

Art, Culture, Araga and Wish Fulfilment

Let us begin with an ending. An artist loses his friend to routine surgery seen as routine but far riskier in hindsight, withdrawing into himself and becoming a recluse after having drawn images of marginalisation, mortality and vulnerability. He turns to a drug habit which he could never kick, tries but fails. Dead at 27. His highly political works end up stripped, sanitised and used by the machine.

Let us begin with an ending. A man who does not exist and who was once a punchline stands in the rubble of his own meltdown, as the next generation repeats his mistakes because of the damage he dealt and the example he set. The bleeding hearts of the artists made their stand, and it was not enough.

Let us begin with my ending. I cannot come up with further elements to a song, and am left with a single vignette disconnected from its broader context, one particular fragment which is well-suited for my aims. The project is meant to have numerous elements, but every addition ends up becoming a subtraction and this one element is the only one which really works.

Let us talk about art and culture. And let us talk about me.

The aims of the project were solidified when I was sat within a theatre. I was there to run the technical side of a small, independent comedy show. It was a full, proper theatre with lights and sound and all that, even though we didn't need much of it. The standard music was your typical fare of late 00s and early 10s pop music, and I hated it. It was industrial not in the sense that it mimicked the sounds of industry, but in the sense that it mimicked the apparatus of industry. A conveyor belt that puts out unambitious but consistent works which generally tend to blend together, number one hits which are now suitable as unremarkable, unoffensive one-size-fits-all music to be played before whatever show happens to be playing the venue.

Araga is, as much as anything else, a venue in which I can pursue some wish fulfilment. Araga does not have a legacy of bigotry because I want to live in a world that does not have a legacy of bigotry. Araga is willing to fight for progressive labour politics and nationalised industries in part because you voted for it but also in part because I want to live in a world where a country is willing to fight for those, even in a war. The unrestrained capitalism, nationalism and militarism of the nation based upon America was able to be conquered and overcome, and this reflects my desire to see those things conquered and overcome.

What does art look like in a world in which all my wishes are fulfilled? It becomes art at its most experimental. It becomes art which is constantly straining at its own boundaries, it becomes art which is packed to the brim with symbols and constructions and elements which challenge the audience to unpack them. It becomes art with numerous complex layers, it becomes art that some intellectual can make a long video essay on. It becomes bands which respond to commercial success not by increasing mass appeal but by rejecting their popularity.

Let's talk about The Wall. The Wall is a work created by the progressive rock band Pink Floyd. It is an album, a film, an opera, multiple tours, it is whatever form the band wants it to take. It is the story of Pink, a musician scarred by World War Two among other things. It is an experimental film which uses metaphor and abstraction to tell a lot of stories and

address a lot of things all at once, it is a film which is incredibly earnest and emotional, a series of vignettes that are loosely but not wholly connected. It is an anti-war film, a film that is filled with anger at war. In a way, it is the perfect film for Araga. But, by the way, which one's Pink?

See, *The Wall* is not the first time that Pink Floyd toyed with the identity of Pink. It was, at one point, a punchline in the song *Have A Cigar*. The choice to continue with this theme does not fit the anti-war theme, because *The Wall* is not just an anti-war film. To quote Dan Olson, "the movie pinballs between war, classism, police brutality, the criminalisation of youth culture, Thatcherism, generational trauma, commodification of art and the homegrown fascism of the nations that bragged about beating the Nazis and it's able to do this pretty fluidly". Really, if you want to hear more about *The Wall*, I'd recommend the *Folding Ideas* video. What does *The Wall* look like in a world where the war is justified, where this is one of the rare cases where it's worth fighting for? What does *The Wall* look like in a world where the gestures and methods of the enemy do not and will not end up being used and normalised by influential figures among the victors? What does *The Wall* look like in a world where there are not neo-Nazis who will co-opt its aesthetics? What happens when the movie does not include classism, police brutality, the criminalisation of youth culture, Thatcherism, commodification of art and homegrown fascism? *The Wall* is built brick by brick. While no one brick is essential, it would not be *The Wall* without them.

Here in my car, I feel safest of all. I can lock all my doors, it's the only way to live. In cars. *The Wall* did not come early to the project, *The Wall* came fairly late. *The Wall* came as the answer to the question "What does film look like in Araga?", it did not come as the answer to what music looks like. The answer to what music looks like was going to have three main answers, but there's a problem. Those three genres were going to be somewhat experimental synthesiser-based music, old school blues-based hip-hop and DIY punk rock. But, well, take a look at that synthesiser music, the music that I connected so much that I wanted to imitate it. Listen to *Cars* by Gary Numan, to a song by one of the artists I wanted to imitate most. "I can lock all my doors", it is a song about a profound disconnection from broader society. It is a song in which the question "Will you visit me, please, if I open my door?" – and once more, just like the character of Pink, this is not the first time that the artist deals with these themes. It's not unique to Numan either, Kraftwerk's album *The Man-Machine* was one of the other albums which inspired me there, and that was around the same time as *The Wall*.

These albums, these songs, this music that I like, it is a response to a particular world. The content that I like, the messages, this all responds to a conflict and it's much the same as punk rock. And, if I am entirely honest, that inclusion of old-school hip-hop? It's there for two reasons, and one of them is to cross the streams in future ages and get to bands like *Rage Against The Machine* and *System Of A Down*, bands that are engaging in much the same conflict.

And now we come to the conflict of this whole deal... How the hell does that music work in my wish fulfilment world? What happens when the 80s are a far more hopeful time with far less disconnection, what happens in a world where the racial conflicts that motivated *Rage Against The Machine* and *System Of A Down* are not present in at least one of the two hegemony, what happens in a world where I already got my wishes? I like this music because it expresses a viewpoint with which I identify, I like this music because I agree with it, because it expresses concerns which I genuinely hold. When I say that I like *The Wall* or *Rage Against The Machine*, I do not just mean that I like the way that instruments are used and the aesthetics of them; I mean that I like what they say about society. But

that doesn't work in a world where all those concerns were already addressed because of how I agree with them, does it?

There was, for a moment, a thought that I could resolve some small part of this, by digging out Windon's corpse one more time. A bunch of migration and defection of minority artists coming across to Araga from Windon, and finding an audience for their art. Not just music, but also visual art, like the works of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Political artists who were suppressed by a McCarthyist and racist state, finally freed and embraced by the public at large. Could that work? Maybe, but what comes next, what comes for the next round of ALC?

Seven years is a long time in the arts. I briefly considered breaking art down into three stages, having these three genres combine and shift in ever more experimental manners, but then I went and listened to *The Wall* and *Have A Cigar* and... Well, *Have A Cigar* was 1975. There were reasons why progressive rock died out and withered after that, but how many of them stem from the sort of commodification of art that I dislike? Would this complex, epic, experimental music die out in the world I like? Do I have it in me to create an alternate chronology of music in which it did not come to be? Can I come up with a way for this to emerge in the late 80s and early 90s? The answer to all of this is... No, not really, isn't it?

The project by which I created the ALC theme music required me to do things that I cannot do, which are far beyond my capabilities. At the outset, I had thought it a simple task; just use the right pieces of software and I could wrangle it into working. Use an emulated version of the synth that Numan used, and use a period-accurate TTS that can sing, but both sides of this were not feasible. On the synth side, I discovered that the Minimoog is far more capable and far more powerful than I ever expected; I discovered that those synth sounds which I love are the result of deliberate artistry rather than technological limitations, but that there are limitations and the music must be constructed with those in mind. On the vocal side, I discovered all manner of intricacies to vocal performances – much like with the Minimoog, there is deliberate artistry in the vocal performances present in *The Man-Machine*, the filters used require specific effort to deliver the correct result and you cannot feed any performance into them.

And this is also true of the project of creating Aragan culture for the 80s and beyond. Every answer brings up further questions. What does Aragan film look like? It looks like *The Wall*, but what does *The Wall* look like when stripped of its bricks? What are those bricks stripped of, what happens to *The Wall*, what does *The Wall* look like in Araga? How does all that political music that I enjoy so much work when you completely rearrange and reshape politics and the world at large? Perhaps someone else could find a satisfying result there, perhaps someone else could invent the fabric of culture in this society, but I cannot. It is poetic, there is a symmetry to it. Just as I was only capable of a fragment of music, I am only capable of a fragment of Aragan art and culture.

So... What does Aragan culture look like? What does Aragan art look like? What sort of music is there, what sort of paintings and sculptures should you be using to inspire your creations? Honestly, take your pick. Expressionist paintings, graffiti art, abstract art, geometric forms, dadaist absurdism, whatever works.

This is the supplement regarding Aragan art and culture for the next round of ALC. This is the supplement regarding Aragan art and culture for every round of ALC. You have *carte blanche*. Anything can exist in Araga, at any time in the next 40 years. Because all I can get is little flashes and pieces. Go watch that *Folding Ideas* video on *The Wall*, I guess.