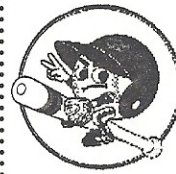


## Tempe's club scene



## Dodgers, Jays up by 2

## Southern cooking



## Tokyo ballclub back in Valley

+ FINAL EDITION

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### GUEST COLUMN

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## For some people, 15 minutes of fame is more than enough

By James Flori

Andy Warhol once predicted that in the world of the future everyone would be famous for 15 minutes. This vision of fame has itself become so famous that people who flash briefly into the public consciousness — a lottery winner, for example — are said to have received their quota of "Warhol Fame."

I happen to like this idea. It manages to be ridiculous and accurate simultaneously. There is something absurdly fleeting about notoriety in the age of mass media. If Andy Warhol's fame (which has endured well beyond 15 minutes) were based, like that of Mark Twain, on a gift for coming up with observations like these, I would be content. Instead, his most worthy idea became famous only because Warhol

himself was already a famous artist. This is where I get lost.

Like acting or athletics, art is a business where many are called, but few are chosen. It would be natural, therefore, to assume that those who rise to the top are actually the best. Or, at least, they ought to be good. But be honest: would you pay even two bucks at a flea market for an original Warhol if no one had ever heard of him? What separates the colorized photograph of Marilyn Monroe from that velvet painting of Elvis in your uncle's attic is nothing more than the fame of the artist.

There seems to be some mysterious social force at work that occasionally counteracts the dead weight of mediocrity and propels the anemic into the stratosphere.

How else can one explain the career of the Rolling Stones? Whatever it was that made them superstars has little connection with music, as far as I can see, and I say that as both a musician and as a lifelong fan of rock 'n' roll. On any given night in any given city two dozen bands that can absolutely play circles around the Rolling Stones are struggling in nameless bars and dance halls, trying to make ends meet. Talent is everywhere, but so often it goes unrewarded.

This is why it is frustrating when mediocrity rockets to the top. I happen to live in the state that gave the world Evan Mecham — perhaps the most famous governor since Ronald Reagan. To call Mr. Mecham mediocre was not to attack him, but to defend him. And yet, during his reign of embarrassment, I found while

traveling abroad that many foreigners who didn't know Mario Cuomo from Sonny Bono were fully up to speed on Mr. Mecham. They could even repeat some of his more interesting gaffes almost verbatim.

Academia is no more immune to meteoric mediocrity than politics or art. I once bought a book by Buckminster Fuller simply because of his reputation as a brilliant and original thinker. What I got was 400 pages of incomprehensible ranting. For example, he complained that by driving our cars so freely, we Americans are "spending four million real cosmic-physical-Universe dollars a day without producing any physical Universe life-support wealth accredited in the energy-time-metabolic-accounting system eternally governing regenerative Universe."

I don't believe anybody actually waded through 400 pages of that. Some people probably read three or four pages and thought, "Wow!" He's so smart I don't even know what he's talking about." My reaction is different. I want to know why this guy was famous. Was it for his invention of the geodesic dome? Well done, Bucky. Fifteen minutes. "Next!"

I have the same problem with Karl Marx, whose linguistic impenetrability almost equals that of Mr. Fuller. Everybody knows who Marx is, but almost no one, even in Russia, ever reads what he wrote because it takes a lifetime to figure out what he was talking about and only about five minutes to figure out that he was wrong.

These people deserved their Warhol fame. Why couldn't we have left it at that?