

Desiderata Musicæ

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1. The pop has become, for the vast majority of people, the arts.
2. This is usually considered to be due to the accessibility and easy-listening of the pop. But the traits of accessibility and easy-listening are hardly applicable even to the narrowest definition of the pop, and when one considers successful attempts (called 'genres') to augment the pop into something more complex, variegated, or technically difficult, this line of reasoning seems to disintegrate.
3. Why exactly the pop has become the arts is complicated – it is enough to say that association of the pop with accessibility and easy-listening is a polite way of saying the pop is low-effort or degenerate. One should remember that, whatever the historical or scientific reasoning, the pop has become the arts because the pop is beautiful.
4. Because the pop is beautiful, and because the pop is the arts, and because the rise of the pop coincided with the sharp improvement of the science of advertisement and marketing, the pop has taken on certain formal aspects of religion. Examples include iconography in the form of plastic figurines; clothing with logos and derivative artwork; conversion of information-media into decoration (in passive ways, such as vinyl collecting, and constructive ways, such as upcycling of ruined tapes into wallets, CDs as seagull repellent, etc.); quotation of pop lyrics as aphorism/pseudo-ancient wisdom; most importantly, idolisation of musicians.
5. Idolatry, in this sense, we posit to be harmful. Firstly, a differentiation between 'artists' and 'consumers' of the pop is arbitrary, and while there are some arbitration lines which make sense (tapping one's foot or singing along to a song in the shower is musicality, but even in traditional music, where this is encouraged, one still does not consider oneself a 'musician' for doing either of these actions), there are others which are enforced only by class-difference, an ill-defined division between 'real' and 'fake' music, or a belief in the special ability of some other person (called 'genius' or 'talented') to create music from the pop. To quote Terry A. Davis,

[...] when I was young there was a huge chasm separating mortals from immortals. And people like Led Zeppelin, that made songs, they were immortals. And then one day I realised 'holy fuck, I can make a song [...] wow, that is the weirdest thing.' My whole life, there was, like, the immortals are the ones who make the music, and the mortals are the ones who

listen. [...] I was like, 'wow, if I just play some notes I could make a song, and that's all it is.

The sum effects of this attitude, in combination with the transformation of celebrity life (even that of anti-celebrities such as Thomas Pynchon or Isaac Wood) into a spectacle [1], creates a scenario in which the society of celebrities and the world of the pop (which is the world of the arts, which is a large part of the World) is both equal in rank to one's community and totally inaccessible. This is variously referred to as a hijacking of the human brain's small capacity for number of meaningful relationships [2], or as a parasocial relationship. Whatever one may call it, it seems obvious why children, when asked what they want to be when they grow up, respond 'famous'. It is a healthy and necessary desire to want to be a part of one's community, and children exposed to the pop view it as their community. This is also likely part of why the pop is obtaining more and more religion-like formal aspects: many major religions, which at one time played a much greater role in organising and fostering community, have suffered various (sometimes catastrophic) failures in the recent past which has left a void for an ideology as community-organiser.

6. Self-conceptualisation (implicit or explicit) of a person as being on the 'monkey' side of the dialectic is associated with consumerism, and especially with a view of interaction with art as 'consuming content'. It is easy for some to cringe at a consumer-participant of the pop for purchasing, in particular, Funko Pops or Marvel T-shirts, but this is useless and even harmful in cases where such artefacts are of sentimental value (especially from childhood) or symbolic of a work to which the consumer-participant has a strong connection¹. This is especially true when we look at critics *within* the pop expressing anti-consumerist sentiment while still collecting vinyls, audio equipment, etc.
7. The issue at hand is that, while disregarding Funko Pops as cringe may work for many as an antidote for some parts of consumerism, it can never be a universal tool for directing a person away from the harmful (consumerist) aspects of the pop. This is because for many people consumerist archetypes are *beautiful* and *meaningful* in an important sense. Clearly we need a method for abandoning consumerism which does not cannibalise the archetypes of a person's pop-based belief system.
8. There is a historical precedent for this. To the same degree that St. Patrick is integrated into Celtic myth, and to the same extent that the Roman gods became the Greek, and in the same way that stoicism is adopted in early Christianity, it is clear that the least oppressive and most readily-adopted way of introducing a belief system is not to *supplant* the old one, but to *syncretise* it. This has many advantages, but the most obvious is that it offers a continuous (and therefore friendly, beautiful, and popular) path from the old system to the new one.

¹A full defence of strong connections to consumerist archetypes will not be given here. One key thing to keep in mind is that television experiences which are 'short' in both retrospective and prospective senses become 'long' in the retrospective sense when one has a genuine connection with the show [3]. We may use the notion of a 'long' retrospective experience as a part of an operational definition of a 'meaningful' experience.

9. Our goal is thus to use the pop to syncretise consumerist archetypes into a post-consumerist belief system.
10. This cannot be done in an ironic way. Ironic integration of the pop into the old culture failed in a quite spectacular way, reflexively allowing the consumerist-pop and advertisements to acknowledge its own harmfulness without scaring away the consumer [4]. We require a way of integrating consumerist archetypes into a larger post-consumerist mythos *in a sincere way* without encouraging consumption².
11. We admire the 15 Theses of Badiou [5] but disagree with the relegation of Beauty to resistance to Empire, and at the Hegelian (and therefore progression-oriented) attitude to art as a tool to effect change. In particular, art whose sole end is that of achieving Utopia (especially a materialist Utopia) has no use in the Utopia – we believe this is contradictory, as any desirable world surely contains art and especially Beauty. A Beautiful Thing is made more beautiful by its usefulness, but not if its use is to render itself meaningless. We may still freely pilfer statements 10–15. The prescription of syncretisation beats anti-imperialism as a *raison d'être* because it allows the art to have function both in the struggle to achieve the desired world and in the symbolic order of the desired world once realised. In the ideal case it *asymptotically approaches* its true purpose.
12. The post-consumerist belief system is left largely undefined here. Aspects of Christianity are admirable for shunning concepts such as false idols and excessive wealth while uniting a community. We may incorporate and even encourage elements of this and other belief systems, but we are not in principle evangelists. It is probably a good idea for the system to be pluralist (but not populist!) in its epistemology.
13. We should avoid constructing the mystical from the knowable. An unfortunate consequence of hyper-specialisation and overselling of modern particle physics is that it has become the *de facto* mysticism of the consumerist belief system (even while Deepak Chopra's quantum mysticism is shunned by, for example, *Futurama*, Marvel films will throw out phrases like 'quantum mechanics' and 'string theory' to invoke primordial awe, and *Interstellar* will posit Love as a fundamental force). We are not in principle against using fundamental physics as a creation myth, but this myth must not obscure the knowability of its own particulars.
14. Social media appears to foreshorten itself as an experience in both retrospective and prospective senses. It has other issues such as social control

²Black Country, New Road did, to an extent, already create a good example of this before the departure of Isaac Wood. This is implicit in the references to other aspects of contemporary pop music (Charli XCX, Phoebe Bridgers, Kanye West), in the extensive use on *Ants from Up There* of imagery relating to childhood and pop culture (*Star Wars*, *Warhammer: 40,000*), and in the explicit reference to nostalgia as a powerful motive: "the escape pod's filled with your friends, your childhood film photos / There's no room for me to go". *AFUT* also recognises the related issues associated with the Internet, which will be discussed later.

Charli XCX created a very good example of what not to do with the marketing of *brat*, in the sense that, while *brat* united some personal and introspective elements with clubbing culture in a potentially helpful way, the phenomenon of 'Brat Summer' glorified only the latter part.

and the further encroachment of the Spectacle onto the ordinary experiences of persons and communities. All of these factors are against us. Working exclusively within the rules of social media is bound to fail, so we should put emphasis on having a strong offline existence and an online presence which is not tied to one centralised medium. Synchronisation of Internet culture is still a must (an attempt to *coopt* has already been started by, for example, the hyperpop movement, although it contains many of the pitfalls outlined in ² and is thus not a proper synchronisation.)

15. Copyright and trademark infringement and overt reference are paramount for proper synchronisation. One cannot begin to associate plastic toys or video games to a post-consumerist work to anywhere near a desirable degree unless the name of the toy/game is explicitly co-opted. (However, encouragement of copyright infringement creates murky issues for cooperation with other artistic enterprises, as well as financial and legal difficulties, so there is an incentive to tread carefully.)

16. Hence Lego Indiana Jones.

[1] G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Zone Books, New York, 1994).

[2] R. I. M. Dunbar, Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates, *Journal of Human Evolution* **22**, 469 (1992).

[3] M. S. (Vsauce), *Illusions of Time*.

[4] D. F. Wallace, E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. fiction, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* **13**, 151 (1993).

[5] A. Badiou, *15 Theses on Contemporary Art* (n.d.).