

### 3

## **ALL POWER TO THE PACK RATS! IKEA AND APPLE'S WAR ON "HOARDERS"**

### *1. APPLE VS. THE "HOARDERS"*

**THE APPLE IDEOLOGY** is sleek and clean. It proposes a futuristic lifestyle without attachments or clutter, where mankind is free to chase down every desire, creative and otherwise, free of the "fuzz" of possessions. Like a nomad on the steppe, movement, horizon, and conquest are the only concern.

The room of the modern man is stark, but in its simplicity it exudes wealth and sophistication. There is just a bed or futon and an iPad. None of the old-time accoutrements which signified intelligence, artistic interest, or a curiosity about the world are evident. There are no magazines, books, or records anywhere. Just perhaps some high-priced "products," a.k.a. toiletries, in the bathroom. Everything he or she needs is on the Cloud.

Things, stuff, and doodads are just hang-ups, after all,

#### CENSORSHIP NOW!!

which serve to drag us into our past and harness us to prior ideas of who we were and what we are supposed to be.

The Apple world is apart from the old world. It is one where we can be anything, free of the wretched past. Just a being of light and electricity who wafts effortlessly from whim to caprice to passing fancy. Like their room, his or her body is also clean, shaved; streamlined for action. If one has possessions, one is seen to be rather fuddy-duddy and certainly not a sexually vital contemporary being.

The Apple proposition is a sixties futurist-Zen minimalist throwback, lifted from Scandinavian designers like Panton and Saarinen, whose Nordic functionalism was influenced by modernist movements like De Stijl and the Bauhaus.

While modernism proposed ways of dealing with the cataclysmic upheaval brought on by industrialism, Apple's proposition is the Western capitalist commercial: freedom, ease, sex, and cool control of one's environment. Apple actively encourages the population to lose their possessions. Music? Store it on the Cloud. Books? Store them on the Cloud. Film, magazines, newspapers, TV are all safely stored in the ether and not underfoot or stuffed in a closet. It's a modernist monastery where the religion is Apple itself.

Meanwhile, those who have hung onto possessions are castigated, jeered at, and painted as fools. The hit TV show *Hoarders* (A&E) identifies people with things as socially malignant, grotesque, primitive, dirty, bizarre. In a word: poor. Apple has turned the world upside down in

making possessions a symbol of poverty and having nothing a signifier of wealth and power.

This is actually a bourgeois sensibility, an aesthetic of Calvinists and other early Protestants/capitalists. While wealth adornment was a no-no, extraordinary wealth accumulation was a sign of godliness and beatitude. These bean counters were pioneers of the modern aesthetic: owning things = vulgar; having obscene piles of money/capital beyond what one could ever use = divine.

The antistuff crowd invokes Eastern Buddhism and communism-lite in their put-down of possessions and the people who "hoard" them. It's supposed to be a sign of superstition, a hang-up, a social disease, greedy, sick. People who have things are derided as "fetishists." Why would one have a record collection when all information is available online to be had by the technologically plugged in (which is, at this point, a requirement for everyone)?

Why would one have a bookshelf when Google has taken all the book content in the world to be dispersed through its beneficent magnanimity? Books are heavy, dirty, dusty, and disintegrate into your lungs. Why should there be encyclopedias when there is the wiki-world? And so on. Why should there be record stores, bookstores, video stores, shopping areas, kiosks, cinemas, theaters, opera houses, libraries, schools, parks, government buildings, meeting halls, et al? Public spaces, markets, and interacting with other people are primeval, germey, and dangerous. After all, it can all be done online, you primates. The only thing one needs is a Whole Foods, some hip bars,

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

and an airport so as to jet to Burma before it gets lame.

This is fine for the cyberelite; they can live as they wish. But why is their ideology impressed on all of us through this shame-based propaganda? Why is the “hoarder” so loathed by the Apple authorities?

Answer: because he or she is feared.

The “hoarder” has “things” after all, items like books and records which are clues to a past when these things were stores of knowledge, signifiers, totems of meaning. The cyberlords want it all destroyed. The library must be cleaned of nasty old books and filled with computers. The record collector must renounce his or her albums and replace them with an iPod. This is an obvious concern if the multibillion-dollar iTunes Inc. is to effectively rein in recalcitrant stragglers in a market it dominates so entirely, selling “songs”—which are, for them, just puffs of free digital smeg-phemera—for ninety-nine cents a pop. No resistance to the realm can be tolerated.

But it's not only the money they make from iTunes or their various other virtual marketplaces—which have left all physical businesses shuttered (aside from fro-yo places, nail salons, and gin-joints)—that they care about. The computer lords want to control everything, and central to controlling all things is controlling perception. Perception of the way things are, the way things work, and what's happened in history so that they can frame their version of events and control the narrative; mind-controlling the masses to make them into better, more compliant consumer/servants.

### CHAPTER 3 | War on “Hoarders”

Just as governments spend enormous sums of money on textbooks, monuments, films, and museums which heroize their regime and frame their particular version of history, the computer overlords are concerned about the myths of the culture. Their ascendancy must seem inevitable, brilliant, brave, noble, just, and right.

The “stuff” that the “hoarder” retains, however, might tell a story which refutes or challenges their version of events in some way. The record collection or magazine or newspaper might reveal some clue to a social movement or trend or fashion or sensibility which defies their moronic stranglehold on consciousness. A burp of resistance. A clue to a way out. A signal that life doesn't actually depend on high-speed Internet access. And the physicality of the item infers that things meant something once, that everything wasn't always a meaningless, equivocal post on Tumblr.

Of course, the “hoarders” who are profiled on the show are extreme examples of people who hold on to things, but the message is nonetheless clear. Just as Willie Horton was exploited for racist ends and invoked to create fear and distrust of an entire group, the “hoarders” who are ridiculed, shamed, and “saved” on the television are meant to tar all owners of stuff with their brush.

The shaming of targeted “hoarders” is intended specifically to cajole, bully, and embarrass the population into giving up everything they have—not just possessions but ideas, ethics, rights to ownership (both intellectual and otherwise), privacy, decency, justice, fair treatment, and human rights.

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

In the Apple Internet age we are expected to surrender absolutely everything; anything less is filthy and deranged “hoarding.” All content is free for the Internet lords who dispense it—or not—at their pleasure.

Apple Inc. is often seen to be selling an image or signifier of a lifestyle, but for them Apple is not just the means to life, but reality itself. Apple demands that everyone throw out all their other possessions for their ersatz mid-century plastic designs. These devices, which never stop “upgrading” and are therefore almost immediately obsolete, present a world where there is only Apple through which we get our information, our culture, our relationships, our sense of self, our love. Apple is the big apple—the world, the cosmos, sin, and godliness—and you’ve got to have it every day.

Apple’s proposal would be impossible without the coordination of its dear ally, the Swedish megacorporation Ikea. Ikea, the original “i”-demon, is their ideological compatriot, and both are similarly ubiquitous features of the modern world. No dorm room or young person’s house is free of middlebrow minimalist Ikea things on which to place their iPod, iPad, iPhone, etc. “iKea” manufactures items which paradoxically comply with the iWorld’s “anti-stuff” doctrine: instantaneous furniture and utensils, created by slaves, that disintegrate or explode when moved.

### ***II. IKEA’S CONSPIRACY TO SMASH ROMANCE***

Ikea furniture is necessary for the success of Apple’s antistuff doctrine. Not only because Ikea furniture eschews the

future (its nihilistic furniture is designed for bivouac living), but because of its nefarious effects on domestic life.

When one conspires with one's partner to construct a piece of Ikea furniture, it is a harrowing task and speaks volumes of the faith one has in one's relationship. No matter that faith, it will most likely destroy the love affair or at least irreparably damage it, sewing the seeds for its imminent destruction. The instructions, supposed to be universal and written in pictograms, are embedded with tiny details, extremely easy to miss, that are absolutely vital to the success of the project. Wrong assembly results in nightmarish frustration, squabbling, and despair. The instructional manual always warns of impending death as well, casting a fearful morbid pall over the (ideally) mundane job of shelf building.

Why does Ikea make their manuals into time bombs of discord? Because Ikea wants couples to break up. Each breakup results in more bachelors and bachelorettes, which results in more Ikea products sold. Abandoned love affairs result not only in abandoned dreams but abandoned furniture, abandoned apartments, abandoned housewares, abandoned throw pillows and end tables left in the rain on the road or given away as Craigslist clutter.

Breakups are attractive to the Apple-iKea alliance for the isolation they ensure. An isolated population is more easily manipulated, misled, shorn of its possessions, its self-respect, and its sense. Romantic dissolution is the ultimate example of the imperialist's tried-and-true "divide and conquer" strategy. These corporations want the des-

### **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

olation of love: a population alone, miserable, confused, and in a state of self-loathing sexual desperation.

Both Apple and Ikea are closely linked to the pornography industry, aesthetically, philosophically, and economically. While home computers' popularity and ubiquity stemmed from their use as cryptoporn proliferators, both Ikea and Apple's designs stem from the ideology which spawned modern-day "adult" programming: Nordic functionalism. Indeed, the ideas of Nordic functionalism—a design idea which eliminated the buttresses, gilding, and facades of old architecture in preference for clean lines and modernity—resulted in the modern pornographic paradigm. Though functionalism began as a version of Le Corbusier and Bauhaus architecture, it ended as a total *weltanschauung*.

Along with the frills and indulgences of old-time design, this doctrine of socialistic simplicity swept away the clutter of the old world's baroque and courtly sex play and distilled it into the highly efficient erotica that is now standard fare. From its late-sixties beginnings (when Denmark led the world in decriminalizing smut), Norse pornography has been, like a science expo, brightly lit and clinical. An exposition of dispassionate technique and disregard for feelings, touch, communication, and affection. Form furiously follows function. Porn action, instead of being a lascivious sleaze-fest (replete with contrived story arcs) as it was in the "blue" era of "smoker" flicks, began to resemble lab work with moans and groans inserted like test data; pellets fed to rats.



### CHAPTER 3 | War on "Hoarders"

What was the purpose of bringing sex into the light? Scandinavian design was an art of transparency. No obfuscation or sentimentality. Proscience and antireligious. Absorbing this philosophy, Danish and Swedish pornographers spearheaded the well-lit, unsentimental nudes which appeared later in hardcore "triple-X" features, ridding the world of the sentiment, treacle, and pretense of the Pompeo Posar/Bunny Yeager "cheesecake" era. The "girl next door" was duly evicted and her place rented by brusque sex workers in an assembly-line brothel. Ikea shelves are storage's unsentimental analogue. Frank, dispassionate shelves concerned with getting the job done, eyes glued to the bottom line. Beds are futons, a type of mattress originally used in Japan by prostitutes. Finnish cloth by Marimekko eschews plaids or complex patterns for simple, uncomplicated Rorschach blobs so one's living room becomes a psychiatrist couch of lurid—yet frank and clinical—revelations. Swedish and Danish furniture looks like the gear from a low-budget film production: director's chairs, boom lights, and simple pallets.

Facebook—and other devices for social control, neighbor spying, and mass surveillance—get their great power and ubiquity from the promise and lure of sex. Easy sex for free from multiple partners is the inferred reward. If people are coupled, in domestic bliss, this is less easily manipulated. Ikea wants to keep the population in a state of romantic flux. This is the reason for the hawking of sexual freedom, caprice, and whimsy as a bedrock of liberal

## CENSORSHIP NOW!!

civilization, as opposed to old control models which relied on sexual repression.

Ikea is ultimately a junior partner of the ascendant Apple megapower, which wants to erase history, strip people of all their belongings, and rehabilitate total poverty and cosmic displacement as modern, sleek, and fun. All this for complete control and ownership of the entire globe. Ikea has accepted the lieutenant's role in this unholy alliance. Like Apple, Ikea sneers at planning, permanence, and real possessions, beyond their ephemeral bric-a-brac. They suggest that the dorm room or living room or bedroom is just a momentary resting stop before we all become ultraefficient digital matter, buzzing at, around, and within each other in an eternal orgiastic cyber-cum-athon. But always orbiting the Apple deity: life-giver, death-merchant, illusionist; that from which all else originates.

How long before we're convinced that hands, arms, legs, and appendages are just bothersome? The cyberlords have already convinced us that maps, paper, pens, and even push buttons are somehow incredibly inconvenient and clumsy, leaving us scraping and pawing like drooling bug life on their flat and sleek digital dildos. Google's search engines, maps, etc., have likewise taught us to refrain from using our apparently out-of-date and hopelessly inefficient brains. What's next? Giving up all thought, consciousness, history, and agency? It's all just in the way.

"Hoarders" are the only thing standing between these incomprehensibly rich, all-controlling, degenerate, dig-

### CHAPTER 3 | War on “Hoarders”

ital despots and the absolute destruction of any deviant or alternative consciousness—and indeed any nonofficial history or interpretation of the world. We must therefore say: *ALL POWER TO THE PACK RATS!!*

Help a “hoarder” consolidate and safe-keep their things today. Lend them money to rent a storage locker. Volunteer to help them keep their things at your place. Their stuff is the final shred of resistance to the destruction of all non-Apple-approved human endeavors.

## 8

# THE DOCUMENTARY CRISIS

**OIL PAINTING HAS BEEN PURSUED** for around six hundred years. Screen-printing was developed during the Song dynasty in tenth-century China, making it around one thousand years old. The oldest known poem is Gilgamesh, written in cuneiform in the third millennium BCE, making written poetry at least five thousand years old. Music probably emerged along with *Homo sapiens* in Africa as an intrinsic feature of human culture, 160,000 years ago. Cinema, till this point, has had the life span of an American box turtle: approximately 124 years. Although just a babe in “art years,” it faces an existential crisis.

Despite being hailed by Lenin as “the most important art form” during its infancy, able to transfix the world until recent generations, film now struggles for life, for relevancy, for viewers, and even to resemble something worthy of discourse at all. Since it developed out of topsy-turvy industrial capitalism, this condition of crisis is not so strange. In fact, as capitalism’s persona is per-

## CENSORSHIP NOW!!

petual crisis, it makes sense that film—a chip off the old block—would be marked by the same manufactured hysteria that typifies the system which spawned it.

When it first developed into something more than a novelty, film was primarily an extension of the theater: a way to tell stories about the world. Unlike theater, film was the industrial era's contribution to art, and therefore—as opposed to other, more ancient mediums—it inevitably resembled the new industries, such as steel and oil, with the same stratified division of labor: unions, strikes, insidious contracts, pitiless exploitation, and monopoly-minded owner elite.

Indeed, since ownership of the means of production is the central issue in such types of industry, the great film houses—Warner Bros, MGM, et al—contrived a stranglehold on film, film processing, supply, workers (actors and directors bought and held under contract), and distribution, so as to stifle, destroy, and otherwise discourage competitors.

Thus, like rock 'n' roll in its "classic" phase, film in the USA was, almost from the beginning, an unaffordable venture for all except the Hollywood studios, with a few designated "auteurs" holding forth with their new offerings each season. Humanity was hypnotized by the fables they were taught in the hermetically sealed movie houses that dotted every city block. To be a participant in "the movies" was a glorious dream. Would-be actresses hurled themselves toward the merciless megalith of Hollywood like so much sacrificial foodstuff. To be a director was a

## CHAPTER 8 | *The Documentary*

laughable, fanciful ambition, akin to being president or king of the world.

When video technology was proliferated on the cheap beginning in the 1980s, it was of course, like all new consumer gizmos, hailed as a revolution for the everyman. It was cheap, portable, and outside of the film industry's monopoly over the means of production. Now anyone who had the smarts and the ambition could make a film, regardless of special show-biz connections, family ties, or casting couches. Like most supposed triumphs for "the people," this was one industry (Japanese electronics) asserting itself over another (Hollywood movies).

The only problem with video was its crudity and ugliness. The picture was rough and it didn't have the same magical sensibility that viewers saw in celluloid. Therefore, despite the almost immediate mass proliferation of video cameras, few films of any note were produced using the new equipment. Instead, the now ubiquitous camcorders were carted dutifully to underground rock shows until another use—documenting sex acts—was discovered.

Hollywood responded to the threat of video democracy, though, by making their means of production even more unassailable. Films were driven by supercelebs and special effects more than ever before. Storytelling was a low priority next to monster makeup, interstellar explosions, and megastars. As cable television and rental video continued to smash away at the revenue of the cinema house, the desire to produce spectacle was the overriding

### **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

concern of the studios. For a film to have a theatrical release, it had to resemble a carnival ride with the attendant thrills, chills, and nausea-inducing spills. Breakneck editing, zany camera work, excruciating volume, and lurid, freakish violence have now made many films ironically unwatchable. Every year or so, due to forgetfulness, one may wander into a theater, lured by a hysterical advertising barrage, convinced that seeing a particular film is indispensable to one's continued cultural literacy. Then, emerging sullied, degraded, insulted, and twenty dollars poorer, one swears never to be tricked again. This life lesson is typically learned about once a year. In fact, movie-watching in a theater is generally an exercise in nostalgia, based on hearing a Drifters song on an oldies station.

This decline has been long coming. Jean-Luc Godard notes in an interview that when he discovered cinema in the fifties it was in fact "already over." Indeed, in 1946 America, with a population of 141 million, 100 million film tickets were sold each week, for a total of 3.65 billion tickets that year. Now, with the US population more than double that, ticket sales for all of North America in 2014 (including Canada) were just 1.27 billion.

Of course, people are still passively watching their master's morality plays, but at home on television, so picture quality is no longer as important. Sensing an opportunity for breakthrough, video makers—people not necessarily anointed by the studios—started trying to exploit the enormous potential for a decentralized movie industry, comprised of real auteurs and enthusiasts, similar

## CHAPTER 8 | *The Documentary*

to decentralized scenes of musicians, painters, and poets. But the video camera's initial utilization as a recorder or documenter was never shaken. Nor was the universal disdain for something which could film just anybody or be afforded by anyone. In a society without class consciousness but with an institutionalized contempt for poor people, video's very cheapness was actually a liability.

Because of its roots in recording music shows and sex acts for pornography, video was seen as "truth." Therefore, the new generation of filmmakers, barred from the use of actual film by its increasingly untenable expense, bothered themselves with making "documentaries" with their video, instead of dramas. Documentaries are now produced at an unbelievable rate, typically portraits of an unusual person, such as an archer with no arms or a vegetarian who hunts, or a political diatribe about the war, or a historical piece celebrating a particular rock group featuring testimonials from people who were "there" or were profoundly affected. Grants for documentaries are comparatively easy to come by, and documentary festivals abound.

While a portion of these video documentaries are interesting, what is fascinating is the *volume* of them that are being produced, in comparison to traditional fictional narratives. What does it mean if a generation can't seem to write a story with characters or a plot with tension? While music has gone absolutely fantasist (rife with "psych-folk" singer-songwriters wailing about magic and elves, electro composers proposing sex with robots, and alt-country crooners lamenting the passing of an imaginary world),



#### CENSORSHIP NOW!!

many new filmmakers are obsessed with presenting a picture of "reality." They have a doomsday cult's concern with presenting their time as they see it, since they are disbarred from the official surreal dialogue which is being inscribed by imperialist lechers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post's* Bob Woodward.

While this impulse to present one's own era to the Earth's inheritors is a human need, echoed in the cave paintings of yore, the artlessness of the medium needs to be taken to task. These films are usually bad-looking, unnuanced, propagandistic tellings of events. The camera work is almost always execrable, the narration is simplistic, the method of storytelling is usually a parade of talking heads; they feel like audio-visual presentations in a grade school. While utilizing this powerful medium and trying to express a particular ideological argument could be admirable, the aesthetic decisions of the video auteurs often reveal an infantilized weltanschauung, a stunted artistic vision, and a linear and impoverished mindset.

It all calls into question: who is the imagined audience for such expositions? Is it one's contemporaries? This seems highly unlikely since the retelling of Iraq War tidbits or the rock 'n' roll mythos featured in such pictures are usually well known to their watchers. If the point is a mere recitation of folklore, that is a defensible raison d'être, though the trappings of cinema hardly seem necessary for such a task when a pamphlet or magazine article could do the job at least as well, without all the

self-important fuss. Making money can't be the reason since these projects are typically a financial risk.

The obvious answer seems to be that videos are produced to explain ourselves and our situation to some future alien race.

The documentary's careful and childlike elucidation of events are calculated to be understood by an exotic sensibility, and their genial idiocy seems like careful consideration of an interstellar consciousness of which no subtlety can be presumed for fear of misinterpretation, and for whom no common culture can be assumed. Why else would a film like *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) be so asinine and simpleminded? Everyone human who saw that particular film must have been baffled at its apologist stance for what everyone knows is an ethics-free killing machine, the United States Army.

The other apparently pointless documentaries are legion. *No End in Sight* (2007), for example, is a propaganda piece that suggests that the war in Iraq was "mis-handled" and then raises the specter of Iran as bogeyman in its closing statements, leaving the door open for a spectacular sequel. With these views palpably omnipresent on television and in the papers, who are the intended viewers for such abominable drivel? Perhaps a future race who will sort through the detritus of our civilization and to whom the filmmakers feel a responsibility to in explaining their damnable capitalist ideology, the system which spelled an end to such a luscious planet. Perhaps they believe that while the transmissions of television will be lost,

### **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

and newspapers burned away in the nuclear holocaust, the video documentary will survive, protected by its tough plastic DVD sheath. Their propaganda is supposed to mitigate the disgust the aliens feel at human senselessness, the same feeling you get when you find a great record collection at a thrift store that's been stepped on, scratched to hell, and left to molder.

The clues are all around that documentaries—and video in general—are meant for aliens. Why are DVDs shaped like flying saucers? To appeal to aliens. Why do pornographic actors shave their genitals? Because their directors imagine this will appeal to the aliens for whom the video porn is actually meant and who are commonly depicted as hairless. Who determined that video would be used this way? No one in particular. It was unconscious. Something about video screams “The Future” to people. Video fonts and screens always feature in futuristic television, records, and films. Perhaps there is some astral travel we've made through which we've witnessed this posthistorical environment.

This impulse—to create explanations of our time for a future superior race or being—is understandable of course, being the impetus for much esoteric and religious writings through the ages. But it's a mistake to assume that the aliens are so aesthetically stilted that they can't appreciate a little artistry in their propaganda. What the videos are really explaining to a future race is how stylistically impoverished our era has become. From the new buildings authored by a diabolical breed of “architects,” to the

office workers' khaki pants, to the artless business signs in the same few computer fonts, to the cars that are designed using the same horrible computer, the population is being aesthetically defecated on, and they know no better. Years of artistic retardation and philistine admonitions against art from everywhere—whether it's the Jesse Helms's of the federal government, or the rock 'n' roll stars of the culture industry ("A French Small Faces EP cover can piss all over any of [Picasso's] paintings," to quote Paul Weller)—have resulted in a kitsch country (the USA) that looks like shit and, through that country's outsize influence on the rest of the planet, a kitsch world that also looks like shit.

Of course, it's important not to be too harsh in one's judgment of the auteurs of these mediocre video movies. They are working under a fascist dictatorship, after all, with its attendant psychic torments, idiot population, and nasty bedfellows borne of the need for funding. It is especially difficult to produce anything worthwhile when one senses there is no audience for it. The mass media has successfully made us all feel remote, hapless, crazy, alone. Certainly, relatively little interesting art was probably produced in Pinochet's Chile.

Bob Dylan's famous interview in *Don't Look Back*, when he chastises a *Time* magazine reporter by saying, "There's no ideas in *Time* magazine . . . just these facts . . . Even the article on which you're doing, the way it's gonna come out, it can't be a good article . . . it means nothing . . ." he might as well have been discussing this new documentary craze. When, upon being pressed for an alternative

#### CENSORSHIP NOW!!

approach, he suggests, "A plain picture . . . a plain picture of, let's say . . . a tramp vomiting, man, into the sewer . . . and next door to the picture, you know, is Mr. Rockefeller . . . on the subway going to work . . ." he could easily be talking about the collage newsreels of Santiago Álvarez.

Santiago Álvarez points the way toward the solution to the current quagmire the documentary film/video world finds itself in. A Cuban filmmaker who was charged by Fidel Castro with producing newsreels upon the revolution's successful bid for power, he created an average of a film every two weeks for thirty years. He did this with almost no materials at his disposal, and yet his constructions are fantastic evocations of the circumstances they were concocted in. An alien viewing his work would certainly be delighted at the humanity which created it, would understand the complexity of this breed and the circumstance and the contradictions in its characters which ultimately led to the destruction of the planet.

Sort of like if the aforementioned ruined record collection at the secondhand shop had a poignant explanation that elaborated the owner's struggle against the dire forces which created the calamity which ultimately befell it.

One of Santiago Álvarez's films worth watching is *LBJ*, made in 1969. It insinuates that LBJ was complicit in the assassinations that plagued the era (L for Luther, B for Bobby, J for Jack), and does so with almost no words or narration except found music. The tools are stark: A few *Life* and *Playboy* magazines, untorn and slowly panned

across with the camera. Ingenious editing. Bewitching use of music. This is a documentary which could be played to any language group to similar effect and also works divorced of its political program, as beautiful collage art for the ages. The music—by Carl Orff, Miriam Makeba, Nina Simone, the Trashmen, Pablo Milanés, Leo Brouwer, and others—follows LBJ's daughter's marriage through to his dastardly deeds and closes with the birth of his grandchild, montaged with footage of war crimes perpetrated by the USA in Vietnam. Almost all of it is using pictures from the newspapers or the society pages of magazines. Álvarez is free to use whatever newsreel footage, magazine photographs, found images, and pop, jazz, or classical tunes as soundtrack he chooses, and from whatever sources he wants, since he is working for Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos of the Republic of Cuba, who were and still are in a state of war with the capitalist world, and therefore disdain copyright laws.

Envious filmmakers will watch Álvarez and cry, "No fair!" when they see what this allows him, but they should quit their bellyaching and get with the program. Modern licensing and intellectual property laws have destroyed art and expression in this country. It's time for the rebellion against filmic conventions and, yes, the laws that enforce modern film's mediocrity. Santiago Álvarez made over seven hundred films in his career which began with Fidel Castro's ascension in 1959 (when he was already forty!) and ended with his death in 1998. And Álvarez's work would be much better appreciated by any aliens who

**CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

happen to wander by than the hokey simplistic garbage that the documentary makers are typically churning out nowadays.

## 9

# THE ARTIST, ALIENATION, AND IMMORTALITY

### *I. ALIENATION*

**THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC** of the rock 'n' roll group is not electrification of instruments or the colonization of outsider music. Nor is it a rebel pose, outrageous hairstyle, or daring footwear. The characteristic of the rock 'n' roll group which sets it apart from other art producers—the reason it is the most modern of all art producers—is that the group's stature has little relation to what it produces.

The group, after all, is not its records, its songs, or its concerts. The group hovers above what it produces; the group is just the group, and the promise of its particular proposal. People may love a group despite their terrible records, their boring concerts, their lack of charisma, etc. The group likewise treats its records coolly and its concerts as ephemera; none of them really *are* the group.

The group always maintains that it is better than the



### **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

things it does, which are the unfortunate products of particular circumstances. These are always either a case of an idiot producer, incompetent sound person, bad crowd, or a momentary lapse; "we were sick" / "I was drunk," et cetera.

Conversely, other artists' stature and identity are determined by the work that they produce. Matisse, Jane Austen, Godard, and Beethoven weren't beloved or renowned because of some ineffable quantity which was bestowed upon them. It was their oeuvre or "body of work" which, at least initially, heralded their notoriety. But the rock 'n' roll group is different; as opposed to other art makers, what the group "does" is separate from what the group "is."

This situation is ironic because, at a glance, a group appears to reconcile the alienation at the heart of the modern postindustrial malaise, whereby people are divorced from the fruit of their labor, the source of the things they consume, and their community and political process.

The group, briefly surveyed, seems to represent a successful defiance of such conditions by ensuring the participants a direct role in their destiny and the art which they produce. But a closer look reveals that the group, once named, takes on a life outside of its creations.

Indeed, rock stars from the beginning express ambivalence about the groups they construct, feeling outside of them, bullied by them, sick of them, imprisoned by them. Even when they slay the group-beast with a suicidal "breakup," it still guides them, haunts them, derides them

## CHAPTER 9 | *The Artist and Immortality*

from the grave, oftentimes gaining otherworldly power and stature in the afterlife.

The songwriter in the group quickly finds that no song or record can serve as a corrective to what the group is in the minds of its onlookers, and that he or she, a participant in the group, may have been a spectator—or the host-body to a parasite—all along.

Groups like Black Flag, the Runaways, the Grateful Dead, the Germs, P.I.L., Crass, the Shaggs, Slayer, Lynyrd Skynrd, Einstürzende Neubauten, Minor Threat, LiLiPUT, Ultramagnetic MCs, Wu-Tang Clan, Pussy Galore, Death in June, and Throbbing Gristle all reveal how groups live outside of their “output”; they are cults which define lifestyles and ideologies separate from whatever songs or shows they produced.

Black Flag’s “bars” symbol signifies an ideology of perversity, toughness, cynicism, and black humor, and is tattooed on the necks of legions who have never heard the group. The Grateful Dead’s “dancing bear” and “steal your face” logos represent a libertarian “gypsy” lifestyle; apolitical but antiauthoritarian, pleasure-seeking, grubby, and committed to outsiderism. The “Deadhead” usually doesn’t listen to “The Dead.” This doesn’t detract from their authentic status as a Deadhead.

The group—even after its demise—is a speculative foundation, whose aesthetic *promise* might create scores of sycophants and true believers as opposed to its actual production output. A formerly insignificant group or performer can also be instilled with “legendary” status

### CENSORSHIP NOW!!

through manipulation of history or a well-timed discovery of their existence. This is convenient for the culture industry that wants to bend historical events, modes, and trends according to its needs.

The rock 'n' roll group/performer, whether it be Scritti Politti, Johnny Thunders, Nina Hagen, Gram Parsons, Elvis Presley, Bruce Springsteen, or countless others, owes much of its legend not to great recordings or fabled concerts, but to some other mystery; a cosmic designation which has as much to do with what they seemed to embody as to what they actually did.

This alienated aspect of the star—group—performer is what allows them to transcend time and space and achieve such resonance in disparate cultures and class groups. Because the group's power is tied only tangentially to their music or appearance, they float above changing styles and become a kind of specter or immortal being.

One often hears that the artist strives for a kind of *immortality*. Immortality is a quality which, in the popular imagination, is related to God, vampires, ghosts, and nuclear radiation. These things—besides being terrifying to humanity—are unified by the common condition of *total alienation*.

The vampire is alienated from humanity, who it must feast on to stay "alive." The ghost is alienated from its former physical body, and the rules that once governed it. God is alienated from His or Her subjects on Earth; while nuclear radiation—used by the Americans to bomb Japan, and then waved around for a half-century to ensure US

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

supremacy over any who wouldn't submit—is the alienated weapon, wielded by a war machine that is terrified of utilizing it for its world-ending effects.

The modern artist is also an alienated being, at odds with society and normal ideas of work, time, morality, and comportment. In fact, the artist is synonymous with a state of alienation. Alienation is what gives them vision to dismantle and reveal the world. If an artist is not alienated, he or she is considered to be boring or a “sellout,” and their work garbage.

How does the artist achieve such alienation? Why do they, like a ghoul, desire immortality? Is the artist a god, vampire, ghost, or piece of radiation?

## ***II. ORIGINS OF THE ARTIST***

Once, under Christianity, immortality belonged to everyone.

After one died, God could grant eternal life—or not. If God did not grant eternal life, one would burn in the Lake of Hell forever. Either way, immortality was achieved.

When the bourgeoisie took power in “the West,” beginning in the seventeenth century, God was defrocked; reduced to second-class status beneath the brokers, bankers, realtors, developers, and financial speculators who were celebrated as lord-deities in the new money-religion paradigm called “capitalism.”

The bourgeois coup was manifested in Great Britain with the English Civil War (1649), and by the Masonic revolutions in North America (1776) and France (1789).

## CHAPTER 9 | *The Artist and Immortality*

Elsewhere, its ideology was spread with the movements of neoclassicism, liberalism, and the so-called scientific revolution. Such consolidations of bourgeois power were heralded by the Renaissance in the Netherlands and Italy and that movement's promulgation of the bourgeoisie's vanguard weapon, the artist.

Through these, the new capitalist class displaced the old titled royals and landed gentry, who withered away into irrelevance. This putsch was only achieved with vital assistance from the emerging "arts."

Just as the aristocracy had employed priests to explain their own divine right, the bourgeoisie invented their own magical imp, called "the artist," to explain and celebrate their own rise to power. It's not a coincidence that "artist" sounds very much like "atheist"; the artist was invented as a gladiator to kill the old god for his paymaster. After victory, the Kingdom of Heaven was, along with God, thrown in the dustbin.

To seize power, the bourgeoisie had required the demotion of the church and the clergy who had explained the divine right of the aristocracy. But in this necessary reduction of God and simultaneous celebration of science, they had closed the old avenue to eternal life, even to themselves.

Becoming a god on Earth therefore became the goal. This required total control of the population and the Earth's "resources"; appropriation of the deity's cosmic abilities as well as his wealth and domain. The sciences were unleashed to wreak whatever they could, regardless

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

of ethics or implications. The transformation of the world through scientific discovery, technology, and development was accelerated at cataclysmic, traumatizing speed. The subsequent cosmology ensured the nascent capitalist class' grip on absolute power and also presented a version of the world wherein they were the central feature.

### ***III. THE ARTIST AS GOD***

Immortality became an obsession of the bourgeoisie, who hoped it could be attained through the artist's portrait. Later, they would use trusts, endowments, legacies, names on university buildings, health food, and cryogenics, but initially it was the painted portrait. This is the reason why, in depictions of rich burghers, their manors are lousy with oil paintings of their clan. Being imbued with the power to grant immortality, the artist was a kind of holy being. For the poor, with heaven's gate shut and without the money to commission a canvas simulacrum, there was no escape from oblivion.

The artist's principle role would be as explainer of bourgeois power, magically dispelling objections to the insanity, inequality, and hypocrisy of the new system. Before the Renaissance, the painter, musician, or sculptor was a craftsman; afterward, as an "artist," he was a seer and priest, anointed by his bourgeois patron. His work would elucidate his master's logic to the exploited masses. The artist was essentially a shock trooper for the capitalist's ideological indoctrinations.

The art-maker was therefore different from other

workers, both far above and far below them. This resulted in a deep state of alienation from society—its mores, ethics, clothes, and sleep schedule. In return for championing the master's god status on Earth, the artist could be interred as a legend after death. This status was always at the whim of the artist's employer, though; just as the bourgeoisie had created him, so could they dispose of him.

The artist as holy man was just one of many inventions commissioned by the capitalist, of course. The capitalist's greatest victory was his commission of the atom or "A-bomb"; that's when he really arrived. The single most compelling argument for the elite as living deities, after all, would be if they could appropriate God's best threat: Armageddon.

Beyond the Michelin restaurants, the private jets, and the high-priced brothels, the believable threat of Armageddon is what makes the capitalist a true potentate. Therefore, the threat of apocalypse must not only be a constant, but must also transform constantly, lest the public become inured to a familiar menace.

Acid rain, mutually assured destruction, killer bees, Ebola virus, Y2K, reactor meltdowns, global warming—capitalism demands not only constructed enemies and constructed desires, but also real impending crisis which threatens the human race itself with extinction. Terrorist threats and the threat of hurricanes, storms, tsunamis, and earthquakes are now conflated, so that weather itself is a terrorist.

The narcissistic idea of apocalypse and Armageddon

#### CENSORSHIP NOW!!

based on “fear of missing out” is something as old as mankind; it’s difficult for each successive generation to imagine a world without them as its center. But only under capitalism are the cycles of seasons, generations, and the future itself absolutely unimaginable.

#### *IV. THE ARTIST AS VAMPIRE*

The artist is often identified as a kind of “vampire”: carnal, callous, shape-shifting, nocturnal, undercover, possessing a strange, malevolent charisma, but ultimately parasitic.

The vampire myth started in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, an area which has had a third world relationship to the West ever since the Crusades. The Crusades weren’t only an invasion of the Holy Land but also included colonization of the Baltic states and the sack of Constantinople, the grand seat of Eastern Christianity. Seen as a whole, the Crusades were principally an attempt by the Roman Church to colonize the East.

The countries of the East, having never experienced their own bourgeois revolutions, were—and still are—used by the West as resources and markets to be colonized. As a result, the people there immediately fostered suspicion of the artists who were heralds of a new invading class of exploiter.

The vampire legend, popular throughout Eastern Europe, was a manifestation of the fear of the new artist class and of the artist’s portraits. The portrait painters were creating an immortal image, immortalizing their subjects, and becoming immortal themselves with their signatures,



which—since the Renaissance—had become a feature of their work.

In the East, there had been a great fear of people immortalizing themselves, outside of the domain of God. God was, after all, the only one who could grant immortality. The portrait painters were committing blasphemy in that they were helping someone live forever outside of the aegis of God. Therefore, the portrait painter was, to Christians, apostate. There is a cliché of certain aboriginal peoples believing that the camera will steal one's soul. The portrait painter of yore likewise was seen as a soul-stealer or vampire.

The East had historically been suspicious of portraiture and the immortalization of a person. The famous “iconoclast” struggles of the Middle Ages—which centered around destruction of graven images—had torn apart the Orthodox Church in the ninth century, leading to a disruption which allowed the Vatican to break free of Byzantine authority, and which led to the East-West schism, a defining feature of modern times.

The struggle between Western-Catholic and Eastern-Orthodox is the backdrop to imperial conflicts such as the NATO bombing and dismemberment of Yugoslavia, World War II, and the US-designed conflict in Ukraine. In these struggles, capitalist powers like NATO and the Nazis typically fight on the side of the Catholics while the Communists, Serbs, or pro-Russian separatists are usually Orthodox-affiliated. Dracula was a story appropriated by author Bram Stoker from the myths and folk traditions

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

of Slavic countries. Stoker set his story in Romania, but it could have taken place anywhere in the East.

Vampirism is a poignant condition not just because it is sexy and scary, but because the vampire is a victim too. The "Nosferatu" is a bloodthirsty creature who looks for prey, but he too was a victim once, a hapless dupe seduced by a thirsty immortal undead. This poignantly illustrates the conundrum faced by the artist under capitalism.

### ***V. THE ARTIST AS GHOST***

Art is often seen as a conjuring up, or as a message from the creator itself.

The musician or painter often complains of their fingers or pen (or whatever) being manipulated as if by ghosts, who lead them to the discovery or exhumation of what becomes their greatest hit. Keith Richards's riff for "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" is just one example.

An artist's stature often increases exponentially after they die, which isn't so strange when one considers that perhaps, once the artist has shaken off their mortal coil, all their energy can be focused on their career. Their artwork, whether it's a record, book, or painting, is thenceforth their only material manifestation, and thus, as opposed to the typical haunting of an old house, diving board, or stairway, the artist's ghost settles into their work.

Records and art are used as mediums with which to communicate to the "other side." Old records are, in a sense, our communion with the dead. Records blurt out trapped moments of rapture, fear, love, anguish, de-

spair, excitement, and insanity. When an album plays, it is a ghost wailing, imprisoned in the moment, rattling its chains. Groups' graven images and output are likewise ghostlike, attempting to wreak their vision on the world from the afterlife, but without a physical body, they must rely on real-world minions, not unlike Stoker's Dracula, whose insane slave "R.M. Renfield" caught flies in the asylum while worshipping his beloved count. Every fan is ultimately a little Renfield, who alternately raves and obscures their fave group or record—that which they see as the light and hope for the Earth but also their precious, personal, esoteric discovery.

When a rock group begins, it mimics the rattle from some tragic old ghost of renown, and attempts to recreate its heroics; reenacting some momentary tantrum which was trapped forever on a vinyl disc. The artist's painting is rectangular and self-contained, but a record is round and—forever revolving—seems to move quickly, but actually goes nowhere. The record being sheathed in a square-shaped cover or jacket is a craven attempt to mimic fine art's rectangularity, and therefore ingratiate itself to the linear, orderly world of bourgeois respectability. Ovals and curves are, after all, linked to tribalism, pantheism, magic, and preindustrial mandalas. The record jacket gives the disc an outward appearance of being complete, systematic, anchored, and logical, so as to disguise the dark drama of the captured soul which rotates eternally in a gyre.

The song, as a bizarre circular repetition, is another flirtation with death and its bedfellow, insanity. The re-

## **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

corded group might live a long life, but once it has been recorded, it's a walking undead, tethered to a material manifestation of a particular moment in time that it must repeat again and again. Some groups go unnoticed and fail; ultimately, they are the ones who are free. Successful groups are like legendary ghosts who have to perform some stunted emotional moment for their entire lives and then on into death.

Record collectors' houses often feel a bit haunted. The collector is someone who consorts with ghosts and the supernatural quite regularly. The compulsion to find the value of an out-of-print record is an unconscious attempt to please the ghost trapped in the groove. They are often insecure about the worth of their contributions, and want terrestrial confirmation.

The recording process is a conjuring of magic, therefore, and as such is regarded suspiciously by some who are less rooted in capitalism's gizmo-conjuring production paradigm.

### ***VI. THE ARTIST AS NUCLEAR RADIATION***

Sometimes groups refuse to write songs or record, such as Pussy Riot from Russia, whose inspiration came from performance artists, the CIA, and the fanzines of the nineties US feminist punk-revival underground—as opposed to its music.

Those fanzines were, in part, inspired by the group Nation of Ulysses, which had a fanzine/newsletter proclaiming itself a political-terrorist party. Pussy Riot, the

Russian protest performance group, took this concept—the group as terrorist political theater—and their name from this riot grrrl faction of the nineties US punk revival. Their guerrilla theater—and the outsized reaction to it—was highly effective in turning world opinion against the Russian state.

The vampirism practiced by the US state in co-opting the “group as terrorist-political organization” via its sponsorship of front group Pussy Riot is a predictable version of its usual bloodsucking appropriation. Yet, since they don’t make records, Pussy Riot are not yet dead and therefore have real potential to wreak the nuclear apocalypse long promised by the rock bands who, wailing from another dimension, have thus far been delinquent and ineffectual in their delivery.

It’s no coincidence that Pussy Riot, who are hero/celebrities in the West and party with camp Catholic Madonna, began their struggle with the desecration of an Orthodox church in Moscow. Pussy Riot are the central pieces in the current push to suppress and recolonize the East, stars of the West’s propaganda campaign against Russian president Vladimir Putin. They are the exemplary rationalization to liberals for the possibly armed confrontation with the Russian state, which the West elite despises for its gas wealth, otherness, and relative autonomy, as opposed to EU governments who are supplicant bootlicks to US-led neoliberal hegemony.

Pussy Riot, more than anyone ever, are the embodiment of the pure rock ’n’ roll promise: they produce

### **CENSORSHIP NOW!!**

nothing, they do nothing, and are—to their audience—incomprehensible; yet they may have engendered a world war through a gesture of nihilistic defiance. In explaining and creating a framework for liberals to applaud US intervention against Russia, an isolated, resentful, and possibly desperate nuclear power, these artists have attained the apocalyptic god status typically reserved for the most elite bourgeoisie. In this manner, they might be the most powerful artists ever.

Pussy Riot are a singular group and cannot be enlisted to play a festival or join a package tour, as they have no real songs, records, or show. Per the rock 'n' roll archetype of absolute individualism, they are alone; isolated from other bands, from their nation, from everyone except the neoliberal celebrities who see them as the path to an easy activism with no negative social or commercial consequences; the best way to self-righteously shake one's fist since "Free Tibet" was the toast of the town.