

Brainwashed - Negativland, "Our Favorite Things"

Written by Jonathan Dean

Saturday, 27 September 2008 18:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 September 2008 02:44



This compilation of Negativland's video work over the past two decades fits right in with the YouTube Poop generation: plunderphonic video cut-ups sourced from mass media are spliced together into prankish, mindbending collages that shock, confuse and annoy in equal measure. The main difference between this material and the video lulz currently polluting the Internet is that Negativland use these techniques to touch on issues of spectatorship, copyright law and American cultural imperialism.

[Other Cinema](#)

After the recent "pop" album *Thigmotactic*, it's a relief to find myself back in the midst of the Negativland I once knew and loved, the quintessential culture jamming collective: cracked pop culture collages, audio snippets sourced from across the vast wasteland of recorded media and, most especially, gleeful lawsuit-baiting plunders of corporate music. Some of Negativland's best-known and best-loved material appears on Other Cinema's DVD collection. Classic tracks like "U2," "Guns," and "Gimme The Mermaid" are presented here with their contemporaneous visual analogs, which are sometimes brilliant, sometimes disappointing artistic misfires, but always bizarre and often hilarious. Seeing Ariel from Disney's

The

Little Mermaid

mouthng the words of a particularly unhinged rant by a litigious copyright owner will never stop being funny. Hearing Casey Kasem's expletive-filled outtakes while Negativland deconstructs U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" over 8mm home movies of basset hounds and people wearing "Kill Bono" t-shirts has stood the test of time, both as comedy and as commentary.

For every winning piece of the Negativland video archive, there is a clunker like "The Mashin' of the Christ (Christianity Is Stupid)," which aims in the general direction of blasphemy with its cut-up of Jesus movies, but only succeeds at being puerile and surprisingly

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pedestrian in its attempt to shock. There is a disproportionate representation of videos made for tracks from 1997's *Dispepsi*, and while some of them are really great (a cut-up of Pepsi sales training videos, classic Pepsi ads and Faye Dunaway's Pepsi-pushing Joan Crawford in *Mommie Dearest*

), mostly it just gets tiring. Maybe I'm just a bit jaded 11 years on, but it seems like soft drink advertising is a pretty easy target, and perhaps more could have been done besides just offering an endless parade of TV spots against sampler-heavy, nerdy, underwritten pop tunes.

Bonus features on the DVD include a film entitled "Visit Howland Island," which purports to be an industrial video produced by the tourism board of a fictional South Pacific island owned by a wealthy entrepreneur. It's a pointed deconstruction of the kind of Orientalist ethnic stereotyping that was common currency until the "politically correct" revolution of the 1980s and 90s. The film also doubles as a parody of the kind of "lifestyle porn" offered by many contemporary cable channels. "At Home With the Weatherman" features one of the most beloved (?) characters from Negativland's "Over the Edge" broadcasts pattering around his humble house demonstrating his anal retentiveness and germphobia. "Anomalies of the Unconscious" is a sort of Stan Brakhage "direct cinema" experiment in near-total abstraction, with some of Negativland's most esoteric, post-industrial noisescapes serving as the soundtrack. It's great, but without any context given, it feels like it belongs on another DVD.

The generous DVD package from Other Cinema also includes an audio CD containing ridiculous, tongue-in-cheek *a cappella* renditions of Negativland's most notable songs, performed by the Detroit vocal group The 180 G's. What makes these versions so absurd is the fact that they are done completely poker-faced, the 180 G's providing competent vocal harmonies and original, melodic arrangements for Negativland's chaotic, unstructured plunder-pop. While I can't imagine wanting to listen to this CD more than once or twice, it certainly is quite a unique artifact. Taken together, this is quite an impressive package for Negativland fans, and serves as a great introduction for those who are just picking up on the culture jamming frequency.