

FRINGE WARE REVIEW

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STAY AWAKE.



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During a recent trip to San Francisco, I had a most enlightening breakfast at Spaghetti Western in the Haight district. I enjoyed not only my Spuds-o-rama, but the company of Joseph Matheny, director of MediaKaos, Dr. Timothy X. T. Finnegan of CSICON (Committee for Surrealist Investigation of Claims of the Normal), and Walter Radtke of the OIT (Occult Institute of Technology). We discussed our current projects, such as MediaKaos' new quarterly zine called *Stare*, which should be available in July (for ordering info query mediak@well.com), Dr. Finnegan's book *The Last Book* an ongoing experiment in interactive media based on a quote of De Selby's "When the text is destabilized, the destabilized get sex," and Walter's project of bringing Velikovsky's ideas and other unpopular memes to the Net (for information, contact walter@netcom.com). We talked about reality, and the moral imperative of the magician to change it. Suddenly it hit me that if I made this into an interview, the trip would be tax-deductible.

Although I think the interview stands by itself, there are certain references which might deepen the reader's Understanding. Yes, Big U-understanding—not only intellectual understanding but an Understanding that has "hands-on" practice, and the resultant self-transformation that comes from the practice. The references are Harold Garfinkle *Studies in Ethnomethodology* Prentice Hall 1966, H. Allen Smith *The Complete Practical Joke* Doubleday 1953, R. I. Gregory *Odd Perceptions* 1984 Methuen, and Immanuel Velikovsky *Oedipus and Akhnaton* 1960 Pocket Books (A Gulf + Western Company).

MediaKaos has a wide array of culturally destabilizing commodities available, including cassettes, books, posters, videos. They're primary publishers of Genesis P'Orridge, and are on the way with such treats as David Jay Brown's multi-viewpoint novel *Vred*. They're accessible by email to mediak@well.com or snail mail to:

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Joseph Matheny, their redoubtable helmsman, is young, vital and intelligent—unless of course you believe the rumor that he is a fictional being created by Nick Herbert and the Wilson twins. He seemed real enough to me, but then I write for FWR. I asked him nine questions in honor of the Unknown Nine who rule the world (see Mundy Talbot *The Unknown Nine*).

fwr: Why is it artistically, spiritually and politically important to create hoaxes?

jm: Oh no. If I think about this question too long, I'll be ruined! Ok, I'll try to answer that without thinking about it too much <chuckle>. Hoaxing and pranking when done well can be the equivalent of a good breaching experiment. Breaching experiments were something proposed by a sociologist named Harold Garfinkle, and probably best explained in his book *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Garfinkle was interested in the flexibility of belief systems, what happens when a person is suddenly placed *outside* their consensus reality. Some of the experiments he chronicled in *Studies* read like elaborate hoaxes, yet this was all done within the boundaries of "serious" academics. I don't want to give too much away here. I'll just recommend the book. Read it, it's a gas! Hoaxing is a way to create "gaps" in the flow of reality.

When someone is faced with the option of deciding what is "real" and what is "hoax" they are thrown into a state of ambiguity concerning the nature of their reality. It is much like the state that an initiate is thrown into during a rite of passage. The Fool of the Tarot deck, unknowing, blindly stepping off the cliff into the unknown. That moment of uncertainty when if even for a second, the world is no longer black and white. That is the gap, the hole in the script, so to speak.

Neoism uses the language of art against itself.

There are many control systems in the world, and most of them we take for granted. The old "it's always been that way" syndrome. One of the reasons monolithic, static social structures endure is the lack of questions about their nature being posed by the participants (you and me). I think hoaxes serve a R/Evolutionary purpose. They are knowingly or unknowingly the agents of chaos, the nonlinear element in the equation, the jamming signal perched midway between signal transmitter and signal receiver. History shows a long tradition of malcontents, unhappy with the way things were, who took it upon themselves to jam the

coercive signal of consensus reality, whether it be church, state, science, or peer pressure.

Everything that MediaKaos does is a "hoax" in the sense that it is designed to dance. What I mean by that is, the relationship between transmitter and receiver is called into question, and the receiver finds themselves in the peculiar position of having to decode the information flow, rather than sitting back and passively receiving and accepting it. Sometimes that dance takes a subtle, elegant form, and other times it's downright slapstick. It depends on the situation, the setting, etc. This process also demonstrates how information normally flows and how easy it is to manipulate it and make it fit an agenda. In the case of MediaKaos it is a benign, humorous one. In the case of someone like General Electric/RCA/NBC it would seem that it is not. But the bottom line to all this is, it's pretty goddamn funny! That's the real answer. All that other BS I was just spouting was filler material, so you can reach your word quota. **fwr:** How does this fit in with the concept of neoism?

jm: Neoism as in Stewart Home and crew? Hmm. The Neoist manifestoes and The Art Strike Papers are pretty funny. The whole idea of playing a hoax on the capital A art crowd is very appealing to me. If anyone is wrapped up in a reality sandwich, it's the art and academic crowd. Neoism is the bastard

child of Situationism and Fluxus, with equal parts of Dada, Futurism, Lettrisme, and guerrilla media thrown in for flavor (to thoroughly mix metaphors). The part of Neoism that I like the most, besides the press releases, is the concept of the apartment festivals. This hits the spectacle where it lives, in the home. We did something like this in the building where I live now. Several of us got together, threw our doors open, and had a party in the hallway. We invited anyone who passed by to join us in our "liberation of a common space". It all turned out very nicely, with barriers being broken down between folks who had formerly only nodded to each other as they passed in the hall.

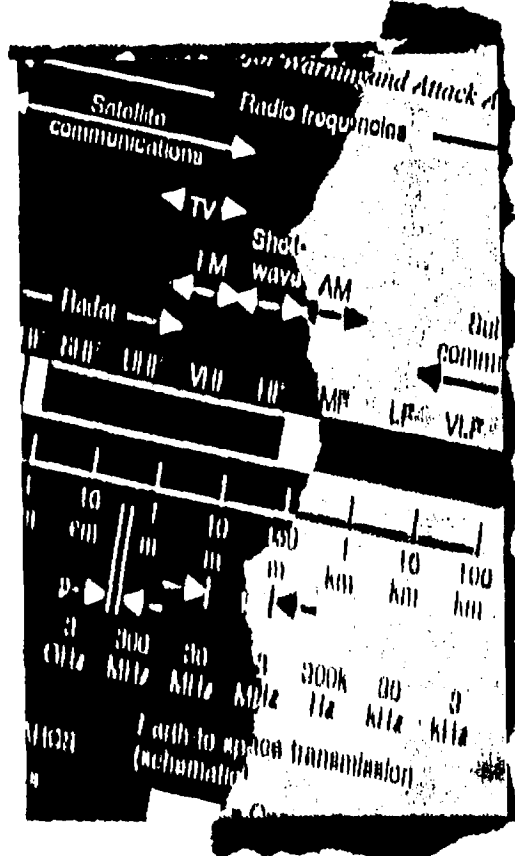
Neoism uses the language of art against itself. It calls into question the place of the artist in society. Neoism is an "Assault on Culture" (to borrow a book title from Mr. Home). It is one more piece in a giant critique of art for arts sake, or art for moneys sake with the delusion of doing it for a higher purpose, (points upward) Aht! The whole concept of ownership is of course discussed and detoured in Neoism with the practice of plagiarism. Is plagiarism a crime? How much of what is created is truly "original"? How can it be? What is "true originality"? I don't think Neoism answers any of these questions, but simply posing them is enough! Think about it for a minute. Even if you were raised in a cultural vacuum, could you ever be original in a pure sense? There's a whole other dimension of genetics, environment, etc. to take into account even after you remove historical influence! Neoism raises some interesting questions to ponder, and by doing so qualifies itself as a hoax.

fwr: Why are you a neoist?
jm: I'm not. Neoism is one of my influences, along with Situationism, Fluxus, Shiz-Flux, SMILE, Negativland, The Cacophony Society, certain writers in *boING-boING*, Discordianism, The Church of the SubGenius, Hakim Bey, the Marx brothers, Joey Skaggs, Dada, Alfred Jarry, *MAD* magazine, William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Aleister Crowley, Lenny Bruce, the BLF, Del Close, and a whole list of wise-acres too long to mention here because we're getting close to that word quota, and I won't go one character over it!

fwr: What's your favorite prank?
jm: That's a hard one. Well one of my favorite pranks goes something like this: A white van pulls up outside of a local bank. Two people in white jumpsuits get out and load up with all kinds of impressive looking techware and proceed to walk into the bank waving around some official looking credentials (no one present can remember what the credentials actually said) and proclaim that they are there to do some "emission testing". Donning SCBAs they rope off an area of the main lobby with yellow Biohazard barriers and mark off a area of the wall about 6x9 with some tape. Next they begin waving around a few "instruments", conferring after each pass, shaking their heads negatively. Now the whole procedure is being nervously monitored by employees and management of the bank. Without a word the two "experts" walk back to the van and get a saw.

taped off area of sheetrock out of the wall, load it into the van and drive away, leaving a bank full of puzzled employees in their wake.

The lesson here? All you have to do is dress like an "official", wave about some impressive objects and you can pretty much get whatever you want. The other lesson is: people will usually submit to someone who acts like they are in charge and knows what they're doing. I don't know if this was meant to be the point of the prank, but



that's what I got out of it. The whole transparency of control systems was exposed by this one, rather creative form, of bank robbery.

fwr: How has the Internet changed writing?
jm: I can only speak for myself. Being on the Net has given me a different perspective on the place of the author and the reader. It seems to me that the Net is a much more interactive form of writing than the traditional role of "I'm the writer and you're the reader. Here's my ideas, here's my conclusion, now ain't I bright? Go tell all your friends how bright I am and how bright you are for discovering me." On the Net writing is much more immediate. People add, subtract, mangle and comment on what you have to say in a matter of minutes. It sometimes puts you in the position of having to

the other hand the Net is a notorious attention shortener. I know that if I go several days reading only Net postings, my attention span has to be retrained for a few hours before I can get back into the swing of heavy material. One thing that I appreciate about the Net is the fact that everyone is a writer of some sort. One thing is for sure. There's a lot of stuff that I have published on the Net as free works that might not have seen the light of day otherwise. The Net is the ultimate samizdat tool!

fwr: What is an author?
jm: You don't really want me to answer that do you? If I give out the secrets of the tremendous scam we're running on the rest of the world we'll all be dead within a matter of days. I say, what people don't know may hurt them, but at least they can't blame me!

fwr: What is fiction?
jm: Life.
fwr: What is magic?

jm: Magick is the exercise of the will. It is creation (writing), to imbue something with life (writing), to incant so as to create a desired effect in the universe (writing). I'm not saying that writing is the only form of Magick, but rather I am showing you how everything is Magick. Getting up in the morning and making coffee is a magickal act, making love, sneezing etc.

fwr: Can Art change the world? Or does it help a few working to create a Hidden world within the world of horrors?

jm: Interesting question. Art is an attempt to change the world. It is humanity's way of trying to make beauty or order or disorder from the surrounding elements. Of course it's always more comfortable in a supportive environment surrounded by those of like mind or disposition. But what good is art for art's sake? This concept has always sickened me. My taste in art is that which questions and engages the status quo. Pranks, experiments in guerrilla ontology, all these things are healthy for the culture. The lone voice of dissent crying out in the wilderness isn't always right (whatever that means) but at least it's a different take on the consensus reality. Can art change the world? It damn well better.

Joseph Matheny is a Cultural Provocateur and Founder/ Conceptual Director of MediaKaos. Make contact via: mediak@well.com or +1 415 241 1568

