



untearable sheets of paper. The ideas are plentiful, they arrive whenever needed, and are picked up on time. Imagine a tube sucked up into the ceiling. Fed into this process, produced and distributed by the network, richly funded by charmed clients and delighted customers, they populate the world.

MACHINE GUNS IN MILAN

It's the Salone, the world's largest gathering of people who care about the shape of spoons. Amongst the tens of thousands of exhibits - chairs, lights, sinks, speakers - only a handful stand out. Starck has created a frisson with his set of gold and silver machine gun lamp stands. They have a ready-made market in his hotel rooms, restaurants and apartment building lobbies, today's real design showrooms. It's debated whether they're a comment on war, a fetishization of its artifacts, or simply a catchy device.

We're sitting in the traditional lobby of an inconspicuous hotel, with Thierry, Starck's behind-the-scenes design partner, and Jasmine, his beautiful wife. A former fashion executive, she now works with her husband as his director of communications, allowing them to travel everywhere together. At his side in meetings she is precise, protective. In person she's warm and devoted. The pair are conspicuously in love.

Starck dictates his theory around a little table, in between greeting passing friends and colleagues, and we laugh at the story, like children listening

to a professor lecture in a nursery. For all the amusing imagery of humanity's evolution into a 'super monkey', the ideas have force. A voracious student of physics, mathematics, philosophy, we're getting E=MC² for the E! Network, complete with sex, violence and a celebrity scandal in the sky. The allegory uses its punch lines to rail against organized religion's suppression of science, capitalism's exploitation of natural resources and humanity's flaws, and suggest a dialectic view of progress that would make Hegel nod vigorously. It's ha ha funny, but the ideas are serious - a burdensome pairing. I'm reminded of the Ricky Gervais character in 'Extras', famous for a catchphrase, but a deep thinking tormented soul underneath. The difference is that Starck's intelligence bubbles to the top of his persona, like oxygen.

"The difference between animals and us is that we control and upgrade the speed of our evolution. It is astonishing. The products you see are just the symptom of this. The car is no more a functional thing, it is pure Freudian product. Psychoanalytic product. It is not the product that is bad, it's how we use it. The car is not used in a logical way. We don't need to destroy the landscape to make highway, parking. We shall not speak about how many 4x4 go to the country. No! People use them because they are higher. If that's the main parameter - why not make the electric car higher? Perhaps one proposal can be to have a certain type of car, you must prove you need a 4x4 or that you need a seven seater car. You need a car that goes faster - you should show where you live, what is your job, what is your family, and yes yes, ok you can have that..."

Starck implies we're all weak, we need discipline. But he's grown rich and famous feeding our desires. This limits his role to what he can make, and what we'll buy. The only check on how he lives is how he decides to. He confesses to having the couple's convertible Bentley driven hundreds of miles to the South of France so they might occasionally use it whilst visiting their home there. In the same breath he declares "the car is clearly the most adverse flag of capitalism. It is the most advanced symbol of that." He's not a hypocrite, he's human - the condition has inherent contradictions which created civilization and drive our progress. Mrs Fish's love for her egg, Mr Fish's invention of weapons to protect it. Like Kubrick's peace-sign helmet from 'Full Metal Jacket', with "born to kill" written on top. Good has a slight edge over bad, he reasons, else we'd have disappeared. So finally, he's an optimist.

"When oil will disappear the car will change - weight, speed. Cars will change, but it's not a crash. What do we need in the city? No cars. With all the millions spent around the car, we can develop a public transportation. Me, I drive my motorcycle or bicycle just because I don't want to go in the subway because it is a shit, it is incredible shit. I don't want to take the train because it is shit." "I'm obliged to take the plane, even first class because it is a little better, but to go the other side of Paris, the subway is dangerous, it's noisy, it's ugly. With all the money spent around the car, we can have the best public transportation and use it every day with pleasure. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. A good subway we'd done, it's very expensive to do it well. A little complicated to do, but why not?"