

Cryptome

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Jacob Appelbaum, Rise and Fall of Celebrities

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From: Patrice Riemens <Patrice[at]xs4all.nl>
To: nettime-l[at]kein.org
Subject: <nettime> The 'Jake' Appelbaum case, or the rise and fall of celebrities

The social, and political 'sad demise' (the Hinglish word for death) of Jacob 'Jake' Appelbaum is for me symptomatic, and symbolic, for an epoch definitively coming to its close.

To me at least, it resonates with the words of Rieger and Gonggrijp, years ago at a CCC conference: "we lost the war". The best I can make of it, is that 'we' have increasingly come to looking like our opponents, not to say enemies, in attitude and behavior.

'Jake' features allegedly as the perpetrator of unsavory, reprehensible acts - to paraphrase a James Bond movie, "strictly speaking as a Swiss banker, the numbers are not in his favor" - and the 'hidden assets' are also, for the time being, nowhere to be seen - but he is also a mere actor in a larger scheme of things: the slow descent into the bottom floor of the opposition against the current world order - to use a shorthand, neo-liberal surveillance capitalism.

It has a lot to do with numbers. These, surprisingly, looked to be in our favor. Gatherings were ever bigger, the amount of people and resources mobilized were ever larger. It was probably a delusion. Just as the numbers increased, so decreased actual, personal participation. Larger groups foster 'strong personalities' - and Jake is surely one, for better or worse - and transform the rest, by sheer inertia, into mostly passive followers.

Reading about 'standing ovations' at the end of Appelbaum's speeches (and of many other, sorry, there is no other words, 'scene celebrities') I can't help to be reminded of what one once read in Romanian newspapers during the dictatorship. From memory, and excuse the spelling: "Applause puternice si prolongat - se scanseaza 'Ceau-ces-cu! Par-ti-dul! Ro-ma-nia!" ...

Jake's 'sad demise' is symptomatic, and symbolic of what we long thought, but now cannot longer deny knowing: That grand adventure, the 'hackers movement' as carrier-vanguard of the 'digital revolution', has truly come to an end - quite some time ago. It had already been irremediably corrupted by the security, or

rather, 'securocratic' industry, which has managed to attract so many hackers to its fold, seducing them with toys for the boys and the promise of 'breaking the system' - at the wrong end of the system - that it now looks perfectly mainstream.

And now it would appear to have been betrayed by one of its very figureheads, which should not have been one of its figurehead, not because of personal failures that were bound to manifest themselves, but simply because there should be no figureheads in the first place.

Making the rise of celebrities possible inevitably ensures the creation of a celebrity cult, itself the blueprint for individual failure. We should not have allowed ourselves to grow so big - as an aggregate. In my opinion we should: either revert to the small scale, and there, not behave as a start-up, but go for soft and slow ; or organise very strictly beforehand how we are to organise. Revolving 'presidencies', rotating speakers, revocable mandates and permanent consultations have already been experimented with in history (think of the Paris Commune, 1871). Or better still: we might go for both, but still prioritize the first approach. Maybe in terms of a Bolo'bolo type of scenario (*)

Meanwhile, and that is the larger scheme of things, the 'world as we know it' is fast heading towards its own system collapse. Unfortunately, this is much better realised at the other side of the social, political and economic spectrum than at ours. 'Incidents', like what is occurring around Jacob Appelbaum, are not helpful. But they should not be ignored, and even less minimized, in the name of the common cause.

Let me be clear, just as with Julian Assange, if the stories are true (they unfortunately largely look like to be), any inference of a 'kompromat' is BS. My advice to 'Jake' is to take a (big) step back, and go for a long period of relax and contemplation. By then, and by then only, it will emerge that Jacob 'Jake' Appelbaum delivered a sterling contribution, as a 'worker for the cause', our cause.

The failures of his personality, for which he will have to take the moral blame, are for his victims to ponder and act upon. Though there too, I would advise some restraint, and a truth commission approach. Learn the lessons that have to be learned, at all levels. That would be the best for all of us.

Wishing all well in these unruly times, patrizio & Diiiiinoos! Firenze, June 10, 2016.

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(*) Its author, 'P.M.', now more widely known under his real name Hans Widmer, has re-scripted the scenario - without reneging on the original one - in terms of urban 'neighborhoods'. Cf: The Power of Neighborhoods, New York:

Autonome media, 2016 (<http://www.autonome media.org/node/198>) (caution: it is a very Swiss, even 'Schwyz', story ;-)

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