10-27-1988

Faithless Reproduction and the Sincerest Form of Flattery

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Sometimes I get the feeling that no one is listening to me. I say "FORGET THE NEW" and the next thing I know I'm surrounded by trend happy beatniks hell bent on originality. Then, to make matters worse, they start bickering about WHO DID WHAT FIRST and WHO BORROWED WHAT FROM WHERE.

"Sure you were the first to sing falsetto under a colored light bulb, but I was the original poet to fart in a bowl."

After a brief, golden age of guileless mimicry, naive mannerism and adolescent genre-cloning, the BEATNIK LEAGUE was visited by it’s first quasi-moral parameter: Suddenly it was uncool to copy. After thriving in various forms at AS220 for three years, the FAITHLESS REPRODUCTION was no longer hip.

At THE CABARET OF THE ODDLY NORMAL this dilemma reached epic proportions. The need to produce "original" material seemed genuinely urgent, but I couldn't understand it. After all, the Cabaret had established itself as an indiscriminate showcase for appropriated beat poetics, quasi-fabulous neo-art performance and "cover" versions of mega-yawn conceptual art. In my mind this did not create the expectation of originality... or even a traditional attitude towards the ownership of style.

Somebody must have forgotten that sifting the radioactive ashes of hip-passe requires alot of incredibly bad but sincere imitation, irreverant reproductions and, hopefully, an original accident or mutation. I had always rather fancied the commingling of hero worship and pirate ethics that I took as the trademark of AS220. It never really seemed clear whether or not the "cover tunes" presented at the Cabaret were meant as blatant affronts to aesthetic propriety or whether they were just awkward attempts to pay homage to neglected modes of grooviness. Either way, I figure that the experiments conducted at the cabaret occur in a safe groove of urarity far away from the dangerous, cutting edge of the culturemart. At such a distance this tribe of declasse dilettantes is free to clone modes of passe profundity without regard for professional ethics, good taste, sanity, vanity or copyright laws. No need to be concerned with stylistic continuity or moral compunctions.
No reason to inhibit the impulse to appropriate material or limit the use of cheap effects. Anytime, anywhere: amplification, aleatory, alienation, audience participation, anti-art posturing and anything for a laugh. If it worked once, why shouldn't it work again? If it worked for some art star of the recent past, why shouldn't it work for a buncha June Meatball?

Personally, I've never fully understood the allure of the original. Maybe because I'd rather look at a post card reproduction of a DeKooning than behold the icky reality. I also consider Xerography just as likely an arena for virtuosity as fresco or female impersonation. But, on the other hand, CASTING ASPERSIONS CAN BE AN ART FORM TOO.

And in this spirit let me say that I am often found cringing in horror whilst sitting through some piece of DEGENERATE INDETERMINACY that passes for an arcane homage at AS220. But, its not the excessive license that bothers me- the presence of ponderous, pirated themes is essential to the comedic base of the cabaret. It's the fact that when the high seriousness of some artsy-fartsy relic gets dragged on stage along with its style, well, the chemistry of the cabaret gets a little too ACIDIC. Add to this a sudden increase in concept territoriality and style paranoia and the SOUND WITHOUT FURY FACTOR goes through the ceiling.

During a recent evening at the cabaret, in-between sets of quasi-aleatory be-bop, I heard a man in a giant puppet suit scream "YOU'RE AN IMPOTENT INTELLECTUAL AND I HATE YOU!" JEEZE! By those standards I'm left feeling as though I have no regard for esthetic real estate at all, and that I have given my "intellect" consideration to a bunch of adolescent art-wankers. Worse yet, I am left with nothing but my withering "intellect" in a demi-monde of the transcendentally bad... listening to beatnik cover tunes in an ambiance suggestive of a psycho-sardonic GRANGE HALL TALENT SHOW.

But, hey, I can live with that. In fact I rather like it. You will find me in the audience every Saturday night. And I am not alone.

What my fabulous friend has overlooked is that the audience at the Cabaret is experiencing the highest form of art the BEATNIK LEAGUE has to offer. They are SHARING THE DELUSION. After all, the most "Original" aspect of AS220 is its commitment to THE ART OF BEING DELUSIONAL. Once initiated into this realm of subjective histrionics, the AS220 affectation becomes incapable of distinguishing between a well crafted original, a half-assed homage and pirate parody. At this point it is immaterial whether the act in progress is a rip-off of some terribly nouveau ART WHIRLED persons or just the latest project indulging the cast in their seemingly inexhaustable enthusiasm for fourth grade humor. Unfortunately, of late I've seen a disturbing preponderance of the latter. Now that nouveau-mania has touched the Cabaret, its creators have left their wholesale borrowing days behind them. With each passing week they find greater and greater rewards yielded from vignettes so utterly weird, puerile, quirky and inescrutable that the issue of originality is lost forever.

I suppose this is an accomplishment.

But, now and again, as much as I enjoy the proto-dada scripts that keep surfacing at AS220, I find myself longing for the return of the faithless reproduction. Sure, farting in a bowl is original, but wouldn't you rather hear some BEA CLASSIQUE screamed at 12 decibels in a North Providence dialect?