

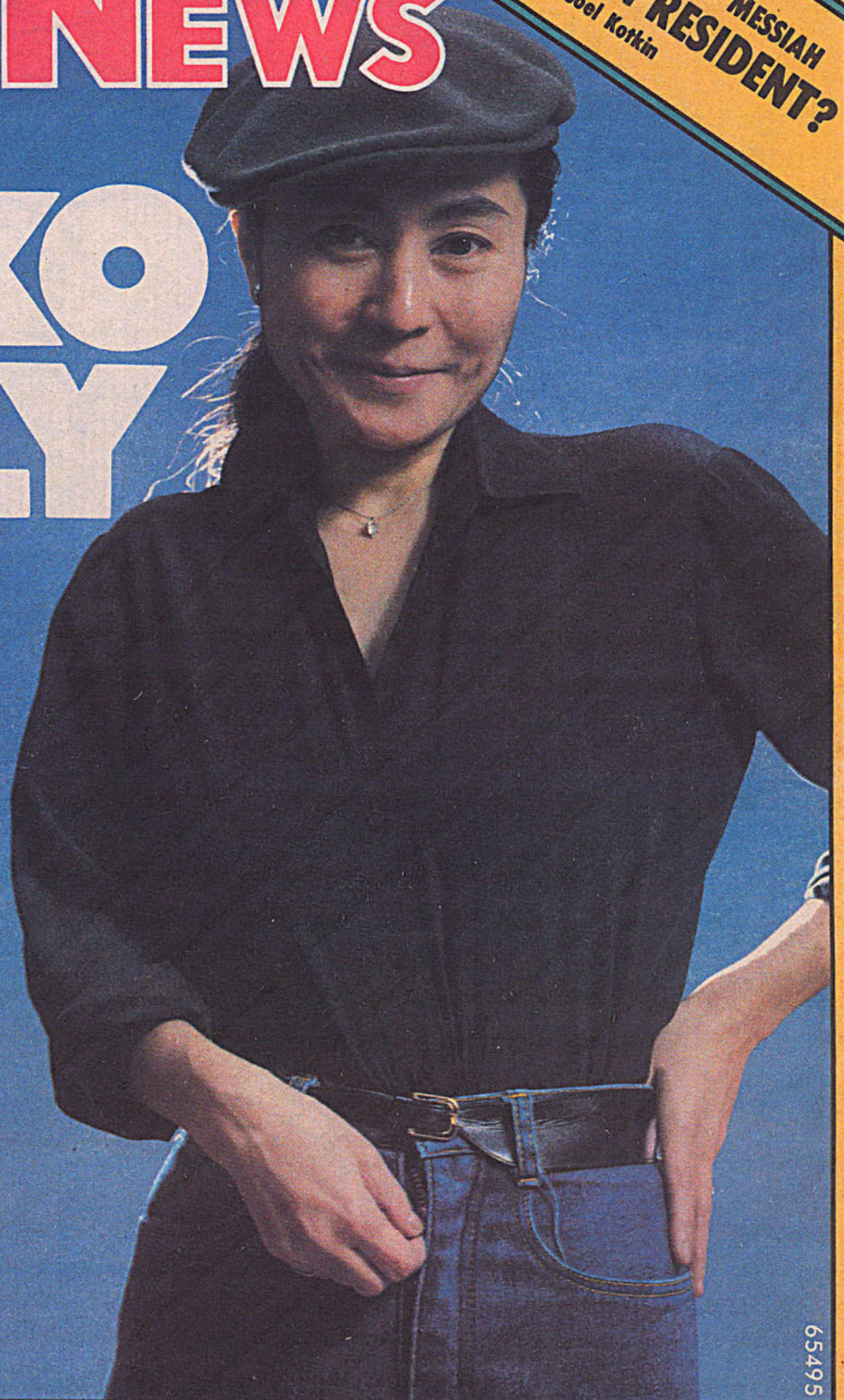
SOHO NEWS

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KOCH FOR PRESIDENT?
Joel Kotkin

YOKO ONLY

Peter Occhiogrosso

'Those hate vibes, they're like love vibes, they are very strong. It kept me going. When you're hated so much, you live. Hate was feeding me.'

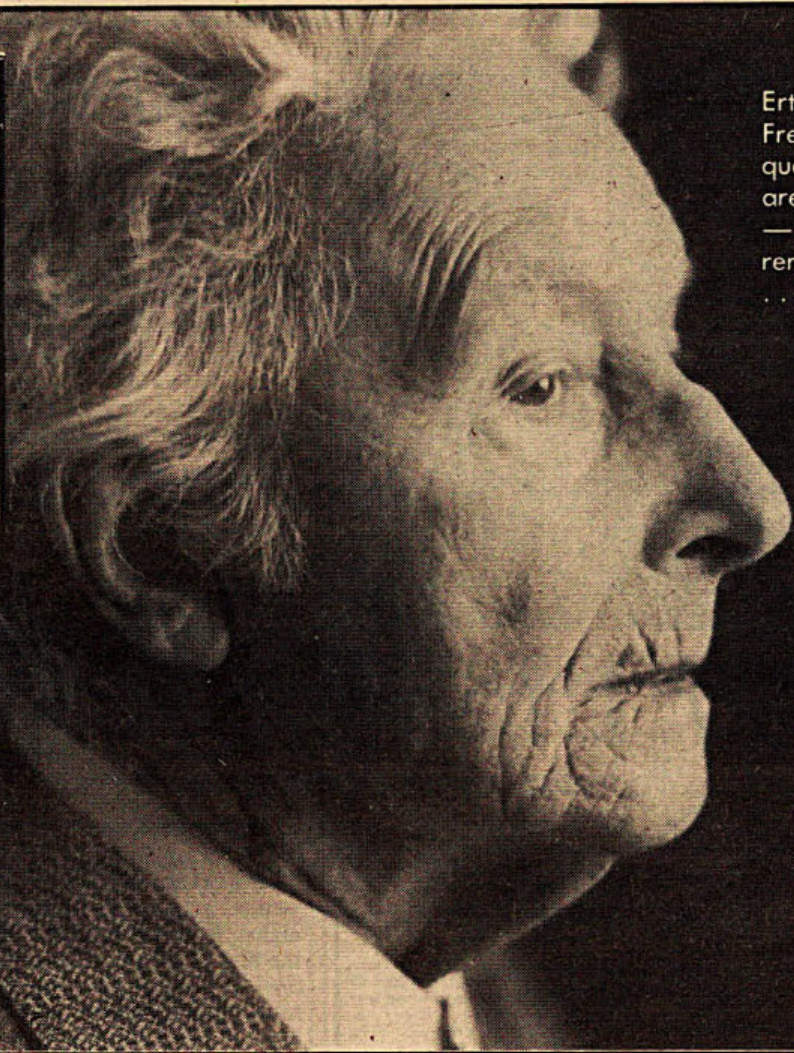


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Photo by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

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YOKO ONO



HERE'S THE REST OF ME

Once an advance punk, she is now a businesswoman. But real estate deals are merely an extension of her art. Instead of dancers and canvas she now works with lawyers and the land

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ALLAN TANNENBAUM

PETER OCCHIOGROSSO

I always hated Yoko Ono. I didn't hate her for breaking up the Beatles, if indeed she did, because by that time I didn't care anymore: the '60s were over, the Beatles were finished and I was already becoming a jazz snob. Besides, anyone who had the power to undermine the most popular band of all time must have had *something* going for her.

No, what I really hated about Yoko was what she appeared to be doing to John Lennon. What was the guy who wrote stories like "No Flies on Frank" doing with someone who wrote things like "Tunafish Sandwich Piece":

*Imagine one thousand suns in the sky at the same time.
Let them shine for one hour.
Then, let them gradually melt into the sky.
Make one tunafish sandwich and eat.*

Then there was *Two Virgins*, with music that John would never have recorded himself, and that notorious album cover with the two of them standing there naked. Suddenly the author of "I Feel Fine" was rolling around on stage in black plastic bags. And was Yoko really serious about wanting to make a film of *every face in the world* smiling like John Denver?

Now, in 1980, here was an even more palpable reason to distrust her. After having gotten John to trade in his guitar for an apron, Yoko was reported running his business affairs, investing in apartments in

the Dakota, secluded estates and quarter-of-a-million dollar cows.

Not unlike Nancy Reagan, she had exercised an unfathomable power over her husband at some crucial point in his life, turned him around from what he was then to what he is now, and consequently had come to call all, or almost all, of the shots. Ronnie refers to Nancy as "Mommy." John calls Yoko "Mother."

All things considered, I really didn't expect to like Yoko Ono.

TWO VERSIONS

Ornette Coleman is standing on a windy street corner in front of the Lone Star Cafe. He is talking about Yoko Ono, with whom he recorded a concert at Royal Albert Hall in 1968. "Oh yeah," he says into the cold. "Yoko, she was like an advance punk. I remember at that show we did, they wouldn't distribute her program notes 'cause she said 'pussy' and 'cunt' and 'penis' too many times, y'know? She was what I would call an ad-vance punk."

Bob Gruen, a New York-based rock photographer who spent the last year in Japan, has this to say about the connection between Yoko's early records and the new wave dance scene:

"When I was with the B-52's in Japan, it kept hitting me how much they sounded like the things that Yoko was doing years ago. I was nervous to ask them about it, though, because you know how people are always so down on her. When I finally asked them if they knew Yoko's records,

they just lit up. They said they loved Yoko and that they used to stay up when they were back in Athens, Ga. and play Yoko's records all night."

Obviously, they weren't the only ones. Yoko's records are all out of print now, but if you can get hold of *Fly* (\$35 at Bleecker Bob's), listen to a track called "Hirake." You'll hear not just the 52's but Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Lene Lovich, that whole popular art rock school of which Yoko was the major source.

LENNON'S LAW

It was 10 o'clock on a drizzly November night when I arrived at the Dakota, passing joggers in hooded sweatsuits running into and out of Central Park. The 72d Street entrance to the Dakota is guarded by a brass-plated kiosk manned by a fierce-looking but really rather jolly old German named Heinz. According to legend, Heinz once chased Mick Jagger—attired in cape, cane and purple shoes—all the way down the driveway, with no idea who the guy was. After years of intercepting dogged Lennon-watchers, he's grown pretty choosy about whom he lets past the gates. In fact, it's not easy even if you have an appointment.

"I can't call up unless she calls down first," Heinz explained. "This is Mr. Lennon's law." The phone rang before I could protest. It was Mr. Lennon's wife. She would be right down.

EARLY ONO

Under five feet tall, dressed in black
Continued on next page

YOKO ONO

Continued from previous page

leather jacket, cap and cashmere scarf in muted gray tones and wearing smoky-gray wraparound shades, Yoko could have fitted in as easily with the Mudd Club crowd as she could at an Upper East Side party.

We walked to a nearby cafe — an outing for her, since she doesn't go out alone at night and it is hard to go anywhere with John for obvious reasons — and talked for an hour while she drank espresso and smoked Shermans. Recent interviews have focused on John and she was anxious to talk about her own life and thoughts (Yoko's theory of wishing: If you want something, wish for it; if you don't get it, it's because part of you is resisting, possibly for your own good).

She was born, she said, 47 years ago, to a mother who came from the Yasuda family ("like the Krupps in Germany or the Rothschilds in England") and to a banker's son who married above his station. "She could have married anyone at all — being from one of the richest families in Japan — but she married my father, you know?"

"My father was a sort of 'big figure,' the kind of man who you think couldn't have any faults, which is a sad thing. He was very tall, handsome and could speak several languages. A banker who got to be very important. I used to have to make an appointment to see him. But I always went for the opposite type, a man who had insecurities, because there's always something very cold about that sort of 'big figure.'"

She lit another cigaret. "The first time I visited America was when I was two-and-a-half years old, and that was also the first time I met my father. He was working for a Japanese bank, and then got transferred to a bank in San Francisco just before I was born. I was sent to America to meet him and live with him.

"My family was sort of upper class in those days, in the '30s, and they were always taking these 16mm home movies. You know, Daddy and Yoko walking in San Francisco. I later got to see all those films, and what I saw was this sort of young guy who was not very happy about suddenly meeting his daughter. But I'm really excited in those films, tap dancing around like Shirley Temple. That was my first taste of America. I remember the Golden Gate Bridge, it was beautiful.

"Then we went back to Tokyo, and after that to New York, because my father was now working for New York banks. I went to school for a while. Then the war started. We were Japanese and we were sent home.

"My mother was in Tokyo and my father was in Indochina. I had a young brother and sister I had to find food for, I couldn't sleep, we were always evacuating. And you know what I used to love then? I used to love the sky. I thought, 'Whatever happens, the sky is blue.' When the bombs dropped, I was living in this country town where the farmers didn't like city people, so they threw stones at you and wouldn't give you food. I went through a period when I was really skin and bones, going around begging for food. It's a long story, too long to tell.

"Later I came back to New York and went to Sarah Lawrence, and studied music composition, art, all the things I liked. I stayed there till 1956 or '57, and then I married my first husband [Toshi Ichianagi], a Japanese musician." Displeased by this unsanctioned marriage and Yoko's Bohemian lifestyle, her mother stopped sending money from home. There has never been a reconciliation. "She never approved of me, you see," Yoko said.

THE FINE ART OF SURFACING

Impoverished, in 1959 Yoko moved into a fifth floor cold-water loft at 112 Chambers

Street. There she created artworks she meant to be stomped on, or burned. There she staged concerts with the likes of David Tudor and John Cage.

Her first art show — at George Maciunas' Madison Avenue gallery in 1960 — was attended by Marcel Duchamp and Peggy Guggenheim. (Maciunas also organized a number of artists — including Cage and Ono, Charlotte Moorman, LaMonte Young and George Brecht — under the rather loose banner of Fluxus. Their "events" were the forerunners of the Happenings of the '60s and the Performance Art of the '70s.)

Shortly thereafter, Yoko presented a concert at Carnegie Recital Hall, the first avant-garde concert produced by Norman Seaman, the classical impresario. Her dancers, performing on a stage so dark they could barely see each other, wore contact mikes that picked up and amplified their breathing as the musical accompaniment. The performance also required two dancers, strapped back to back with empty cans tied to their feet, to walk across the stage without making the slightest sound.

"Earlier that year," Yoko said, "I did a concert at the Village Gate where there were microphones hidden in the bathroom. When people flushed the toilet you could hear that on stage. I did a lot of interesting things like that, which nobody noticed because they were too complex.

"That Carnegie Hall concert really upset me, because I performed with Toshi and another Japanese composer, and we gave the press a photo of the three of us. And of course the *New York Times* cut me out. The review praised the two guys as being accomplished, established composers, and then said, 'Well, what is this Miss Ono doing?' I think the reviewer didn't even stay for my part of the show."

She went to London in 1962, where her work got "terrible reviews." (For one event, she announced the day and the time but not the location; two people found it.) After "a series of these not being understood kind of feelings, I went to a rest home to recuperate."

In November 1966, now married to her second husband, Tony Cox (then living in Japan with their daughter Kyoko), she met Lennon in a London gallery. As she got involved with John, his music and his films, her own career faded. John's popularity, moreover, made it even harder for her. From being ignored and misunderstood she became reviled. "The world was really hating me, and sending hatred vibes toward me very overtly for I don't know how many years. But in some ways I'm happy about it. It taught me a lesson. These hate vibes, they're like love vibes, they're very strong. It kept me going. When you're hated so much, you live. Hate was feeding me.

"The minute I got together with John, many hate letters came in from Japan. In



Japan they put all the Yoko albums in a big garbage can. By then I'd learned my lesson that you can't even trust Japs."

Yoko remembered recording at Apple studios: Lennon would finish laying down his tracks and it was her turn. But the engineers would all suddenly have to go to the bathroom. Even Apple producer Phil Spector treated her this way. "He was the worst," Yoko said. "He would come back from the men's room and say, like, 'I just threw up,' to let me know how he felt.

"John and I visited him one time in his

mansion in Beverly Hills. The place was so cold and dark, and the mattresses we had to sleep on were all damp and musty-smelling, like some old castle. The next morning he gave us this crummy breakfast, you know? And then when we got home, I was amazed to find he'd sent us a bill for the breakfast."

WONDERWALL

The most striking feature of Yoko's ground-floor office at the Dakota, after John's unflattering lithograph of Yoko which hangs at the back, is one entire wall, maybe 30 feet long and 15 feet high, of white filing cabinets.

"You see, we have very many different areas," she said, explaining all the drawers. "We have the real estate, we have the farm, we have the Maclen [song publishing], we have Apple. Then we have records of various antiques, you know, Egyptian things that we've bought. Also, we have John and Yoko projects that we've done — the films alone go back to 1968 and it's just incredible how many there are, and Beatle films too. So there's the film file, and then there's our songs, a tape file of songs. Also there are files of what I did before I met John, and files of what John did before I met him. There's lots of things, you know, files of personal letters and court cases — a lot of court cases — and there are maybe two or three files just for accounting. There's Lennon Music and Ono Music, and now they're combined in Lenono Music; and things that aren't covered by any label, like lithographs, other artwork, it's endless..."

The mixture of business and art, law and music, is a natural one: Yoko's real estate projects and business deals are an extension of her performance art. She began losing interest in conceptual performances around the time she met John and started handling his tangled legal affairs. Only the props have changed: instead of dancers and canvases, she now spends 10 to 12 hours a day working with lawyers and land. And long before she could afford to buy what she read about, Yoko used to love scanning the real estate pages of the *Voice* classifieds. "They were like little poems," she said. "Like haiku or something: 'two rooms, looking at the river...' It's so nice to visualize it.

"Everyone says it must be boring to talk to lawyers and all that," she continued. "But it's a fascinating world and, of course, they have their own jargon and everything. It's like another chess game, you know? And, of course, I'm using the same methods I used in my 'events.'

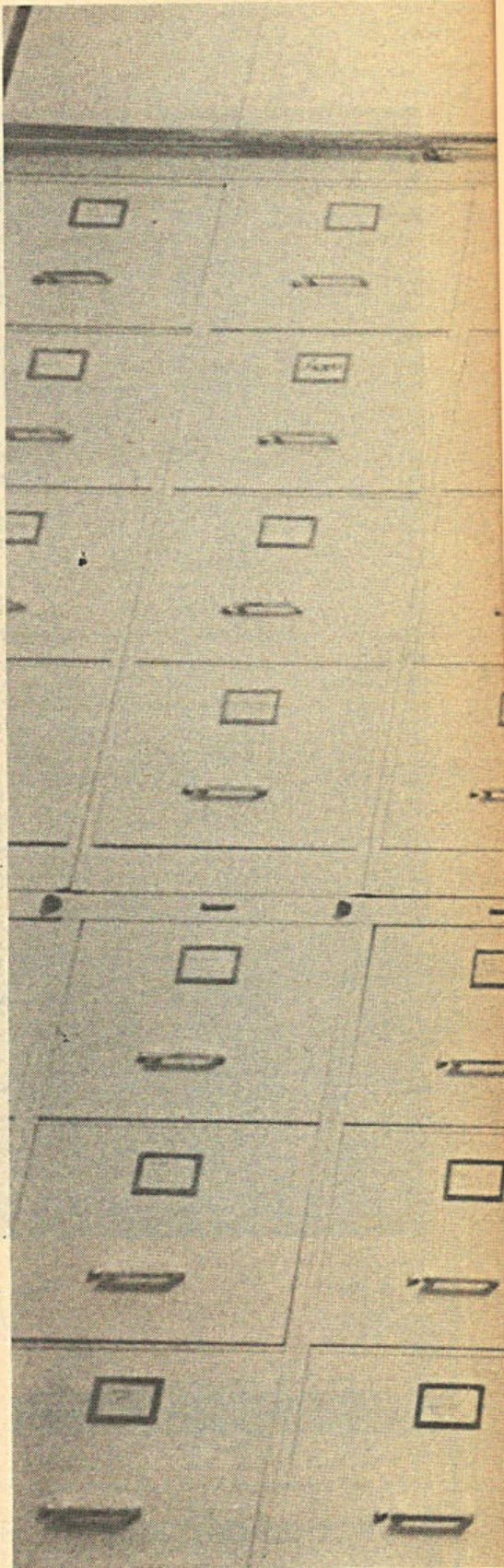
"For instance, there was a situation where these representatives were terribly antagonistic toward me. I was the only person in the enterprise who wasn't being paid a fee, because they would say, 'you're taken care of already [through John].' So just to emphasize that, I came in Arab headgear, as if to say, 'Yes, you're right, I'm an Arab.' At the meeting they were pretending not to see the headgear while they were talking in their stuffy lawyer language, but it was still there, you know? And I was eating an apple, of course, because it was an Apple meeting."

YOKO IN THE SKY

Picture yourself in a room in a mansion, with 20-foot ceilings, a view of the park. The White Room of their fabled Dakota digs: the dramatic view of the downtown skyline on a brilliant late fall night; the elegant white piano; the sofa, rugs and furnishings all in tasteful shades of off-white; the ancient Egyptian artifacts standing unprotected on the mantelpiece (all Yoko's touch); the neat stack of new albums, ranging from Michael Jackson to Van Halen, that sat, still factory-sealed, on the endtable under towering potted plants.

Yoko wanted to talk about the just-released *Double Fantasy* — the first commercial album on which she and John have equal weight, seven songs each. "Obviously people are going to say it's all love songs, all gooey stuff, but what's wrong

'...Yoko films, Beatle



with that?" she said. "Daring to bring the romance back is quite a courageous thing to do. We're just saying it very simply. The female might be afraid to show her vulnerable side, but we're human, too. It's all right to show this side and sort of understand each other.

"I now have a great respect for pop form as communication. It's a very concise form, you have to do it in three minutes. You have to use street language as opposed to intellectualism. I like that. It's a people's weapon in a way. I like that. Like a contrast to the snobbery of the artist, Ivory Tower kind of stuff. At the same time, there are some songs of mine that have a very experimental side to them. Musically and lyrically, when it was time to choose, I chose the ones that would fit in the concept of this album, because the idea is to communicate with a large audience.

"When I was into experimental music and things, I wasn't hiding things. I was doing it all right up front. 1975 was a time that no one was really willing to have babies, and we had a baby then. And now they're thinking about househusbands — maybe in two or three years we'll have househusbands. We're not trying to do something before others do it. It's a

films, antiques, tape files, letter files, court cases — a lot of court cases...'



then you see all these people saying something, then you turn the channel and some guest is saying something, but not any special guest, just people sort of saying things. It's that kind of age."

THIS IS WHAT WE FIND

During the time when Yoko was hanging out with Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the famed garbologist A.J. Weberman paid a visit to her and John's Bank Street loft. Inspecting some art pieces that Yoko was preparing to put on the market, A.J. exclaimed, "Why are you selling these things, Yoko? You should be giving them away."

"Why shouldn't I have the right to make money from my art?" Yoko asked when relating the story. "Would he say that to John? 'Why don't you just give the records to people instead of selling them?'"

If John and Yoko are wealthy, in fact, it's because people like you and me gave our money to *them*. The fact that they put it into real estate rather than into drugs and booze can hardly be held against them. And it's quite possible that without Yoko, John might have done just that — as his famous 18-month lost weekend in L.A. indicates.

Although she has received little public credit, the fact remains that many artists and musicians have benefited — both creatively and financially — from Yoko's innovations. For all her resentment at being perceived as the Machiavellian Mrs. Lennon, she kept her experimental material off *Double Fantasy* "so that John would have a better chance for a hit record. He's used to being Number One, you know." The radical feminist with a heart of gold.

She's also vulnerable. "We were in the studio," she said, recalling how she recorded the finale of "Kiss Kiss Kiss," which ends with Yoko simulating an orgasm and muttering "moto, moto" (more, more). "Suddenly I got embarrassed at all these guys in the control booth watching me make those sounds. You know? So I made them turn out the lights on my side of the glass and I lay down on the floor with the boom mike dangling over my mouth. That was the only way I could do it."

COMING OUT

no sex
no drugs
no wine
no women
no fun
no sin
no you
no wonder it's dark

The Vapors' hit song "Turning Japanese" (Brit slang for jerking off) is surging out of the speakers at the Peppermint Lounge, and the dancers are lapping it up. The Peppermint Lounge is currently the hottest rock dance spot in Manhattan, and David, who moved there from the Mudd Club, is without a doubt the best DJ on that circuit. It's 3 a.m. and I'm leaning against the wall talking with a friend, when David segues neatly into "Kiss Kiss Kiss." It's not wildly popular with the dancers, but the fact that *David* is playing it means that in three weeks they'll all love it.

Meanwhile, only my friend is getting excited: "God, I love this song," she says over the din. "Isn't it funny that *Yoko* should be the one to come out with a song that fits right in at this place? I mean, if you want to hear John's single you have to tune in to WABC or something. He sounds like he's still stuck in that mellow period around the *White Album*. You know? I never used to like Yoko's stuff that much, but suddenly it seems perfect. Perfect."

The sound of a woman moaning in Japanese fades into the latest hit by the B-52's. And the dancers return to the floor.

torture because people do not understand. We arrive at something and maybe later it will be understood. Seems like our time sense is slightly off, and we're hoping that will not happen with the record. We're not hoping that three years later people pick it up and say, 'Wow, that was something else.'"

The conversation turned to money.

"I believe in that 10 percent thing," she said. "We give 10 percent of our income to some important cause, but other than that we don't wave flags anymore. In the '60s a lot of people, and we were guilty of it too, were waving flags, but then their wives were miserable, they got a divorce and their children were miserable. There are many people like that, all for the cause, but their lives are a mess.

"So when you talk about me having all this money and why don't I give it to poor people, it's not that easy. You really have to think hard exactly how to do it, so you won't be just doing that 24 hours a day. We think about it. We don't want to put money in oil, we don't want to put money in weapons, we just have to think, step by step, what we're doing. We're doing what we think is right. For instance, we have a farm, but we're not using any chemical fertilizers there. Or with the cows, we're

not giving them chemical food and we're not killing our cows, we'd just like to keep them there. It's sort of minimizing pollution.

"I'll tell you what, though. I'm just trying to be myself, actually. The funniest thing is that if people want to learn something, they'll learn from the drop of an apple. Right? You really can't teach people anything. When John and I were alone, we weren't suggesting 'Don't have children,' or anything like that. When we were separated and John was in L.A., he wasn't trying to say, 'This is what you should do.' I don't think like that. I would like to see people being happy and making life happier, doing whatever they wanted to do so they would be happy for it. It's not like saying, 'We're a family so you'd better be a family too.'"

WHAT ABOUT PRESIDENT REAGAN?

"I see it this way: without an establishment, there is no anarchy. Things come out of that sort of dialogue. Maybe establishment ideas are an important springboard for people to go further.

"We have to understand we're human. And we have, as people, an immense part

of us that we don't even know about, and it goes beyond social systems and institutions. For example, John and I are permanent residents here, we're not citizens. But then we're not really citizens of any country. Just like with women, we don't have any country or state. That's a very strong thing to be, someone without any country or state. Because if you have the rights of a society, then you are limited by those rights as well.

"From that point of view, for women to have equal rights with men might be a step down. Women are a very strong race. That's one of the reasons we are persecuted. It just came to me that it could be compared to the fact that the Jews always had to wander, they never had a country. They really wanted a country, but when they got Israel, that was a headache, too. When you get something like that, you're limited. But when you don't have a country, then the whole world is your country.

"The human race is pretty aware by now. All the things they use in an ad, you know, sound like philosophical statements. One line comes to mind: 'Sometimes we talk for hours without saying anything.' Now that's an ad. That's beautiful, you know. What I mean is, it's that kind of age. You turn the TV on and