots on the roll seem just as random as the ones from the diner. The contact sheet reveals other photographs of street scenes; the side staircase on what was then the State Theatre, a scrap metal collector's cart in front of the Automobile Club building, and the view from Grand River Avenue facing downtown toward the Book Tower and the G.A.R. building. In that sleety street scene, one can just barely make out a sign for a diner called the Edison Grill. While he probably hung out there for lunch and coffee since it was so near work, I know these photos weren't taken from the Edison Grill. Grand River is too wide. The topology just doesn't work. I wish it did because it would give me

a greater geographical sense of my father's everyday world at that time, much of which revolved around Detroit Edison, where he worked as a staff photographer for 35 years.

But I don't know the location of this diner. And these photographs aren't random. Perhaps that's why I keep coming back to them. In the first shot, there's a coffee cup and spoon in the foreground sitting on a ledge that's missing from the other two shots. This was probably just an experiment. During this period in the mid-fifties, it was one of his favorite things to do in photographs, to have something loom large in the foreground to steal your attention from what's happening in the background. The light is brighter in this shot too, less oppressive. In the other two photographs, there's a shadowy darkness around the edges of the frame. Because of that, the second and third photos feel stealthy and sinister, like a couple of stills from a lost fifties Noir film. In the second and third shots, it's easy to imagine the diner window as the location for a casual stake-out, the perch from which the private dick waits for a certain person to enter the scene, a shady businessman he's been hired to tail, an unfaithful husband headed to an assignation, or the unseen killer from the first act.

Yet despite the lurid shadows in these shots, nothing much is really happening in them. In one, a truck is backed up to a storefront next to Federal Shoe Repair, but obscured from our view. We surmise the business by what's being delivered, in this case fruits and vegetables, so it's probably a small restaurant or market. In the third photo, even less is happening. Same scene, but with a man crossing the street heading toward the diner. The quirk of the photo is that the moment that the shot was taken, the man's foot is up and behind him in mid-step so it looks as though he's an amputee. At that instant my father's camera captured a one-legged man coming toward him. Again the Noir aspect of these photos manifests itself. I'm noticing that a lot of his photos have this same quality. Maybe it's just the circumstances. Black & White film shot in city streets sixty years ago tends to look pretty Noir these days, almost inescapably so, because of the chiaroscuro palette of those films and the tropes that inevitably lead us to the idea of those shadowy rendezvous.

Thinking about it, there was something of the Noir figure about my father. He was a man who kept to himself. Didn't go out much, didn't have a lot of buddies, in some ways a loner in the world of men. He obviously spent time lurking down dark avenues, as one can see from many of his early photographs. Yet by the time I came around, he was mostly done with all that. Perhaps a second child knocks the Noir out of a guy. My father was anything but hard-boiled. The man I remember faithfully came home to his family every night after work. He was simply my father, who worked to keep us all fed and clothed and sheltered and never complained about it. He was emotionally open, funny and sensitive, quick to flair up in anger, then just as quick to apologize. Not particularly common traits in men of his generation.

The man just did his job and his job was taking photographs. He loved doing it. Yet still, looking at his photographs, and especially these three, I realize that a son never truly knows the dark night of his father's soul. What the hell was going on here in this diner? Was something about to happen? Who was he waiting for? Who was he watching? Why was he taking these photographs? Was it something that he wouldn't have wanted his family to know about? I can't help entertaining these ideas. Though he was probably just amusing himself during a coffee break or trying out a camera, part of me wants to think the Film Noir version: Stakeout on An Unknown Street.

## Cary Loren and Michael Zadoorian interview each other

March 8, 2015, in Southfield, Michigan.

**MICHAEL ZADOORIAN: My dad did not have a lot of close friends. He did not go out with the boys much.**

CARY LOREN: Really? He seemed like a very–

**MZ: He was very gregarious.**

CL: Outgoing, in some ways. The (photo of) the boys at the lunch counter. There was a kind of--

**MZ: --Camaraderie or something. Did you see? Probably the best and most revealing (photos) of that new batch of film. You saw the ones of the guys all in uniform?**

CL: The meter guys. I love those.

**MZ: The (Detroit Edison) Meter Men graduation. In that same series, there are some photographs of my father taking photographs of all the Meter Men. Someone took them, it looks like, through the door of a bus, but you can see my father right in the middle and seeing those pictures, it made me remember. I used to go on jobs with my father. If it was on a weekend, he would just take me along. I would carry his camera case or whatever. But those pictures of him taking charge of everything; getting everyone to calm down and shut up. I'm going to take your picture. And now I'm going to make you laugh.**

CL: Right, you had to be very personable to do all that.

**MZ: Right. With a bunch of men like that, one of his stock tricks would be to pose everyone up, then tell everyone, "Okay, everyone say...horseshit." And everyone would laugh and he'd take the picture.**

CL: He sort of invented a career for himself. This touches on one of my questions. I was wondering if working on all this material of your father's has changed any of your perceptions about him.

**MZ: Absolutely. It's really been a weird sort of intimacy with my past, with my father, just looking through all these photographs of his. And seeing them through your eyes as well. Just because I know you've been thinking**

**about my father a lot too. For me, it's been some simple things too. Like seeing the streets he used to walk all the time. He used to hang out on Griswold a lot.**
CL: Where he had lunch.
**MZ: Yes, so it was seeing a man that I really didn't know. I was just a boy. It was the artist, you know?**
CL: A lot of the images seem taken before you were born.
**MZ: A lot of them are, the ones we've been dealing with.**
CL: Like mid-fifties.
**MZ: Right before I was born. I can almost kind of detach myself from the situation. (Laughs) I can detach myself completely because I'm simply not there. I don't know, it does make me think about what happened with my father after he had another child because I think a lot of that street photography, the roaming around, sort of stopped.**
CL: You said he just picked up the camera himself. He was self-taught, right?
**MZ: I know he was self-taught because he had – I think I have it – a really old book, I want to say it's from like 1935 about how to take photographs. And I think that's how he taught himself.**
CL: Was it before the war? (WWII)
**MZ: Oh god, yes. I really think he started in his mid to late teens in earnest.**
CL: Do you think his experience in the war, the action he saw, in Leyte (Norman Zadoorian was stationed there), being wounded, do you think that changed or affected him?
**MZ: I think it must have. I mean, he never seemed terribly... I mean, you're always going to be damaged to a certain extent when you take part in a war, and I'm sure he was, but he wouldn't talk about it much. He would occasionally give us a weird tidbit about the war, about eating monkeys or something like that.**
CL: It was very violent in the Philippines when you look at the photos. Horrific. Jungle fighting, flame-throwers, that sort of stuff.
**MZ: Rain. Constant, constant rain. Where you'd be stuck somewhere and every inch of you would be soaked for days on end. I used some details like that for a story I wrote, which was kind of about him.**
CL: It's why they're called the Greatest Generation. They went through hell to change the world.
**MZ: Yeah. So, so I forgot what the question was, Cary. (Laughs)**
CL: I was wondering how the war affected him. I think you touched on it.
**MZ: I think it did. Some of this is a matter of doing the math. I realize that some of those photographs are like 1944. And I was thinking, what the hell was he doing in Detroit taking photographs during that time? Then I thought: he must have been done by then.**
CL: He was wounded.

**MZ: And he must have been home by that time.**
CL: Did the wound affect him? Did he have a limp or anything?
**MZ: No. Never. As long as I knew him he never complained about it hurting him. But you and I talked about the change in the photography. There was suddenly all this night photography.**
CL: Yeah, there was a certain darkness that started with him wandering the streets – lots of night photography.
**MZ: Absolutely. I think he was affected.**
CL: Those photos tell a story.
**MZ: There's a sort of bleakness to them. And the streets are empty. Except for, I mean, he's sort of peeping in some ways. He's taking photographs into windows. And in a couple of those photographs, people are discovering him.**
CL: They have a very existential quality, and that whole noir thing happening in Hollywood was also reflective of that.
**MZ: The darkness of the times. The post-war malaise.**
CL: Umm.
**MZ: Want me to ask you a question?**
CL: Sure. It will give me time to think. I've got a splitting headache.
**MZ: Want some aspirin? I've got some in the car.**
CL: Oh, no. No.
**MZ: No, Mike. I don't take drugs from other people's cars. It's kind of a policy of mine.**
CL: (Laughs)
**MZ: So why are you so obsessed with all this stuff of your childhood? All the detritus--**
CL: It's not only my childhood. It's our entire generation [of baby boomers] and learning more about it by discussing our roots -- exploring those histories.
**MZ: Not just with you—**
CL: The origin thing has been ongoing with me. Working and thinking about origins and the seed idea, to see how events grow and connect back to our present. The answer always seems to be in the past.
**MZ: And are you exploring your own origins too? I mean you do seem to be lightly obsessed with the junk and media and culture of your childhood. Those are your origins.**
CL: Right. Right. It's my history too, but I think we all have a similar overlapping history. I mean, what kind of bicycle did you have when you were young?
**MZ: Are you asking me?**
CL: Yeah, it's a question.
**MZ: I still have my bicycle. (Laughs)**
CL: And you still have your childhood TV set.
**MZ: (Laughs) I know. Some patterns are emerging here.**
CL: What kind of bike was it?

**MZ: It was a gold Schwinn 3 Speed.**
CL: Send me a photograph. (Laughs) That's the kind of thing that interests me because, like, I had a Huffy, which was like the poor man's Schwinn.
**MZ: Well, this one was special. I had a couple of junky sort of low-end bikes.**
CL: My brother had a Schwinn. Or sister.
**MZ: The story of my bike. I got it after my sister got married. It was 1968 and everyone in our middle-class world just did everything the way they were supposed to, so my parents paid for the entire wedding. And they were not by any means, wealthy or anything like that. Anyway, they spent a bunch of money on my sister's wedding and they had a little money left over and they bought me a bike. So my sister got a husband and (laughs) I got a bike. And we both still have them.**
CL: I think too that when you start looking at old photographs or at the objects that you may have had or played with, they can also stimulate your memory

more. Time. And I think what's around us is created and enhanced by those feelings. We tend to throw everything out as a society. We discard the past. We're not the only ones doing that, but we're a very throwaway society. So it's kind of interesting to stop and look.

**MZ: Absolutely. A lot of my first novel (SECOND HAND) was about that. Okay, a couple of things. I'm going to skip around with some of my questions, but this one will dovetail very nicely into that one.**

CL: Okay.

**MZ: You know, we're both from Detroit. We're both Midwestern. I mean, Detroit is Detroit, but it's still part of the Midwest. Basements are part of our lives here. I notice that all the things I want at an estate sale tend to be in the basement.**

CL: (Laughs)

**MZ: I'm always interested to see what people have done to their basements or what's there. And just a lot of the time, the best shit is there.**

CL: I don't know if your family did this, but with my family we always stored Time, Life and Look there, the magazines.

**MZ: National Geographic in mine.**

CL: Think about that. Time and Life in the basement.

**MZ: Yes, well, Time and Life is definitely more poetic.**

CL: The basement is the storage for memories and life. It's hidden, like your subconscious. Was it too horrible to toss out a magazine in the fifties or sixties?

**MZ: Yeah, especially if you'd been through the depression. Everything had a use. Magazines had a use. Newspapers definitely had a use when there wasn't indoor plumbing.**

CL: They would save newspapers of special events.

**MZ: Right.**

CL: When the Kennedy assassination happened, every paper—

**MZ: That's why you can still find them at estate sales or whatever.**

CL: That's really changed the way we think about time. Because everything's recorded in the digital world, there's a feeling we don't need the tangible-ness of physical things.

**MZ: Right. But it can disappear all too easily because it isn't a tangible thing.**

CL: Not only disappear, but it can be manipulated as well. Which is kind of a frightening thought.

**MZ: My father's entire career has been (stored) in basements. Now it's in mine.**

CL: We used to play in our basement. Constantly.

**MZ: So did we. That was a big thing. It was extra space where the kids could go and you could keep an eye on them.**

CL: I would recreate the Saturday monster movies. Make a little playhouse

theater down there. Summertime spookhouses. Mad scientist club meetings. We'd shoot our BB guns in the basement. (Laughs)

**MZ: I remember there was a room under our stairs that I loved.**

CL: Right. We had that too.

**MZ: One of those little crazy rooms.**

CL: The hideout! Yeah.

**MZ: I loved that room.**

CL: I kept my chemistry set in there. That was my mad scientist room.

**MZ: I think you've said what basements mean to you.**

CL: It's funny. In a way we're similar, but sort of this odd couple too.

**MZ: You and I? Yes.**

CL: We both have an appreciation of Detroit as a space, growing up here. And it seems to be a part of the work we do.

**MZ: I totally agree.**

CL: There's an overlap. That's why I wanted to work with you.

**MZ: I think this is something too, that I see in a lot of artists from around here. That appreciation for that which is thrown away. You know, the discarded?**

CL: Yes, especially people that grew up here. There's some deep pride for this area. I don't think every city is quite like that.

**MZ: Here in Detroit, discarded things are part of a design aesthetic. There's a new place downtown where the floor is from an old public school gymnasium.**

CL: Oh yeah.

**MZ: Part of what's going on is that so much stuff is fucked up here. And so much stuff has been allowed to fall apart. In a way, Detroit's been it's own estate sale for a long time.**

CL: Right. We're able to live with the past—

**MZ: And people take the broken things and they do other stuff with it. Once again, it goes back to what's discarded, what's left over. The detritus.**

CL: This is a topic I bring up a lot. I was wondering how you define nostalgia and if you think—

**MZ: (Laughs) You son of a bitch! I had a nostalgia question too.**

CL: We'll both talk about it -- how to define it. Do you think it has a place in the arts? And how does it function?

**MZ: I think nostalgia gets a bad rap in a way. People just associate it with just dumb—**

CL: Sentimental stuff.

**MZ: Yeah. Sentimental stuff. When I was preparing for this, I wanted to look at the root of the word (nostalgia), I think it's the Greek (algos), that means pain, grief, sorrow. It's the pain of remembering, you know? And there's nothing really schmaltzy about that. People like to talk about nostalgia like it's some rosy view of the past, but it's really about the pain**

**of remembering, the pain of what is gone. And there's a lot of that kind of pain here in Detroit. Things disappear here more than in other cities. So there is a place for nostalgia. I write about old things a lot, I've written about people reliving their lives through stuff, so I think there is a place for it. You need to think about not just the cheery side of nostalgia, but all the sides.**

CL: There's also that borderline area of kitsch, which is interesting. Kitsch tells you a lot about the time you're living in. The lowest forms of culture are way more fascinating—

**MZ: Way more revealing. I mean, what kind of crap regular people had is way more interesting and more revealing from a historical point of view than some fucking paintings of noblemen or something like that. Or religious paintings. I mean, all that stuff is fine, but seeing something that someone used at their dinner table or looked at to be amused. I mean, kitsch is sort of a luxury too—**

CL: Like when I look at that photograph of you in your den and you're listening to music and you have a sort of knick-knack shelf with the souvenir spoons on it--

**MZ: (Laughs)**

CL: Everybody had that. My family had a little spoon shelf by the front door with all the small junk they'd buy when travelling.

**MZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was a mug, I think, and probably a couple of model cars. I've looked at that photograph close up and tried to remember.**

CL: When you went on a trip, you'd buy a sticker at the gas station and put it on your car.

**MZ: On your trailer is what we did.**

CL: Your trailer was filled with those. I love that picture of the car and the trailer. I'm putting that in the "Nature" banner. I also included a photograph of myself and a group of friends in Junior High School, when we travelled to the upper peninsula and out west. That was a real turning point for me to be in nature that way—

**MZ: And to be independent too.**

CL: And to be sort of wild.

**MZ: What were you, twelve or something?**

CL: No, I was fourteen.

**MZ: Was this with your friend's older brother?**

CL: Yeah, this was with Tim Burton and Eric Burton. And Eric's girlfriend. It was really my first time being away.

**MZ: And it wouldn't be the last—**

CL: No. I was really hooked. It was an important experience that helped change how I thought. So in that first banner, the early nature experience is key… I think you had it with your family, which was different but still a good thing.

**MZ: Absolutely different.**

CL:  It's a similar experience for many people. The wilderness helps open up the world.

**MZ: Absolutely. I spent a lot of time in natural environments and it affected me in ways. Um, while we're still on nostalgia, you came up with a quote about it. You were trying to figure out where it came from then you realized it came from you—**

CL: "Nostalgia is the rich man's malady."

**MZ: That's it. How do you feel about that? What do you think that means?**

CL: I was thinking about how people who can reflect a lot about the past have a certain situation in their life—

**MZ: They have the luxury of having time to do that.**

CL: Yes, they have time to afford to do that. And people that are surviving every day, that are struggling, um, they may have those memories but can't afford to dwell on them – to reflect. They have to worry about earning a living every day and it's a struggle. And it's a horrible kind of existence to be stuck in that world.

And the thing is, you can't feel secure unless everyone's secure. You know what I mean? There's a feeling like—

**MZ: So you feel guilty for your feelings of nostalgia?**

CL: Yeah, there's guilt involved and it can definitely become an obsession. I've had several collections and when you're young, you maybe start in stamps or coins or whatever it is. And as you get older, collecting seems to be an embedded practice --it helps form your identity and is also a social thing we all participate in.

**MZ: As you get older, collecting doesn't seem to be the same. Suddenly, all the things you collected start to feel weighty. I'm more inclined to get rid of things right now.**

CL: That's why you go through them as you change. You give away the stamps or coins. As you age, you wonder "What use is this, what meaning does it have?" It becomes like, you say, heavy, almost a burden in your life.

**MZ: What am I going to do with this now?**

CL: Photography is something I love to collect but then it can become this massive weight. It's unruly. Suddenly, you're managing an archive.

**MZ: It's funny that we both have questions about nostalgia.**

CL: It had to come up -- our project is based on it. My question for you is, how do you feel the project has progressed? I don't know if you had ideas or projections about how you thought it would go? Is this headed in the direction you thought it would?

**MZ: I think it's been evolving, certainly. You've obviously been the anchor of this, I mean, you've been handling a lot of the logistical kinds of things. You've done this, so you've been getting things printed, getting people to build things...**

CL: It overlaps a lot of projects I've done before.

**MZ: It's been really great.**

CL: It's been different and interesting to work with someone else. So much art… Art seems to be this sort of lonely creation thing. Like people think it comes out of genius and I've always been opposed to that. I've worked alone and with groups of people. To me, it's always more interesting, and you get better ideas when bouncing it off of people. You can lose yourself in it. And it can also be more revealing in some ways.

**MZ: That's interesting. Also when you work with people and when everyone's sort of revealing something to a certain extent, it pushes you to go in the same places.**

CL: Nothing is ever done in a vacuum. You're really the conduit for things you've learned or people that have inspired you, the books you've read or films you've seen -- other creations are standing behind you, so… I mean writing seems like this very solitary thing, but it's also like you're carrying a lot with you. It's like any art. But we seem to push and worship this very solitary kind of genius

theory—

**MZ: Oh god yes. So many of those ideas about art are kind of bullshit.**

CL: Right. That's behind a lot of what I'm doing.

**MZ: Subverting the whole idea of the artist? And what art is?**

CL: And celebrity. The whole idea of the single genius theory just doesn't--

**MZ: I think about those things a lot. I mean, how many people get to a certain level of whatever in their art, and it doesn't-- this sounds trite -- but what's more important is doing the work.**

CL: Right. And maybe not analyzing it so much. That's one of the major problems, the over-thinking of all this stuff. Sometimes you just need to do it and not break it down so much.

**MZ: True. And that's actually been something that's been really, uh, been fun about working with you because I think I put way too much into the "solitude" thing and I'm trying to, at this point in my life, I'm trying to open my mind back up again. I feel as though it's gotten a bit closed these days, so working with you, being part of something that's a collaboration is good. Actually, as far as collectives and groups go, I'm barely even a part of the literary world.**

CL: (Laughs)

**MZ: I've had three books published and just by dint of having some books published, I'm kind of part of it, but I've never been very good at being part of a literary gang or having a bunch of writers to hang with. And all that is borne of my own insecurity. But I guess I was never insecure enough to not write. (Laughs)**

CL: Is there anything you think we could add to the project to make it more interesting? Improve it?

**MZ: I couldn't be any more thrilled about using my father's photography in this.**

CL: To me, that one photograph was the center (Norman's photo of MZ on the parade float with kids' show hosts). That was the start of it. And learning more about his history, slowly lifting up this veil, has opened a Pandora's box of images. And I see that as an integral part of this. To me, it's like the best thing we've discovered is your father's work, what a treasure.

**MZ: Absolutely. I've just in the past year or two, started going through some of his slides. There are thousands and thousands of them. I was afraid to go into the negatives. It was daunting to me. This gave me an excuse to do it. So that's been one of the best things about this project -- exploring my father's early work and having some people see it and appreciate it. That's been wonderful.**

CL: It reveals an era of Detroit that's not well-documented. You just don't see it. The closest thing to it is Bill Rauhauser's work, which is a faster format and a different beast altogether. There's a real sturdiness about your father's work. A

very solid, a solid kind of foundation that's there. I used Walker Evans (as an example of similar work), not so much (Robert) Frank, but the photographers who use a larger format, really need to think slowly. You're not just flipping it up (the camera) and grabbing a picture, you need to be serious about it, compose and study the situation much slower. It's a world carefully put together. So the framing is really thought out, all of it is orchestrated. It's all considered.

**MZ: Yeah, well. You know, I think that sturdiness—which is a great word---I think a lot of Detroit artists have that. I think there's a sort of sturdiness to a lot of the people I know who create things in Detroit. I've talked about that before. No one here thinks the world owes them a living. (Affects a haughty accent) *So I can do My Art!***

CL: Maybe it's the manufacturing, blue-collar element of the city.

**MZ: I think it is. Everyone I know here works. Has to do something for a living. To make some money. And they do what they have to do. They do their work when they can.**

CL: This sort of relates to what we've been saying. Do you think it's the physical place of this (Detroit) or the history or what? What made it such a place that gives people such a sense of pride? Is there something special about where we are physically?

**MZ: I think there is. Absolutely. When I was a kid, I used to think that I was really lucky to grow up in Detroit. Where they make the cars. I thought that was the most special thing. I know it's kind of nutty. But I was obsessed with cars as a kid. And the photographs have made me realize where I got that from—my father. There are cars in so many of the photographs.**

CL: But also since you've traveled and you've seen Michigan too, in relation to the rest of the country that you maybe have an appreciation for the state and where we're located.

**MZ: I do. I love being Midwestern. Okay, I have a question for you. The picture of me from the parade, on the float with all the kids' show hosts. How did you feel when you first saw that? What do you think resonated with you to make you want to create something out of it?**

CL: It hit on a couple of things. Like when we did Strange Früt (an earlier project with D.A.M., 1998-2001), it was also about memory and TV hosts that I was obsessed with. Your father's photo was like a manifesto, a container of those ideas, but it also went further and was about entering into that world. I had that photo on my office door for years and looked at it every day. As a kid I'd recreate those situations (kids' shows) in my basement. That was part of it. The photo contains multiple layers, because you were actually inside the show, on the set of a set. I mean, I had the same stupid hat, the same coat, we could have been identical twins. And to be a child on that float seemed so magical, like a dream.

**MZ: And the float is shaped like a giant television set.**

CL: So it had the idea of being inside the whole world of TV and of those people

particularly. I remember how the host was at the center of these different imaginary worlds. Jingles in Boofland, was an alternate universe inside a castle. And you're having all these multiple overlapped worlds coming together. There's Milky the Clown, Johnny Ginger the bellhop who showed The Three Stooges and Captain Jolly who showed Popeye cartoons. Because that's what you did, growing up at that time, you watched those shows. That was our history. We were hooked on Soupy Sales.

**MZ: I was obsessed with cartoons.**

CL: So you would kind of be inside their world.

**MZ: And you loved being there.**

CL: It was absolutely the best part of your day.

**MZ: Soupy Sales? I would sit there and laugh and laugh and laugh.**

CL: And if he told you to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or have tomato soup for lunch that day, you did!

**MZ: Or if he told you to go into your mother's purse—**

CL: I don't remember that ever happening.

**MZ: Apparently it did. Interesting though, that photograph for me. I mean, I've had it for a long time. I've had it on the wall of my living room.**

CL: Most art is involved with re-creating. Thinking about it, then re-arranging and commenting more about it.

**MZ: Is it a kind of re-arranging the past, do you think? What should have happened? What may have happened?**

CL: No, I'm not trying to make it more perfect or anything.

**MZ: Oh no, you could make it more fucked up.**

CL: (Laughs) It's more F'ed up, for sure.

**MZ: Didn't Mike Kelley do something like that? Where he took yearbook photos and re-staged them almost?**

CL: Kelley did that in "Day is Done" [2005] a film and installation that was almost like a Broadway musical. That was an extension of his Educational Complex – a massive project that used repressed memory syndrome as a jumping off point.

**MZ: There's another guy who created art out of thrift store stuff, discarded objects.**

CL: That was Jim Shaw and his thrift store painting collection. Shaw has this incredible radar for low culture and usually zones in on the most bizarre rejects. I think we all used parts of this thrift store aesthetic as a group. It was just what we did.

**MZ: Wasn't part of that just a result of being poor?**

CL: Not really, I think it was more of a style. For myself, that element came out of Jack Smith, an artist I really admired growing up. I read Sontag's book Against Interpretation while I studied Smith in high school. Her ideas about camp, Warhol and Smith were important to me. I wrote to Smith in my last year of high school and lived with him briefly in the summer of '73. That was my first exposure to avant-garde art.

**MZ: You were reading Sontag while you were watching the cartoons. (Laughs) No, I know you weren't that young.**

CL: Not that young, but I discovered Sontag in high school from reading her essay on Smith's Flaming Creatures, and then I used that aesthetic, bringing it to Ann Arbor.

**MZ: And then Destroy All Monsters?**

CL: At first it was street theater, reconstructing underground comics and medieval minstrelsy. We got our costumes and props at thrift stores. It was a combination of live performance and midnight-theater film show. I met Kelley and Shaw during this theater project and D.A.M. began just after that period.

**MZ: Were you making films too?**

CL: I was making films beginning in high school, mostly influenced by Smith and Warhol.

**MZ: And that was way before--**

CL: Before the band had formed.

**MZ: One last question. Well, you probably just answered this. I was going to ask you if you saw this project as an extension of your earlier work. I think**

**you've said that it has.**
CL: Yeah, definitely. I see everything as connected.
**MZ: All part of one big—**
CL: All part of one big puzzle.
**MZ: One big hustle?**
CL: Puzzle.
**MZ: (Laughs)**
CL: I wish it was a hustle. I could make some money on it.
**MZ: (Laughs)**
CL: I've never been able to turn it into a hustle.
**MZ: Your hustle needs—**
CL: My hustle needs work.
**MZ: I know what you mean. (Laughs) I have no game. I'm game-less.**
CL: I was also going to ask, going back to this thing (list of questions) Do you think the Kresge foundation, which is responsible for this (ArtX). Do you think it's a successful way of presenting culture?
**MZ: I don't know. Like I said, I've never been a big joiner…The Kresge thing was one of the first things I've ever tried to be part of. I haven't gone for a lot of fellowships or things like that.**
CL: I was always kind of opposed to that, to be honest with you. I thought: "Why try for a grant?" It's hard, like asking for a handout.
**MZ: It just never occurred to me. It was probably half laziness, half I have a job I don't need a fellowship. I'll leave that to someone else. So it was interesting, considering you and Colleen where the ones that encouraged me to try for a Kresge.**
CL: Oh, good.
**MZ: Yeah. So I think it's successful. At least it's getting people to pay attention to art and getting people out there.**
CL: That's what I figure. If you're going to throw money, it may as well be in the art world.
**MZ: Yeah, why not? So much money gets thrown at way worse things.**
CL: And it gets people thinking about other things besides—making an automobile.
**MZ: Making money or buying things, whatever.**
CL: I don't know if this is even a question, but the perception of us being, like, baby boomers? It's sort of like, we've had so much given to us.
**MZ: Whereas our parents were the "Greatest Generation" and we're the most annoying generation.**
CL: (Laughs) And it's like we're not giving up, you know?
**MZ: Oh, no. We're absolutely not.**
CL: We're on this path and just like shoving people into our business—
**MZ: In our pasts. Like we're doing right now with this project.**
CL: Exactly.

**MZ: It's like "Look at us! Look at our horror movie hosts! We demand it!" (Laughs)**
CL: (Laughs) Exactly. Look how wonderful we are!
**MZ: We're going to be doing it until we're dead.**
CL: I know, until we're dead. I'm just wondering if this perception, will we ever lose it? I guess not. Or if it could be helpful—
**MZ: Us being the bossiest generation ever?**
CL: The most loud, TV-obsessed, pop-culture addicts.
**MZ: I don't know. It's interesting.**
CL: It's funny because the older boomers aren't as TV-obsessed as we were. They're much more political, more activist-oriented, and they're just a few years older.
**MZ: But it was enough to make a big difference. I came up in the seventies where it was, you know, things were not the same. Everything (the movement) had lost it's-- the activism balloon had sort of fizzled out around the room. And then it became about ourselves.**
CL: I felt that way too. We just missed the thrill of the sixties and it left us high and dry.
**MZ: I missed all that. I mean, even if I had—**
CL: Yeah, where's all the free love?
**MZ: I totally missed all that. Not that I would have been any good at it. But I completely missed it. (Laughs) Yeah. I think they had more highs and lows than our generation.**
CL: The later generations were probably thinking "Well, leave something for us!"
**MZ: All the later generations are thinking that. We're using up everything. We're the worst generation.**
CL: We are, I think, in a way.
**MZ: I love this part. This is going to be a good part of the interview.**
CL: We're very spoiled people.
**MZ: (Laughs) Maybe that's a good place to end. Anything profound to wrap it up with? I got nothing.**
CL: I got nothing. This is good. I'll email it to you.
**MZ: (Laughs) That can be my job.**
CL: And we'll doctor it up.
**MZ: To make us sound way smarter.**
(Both laugh)

END OF RECORDING

Photo of Larry Sands and Jerry Booth from DetroitKidsShow.com

# The Boofland Loyalty Song

Words and music by Larry Sands

Away across the Ishkabow,
And across the Foofram Sea.
There is a place called Boofland,
Where very soon you'll be.
Boofland is full of surprises,
There is a place called Boofland,
Where very soon you'll be.
Boofland is full of surprises,
Like birds and dragons and things,
And inside the magic castle,
Jingles laughs, dances and sings.

Oh Boofland, my Boofland,
let us always sing.
And have some fun with Cecil B.,
Herkimer and Jing.
No matter how big I get,
No matter where I go-go-go.
I'll always watch my TV set
for the Jingles Show!
The Jingles Show

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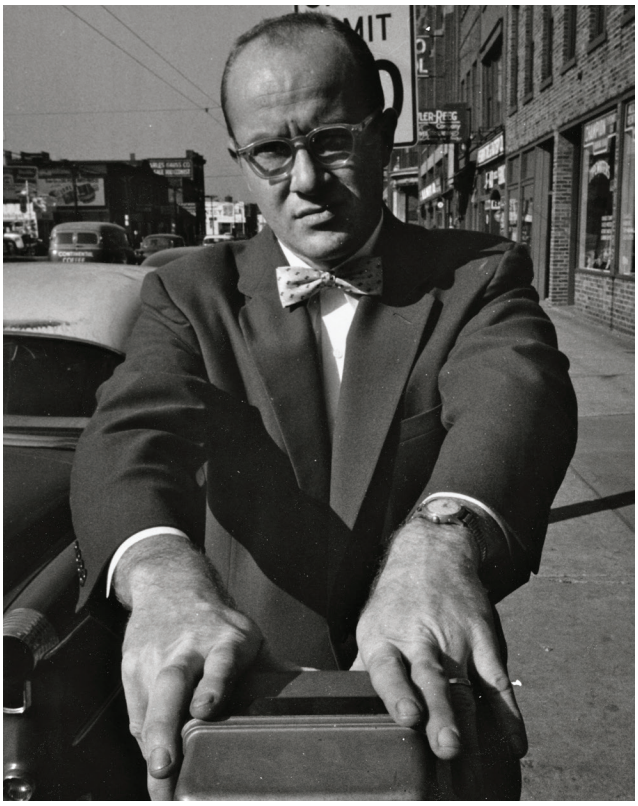
*Midtown Detroit, The Kresge Foundation, MOCAD, Leith Campbell, Ed Golick, The Graphics Factory, Keith McLenon, Susan Zadoorian and Cameron Jamie.*
*This project is dedicated to the memory of Norman Zadoorian.*



My father, Norman Zadoorian was born in 1921. He was a self-taught photographer. He started taking photos as a teenager and continued all through his World War II years stationed in the Philippines. After the war, he came back and worked at a Detroit studio owned by a Japanese-American photographer. He started working at Detroit Edison around 1948, doing exactly what he loved, taking photographs and talking to people. He photographed nuclear power plants, Thanksgiving day parades, "All Electric Kitchens," supermarkets, strikes, electrocution victims, local politicos, and everyone from Edison's rank and file to the corporate executives. He was a member of the Photo Guild of Detroit. He won two Freedom Foundation awards for his work series photographs. He had a number of magazine publications. He almost got into Life magazine once, but didn't quite make it. (I stole that fact for my novel Second Hand, as well as many of the images from his street series.) The photographs featured in Boofland Babylon were taken anywhere from mid forties to late sixties. The street scenes are my favorite. Detroit looks so amazingly different, sometimes bleak and mysterious, other times bright and bustling, bursting with post-war optimism. When he died in 2004, he left behind decades of photographs, slides and negatives, now in my possession.