

**Rage Against the Author:
On Will to Create, (Meta-)Fiction,
and Being a God?**

Nezhla Imanzadeh

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(Meta-)Fiction, and Being a God?

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Why do we create? Is it solely the desire to be the figure of authority rather than being at the mercy of one? And why and where do we draw the line between imagination and creation? Where does reality come to play in all of this? Who is god but the one to take credit for what we can't or don't want to?

This thesis will drag from the realms of fiction, whether it be organised religion, cults, sci-fi books, cartoons, art, magic, or just one's own imagination running loose for personal satisfaction or distraction.

This mass of words came to life from an excruciating exhaustion with the notions of god, authority, freedom, and the cliché struggles of creation (in art or otherwise). But what better way to wage war against an imaginary figure of authority, than with imagination?



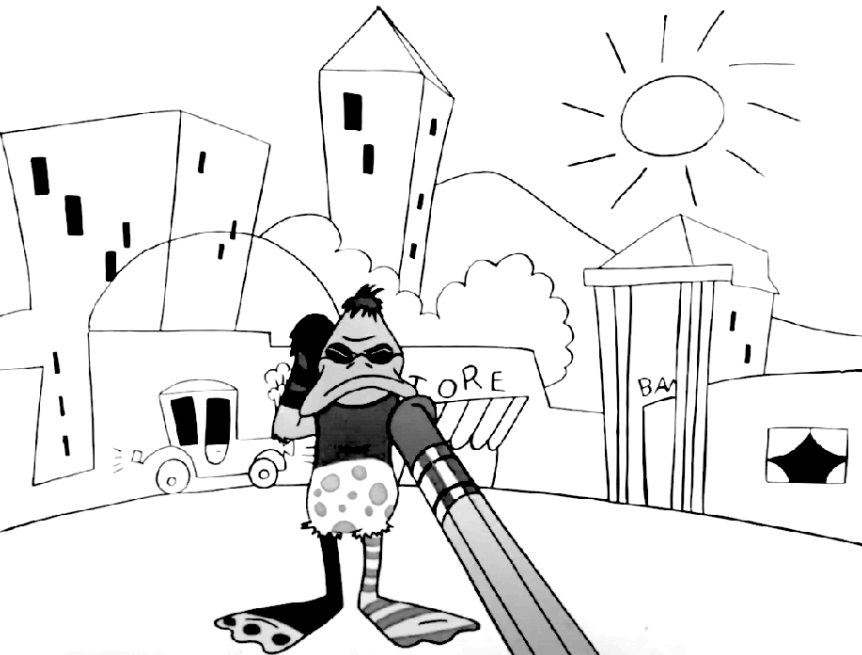
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«Rage against the author» is the name tvtropes.org has given to one specific trope, where a level of metafiction is achieved by not only breaking down the fourth wall but actively making the creator take a part in their own fiction. In Duck Amuck (1953) we see Daffy Duck step onto a universe where he is supposed to star in a medieval episode of his show, yet halfway through his line, he realises there is no background or as he says “scenery” in the frame. He turns his head towards us and asks about the lack of scenery, addressing “whoever’s in charge here”. Aka the author.

In Duck Amuck, we see Daffy just ask for what is supposed to be, his sense of self is not dependent on his outer appearance, voice, or background. When his planned scenery of a medieval castle is replaced with a barn, he still co-operates and acts the part. This cooperation reluctantly continues with each change of context as he changes the words to his initial dialogue to match each scene, which doesn’t last too long as the background is fully erased again. It is at this point, that Daffy turns to his creator (and also you the observer) and asks him to acknowledge that this is an animated cartoon and that animated cartoons require a background (his words not mine). We’re not so different from him. In moments of despair, we too blame the invisible guy in the sky. At least we acknowledge that

many of our problems are out of our hands. However we do not live our lives under the assumption that an imaginary audience that we must entertain is watching us, and I suppose that's what sets us and Daffy Duck apart.

Despite his full awareness of the situation and endless bullying, he doesn't seem to be able to take any action that is not in tune with his job or his "purpose" in his life. He doesn't ask for autonomy or any specific reality to be placed in, all he asks for is consistency and for "someone" to take charge, and although full of rage he never truly rebels against the author, maybe because that would result in his lack of existence.





Fiction, even if it is about a cartoon duck, is always a reaction to reality. There is no imagined thought, no matter how surreal or abstract, that exists outside the context of the reality in which it's imagined. So it is safe to say Chuck Jones was reflecting on his own existential crisis through this episode of Daffy Duck's adventures, where he so happens to become the big guy in the sky, having control and authority over a made-up, but still vastly popular character.

L Ron Hubbard, was a science fiction writer turned prophet (a title he never claimed) who successfully materialized his imagination as an institutional religion (and coincidentally a financial asset but that's beside the point now) known now as the Church of Scientology.

Around the same time that Chuck Jones was drawing a self-aware Daffy Duck, Hubbard was writing his book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* which at first glance may sound like any self-help book but is in fact a collection of wild (but convincing enough) accusations of how the human mind and essentially all of existence works, most of which Hubbard fully imagined or at best was loosely inspired by all other religious and philosophical concepts that touch on those subjects. I say "wild accusations" to stir up the pot, but in fact, it's not all so different from childhood imaginations of all of us, this imagination is our most basic tool for rationalising our existence.

It's fascinating how one person's imagination can affect so many others. In the case of Chuck Jones and Daffy Duck, it seems quite normal. After all, he is making cartoons for children and of course, imagination affects things in other people's reality! that's how things are invented, how politicians are picked and how the future is decided. But why is it so shocking to realise a man imagined a whole universe and convinced a couple thousand others to believe in it too? Or is the shocking

part that the rest of us haven't done that yet? It's not quite the same as being god but being the "mouth of god" is just as good if you're trying to justify your ideas. So, are we sure neither Chuck Jones nor Ron Hubbard are god? In the case of Chuck Jones, as long as we are not made of graphite on paper, we can be sure he is not god, and he never claims to be either. But, Hubbard brought his imagination into the real world, his characters were real people that already existed before his book and his book was about them. And he had the final say in what is canon and what is not, if there was a question, he could just "imagine" an answer based on his own previous imagined logic and science. So, is that enough to make him god? Not quite. Because further than putting his ideas out there, he couldn't do much. He had no miracle nor could he telepathically control people and now, after his death the fiction he created lives on in reality, for a couple of thousand people as a way of life and for some others as a fascinating social phenomenon.

When I was in the fourth grade, I was asked to bring in an essay on my favourite prophet. At that time we were watching a lot of religious cartoons in class. Jonah and the whale, Noah and his ark, Muhammad with his overwhelmingly radiant face -lazy solution to depicting a face that is not to be depicted-, Joseph and the well his brothers left him in, Moses and the red sea, or perhaps Adam who got fooled by a snake. I (proudly) chose

Māni. I'm not so sure how generally accepted he is as a prophet worldwide, but as the second Iranian prophet, he does not get any credit in Iran. In order to maintain the dignity and respect for Islam, prophet Mani is mostly referred to as "Painter Mani".

Mani, like most other prophets, had visions of what he perceived to be his "heavenly twin" who convinced him to spread the true message of Jesus in a new gospel. What he preached was that Evil and Good are in a constant battle and all that exists is the byproduct of this battle, denying "god's" omnipotence or omniscience and redefining Evil (or darkness) as something not inherently bad but rather more material than spiritual, or what he attributed to good. So in his belief, there was good, evil, and Divine Spirit (middle Persian Mihryazd). And the arts were of the same esteem as the Divine Spirit. Mani believed the creation of art was comparable to god's creation of living forms, and so the experience of art was the most divine act in the material world. I wonder why he is not more popular, I imagine hippies and artists alike would go crazy over this, a religion that not only defines a purpose for "artistic practice" but places the artist on the same pedestal as god.

I'm quite convinced; If Manichaeism was now a modern institutional religion I would be one of those people in public squares, looking for passersby to save and lead up the true path of Mani.

“Hey, yes, yes you. How are you doing today? Do you know Mani? Mani the prophet? Are you curious?”

“No.” The woman said as she passed while avoiding eye contact.

“That’s not how you do it, you’re being too pushy.” said the man holding the giant cross.

“How do you do it then.”

“You need to speak with your eyes first. You have to catch their sight, and look real happy too like you’ve got a secret you can’t wait to tell someone.” He said stashing his pocket bibles in his pocket and taking out an e-cigarette.

I do have a secret I can’t wait to tell:

HEY EVERYONE! GOD IS NOT REALLY GOD BUT THE PRODUCT OF EVIL AND GOOF EXISTING TOGETHER AND IT MANIFESTS AS THE WHOLE WORLD! AND HUMANITY AND SOULS! AND GUESS WHAT? HUMANS ARE BOTH GOOD AND EVIL TOO!

I did not say that, I just looked at him take a drag from his grape scented e-cigarette.

“Who the heck is Mani?”

“He’s a guy from the third century after christ. he had visions when he was 12 and again when he was 24. Visions of his heavenly twin telling him to tell the true message of Jesus in a new gospel.”

“Jesus told the true message of Jesus.”

“Well... yeah I suppose, but more than 200 years had passed by that point... well, and, there is always misunderstandings.”

“So he made his own bible?”

“Well, he wrote a bunch of books but there are seven main ones, all about life and existence and everything else.”

“You got some?”

“Some what?”

“Some of these books?”

“Oh, all the originals were lost in the middle ages, but there are some pages of manuscripts that were found in China and Egypt.”

He burst out laughing but his laugh turned into a nasty wet cough.

“So what do you plan on giving to these people if you get them to talk to you?”

“...flyers?” I didn’t make any flyers.

“Plus, it’s not about books or flyers, it’s about the idea, the philosophy behind his way of explaining all of this. God’s not a guy in the sky, god is the mutual essence in all of us and everything that surrounds us. Evil is not the red guy with horns on his head. It’s darkness, matter. And Good is not a halo above the head, it’s spirit and light and Art! creation-”

“I get it I get it it’s some new age hippie thing you’re making up.”

I suppose it is.

“Can I have a bible?”

He looked me up and down.

“English?” He said as he looked down at his box of bibles.

“Yes please.”

He bent down and scattered some around in the box.

“It looks like all the English ones are gone.”

Guess it wasn't meant to be.

“Any other language? Italian? French? Hebrew?”

He grabbed a stack.

“No.”... I lied and I grabbed my bag from the floor.

“What a shame. If you come here tomorrow from noon I'll bring fresh ones in stock”. He said as he switched some of the dutch bibles in his pocket with the Italian and French stack.

“Okay! You take care!” I said as I walked away.

God as a Witness (Spectator)

Does god have free will? That depends on who you believe god to be, most believers of Abrahamic religions would say yes. But it can be a lengthy debate, to have free will is to take action, and it's debatable whether god has taken any action since creation (and if that was a conscious action itself). And in short, the good old question comes up: If he is taking action does that mean he wants evil to exist? As it so clearly does while god supposedly is in charge of all. A spectator is generally not the author, especially within an art context. As the author, it is impossible to remain objective and the main redeeming quality of the spectator is its initial unfamiliarity with what it's encountering that allows it to explore and perceive. Is the spectator helpless? Can they intervene? Well in the case of art, I suppose it can happen and immediately be labeled as an "interactive performance" where the spectator becomes an active factor in the artwork and is no longer a spectator, but rather is part of what the author has authorship over, practically robbed of the experience of spectatorship and dragged onto the pedestal as an object, or even *the* object.

In the case of Daffy Duck and Chuck Jones, it's a bit more complicated. Is Chuck the spectator? Daffy addresses both us "Dear Audience" and Chuck as the "person in charge". Daffy's categorisation of whom he is

dealing with makes it clear that we have no say in what is happening, we are there to enjoy the show, now what the show is going to be is between Daffy and his creator. The extent of our say is whether we keep watching the show or switch the channel, I suppose the ones who are truly awakened may even turn the TV off.

But, there is no questioning whether Chuck is the author or not. But then is he also the spectator? One could confidently say yes, as not only is he addressed and he has an active role in the episode, but he also is faced with unexpected counter-attacks from his alleged creation. The self-awareness of Daffy Duck has ruined the classic structure and has jumbled up all our roles, Daffy trying to take authorship while addressing both us the silent innocent viewers, and his creator who is restlessly bothering him. All the while Chuck is seemingly “in charge” but not quite as he has to keep thinking of ways of neutralising Daffy’s rebellion.

The least bothered role is us, the self-assumed spectators. However even our neutrality is challenged when we are addressed. We shouldn’t forget the whole reason they are fighting is because of the show they are putting on for us. And in fact, if we were not there, perhaps there would be no reason for Chuck to torture Daffy for the sake of our entertainment. Or perhaps Daffy would fight harder if he wasn’t so concerned about the show he has to put on for the audience.

A common scenario: we are there for god's entertainment. He is watching us for his own amusement. Essentially we are Daffy Duck. But it is not clear, did he write the show? If so why would he be amused by watching it? Or did he not write it? Is it not written and directed at all? Fully authentic? Then why is god there? Is it so necessary to have the spectator lingering around? Certainly, we wouldn't cease to exist if we stopped being perceived at all times. Is there a point to creating if the creation is not to be perceived? This question can also be dragged down to the topic of art. *The Thirteen Year Plan* (1986-1999) was what some call Tehching Hsieh's last work, and other's may call it his second to last work (and I suppose that could start a long discussion on what is considered an artwork but we leave that for another time), after which he publicly declared that he is no longer an artist. The Thirteen Year Plan was the plan to make art for 13 years, but not show it *publicly* – Emphasis on “publicly”.

Why show it at all? To anyone? Because he couldn't bear to be the sole spectator? Or is it impossible to be the spectator of what you already have authorship over? Was he afraid his art would cease to exist or that he would have no reason to actually create something as only imagining it would be enough if it was never meant to be seen by anyone but him? After thirteen years, on January 1st 2000, he announced: “I kept myself alive, I passed the December 31st 1999.”

JULY 1, 1985

STATEMENT

I, TEHCHING HSIEH, PLAN TO DO A ONE YEAR PERFORMANCE.

I ■ NOT DO ART, NOT TALK ART, NOT SEE ART, NOT READ ART,
NOT GO TO ART GALLERY AND ART MUSEUM FOR ONE YEAR.

I ■ JUST GO IN LIFE.

THE PERFORMANCE ■ BEGIN ON JULY 1, 1985 AND CONTINUE UNTIL
JULY 1, 1986.



TEHCHING HSIEH

NEW YORK CITY

Perhaps that's where we may find flashing arrows pointing at our answers: "I kept myself alive". Not "I made art" or "I didn't show my art publicly". What was the thing keeping him alive? Surely it wasn't creating art. He had just previously finished the last of his one-year performances having created absolutely no art for a year, so certainly he could, and did, survive without doing so. Then what was this magical non-art force that Tehching Hsieh managed to stay alive despite of? Was it perhaps dealing with thinking of oneself as created and not an absolute creator? Was it all a battle against the inflated artist's ego? Or just wanting to experience the joy and simplicity in being a creation rather than the creator? Or just to enjoy things as they exist and not add to it? Surely it must've been fulfilling in some way or another, as after the 13 years, Tehching announced his complete retirement from the art world.

December 31. 1986

STATEMENT


I, Tehching Hsieh. have a 13 years' plan

I will make ART during this time.

I will not show it PUBLICLY.

This plan will begin on my 36th birthday December 31. 1986

continue until my 49th birthday December 31. 1999

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tehching Hsieh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Tehching Hsieh

Certainly being perceived, or the assumption of, has an effect on how we act. We too (like Daffy) get caught in a desperate attempt of putting on a show. There may not be cameras or professional lightning, but essentially “putting on a show” is any act that is not authentic to actuality. Though it may commonly attempt to mimic it. The show comes to exist solely due to the acknowledgment of others, aka spectators.

In rare moments of true authenticity, one has forgotten about the existence of an all-seeing god and all other existence around them, as if the whole of existence is limited to the self only and there is no external author or spectator. The self is simultaneously the object, the spectator, and the author.

But the concept of god as a witness is not modern at all. In fact, it's the main pillar of religions' ability to justify their codes of ethics and morals. Because the idea of the big all-knowing all-seeing man in the sky watching our every move and taking notes to decide whether you are “good” or “bad” is the ultimate manifestation of authority. In this case, being a spectator (or witness) and being the author come hand in hand. The authorship comes from the responsibility that comes with being the sole great witness.

So does this mean the spectator is a necessity? I suppose it depends on what you would define as a necessity. We exist with or without god's potential spectating. And so

would Daffy Duck without us tuning into cartoon channels. Artworks would still remain artworks even if they're not viewed. But the knowledge of things is essentially the responsibility that comes with witnessing them.

God as the Author

(and the Potentiality of the Author as God?)

“What the hell is Dianetics and Scientology? It’s a religion. A religion of self. It’s one man’s religion. One man’s labyrinth. A trip of L. Ron Hubbard’s. A trip he lays on everyone else as ‘the trip,’ their trip, your trip. A science fiction story he wrote and forced into reality within the heads of others by the will of L. Ron Hubbard. The self-created fantasy of one man brought to deadly reality for others by a simple word: agreement.”¹

These are the word of Lafayette Ronald Hubbard Jr, L. Ron Hubbard’s son.

I find the character of the science fiction authors quite fascinating. You must have an immensely strong imagination to come up with whole universes, with thousands of years of lore and infinite possibilities. But what’s even more impressive is the control and ability not completely lose your mind. To be able to spend hundreds of hours of your life thinking about all the little details of your creation, making sure its made-up logic and scenarios are foolproof, yet not completely losing your sense of self in it. I suppose not many authors are good at that though, but is that what makes the fantasy so delicious to consume? Is it that it has got the heart and soul of the author trapped in it?

¹ LR Hubbard Jr, later changed to Ronald DeWolf, wrote in his autobiography *The Telling of Me, by Me*, which he never published.

Any attempt at creation is an attempt to materialise the essence of one's own self. Whether this materialisation is done in the form of a baby, novel, or painting, does not make a difference. They are all meant to eternalise their creator in such a way that he can be at peace with his own death, knowing his "legacy" will live on.

Or does it make a difference? It certainly felt like it did for the Hubbards. It sounds like the ultimate act of authority, to name another human after yourself, pushing an identity onto a blank canvas of a human who may not have even been born yet. Not only making him an extension of yourself but limiting his existence to your own curated piece of reality.

Although L Ron Hubbard never officially claimed to be a prophet, he sure acted like one. Though the fact that his religion was a "science" of his own categorisation may have had a lot to do with his unwillingness to appropriate the prophet role and instead attempt to appeal to the modern thinking yet skeptical man.

But there was a man who did claim prophecy, and according to Hubbard's son, was his main inspiration: Aleister Crowley.

Before diving into this character, I need to point out the obvious plot hole here: that a prophet is not an author in any way. A prophet is more than anything an activated spectator, one that has reached an awareness and

perceives the message of god and brings it to the rest. But that is only valid in the case of taking god as granted. Considering the potentiality of (non)existence of god, can mean the potentiality of “the prophet” as the author.

In the case of Crowley, he may be the prime example. His religion, Thelema —a word taken from the Greek for Will — stood as possibly the most individualistic religion. Stating "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law"² in *The Book of The Law* dawned upon his wife, through the deity which introduced itself as Aiwass on their mystical honeymoon in Egypt. This book consists of about 100 pages of rather cryptic text, but is summed up in three statements at the end:

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law”

“Love is the law, love under will”

“Every man and every woman is a star”

I find it hard to objectively talk about Crowley’s approach to Thelema. But I can’t help but think Crowley was the wrong “prophet”. Putting the fact that these words dawned not upon him, but his unsuspecting wife who unlike Crowley had no knowledge of the occult aside; To me, it seems as if he either chose to ignore the statement “Love is the law, love under will”, or he was simply unable to differentiate between love and lust, or

² Aiwass, Aleister Crowley, *The Book of The Law* (1904), p. 23.

perhaps he was shallow enough to assume lust to be the shortcut for love. With his history and background in occultism and having traveled and experienced different eastern and western magical practices, he slowly but steadily started his own school of magickal⁵ practice and following and Shortly, Sex Magick became the core of his praxis, from erotic and nauseatingly graphic poetry, or his rumoured “child sacrifices” which is most probably his quirky choice of alternative wording for “ejaculation sacrifice”, and my favourite detail which is the phallic A in his signature that charmingly reminds me of teenagers drawing penises on any surface they can reach. He was very much convinced of his role though, titling *himself* “The Great Beast” and doing absolutely anything he could to impose his will on his nature and surroundings, going away from civilisation and its laws to his magickal retirement facility in Sicily which came to be known as “the Abbey of Thelema”. Although soon he would be banned and deported from Italy after Mussolini heard of his magickal activity and sex-drug temple. Crowley came up with his own system of exercises he named as Thelemic Magick. He defined this as “the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will”. Magick was recommended as a way of discovering one’s True Will.

⁵ Crowley started the trend of spelling Magick with a “k” as to differentiate it from stage magic and magic tricks.

With this extreme emphasis on the individual will, the matter of authorship is shifted. The only message of “god” is to enable the will. No moral or ethical guidance or greater good to aim for. Just what the heart pleases. The self (previously known as the object of god’s creation) becomes the author of its own experience as it’s doing what is its absolute will. The Will comes from within and differs based on each individual. Sure, the book was dictated to Crowley by the non-human deity he called Aiwass, but the words are meaningless without the authorship of self over its will. Crowley even went to the beautifully ironic stage of writing a declaration of his own status as a prophet, titled “To Man”.

Is the self’s authorship over its will the same as its authorship over its actual whole self? Maybe and maybe not. How separate are we from our will, whether it’s free or not? I can’t say Crowley answered this question, but he sure as hell tried. He took his will to the absolute extreme getting away from civilisation to create his own lawless reality, rigid only to the structures of Aleister Crowley’s “will”.⁴

Yet perhaps the most apparent failure comes to light in the moment of Crowley’s attempt to institutionalise his religion, which was fundamentally individualistic, and his failure to grasp the inherent irony in his brilliant idea was only the beginning of the infamous slippery slope that gave him not the image of “god”, but a mad man

⁴ which in it’s material sense is Desire.

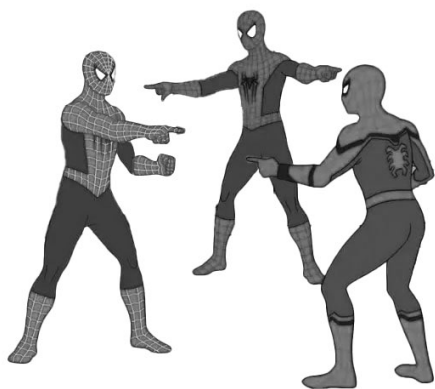
who claimed to be satan. in his personal search for True Will, Crowley tried to take full authorship of his life (and a few others along the way as any good prophet does). But what is it to have full authorship of your own life? To do absolutely whatever your heart tells you? To take it to the maximum extreme of experiencing all the pleasures life's got to offer beyond our societal or moral restraints? Or the other extreme, to deprive all pleasures or immerse in all the pain and suffering the world's got to offer? Crowley definitely tried to reach the extremes of pleasure but would have to be an overly devoted storyteller to tell you all the tales of Aleister's search for his will, and it doesn't help our story much either, as what Crowley took to be his will, drowned him in unearthly materialism that didn't do much other than affirm his pleasure-seeking nature. You may be thinking it's unfair and ignorant of me to assume Crowley's techniques of exploration were not successful, and you may be right, I could never know. But I would argue that you may be too easy to please, accepting this most obvious answer of following your "heart's desires" in the most beastly way as the path to taking authorship or finding one's True Will.

But let's not skip the obvious that's almost too obvious to point out: god's authorship. Whether you're a believer (however you may define that) or not we're both familiar with the good old classic god. The God. A being that has supposedly created us and everything we can and can't perceive. That is quite literal and absolute

authorship, I can't find any way to get around that. Except for the fact that one can simply not believe in said god and therefore it's (non)absolute authorship.

It does become even more painfully literal when you realise the Bible, Torah, or Quran are said to be the literal words of God, and not the human prophets that wrote down and spread them. God wrote a book and sent it down and expects all of us to not only read it as any other book but to take it to heart and live our lives according to his rules. How obnoxiously egoistic of him. He doesn't even live here...

Maybe if you're a hardcore atheist you don't find it as amusing to entertain the idea of god. Maybe you're scared it will become a slippery slope to religious fanaticism or casual new-age spirituality. I will not take responsibility for any of that but I will invite you to be entertained by god because he's supposedly entertained by us at all times.



God as the Object

Blasphemy!

Even if you are someone who doesn't believe in any definition of god, you still can't deny the word exists. This word, "god", is the representation of a collective idea. This idea can't be denied. Sure there are varying details and disagreements, but the sole existence of the concept of god as a topic in our collective imagined consciousness is what makes it the ultimate singular collective object.

Does that make god real? Sure. In the same sense that good or evil is real. There are some that believe in them and some that don't but either way, they still lurk around us as ideas that affect our perception and our realities. So if god is the object, who is the spectator? Are we such self-obsessed authors who are spending eternity spectating our own creation?

And what is this general idea of the object we are talking about? In the art context of course it is the fiction of the author, materialised in one sense or another. But it is more than that, it's independent. I even believe really really good art will make you completely forget the existence of its author. Perhaps that sounds like a massively generalising statement and sacrilegious to even use the word "good" to describe art, but considering the subjectivity of "good", I think I can get

away with it for the sake of this argument. ~~And mind you even a self-portrait can exist autonomously of its author within the white cube's walls.~~

So, you're in the gallery with an object, *the* object. The simple act of witnessing the object (or intending to) is what creates the role of the spectator. It's also what essentially makes the object exist autonomously from its author's reality.

Belief as a tool:

Belief is the key tool to achieving anything, not necessarily in the personal sense of "believing in yourself" but rather in the more general sense of societal perception. The "truth" has always been objective, but the "belief" has taken a separate more independent and subjective role in contemporary history and within postmodernism. Belief is also somewhat of an evil twin of imagination, although they come from the same essence. Belief is constrained in rigid belief structures, while imagination thrives in all opposite directions. You as an individual may not believe in god in any shape or form, but you better believe the effects of millions of other minds who do believe in it. What they do is further than imagination. It's actively fuelling the concept, and therefore the consequences of "god".

The beauty of considering uncertainties that people often dismiss, is the chaotic burst of potential realities

that sparks with it. Though not entirely easy, it is not impossible to believe in the potential existence of a monotheistic god, mother nature, mythical deities, or even a gigantic humanoid cartoonist who has trapped us all in his illustrated universe. In fact, I think most people who grew up in a rather non-religious household have entertained most of these ideas in their life even only for the sake of entertainment. And that's all owed to the non-rigid (and possibly unconscious) belief in the idea of god. This nonrigid belief structure can be rebranded as imagination, although it requires a committed (and possibly subconscious?) imagination, willing to let go of all logic or reason that exists within and outside of the imagined.

What about magic? Is it the loophole around all things rigid and stone-cold? To liquify belief, and shove it back in the freezer and wait to see if it comes out any different? I threw this word at you and didn't say much about it. Magic, Magick, "the lost Art", simply an overactive imagination, or however else you may choose to call it, it's typically in our minds as young children. It's the ideas and fantasies that don't fit within our realm of logic and doom, but to a child the world is full of curiosities and questions, there is no rigid logical system that toddlers use to answer their questions or form their beliefs. They may believe in Santa, magic, or talking animals before they believe in god or evolution. Magic(k) is not much more than that in it's core, though the

problem comes when we as adults find ourselves surrounded by belief structures that even if we consciously try to dismiss, their real-life consequences tend to kick us back into them. If Magick⁵ can be defined as the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with the Will. What that essentially means is any intentional act is a magical act; It perhaps requires just as much magic, belief, or “Will Power” as grabbing a pencil a drawing a circle. Or typing a sentence. It's the utilising of belief and it's properties within one's consciousness and sub-consciousness. And let's not forget the cherry on top: Magic(k) is an Art. At least those who practice it like to call it so. It's a manifestation of Will, a realisation of ideas and whether it works or not I suppose can be just as subjective as a painting or a poem.

If you ask most artists, or those who may refer to themselves as students of art (perhaps they're not yet as disillusioned with their own inevitably inflated ego that comes with considering yourself an artist (or creator) why they make art, you will be faced with an array of answers ranging from cheesy to psychotic but the most genuine one at that moment may be “I don't know”. Why do we make art indeed? Is making children simply not enough? Or perhaps making a lovely dish? Many would probably compare it to a religion but would refrain from

⁵ by Crowley's definition in *Magick, Liber ABA, Book 4, part III*

doing so as it would be as admitting to being a slave to the church (or worse)...

But, would it be so horrible? To be god and finally the object of attention? Is it a contemporary twist on the idolisation of god? Or is it too literal to be any good? Has god been the object all along?

The yearning for a spectator that not only witnesses everything but also makes a flawless judgment has led us to the notion of god. But the belief in it has also weakened over time. Are we over the need for our made-up spectator? Are we self-aware enough to witness (and judge or perceive) ourselves? No external authors, no external witnesses, only objects of our imagination acting their part. Where does that leave us? As mad people who imagined themselves as objects, authorised by an object of their own imagination? As if an artist who would lock herself in a room, imagine herself to be a creation of her own imagination, and not even invite anyone to come witness.



“...Our asylums are crowded, the stage is over-run! Is it by symbolizing we become the symbolized? Were I to crown myself King, should I be King? Rather should I be an object of disgust or pity?” -Austin Osman Spare⁶

Austin Osman Spare was another 20th-century English occultist, who was also a gifted but not-so-well-appreciated artist. Inspired by symbolism and art nouveau, his art was known for its depiction of occult and sexual imagery. Though he was the youngest exhibitor at the royal academy summer exhibition in 1904, his flame of fame did not last so long as shortly the war would happen and he would be enlisted as an official war artist. In his explorations of the conscious and unconscious self, he developed techniques such as automatic writing, automatic drawing and sigilization.

With the arrival of surrealism in London in the 1930s, he was pushed to the forefront as the “father of British surrealism” as indeed he had come up with surrealist techniques more than a decade before. Though he lived most of his life in poverty, he exhibited his work regularly and in different contexts (from rather prestigious art shows to tavern exhibitions) until he died.

⁶ Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure (Self-love) The Psychology of Ecstasy* (1915) p.2. : An elaborate diss to Crowley and other ceremonial magicians as he goes on to call them “the unemployed dandies of the brothels”.

Austin Osman Spare could be referred to as the modern archetype of artist-prophet (if there is such a category), though he never claimed prophecy, after a rather short companionship with Crowley, and joining his religion of Thelema, he soon came to the conclusion that Crowley was not much more than a big, rich, spoiled child and even though early on he had illustrated some of Crowley's books and took part in the Thelemite meetings, soon each man would accuse the other of being a black magician and their companionship would end there. Spare's *Book of Pleasure (Self-Love) the Psychology of Ecstasy* serves as a wonderful antithesis to Crowley, realising the very lustful nature of Crowley and criticising his school of thought and magic. But he wasn't solely criticising Crowley, nor just ceremonial magicians. He was pointing at the ironic ambition of faith - to believe or pray is but one's poverty of imagination, and to be bound to "truth" is not much more honourable than that.

Besides illustrating his own books, Spare also practiced developing techniques such as "sentient symbols", "alphabet of desire" and creating "sigils", which is possibly what he's best accredited and known for. His ideas and approach towards sigils were different from all previous ones, rather than taking historical and pre-existing symbols to appeal to a deity or god, he believed this could be "created" from within and fed into the subconscious. By taking an intention, a well-thought-out

intention, tapping into one's subconscious to channel one's will, and symbolising that intention into a small sigil and then destroying it. A practical visual manifestation of implementing the intention or the idea in order to aid in making it no longer just an intention or idea but as existing within reality.

He defined magic as “but one's natural ability to attract without asking.”⁷ In his basic theory, all dream or desire, all wish or belief, anything in fact which a person nurtures in his inmost being may be called forth in the flesh as a living truth by a particular method of magical evocation. This he named ‘atavistic resurgence’. It is a method of wish-fulfilment which involves the interaction of will, desire and belief.⁸

Imagination is the exercise of creativity without materialisation. Therefore it can go further than the bounds of the law, whether it be civil, natural, or divine. Though Spare never really attempted to institutionalise

⁷ Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure (Self-love) The Psychology of Ecstasy* (1915) p.2.

⁸ Kenneth Grant, *Austin Osman Spare: An introduction to his psycho-magical philosophy* (1961)

or teach⁹ his ideas, as I suppose he thought such individual based concepts are non-institutional at their core, his late-life friend Kenneth Grant attempted to compile his teachings and Philosophy, the Zos Kia Cultus, a term coined by Kenneth Grant.

To explain Austin Osman Spare's psycho-magical school of thought is beyond this text, but what is important is to note in his philosophy, there was no ascension towards the great but more of a gravitation toward the divine light, or Kia (akin to the Hindu Brahman or Zoroastrian Ahuramazda), which so happens to be the "self", the essence existing within all of us and all of existence and embodies the everlasting. A third gender that surpasses male and female and denies hermaphrodite.

This essence no longer fits in either as the spectator, the author nor the object, it is past being none and all of

⁹Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure (Self-love) The Psychology of Ecstasy (1915)* p.14. : "...The way of life is not by "means"—these doctrines—my doctrines even though they allow the self-appointed devotee to emulate my realization—may I ever blush! The man of sorrows is the Teacher! I have taught—would I teach myself or thee again? Not for a gift from heaven! Mastership equals learning equals constant unlearning! Almighty is he who has not learnt and mighty is the babe—it has only the power of assimilating!"

those at the same time. A state of neither-neither.¹⁰ Of course all these roles and personifications can fit into it. After all, what can escape the divinity of light without being devoured into non-existence? To be in the darkness even requires the acknowledgment of the light, and to not create too acknowledges the potential of creation.

¹⁰ Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure (Self-love) The Psychology of Ecstasy* (1915) p.7. : “the Kia which can be vaguely expressed in words is the “Neither-Neither”, the unmodified “I” in the sensation of omnipresence...”

?

So now what? You've heard the tales of men from prophets to magicians to writers and artists. Are you one of them? Or do you find it offensive as an artist,writer,magician or prophet to be categorised with the rest? Will you burn me at the stake if I say art is not so different from magic? Or will you dismiss of my art for not being art-worthy enough or being just too magical? Or perhaps you will grab me by the shoulders and shake me so I immediately tell you all about this "art magic" and then call me a charlatan for not being able to perform life changing miracles through art or bringing the dead back to life or even manifesting myself a moderate amount of success within the art world.

Maybe I am taking meaning away from both by reducing them to one another. I wouldn't cling to Crowley's or even Spare's definition of magic for the simple matter that both magic and art (and religion which can be thought of as both) are words to define deeply individual concepts which are rooted within unconscious thought and exploration of the self. What is "making art" other than a burst of the self's essence through its consciousness (or lack thereof). And perhaps that's also not so far from Mani's ideas regarding art creation. To accredit the individual with the power of creation is nothing small. The potentialities that lie within a person are the same as

those that lie within a universe, which so happens to go back to the third core statement of Thelema: every man and every woman is a star.

Just as religion is meant to be personal and is ruined the moment it is institutionalised, art has experienced the same. The seemingly never-ending stream of critique on art institutions has made that apparent: No ethical art-making under institutions (haha). No ethical magic under covens.

Though it has proven considerably less dangerous to criticize art institutions rather than religions, and we owe that to the fact that no one can step forward as the “one true artist” or “the curator messiah” and be taken seriously (yet), it is still quite church-like how anything that defies the hierarchy of that religion (in this case art) will be shunned or categorized as something that is almost art but not quite¹¹ purely art.

We don't go quite as far as literally calling each other “dark” or “white” artists based on our methods of praxis but we tend to come comically close to it. Some make good* art and in some way that must mean others make evil art. What is evil art? Is it art beyond the ethics of man or society? Is it one that is just unpleasant or perhaps just a little too flashy? Is it the lack of the “good” in it? What is supposed to appeal to our humanity? The good

¹¹ terms such as outsider art , folk art or art therapy come to my mind.

or the evil? You wish to argue for the good but “human” is interwoven with the feral flesh that is constantly drawn to the “material”, be it sex, wealth, belief, or art. And what is good (art) anyway? Is it enriched with a niche yet elaborate history? Is it passion? Is it what is so far beyond our understanding that we simply fail to put a flaw on?

You may be thinking: “Enough with the question marks!” And I understand the frustration. But if you, just for the sake of this text, take those question marks not as grammatical marks but rather as a symbol of possibilities within a statement, your frustration may be replaced with a preciously childish sense of wonder.

She Whose Breath Burns Sharper than the Times¹² (or To Ask is to Be Denied)

The times are burning sharp indeed. It seems only during the most desperate of times does one choose to think about his “true” purpose in existing or his creator’s legitimacy. Maybe it is not even a choice but a faith-coded reaction. The will to power, freedom, or life are all more or less the same thing, which is the “life-essence” that threads through everything within the fabric of nature and what pushes through the despair and dread, solely to keep living, not for another nor a “greater” but for the self which is in the end, just as vast as it’s will reaches.

For the fear of becoming too preachy or cheesy (it may already be too late) I will stop forcing a conclusion out of my ramblings. Perhaps it’s best not to conclude anything of things we talked about so far as they’re words from a mouth of a professor of nothing. I didn’t study religion nor literature and I dare not say I should be the spokesperson for any idea of art or life. This thesis should, at best, be taken as an attempt to not lose

*translation of the opening sentence to a song that surfaced on the internet around Dec 24th 2022, sung by two Afghan women wearing the blue burqa two days after the Taliban announced the ban of all education for girls.

oneself into the sea of fantasy that surrounds us, and at worst a religious¹⁵ fanatic's manifesto left undone.

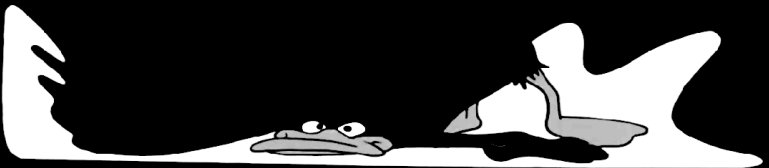
¹⁵ not a religion of god but one of a universal "self", be it called that or Holy Spirit, Divine Light, "mihryazd" or "Kia".

"This can't be it! You can't end it like this."

Yes I can. What more do you want of me? To give you an answer? A conclusion? To what? You've read the best that could've come out of this, *this* is the pinnacle of comprehended thought.

I could tell you you are god, the object the author and the spectator. And you could tell me you are neither of those things and point out my hypocrisy after all my preaching.

Maybe *YOU* are being lazy and inconclusive. How dare you dare me to make sense of my ill-informed trains of thought! I shall not be pushed into the throne of a preacher. In fact take a pen and cross out all the nonsense you can see, I bet you will not be left with much more than a couple of "a"s and "the"s. Or perhaps a playful haiku.



God says to me with a kind of smile,
'Hey how would you like to be God awhile
And steer the world?'
'Okay,' says I, 'I'll give it a try.
Where do I set?
How much do I get?
What time is lunch?
When can I quit?'
'Gimme back that wheel,' says God.
'I don't think you're quite ready yet.'

-Shel Silverstein

Thanks to
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