



The Last Word:
WHERE HAVE ALL THE PUNKS GONE?

David Keegan discusses a flawed society.

Where have all the punks gone? The bra burners, the hippies, the socialists, the Trotskyites, the anti-globalisationists, rioting students, the malcontents, the discontents, the markers of virtually every generation since the Second World War.

It didn't matter if you agreed with whatever the fashionable disagreement heralded by a generation of youthful protestations. Their importance lay in non-acceptance of the status quo, which often had the effect of making the ruling classes feel uncomfortable. It was like a scary set of checks and balances before they grew up to become the rulers and leaders. However, in my view, it also brought the vagaries and extremes of the ruling classes into sharp relief – instead of the dumb subjugated acceptance we seem to have fallen into during present times.

Where are the generation of weird clothes and strange haircuts hibernating, as our society melts away from all that is known? Pop has eaten itself and become a regurgitated mass of wannabe X Factor, Big Brother acolytes, dancing on ice.

It would seem the younger generation have left the world of reality for the virtual world. Busy playing WeeWorld and Wii and incessantly chatting on Facebook or some other parallel universe such as Second Life.

Take Second Life as an extreme example of where we have gone.

I find it disturbing that so many people subscribe to and invest so much of their lives in a computer world such as Second Life. For a time it was even touted as a viable economy where communities and houses were built, a currency invented and fortunes apparently made that could be currency traded in the world back here, on the other side of the computer screen.

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Articles were written in serious newspapers, such as The Times and Telegraph, extolling its virtues.

I will confess I was so intrigued I signed up, invented my avatar, and took up flying like a bird from place to place, town to town. For those of you who haven't tried it, in Second Life you have the ability to fly like a bird. And yes, I initially found it addictive and intriguing until I got bored and restless, sitting in front of a computer holding virtual conversations with other cartoon figures.

However, I guess what really hacked me off in the end, was that the drink in my avatar's hand could never really be mine. And if you spun your mouse around fast enough the whole place resembled a spin painting by Jackson Pollock. Meanwhile back in the real, non-flying world, our society is falling apart at the seams into what is euphemistically referred to as the credit crunch.

And I am having a hard time with that one. I suggest it's more of a mortgage crunch. As in, there is no more freely and readily available credit to continue to buy over priced, poorly designed boxes. I am beginning to think; far from it being a bad thing, I actually think it may turn out to be a good thing. As a generation that is probably the most design literate ever, we have been offered some of the most poorly designed and built houses and apartments as those that have sprung up over the last ten years.

This seems to be a continuation of a condition that has afflicted us ever since Le Corbusier unveiled his vision of utopia, which was largely responsible for the urban ghettos created during the sixties and seventies. Le Corbusier was a good furniture designer and designer of signature individual homes, but his vision for urban conurbations was seriously flawed and detached from the need for housing set within a more human aesthetic. If my conversations with architects are anything to go by, he is still revered in the industry. The results are plain to see up and down the country, whether it is suburban developments or city apartments, with many resembling prison blocks, only without the bars.

Function without style or aesthetic is failure, which eventually leads to decay. Too many of these properties were built as investments and not as homes.

As a result, whole swathes of our so-called regenerated cities are now empty abandoned and yet there is supposedly a housing shortage. So where are all the people who are short of a home?

What I find interesting about the current situation is the number of political pundits exclaiming that capitalism is not dead and socialism will not make a return. They are right and wrong on both counts. The fact is we have allowed ourselves to get into the current appalling mess by continually taking our eye off the ball.

If we permit, the system will quite happily allow us to repeat the cycle all over again. Instead, it is time to turn off the games and the virtuality of our existence, go out, get funny haircuts, wave placards, and generally cause a nuisance whilst helping to influence the future direction of our society and how we live in it.

Ground Hog Day was a good movie but would you really want to live it? ■

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