

[return to updates](#)

# The CIA and Art



*by Miles Mathis*

*Since this is a review, all images here are reproduced under the fair use doctrine of the US. The clothing photographs were taken from [Urban Outfitters website](#), where you can purchase this clothing if it appeals to you.*

Some of my art readers will think I have gone offtrack over the past few years, writing less about art and more about politics. Although it is true I have done that, I wouldn't say it is offtrack. It is just further along the track than most have traveled, and further along than many wish to go. I understand that. I understand that many got off long ago, and I understand why. We all do what we have to do. But if you are still with me on this ride, we will see today that I am ontrack. I will prove it by showing how the tracks of art and politics collide.

The collision we will see today isn't the normal collision we are used to, where art and politics are mashed together to create some fake relevance. We won't see art and politics colliding in order to make a sale or manufacture a market. We will go a step deeper than that: another level down the rabbithole. For when the CIA gets involved, it doesn't get involved mainly to make money. In this case, it gets involved to mess with your mind.

I was led to this paper when I had the recent misfortune to visit an Urban Outfitters. For those of you who don't know, Urban Outfitters is a clothing and decor store mainly for young people. I seem to remember it hitting Austin when I was there in the 90's, but I never went there. It was too punk or "funky" for me and didn't fit my decor—as you can imagine. No longer living in the big city, I have since forgotten about it. But I was strolling around with some younger friends on vacation recently, and we all went into an Urban Outfitters. The styles had only gotten more idiotic since the 90's, and I had to bite my tongue. The men's fashions were even worse than the women's, and it seemed to me that someone was encouraging young men to look as asinine as humanly possible, and to pay for the privilege. Some of the female models on the posters on the walls looked OK in their funky fashions, but the male models just looked like morons. Nothing seemed to fit them. They all had 36 inch chests, with tight shirts that made them look even weaker and more emasculated. Their pants and jackets all

fit poorly and were cut in all the wrong places. They looked sort of like Dr. Seuss characters, without the charm.



\$68 OBEY swim trunks



\$88 shorts

But it got worse. I noticed that several of these poster boys and girls were wearing shirts that said “OBEY” on them, in big black letters. I thought that was odd. Why would it be seen as cool or funky to wear that? You won't be surprised to hear that my first thought was that this was some sort of Orwellian mindgame, played on the young by some big company. And you won't be surprised to find I was right, though you may be surprised at the company.



OBEY triangle



OBEY propaganda

As soon as I got home I researched these OBEY shirts, and I found that they were a product of Shepard Fairey. Some of you will remember Shepard Fairey as the creator of the Obama/Hope poster. As such, he has been the center of controversy from the beginning. The first controversy happened when he was sued by Associated Press photographer Mannie Garcia for copyright infringement. It was claimed that all Fairey did was poster-ize the AP photo, which you can do with nothing more than a computer program. Although Wikipedia still tries to whitewash the incident, Fairey got caught lying to the court and destroying evidence, and he was eventually convicted of both. This is ironic, since all this came out in court after Fairey sued the AP, trying to get a judgment of fair use. But it backfired on him, sort of like Oscar Wilde's lawsuit backfired on him a century earlier.

Fairey weathered an even bigger scandal about a year later, when his friend Yosi Sergant [was forced to](#)

[resign](#) from his post as NEA director of communications. Sergeant had co-ordinated a conference call to arts organizations nationwide, asking them to create art in support of the White House agenda on “health care, education, environment,” etc. You can't do that, of course, since government agencies—and especially the NEA—are supposed to be neutral to the two parties' agendas. Fairey was involved because Sergeant had been Fairey's Obama/Hope publicist and had been given his job at NEA based on that. Sergeant also used the Obama/Hope poster as an example of what was wanted by the White House. Curiously, none of this is mentioned on Fairey's Wikipedia page.

Since then Fairey has been criticized by many artists and critics, which—as I have shown in many previous papers—is rare in this milieu. Art is normally “live and let live” now, and most of the rancor of previous centuries and decades is gone. Not with Fairey. He rubs a lot of people the wrong way, including fellow hip-hop artists and critics who are supposed to love everyone. Even Wikipedia admits Fairey has been attacked by Liam O'Donoghue at *Mother Jones*, Erick Lyle, Benjamin Genocchio at the *New York Times*, Andrew Michael Ford, Mark Vallen, Lincoln Cushing, Josh MacPhee, Faviana Rodriguez, and Brian Sherwin. When Jamie O'Shea defended Fairey, he too was attacked by Sherwin and others, who pointed out that O'Shea had financial ties to Fairey. And Fairey's financial ties don't stop there. Fairey has worked for Saks Fifth Avenue, Pepsi, Hasbro, Netscape, and TIME magazine. In the avant garde, that isn't hip.

Finally, in 2011 Fairey was beaten outside a club in Copenhagen, Denmark. He was told to go home and told that they didn't want his propaganda there. Interestingly, Fairey admits his assailants called him “Obama Illuminati.” This ties into my thesis here. During the same trip, his peace mural was immediately vandalized with the words “No peace,” and “Go home, Yankee hipster.” This is pretty extraordinary, considering that the Danes are extremely peaceful people. I lived in Northern Europe for several years, and the Scandinavians (of whom the Danes are normally considered a part) are not known for brawling. Although they are very big guys, their temperaments are known to be just the opposite of the Vikings, and it is pretty hard to get a rise out of them. Or at least that is the way it was a decade ago. Maybe the giants are awakening. The US has pushed a lot of people too far, and this would seem to include the Danes now. We would expect such a reaction from Libyans or Moroccans, but surely not from Danes.

That was all strange enough, but in my opinion it is the unanalyzed OBEY GIANT “guerrilla marketing” of Fairey that gets us behind the curtain. Fairey tells us that the idea for the OBEY sign came from John Carpenter's 1988 movie *They Live*. The main character in that movie is given special glasses that allow him to see subliminal messages everywhere, the most prominent of which is OBEY. The rest of the movie is about the character's fight against the control grid he can now see clearly. So Fairey is implying that his OBEY clothing line is a reaction against the control grid, by bringing it out in the open. But is that true? Let's look a little closer.

The OBEY GIANT campaign spun out of Fairey's early “Andre the Giant has a posse” poster campaign, which Fairey initiated in 1989 while a student at the Rhode Island School of Design. We have never gotten a rational explanation of that campaign. Why Andre the Giant? Fairey tells us the posse idea came from rappers who also had posses, but why Andre the Giant? Most people will fail to see anything clever, subversive, or otherwise meaningful about “Andre the Giant has a posse.” It makes no sense until you discover Andre was Jewish, and so are all the other players in this saga. We have known that Yosi Sergeant is Jewish, since he makes no effort to disguise it. But Fairey is also Jewish, or it would appear. The internet seems to be running interference on this topic, since not only are Fairey's roots and upbringing never mentioned, Andre the Giant's are censored as well. They tell us Andre was French, of Polish and Bulgarian roots, but admit his real name is Roussimoff. That is a

Russian name, and further research shows that Andre was a Russian Jew. Although that fact was scrubbed off Wikipedia, it remains [on some online encyclopedia entries](#). We also know that Fairey went to Idyllwild Prep School near Palm Springs, which—being an arts, music and drama school near Hollywood—naturally draws the children of many prominent Jewish families in the arts and media. We also find that Fairey worked with Helen Stickler at Rhode Island School of Design. She produced a film short about Fairey and the Andre the Giant posters which appeared at Sundance in 1997. There is no information on her roots online, but anytime you see a filmmaker with the name Helen Stickler, you can be fairly sure she is from a family of German Jews.

The Jewish angle helps us explain why Fairey chose Andre the Giant, and that in turn will help us understand other things. Without this information, it is nearly impossible to understand why anyone would think Fairey was an interesting subject for a film short, or why Sundance would agree to show it. It is a complete waste of celluloid, and only the fact that all these people had connections explains any of this.

We are told that the OBEY line evolved from the Andre the Giant posters, but we see no connection. The threat of a lawsuit from the WWF (Titan Sports) forced Fairey to drop Andre from his posters, so Fairey developed a giant stylized face—which looks nothing like Andre—connected to the word OBEY. Art critic Robert L. Pincus has explained the poster this way: "[Fairey's work] was a reaction against earlier political art, since it delivered no clear message. Still, 'Obey' was suggestively anti-authoritarian."

Was it? Before we unwind that, let us unwind this strange quote from Pincus. Was Fairey's work a "reaction" against earlier political art? In other words, did Fairey purposely choose an ambiguous sign in order to react against previous art, which was less ambiguous? As we will see, it is more likely Fairey chose an ambiguous sign to prevent his audience from reading his real intention. Fairey has also quoted Marshal McLuhan's "The medium is the message," which does the same thing. Of course McLuhan also massaged the medium, but Fairey re-massages it, making you think he is going a different direction when he is really going the same direction. Fairey is not reacting against anything. He is acting just like he is instructed to act.

We are told that the OBEY sign, with or without the GIANT sign, is anti-authoritarian. But is the fact that a lot of young people are wearing shirts with the words OBEY on them—without knowing anything about the artistic, historical, or "anti-propaganda" significance of all this—really anti-authoritarian? Or is it just the excuse to get the word OBEY up everywhere? Fairey and his promoters have many stories for the OBEY sign, justifying it as the opposite of what it is; but at the end of the day what we have is a lot of impressionable, poorly educated young people wearing clothing that says OBEY. The subliminal effect of that is not anti-authoritarian, it is authoritarian. OBEY means OBEY, and no amount of pseudo-philosophy or art-speak can change that. It would appear that once again, the authorities have achieved an *overt* campaign of mind control by dressing it up as its opposite. Young people are being told they are more free by wearing signs that say OBEY. [Remember, Urban Outfitters was originally called Free People, and that is where that brand name came from.] If we saw this happening in Russia or China, we might be able to unwind it. But when it happens here, it passes without comment. Which just proves the success of the overlying scheme. The control is not even subliminal. It is hidden in plain sight. You don't need special glasses to see the word OBEY. You just need some residual level of self-determination to see it for what it is, and they know most people don't have that. The success of the campaign is proof of the campaign's success. The medium is the message. Everything is believed except that which is true. Everything is seen except that which is visible.

To dig even deeper, we can go to Fairey's website at [obeygiant.com](http://obeygiant.com). It is subtitled "Worldwide Propaganda Delivery." Note that: not Delivery *from* Worldwide Propaganda, but Delivery *of* Worldwide Propaganda. He is admitting what he is doing in plain sight, and trusting that you can read everything but that which is right in front of you.

If you then click on "about," you find Fairey stirring your mind with the philosopher Heidegger and the philosophy of Phenomenology. He needs to divert you with big words back into your trance, so that you don't realize that everything is on its head here. Unfortunately for Fairey, I was a philosophy major, and I can see right through this. Fairey tells you that Heidegger describes Phenomenology as "the process of letting things manifest themselves." Fairey then says, "Phenomenology attempts to enable people to see clearly something that is right before their eyes but obscured; things that are so taken for granted that they are muted by abstract observation."

No, phenomenology is the study of subjective experience, as opposed to numenology, the study of the objective, real, or pre-experienced. Fairey is twisting the word to suit his own purposes. He does that by first trying to make you think he is an intellectual—someone who knows more than you about these things. This makes you tend to accept his new delineations. He then talks about seeing clearly, when his purpose is just the opposite. He is trying to hide from you his real intentions. As we have seen, what is "muted by abstract observation" is his real intent with the word OBEY. His intent is direct. It is *not* abstract. It is straightforward and completely normal. So to prevent you from seeing the word OBEY as the word OBEY, he has to manufacture a complex symbolism that is anything but direct. He has to get you looking under rocks and between words for meaning, when the meaning is right in front of you. Pseudo-philosophy is the perfect way to do that, since it immediately convinces you the world is more complex than it is. It intellectualizes everything, confusing your mind. In short, Fairey is selling you on and educating you in a mode of thinking that inverts all common sense. You look for meaning everywhere except where it is.

Fairey tells you he is "manufacturing quality dissent since 1989." That is curious, since you should not have to *manufacture* dissent. Dissent should arise naturally, with no need to manufacture it. Remember, Fairey is again borrowing here—he has been called a master of plagiarism. He is borrowing from and perverting Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, which was a study of how the CIA, the media, and other government agencies create consent by dishonest means. By Chomsky's meaning, to "manufacture" is to create by inorganic or unnatural means. It is a *forced* creation. So for Fairey to admit he is manufacturing here is telling. But it isn't dissent he is manufacturing, it is consent cloaked as dissent. A large part of modern art always has been this cloaking of consent under a false curtain of seeming dissent. Modern art has never been progressive, it has only *seemed* progressive. In most cases it is far-right propaganda posing as far-left progressivism. But that is another paper.

You will say, "Fairey may be inverting things for his own purposes here, but why do you think he is CIA? Do you have any evidence of that? Isn't he just another creep trying to make a dollar and get famous?" We rarely get direct evidence of the CIA, since they are covert. But if someone looks CIA and acts CIA, they are probably CIA. The things we have seen Fairey doing are things the CIA does. When it works domestically, the CIA—and other intelligence agencies—manufactures events. Since they are an arm of the government, they manufacture events in the favor of the government. "Hip" kids wearing T-shirts that say OBEY is obviously part of a larger event that is in the favor of the government, and I don't think you need to have studied Orwell to understand that. It is to the government's benefit, and no one else's, that young men and women should think they are progressive when they are regressive, that they should think they are cool for wearing openly fascist signage. It can

only be propaganda when the tag inside the shirt says Free People and the tag printed on the front of the shirt says OBEY. Likewise, the government has convinced the young that it is cool to be utterly emasculated and de-feminized, to be drugged-out and nearly catatonic, to know nothing, and to be emotionally retarded. The fashions of the youth, the music, the drug culture, the false sexualizing of everything while destroying healthy sex: all these things work to the same end.

We are told by the culture critics and hired talking heads that this destruction of the youth is an outcome of over-permissiveness, 60's liberalism, hippie culture, media influence, and so on. But only the last is true, and it isn't true for the reasons they say. We are told the "liberal" media has ruined the youth, but although it is true the media have ruined the youth, the media has never been liberal. Even in the 1960's, the media was controlled by the government, and the government isn't and wasn't liberal. The governor of California during the hippie movement was Ronald Reagan, and no one has ever accused him of being liberal. If the most liberal state in the union wasn't really liberal then, you can be sure none of the other states were either. J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI was running large swaths of the federal government in the 60's, and he also wasn't liberal. As for now, the idea of a liberal media is pure propaganda, spread by agents in disguise like Rush Limbaugh. As Noam Chomsky has shown, the media—like the rest of the country, both Republican and Democrat—is (or is convinced to be) pro-war, anti-union, pro-security state, pro-secrecy, and pro-big government. That isn't liberal. Some parts of the media are pro-choice, pro-gay marriage, and things like that, but those tangential beliefs don't make a pro-war fascist into a liberal. Those issues don't make a rabidly pro-Statist press liberal.

And, as it turns out, the government has been found to be promoting pro-choice, gay marriage, and other things for its own reasons, reasons no one would call liberal. Abortion is simply a means of population control, and the new governments of the world have decided they want that, in any and all forms. The government is pro-choice for purely practical reasons. As for gay marriage, it tends to the same end: population control. It also acts just like the fashion trends to emasculate boys and de-feminize girls. The government wants men to be weak and women to be sexually confused, and both the fashions at Urban Outfitters and the promotion of gay marriage achieve that end. In other words, although the logical thing for a liberal government to have done would be to have quit demonizing gays, what we have seen instead is that the government has gone from discouraging homosexuality to *promoting* it. Why would it do that? Nothing wrong with homosexuality—it has always been around—but why promote it? Because it achieves the ends of the government. The government prefers to rule over men who cannot resist it. It prefers that all young men not in the army be pale, skinny young men with 36" chests and manicured fingernails. So that is what it promotes in fashion posters, Hollywood movies, and on TV. If promoting homosexuality accelerates that end, then the government will promote homosexuality. The government actually doesn't give a damn about equal rights or fairness, for if it did we wouldn't be living in the world we are living in. The government now promotes homosexuality and gay marriage, but not because it likes gays or likes marriage. It promotes them because through both it can promote the emasculation of civilian men and population control. It is not hard to understand or to see, so the fact that neither liberals nor conservatives in the media ever state it this way is telling. Once again, you are told every side of every story, except the side that is true.

You will say, "That may be, but it has nothing to do with Fairey. The odds of Fairey being CIA are very slim." Are they? Since we know how to do math, let's calculate the odds. The government itself gives us the figures to do this calculation, though they assume we won't be able to do it. The CIA's own newspaper, the *Washington Post*, published an article in 2010 with the title "[Top Secret America: A Hidden World, Growing Beyond Control.](#)" In the article, we find

\* Some 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States.

\* An estimated 854,000 people, nearly 1.5 times as many people as live in Washington, D.C., hold top-secret security clearances.

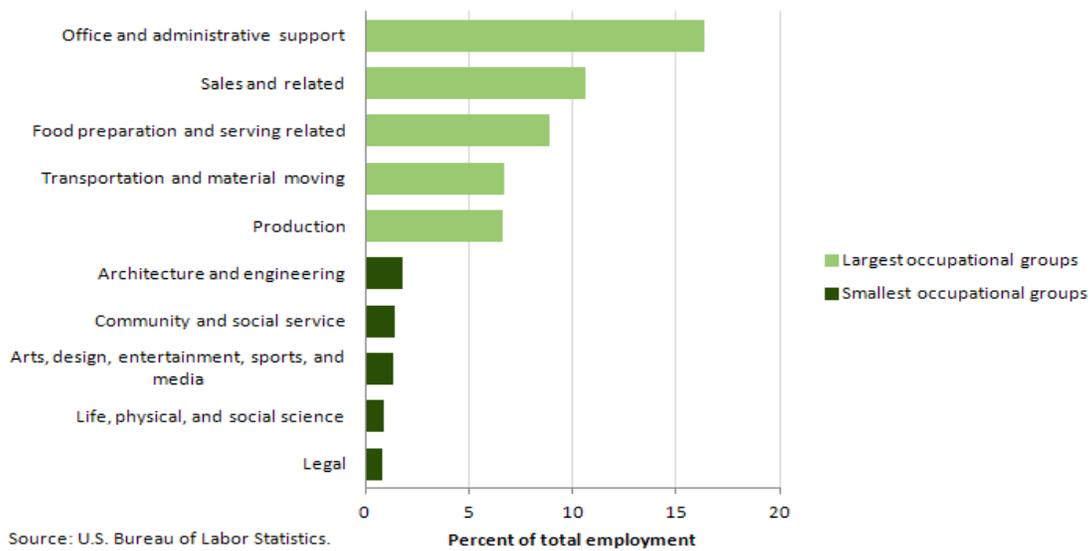
\* In Washington and the surrounding area, 33 building complexes for top-secret intelligence work are under construction or have been built since September 2001. Together they occupy the equivalent of almost three Pentagons or 22 U.S. Capitol buildings - about 17 million square feet of space.

That sounds frightening enough, but the numbers have been massaged. They are hiding the whole truth by telling a partial truth. The article is about *domestic* intelligence, so these numbers don't include American citizens working for intelligence, but who are living abroad. Since the CIA is not supposed to be active domestically (which is a joke), we may assume that a large percentage of their agents and workers are not included in these numbers. We have no hard numbers to work from here, but if we assume that only 2/3rds of all those in intelligence are included in these published domestic numbers, then we have to start by taking the number 854,000 one-third higher. Which takes us to the number 1,281,000. Next, we have to notice that they are only telling us those in intelligence who have top-secret security clearances. But only a fraction of workers in intelligence have top-secret security clearances. Security is divided into controlled, confidential, secret, top-secret, and compartmented. Even Wikipedia admits, "There are far fewer individuals with TS clearances than Secret clearances." Since most work falls into the lower categories, top-secret clearances may be issued to only 1/5<sup>th</sup> of all workers. Which brings our number up to 6,140,000.

How big is that number? Well, it means that about 1 in 25 of those employed the US is working for intelligence.\* So even in a small town of 5,000, you are surrounded by about one hundred spooks. In a city of a million—like Austin, San Francisco, or Indianapolis—you are surrounded by 20,000 spooks. And in someplace like Los Angeles, you can expect to be surrounded by over 150,000.\*\*

Or we can look at it another way. If you look up the largest employers in the world, you will find the US Department of Defense at the top, with 3.2 million workers, including active military and reserves. That is almost a million more than the Chinese military, which should surprise you given that the US has a population about ¼ that of China.† But you now see that US intelligence, which doesn't make the list because it is secret, is almost twice as large as the entire Department of Defense. The DoD is 3.2 million, and we just calculated Intelligence at 6.1 million.

**Percent of total U.S. employment for the largest and smallest occupational groups, May 2012**



Since [according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), only 2% of the workforce works in arts, design, entertainment, sports, and the media, less than 3 million work in that sector.\* Which means the intelligence communities could own absolutely everyone in that sector and they wouldn't even be half full. Of course we don't know how the intelligence community fits into the BLS statistics, since they aren't included, but we must assume that a large percentage of that sector *is* in fact controlled by intelligence. Due to its power in communication, that sector would be the first the intelligence communities would want. And if you study the chart, you will see that the intelligence community would have little interest in the larger employment groups above the arts. It would have no interest in office support, sales, food preparation, production, and social service, and only a small interest in transportation and engineering. But it has to be getting its 6 million from somewhere. Even if intelligence completely owned the sciences and the law as well as the arts and media, that wouldn't get it up to 6 million.

So you begin to see that the odds of Shepard Fairey being connected in some way to intelligence are actually quite high. Even before we study the facts surrounding him, the odds are quite high. The odds are very high that *any given person* who is successful in the arts, media, or entertainment is connected to intelligence, but Fairey's personal history makes it all but a certainty. His time at Idyllwild and RISD, his being profiled at Sundance for no good reason, his invention of the OBEY line of fashions, his work on Obama propaganda, and his continuing promotion by mainstream art galleries despite being *persona non grata* in his own field—all this points at the influence of intelligence. Not Fairey's own intelligence, which we have seen little evidence of, but of government intelligence, which loves guys like Fairey for its low-level public relations work. He is (probably) from Jewish money but doesn't look it, which gives him immediate connections in the arts and media as well as plausible deniability. He is attractive enough to be photographed without breaking the camera, but not so attractive that he becomes suspicious. He is outspoken enough to take care of himself in most situations, but not so outspoken that he expects to be independent. And most of all, he is ambitious without being talented, moral, or scrupulous. This means he will do what he is told as long as they dangle the right fish in front of him. In this way, he is like tens of thousands of other people in the arts and media, who make up the ever-growing ranks of intelligence assets. In fact, we may assume there are very few people in the arts or media that have enough talent or self-respect to refuse the intelligence

offers they come upon sooner or later. Even more, we may assume that those who refuse find no place in the company, and no place in the arts or media. Which you have to admit explains quite a bit.

Some readers will fear for me, thinking it is against the law to out an agent of the CIA. What if I am right and Fairey really does work for the CIA? Aren't I opening myself up to prosecution? No. It is against the law for government employees to out agents, or for agents to out each other. It is not against the law for citizens to resist propaganda, or to tell agents to leave them alone. These intelligence agents aren't even supposed to be active in the US. Most of these domestic spying and propaganda programs aren't legal to begin with, so exposing them can't be illegal. The *Washington Post* pretends in its article that there is nothing we can do to counter the rise of the intelligence state, but there is actually a lot we *can* do. We can start by exposing the illegal programs and outing the illegal agents. We can tell them we can see right through them and suggest they go peddle their mindgames in Russia or somewhere. Protecting your own mind from pernicious outside influence should never be illegal, and the moment you become convinced it is, is the moment you have lost your mind.

\* Out of a current workforce of 156 million.

\*\*You will say that is twice too much, but because of Hollywood and other big institutions in LA, the percentage is about doubled. The same can be said of New York and Chicago, which are spook central. Only DC has a higher percentage of intelligence workers than these big cities.

†And, although the US has a quarter the population of China, it outspends China on defense 10 to 1. No one is attacking China, are they?