

## Larry Bell

Born Chicago, 1939

Resident Venice, California

MT described various available corporations to Larry Bell in December, 1968. The artist was most intrigued with the Rand Corporation, which is located near his Venice studio. He had the impression (a "romance," he later called it) that top-secret research in the area of "mind-reading," and other "1984-type" propaganda techniques were being carried on at Rand.

As an artist whose work has become increasingly dependent upon perceptual psychology, Bell's interest in Rand was certainly related to his current esthetic thinking. But his concern about Rand's activities, whether naive or informed, was also obviously a moral one. He liked the idea of working in a non-manufacturing situation, "with a bunch of guys removed from my knowledge area."

Brownlee Haydon, Assistant to the President at Rand, agreed to take the artist into residence. He later wrote us, "During Larry Bell's experience with Rand, we dealt with his visits on an ad hoc basis. We arranged for three seminars with groups of interested persons on three occasions, and deliberately kept attendance to about fifteen (several interested non-Rand artists who knew about the program attended a couple of these meetings). The usual consequence was of two sorts: Larry returned to visit with interested individuals or to lunch with them, or these individuals visited Larry Bell at his studio—during their lunch hour, after work, or on weekends. Several individuals established continuing personal relations with Larry—and some, I believe, still see him."

Unfortunately, nothing very interesting happened. Bell felt that Rand's attitude toward him was, "Let's all pitch in and make something for the patio." He was distressed by the lack of interest he felt expressed in him or his work, but confessed that he was "probably as much at fault" as they, because he was "not capable of maintaining an openness" himself.

In the fall of 1970, through the request of Rand's communications department, several people who had had contact with Bell at Rand talked about the collaboration. The comments of a chemical engineer and an engineer who works on the electrical activity of neural networks are given respectively as follows; although they certainly don't give a complete picture of Bell's activities at Rand, they indicate certain attitudes on the part of those with whom he consulted which are of interest:

I met with Bell a number of times, individually and in

groups and I felt there was a lot of interesting potential in Larry's continuing here. Several of us were intrigued with the idea of working with him, but nothing materialized. The biggest difficulty was that he was looking for something specific and wanting someone to describe a joint project immediately while we felt that we should take more time in exploration. Some of us who are working in visual perception and the mechanics of human color vision, for example in computer color display and image enhancement, thought there was some real potential in a joint effort . . . Things like how you can create color sensation with white lights just by flickering them at different frequencies.

The second engineer commented,

The things he did were a whole new bag to me. He had little cubes with semi-transparent sides and different densities of coatings on them. They would be placed in a bare, white lighted room and an observer would walk around them and receive different perceptions, especially the fact that they changed as you move around. Now these perceptions depend on very complicated signals to the visual system. Say we're exploring a project and Larry wants to make people have the sense that the object looks more shimmering depending on how fast you move around it. I could say, then, I'll build a model to try to predict how the visual system would behave with different speeds. But this would have been a psychophysical project that should have been in a psychology department. Even though there was a great deal of overlap in our interests, and a great deal of fun, when we tried to push it through to a project, it got too complicated.

It certainly wasn't anyone's fault that Larry didn't get a project. The limitations were inherent in the context. Here you have two professions—science and art—both of which are creative, but with largely different backgrounds and goals. For a truly creative result in either profession, you need highly individualized effort. To try to blend your efforts is impossible. If I see something I want to pursue, I have to go ahead and he can't help me very much. The same is true for him. We could brush together and perhaps get stimulation from each other, but to create, we have to part paths.

The relationship between Bell and Rand terminated in July, 1969.