

THE HUNTING PARTY

WHY UNCERTAINTY IS MAKING HUNTERS IMPORTANT AGAIN

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A COMPANION PIECE TO *THE HUNTING PARTY*

The Celebrity Conspiracy

Stephen Fry, Vladislav Surkov and the organisation that does not exist

A deliberately tongue-in-cheek companion piece to *The Hunting Party*. Starting with Vladislav Surkov, Adam Curtis and one suspiciously well chosen phrase, it asks whether culture can coordinate dissent without a committee, a manifesto or anybody being in charge. The sources at the end document the public record and the intellectual lineage, not a real celebrity conspiracy.

COMPANION ESSAY / AUGUST 2026

THE CONCEIT

I have discovered that there is a vast international conspiracy of celebrities plotting to take down the establishment from the inside.

I am obviously not being entirely serious, but wouldn't it be funny if it were true? More irritatingly, the longer I think about it, the less completely ridiculous it becomes. The organisation is chaired by Stephen Fry, who has not been informed of his appointment and would, I strongly suspect, tell anybody who asked him to run a secret international cultural insurgency to fuck off. This is precisely why he is right for the job.

The organisation itself has no headquarters, constitution or membership process. Nobody joins and most of its senior officers are unaware that they hold positions. I have assigned the roles retrospectively, based on what each person appears to do in public and the particular part of the establishment they seem best equipped to annoy.



THE C.C.C.C.C.

COVERT CELEBRITY CULTURAL COMMAND & CONTROL

NO HEADQUARTERS / NO MANIFESTO / NO COMMENT

It started with Vladislav Surkov. One night after a long day, I turned on the television and Charlie Brooker's *Screenwipe* was on. Adam Curtis was explaining the extraordinary way Surkov manipulated Russian politics, describing somebody who had brought ideas from conceptual art into the centre of government and would support apparently contradictory groups at the same time, sometimes even making people aware that he was doing it. The objective wasn't simply to make people believe one version of reality. It was to make reality itself harder to establish.

Then Curtis called Surkov 'a hero of our time'. There is a reasonable explanation, because *A Hero of Our Time* is an 1840 Russian novel by Mikhail Lermontov whose central character is very deliberately not a conventional hero. Curtis was probably making an ironic literary reference, but the wording stayed with me until a considerably less responsible interpretation occurred: perhaps it was a coded message.

Surkov is therefore the organisation's Director of Strategy and Misdirection, although the conceit immediately presents a problem: if anybody in this imaginary organisation were going to turn out to be a double agent, it would obviously be him.

That thought amused me because the theory has an irritating neatness to it. I have no evidence that Surkov worked for British intelligence, and I am not suggesting that he did. But as a fictional device, somebody who understood destabilisation that well makes an almost absurdly perfect candidate for turning the same machinery back on the system he served. In the logic of the joke, he would be doing to Putin what Putin was doing to everybody else.

THE ORGANISATION CHART

The rest of the organisation is a device for describing different ways of applying pressure. Adam Curtis is Head of Intelligence. He does not gather secrets so much as take information which was already public, arrange it correctly and reveal that it was stranger than whatever the secret explanation might have been. Charlie Brooker runs Broadcast Operations, getting the intelligence into people's homes disguised as entertainment. Doug Stanhope is in charge of Field Operations because he does not petition authority, flatter it or try to look respectable enough to be admitted into the conversation. He stands outside, points out that the building is on fire and explains why the people running it are cunts.

Jenny Holzer is Director of Public Communications. Her work takes the language of power and puts it into streets, buildings and public spaces until it starts behaving differently. The words still look authoritative, but their authority has become unstable. She does with text what Surkov supposedly does with politics, except that she exposes the manipulation rather than concealing it.

Carrie Fisher remains Head of Internal Dissent, a position she retains posthumously because, within the fiction of the conspiracy, OpenAI have created a virtual Carrie from her books, scripts, interviews and lifelong refusal to behave like a manageable celebrity. Virtual Carrie is not permitted to make public appearances or generate new Star Wars dialogue. She has one function. Whenever the organisation becomes self-important, bureaucratic or slightly too pleased with its own cleverness, she explains exactly why it is talking bullshit. She is also the only officer who attends every meeting, which is administratively straightforward because no meetings are ever held.

The technical division is run by white-hat hackers under the reassuring title of Systems Integrity and Counter-Surveillance. Their job is to find the distance between what a system claims to do and what it actually permits, then make the vulnerability visible before somebody less helpful exploits it. Their unofficial motto comes from the 1995 film *Hackers*: 'Snoop on to them as they snoop on to us.' It is an adolescent line from a knowingly ridiculous film, but the principle underneath it is not ridiculous at all. Watching is a form of power, and one defence is to make the watcher visible.

George Clooney and Brad Pitt handle International Relations and Celebrity Air Cover. Their job is to get into rooms the rest of the organisation cannot enter, attract cameras to subjects the cameras would otherwise ignore and make serious activity look sufficiently glamorous that somebody pays attention. None of these people needs to share the same analysis, tactics or politics. The roles describe different ways of seeing a weakness in the prevailing story and pushing at it.

WHERE THE JOKE LEADS

This is where the joke connects back to The Hunting Party. We tend to imagine that collective action requires meetings, leadership structures, agreed objectives, minutes, votes and somebody responsible for sending a calendar invitation. Those things matter when power is being governed, so this is not an argument against democracy. It is a distinction between governance and action. A hunting party does not vote when the prey changes direction because, by the time the committee has approved the response, the moment has gone.

Celebrities, artists, writers, hackers and comedians can operate in something like the same way. One person uses their position to puncture a story, somebody else recognises the opening and pushes it further, and a cultural action becomes a signal, an example or permission. They may never meet, may not like one another and may not even recognise themselves as participants in the same activity. What they share is not a plan but the belief that, having acquired some degree of power, they ought to leave the world better than they found it.

The conspiracy has a longer cultural lineage. The Situationists called one version of it *detournement*, taking material which already belongs to the dominant culture and rerouting it until the old meaning starts working against itself. Culture jamming applies a similar move to advertising, branding and mass media. Rather than defeat the signal from outside, it borrows the signal's authority and changes what it says. That is why a joke can sometimes do more work than a direct argument. It inhabits the existing frame long enough to make the frame visible.

The larger question is what comes after postmodernism. Postmodernism became extremely good at exposing the stories, categories and power structures hidden inside apparently natural reality, but exposure eventually reaches a limit. Once everybody understands that the message has been constructed, revealing its construction no longer necessarily changes anything. Metamodernism is one proposed answer, moving between modern sincerity and postmodern irony. I think the word we settled on was *posthumanism*. Not as a claim that people should be replaced by machines, but as a way of seeing agency emerge through people, technologies, institutions, stories and environments rather than from one sovereign human being at the centre.

Virtual Carrie makes the point literal enough to become uncomfortable. She is obviously not Carrie Fisher. A body of writing processed by a machine cannot restore the person who wrote it. What it might preserve is a function within a larger system: the dissenting voice, the refusal to accept the official version and the instinct to puncture self-importance before it hardens into authority. The agency would not belong entirely to Carrie, OpenAI, the model or the people listening to it. It would exist somewhere between them, which is both the joke and the warning.

The question is not whether Stephen Fry is secretly coordinating these people. It is whether culture has become capable of coordinated action without anybody being in charge. If it has, the hunting party is not an organisation waiting to be founded. It is already an emergent property of the system it is trying to change.

The material underneath the joke

These links support public facts, quotations and the intellectual lineage discussed in the essay. They do not provide evidence that a celebrity organisation exists.

[Adam Curtis, 'Contradictory Vaudeville'](#)

Curtis's 2014 Wipe segment on Surkov, conceptual art and non-linear politics.

[Mikhail Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time](#)

The 1840 novel behind the phrase that started the whole thing.

[Peter Pomerantsev, 'Non-Linear War'](#)

On Surkov, Natan Dubovitsky and the idea of non-linear war.

[Chris Kempt, 'A Hero of Our Time'](#)

The original short piece which preserved the Curtis observation.

[Situationist International, 'Detournement as Negation and Prelude'](#)

The primary text on reuse, rerouting and subversive cultural construction.

[Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance](#)

A useful route into the practice and history of culture jamming.

[Hackers \(1995\) script](#)

Source for the counter-surveillance line. The film is not a security manual.

[The Sentry on Not On Our Watch](#)

Background on the organisation co-founded by George Clooney, Brad Pitt and others.

[N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman](#)

On embodiment, information and the dismantling of the liberal humanist subject.

[Rosi Braidotti, 'A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities'](#)

A concise route into posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism.

[Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'](#)

The nearby, but distinct, argument about what follows postmodernism.



ABOUT THE BOOK

The Hunting Party: Why Uncertainty Is Making Hunters Important Again explores why some people see patterns, risks and possibilities that others miss, and why that kind of mind may matter more again as the world becomes less stable.

mybook.to/TheHuntingParty

thehuntingparty.net