

# iel

« He will be remembered  
for his honesty, his integrity,  
and the clarity of his art. »

*Kramer, producer, founder of Shimmy Disc*

# ston

Wilfried Paris



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\* *Requiescat in pace.* (Rest in peace).

As everyone knows, ever since the *great metamorphosis* that took place between the solar eclipse on August 11, 1999 and January 1, 2001, the collective unconscious of the human community has become an *everlasting collective consciousness*, and humankind has become a *human soul*, a psychological mass, one single being subjected to the law of the mental unity of crowds. One for all and all for one. All those who were not saved during that lapse of time (because of *terrible accidents* or simply due to selfishness, pride, vanity or laziness) are *dead*, and the inhabitants of the second millennium are *living dead* (they are *in the process of dying*, at the same time as Gaia).

“A tormenting thought: as of a certain point, history was no longer real. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality; everything happening since then was supposedly not true; but we supposedly didn’t notice. Our task would now be to find that point, and as long as we didn’t have it, we would be forced to abide in our present destruction” (Elias Canetti).<sup>(2)</sup>

The only thing left for the living dead of the 21st century is to reverse the course of time or pass through to the *other side of the mirror*, and seek the *punctum* of their disappearance from reality, of their death, in order to join the connected human community. The human soul as a whole is working at it flat out, the goal being, of course, to guide the lost sheep back into the everlasting collective consciousness in order to *rescue* them and to save their lives. Because “*live together, die alone*” (*Lost*). And no one should die. There is no provision for someone dying before joining the everlasting collective consciousness of the human community. And in fact, no one does because a way has always been found to save the person before he or she actually dies (before his or her spirit dies) and a way always will be found (cloning or the resurrection of Christ may have been the most complicated and extravagant means of doing so, but they worked).

“Time is a human illusion [...] all times co-exist in the stupendous whole of eternity,” Alan Moore has Charles Howard Hinton say in *From Hell*.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is this collective consciousness that now defines and creates our reality through the language it produces (“The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words,” according to Philip K. Dick,<sup>(4)</sup> the 20th-century reincarnation of Elijah the prophet). But the living dead of the 2000s have not actualized the collective unconscious into

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2 *The Human Province*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 69.

3 *From Hell: being a melodrama in sixteen parts* (Marietta, GA : Top Shelf Productions, 2006).

4 “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later,” *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon* (Doubleday, 1985), introduction.

collective consciousness, and without the idea of their participation in this great everlasting human soul, they are messing things up quite a bit by their non-control of language and the concomitant creation of a dangerous, chaotic, troubled reality. They are recognizable in that their picture circulates everywhere and that a certain organized *ostracism* has excluded them from society. They are *publicized* in the *media*; they're *stars* (that keep shining although they're already dead). This banning<sup>5</sup> of *stars* by the human community enables it to keep a handle on them in the event that they start saying and doing whatever comes into their head and thereby considerably disturbing our reality. The *media attention* given to stars makes their words and deeds instantaneously accessible (thanks to the development of technology – Internet, cell phones, GPS – and news features in *People* – because they are, literally, the only and the last *People*) to the human community, which can organize rapidly to find *safeguards*, arrange magic rituals, and say the right words at the right time to set the world right again.

Now there is the particularly difficult case for the connected human community of an individual who poses a big problem – namely, Daniel Johnston. Daniel Johnston is one of the hardest people in the world to rescue and usher back into the bosom of the everlasting collective consciousness. After the *Kurt Cobain catastrophe* (who, as we all know, tried to release himself from the chain of reincarnations, the *Samsara*, which we all go through, luckily in vain, thanks to Gus Van Sant's intervention in extremis), we narrowly missed, on several occasions, a *Daniel Johnston catastrophe*. And, incidentally, Kurt Cobain prophesized this catastrophe when he wore a *Hi, how are you?* t-shirt at the MTV Awards in 1992 (and so politely asked Daniel how he was doing, through the intermediary of the photon screen). And we could say that Kurt Cobain, with his complex about *extinction* ("Nirvana," en Sanskrit), probably wanted to warn Daniel Johnston about the potential danger that he represented for the human community... But what exactly is this Daniel Johnston danger?

#### FAT SLOB

Daniel Johnston is evidently one of the most dangerous *stars* for the human soul. For fifty years, Madonna has been greedily monopolizing the Virgin Mary's body in the *Samsara*, to the detriment of the whole community that is patiently waiting for its turn at reincarnation. And Michael Jackson, out of terror, has become a self-made *mummy* and buried his own mortal remains in an Egyptian pyramid, the extremely complex structure of which people are still trying to understand today (a problem that may soon be resolved with the help of a competent team of dynamiters). But Daniel Johnston has found, no doubt, a better hideout, the hardest to access refuge, the most hermetic bunker (Hitler's was pitiful in comparison), by retreating deep *inside himself*. And he may very well commit a collective murder on an unprecedented scale, causing a monumental spiritual catastrophe, if he's not dislodged, *expropriated, evicted* from himself as quickly as possible.

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5 In ancient Greece, ostracism was the banning of an individual from the polis decided by public assembly.

In larger stars, fusion continues until the iron core has grown so large that it can no longer support its own mass. This core will suddenly collapse as its electrons are driven into its protons, forming neutrons and neutrinos in a burst of inverse beta decay, or electron capture. The shockwave formed by this sudden collapse causes the rest of the star to explode in a supernova. Supernovae are so bright that they may briefly outshine the star's entire home galaxy. When they occur within the Milky Way, supernovae have historically been observed by naked-eye observers as "new stars" where none existed before. Most of the matter in the star is blown away by the supernovae explosion [...] and what remains will be a neutron star [...] or, in the case of the largest stars [...] a black hole (Wikipedia)

Daniel Johnston is truly a very *large star*, and everybody is flipping out at the idea that this star may collapse, implode, and turn into a *psychological black hole*, absorbing the entire spirit of the human community in its self-destruction. Like such artists as Syd Barrett (saved by gardening), Brian Wilson (saved by the genetic implantation of his brother Dennis' stardust found at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean) or Rocky Erickson (saved by electroconvulsive therapy), Daniel Johnston struggles daily against a *so-called* "chronic mental illness," with the help of chemical straightjackets (to immobilize the psyche), repeated institutionalizations (when he represents "a danger to his surroundings and to himself"), sodas (regression and emotional substitute) and menthol cigarettes (compulsion and oral stage). A sugar-based diet ("the most dangerous drug" according to Kim Fowley), combined with neuroleptics and other antipsychotics, has caused a slowdown and other modifications in his metabolism, an increase in appetite, hormonal changes and a reduction of activity, which have made him gain so much weight that he is now *obese*.

*Every time you look at me  
You see the monster in my eye  
If you could only help me girl  
We could be in paradise*

*(The Monster Inside of Me – Laurie EP)*

Everything we live through, we have chosen. The figure of the "monster" runs through Daniel Johnston's discography, like so many *alter egos* – oversized (Godzilla, King Kong, Frankenstein), spectral (Casper the Friendly Ghost) or created by Daniel himself (Joe the Boxer, Jeremiah the Frog, the Duck, the Three Eye's Dog From Hell, etc). American super-heroes (Captain America, Spiderman, Hulk), recurrent in his graphic and musical work, are also fantasy or genetically modified creatures that Daniel charges with new meanings in an altogether personal mythology (Captain America becomes the symbol of Divine Glory and the American Dream and is to come back with The Beatles for the Apocalypse in a new version of Manifest Destiny)... One possible etymology for the word "monster" is the Latin verb *monstrare*: *to show*, which implies that it originally referred to a phenomenon that was *shown* at fairs or in circuses.

The monster, outside any moral interpretation (King Kong, Frankenstein and the Hulk are fundamentally “good people”), is firstly a *public*, obscene figure.<sup>(6)</sup> So all stars are *monsters*. The monster shows his or her difference. A chosen difference, because what we are, is what we’ve chosen to be. Here the visible and inner monstrosity combine, and take the form in Daniel Johnston’s case of *excess* (in others, of a *defect*, or an abnormal arrangement of parts).

*I’m chained to the wall  
I have nothing at all  
And my eyes look in the sunset  
Thinking of better things to do  
Like a monkey in a zoo*

*(Like a Monkey in a Zoo – Songs of Pain)*

Whereas Dorian Gray hid his (spectacular) “monstrous” face and showed his attractive *core* of eternal youth (Dorian Gray being the very figure of retention, like his disciples Isabelle Adjani and Jean-Michel Jarre today), Daniel Johnston’s monstrosity *overflows* in every respect. It becomes increasingly visible just as it occupies and absorbs more and more space around it with its exponential obesity: “The secret rule that delimits the sphere of the body has disappeared. The secret form of the mirror, by which the body watches over itself and its image, is abolished, yielding to the unrestrained redundancy of a living organism. No more limits, no more transcendence: it is as if the body was no longer opposed to an external world, but sought to digest space in its own appearance.” (Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*).<sup>(7)</sup>

If the connected human community is thoroughly capable of *seeing* the genuine bodies of the 21st-century living dead, as was clearly illustrated by the Farrelly brothers’ movie *Shallow Hal* (*Extra Large Love*, in which a mesmerized Jack Black sees only the inner beauty of women and, in a magnificent, adorable vision, falls in love with one who’s obese), the media appearance of certain *stars* corresponds to the (photographic) development of their internal entropy, like a sudden eruption of acne or eczema, and expresses (externalizes) their particular dangerousness for the community; thus, to hide the advanced state of rotting of his physical body, Michael Jackson had his face redone several times and is now obliged to wear an veil. Daniel Johnston, for his part, has seen his inner monstrosity merging increasingly with his public media appearance, reflecting a prominent, extensive *hubris*: by his placental,

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6 From the Latin *obscaena*: close to the stage, pertaining to the theater.

7 *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Phillip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski (New York: Semiotext(e)/Pluto, 1990), 27.

foetal obesity, Daniel grows, ramifies, increases, fills out, occupies virtually all of the space, monopolizes the news and basks in a genetic redundancy (self-cloning), in a quasi-fractal expansion that makes him resemble more and more a planet, a *full-fledged world*.

According to Ludwig Binswanger, Swiss psychiatrist and inventor of *Daseins-analyse*, an “alienated” state corresponds to a withdrawal into a “private world” (*idios kosmos*), whereas a healthy state departicularizes the ego, which makes the conditions of a “common world” (*koinos kosmos*) possible. The “being-in-the-world” of the schizophrenic is described as a *secluded being-in-the-world* as against the *koinos kosmos* of all. From this perspective Daniel Johnston has been striving for several years to join his *idios kosmos* and our *koinos kosmos*, and this is particularly dangerous for us all. Like Elvis Presley and Brian Wilson during their “eating binges” (when they shut themselves up in their bedrooms and stuffed their faces with hamburgers and peanut butter in nearly successful attempts to acquire psychological power over the human soul organized by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger since the terrible year of 1969), Daniel Johnston has retreated deeper and deeper into his inner world, using in a wholly unconscious way (automatic thinking) magic rituals (trances, dances, chants, allegorical drawings) that actualize the elements of his singular world in our common world and profoundly alter our reality. It is widely known that the most dangerous schizophrenics are the ones who shut themselves up in a cellar, a garage or a padded cell, their extreme isolation acting as a psychological sounding board, a vortex all the more active in that it is withdrawn and inaccessible (which is why GPS chips were implanted in the brains of schizophrenic patients and this is how Dennis Wilson’s stardust was found in the Pacific Ocean). They draw their devastating psychological power from reversing the polarities between our real world and their imaginary world: what’s up becomes down, inside becomes outside, empty becomes solid, the part becomes the whole, the false becomes true. The more Daniel Johnston withdraws from the human community and sinks into his *mental garage*, through autosuggestion and a proliferation of rituals, the stronger his grip on our reality becomes, by way of reversal, propagation, contagion, extension, and *enlargement*. Daniel Johnston becomes *our world*; he becomes our planet. But what kind of planet is it?

I AM ALIVE AND YOU ARE DEAD

*“I was living in a Devil Town  
Didn’t know it was a Devil Town  
And all my friend were vampires  
Didn’t know they were vampires  
Turns out I was a vampire myself  
In the Devil Town”*

*(Devil Town, 1990)*

In *Ubik*, the characters created by science fiction writer Philip K. Dick experience the accelerated rejuvenation or aging of their environment, traversed by the constant idea of disintegration and death, which hits everything and everyone in this chaotic world. The truth behind this incoherent rampant entropy appears to the hero Joe Chip in the form of a message written in graffiti on a toilet wall: “I am alive and you are dead.” Joe Chip realizes that he and his companions died in the accident on the moon related earlier and that they are being kept in a half-life state, their bodies preserved in cryogenic coffins. The world they are moving around in is a world of encephalic projections and the entropy phenomenon that is disintegrating their erratic world of the half-living was mentally fabricated by Jory, a psychotic rodent who died at a young age. Placed like them in a cryogenically frozen half-life state in a moratorium, Jory is taking advantage of the fusion of their mindflows to literally *devour* them.

Daniel Johnston, in spite of himself, is a similarly *psychotic rodent* in our *koinos kosmos*. In 1985, he filmed himself in front of a mirror and clearly expressed his living-dead condition: “Hello, I’m the ghost of Daniel Johnston. Many years ago, I lived in Austin, Texas, and I worked at McDonald’s. It is an honor and a privilege to speak to you today, to tell you about my condition in the other world.”<sup>(8)</sup> Many of his songs also directly speak of his position beyond the grave (*Devil Town, Life in Vain, Funeral Home*), presenting him as a ghost (*A Ghostly Story, Casper The Friendly Ghost, Ghost Of Our Love*) or evoking his unrequited love for Laurie, (*Laurie, Funeral Girl*), the love of his life, who spurned his advances and married an *undertaker* (!). Now, everything would be fine if Daniel Johnston would just leave us alone, but the entropy phenomenon that characterizes the dead who are living in their own world does not spare the world of the living. A psychotic rodent unaware of what surrounds him (since in the end nothing surrounds him but himself), Daniel ends up *All Alone*

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8 In the 2005 feature-length documentary by Jeff Feuerzeig, *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*.

(All *and* Alone), gradually reversing the all living into a singular dead, as he pursues his headlong flight through the increasingly complex twists and turns of his psyche. Running every which way through his auto-mythological burrow, everywhere creating new ramifications, dead ends and paths leading nowhere, destined to lead us astray as he himself loses his way, extending his territory unendingly in an uninterrupted vanishing line, Daniel drags our whole world with him while *diabolical powers are knocking at his door*.

“ [D]espite all my vigilance, may I not be attacked from some quite unexpected quarter? I live in peace in the inmost chamber of my house, and meanwhile the enemy may be burrowing his way slowly and stealthily straight toward me [...] And it is not only by external enemies that I am threatened. There are also enemies in the bowels of the earth [...] they come, you hear the scratching of their claws just under you in the ground, which is their element, and already you are lost. Here it is of no avail to console yourself with the thought that you are in your own house; far rather are you in theirs.” (Franz Kafka, *The Burrow*)<sup>9</sup>

This strategy is so complex that ultimately it backfires on its creator (having forgotten where the entrance and the exit are, having even forgotten that they existed, he has ended up chasing himself) with utterly devastating effects: the Daniel Johnston planet (our planet) has become a world of *MTV*, *Walt Disney*, *McDonald* and *George Bush*. Daniel Johnston's psyche, in a constant regressive compulsion, produces an automatic thought pattern with recurrent elements that belong to his personal story and become repeated figures like self-hypnotic mantras in a singular mythology: the McDonald restaurant where he worked in Austin and where he was regularly photographed, filmed and interviewed in his work uniform (*Monkey*); the Astro World amusement park in Houston where he worked in 1983 and its Disneyesque extensions (*Mickey*); the traveling carnival show where he sold corndogs in 1984 (his graphic universe resembles a pop-version of a James Ensor or Hieronymus Bosch carnival); Captain America as an idealized paternal figure (Daniel's father was an army man) and defender of the national territory against the invaders; MTV, which filmed him and made him famous in 1990 during a documentary on the grunge scene in Austin, having become the “devil's station” after his LSD trip with the Butthole Surfers and the development of his “psychosis” (the culminating point of which came with the defenestration of an old woman, followed by an institutionalization in due form.

“Psychiatric problems? Not only. ‘I was on MTV. Everybody was looking at me. Held the hand of the devil.’ The establishment, epitomized by MTV, embodies the devil who tries to tame the *monster*, to turn him into a *monkey*, pin down the tension in a myth that will ensure record sales when Daniel Johnston's intensive tinkering is born precisely from this struggle. ‘Who killed the monkey? It was beauty.’ His problems – lapped up by the press –

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9 Franz Kafka: *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (Shocken, 1971), 326.

are something he presents as a battle whose stakes are pop classicism and beauty.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Despite the quest for beauty evidenced by his prolific output of magnificent songs (he/she who has ears, hears), the plethoric, carnivalesque imagery that feeds his imagination produces paranoid reflexes of protection and isolation, and an ideology of fear, set up as *self-produced* affect (like his first cassettes – isn't one of his last albums called *Fear Yourself?*) that seems to dig countless identical burrows under the ground of our democracies. The fear of the other, of the alien (George Bush is “OK,” according to Daniel), plots a “new boundary” (an *axis*), aimed at blurring the differences between the imaginary and reality, and simplifying thinking to such an extreme that it yields such oppositional pairs as good/bad, good/evil. This simplistic, dualistic outlook releases regressive fantasies, like the desire to possess, accompanied by the desire to consume, feeding Daniel's obesity in a vicious circle, a continuously looped automatism, the Johnston spiral, from its vortex to infinity, and gradually invading our world. Combining the patriotism of Captain America with the regressive imaginary world of Disney, Johnston's recent drawings develop their predictable ideological extremes: in 2008, they are seething with *swastikas*, *Nazi salutes* and *Waffen-SS* (Captain America giving a Nazi salute, Jeremiah the Frog wearing an Iron Cross around his neck, etc.). Seeing himself as a child scribbling transgressive symbols on his school desk, Daniel Johnston, in his powerful autistic armor, is as much witness as producer of the coming of globalized fascism, apotheosis of the international Nazi plot in force since the end of the 1939-1945 war.<sup>(11)</sup>

This novel mix of pop culture and fascist symbols evidently goes hand in hand with a decent amount of religious bigotry, Daniel being the youngest of five children from a Christian fundamentalist family, and his father having worked from the end of the war on with the Quakers. Raised to the sound of Biblical sermons and exhortations to resist Satan and temptation, Daniel is a quasi-fanatical Christian who learned that the Bible is *the main book* and, in any case, reads no others aside from Jack Kirby *comics*. Obese, *born-again Christian*, neo-Nazi, Daniel Johnston is therefore the perfect prototype, the most representative, reflexive *guinea pig* of the programmatic nightmare of George Bush's America. This is why it is so hard for the human soul to save him.

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10 Emmanuel Levaufre, “La belle et la bête” in *Bar-daf* # 1, 1993. Article updated in *BRDF.NET* in 2000.

11 For more on this subject see Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (New York: Putnam's, 1962), Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004) and Elizabeth Antébi's 1974 movie *Les Evadés du Futur*.

#### FATAL STRATEGIES VS. RANDOM STRATEGIES

How then does (did) the everlasting collective consciousness go about saving Daniel Johnston's soul? Several techniques were devised and others are being developed, from the standpoint according to which this text, and I, the reader, are placed. These techniques are obviously random, haphazard, misplaced and poetic, since they are pitted against Daniel Johnston's *fatal* strategies, against the methodical construction of his own "black iron prison," his totalitarian dystopia as self-accomplished prophecy, his Empire (that has never ended) and its mind police. Indeed, to confront *destiny*, only chance, coincidence and (fortunate) encounters are useful weapons, as everyone knows. Consequently, the human community sent its emissaries and missionaries just about everywhere in the past, present, and future to counter Daniel Johnston's *base instincts*, scattering some redeeming cues along his signposted trajectory (his spiral), perpendicular paths along the margins of his vanishing line (his perspective), *angels* in his terrible hell (his fall).

"In the Beatles songs they would refer to different things, another song. Like John Lennon said, 'The walrus was Paul.' I started referring to other songs that I had written and started to make like an epic of songs that were referring to each other. Then the drawings referring to the songs and the songs referring to the drawings." (Daniel Johnston interview by Andrew Hultkrans)

The most powerful and wonderful angels, George, Paul, John and Ringo, started working on the Daniel Johnston case very early on. Johnston discovered them in high school when his father offered him the *Complete Piano Songbook* of the *Fab Four* with which he learned to play piano. The Beatles wrote many songs *for* Daniel Johnston, throwing their grain of magical mysterious sand in the wheels of his deadly automatism. *The Fool On The Hill* is thus a song for Daniel Johnston (for Jesus too, that perfect *idiot* on Mount Golgotha): "I always thought that the 'Fool on the hill' was me because I was living on a hill and I was playing piano when I lived in Virginia." Daniel Johnston first did remakes of the Beatles songs (as a friend), then imitated Beatles songs (as a follower), until the imitation became indifferentiation, reversal of causes and effects, and Daniel's *idios kosmos* literally devoured the proposal of friendship and alterity made by the foursome: "But who wrote 'Yesterday'? Was it Frankenstein or was it Paul McCartney? I mean I can't get over this. Listen to those lyrics. I know that Frankenstein will write a song never before hearing 'Yesterday'. He'll pick up his guitar and he'll say, [sings] 'Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away; Now I need a place to hide away; Oh, I believe in yesterday.' He won't be remembering the song – he'll be writing it! Paul McCartney just wrote the melody and he wrote the lyrics. Who wrote it? Who wrote what? When I hear a song on the radio am I writing it?" The intervention of the Beatles in Daniel's past assumes the form in his mind of *plagiarism by anticipation* of his own songs, and we can say that even the Beatles failed in the enterprise of the human soul to save Daniel. After the self-quoting (a Beatle's technique par excellence) Daniel took to quoting *the other as himself* (the very structure of Frankenstein's creature), reappropriation, reterritorialization, phagocytic inclusion of the other in his extensive planet. In this way Daniel ends up contradicting the lyrics of *Tomorrow Never Knows*

in his cover of it with Jad Fair: *Don't relax ... No, no it isn't love*, then participates in the tribute by Shimmy Discs to the Rutles, the parody band with Neil Innes (ex-Bonzo Dog Band) and Eric Idle (from the Monty Python), whose target was precisely... the Beatles. The Empire counterattacks and the Beatles were done in by Elvis Presley and Robert Nixon (via their *puppets* Charles Manson and Mark David Chapman), examples of a risky operation that failed.

"If he boasts, I put him down, if he puts himself down, I build him up, and I always contradict until he understands that he is an incomprehensible monster." (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*)

None of which has prevented the connected human community from continuing its operations to counter the infinite expansion of Daniel Johnston. It does so firstly by showering him with *attention*, marks of affection, and demonstrations of love in the hopes of restoring Daniel's bashed up ego: public signs of friendship (Kurt Cobain was the first), numerous collaborations (Jad Fair, Sonic Youth, Sparklehorse), tribute albums (with celebrities like Beck and Tom Waits). This artistic recognition, which ranges from underground circles to "mainstream" singers, gives Daniel some experience in alterity at the same time that elements of his "inner world" are reinterpreted, deterritorialized, and re-externalized. In view of these artistic encounters, Daniel can also reconsider *love* in terms of a real life experience not a universal abstract notion (Christian, disembodied, objectless and aimless – and hence a true *perversion*). Some courageous *groupies* took on the task of bringing home the meaning of the word "encounter" and getting him to feel the reality of the love experience in his body (*Mean Girls Give Me Pleasure*). We thank them for this. So much for the *upside* of the interventions of the human soul. As to the *downside*, the *descent*, equally necessary in a equally necessary manipulative rollercoaster dialectic that should bring the monster out of the depths of his *self* and enable him to actualize his archetypes, everyone agrees to stick right under Daniel's nose the extreme situation in which he is found and the peril that he represents for us all, by attempts to *shock* him.

It is a matter of showing Daniel that he is really and truly a living dead and that if he doesn't do something quickly, that he will really *die*. The idea is to scare him with this, like Tom Cruise was scared when he was given the part in *Vanilla Sky* to play (with the aim of countering his candidacy for the American presidential election of 2016). So Daniel was asked to pose *in front of his own grave*, a bouquet of flowers in his hand, for the cover of the compilation *Discovered Covered*, in the hopes of triggering a survival reaction in *The Late Great Daniel Johnston* (as he is called on the album cover). All of the attempts to shock Daniel were manifested in still or moving pictures in which he plays a part. Press photos or necrological documentaries (the movie *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* starts from the presupposition that Daniel Johnston is *already dead* and that it is his ghost that is appearing on the screen), the *shocks*, here, involve as much a transformation of Daniel's perception and the proliferation of "traumatisms" (dislocation of time and space at work in the cinematic montage), as a way of holding out to him an omnipresent mirror (through the industrial reproduction of his works and the images representing

him), and of turning him into a *public figure*. Because what is at stake here through photography and cinema, is not only a way of seeing but also a way of *being seen*.

*I had a girlfriend  
Made me scared of the world  
I'd sit and watch the TV  
Terrified of the soap opera*

*(The Dead dog laughing in the cloud, Continued Story)*

Daniel has the impression of being both the maker and the main hero of an ongoing movie: "I'm on film 24 hours where everyone sees me." This is what the song *Fly Eye* on *Continued Story* is about: "Fly eye, into the sky / fly eye, it's all right." He explains in interview, "Well, at first I didn't know what they were, and then somebody told me, 'Those are the eyes of Satan,' and I said 'Thank you.' But they're my friends 'cause they're always there and they're filming me and they're entertaining a lot of people."

We owe to Umberto Eco the idea of the *anopticton*. It is the opposite of the *panopticton* as described by Jeremy Bentham in 1787, since this system is structured in such a way that the observer is the only one to *be seen* and can *never see*... Using still and moving pictures and a wide variety of means of dissemination, the connected human community first attempted to turn Daniel Johnston into just such an eminently *public* figure, the center of this *anopticton*, in which the awareness of constant surveillance would serve as an authority from above or a guilt provoking superego, prompting him to make an effort to drag himself out of his damn mental garage. This somewhat lazy solution (in a reluctant war) has backfired on the human soul, since Daniel, ingesting and incorporating our whole reality little by little, finds himself henceforth Alone with himself (with his pictures of himself) or with Satan (his double) in a veritable *desert of reality*. Everyone has been ousted from planet Daniel Johnston, and the proverb "help yourself and heaven will help you" takes an unheard-of literal turn here since Daniel is at once Earth and Heaven, God and the Devil, and when he *helps himself*, he's feeding his desert with spectral presences and other reflexive extensions that give him the illusion of a threatening or friendly alterity (but he is his own enemy and friend). Daniel is probably aware that the connected human community that surrounds him in eternity cannot do much besides *watch* him helplessly. Because *All Alone*, Daniel has cast us out of himself and his world, and when he hears someone talking, he is probably one of those people who think they're "hearing voices."

### SACRED MONSTER

So basically we're all in big trouble. The small signs and cues set up to help Daniel escape his burrow and rejoin the connected human community have been a miserable, poetical flop, and it seems that all we have left is one very commonplace solution to get us out of this bind: namely, a *soul murder* in due form. We are not going to explain in detail how a soul murder is committed (it's a complicated process plus nobody has a memory of it), but suffice it to say that it allows us to get rid of souls that have refused to join the everlasting universal human soul, simply by taking away their *existence*. We kill something that *is*, but without *existence*. This is why soul murders are *unnamable* (and this is why nobody has a memory of it), and also why it is a perfectly *legal* murder.

"The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that 'if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide.' This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred." (Festus, *On the Meaning of Words*)<sup>12</sup>

After numerous rescue attempts, Daniel Johnston can be deemed henceforth a *sacred man*, a *homo sacer*, a borderline case in the Roman legal system, the specificity of which is that there is impunity for the person who kills him and a prohibition to sacrifice him. The particularization of an individual as a *homo sacer* corresponds to a banishment, that is, to an exclusion from society. For the connected human community, the ostracism of the *star* (impious sinner or enemy of the community) also corresponds to such a banishment. Banning was originally a form of consecration to the deity (this is why in ancient Judaism, for instance, the term "banish" is sometimes rendered by "consecrate"). Indeed, the *stars* are *homo saceres*, at once banned (set apart) and consecrated (celebrated), saints and damned, perpetuating the original indifferenciation between the sacred (objects of worship) and the impure (corruption, vanity), producing a genuinely "sacred horror."

The emphasis in certain uses of the word "monster" is simply on the "spectacular" dimension, as in the case of the *sacred monster*, for example Marilyn Monroe or James Dean (their character as sacred monsters, by the way, also explains their violent death). Daniel Johnston can be considered just such a *sacred monster*, if we extend the concept of *homo sacer*, as Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben does, to the "wolf-man" and to the man "without peace" (*friedlos*) of ancient Germanic law: "What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city – the werewolf – is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city. [...] The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law

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12 Cited in Baudrillard, *Homo Sacer...*, 71.

and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither.”<sup>(13)</sup> In the many drawings that Daniel Johnston has produced on the figure of the monster, and particularly on the werewolf, he reveals his particular condition, at once cursed and sacred, of *outcast*. If he was at first the Idiot in the Christian sense of the term (*the fool on the hill*), then the *village idiot* (living on the edges of the village right when the village ceased being a village), Daniel has become a werewolf (between city and forest, culture and nature, human and animal), a sacred monster, paradoxically excluded from (ostracized) and included in (consecrated) the human community.

Under the reign of Daniel, the *freak-show* is inexorably spreading and we’re all turning into *sacred monsters*. The “fifteen minutes of fame” that Andy Warhol promised everyone is becoming widespread thanks to reality shows (the violent collective treatment given to Cindy Sanders, trash icon of *Nouvelle Star* – France’s version of *American Idol* – bears witness to the metamorphosis of our idols into definitive *freaks*, targets of mockery, gibes and multiple humiliations), while the *panopticon* and the *anopticon* are merging on the Internet, the ultimate den of auto-surveillance (Facebook, “You are the ONLY person to visit this page. No one else will ever come here”).

We are without a doubt part of *planet Daniel Johnston*, and all it takes is the star imploding once and for all for all of us to disappear just like that, all *suicide victims* of Daniel Johnston.

“We earthlings are all here with a secret identity.” (Patricia Maincent)

So rather than accept the prospect of a *collective* suicide committed by Daniel Johnston, the connected human community has opted to put an end to Daniel’s soul by turning him into a “sacred monster,” a *homo sacer* who everyone can kill without committing a homicide. This legal murder is permitted by the state of exception in which the *homo sacer* is situated: this twofold exception and twofold exclusion, as much in the religious realm as in the secular, enables the human community to be *sovereign* over the life (in this case, the soul) of the sacred man Daniel Johnston.

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13 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105.

Because we started to play music listening to Daniel Johnston songs, because we recorded our songs on a cassette recorder, like he did, before distributing our cassettes to our friends, like he did, because we played, like he did, on toy instruments offered to us by our friends, because we swept up in a McDonald's, like he did, with an "I am an apprentice" badge on the jacket label, because we loved him, imitated him, and met him, and because our apprenticeship is over and that it's time to kill our fathers, destroy our idols, and murder our teachers, Daniel Johnston no longer belongs to the everlasting human soul; neither does he belong any longer to the Daniel Johnston planet or universe. Daniel Johnston *is*, but he *exists* no more. His soul is *dead*. We have just killed it, *in this piece of fiction*.

QED  
RIP Daniel Johnston.

*Translated from the French by Gila Walker*

***Dani***

***John***

***R.I.P.***