

I'll fly away (sing):

One bright morning when this life is over, I'll fly away!

To my home on God's celestial shore- I'll fly away!

I'll fly away, fly away, oh glory!

I'll fly away in the morning

When I die, hallelujah! By and by

I'll fly away

-traditional

In American roots music, songs that express longing for death are common. At their core is the old dialectic of freedom and confinement specific to American regional music. (St. Clair 2) These songs are a form of protest.

To the increasingly marginalized American working class, death, or “flying away,” brings instant equality, erasing one’s existence in an unfair, predatory society. The Apocalypse, the end of the world as we know it, frees one from the contemporary world’s hierarchies, hardships and social constructs. As perceived by William Martin, a specialist in fundamentalist religious culture:

[Apocalyptic] teaching is probably the most attractive to those who feel that the world, or at least their segment of it, is out of control and can be brought to a good end only by concerted supernatural intervention. Such feelings of marginality are likely to be especially acute when established ways of life are being threatened.

(1982, 31-37)

Longing for one’s own relief and equality is private and lonesome. This desire

rings through bluegrass, gospel, blues, hip hop and punk music. Similarly, marginalized and working class artists invent alternative forms of expression, breaking the endless monotony the mainstream. Echoing the revolutionary songs sung in American regional music, they use blogs, appropriated material, and experimental filmic images, breaking out of the mainstream's anticipated formula's, and overwhelming apathy.

In popular culture, anticipating the end of the world—hoping fervently or passively for the Apocalypse—is an increasingly popular group activity. Ironically, it is a group activity that encourages disconnection from the world.

This concept of Apocalypse is integral to American culture and the way that we perceive time. Martin continues:

To many... an apocalyptic outlook is simply part of the package they have inherited... And if current events seem to offer tangible supporting evidence, then faith is strengthened and hope increased. (1982 31-37)

Measuring time by focusing on destruction leads to apathy and complacency. Holding on for the promised divine justice at the end of the world, believers are obedient to religious authority. The mainstream media exacerbates this, offering up fear and images of destruction, encouraging isolation and disconnection.

To the believers this is simultaneously empowering and disempowering. For those who obey religious authority, the apocalypse is a spiritual lottery prize, for being lucky enough to be born at a time near the end of the world. Fear is alleviated and, as a consequence, apathy rules. Jurgen Moltman identifies this phenomenon in his work, *Theology of Hope*,

The promise of divine righteousness in the event of the justification of the godless

leads immediately to the hunger for divine right in the godless world and thus to the struggle for public, bodily obedience.....(225)

There is no anxiety for the obedient believer. Why should one strive to change the world, if its destruction will result in one's personal triumph? The believer is beholden only to a "higher" calling. As A.G. Mojabai observes in her work on American fundamentalism, "End time thinkers...share...blessed assurance, the promise for true believers of exemption and safety from the suffering that might befall others." (x-xi) This is especially true for the soon-to-be-Raptured.

Ordering current events into contemporary apocalyptic manifestos forces the messiness of life-on-earth into the structure of a formulaic script. This obedience to the formula is evident in contemporary cinema. In his recent work, *Visions of the Apocalypse, Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema*, Film scholar Wheeler Winston Dixon bemoans the connection of cultural apathy to contemporary mainstream cinema's simplistic, endless recycling:

Indeed, as a culture, we seem tired with life. As we enter the 21st century, there are signs of exhaustion everywhere. The narrative structures of feature films...are being shamelessly recycled from one film to the next, and sequels (which have always been a part of movie history) now predominate the box office. Politics, especially in the U.S. have become so "stage managed" as to divorce themselves from anything remotely resembling a democracy....Do we seek the obliteration of social culture, in which the ever-widening gap between rich and poor recalls the gulf between workers and the ruling class in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)? (1-

2)...Indeed in all our contemporary cultural manifestations as a worldwide community, we seem eager for the end. (1-2)

Dixon's lament about recycling in contemporary cinema is a lament about linear time. Linear time *is* a recycling. Biblical study paradigms do not differentiate between linear and cyclical time. Theology and Film analyst Robert Jewett explains that religious scholars place great emphasis on the difference between the two *Bible* words that signify time: *Chronos*, meaning linear time, which cycles endlessly (Wednesday arriving at the same time, every week), and *Kairos Idios*, meaning appointed time, the time that God chooses to make a decision or a change. (Jewett 155) *Chronos* requires obedience.

Jewett explores the *Chronos* vs *Kairos Idios* differentiation as he discusses the film *Groundhog Day* in an essay entitled, "*Kairos, Chronos and the Flesh in Groundhog Day*." Jewett writes:

There is an intriguing expression in the *New Testament Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians* (Gal 6:10) that addresses [feeling] stuck in time." [One] feels in an endless cycle of repetition reminiscent of the despair felt by most people in Paul's time. Paul moves against the cultural stream in promising that "in its own time we shall reap a harvest if we do not give up..." The expression *Kairos Idios* (in its own time) in the final verse of this passage from *Galatians* implies there are moments that are appropriate, distinctive and non-repetitive designed by God for the harvest... Time is going somewhere because God intends it so. (154-155)

Original, unanticipated time introduced in an exceptional film might be an example of the filmmaker's use of *Kairos Idios*, appointed time, creating a work that embodies the literal translation, *a time a part*, – a product of its own time. Tarkovsky

might further associate this act with the filmmaker's embodiment of God's likeness. ()
Such a film would be an act of disobedience.

Alternatively, a film exemplifying the endless formulaic recycling would simply be (re)rendering *Chronos*, that is, chronological time—the recurring, comfortably anticipated fare obedient audiences accept.

In *Galatians*, Paul recommends obedience as the recourse for the endless, thankless cycle of days. Like our contemporary apocalyptic leaders, he advises believers to be satisfied with the status quo, blessedly assured that the authority will release them at the appointed time.

Apocalyptic preachers and politicians are the first tier of believers, those who say they get the skinny directly from God. The disobedient of the religious community, however, is rarely analyzed. Religious historians assert that society benefits more from studying those who create through direct conversation with God. William James, in *The Variety of Religious Experience*, writes:

It would profit us little to study...second-hand religious life. We must make search rather for the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct. (19)

Second hand religious life, however, includes the restless—those who try to escape *Chronos*' endlessly cycling chronology—the media makers appointing their *own time*. Jenny Stark is an example of James' second order of believer. She is an apocalyptic experimental filmmaker, who is disobediently engaged in a struggle for change. Stark's films explode the cinematic medium and formula, seizing *Kairos Idios*. Her characters dwell in the End Times, but, when faced with the Apocalypse, are uncomfortable,

anxious and, out of love, take action. That is what makes her work so rare and important in this time of apathy and obedience.

Jenny is from Texas, a presuburban, postrural area called Bellaire. She's the product of a rural, working class lineage rare in the contemporary experimental film world.

Her first film, *The First Day of the Beginning of the End of the World*, is set in the decrepit suburban working-class high desert of California. The film is shot on grainy black and white 16mm film. The film's star, Kathy, is a teenager who wears black clothing and applies thick layers of black lipstick. Around her, the landscape glows white-hot. In one of the opening scenes of the film, Kathy's mother is reading the newspaper aloud to her daughter. She is describing a Chernobyl-like event. Pausing to light a cigarette Kathy hands her, she reads, "Residents in the surrounding areas have been instructed to keep their windows closed, mop their floor and wash their heads everyday." (??)

Palmdale, the town featured in the film, is apparently awaiting news of where a fallout cloud will drift. Visually, the landscape already seems white-hot, radioactively bright and oppressively still. Our character walks all the way through shots, and we feel discomfort watching someone clothed in black layers wander through dry heat. There is too much light here.

Another character mentions the date. It is May 15th, 1986, the day that Nostradamus predicted as "the beginning of the end of the world." There is no sense of anxiety among the teenagers, apart from the angst of a couple of activist students. As the

audience responds to the apocalyptic backdrop, her characters heighten our anxiety by absurdly proceeding with their routines.

These characters are oblivious. They are teenagers already involved in the catastrophe of puberty. Their bodies and hearts are exploding. The entire world is secondary. However, one character, named Emily, seems to symbolize personal liberation. Emily writes a note about flying away to another girl:

“We should meet in another life...We should meet in the air, you and me.”

Emily secretly slips anonymous notes to other girls. She communicates love and admiration, as well as a desire for escape. Out of love, she wishes to redeem the world. She is neither apathetic, nor static.

Kathy’s mother chides her for refusing to eat, refusing to dress attractively, and insisting on wearing black lipstick. The oppressive desert light makes Kathy’s dark lipstick even more dramatic. In the opening line of the film, Kathy reflects that she has been afraid of the darkness in her brother Daniel’s room. Now, under his influence, she briefly considers escaping. After stealing money from the cookie tin, Daniel convinces Kathy to run away by saying, “I fucking hate this place—nothing good happens. Nothing bad happens.”

Once Kathy is in the car, fleeing her monotonous *Chronos* cycle, the landscape begins to move. It is suddenly dark outside. Kathy’s face, in the moment before she changes her mind and decides to stop running and return obediently home to Palmdale, suddenly glows hot white, surrounded by the darkness of possibility.

After wrestling her into a final hug, Daniel leaves his sister standing—a light, in a streetlight. She is still glowing. His Point-of-view, evident as darkness in the shot's, foreground, withdraws, leaving her alone in the light of the known.

Home again, Kathy helps her drunken mother to bed, promising her, “nothing's gonna happen.” Kathy removes the dark cloths from windows of the room Daniel has abandoned, the room that has frightened her. She lights candles. She seems to be driving away the dark, clinging to an apocalyptic light, where nothing is unknown.

The First Day of the Beginning of the End of the World concludes hopefully. Kathy, having removed the darkness from her brother's bedroom, suddenly notices a note, slipped to her by the hopeful Emily. Kathy ends the day dancing alone on her brother's bed.

The final shot of *The First Day of the Beginning of the End of the World* frames the note-writer. Emily gazes directly into the camera, offering us her vision's reflected grace.

To call Jenny Stark's filmmaking apocalyptic is appropriate. It is important, however, to further consider the cultural/historical context of this term. Nowadays, there are many different meanings to the word apocalyptic. These definitions coexist and blend here. Religious theorist Timothy Weber offers an excellent breakdown of the different approaches to the biblical millennium. He differentiates three categories of Apocalyptic belief systems. The first two, Amillennialists, who believe the idea of Apocalypse is metaphor, Post-Millennialists, who are socially engaged, inform Jenny Stark's work. The third category, Premillennialists, who are by far the most influential,

believe that human beings are inherently evil and therefore, the sinful world can only be saved by supernatural intervention.

Characteristically, Premillennialists scan contemporary events, appropriating media reports and incorporating their own personal reactions in an attempt to interpret, order and understand the world's progress towards the end. Applying doomsday rhetoric and manipulating order unto disparate world events, Premillennialists appropriate and forcibly recycle narratives, prescribing apocalyptic obedience. In a chaotic world, order is soothing.

In 1787, Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards ordered the world in a pre-computer blog, recording a daily his Premillennial observations. His work, titled *An Account of Events Probably Fulfilling the Sixth Vial on the River of Euphrates, the News of Which Was Received Since October 16, 1747*, contains a series of entries culled from the international papers. His presents the day's news as evidence of the pending apocalypse:

Evening Post, Bristol, August 29 (1747):

Thursday evening ... the Viper, sloop of war of 14 guns, had taken, in the Bay of Biscay, after a warm engagement of four hours, a large French ship called the Hector, burden 600 tons...brought her to Plymouth...(vol. 5, 254)

Edwards is likely responding allegorically to the names of the ships engaged in battle, Viper defeating Hector, and then arriving at apocalyptic significant Plymouth. The events he chooses as signs of end are often obscure. At one point he writes of the falling prices for wine and brandy in France and dire consequences should they have a war with the Dutch:

many thousand families in that kingdom would be ruined, especially as they should have no market for the production of their vintage.” (vol 5. 263)

The entries continue. For years, Edwards continues adding entries, ordering events into his apocalyptic formula.

Current blogs continue his work, with heightened interactivity. Hal Lindsey's Blog, the *Hal Lindsey Oracle: Politically Incorrect-Prophetically Correct*, takes a direct approach, listing current headlines and following up with dire scriptural passages, presented as analysis

. For example, a recent posting:

News analysis:

• Iran Vs. America And The US Port Sale

Analysis: "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast....Rev. 17: 12-14) _

Cuttingedge.org, a Baptist Church outreach ministry presents their own blog, "the most complete,...source of information available (regarding) the Biblical prophecy of the new world order." On Sunday 12/2/01, they offered a new entry:

Review of Bible Prophecies being fulfilled in your Daily News!

We will review one days' newspaper so you so you can see how the new is completely filled with events that are fulfilling Bible prophecy in the "Last Days."

You will be shocked and your faith made stronger.

Sample headlines included: "America is Suffering Unprecedented Murder and Bloodshed," "America is abusing Children in a Unprecedented Manner," "American

Citizens Already Starting to Disappear,” “Top Scientists Are Suddenly Either Dead or Missing.”

Chuck Currie, a United Church of Christ Seminarian, hosts the blog *God is Still Speaking*. Interspersed with the familiar news headline followed by a bible quote or two, Currie offers autobiography. A passage of analysis applying *The Book of Deuteronomy* to immigration reform is preceded by an entry marking the death of Currie’s cat, named Freedom. He writes, “ He was a good friend to me for a long, long time...”

Currie’s personal approach is appealing, and his commitment to regular posting appreciated. Since the early days of religious radio, listeners have counted on the appearance of a dependable personality. As Tona Hagan observed, “To (the audience of fundamentalist broadcasting) the broadcaster was a deity as close as the dial on the radio, hard at work for his faithful, who themselves were dedicated to furthering his religious causes.” (7)

Blog readers, however, are able to form much more instantaneous and interactive relationships with their bloggers, adding their own voices to the forum.

Antithetically, Stupid Evil Bastard’s Blog encourages disobedience. A rural radical lefty who feels that the right-wing’s obsession with premillennialism will become an apocalyptic self-fulfilled prophecy, S.E.B. also anxiously compiles headlines mixing his interpretation with autobiography. His recent posts:

Windows Vista will come in six flavors just to confuse you 2/27/06

Israeli planes with anti-missile devices banned from Swiss airports 2/26/06

Momma’s Birthday 2/25/06

Idiots want to teach the controversy (about evolution) but there isn’t any 2/24/06

S.E.B.'s community religiously adds its own comments and news selections to the list, generating a humorous cranky, country fried dialogue that directly challenges authority. SEB, even in his chosen name, resists a spiritually authoritative position, and rather acts a voice of dissent. "What the Fuck Is Wrong With You People?" is the subtitle of his blog. SEB honestly doesn't know. He grapples with the unknown, in the middle of the information super highway.

John Berger, critical of internet culture and aware of the necessary transformation between the dispersion of information and knowledge recently wrote:

"We are living today in a culture of information...It stimulates calculation but consistently discourages reflection. Thus it substitutes information (and misinformation) for knowledge or wisdom...We may remember knowledge, as distinct from information, always allows for and reckons with the unknown."

(Harpers)

Currie, Lindsey and the other Fundamentalists represent obedient information-seeking. Although they seek, they feel they already have the answers. Their medium is digital, yet they work in the analog of *Chonos* time (rewindable, replayable but not reorderable) within the utterly unorganized culture of information. S.E.B and his community are anxious—they have no blessed assurance. They are the oppositional, knowledge-seeking and unknowing-probing bloggers.

There is a direct connection between SEB's use of compilation and appropriation to anxiously reflect on the unknown and Jenny Stark's *short film/video series*. The works, entitled, *Did You Hear Something?*, *Negative 10*, *How Does Electricity Work?* and *Flood, Ghosts and Contamination* disobediently, spiritually seek knowledge while

anxiously engaging the unknown. The process involves the degradation of analogue tape and *Chronos* time.

In the summer before 2001, Jenny began working with 10-year-old disintegrating VHS tape. These were the kinds of tapes that were composed like blogs, odd compilations of different television programs, movies, home movies and news shows saved to replay privately or for the family. The analog tape, flawed and lined, has been transferred to digital, and transformed in the process. We hear the other 90's family blog-like sound artifact running in the background—the answering machine tape. We watch images stolen from television, mainly the apocalyptic teenage program *Roswell*, reimaged. They are pulled from their normal *Chronos* and converted.

In *Did You Hear Something?* We witness the spectacle of absolute analog degradation. The image separates into discreet color channels and dies a beautiful death. The opening sound of the video is an explosion, perhaps a brick thrown through a window. Windows breaking cut quickly to black. We hear a woman's voice, a poor recording, like an answering machine tape or a television in another room:

“It's like being on Pacific and Central and Mountain Time all at the same time...It's impossible.”

Time has become appointed—the cycle has collapsed in a way that only the digital can allow.

Slowly we come to an image of two women turning at the sound of the crash. The video moves at an excruciating pace. Each frame becomes a distinct moment—each expression is magnified until the viewer feels nothing but anxiety. The screen spits into two—Two characters are visible. Their simultaneous experience is Stark's homage to

David Lynch and what she describes as his masterful simultaneity. Stark says, “He addresses the collective unconscious by creating horrible events and allowing the viewer to experience the immediate effect they have on those who inhabit his films. (interview)

With *Negative 10*, Stark expands this idea, attempting, like (and unlike) contemporary bloggers to examine actual history and contemporary events through appropriation. Made in response to a destructive flood of the Texas Pan Handle and completed in August 2001, *Negative 10* contains recycled audio from newscasts dating back to 1991. After the events of September 11, the anxious details of the newscasts create an eerie temporal loop between the two presidents Bush and two attacks on Iraq. The cyclical nature of the actual history Stark sought to invoke heightens the already eerie, horrified tone of the work.

Alluding to Timothy Binkley’s 1993 essay, “Refiguring Culture”, Jenny appropriates, converts and repositions each frame as a discreet moment in *How does Electricity work?* She reduces analog frames to data that exists as a series of discrete zeroes and ones. (??) We watch an alien teenager from *Roswell* (the television program), as she watches a man disappear. Single frames last several seconds and time flips back and forth as she seems to believe and deny what is happening with a slight movement of her head. The man flickers, appearing and disappearing. The original footage appropriated for this piece was only a few seconds in duration, yet, though the piece lasts several minutes, the viewer never loses a sense of urgency. Things are happening too quickly and we can’t quite stop them. It is like a dream about walking through quicksand.

The network watermark for the *WB* remains in the corner for the duration of the piece, yet this work which literally recycles Hollywood imagery, escapes the formula original. This is a cycling that is personal, *Chronos* manipulated into *Kaidos*.

Roswell was an apocalyptic show about UFOs. In the program the aliens live among us...as teenagers– the ones who don't quite belong. Their disobedience threatens to infect the culture.

The world is reordered once again in Stark's film *Flood, Ghosts and Contamination*. Combining of storytelling, autobiography, history and contemporary events, *F, G&C* is made up of three distinct stories, presented in a sequence similar to blog entries written by three different users. One story unveils the myth, the story of La Llorona; one reveals history, the story of the towns of East Texas flooded and destroyed and abandoned; and the last points to contemporary fear. The film ends with a slow-motion image of a family hugging in their front yard. They have just bought a contaminated house, beneath which runs a river of jet fuel. Each section offers information, distilled by the unknown of hope. Stark's treatment of the material, through use of abstract imagery, appropriated newsreel footage, and slow motion interrupts and injects the stories with urgency. This personalized, autobiographical voices speak haltingly in the film, sometimes unsure of what is really happening as they relay the facts. They often say, "I didn't know..."

Our experience of their voices, the things they leave unsaid converts information into knowledge.

Death haunts Jenny Stark's work. Haunting and ghosts are a kind of contamination of time; characters co-exist in ways they should not. Time collapses into a

single appointed moment: a small apocalypse. Stark works exist after the end of analogue, wherein analog is reborn.

Search for the apocalyptic observation that escapes stasis and apathy. Look for the anxious films, those that do not lose their edge as they touch the sublime. Look for the disobedient, rural and working class filmmakers and bloggers. These are bluegrass songs, gospel songs, full of myth and memory and religion, full of death, anxiety, and protest and hope!

The rural margins of the American underground raise their worried, uncooperative voices to you, friend, as they always have.

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