

### Jerry Saltz on Kanye, Kim, and 'the New Uncanny'

Lou Reed got Kanye West's *Yeezus* absolutely right. "No one's near doing what he's doing." Reed wrote in a review just a few weeks before he died. "It's not even the same planet ... He keeps unbalancing you." The unbalancing act went full-tilt last week, when West released the video for "Bound 2." Instantaneously, the Internet did what the Internet does: hate. The video was ridiculed as clueless kitsch. But I dig it, and I think it represents a part of a collective cultural fracturing, via an idiom that I call the New Uncanny.

When performers like Kanye West, Kim Kardashian, Lady Gaga, and, yes, Jeff Koons and Marina Abramovic try so hard to showcase and communicate how sincere they are, instead they reveal how out-of-touch they are — from each other, from themselves, from us. These are not just famous performers; they are performers of fame. In their grandiose sincerity, their attempt to keep it real (West says his "passion is for humanity" and that his art is totally about "beauty, truth, awesomeness"), these stars become alien things, automata, odd gods before our eyes. By some bizarre alchemy, they then toggle back into demented sincerity while simultaneously remaining alien, other, apart. They become psychological quantum particles, in two states at once. Sincerity and fame combine, float free of common rules. "Bound 2" represents a psychological fissure whereby stars give us exactly what we ask of them — a glimpse into their inner selves — and then are shunned and mocked for it. They're sacred cows and sacrificial lambs at the same time. Just as the Rodney King video included in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, "Bound 2" should be in the upcoming one, representing a bend of cultural nature.

Last week, I suggested this on my Facebook page, and watched my words burned before me, the way disco records were in the seventies. Had I once again been blinded by fame's death-ray of idolatry, idiocy, and primitive force? (See my dancing with Jay Z.) Is this video anything? Is Kanye doing what he says he's doing, "clearing a path for people to dream properly," or has he gone off the demented deep end? Had I followed him?

"Bound 2" is certainly a piece of work — as bizarrely gonzo and creepily asexual as Jeff Koons's hyperrealistic 1991 paintings of himself having sex with his then-wife Cicciolina, John Currin's 1989 paintings of Breck girls, and Marina Abramovic's staring at spectators at MoMA in 2010. "Bound 2" is different: a freakish act of creation and destruction by appropriation. It stars Kanye and his fiancée, Kim Kardashian, and we see (along with the two of them) wild horses running in rivers, eagles flying to the sky, sunsets, purple mountain majesties, redwood forests, and gulfstream waters. It's a teenage girl's bedroom's idea of romance crossed with Richard Prince's *Cowboy* photographs, American Romanticism, Celestial Seasonings packages, shampoo commercials, Iranian music videos, Thomas Kinkaid, beer ads, Jeff Koons, *The Onion*, Lars von Trier, the House of Fendi, and Jeffrey Deitch and his own uncanny 1992 prophecy "The Freudian model of the psychological person is dissolving ... freed of the constraints of one's past." The New Uncanny is un-self-consciousness filtered through hyper-self-consciousness, unprocessed absurdity, grandiosity of desire, and fantastic self-regard.

Those attacking "Bound 2" as crass kitsch employ preestablished taste hierarchies that often exclude people like West. They assume he doesn't know where his work is coming from or what he's doing with his sources. Yet he names Parisian Corbusier homes, and a Corbusier furniture show at the Louvre, as key inspirations for his latest work. He has worked closely in the past with established artists like Vanessa Beecroft and Marco Brambilla. (Gaga, too, will soon be shown at the Louvre, in a video piece by director Robert Wilson.) Yet people



discount West's artistic intelligence. As he wrote, "Y'all throwin' contracts at me/You know niggas can't read." Extending Deitch's dictum about the new organization of one's personality, West is part of some total merging of art with everything around it of art going viral — of more people wanting a bit of it in their lives. Regardless of their reasons.

"Bound 2" tells me that empirical observation, obsessive introspection, creativity, cravenness, ego, and id are combining in new uncanny ways, and that a segment of the population that has the means to embrace this total merging is evolving in strange ways. The New Uncanny pools all through "Bound 2." At about 2:20 in the video, Kanye and Kim are riding on a motorcycle, maybe in Arizona, or the Crab Nebula, or a video game, or Thunderdome. He's wearing a sort of Scottish caveman thing. She looks like the reclining silhouette on a truck mudflap — topless, of course. They seem to boink on the motorcycle as it rides, gently bouncing along. That's when we see full-on shots of Kim's rack wobbling back and forth, heaving, defying gravity like two great cannonballs. But her boobs are nippleless. It's a new flowering of Meret Oppenheim — whose 1936 version of *The New Uncanny*, her fur-lined teacup, saucer, and spoon, is still striking. My mouth still tries to spit out hairballs whenever I look at this thing. Likewise Kim's breast: I don't know whether I'm turned on, turned off, freaked out, or struck dumb.

To the famous, these new unprecedented levels of fame must feel like Kim's nippleless boob: They perform, yet are removed from, yet embody the culture all at the same time. What they do makes a grand gestural show of doing away with concealment, modesty, and self-consciousness, in ways that leave us only with two truly concealed, rather than revealed selves. This is the New Uncanny. "Bound 2" looks as cheesy as anything anyone could make on their home computer. This too is what West means by "clearing a path for people to dream properly."