

Spark #1.04 - Listen. Watch. Make.

- Henry Warwick

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If you've read my column before, you've probably wondered why this column is called SPARK. It's a gesture to a propaganda organ of the old Soviet Union, ISKRA. I'm no communist, by any stretch — my Marxian theory runs more towards Groucho than Karl. But I remember in my old college days an essay by Lenin I read in one of my political theory classes- What Is To Be Done? That question has haunted me ever since, and I think it should haunt everyone and anyone who is creative. If it did, and if creative people thought about the deepest implications of that question, I would hazard to guess that we'd be surrounded by higher quality cultural objects, and lead happier more fulfilled lives.

So, consider this column a propaganda organ of the Creative. Ask yourself "What Is To Be Done?" Don't answer with some snide remark like "Laundry" or "Lunch". And don't hide behind your post-modernist irony, for this question is too vast and problematic. Your irony can't protect you here. You have to look at what you are doing, and you have to pay very close attention to your deepest intentions.

And if you haven't any "deepest intentions", what then? Then acquire some perspective.

Example: The galaxy we live in is composed of hundreds of millions of stars, and it is very likely that we may be the only creatures in it that make art, music, dance, etc. And there is a non-zero probability that we may very well be the only creatures in the entire universe who wear bow ties and find some bizarre measure of solace in front of a stack of Marshalls turned up to eleven. So, what you do is what our galaxy, and indeed, our entire infinite Universe, is aware of in the instance of what is commonly referred to as "You", here on this tiny green planet of day timers.

The Universe Depends On You. You Matter.

You truly do matter. No one else has your perspective, your history, your insight into the human condition. It's a matter of what you are going to do about it, and that brings us back to Lenin's question, "What is to be done?"

Obviously, Lenin's answer was to go pump a great big bag of bullets into the Russian ruling classes and feebly force the hand of history in Russia to develop something vaguely resembling a socialist society and closely resembling a dictatorship of the proletariat, or simply, a dictatorship. Regardless of how one feels about his aims, theory, or methods, that was what he believed he needed to do. It's not how I would choose to spend my time, but it's what he believed in, and it changed the course of, and helped contribute to, one of the most wretched centuries in the history of civilization. So I have to answer his question quite differently. I think I would answer:

Listen

Watch

Make.

Listen with a clear mind. Watch with open eyes. Make with a pure heart. Work from a suitable model of effort with right intention, and don't stop working that way. We are very much what we do, and if all we do is work our indentured servitude to our mortgage and car payments, we really haven't done much except give money to a bank, keep our lawn clean, and cruise around in some gas guzzling death monster with some active fantasy that such extravagance really matters at all. Or, you might be sweating out that mortgage and paying off that minivan because through some weird mistake of birth, you have found yourself living in an American suburb and you're heroically raising a brood of innocents in this world of darkness and many changing shadows.

Which is the accurate assessment? Only you can honestly say. But it's important that you do Honestly Say. And Say It Now.

Then Listen

Watch and

Make.

You are a great artist. Even if you have never lifted a brush, or strapped on that geeetar, or beat out that rhythm on a drum- you are a great artist. Everything you do is something you have fashioned, and as each fashioned thing speaks of its changing, so, too, it speaks of you. You are the nexus of a complex series of electro-chemical workings, a community of organisms and a constellation of feelings and ideas. You are completely unique.

Listen

Watch

Make.

It's the SPARK of creativity - it's that one bit of human dignity that makes us more than what we are in our weakest moments and the one saving grace that makes our greatest moments possible. Now - answer "What Is To Be Done?" for yourself.