

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a dark blue shirt, sits at a bar. She is looking thoughtfully to her left, with her hand resting against her cheek. In front of her is a bottle of wine with a decorative label. To the right, a poster of Che Guevara is visible on the bar counter. The background shows a dimly lit bar setting with framed pictures on the wall.

Chez **PAULETTE**

ON THE SUNSET STRIP

ANYA LEWIN

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PENINSULA ARTS GALLERY

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CHEZ PAULETTE: A CORRIDOR IN TIME

JOHN GILMORE

So many faces in the brain's warehouse, albums of old photographs or a slide show of pictures talking and moving. It isn't a sterile performance. It's been seeded with past segments, with Santana winds, bright Hollywood sunlight, and the ocean. There's movement, and the nights—bright lights, dazzling colors, a half-clogged stream of headlights swamping Sunset Boulevard.

We found a parking place down the slope south of Sunset. Walking back, I'm remembering restaurants and nightclubs like Ciro's, Mocambo, Crescendo—the marquees' with names one knew. You pass Beatnik coffee shops and dark driveways, jammed parking lots. This was Hollywood—its heart at that time in life.

I'd returned from NY to my native L.A., staying at a friend's house beneath the weathered HOLLYWOOD sign. I said, "Your coffee's lousy." His wife says the best coffee's at Chez Paulette. I ask, "Where's that?" Barry, a director, tells her, "John doesn't know 'cause he's been on location." Looks at me: "Café opened last year. Got in with the 77 Sunset Strip series." He snaps his fingers to the beat. "Warner's bridged a gap between real time and tinsel-make-believe."

I'd been everywhere, no newcomer to make-believe, mandatory for a happy life in Hollywood. I remember winding down the mountain onto Beachwood, then Hollywood Boulevard, Laurel Canyon, and south to the Strip. Monuments fading like the Garden of Allah and the Garden Court Apartments. They beckoned to memory like sea nymphs.

I remembered Chez Paulette. I'd remembered it's twin at Warner's, constructed after fame beknighted the real café. We stood where the little alleyway had been, gone like so many other landmarks; I knew the warmth of those sea nymph arms back-tweaking the brain. Did it matter when there was nothing anymore?

It had been warm and cozy in Chez Paulette. I remembered Max Lewin, who'd opened the place. Seeing him in the Unicorn, Sea Witch, Pandora's Box on Laurel Canyon, Cosmo Alley in Hollywood. Many times in Schwab's where I'd slump in a booth with Jack Nicholson, Warren Oates, Harry Dean Stanton, those who came and went—a nucleus hungrily seeking work.

I never saw Max Lewin without him smiling. We shook hands and I congratulated him on the nest he'd made not only for the sometimes-working actors to find refuge with coffee and "crusts of wondrous garlic bread", but as well for those more ready to afford: Marlon Brando, Bobby Darin, Marlene Dietrich, Fritz Lang, Eddie Fisher, Shirley

MacLaine, Jane Russell, and many others flying in but slow to leave.

I'd spent nights at a round table outside, drinking Chianti with Bobby Blake or Hugo Haas or Laurette Luez whose personal tragedies sat like crows on her shoulders. Or I was with my mentor Ida Lupino, or my friend John Hodiak who'd linked Marilyn Monroe to my life for a hop-scotch friendship before the darkness came.

I'd been in Paris for a contemporary La Boheme movie with Jean Seberg. She'd walked. We connected in Hollywood's Schwab's, later fusing in Chez Paulette. I cared for Jean, then lost her. Others arrived to play their lives against an undying warmth within Chez Paulette.

Max was pleased when Curtis Harrington and friend Gloria Swanson, and plus myself, paid a visit. Jane Russell joined up, all involved in a picture under development. Gloria adored Chez Paulette, and Jane later told me, "I can be there without looking like a hothouse bulb." She'd be quickly among other stars, writers, directors, while the unobtrusive hopefuls managed through to wherever.

Other Cafés lost fame, yet Chez Paulette and its Warner's twin are easily recalled—pictures tumble in. Life fills the screen with faces so recognizable. Imagine recordings of the talk, the laughter, romances over candlelight—brief or long-lasting?

It's easy to go back to that place and those people. Think of Sunset Strip as old Route 66, "the bloody highway", and Chez Paulette as a roadside stop you visit but go back again and again in memory because its American magic rules out nothing. Welcome all travelers from where you were to where you're going. Thank you, Anya Lewin, for opening this corridor just in time. A view for most before it's gone from eyeball view forever.

I've gilded historical lilies with fragments of diamond to serve as a roux; imagine the heart sprouting an appendage that wraps itself with petals, as these delicate shapes are intended to hide darkness. The Chez Paulette was more than its walls, its floor, Chianti bottles, delicious food, or soft guitar music; more than that, and beyond what you can show in your hand. It's found in that corridor. Think about the travelers; listen with your mind to the silent voices. You're on hallowed ground.

No stranger to Hollywood or Times Square, former actor John Gilmore is today one of the most acclaimed and controversial writers whose following spans the globe. www.johngilmore.com



Max Lewin in front of Chez Paulette



ANYA LEWIN'S *CHEZ PAULETTE ON THE SUNSET STRIP* (2013)

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Kookie, Kookie (lend me your comb).
Kookie Kookie ... [snap, snap].

I can't get that out of my head. I've tried everything.

The iconic song refrain – sung by Connie Stevens – refers to a super suave (pronounced swave) hipster Edd “Kookie” Byrnes (that’s Ed with stuttering d’s, not to be confused with Mr. Ed the talking horse), who has a habit of re-shaping his pompadour, whipping out a comb from his pocket faster than James Garner could whip out a wild card in *Maverick*.

77 Sunset Strip, where Kookie and his comb went viral, ran on the ABC television network for six seasons, starting in 1958, when I was 8 years old and totally enthralled by this show, which defined network TV cool (a simulacrum of a mirage). There were two detectives working out of that office on the Strip – one played by a character whose actual name was, after Kookie, the show’s chief asset: *Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.* In the show, Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. played Stu Bailey; talk about double consciousness, the marked name of the actor and the unmarked allure of his character. I loved that “Jr.” – a wink to the fact, even to me at 8, that Sr. was a world-famous violinist. There was something both magnetic and comforting about that name, Zimbalist, which suggests both symbolist and cymbalist, and that buries, deep within, the story of Efrem’s baptism by his Russian Jewish assimilationist parents and his subsequent Christian odyssey.

In 1958, Efrem was Stu, the *Maverick* sidekick and future star of *The FBI* and Goldwater-supporter: as American as a chicken-potpie frozen (“TV”) dinner.

Not to mention Efrem’s mother, the renowned opera singer Alum Gluck, who came to fame in 1916 with million-selling version of “Carry Me Back to Old Virginie” (“There’s where this old darkey’s heart am long’d to go”), a perfect example of a European operatic voicing of minstrel-dialect, which suggests, in all its grotesque deformities, a – dig it! –genuine American social space that lurks, like an trans-species Oedipal fantasy in *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, in the black heart of Cold War mass culture.

The guy with the comb – in the show a character named Gerald Lloyd Kookson III, so outdoing Jr. by a full notch on the scale of social hierarchy – was a jive-talkin’ parking lot attendant at Dino’s, next door to 77 on the Strip, the nightclub of Dean Martin, the ur-figure for the show, the great lounge vocalist and sometimes straight man to America’s most manically zany Jewish comic, Jerry Lewis. Martin and Lewis played out the desires for, and impossibility of, assimilation that the Zimbalist family story enacted in what goes for real life among the squares. Who doesn’t long for the extreme mellow of Martin’s intoxicatingly relaxed singing? “Everybody loves somebody sometimes.” It sounds like Gertrude Stein tamed on Miltown.

This is the world we enter in Anya Lewin’s recreation of Chez Paulette, her father’s actual hip café, which was recreated on the sound stage of *77 Sunset Strip*.

Let’s call it nested simulacrums.

In 1958 Max Lewin took over his family’s failing cake shop. Capitalizing on its hip location on the Sunset Strip, he turned it into a coffee house called Chez Paulette, after his mother, whose name was Ada. With the help of Marlon Brando, it became a bohemian Hollywood hangout.

For the gallery show at Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth University, Lewin has created a short film noir where the habitués of Chez Paulette are characters in search of an identity, refracted through the lens of the director/daughter. At the same time, Lewin has followed the lead of Warner Brothers and created a replica of the café in the gallery, where you can enter into the imaginary world of her film, both her father’s utopia AND the set in the set of *77 Sunset Strip*.

Snap, snap.

If you are beat, you need a beret and a French name to boot. Behind every Paulette is an Ada in a refamiliarization pogram. A kind of Romper Room for – it’s far out, man! – newly emerging social relations, forged in Hollywood where the replica is way more cool than the forgery it models itself on.

But despite the cool surface of the hip café, Ada keeps coming in with a babka, at one point with Star of David tattooed in icing on the top, breaking the illusion of a delusion (or is it the other way around?). There is a parallel moment in the film, when Ada speaks with a Yiddish accent, a linguist crack in the hipstereze coin of this realm, where unassimilated jars against post-assimilated. At that moment, the color line rips open and the hip jive talk comes into sharp relief: the white cats in the cafe have adopted the miscegenated tongue of mass culture cool, a cover version of African-American vernacular.

Referring to her father who played the bit part of the proprietor of Chez Paulette on the TV show, Lewin asks, “How do you play yourself?”

How do you not play yourself? That’s what I wanted to know in 1958, just a few years into the mirror stage and trying to adjust.

That’s why *77 Sunset Strip* left me spellbound.

In God We Trust All Others Pay Cash, as Jean Shepherd liked to say.

Was it Kooky or Cookie?

Polly wanna a cracker.

And what exactly was Connie Stevens asking Kookie in the song?

(Sometime a comb is a phallic Zimbalist and a babka a goyisha coffee cake.)

Chez Paulette – the work of art – is a transitional space where the real finds itself empty and fills up with espresso and long drags on bitter cigarettes.

Stella! Stella!

Lend me your comb.

Snap, snap.

Charles Bernstein is author of *Recalculating* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (Chicago, 2011), and *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). He is Donald T. Regan Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is co-director of PennSound <writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>. More info at epc.buffalo.edu.



👉 Stills from *Chez Paulette on the Sunset Strip*

SOME NOTES ON CHEZ PAULETTE ON THE SUNSET STRIP

ANYA LEWIN

Coffee House - New After Dark Lure was the headline of a 1958 LA Times article discussing the emerging culture of espresso-serving hip cafés (including my father's place Chez Paulette), which I excavated from the basement archives of the central Los Angeles Library.

Immediately, I admit to my first exaggeration. I did go to the basement of the library, but the article was found on a computer search, as everything was conveniently digitized. There was no digging through boxes in a darkened room while wearing white gloves.

But that's the story part of history.

And there were lots of stories, ones from the habitués whom I interviewed, articles I read (*Playboy* did a four page spread on café culture with a picture of Mort Sahl holding court at Chez Paulette), and anecdotes that I remembered my father telling, vagaries based in truths - Marlon Brando using his celebrity to get the Chez Paulette on the radar, so the business didn't go belly up, motorcycle rides with James Dean, race cars with Steve McQueen, flamenco dancers dancing on tables and of course *77 Sunset Strips'* reconstruction and parody of Chez Paulette.

I remember the first time I saw these scenes, standing in a viewing booth in the New York Museum of Television and Radio, listening to my dad's hepcat lingo covering his real accent and laughing at the credits that said he played himself.

There were also the stories my dad didn't tell, but that were there when you looked into the tealeaves. The ones about Jewish immigration to Hollywood, (if you didn't make it as an actor open a restaurant) name changes and mottoes like "dress British, think Yiddish," along with European coffee houses that played out a different kind of cultural assimilation, more noodle kugel than apple pie.

These tales and tidbits, TV scenes, facts and momentary glimpses from photos in a scrapbook have been reworked, copied, quoted, and reconfigured into a film script and made into a film that is finished and unfinished at the same time. Like the director/detective/daughter figure in the film *Chez Paulette on the Sunset Strip: The Coffee Caper*, which sits within the gallery installation *Chez Paulette on the Sunset Strip* says "there is no mystery, just history". Maybe it's only a good rhyme.

Chez Paulette was a place for late night talking, philosophizing, dreaming, slow time for those searching for the big time. Chez Paulette has opened again, in a day for night scenario, not in Hollywood but in Plymouth in the Peninsula Arts Gallery, serving espresso and offering itself as a place to be reinvented by its new clientele. It's not nostalgia, it's the now.

Anya Lewin has had over 75 jobs - she once listed and counted them while on a road trip - including working as a shepherd in France. She was born in Los Angeles and now lives in the UK where she is a lecturer and researcher in Fine Art at Plymouth University. Her works, both individual and collaborative, have been exhibited and screened in such places as Beijing, Belfast, Bristol, Bulgaria, Cuba, London, Montana, New York, San Francisco and Siberia. She has been the recipient of two Arts Council England Grants for the Arts and several international residencies. More info can be found at www.imadeitup.info

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