

January 4, 2009

Hi John and Christy-

Here's the pilot of the possible weekly pop-culture article we talked about. I like the column name Zero Conditional for it, but that can be discussed later. I've got photos from Paris if you think you 'd like to do something with it. We'll talk this week, hope you like it and yr all ok, Big P

Zero Conditional: Instant Culture-No Waiting

Paris Shmaris, Give me Plateia Exarchia

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In last year's way-past-kitsch TV program, "Ugly Maria" Leonora, the airhead-savant heiress character in the show made the statement, "Paris, London, Rome, all banal- Neos Kosmos is the fashion center of the world!" I've recently been to Paris for the first time. Like any tourist, I was absolutely pimp-slapped by its beauty, high culture, history, bright lights, and blah-blah-blah ad infinitum. The initial whiz-bang effect of the place started to wear-off in a couple of days. About three days into my junket I started to think that Leonora might have a legitimate point to make. By the end of the week I was convinced she was kind-of-right about her pronouncement.

Any little Greek, funky-but-chic, cheese-ass neighborhood (Neos Kosmos, Exarchia, Kallithea, Psiri, etc.) has more genuine, lust-for-life, pathos in its daily life than all of the areas of Paris combined. I intentionally left Kolonaki, the biggest Athenian white trash circus of all, out of this list for another article. There are any number of reasons for the anthropological phenomenon: inherited culture, DNA, daily diet, weather conditions, you name it. Here are some observations and attempted explanations of the puzzling situation.

French people on the street, I've noticed, are good at finding the sweet spot between things. They commit to nothing, demand everything, are queer for details and can still look at you while simultaneously looking through you and into the never ending middle distance. They're not exactly indifferent people and they're not exactly preening academic pimps. I've decided that their collective psyche can best be described as pimp-lite. Kind of like how the Spice Girls' girl-power credo could be tagged as feminism-lite or Scott Evil, son of Dr. Evil in the *Austin Powers* movies, was claimed to be evil-lite by his father when displaying any kind of forgiving behavior to an intended victim.

Couture wise, Parisians have found the pimp-lite middle ground as well. A complete lack of heavy rock metalistas in Paris gives the city no extreme-left costume culture. Junkies seem to be ultra-stylized, chemically dependent, living ornaments. They're not just dirty and strung out, but even in the throes of agonizing physical withdrawal, they appear to be waiting to be photographed or offered an agency

contract to advertise boutique label junkie products: Peirre Cardin signature syringes, Kate Moss approved butane lighters, etc. The standard issue Parisian does not look stylish, but stylishly-blase about couture. A big part of the blame for this mess, I believe, is the academic stuff they've been culturally force-fed for so long. Big name Deconstructionist theorists and writers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucoult celebrate the fact that nothing in this world can be axiomatically proven. Writer Marcel Proust, who goes on endlessly about the depth of his feelings for things, wrote the most beautifully unmoving, devoid of passion prose ever read by human eyes. However, Hope springs eternal in the human soul. I was greatly relieved to see that in the famed Pere Lachaise cemetery that the tombstone of Oscar Wilde was literally covered with red lipstick smears and smooches by adoring fanatics, while the tomb of Proust was impeccably well-tended and antiseptically clean.

The reason I prefer Plateia Exarchia to anything Paris has to offer is that it's an older culture, by many centuries, but has reached the Chaucerian ideal of "having the same self-soverignty over it's wife as over its lover." It's not trying to be a super romantic-stud or sensitive, self-deprecating esthete: junkies look like junkies, girls wear jeans because they feel sexy in them, metal kids hang-out in bars and play loud music. Putanas have a sense of humor and don't act like angry praying mantises in mini-skirts and hip boots. Don't get me wrong, you can spend a lifetime in Paris and not see everything it has to offer: the metro system is impeccable, the cabarets are mind-blowing, jazz clubs are everywhere, and there are cafes every ten meters on the street. The ice cream and sweets are, and I'm talking to you, the person holding this newspaper, more than your brain can handle in the taste-ecstasy department. You can practically hear your hypothalamus groan in pleasure with every spoonful of almost any confection.

Alice Cooper once said that he and his early band were never interested in being big headline stars. They were trying to be the freak show next to the big circus. Their idea was to be the Guignolesque forbidden snack before the main course. Ironically, they went on to become one of the biggest acts in the rock music business for many years. They took the sideshow and expanded it, but always with the heart and soul of a cheap carnival act and nothing more. Conversely, Van Halen was a bar band that eventually became a stadium band, but changed mentalities. They thought themselves into a megalomaniacal mindset, and artistically crashed when their singer, David Lee Roth, split for a solo career.

Paris and Exarchia are similar in nature to the Alice Cooper/Van Halen paradigm. Paris is a big show trapped in the body of a big show. All that is left for it to do is accumulate more stuff. Exarchia is a freak show that shows funky, wise, tired amusement to the big show next to it. Alice Cooper would dig Exarchia. Of this I'm sure. Tell your kids I said so.