



‘The Dick Joke Is Not Always Your Friend’

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The recently-deceased Harold Ramis’s beloved anti-authoritarian comedies of the late 70s and the 80s were pop trojan horses of then-emerging right-wing cultural values, writes former Harper’s Magazine columnist Thomas Frank at Salon.

Frank begins: “Start with the first really great movie Ramis had a hand in writing, ‘National Lampoon’s Animal House.’ Watching it again today, I didn’t think so much of righteous defiance, or underdogs and outsiders; I thought of Wall Street. This particular iteration of Ramis’ martinet vs. slob theme pits—as everyone knows—a prissy, militaristic college fraternity against a fraternity where the boys like pleasure, which is to say, where they drink beer and throw parties and actually enjoy getting laid. If this basic formula doesn’t strike you as particularly rebellious or even remarkable, that’s because it isn’t: in its simple anarchic assertion of appetite, it’s the philosophy of the people who rule us. Everyone is a fraud in this world; learning is a joke; sex objects are easily conned; Kennedy-style idealism is strictly for suckers; and in one telling moment, fratboy 1 remarks to fratboy 2, who is crying over the trashing of his borrowed automobile by fratboy 1 and company, ‘You fucked up. You trusted us.’ What popped into my mind when I heard that line was that other great triumph of the boomer generation: the time-bomb investments of 2008; Goldman Sachs peddling its ‘shitty deals’ to the naive and the credulous.

“Drink, take and lie: translate it into Latin and it could be the motto of the One Percent. It is no coincidence that P. J. O’Rourke, who was editor of National Lampoon when ‘Animal House’ was made and is currently a wisecracking critic of liberalism at the Cato Institute, recently declared that the release of the movie in 1978 marked the moment when his generation ‘took over’ and started to make the world ‘better.’ (That O’Rourke chose to write this for the American Association of Retired Persons is a particularly poignant detail.) It is also no coincidence that the fraternity at Dartmouth which served as one of the models for ‘Animal House’ has of late become a kind of pipeline into the investment-banking industry, nor should it surprise anyone that Wall Street is home to a secret Animal House-style fraternity of its own, a place where the anarchic captains of finance come together to slurp likker and howl their admiration for their beau ideal: the self-maximizing asshole . . . who got bad grades in college.”