

Phenomenology of the Buckethead

The other side of the face: the origins

A 'chronovisor' would allow us to trace back the use of the mask and of the facial and body ornamental techniques from the onset of civilization, something that today is still visible in the indigenous populations which never mingled with society. For the indigenous mind, coloration is the face or it rather creates it. As Lévi-Strauss wrote, only color endows man with his being social, his human dignity, his spiritual significance. In the indigenous culture, the main feature of the mask is markedly theatrical and stands above and outside the body, within a social space, where personal identity is properly constructed.



Buckethead and his guitar

This distinct feature of exteriority is not only the translation or the foundation of the persona's sociality, but it also combines with the ephemeral aspect of fiction. These two elements – ephemera and fiction – converge towards the idea of culture as theatricality, the social life as mise-en-scène in which individuals usually play different roles. The use of masks may therefore be interpreted as a reflection, a theorization of theatricality – a sort of staging of the mise-en-scène, like the expression of a meta-culture, whose object is culture in its radical unstableness.

The disintegration of the self as an artistic escape plan

Man's pathological refusal of parallel realities is called schizophrenia. However, if such refusal stems from an interior conscious state that will be nurtured even after last reflux, we would trip over

characters who play picturesquely with reality, exorcising it and molding a persona through playful and facetious projections of their self.

Let's think for a minute of how western society is structured today. Such a *variation of being* would clearly appear as a practicable option. Perhaps for many people it is the only way to decentralize themselves from a system which, by means of the hammering beat of media, disrupts the idea of a salubrious individualism favoring instead a inconsistent ad superficial selfishness, that feeds on and suffers such storms of media pheromones. We then associate this *escape* attitude to a distinctive artistic mark and we would confront ourselves with outbursts of imagination, both in terms of look and of outcome, especially if we refer to an artist who has never been photographed without a mask for years.

Brian Carrol is Buckethead and Death Cube K (the wicked nuance/take/variation of B.), a cathartic turbine of alter egos and heteronyms. It seems like he moves within an astral kind of alternative reality and that his universe is an omnipresent stage dominated by his figure: thin, tall and self-effaced by a mask devoid of expression, which is now part of his epidermis. The flipped bucket with the KFC logo he wears on his head, is the container in which Kentucky Fried Chicken (a very famous American fast-food franchising) is sold. Due to legal issues with the official company however, he had to replace it with a blank one with the writing *Funeral*.



Brian Carrol, alias Buckethead

If Buckethead disguised himself to conceal inventiveness or lack of skill, we could alphabetically place him in the mainstream list of eccentric guitarists. On the contrary, the ability and mastery he displays make him unique, addressing us to an interpretation of his disguise as a reduction of man to the lowest terms, because of his search for a universal and pure sound of the instrument. For Plotino the *one* is something that "*cannot be any existing reality*" and cannot be the mere sum of all these realities, but "*before all is everything that exists*". On this note, we might define Buckethead as the *one* with the guitar.

The space in which his sound flows varies from an exhausting technicality in which is difficult to zero in on the fingers that morph into ophites (between 16 to 260 bpm on the metronome), to wondrous ballads which would turn pale even the most romantic five chords fan. Paul Gilbert's touch is surely present in Buckethead's formation, the style of his picking is unmistakable, although it is also evident the influence of Yngwie Malmsteen, Boosty Collins (with whom he played many times), Shawn Lane and Angus Young. Nevertheless, any of these styles is didactically replicated.

The imaginative world that unravels before his sound is a blend of horror elements and the passion for martial arts and robots. A whirl of melancholic slivers of childish memories coupled with an apocalyptic vision of a world populated by androids: a crooked Disneyland where everything can happen (he claims to have been there many times and that it is the place where his dreams and

nightmares become true; after his death, he wishes to be buried among the Disney parks in Orlando, Tokyo and Paris!).



Buckethead in action on stage

The obsession, the fixation with robots is overtly manifested, in the middle of a live performance, whenever he plays the *Giant Robot Theme* with one hand, while the other lets a toy fly (*Johnny Sokko and his flying robot*, a sort of *Golem*), or when he flutters in his breakdance steps – like an android throbbing with controlled beats. During the interludes instead, he could either swing perfectly the *nunchaku*, or give puppets and candies to the audience. This also took place while he was touring with Guns'n'Roses when Buckethead joined the band: a smart move by Axel, who, having introjected the character, left him his *own* space inside the band's concerts.

Rock's Leatherface

Since there is no drab lack of content both in Buckethead aesthetic and music, we must seek for the genesis of the camouflaging as explained above, in the visceral passion toward certain horror movies that Buckethead keeps on nourishing.

It was 1974 when Tobe Hooper directed *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, where *Leatherface* appeared for the first time and which indelibly marked the imaginative (eight)teen along with the *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* series. The birth of this character draws inspiration from the famous serial killer Hed Gein, who used to wear masks created with the skin of the face of his victims. The murderous drive, the so called *cruising*, finds its absurd motivation into *diversity*: an unknown illness warps his face and renders him mentally impaired. He is at the mercy of a bumpkin family and of a micro-universe that charges him up with hatred against human beings. Leatherface is an enormous man, endowed with a superhuman power, who expresses himself by means of a tone

and a kind of speech typical of a retarded. He is suggestible and shows his narcissism when he admires himself in front of the mirror with the trophy obtained by his victim.

In some amateurish footage available on-line, Buckethead must be presumably in his bedroom, an untidy, un-cultivated place, which dashes the first element of childishness and outlines the borders of the character, as the bedroom stands for the portion of the world, the other dimension, that remains untouchable for a kid and for that part of man who will stay that way for the rest of his life. In this place he delighted himself giving guitar lessons, via amateurish frames during which he lets Leatherface mask speak, between one bar and the other, declaring his passion for him.

Buckethead hides a presumed, painful shyness behind a masquerade that detaches him from reality, that frames and allows him to live life as some kind of fiction, expressing himself, inspired by the deformed monster, in almost an automatic, abnormal manner. Leatherface suffers his own condition and tries to wear other faces by killing and removing the skin from his victims, in order to fill the hole left by his disfigured face. Buckethead uses the guitar as an extension of his self. Leatherface uses the chainsaw as an extension of his arm. The locations of Leatherface are the house/prison and the wood where he chases his victims and lifts the chainsaw to the sky, in a warm spring-like sunset, like the hammer of Thor. The location of Buckethead is the stage, his scepter is the guitar that he rotates under stroboscopic lights. The idea of perfection lies under the image of imperfection.

Recommended discography: Bucketheadland, Sacrifist (with Praxis), very young with Deli Creeps, Colma, Entrer the Chicken, Decoding the Tomb of Bansheebot, Underground Chamber. A listen to the projects with Brain on one hand and Viggo Mortensen on the other one is strongly recommended, as well as a foray into Drematorium (by Death Cube K).

Equipment: he sways between Ibanez guitars and other brands: Jackson, Gibson, ESP, Steinberger and acoustic Takamine; he is used to play with Peavey amps combined with Marshall and Mesa Boogies heads.

Curated by Fernando Anateti