

LIBERATION ARTS AND THE CREATIVE REVOLUTION

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“The essence of a revolution is the direct intervention of the masses in the political life of the nation. It represents a radical break with the normal routine of existence, where the masses leave the key decisions affecting their lives in the hands of the powers that be. Such a break only occurs at a point when the majority draws the conclusion that the existing order is incompatible with their very existence. A revolution is a situation where the masses take their destiny into their own hands.”

Alan Woods and Jorge Martin in “Revolution in Bolivia” 2005

“A world of unseen dictatorship is conceivable, still using the forms of democratic government.”

In “The Hidden Persuaders”, Vance Packard 1957

Revolutions are usually messy things and in a ‘civilised’ society not the sort of activity one wants to be involved in, unless it’s a sanitized misrepresentation of the term in which technology or some other corporate phenomenon is promoted as a mass movement that changes our lives. But this has little to do with being driven by the masses; usually the masses are further manipulated into believing that they are the major beneficiaries of whatever has been sold to them. Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people but people are these days more likely to be anaesthetized by the ideology of consumerism promulgated by the corporate greed machines. Truly, our lives are controlled by them; what we look like, eat, drive, think about, believe ourselves and others to be, are all shaped by the corporate monopoly of the human mind.

In ‘Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph Of American Materialism’, 1999, James B. Twitchell suggests advertising is the new neo-religious force binding American society together. ‘They’ command history’s most subtle and pervasive tool of learning, training, and mass socialization. ‘They’ have been training generation after generation to be good, consistent, obedient, and hungry consumers.’

And in ‘The Corporation’, a book that every human being should read who is concerned about the future of the planet and their own freedom to act on its behalf, Joel Bakan unveils the history and the character of what Noam Chomsky describes as “a devilish instrument that has been created and is nurtured by powerful modern states. They have endowed their creature with the rights of persons – and by now, rights far exceeding persons of flesh and blood – but a person that is pathological by nature and by law, and systematically crushes democracy, freedom, rights, and the natural human instincts on which a decent life and even human survival depends: the modern corporation.”

Thus, we live in a society touted as a democracy but in which freedom is circumscribed by what Vance Packard refers to as the ‘people shapers’, for whom solely materialistic concerns prevail and are reinforced as the benchmarks of freedom. Unless we decide to reclaim freedom in its truest sense, we will continue to be puppets, yet believing ourselves to be free.



Art is the last bastion of freedom and the final means by which freedom can be reclaimed, for freedom arises from our capacity to explore and question the world and move within it according to guidelines generated by social ideals translated into self-prescribed values. In so many areas this opportunity seems closed to us for the world presents itself **as a fixed and inalienable 'reality'**, and the real is taken-for-granted and inviolable. There appears to be no way out, for the existing structures which constitute reality are implanted in our collective consciousness.

It is only when people rise up out of this oppressive status quo to question reality that the seeds of change can be sown. When we opened Outer Space Gallery, a gallery for young people and students, we started to become aware that their work showed significant expressive and conceptual freedom. The way they viewed the world was different, and the way they translated what they saw into their art gave an inkling of a world likely to eventuate when freed from the entrenched tendency to reproduce itself. Vibrant, humorous, sometimes acerbic in its social observations, unconstrained by rules of colour or technique, the work seems to arise directly out of the creative spirit. Two of the artists spoke about a stream of consciousness where meaning became evident as the work found its way onto the canvas. In this way art becomes a journey of surprises. The primary intent is to embark upon the journey and see where it leads.

Art as the medium through which freedom is both experienced and manifest is at the cutting edge of social change. For once people are aware that they can exercise freedom of thought and expression and that it can be different then the bondage of social replication is broken and the potential for change becomes evident and exciting. I would love to live in some of the worlds that artists create – the 'magical realism' of Riki Bowler and the sacred tui of Jermaine Reihana spring to mind - where creatures feature largely and lovingly in the landscapes and human beings are reminded of their place as transients in a world where the main components are not individuals but 'enduring existence' in both its diversity and completeness, thus somewhat diminishing human dominance and 'putting us in our place'.

To rise above the machine which reproduces society for its own sake, is to have the capacity to create an alternative culture and thus to undermine the current one.

And in the place of gross consumerism, which masquerades as progress but which is merely greed by another name, are new worlds unfolding, for creative, and not destructive and exploitative, forces are at their core.

References:

- 'The People Shapers': Vance Packard 1961
- 'The Hidden Persuaders': Vance Packard 1957
- 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions': Thomas Kuhn 1962
- 'Disruptive Innovation' Kieran Connelly 2005 in "Music Liberation Project"
- 'Harrison Bergeron' in "Welcome to the Monkey House": Kurt Vonnegut

