

[ENTER WITH SUNGLASSES]

"I've come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass. And I'm all out of bubblegum ". . . so if you feel so inclined, please don your sunglasses and we can kick ass together.

What do you think of when I say "anarchy"? For me personally, I think of punk music. Alternative hairstyles and clothing. I also picture chaos. Violence.

I wouldn't describe myself as an anarchist right now, but with such a strong mental picture coming to mind, I did get curious to know what it *actually* is. Could it be as scary as I imagine it to be? As radical? That's what we're going to explore together.

We'll do that with the help of punk music and John Carpenter's 1988 film "They Live." If media has molded our impression of anarchy thus far, then I figure we can use media intentionally to remold that impression on our own terms.

That's why we have the sunglasses, right? We need to see the thing clearly, not how someone else may want us to see it.

Oof...speaking of sunglasses, my head is starting to hurt....I just have so many new ideas in my head, new neural pathways opening up....I'm going to take my sunglasses off for a bit to let these ideas cook. I invite you to do the same (don't worry, we *will* have a chance to put our sunglasses on again later).

[REMOVE SUNGLASSES]

So, why the heck are we playing Simon Says before a sermon at church?! Well. Why did *you* engage with it? It was optional after all. Whatever the motivation was for you, it was enough to compel you to play a non-sensical game that told you to cover your eyes, ears, and mouth in service to some purpose yet to be known (for all you know, there was no purpose. Maybe it was just to make you look ridiculous).

I've got a song lyric for you.

"Sunday morning, brings the dawn in. Its just a restless feeling by my side. Early dawning, Sunday morning. Its just the wasted years so close behind. Watch out, the world's behind you."

This is from The Velvet Underground's 1967 song "Sunday Morning". Its a melancholic and kind of dreamy sounding song to me, and while I've heard that the song might be about waking up after a long night of partying and seeing people walking outside living their lives more mundanely than the singer, I get a different impression for my own life.

Its that feeling of having followed routine all week and the weekend rolls around sometimes and I wonder what I did all week. And I wonder if my whole life will just be that on repeat. Stuck in a system that I did not ask for, one that leaves me empty and exploits the many for the comfort of the few.

In case it wasn't obvious, we're talking about capitalism, "private ownership of the means of production" as the Encyclopedia Britannica defines it. A bunch of things come intertwined with this, patriarchy and white supremacy being just two of this rather questionable BOGO offer.

To answer your unspoken question, though: no, I did *not* have you play Simon Says just for the heck of it. We are plugged into a system that makes it all too easy to follow routine, to obey, and above all not to question things. And while we had some fun earlier, Simon Says is not such a fun game when the people setting the rules require us to play just to live.

If you are willing and able, its time to put those sunglasses back on.

[WEAR SUNGLASSES]

"For an Old Kentucky Anarchist" is a song from the early 2000s by The Orphans. The singer describes a conversation with an old woman at her cabin on a "forgotten mountaintop". She speaks of family, of friends, of mutual care between people. According to the song, she lived in poverty but the woman said she had all she needed between her old guitar and her stories, her memorized recipes, and a "liking to wake up and greet the day".

She doesn't mention the government until the end of the song, saying "Hell, I never cared for any government. I got my Jesus when I feel the time is right." She lived her life caring for others and being cared for by others. Making music and food. And having lived her life this way - in all its ups and downs - she was satisfied. That isnt to say her life and the lives of her loved ones were untouched by oppressive systems. War, poverty, and abuse were all part of her tale, just as those things are unfortunately part of our tales too.

The common refrain I have heard from newcomers to our church is this: I'm looking for a community. I don't know about ya'll, but thats why I show up here too. I came here to care for others and to be cared for by others. To celebrate with others in times of joy, and to grieve with others in times of sorrow. To create and play and learn and teach. I needed a respite from that elaborate Simon Says game outside these doors, to remind myself weekly that there is more to life than that and its okay to demand more and to ask questions....perhaps its even okay to cause some good trouble.

Oof...anyone else getting a headache from all this? Im taking another break from these sunglasses while I let all this settle into my mind. Feel free to do the same if you would like.

[REMOVE SUNGLASSES]

Ah. Thats much better. Sometimes its good to take a break. Kind of like in the movie "They Live." In the movie, these sunglasses are considered dangerous technology. The sunglasses allow the resistance to see that planet Earth has been invaded by ghoulish aliens from outer space. But even when fighting space invaders, the resistance can't keep their sunglasses on all the time because it hurts them and can mess with their brains. So they take breaks. But the technology is always with them, tucked into a convenient pocket or bag, so that they can don those sunglasses at a moments notice.

"This is the Anthem. You are in control of your thinking. You are responsible for your actions. You create the limitations. You know well the situation. " That's from Pailhead's song "Anthem" (coincidentally from the same year "They Live" came out – 1988.)

The ghouls in the movie recruit rich, influential humans to help them deplete the earth's resources for their own gain, resulting in global warming on planet Earth. And guess what? They are wildly successful in this. Only the largely outnumbered resistance is aware of the invasion. Aware of all the subliminal messages in every bill board advertisement, every printed publication, every TV program. Thank goodness the internet and social media wasn't a thing in the '80s, can you imagine?

The resistance tries getting word out to people but are met with disbelief and vitriol. The ghouls and their allies - as you can probably guess - respond with violence. At one point in the movie, the protagonist wrestles a pair of sunglasses onto his friend because he needed him to beware of the danger they were facing. And yes I do mean wrestle, they have a whole fight scene in the alley because the friend doesn't want to be perceived as part of the resistance, as it would surely put a target on his back. It felt safer to obey and conform. To stay silent while the ghouls continue their invasion and destruction of planet earth.

"This is the Anthem. You are in control of your thinking. You are responsible for your actions. You create the limitations. You know well the situation. " With those Pailhead lyrics in mind, let's revisit that Simon Says game from earlier.

Alright so, you know the game now. You know its optional. Lets try this again. Im going to say "Simon says" and you get to do your own thing. Maybe you do the opposite of what I tell you, or you sit there in silence staring at me, or maybe you start doing stretches in the aisle or some other random action. Whatever the heck you decide to do, please consider doing it with a friend or a friend-to-be. I'll count to 10 to give ya'll time to decide with your neighbors how you are going to respond. And remember: you *can* be disruptive (whatever that looks like for you), this *is* a sermon on anarchy after all.

[COUNT TO 10]

- Simon says cover your eyes but NOT with sunglasses!
- Simon says stop covering your eyes!
- Simon says cover your ears and say "lalalala I cant hear you!"
- Simon says stop covering your ears and be silent!
- Simon says cover your mouth!
- Simon says stop covering your mouth!

Now *that's* more like it! With that, I think its time to don those sunglasses one more time, there's a signal coming in from a hacker in the resistance and I want to make sure we can hear him...

[WEAR SUNGLASSES]

He says "The poor and the underclass are growing. Racial justice and human rights are non-existent. They have created a repressive society and we are their unwitting accomplices." In the movie, the hacker goes on to say that the ghouls intentions are to keep humanity lulled

into a state of trance and that so long as the ghouls aren't discovered, they are free to continue their invasion and destruction of the planet without any push back from those irritable humans.

The resistance manages to destroy the transmitter that the ghouls had been using to keep humanity lulled into a trance. Humanity wakes up and discovers the danger at hand. Finally *everyone* sees it.

The movie ends on a cliff hanger. We don't find out how the people of earth respond to the revelation that the planet has been invaded and is under threat of imminent destruction. Who knows how long the ghouls have been there, molding the world around them for their own gain. What could resistance even look like in the face of such far reaching oppression?

In "Practical Anarchism: A Guide for Daily Life", Shuli Branson writes "When it comes down to it, people tend to organize themselves quite well without domination and heirarchy. It takes a certain amount of (constant, everyday violence) to maintain the power structures of the state, the market, and gendered, racialized, and sexual differences, which make us feel dependent on answers coming from above."

You'll notice I haven't defined anarchy for you. If you try looking it up yourself, you'll find - like I did - that anarchy has conflicting definitions. Kind of frustrating, right? Its something that can't quite be pinned down and put into a box. And I think that's the point.

We define anarchy for ourselves. For me, its disrupting the system we've non-consensually been plugged into. It's listening when we aren't supposed to. It's using our voice when we're expected to be silent. It's putting on our sunglasses to see the world around us. It's making art, making music, making our own meaning out of life. It's caring for others and letting others care for us. It's doing things for the sheer joy and fun of doing things, not for profit or power. It's realizing that rules are nothing but paper and words. And yes. It's punk music too.

That's what anarchy means to me. Now it's time for *you* to define it for yourself.