



YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. **YAWN** welcomes responses from its readers, especially those of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent to **YAWN** may be considered for inclusion in a future issue. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. Monetary donations are requested to help defray costs. Subscriptions to **YAWN** are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for one year by first class mail. All content is archived at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

ART STRIKE

1990 — 1993

We call for all artists in the U.S. to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their work from January 1, 1990 to January 1, 1993. We call for all galleries, museums, agencies, alternative spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools etc., to cease all operations for the same period.

Art is conceptually defined by a self-perpetuating elite and is marketed as an international commodity; the activity of its production has been mystified and co-opted; its practitioners have become manipulable and marginalized through self-identification with the term "artist" and all it implies.

To call one person an artist is to deny another an equal gift of vision; thus the myth of "genius" becomes an ideological justification for inequality, repression and famine. What an artist considers to be his or her identity is simply a schooled set of attitudes; preconceptions which imprison humanity in history. It is the roles derived from these identities, as much as the art products mined from this reification, which we must reject.

Unlike Gustav Metzger's Art Strike of 1977 to 1980, our purpose is not to destroy those institutions which might be perceived as having a negative effect on artistic production. Instead, we intend to question the role of the artist itself and its relation to the dynamics of power within our specific culture.

Everybody knows what's wrong

We call this Art Strike because, like any general strike, the real reasons being discussed are ones of economics and self-determination. We call this Art Strike in order to make explicit the political and ethical motivations for this attempted large-scale manipulation of alleged "esthetic" objects and relationships. We call this Art Strike to connote and encourage active rather than passive engagement with the issues at hand.

GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM

Art Strike will fail for many reasons, not the least of which is that it's a bad idea. But Art Strike raises a number of questions worth asking. Is there an attitude inherent in self-identification as an "artist" which implies that art-making is in itself a sufficient response to cultural issues? Is there an implication that the "artist" identity somehow absolves one from responsibility for cultural conditions? What are the possibilities for real engagement? This is not meant primarily as a critique of "art for art's sake" but rather as a critique of the perception that a class of artists exists as an independent social class. What are the priorities of the people who are calling for Art Strike? Does Art Strike, as a method for prompting dialogue concerning issues of personal productivity, commodity dynamics and cultural identity, conflict with the needs and priorities of artists who identify themselves primarily as feminists, hispanics, blacks, gays, etc.? Is Art Strike in any form a good idea?

GIVE UP ART SAVE THE STARVING

Imagine a world in which art is forbidden! Art galleries would close. Books would vanish. Pop stars would shed their glamour overnight. Advertising would cease, television would die. We could refocus our vision not on a succession of false images but on the world as it is. A stillness would fill the air. Art has provided us with fantasy worlds, escapes from reality. For whatever else it is, art is not reality. Soap operas, novels, movies, concerts, the theatre, poetry. None of these are real as a starving child is real, as a town without water is real. Art is the glamorous escape, the transformation that shields us from the world we live in. Injustice, endemic disease, famine, war. These are real. Art has replaced religion as the opiate of the people just as the artist has replaced the priest as the spokesman of the spirit. Once men reached inside themselves to find God. Now they find art. We are regulated by our addictions and art has become an addiction. We struggle through life in a drugged dream, searching for escape, for brighter fantasies, longer voyages of imagination, louder music. Another man's life is always more interesting than our own. It is only those who have given up art who can experience the true nature of creation. Now a self-perpetuating elite market art as a commodity for the wealthy who have everything while making the artists themselves rich beyond their wildest dreams. Art is money. It is ironic that the myth of the artist celebrates suffering while it is those who have never heard of art, the poor and wretched of our earth, who truly suffer. To call one man an artist is to deny another the equal right of vision. Paint all the painting black and celebrate the dead art, there is no booze in hell. We turn away from mountains of food that rot in storage while across the globe men grow too weak to eat because it is time for our favorite TV program. We live up to our knees in blood, wasting not only hours but days—whole lifetimes—in the blind belief that art is good, art is pure, art is its own justification—and a nightmare scourges our planet. Until we end famine there will be no peace. Artists are murderers! Artists are murderers just as surely as the soldier who sights down the barrel of a gun to shoot an unarmed civilian. Without art, life would be unendurable! We would have to transform this world. Overnight, one man's dream can become a nation's future—but we do not seize power because we are enchanted by art. Forbid art and revolution would follow: the withholding of creative action is the only weapon left to men. Seeing and creating are the same activity. Those who create art are also creating the starving. In a world in which art is forbidden the deserts would flower. Give up art. Save the starving.

JOINT PUBLICATION

YAWN

P.O. Box 162
Oakdale IA
52319
2056

Art Strike Action Committee
BM Senior
London WC1N 3XX
UK

Art Strike Action Committee
P.O. Box 170715
San Francisco CA
94117

PhotoStatic/Retrofuturism

Audio & Print Culture
911 N. Dodge St.
Iowa City IA 52245

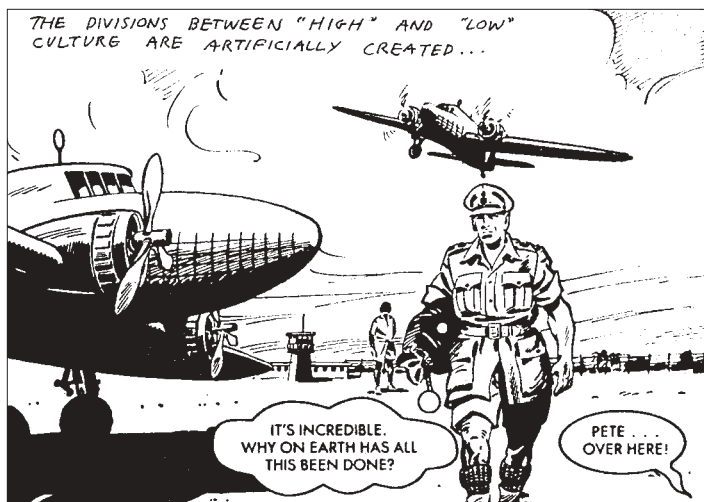
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CONFESSION IN SUPPORT OF THE 1990-1993 ART STRIKE

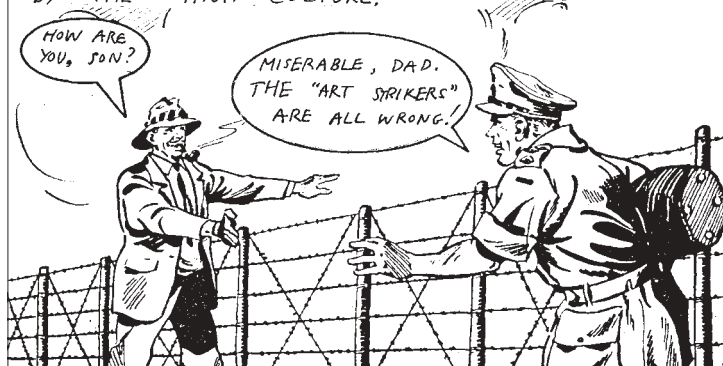
THE ART STRIKE (1990 - 1993) CAN ONLY BE PROPAGATED ON THE BASIS OF A LIMITED IDEA OF WHAT ART IS. IF ART IS EVERYTHING, ACCORDING TO THE DEFINITION OF DADA AND FLUXUS...



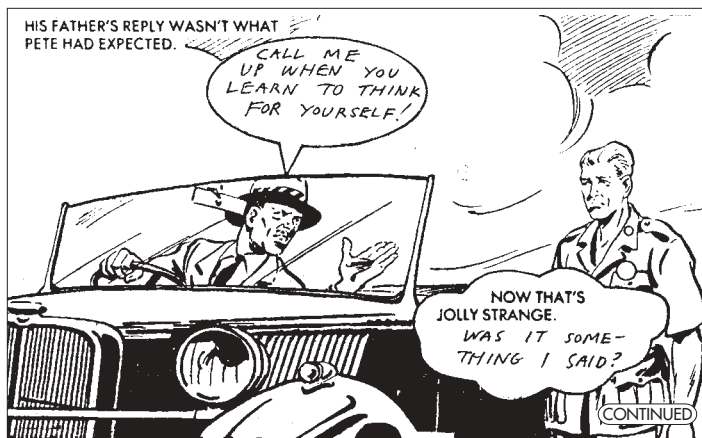
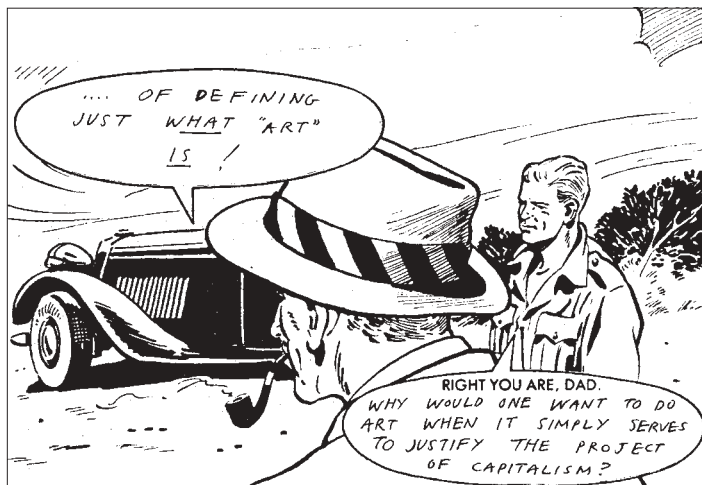
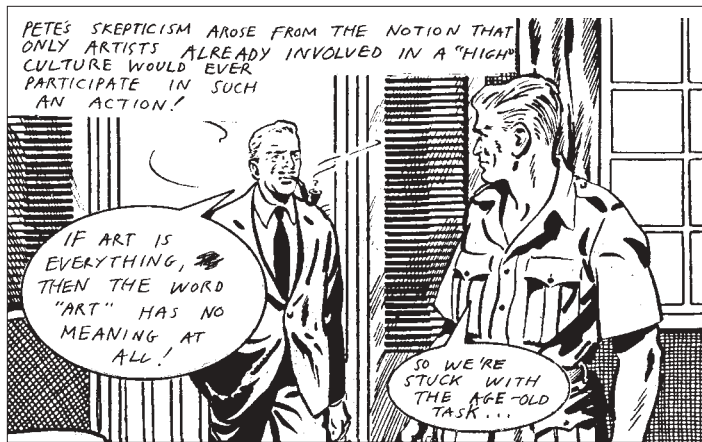
THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN "HIGH" AND "LOW" CULTURE ARE ARTIFICIALLY CREATED...



THIS ARTIFICIAL DIVISION RESULTS IN ELITISM AND A "JUSTIFICATION" FOR THE REPRESSION OF THE "LOW" BY THE "HIGH" CULTURE.



CONTINUED



ART STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEES (ASACs)

ASAC, PO Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117
 ASAC, PO Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203
 ASAC, BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 ASAC, c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork,
 Republic of Ireland
 ASAC, C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay

20 OF THE MOST DIFFICULT, AWKWARD, & SEARCHING QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK ABOUT THE ART STRIKE (1990-1993)

1. What is the Art Strike?

Art Strike is the total withdrawal of all cultural production for a period of 3 years. All artists will cease to distribute, sell, exhibit, or discuss their work between January 1, 1990 and January 1, 1993.

2. What art will be struck?

Art Strike is an assault upon all cultural activity within the modernist and post-modernist traditions.

3. Strike for what?

To dismantle the cultural apparatus.

4. Is this a joke?

Absolutely not. How can you have shows when people don't even have shoes?

5. What is the Art Strike?

Art Strike is the rough undressing of creativity. What an artist considers to be his/her identity is nothing but a divisive set of schooled, snotty attitudes.

6. What's wrong with being an artist?

To call one person an artist is to deny another the equal gift of vision.

7. What will I be if I'm not an artist?

Think of how many people have gotten laid without even talking about making art.

8. What's wrong with making art?

We're living in an isolation tank, only instead of warm water we're bathing in bullshit. Within the information economy, opposition speeds the flow, each statement creates its own negation, context shifts constantly, and the only principle that emerges from the din is the principle of flux itself: consumption.

9. What is the Art Strike?

Silence.

10. What do you expect to

accomplish?

We will step outside of history.

11. Why should I go on strike?

Self-interest.

12. Is this a joke?

Sure: a joke, a fraud, the worst idea ever.

13. What is the Art Strike?

In its origins, just another cocky white-boy spectacle. Now, however, girls are playing too.

14. What's in it for you?

We hope to promote our own careers. Of course, only the Strike's failure will accomplish this, so you can't get out of it that way.

15. Why do so many people hate this idea?

Because they stand to lose everything they don't have and wouldn't deserve even if they did have.

16. Will sex be better in the years without art?

It goes without saying.

17. What is the Art Strike?

Art Strike is the ceremonial mask of a movement away from competitive art and toward a culture without curators.

18. Who's behind it?

Better a thousand movements fail than one leader succeeds. Anyone can organize the Art Strike, many have.

19. Why 3 years?

In the first year, the world will be a field of undifferentiated experience. In the second year figures will emerge from a background. In the third year new perceptual methods will arise.

20. Why must we stop making art?

Because the refusal of artistic identity is the only weapon left to us and the demolition of serious culture the only way ahead.



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CONFESSION IN SUPPORT OF THE 1990-1993 ART STRIKE

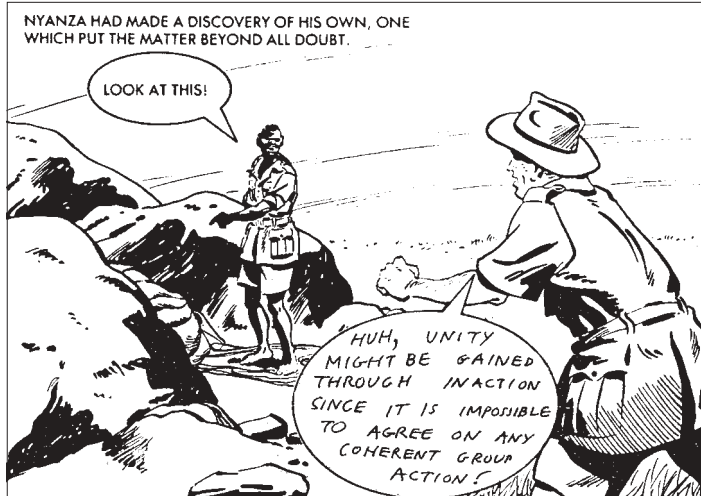
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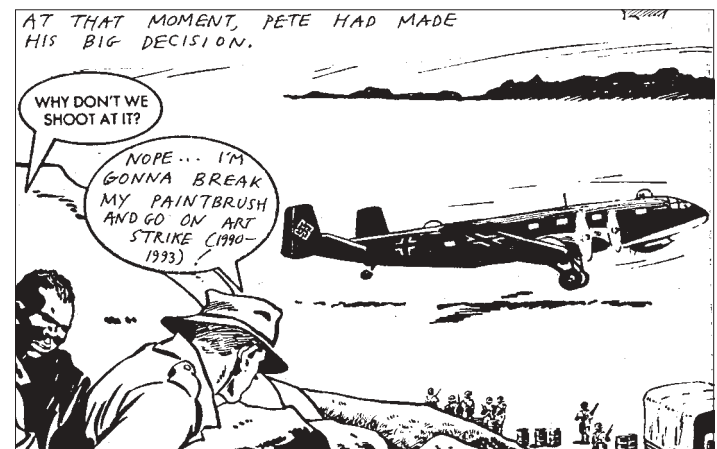
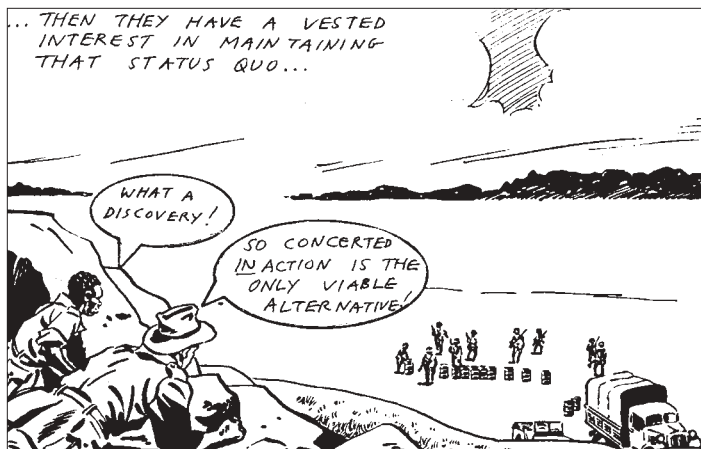
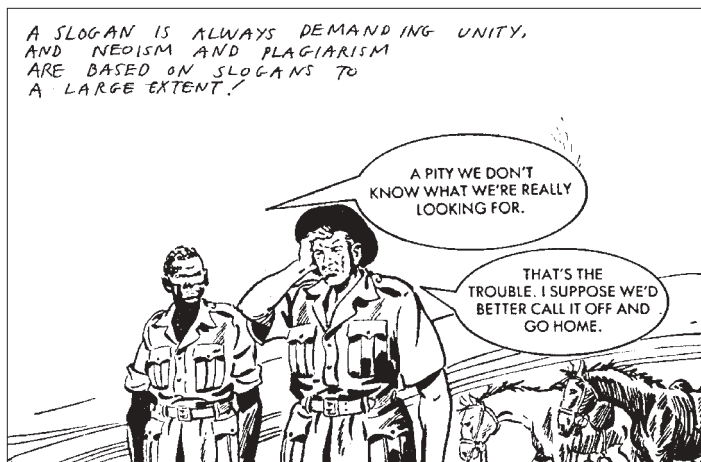
LATER...



*Neoism: a mid-1980s movement which merged Situationism and Fluxus, opposed to originality (through the use of plagiarism) and the myth of individual genius (through the use of multiple names, such as Karen Eliot, which anyone can use and everyone is encouraged to).



CONTINUED



You must decide for yourself whether or not to join the Art Strike (1990-1993)!

Out of Culture and Into the World

After December 31 of this year, there won't be any more poetry readings. Nobody will write poetry. Nobody will print pictures or make art videos. No dance performances will be held, no one will mingle at art openings. Galleries will close or be converted to other uses. A great calmness will settle over the world. Former artists will have more time to cook, correspond. Creativity, freed of traditional constraints, will be channeled into relationships, work environments, community activities. People who never thought of themselves as creative will no longer be intimidated by talented bullies. Life will become increasingly delightful and unpredictable. The rich will have only the art objects of the past to signify their cultural superiority, and their sense of status will grow more desperate and ironic with each passing day.

Plagiarism Made Easy

Plagiarism in late capitalist society articulates a semi-conscious cultural condition: namely, that there is 'nothing left to say,' a feeling made more potent by the theoretical possibility of access to all knowledge brought about by new technologies. The practitioners of much of 'post-modern' theory have tended to proclaim this feeling rather smugly; but if there is nothing to say, they yet demonstrate that there will 'always' be something to sell. On the other hand, there are practitioners active in many disciplines who, recognizing the necessity for collective action demanded by the media such as film and electronic tape, engage in Plagiarism in an attempt to expose and explode once and for all the individualistic attitudes which tend to make all human activity seem redundant and increasingly alienated.



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OWVRAS90-93 (One Woman's Viewpoint Regarding Art Strike 1990-1993)

Conceding many of the points in **YAWN** (particularly those self-evident), and most assuredly acknowledging the pompousness contained in the genetic code of artists, both past present and future, and being aware of the general relevance/irrelevance of all art (depending on who does it, who sees it, who critiques it, who throws up on it, etc.), OWVRAS90-93 would like to brashly put forth another possibility. (After all, this isn't 1990 yet, despite what many of us believe to the contrary). Therefore, there is STILL TIME to promote another way of going about this whole business of trying to determine the role of (if there is one) creativity in any society (much less today's), and whether or not creativity (i.e., art? [unsure]) has any potential for anything, such as ideas to save the world, or to promote art outside of history and thus if it solves anything, not to get the credit for so doing. Thus, it struck this woman (yes) that instead of Art Strike 1990-1993, there should be Forced Art Participation 1990-2001. Still basically undefined, FAP (even the acronym has a kind of strong sound [i.e., empowering] about it) would mean that people would not ditch their tvs, but instead have to write their own shows. On any given night, people showing up at a Royal Shakespeare (or other) production would have to bring substitute scripts and be prepared to play a role or two. And so it would go. People couldn't just go to a Stones concert, they would have to bring their own lyrics, melodies or whatever (some might be interested in playing the air guitar à la Mick Jagger), and participate in the event itself. This means that there would be no admission charges to anything, and thus capitalism's head (ugly to some, not to others), would be removed from the 'scene' (art, in this case). Voilà! Overnight the profit motive would be gone. Art would no longer be money. All artists, which would be everyone, would be sharing equally in the non-return so everyone, i.e., all artists, would be equally poor and suffering. And when famine was a true communal experience, art (through artists?) would perhaps save the day with some creative response. But we would have to stay on our guard, etc.

"The whole point is that life during the strike is going to be more creative, not less."



A Response to the Proposal for Forced Art Participation 1990-2001

At first glance, FAP 1990-2001 may seem like an appealing idea, inasmuch as it is an attempt to integrate the mental set "art" into the daily routine of all individuals. (Although it is difficult even at a first glance to overlook the authoritarian quasi-Fascist nature of the proposal itself.)

But it becomes very evident that the theoretical incoherence of FAP would, in effect, promote the opposite of its intentions. It would in fact be of benefit to the Art Strike in terms of the resentment it would generate toward art on the part of the general populace. The public would (and rightly so!) resent any hierarchically imposed activity, especially one which serves

no evident productive purpose. Resentment would lead to extreme distaste for "art" and its related activities. No doubt this would lead more people to reject art, and thus, consciously or un-, participate in the Art Strike 1990-1993.

But let us look deeper. Upon any more than the most casual reflection, it becomes obvious that FAP is based on an implicit and reactionary fear of liberation from the hierarchically imposed vision of the world as having neatly classifiable needs, along with the commodities to answer to those needs. In short, the proposer of FAP 1990-2001 is afraid of losing everything she doesn't have, and wouldn't deserve even if she did.

"Art" is a commodity which "answers" the "need" for escape on one hand, and promulgation of social status on the other. FAP suggests that, by making art a univer-

sal activity, the profit motive would be removed from it. But there would still be groups intent upon elevating themselves above others, claiming they alone produce the only "genuine" art. And their work would continue to be overvalued by those with excess money and the desire to invest it in something which will realize a profit and simultaneously enhance their status.

The whole point about the Art Strike 1990-1993 is that it is a means of intensifying the class struggle within in the cultural, economic, and political spheres all at once. If the Art Strike succeeds in demoralizing a small cross-section of the bourgeois class, even if it's only the artists, then it will have succeeded. FAP reads as a very sorry attempt to lend support to the hierarchically imposed ideal of the "value" of art. **YAWN** rejects this ill-considered proposal outright.

Hints From Heloise



DEAR HELOISE: I'm confused. Tell me, during the years of the Art Strike (1990–1993), what can I do with all the works of art I now have hanging around? Won't they be considered unsightly during this time? What will my friends think?

Confounded in Poughkeepsie

DEAR CONFOUNDED: You will never find the world to be a good place to live until you learn to think for yourself.

...

DEAR HELOISE: As an artist, I realize that my participation in the elite art world to date has essentially rendered my activity complicitous with the project of capitalism. But what will I do with my creative energies during the Years Without Art (1990–1993)?

Jaded in Jacksonville

DEAR JADED: You apparently still cling to the myth that the artist "must" create in order to "survive". Such archaic notions are harmlessly romantic at best, and at their worst, they are the mechanism by which cultural workers are encouraged not to question the motivations and end results of the larger project in which they are engaged.

Creative energies can be channeled into any activity you can imagine. Imagine it now: this will take you some distance toward disavowing art as an activity that is somehow "special", somehow "superior" to other human activities. It must be obvious even to you that art making is, in itself, an insufficient response to social crises. I suggest you get your act together and strive for a new level of activism within culture as a whole, instead of remaining insular, debilitated, and self-referential.

DEAR HELOISE: How does someone who constantly thinks in terms of art—such as myself—participate in an Art Strike (1990–1993) in light of the fact that they might consider an immense number of practical, everyday objects to be art? After all, is not a can opener a work of art? And the clothes that we wear? The food that we cook? Does creativity not enter into all human activities?

All-encompassing in Anchorage

DEAR ALL-ENCOMPASSING: Do not be mistaken: the Art Strike is directed against art in the Modernist and Post-modernist traditions, which brazenly proclaim that there will always be something to sell—even in the absence of thoughtful ideas or meaningful work. These artists cynically hold to the idea that the art which brings them the most money and fame is the best art.

Those objects which are the products of human invention need not be branded with the term "art" to be valued and respected as meaningful cultural achievements, especially when they do not participate in the subjugation of a class of individuals.

...

DEAR HELOISE: I'm with you! The Art Strike (1990–1993) truly is the only way to show the bastards of elitism what we're made of! Plus, I finally have the time to paint that garage! The wife's been after me for years to get it done!

Eager for Inaction in Albuquerque

HELOISE SAYS: Right you are, Eager! Simply making this challenge goes a long way towards taking apart the mental set "art" and undermining its position of hegemony within contemporary culture, since the success of art as a supposedly "superior form of knowledge" largely depends upon its status remaining unquestioned. We need to abolish the myths whereby the powers-that-be focus the image of their own moral superiority. Art is the armchair in which these fat cats sit for their own pleasure and self-assurance. Art has degenerated into a sniveling sycophancy. It is our duty to reject these models.

An Apology from OWVRAS90-93, the Proposer of Forced Art Participation 1990-2001

I am sorry. It has only just dawned on me how destructive the implementation of my half-baked proposal of the Forced Art Participation 1990–2001 might be. Simply forcing people to participate in the making of art does nothing to remove it from the domain of the commodity, as I once maintained. My reactionary proposal would only serve to create pockets of even more reactionary individuals who would find it necessary to create a new separation between themselves and those who are forced to make art by FAP. These cynical reactionaries would maintain that only they themselves were the "real" artists, and that "forced art" is not art. Since art is a sub-culture that often defines itself in opposition to culture, I now recognize that artists have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Therefore, far from abolishing elitism, FAP would greatly strengthen it, oppositionally and in direct proportion to what it opposes. These reactionary groups of individuals would no doubt spend their time writing mutually self-congratulatory texts and strutting about the street as if they were better than everyone else. In short, nothing would change. Down with FAP! Forward with Art Strike 1990–1993!



YAWN

SPORADIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE
November 3, 1989

Nº5

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DEMOLISH SERIOUS CULTURE

When the PRAXIS group declared their intention to organize an Art Strike for the three-year period 1990-1993, they fully intended that this proposed (in)action would create at least as many problems as it resolved.

The importance of the Art Strike lies not in its feasibility but in the possibilities it opens up for intensifying the war between the classes. The Art Strike addresses a series of issues: most important among these is the fact that the socially imposed hierarchy of the arts can be actively and aggressively challenged. Simply making this challenge goes a considerable way towards dismantling the mental set behind art and undermining its position of hegemony within contemporary culture, since the success of art as a supposedly "superior form of knowledge" largely depends upon its status remaining unquestioned.

Other issues with which the Art Strike is concerned include that series of "problems" centered on the question of "identity." By focusing attention on the identity of the artist, and the social and administrative practices an individual must pass through before such an identity becomes generally recognized, the organizers of the Art Strike intend to demonstrate that within this society there is a general drift away from the pleasure of play and stimulation; a drift which leads, via codification, on into the prison of the "real."

"For the true and living equality we will give up everything. Let the arts perish, if need be! But let us have real equality."

—Sylvain Marechal, "Manifeste des Egaux," published by the *Tribun du Peuple*, 1796, France

One Woman's Reaction to "A Response to the Proposal for Forced Art Participation 1990-2001"

[YAWN #4]

Oh godless, how could such error evolve (assuming evolution, not creativity). Did I not eat that day? Did I read *Hints from Heloise*? Run out of unused stamps? No matter. In the realm of infinite possibilities something could have gone. One woman (yes!) is wearing her wooly mammoth shirt. She doesn't, however, believe it makes a difference. When the premise is wrong, the end is inevitable. It's not art that's illusory, it's the criticism.

YAWN responds: Because "art" is nothing but a schooled set of attitudes, both practice and criticism

are equally suspect from a motivational standpoint. The artist, together with all of the ancillary functionaries that her/his activity supports (curators, academics, critics, gallery owners, their secretaries, janitors, spouses and offspring) have a vested interest in keeping the practice and criticism of art mystified. This is done so that everyone else perceives art as a "special" (i.e., elite) sphere of activity. This perception is heightened by the myth that art is an exclusive source of certain types of knowledge. Defending "art" and simultaneously attacking "art criticism" fails to

recognize that both are manifestations of essentially the same attitude.

The sense that art and art criticism are somehow at odds is engendered by the practitioners of each of those fields. This makes their respective "achievements" seem objectively "valid" because of the constructed "challenge" each poses the other; but in fact this false challenge is what supports the entire construct of art and the attitudes around it. Each creates the impression of strength by knocking down straw men.

Furthermore, it was never **YAWN's** contention that art is illusory. **YAWN** recognizes that power is always a reality in capitalist society. Art serves as an effective buttress to the power of capital by fostering the illusion that the world as it is is a bearable place to live.

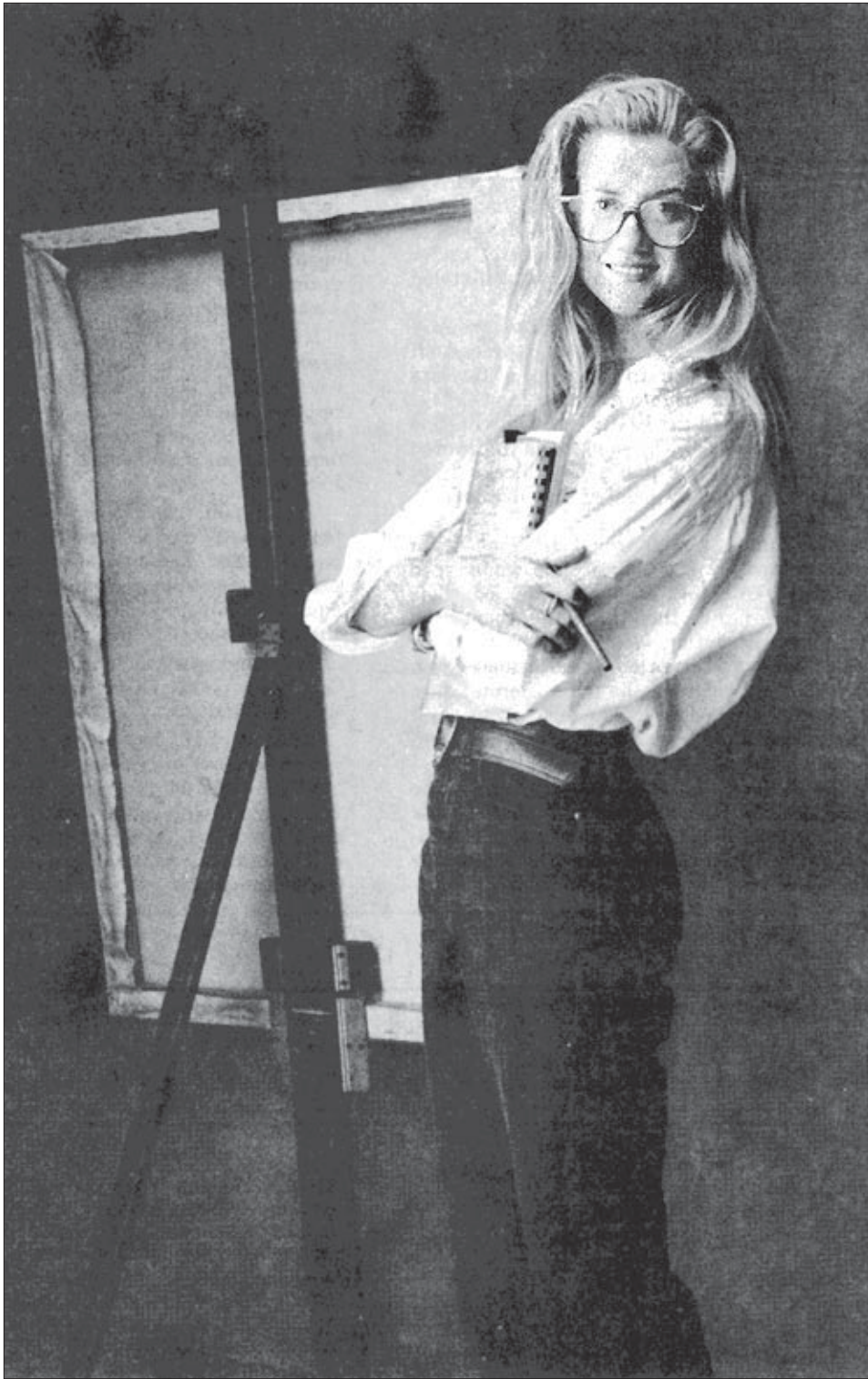
DEAR YAWN,
You Saved
My LIFE.

Thank You,
Pablo Picasso

October 25, 1989



“I may be an art major,
but I know a little something
about economics.”



I've done my homework. I know that money is power. And I know that this power is unevenly distributed in our unegalitarian society.

I also know that “High Art” helps buttress this power. Through complicity. Through cheering it on. Through participating in the investment game. And through its snobbish, elitist treatment of anything that fails to meet its arbitrary standards.

Another thing I realize is that the division between “High” and “Low” art is just a reflection of what occurs in society. Namely the oppression of the “lower” class by the moneyed bourgeoisie. They feel that one class is “better” than another because it can appreciate the “finer things,” and the other cannot. This is a way for the “upper” class to justify the oppression required for it to remain the “upper” class. Art fuels this in part by being class specific—the sole domain of the bourgeoisie. Make no mistake, “art” is not the universal category it claims to be: every survey of attendances at art galleries and museums demonstrates that an “appreciation” of “art” is something restricted almost exclusively to individuals belonging to higher income groups. That is, aside from the artists themselves.

The attitude that one class of people is better than another is precisely the logic which oversaw the rise of the Nazis in the Germany of the 1930s. You see, I've studied history, as well.

I refuse to participate in this social construct. That is why I've turned my canvas to the wall. But where can I turn for an ideologically coherent discourse to support my views?

The Art Strike 1990–1993, that's where.

The Art Strike offers the most aggressive and consistent critique available of the status quo of production and consumption and its power structure. Before you make your final decision, write one of the Art Strike Action Committees.

YAWN has an address list available. Drop us a self-addressed, stamped envelope today.



The Art Strike
1990–1993
The Right Choice.

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Four Billion People Can't Be Wrong

It is not a matter of realizing the Art Strike, or even building on every level of life everything that hitherto could only be an art strike memory, or an illusion, dreamed and preserved unilaterally. The Art Strike can only be realized by being suppressed. And in suppressing it with the automatism of an even more passive and hierarchical spectacle, we freeze-dry its contents into something stable, quantifiable, investment worthy, in short, homogeneous.

The Art Strike is not only a commodity but also a symbolic representation of this order, the justification of its concept of reality.

There will be an empty space left by the Art Strike as a comprehensive order binding everything, the social consensus will be destroyed, we will have reached the end of the great history of our common culture. The empty space left by the Art Strike will be occupied by another order, the economy. The ideal of change as value, adopted by our culture, has found its full significance in the Art Strike.

The Art Strike in its honesty, says about itself that in its state of exhaustion it is not able to put forward values. It can only be a description of the situation, the world of exhausted values of our culture. It can only be a quotation of history, a substitute for something that has ceased to exist.

The Art Strike opposes the logical way of mind which has led to this cultural devastation. The Art Strike will be a resounding stroke of the gong, its ringing will drown out the squawks of the malingerers, their strained voices will fade into thin air.

To speak of the Art Strike means to speak of the unknown, to speak of a door to a new world, to speak of a desire to discover what one does not know. For how can one know a desire without satisfying it?

[ASAC-CA 1988]

Artist Sucks

Most of Richard Serra's commentary in "Artists have rights to their work" (*Des Moines Sunday Register*, October 29, 1989, page 1C, 3C) is irrelevant, because Serra's predicament is not a First Amendment issue. Serra has every right to reconstruct his razed work "Tilted Arc" using his own resources. The issue is whether the government has the right to correct its mistakes or not. **YAWN** believes that it does.

When art participates in culture as a commodity, as it now does, it should expect no less than to be treated as such. Goebbel's famous quip "when I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my revolver" is aptly rephrased as "when I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my checkbook". Serra sold "Tilted Arc" to the US Government. "Art" was the object of a real estate transaction. It was decided that the property lacked the value it was originally thought to have. The property was removed. It is very simple. And absolutely consistent with the culture in which we live.

Serra's egotistical bellyaching does nothing to change the facts of the case. He created a work of limited cultural value. The public, fed up with the irrelevance of contemporary art, not to mention its manifest hostility toward them, finally rebelled, and the work "Tilted Arc" was quite properly removed.

The real issue is whether or not art has the responsibility to address the concerns of its culture. Modernist and Postmodernist art, for the bulk of this century, has been quite smug in its insular self-referentiality and cynical profiteering. This art really only appeals to other artists, and their ancillary functionaries—critics, curators, and collectors. They see art as an investment for realizing a profit, while simultaneously enhancing their social status. At the same time, they create and foster the myth that "Art" and the "Artist" are wellsprings of special knowledge. **YAWN** rejects this model as elitist and self-serving.

To the person who offered a critique of **YAWN** #5 by scribbling on a copy that was publicly posted: "This degrades women. Down with **YAWN**!": You sexist bigot! The battle against degradation must proceed upon all fronts simultaneously. To see this image as primarily degrading to women is to miss that, if it degrades, then it also degrades caucasians, blondes, art majors, people who wear glasses, and human beings in general. When you fragment your reality into smaller "political issues", you only make it easier for those in control to control you. **YAWN** refuses to toe the line of your dogmatic, outmoded, snotty feminism.

Letters from Our Readers

Dear **YAWN**,

...here's some info pertaining to the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art's panel discussion of the Situationist International. [I] challenged Greil Marcus (art critic NYC Village Voice) and read the Art Strike flyer. He interrupted, "I don't believe artists are murderers..." Oddly, no applause. He continued, "Neoists and Stewart Home are only using Art Strike to call attention to itself." He concluded, "Art Strike will fail!" I counted "Of course it will fail, but you've lost the entire point of why Art Strike must happen." ...

Lebanon, New Hampshire

...I've been thinking about this Art Strike *thing*, after reading a pamphlet about it, and this is how I see it. I'm not going to go along w/any Art Strike, because what's in it for me? Little ol' me is supposed to stop doing my measley art books with no thanks from anyone while the people who put out "Art Strike" pamphlets and manifestoes are going to go *right on* doing it, keeping right on going with *their conceptual art project!* Forget it!

San Francisco, California

YAWN says: The Art Strike is not seen by this instigator as a collective [in]action having rules-to-be-broken. There is no Art Strike dogma as such. Instead, it is essential that each Art Strike participant construct their own set of activities in support of the Art Strike. This may take as many forms as there are participants.

The Art Strike will fail for many reasons, not the least of which is that it's a bad idea. As a bad idea, its chief objective is the collective rethinking of the role of art in our culture. It is a constructive response to the hypocritical smugness with which most artists treat the public.

Life during the Art Strike should be more creative, not less. As we will no longer have art to fall back on to structure our leisure, we will need to structure it ourselves. This will demand conscientious discipline and awareness of the reality of our surroundings. The rejection of hierarchically imposed collective illusions is merely a first step.

ART STRIKE

Karen Eliot Interviewed by Scott MacLeod (1989)

Karen Eliot is not a specific, or identifiable, human being. It is a name adopted by a variety of cultural workers at various times in order to carry through tasks related to building up a body of work ascribed to 'Karen Eliot'. One of the purposes of many different individuals using the same name is to highlight the problems thrown up by the various mental sets pertaining to identity, individuality, originality, value and truth. 'Anybody' can use the name Karen Eliot but the extent to which it is used is limited by the fact that 'multiple name concepts' are neither widely known nor understood. Since the Karen Eliot project was launched in 1985 (at the same time as the proposal for the 1990 to 1993 Art Strike), around one hundred individuals have operated within the parameters of the 'identity/context'. Considering the difficulties involved in persuading anyone to 'invest' their time in something which is unlikely to bring them much 'personal reward' (in terms of cultural recognition, etc.) this number is not without significance.

Scott MacLeod: Tell me about Art Strike.

Karen Eliot: The premise is that an Art Strike should be held from January 1st, 1990 to January 1st, 1993. The strike will force the closure of galleries, 'modern' art museums, agencies, 'alternative' art spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools, etc. All the educational, distributional, and critical mechanisms by which art both as an ideology and as a commodity is propagated.

SM: What do your artist friends think of this?

KE: Their reactions are a mirror image of the response we got to an earlier project—the Festival of Plagiarism. With the Festival, everyone was initially confused about the relationship between plagiarism and what they were doing. Then they got very excited by the idea and saw lots of possibilities in it. With the Art Strike, most people's initial response is favorable, it's only a bit later that fundamental disagreements arise.

SM: So you think the use of the word 'strike' could be responsible for the initial enthusiasm?

KE: Yes I do. The term has certain connotations in England which I don't think it has here (i.e. in the United States); there's a very different experience and perception of labor movements in Europe.

SM: Was there a conscious decision to use the term 'strike' which was based on those connotations?

KE: A conscious decision? Gustav Metzger used the term 'Art Strike' in 1974. He called for a strike between 1977 and 1980, so there's a historical precedent. However there are significant differences between that earlier Art Strike and our own; Metzger's activity was primarily directed towards destroying those institutions, commercial galleries and so on, which appeared to him to have an adverse effect on artistic production. It was set up in the classic hero/villain model. Which might

account for the difficulties Metzger had attracting support for the strike. In fact, no one joined him!

SM: It must have been, must be, hard to convince artists or anyone else that going on strike is a good idea.

KE: Well, the Art Strike is not a good idea. It's a bad idea from the point of view of anyone trying to make a career out of art. It's a bad idea from many perspectives, and that does make things a bit more difficult; even though our aims in organizing an Art Strike are completely different from Metzger's. We're addressing a far broader range of issues than Metzger and unlike him we don't necessarily expect the mechanics of a strike to operate in the same way within the realm of culture as they would in the economic sphere. Rather than attempting to disrupt and destroy those institutions which affect production and distribution of art products, the 1990 Art Strike is principally focused on the role of the artist. On how the artist defines her or his identity, on how that identity affects the artist's ability to engage with the surrounding culture.

SM: So, Art Strike is a bad idea and it's not really what it says it is, it's not really a strike against the gallery system or the commodity system.

KE: We've had endless discussions about the appropriateness of the term 'strike', about its efficacy in this situation. At one time we tried to change the name to 'Refusal of Creativity' but this phrase just didn't catch on. We found that people responded to the term 'Art Strike' because it's confrontational and brings together ideas from what are traditionally considered to be two autonomous realms—the economic and cultural. In the syndicalist tradition, which has had an influence on our thinking, the strike is ultimately the means of revolution—far more is at issue than a simple hourly-wage increase.

As far as we're concerned, the Art Strike is a strike. It's a denial of product and a denial of labor. Like the syndicalist general strike, the issues being discussed range from the economic to those of revolution and self-determination. We're trying to achieve large-scale change in our relationships with what the bourgeois art establishment alleges are 'esthetic' objects and relationships. We decided to describe our activities as a strike to make our political, economic and moral motivations explicit. And we hope the use of this term will encourage active rather than passive engagement with the issues.

SM: And yet you've said the Art Strike is a bad idea.

KE: It probably is a bad idea if one conceives of it as taking the shape of the classic proletarian strike within the economic sphere, and for several reasons. If one were naive enough to attempt to disable certain institutionalized forms of commodity culture through the organization of artists along trade union lines, then one would be bound to fail

because the vast majority of artists would scab. Artists typically view themselves as isolated producers who are in competition with each other; they lack any sense of the solidarity and self-interest upon which successful strikes are built. And even if all the artists in the world did withhold labor for three years, or even ten or twenty years, such a strike might still fail to have much impact within the economic, or even cultural, sphere. The denial of product will not change the fact that there are those who have excess money and want to invest it in something which will realize a profit and simultaneously enhance their status. As long as capitalism survives there will always be entrepreneurial middle-men and hangers-on who seek to increase their status and/or wealth by playing the appropriate roles within a culture of acquisition. Art is a product which, if withheld, can easily be replaced by classic cars, artificial sex partners and the like.

However I'm not trying to suggest that art is a mere appendage of economics. Anyone with half a brain can see that there is a dynamic interaction between culture, economics and politics. All I'm saying is that there are an almost infinite variety of substitutes for the ideological and economic functions with which art services capitalist society. The whole point about the 1990 Art Strike is that it is a means of intensifying the class struggle within the cultural, economic and political spheres. If the Art Strike succeeds in demoralizing a cross section of the bourgeois class then it will have succeeded.

SM: Are you suggesting that artists form a faction within the bourgeois class and that you're hoping to demoralize them?

KE: Yes, artists are one group our activities are intended to demoralize. There's an attitude among artists that they're in touch with a higher discourse, a meta-ethics if you will, which frames their activities within different ethical standards than those of other people. The National Socialist Party in Germany became successful partly as a result of encouraging this kind of attitude. So what we're trying to do with the Art Strike is call into question this notion which artists hold, that they are somehow exempt from the responsibilities of engagement with the issues of their own culture. The attitude that artists are engaged in a pursuit which is somehow separate from other human activities. This attitude creates an ideological justification for hierarchical divisions between human beings. It will be difficult to convince art 'producers' to take an objective look at their own attitudes and activities but this is no reason to be pessimistic about our chances of significant success; black propaganda might well prove sufficient to demoralize a sizeable proportion of artists to the extent that they will abandon their present cultural pursuits.

Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs)

ASAC (California), P.O. Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117 USA
 ASAC (Eastern USA), P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203 USA
 ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
 ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay





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CENSORSHIP

Existence as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation

THE OLDEST OF SUPPRESSED TRADITIONS

It should come as no surprise that in a world dominated by apocalyptic illusions and the counter-real, that censorship should be popularly misperceived as a form of social repression. The contradictions which support such an inversion are manifest in every area of institutional life, they constitute the apparent "reality" of our "lives." Despite the fact that consciousness has been demonstrated time and time again by logic, philosophy, and science to be always the effect of a closed system of exclusive focus, of *censorship*, "literate" consensus maintains that censorship and silence are the negation of consciousness. It is clear that power has a vested interest in maintaining a monopoly on censorship so as to control the necessary flow of images and behaviors which constitute "social" reality. In the political presence of "free" press, "free" market, and "democratic" systems which form late capitalism, the "concept of freedom" becomes an unreachable, collapsing absolute, coherent only in the regulation of its negation. Freedom means being unable to experience the world. In "capitalist" culture, power materializes within a fragmented surface-reality, a surface which conceals the abstractions of exchange-value that define its sophisticated totalitarianism. All experiences (nonmaterial commodities) are indistinct and equal when exchanged via capital, with class "privilege" determining how much of this worthless "equality" each person is entitled to. Over all visible things circulate the malign forms of work, communication, participation, and play. As we desire the negation of the imposed surface "reality," so too we make visible the horrifying mechanism of exchange beneath the varnish of civilization. What is necessary is willingness on our part to give up the "identity" and "productivity" which capital has forced us to invest in it. We are addicted to production and to the consumption of identities to give our "lives" "value," since exchange has effectively suppressed the aspects of existing which would make it bearable. Nevertheless, in (fragmented) present time it would be useless to conjecture about the freedom of subjectivity projected for post-capitalist utopia, since such projections would only detract from the negative power of the present.

VARIETIES OF NEGATION

Anything can be censored for any reason, but the goal of revolutionary censorship is to censor everything for every reason. The censors of the "left," "right," "center," and all philosophies, theories, and religions all do their collective part, despite the fact that they imagine themselves to be motivated by the very "beliefs" important to negate. Do your part and start by censoring this text. There are of course such instances when questions arise relating to the censorship of censorship, so-called "paradox," and in such cases it is up to the "individual" censor to determine the approach (s)he wishes to adopt. Some censorship requires the extremely temporary adoption of beliefs in order to formulate a convincing negation of another belief, but in many cases it is possible to transcend this compromise through apathy.

FROM ORIGINALITY TO ONTOLOGY, THE PAIN OF THE TEXT

Censorship is a more powerful, more revolutionary, and more populist form of subjectivity than "imagination" because it requires only familiarity with dominant "reality," rather than the production of other ("imagined") realities. The possibilities for communal transformation of the world thus lie in the "negative" when one is capable of disconnecting from imposed notions of economy. Plagiarism is the "beginning," the negative point of culture which finds its justification in the "unique." Censorship supersedes plagiarism as an intelligent negation of "originality" because it suppresses not only ("original") production, but also the *reproduction* (plagiarism, appropriation, etc.) which revalues the "original" and maintains its circulation in "reality." Censorship is to the present what plagiarism is to herstory. Both go instantly

beyond the empty siren-song of academic "deconstruction" (a philosophy "against language" [sic]), that capitalist scam which pretends to talk about the negation of "reality" without ever mentioning it. "Deconstruction" and its "critical" contemporaries become raw vital material for plagiarism and censorship. As a revolutionary practice, both turn the tremendous waste of western "critical thought" into tools for the complete transformation of everything. We rewrite the situationist slogan thus: "Everyone, one step less if you want to be revolutionaries!"

THE HEALING POWER OF DOUBT

"Take things one step farther by not doing them."

—Charles Boyd, 1984

Experimental philosophy finds its coherence in the creation of situations. In order to practically examine questions of truth it is necessary to suppress ideas which are initially believed, and then to observe popular reaction. Find reasons to stop yourself from thinking or saying things, and to stop other people from thinking or saying things. At least, try to get them to stop themselves from thinking or saying things by presenting them with ideas which make what they are thinking or saying seem obviously incorrect, but which to not offer alternatives. Perhaps begin by focusing on ideas, objects or actions which you are "against" and progress towards censoring things which you were previously "for." Kill your desires and live. Erase, destroy, and make useless recorded information. Physically and otherwise attempt to suppress expression in art, politics, and philosophy, and investigate the more technically difficult negations of science, math, history, and so on. Resist culture and all other forms of institutional identity. Refuse to participate in and suppress interpersonal and mass social relationships. As you see fit, smash the "imagination," "schizophrenia," "death," "sexuality," "values," "time," and other forms of seduction, propaganda, and abstraction which you are capable of perceiving. Experimentally break down the frames of reference by which you organize non-valued perceptions into valued entities: e.g., objects, ideas, means of self-perception, etc.

AN END TO SOCIAL RELATIONS

"Self-destruction" is an impossibility, a semantic swindle. The "self," when reordered beyond dominant social reality will always seem "destroyed," but the "self" by definition always "is," and its alteration beyond recognition is nothing to worry about. Just as there is no opposite of "being" (what would it be?), the self transformed simply cannot be perceived as what it was before. Thus the moralism against suicide is a reactionary resistance to change. Intrinsic "rationality" is an economy of language which reconstructs the physical reality of military capitalism on a mental plane. Given the total colonization of everyday life by capital, we are forced to speak the received languages of the media. It seems that only complete opposition to everything is not reversible. If this polemic then seems contradictory or absolutist, it is because it poses itself in opposition to a coherent totality, an absolute contradiction.

THE FESTIVAL OF CENSORSHIP

"There is no deprogramming, the only deprogramming is death, there is no death."

The Festival of Censorship is a patanational, completely decentralized event which will take place in the Summer of 1988, two short years before the commencement of the **ARTIST'S STRIKE**, a period during which (at minimum) no creative activity will take place. The Festival aims to begin on a limited and visible scope what will expand and constitute a new and total organization of everyone's life. Some events have already been planned for the festival, including international performances on July 4th and other holidays during which participants will look into the daylight sun for a full hour. A day of "cover-ups" is also planned, during which participants will go to rigorous lengths to hide traces of their mundane activities. We are eager for people to come forward with contributions or to organize other events to be presented under the banner of the festival, being free to organize events unconnected to the Festival under its banner. The Festival is intended to involve research into the practice of censorship, in "culture" and beyond. It is not important to us that participants agree with "our" polemic. We plan to stage manifestations in several major European and American cities, including New York, Baltimore, Montréal, London, Berlin and San Francisco. We need your help.

Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs)

ASAC (Eastern USA), P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203 USA



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Art Strike as Art

It's amusing to think that "art strikers" could so value their work that they imagine its cessation would change the economic topography of our country. If they actually saw Art Strike as a practical solution to the problem of the artist's contribution to the perpetuation of an oppressive system, they would be guilty of the egotism and elitism they deplore. They would be elevated to the status of tragic heroes, like the lost Olympians, who sacrificed personal glory to the dream of a greater good.

The participants have no delusions about their (non-)action and yet, in the imagination the ramifications of Art Strike are exhilarating. If cultural workers suddenly shut up and could no longer view themselves as superior beings, humanity would truly have the chance to create itself new. What would this new humanity rising like Phoenix from the ashes of its own culture be like?

Art Strike is a brilliant gesture.

Art Strike is symbolic, merely provocative. It is meant to provoke conversation among artists like all the other insulated works it rails against. It is a piece of performance art that will break down the boundaries between art and non-art to focus on life.

Since Art Strike is art, during Art Strike, Art Strike itself won't be possible. Conceptual art in the wake of Art Strike would be redundant and superficial. No single work of art could approach the brilliant simplicity/complexity of Art Strike. I imagine artists spilling out of the ship of culture like so many bewildered rats, only to drown.

Since art will be irrelevant after the strike, the strike will have accomplished its mission, even though by definition this is impossible.

Art Strike is the sound of one hand clapping.

Therefore it is the most important work of art of this century—make that this millennium.

[Karen Eliot]

The Artist as a Victim of Tourette Syndrome

Artists. Can they help it? Are they possessed with the uncontrollable urge to create, or is this simply a pose designed to mystify the activity? Is the making of art a kind of obsession, the suppression of which might lead to profound dissatisfaction with daily life and seamless unhappiness? Do artists "require" expression in the same way you or I require food or water, as a matter of survival, as many of them would have us believe? Or are artists driven by manipulated cultural forces of which they may be only dimly aware? If so, who pulls the strings?

Presented with the possibility of giving up "art", many artists will stare forward, dumbstruck, mouth agape, with the hollow words "I couldn't!" scarcely able to form at the orbit of their lips. Sweat forms at their temples, their brains race in epicycles from their panicked frenzy, faced at last with the possible obligation of confronting the prison of nude reality. Is art an addiction, or is it much more?

Think of the absurdity of such a proposal: *Artists can't help it*. This creates a subset of the 'human condition' which we should have to call the 'artist condition'. Such artists are little better off than the pitiable victims of Tourette syndrome, a medical condition characterized by violent nervous tics and involuntary spasms of socially unacceptable behavior. Victims of Tourette can't help it. They tic like you or I blink our eyes or swallow a mouthful of saliva.

Many of the things which so clearly characterize Tourette can also be applied to the artist. The violent jerks and ejaculations of half- or fully-formed epithets, the flinging of the arms, and the otherwise disturbing uncontrolled outbursts which would seem to be somehow significant. The short attention span, the hyperactivity, the disruptiveness in school, the obsessiveness, the compulsions. Or the slopping of large canvases with pigment. It is the same.

If Tourette syndrome is the operative metaphor for what is here called the 'artist condition', then it seems likely that there would be no cure. For those of us who are fortunate enough to be wholly conscious of our every decision for taking action, all we can do is to go on Art Strike and show these miserable sufferers exactly what's possible if you put your mind to it.

[ASAC-IA]

“The architects of the Art Strike want everyone to emulate their own lack of success. They’re promoting lazy café intellectualism as a political ideal.”

—Julian Schnabel, 1989

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(elsewhere: air mail \$20 or equivalent foreign currency). Trades are welcome, too. Issues are given away free by hand in Iowa City and other distribution points. Anyone wishing to be a distribution point for their area should write for information. **YAWN** is interested in seeking alternative forms of distribution. This edition appeared as part of *Artpaper* and made use of that pre-existing distribution network for its dissemination. This is part of an effort to reach as many people as possible at minimal cost and effort to **YAWN**. Any publisher or reader wishing to help in propagating this information should write: **YAWN**, P.O. Box 162, Okdale IA 52319. Camera ready masters customized for any publication, or for standard letter-size paper can be made available at cost to anyone wishing to help in disseminating **YAWN**.

YAWN is not art. **Yes, it is.** *No, it isn't.* **Yes, it is.** *No, it isn't.* **Yes, it is.** *No, it isn't.* **Yes, it is.** *No, it isn't.* **Yes, it is.** *No, it isn't.* **Ye**

ANY PART OF **YAWN** MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM WHATSOEVER, EVEN WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

2069



HOW COULD WE STOP MAKING ART WHEN ART IS OUR ONLY WEAPON IN OUR STRUGGLE? WHY WOULD WE THROW AWAY OUR ARMS AND GIVE UP ART, THE ESSENCE OF OUR LIFE? WHY WOULD WE SURRENDER WHEN WE FIRMLY BELIEVE IN ART?

WE, FREE ARTISTS, WHY SHOULD BECOME ART STRIKERS WHEN WE MAKE ART ONLY FOR THE SATISFACTION OF OUR OWN MIND?

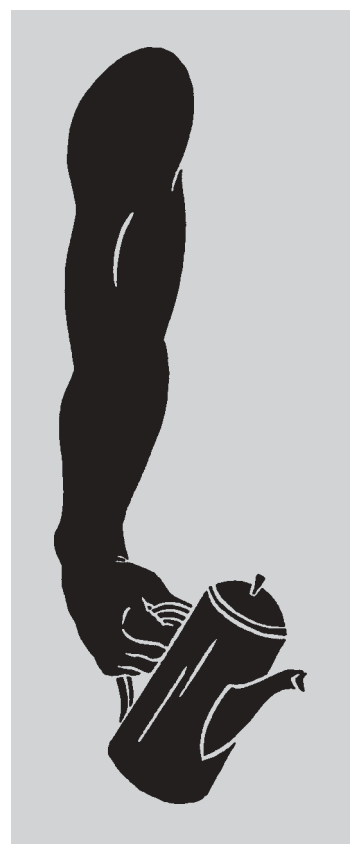
WHY WOULD WE STRIKE WHEN WE ARE HAPPY WITHOUT ANY CONNECTION TO THE ART SYSTEM?

AND WE, ESTABLISHED ARTISTS OF FAME AND MONEY, WHY WOULD WE STRIKE WHEN WE HAVE ALREADY SATISFIED OUR DESIRES?

AND WE, WHO ACCEPTED THE CONCEPT OF "EVERYTHING IS ART", SHALL WE KILL OURSELVES TO MANIFEST OUR SYMPATHY WITH THE ART STRIKERS?

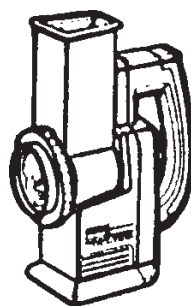
AND WE, WHO BELIEVE THAT "EVERYBODY IS AN ARTIST", SHOULD WE TRY TO CONVINCE THE POLICE TO JOIN THE ART STRIKE?

Stop carrying the torch for art. Sit down. Take off your shoes. Relax. Have a nice, hot cup of coffee.



Remarks

Bob Black, in his essay "On the Art Strike" (*Artpaper*, Vol. 9 No. 4, p. 9-10) raises some strong arguments supporting the idea that the Art Strike is, against its overt intentions, an elitist (in)action which "...only certifies artists as the expert interpreters of what nobody but artists do." He does so by likening the Art Strike to "imperialism" and suggests that it is "Ostentatious renunciation [which] is greed in its warped and most insidious form". He also says that art-strikers engage in this (in)action because they are "...some of the less commercially successful [among] contemporary artists..." True, few of us are "successful" in these cynical terms—and to measure our value as contributors to culture based on how much money we make is just one of the ridiculous attitudes the Art Strike seeks to combat. A Julian Schnabel could not participate in an Art Strike. He has far too much to lose to be completely honest about milieu in which he prospers. Other points: If "...only artists can refuse art...", then art is irrelevant to begin with, and must be renounced, perhaps even ostentatiously. (Although the Art Strike maintains that consumers must refuse art, too.) If "...art... becomes everything..." then the word has no meaning at all. (Art is not everything, but a class- and gender-specific activity which serves to justify an objectionable ideology.) Bob Black does culture a disservice by taking the Art Strike too seriously—and this is much the same as not taking it half seriously enough.



FREE!

Forget it. In a world where attitudes are commodities to be bought with time, the price of freedom would be far too dear. You couldn't afford to be without your fear of starvation, the fear of the denial of shelter, and, perhaps most of all, the fear that someone might be able to take away the banal comforts upon which you have grown to depend.

WHEN CENSORSHIP WORKS, YOU DON'T KNOW IT.

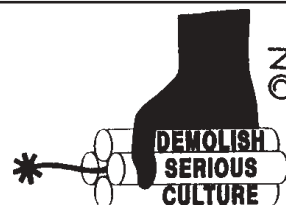
DON'T FOOL YOURSELF INTO THINKING THAT THIS, OR ANYTHING ELSE YOU ARE EXPOSED TO, IS "UNCENSORED". THE CYNICAL AND NAIVE HACKS WHO PROMOTE "CULTURE" FOR THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST USE THE IDEA OF ANTI-CENSORSHIP TO LEND THEIR ADOPTED DISCOURSES CREDIBILITY, AND TO ONCE AGAIN MYSTIFY A PASSIVE AUDIENCE. AN AUDIENCE CORRECTLY EXPECTED TO CONSUME ANY CONTROLLED SPECTACLE WHICH IS APPROPRIATELY FRAMED. PRODUCTION IS CENSORSHIP. ALL EVENTS TAKE THE PLACE OF SOMETHING ELSE. UNDESIRE, UNMENTIONED, UNIMAGINED. WHAT YOU WILL BE EXPOSED TO TODAY IS DESIGNED TO REINFORCE THE FUNCTIONING OF A PARTICULARLY NARROW IDENTITY—ONE WHICH IS NOT ONLY OUT OF TOUCH WITH REALLY INTERESTING "HUMAN CULTURE", BUT ALSO OBLIVIOUS TO THE UNMEDIATED UNITARY EXPERIENCES WHICH LIE OUTSIDE OF IT. IN SHORT, A SET OF REDUNDANT GESTURES COMPLETELY IN SUPPORT OF THE STATUS QUO, CREATING ANOTHER ILLUSION OF FREEDOM—REPRESSIVE TOLERANCE. [ASAC-MD]

PARADISE STANDS IN THE SHADOW OF SWORDS

Although the "cold war" is proclaimed to be over, all atoms but that still won't change the capitalisms. Each of the two former enemies...

Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs)

ASAC (California), P.O. Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117 USA
 ASAC (Eastern USA), P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203 USA
 ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
 ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay



Bob Black on the Art Strike

Reprinted from *Artpaper*, vol. 9, no. 4, December 1989, Minneapolis, Minn.

ART ABSTRACTS from life. Abstraction is deletion. When the first artist painted an aurochs on a cave wall, the first critic saw it and said, "That's an aurochs!" But it wasn't an aurochs, it was a painting. It's been downhill for art criticism ever since. Art, like science, is illumination through elimination. Artists remove in order to improve. In this sense, minimalism is not just another school of art, but its evolving essence, and all of modern art can be seen as a process of progressive self-destruction. Artists often destroy themselves, occasionally each other, but it was left to a relatively unknown German artist, Gustav Metzger, to give this artistic impulse its most succinct articulation when in 1959 he announced his theory of "auto-destructive art." It's not surprising, then, that Metzger also anticipated the proposed Art Strike 1990–1993.

On January 1, 1990—if they comply with the directives of the PRAXIS Group—all artists will put down their tools for three years. There will be no openings, no showings, no readings. "Cultural workers," unless they scab, will also walk out. Galleries, museums, and "alternative" spaces will all shut down or be converted to serve more practical purposes. According to the Art Strike leadership, everybody benefits. The artists, by stepping out from under their burden of specialized creativity, get not only a breather but a chance to get a life. And the plebeian masses, no longer cowed by "talented bullies," are in turn expected to rush into art like fresh air into a vacuum.

Although appearing at first as the suppression of art, the Art Strike is in essence its realization—the ultimate work of art, the culmination of its *telos*. In the Art Strike, artistic abnegation achieves its final expression: art, having become nothing, becomes everything. If art is what artists *don't* do, what *isn't* art now? The Art Strike thus becomes an exercise in imperialism. After all, everyone else has been

on an Art Strike all along. With the Art Strike, the leaders are given a chance to catch up with their followers, who weren't previously aware they *had* leaders, let alone needed any.

Ostentatious renunciation is greed in its most warped and insidious form. By their noisy refusal of art, the Art Strikers affirm its importance and thus their own, not unlike alcoholics whose AA meetings testify to the power of the drug and thus to their own power in collectively renouncing it. But there the analogy ends. The Art Strikers liken their strike to the syndicalist General Strike so as to appropriate the glamor of this obsolete tactic. But a Particular Strike is not a General Strike; and the Art Strike, since it doesn't include the refusal of work by waged or salaried workers (artists being generally self-employed freelancers or independent contractors), is not a strike at all.

What remains after artists forswear art? Artists, of course. The Art Strike magnifies the importance of artists even as it eliminates their toil. Disencumbered of the obligation to create, the artist no longer must try to inform or agitate or even entertain. All pretense to being useful to other people can be dropped. But that's not to say artists are about to disappear into the crowd—if they did, nobody would ever notice there even *was* an Art Strike. No, artists must instead make a production out of their refusal to produce, they must clamor for attention over what they don't do, even though their credentials for inactivity are precisely their previous art. This is what makes the refusal of art elitist. The Art Strike is a vanguardist notion: only artists can refuse art, and only artists can flatter themselves that *they* stand in the way of an outburst of popular creativity.

Actually, the reason the hoi-polo don't create art is not because they're intimidated by "talented bullies," but because their creative power has been so suppressed—above all, by work—that

they devote their leisure hours to consumption not creation. School, work, the family, religion, rightism and leftism—these thwart creativity. The sort of "art" created by the Art Strike leadership, its various predictions and pronouncements, is much more opaque to the proles than the representational art of pre-modern times, and no less so than modern art, which is too remote from everyday experience for anybody to be bullied by it, unless by its reputation, which, of course, will grow during the Years Without Art.

Art Strike theorists are ambiguous about the scope of the strike. If it represents the refusal of "creativity" by specialists, it is only for artists. But if the Art Strike seeks to close down museums, libraries, and galleries, it must include the workers for whom it would then be a real strike, the employees of the cultural apparatus unable to refuse their creativity since nobody has ever called for it in the first place. The janitor would as soon mop up the museum as a nuclear power plant, especially since the activist intellectuals will hound him out of there too if they can. Such workers already know firsthand what artists require outlandish antics to comprehend—working for the cultural industry is still working. Only for the artist is the Art Strike a work of art. Others who get involved would be but the paint the striking artists apply to the canvas, props in a performance-art piece. Human lives and livelihoods as the stuff of art... What artist in his or her deepest inwardness hasn't longed to echo Nero's cry, *What an artist dies in me!*

Since the Years Without Income hold no appeal for the art industry proletariat or its bureaucracy, they will no doubt remain on the job. The impact of the strike will be very uneven. Curators and librarians will be glad to be rid of the hardest part of their task—keeping abreast of new artworks and conjecturing which ones will pass the test of time. Art has been piling

up since before the Bronze Age; three years will not be time enough to reassess and rearrange and redistribute the existing inventory. Still, budget pressures may ease. Music, already all but completely given over to “classic hits,” will be living in the past too. In lieu of live music, disco will come back—it pretty much already has. Most people watch TV, not stage plays; now everybody will. Are the artists going on strike so that, after three years we beg them to come back? If theirs was a place of privilege before, how high then will their seat be in 1993? The real inspiration for the Art Strike is not, as is pretended, the general strike of the proletariat, but rather something already depicted in a work of *art*—the general strike of the capitalists in Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*.

But artists won’t have to wait three years to profit from the Art Strike. Returns will be immediate and they will increase

like compound interest. The Art Strike cunningly acts upon supply, not demand. Existing art will appreciate in value since there won’t be anything coming into the market to compete with it. In addition, there’s the surcharge conferred by the mystique of extinction; subsequently, recent art will lead the price rise as the last of its kind. In fact, it will stand not as the last but as the culmination, since the ideology of progress so sways the Western mind that it regularly mistakes the latest of anything for the final form of a supposed evolutionary process. The last shall be made first, or at least it’ll be priced that way. No wonder some of the less commercially successful contemporary artists are leading the Art Strike, and no wonder others follow them. They don’t propose exactly to *destroy* artworks (although, if done selectively, that would have nearly the same effect as an Art Strike). The Years

Without Art will include nothing of the kind, even if *everybody* joins the strike. Instead, the Art Strike will create a cartel—its inspiration isn’t the IWW or the CNT, but rather OPEC.

The Art Strike is not, for all its proletarian posturing, in any way indebted to the workers movement, except for the theft of what you’d expect artists to steal—its imagery. It enables artists to invest their exhaustion with importance. The refusal of art only certifies artists as the expert interpreters of what nobody but artists do. The *art of refusal*, on the other hand, acts against what everybody does but nobody once did, against work and submission to the state. The art of refusal is the art of living, which begins with the general strike that never ends. ✱

Bob Black is the author of The Abolition of Work and Other Essays.

Addendum to Smile Magazine no. 11

CRITICS PRAISE STEWART HOME!

“When Home realized that the small number of *cultural fuck-offs* calling themselves ‘The Neoist Cultural Conspiracy’ were more interested in having a good time disorienting each other than in pedalling a ‘coherent’ ideology to a purportedly passive social mass, he came to understand that associating with them would never make him the intransigent revolutionary leader he had aspired to be since childhood. He realized that by and large the Neoists were more focused on the details and nuances of altering social reality than in constructing inflexible but ‘coherent’ identities through language. And while Home took pleasure in disparaging the Neoists, this was precisely to hide the embarrassing similarities between his own methods and those of Neoist strong man Istvan Kantor. But Kantor and Home tried to rally the uncooperative Neoists around their programs with limited success—since Neoists greatly preferred ‘actually experiencing’ strange behavior to abstract mystifications, whether those of ‘social process’ or fascist ‘mythology.’ Home’s frustration with such types had much to do with the economics of the situation—since the very ‘bohemian’

traits which made Neoism valuable ran contrary to the expectations of the academic leftists whose financial support Home hoped to gain. Neoism was blatantly ‘stupid’ by the bourgeois standards of the academic art world, and involved pretending to go crazy; an activity which Home found distastefully unprofitable, though he labelled such activity elitist.

“For Home to attend the ICA under the pretense of ‘getting his hands dirty,’ and then criticize Prigent for using the ICA’s xerox is typical of the manipulations in which he engages. It is a perfect example of the lack of sympathy often displayed towards those individuals who do not ‘rigorously carry out’ their ideological programs (to what would usually be debilitating conclusions) by other individuals with similar ‘failings.’ It remains to be known whether Home’s ‘critical’ getting his hands dirty at the ICA will turn up on his CV, as another example of the blatant inconsistencies of his approach—once justified with exactly the same compromises used by those he most strongly criticizes.

“Home’s assertion that *his* critical program contains only negations and no alter-

natives is rubbish. Throughout his work we are exposed to the programs of the redistribution of wealth, polymorphous sexuality, the unitary present and other reductive neo-leftist claptrap. That Home should then introduce Henry Flynt’s ‘Acognitive Culture’ (sic) is more incoherence. Flynt’s ideas are based on philosophy and mathematics, two forms of bourgeois occultism which have no place in the collective revolution of the proletariat. Like Home’s, Flynt’s *textbook nihilism* is saturated with academic clichés and inconsistencies which make proletarians recoil in boredom. Such abstractions have the same function as advertising or soap operas—to reify a constructed reality threatened by the negative power of those who refuse to do anything at all, the working class.

“They circled around the young Anarchist, their white robes blowing in the breeze. Then the sandals went in—HARD! The satisfying sound of splintering bone in the parking lot. They were the shock troops of the Moorish Science Temple and had no sympathy for the lies of a satanic skinhead, especially a ‘communist.’ Each of them knew in his heart that it was the devilish white-tailed motherfuckers like this that kept the power going despite whatever lies they would tell you to the contrary—they were THE ENEMY.” ✱



YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent to **YAWN** may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. It is the policy of **YAWN** not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive 3 copies of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions to **YAWN** are available for \$10 for one year. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM

The following letters were lent to **YAWN** by *PhotoStatic Magazine*, a publication which is participating in the Art Strike 1990-1993. They can be considered as a cross section of the responses to the Art Strike, and to some extent typify the ways in which people interpret the action as being counterproductive. Most of them, of course, miss the point that it is the intent of the Art Strike to "create as least as many problems as it solves." Although it is not **YAWN**'s intent to offer dogmatic "clarifications" of what the Art Strike is "all about," it does behoove us to offer some response in an effort to stimulate dialog which will hopefully be a means of critiquing what art is "all about" in the current mood of *fin-de-millennium*. The reader is encouraged to look beyond **YAWN**'s response to each letter, as well as the letter itself, and formulate opinions and critiques that point us in the direction of reconstructing creativity and its role in culture.

Dear **YAWN**,
...Thanks for your **YAWN**. I had to smile. It's usually the other way 'round....
London, England

im writing about this art strike— i think it is a mistake— granted big business takes (eventually) from the cutting edge of visual art, music, literature & twists it to their own service— but they could probably do this w/out you guys— or perhaps, w/out you guys doing it, they wouldnt even have to waste their time w/it— they could use the same old shit all over again— in say a ten to twelve year cycle— sound familiar?

besides, dont all you people already hold hands w/big business all the time? i do. i think we all do. if you turn on yr electric light you line the power companys pocket— the fridge, the car, the heat, buy anything this system wears has anything to do w/anything— they dont mind changing clothes— in fact it might be the book theyve been looking for— more new styles to sell—

i am not a visual artist so excuse me if im stupid but it seems there are many good things that come from an active underground culture— a culture that usually revolves around the "arts"— there are many people out in this coun-

try who dont believe in how its going & relish the opportunity to see, hear, read something that puts it all into a clear picture for them so they dont think they are the only ones & crazy—

as to whether story-tellers should cease telling their stories for three years, it is ludicrous! sometimes i think the only ones telling the truth on paper anymore (ever?) are the micro-press story-tellers (not ALL who claim to be that, just the few who have honed their ability to rid the vision)— i know people need the stories i tell them— they say so— i dont give a shit what hewlett-packard or i.b.m. or honeywell think, steal, care about my stories— in reality i believe im invisible to them—

an art strike wont change the course of events— it wont seal the hole in the ozone layer (if you want to attempt to aid that, stop driving yr cars & bury the fridge out back & turn off the air-conditioning...), it wont stop the war between the banks & the mafia in central america, it wont stop greed, hatred, selfishness, abandonment of children to cruel governmental systematic crushing, it wont do any of that or anything at all, except stop itself— & i'll miss great pieces like the ollie north full metal jerkoff piece & lipface marilyn monroe & etc. i urge you all to just stop taking yerselves so seriously & CREATE... imagine, discuss, describe for those millions out there who have for whatever reasons lost their

ability to do this— these are the fucking DARK NEW AGES— dont stop carrying the light of the true universe— persevere— fuck the outcome— fuck the system— who cares?

ps. if football was gone for three years, people would miss it. if baseball was gone, people would miss that too. if *poetry motel* or *PhotoStatic Magazine* were gone for three years twenty people would miss them for one year & then no one.

pps. angry juveniles spit: im gonna run away from home, and, and, and... THEN THEYLL BE SORRY!

Duluth, Minnesota

YAWN says: By focusing on "big business," "underground culture," "the ozone," and other pop culture buzz words, you've neatly avoided the broader issues raised by the Art Strike. Instead you've focused on trying to make the Art Strike look stupid. Well, Art Strike is a bad idea, but it is not, in fact, a stupid one. It raises some real issues that can yield practical benefits if honestly confronted.

Art Strike has less to do with "...big business tak[ing]... from the cutting edge... twist[ing] it to their own service..." and more to do with the so-called "cutting edge" setting out from the start to serve not just "big business" (a banal and ultimately "easy" target) but the *status quo* of culture and all that represents it in daily life.

Of course Art Strike will be ineffective in terms of its overt aims. This will be one of its biggest successes. You suggest in your postscript that "art strikers" are going to hold their collective breath until they turn blue as a childish means of getting attention. However, "art strikers" quite fully expect *no one to care!* This apathy would be proof that art as a category and mindset is irrelevant and discardable. The "art strikers" know and understand that no one would miss art if it were missing for three years. It would be too easy to replace it with antique cars, artificial sex partners, and, as you suggest, organized athletics. This is a large part of the point of the Art Strike. It is merely the first step towards liberating creativity from the narrowness of "Art."

...I'm sorry to hear that you are shutting down *PhotoStatic Magazine* for the strike, although I know that's not a very interesting reaction. I'm still considering the issues involved. I certainly don't

find the five reasons you give too convincing. Reason #1 says that you're striking because you support the motives behind the Art Strike, but leaves it open what you actually think of the strike itself. Reasons #2 through #4 seem like reasons to keep publishing *PhotoStatic Magazine*, not to stop; you're registering a protest, ok, but in practice, it'll just make things worse. Also, in #5, you imply that shutting down the magazine is a good idea in and of itself, Art Strike or no Art Strike. This all adds up to a rather peculiar way of "supporting" the strike. Finally, I have a lot of problems with #2. I fail to see how observing Art Strike in any way relates to the "larger cultural context." Face it, Art Strike is *specific* to our "subculture," and has no chance of reaching almost anyone outside of it. It's intrinsically incomprehensible to anyone outside the subculture. (Admittedly, it may cause *members* of that subculture to consider the larger cultural context.) I found Art Strike more interesting as a hypothetical proposal (as it was presented in *PhotoStatic Magazine* #34) than as an actual course of action. Martyrdom for nothing. (Although perhaps for you it's not martyrdom, for the reasons given above.) [Don't print any of this, by the way. I'm just ruminating, I haven't made up my mind sufficiently to speak in print.] Wheaton, Illinois

YAWN answers: In the case of the Art Strike, supporting the means is the way to support the motives. In principle, the goal of the Art Strike is to get people (not just artists) away from the notion of subcultures through encouraging a more pervasive activism. Why squander the creative impulse on art when there's a world of problems to be solved? These so-called subcultures only serve to diffuse the energies of the creative public so that they pose no collective threat to establishment culture. Art Strike is a lens, focusing rays of light to a fine point, concentrating their power, causing whatever is examined under it to burn into a fine, black ash that will blow away with the first wind.

I don't understand the art strike. Do you long to believe in popular songs? Why are we going to exchange whispers while the media continues to scream? Are you minding the media? It's Christmas again and I hear the mannequins sing. It makes me forget something...

Atlanta, Georgia

YAWN counters: The Art Strike is a call to stop whispering and start screaming.

PhotoStatic Magazine is a weapon! Don't throw away your arms! You strike when you agitate! You strike when you fight! or die!
New York City

YAWN responds: Art Strike is a more powerful weapon because it is agitational, confrontational, and in fact is a call for more activity, not less. Let us reject useless "creativity" and instead create something useful.

For some time now I have been trying to comprehend *PhotoStatic Magazine*. Now that you are going "on strike" I won't have to try anymore. I hope you have lots of free time to invent more definitions for things, and will be able to talk and think constantly about what art "is," what creativity "is," and make up a lot of new things that you think they mean.

It would be interesting if saying a thing *is* something actually made it so, like if you said "art is important" or "art is bullshit," and then it was. Taking subjective experience for objective reality, and trying to sell it to someone, provides a great deal of diversity and interest in daily life.

I like to imagine that there are people who read *PhotoStatic Magazine* and say "Yes! This is *all true!* These ideas are all *very important!*" And I wonder what that sort of person will do when they have to have ideas of their own, or none at all, for 3 years.

Send me a dollar and I will pray for you.
Cambridge, Massachusetts

YAWN concurs: Right you are, Cambridge! Lacking real reference points in the terrain of everyday life leaves most of us to adopt those coordinates only too eagerly provided by mass communication, consumer politics, and production-line ideology. To suggest that what's handed down to us by our parents (or our college art professors) is somehow "correct" is as lazy as it is dangerous. **YAWN** sincerely hopes that the hole left in the followers of *PhotoStatic Magazine's* lives is spackled in by an intense examination of the world around them with an eye toward determining whether or not life as it is is at all acceptable.

So sad that *PhotoStatic Magazine* will be taking a 3 year absence. I'll miss your great reviews....
Herndon, Virginia

YAWN suggests: It's time to do your own reviews!

I received the news of your participation in the "Art Strike" with some feeling.

I guess, finally, I don't dispute the decision, but I doubt the motives. Personally, I find the art strike somewhat threatening. To what? To expression. To my work. I hope no one objects if I do not participate in the strike.

...I think art is already a strike. I'm just getting rolling on what art is, especially in relation to society. If something is wrong in society, that is occasion for more, not less, art. To me, an art strike would mean increased activity not a shutting down. If society is bad, it is the artists' responsibility. They should get off their asses not sit down on them. I thought of doing some "art scab" pieces, but that isn't really the point I don't think.

PhotoStatic Magazine was doing so well these past half dozen issues or so. I am surprised you are so willing to suspend publication. Nevertheless, ...of all people, I think you have the right to go on strike. You have published a lot of other people's work and perhaps owe it to yourself to take a break and do something strictly for yourself. That I can understand. With that in mind I wish you well in whatever you do. I look forward to your newsletter or comment letter. I wonder who will take up the slack left by *PhotoStatic Magazine's* hiatus. Are you directing contributors anywhere?

I hope you will find reasons to keep in touch. Perhaps you will issue a strike newsletter with work from familiar contributors....

With some sense of an important passing, I am
Sincerely,
Wichita, Kansas

YAWN responds: A response to this letter would be redundant; these issues have been dealt with above. But let us simply belabor one point: No one will mind if you do not join the Art Strike. The decision is entirely up to you. The Art Strike springs from multiple sources, and Art Strike dogma as such is not handed down from on high. Keep considering the issues. That is the most important part.

...I'd like to comment on the Art Strike. I don't quite know what to make of it. Yes, attention should be drawn to the unfortunate fact that art has been amalgamated with advertising and the commodity, and that the culture industry should be dismantled. However, insofar as it is the commodification of art and the reification of social relations which is being addressed in the Art Strike, and insofar as those artists who serve as specialists for the spectacle will not be in any way affected by the Art Strike, it seems unfortunate to me that those who consciously recognize the problems of our time and attempt to deal with them, albeit in an esthetic manner..., are those who are going to *stop*

doing so for three years. Certainly, art cannot negate art, and I commend the Art Strike for seeking to go beyond "anti-art" to address problems of life. However, have you completely given up the idea that art can, possibly, communicate a need to go beyond itself—esthetic self-negation, as it were? ...Again, while I agree that "more needs to be done," I wonder if Art Strike is really this more, and I wonder if it isn't perhaps less....

In a way, doesn't Art Strike give the esthetic specialists of the spectacle everything by no longer challenging them on esthetic grounds? The problem with Art Strike is that it does not ... delineate how art is to be determinately overcome, it rather ... leaves the terrain of esthetics to the practitioners of banality, i.e., it doesn't fight for the kernel of truth which is in Dada and surrealist oriented esthetics and which needs to be realized on the terrain of everyday life. It seems that to advocate the suppression of art *as such*, for three years ... is what in Hegelian philosophy we would call an "undialectical" movement, one that does not supersede, i.e., does not realize *and* suppress, art. I would argue that a kernel of truth must be taken out of art and the false shell in which it is encased must be discarded, *this*, rather than art as a whole being trashed.

In other words, Art Strike, it seems to me, implicitly poses a false dichotomy between life and art. As I see it, the choice is between life (free subjectivity) and the reification of life one lives in the spectacle (and in the workplace), with spectacularization being only *one moment* of art. Thus, it is not art as such which, if forbidden, would be followed by revolution, but the use of art in the spectacle which, because of its function of mystifying the populace, if abolished, would be followed by revolution. ... "The established meaninglessness and separation give rise to the general crisis of traditional artistic means—a crisis linked to the experience of alternative ways of living or to the demand for such experience. Revolutionary artists are those who call for intervention; and who have themselves intervened in the spectacle to disrupt and destroy it." The question is, does Art Strike do this, or does it do it better than say, some other type of activity, which at this point I leave unspecified?
Iowa City, Iowa

YAWN maintains: Art Strike does indeed "...supersede, i.e. realize *and* suppress art." If you think of Art Strike as art, then it is evident that Art Strike is impossible: for in it, *to give up art is to realize it*. If Art Strike is art, during Art Strike, Art Strike itself won't be possible. Further, what Art Strike suggests about revolutionary intervention is that

nonparticipation in the status quo is one way to take the needed time to invent and decide how the world should be, and work for it. The participation which the system demands of each individual creates the collective illusion of consensus; because "everyone does it," "it must be right." Art Strike could aim at propagating to all spheres, so that the refusal of the system by significant numbers of people is what brings it down. Of course, that still leaves the problem of what to replace it with. We should all help to decide that one.

...Art is a safe, a very safe word. The big mask.
Atlanta, Georgia

YAWN responds: Indeed it is, Atlanta. Haven't we had enough of insults masquerading as cultural achievements and sources of knowledge?

...Art Strike is a *test*.

I *like* the Art Strike more and more because people *must* express their opinions about it—even those who feign apathy *must* inform you that they don't care. I never liked Christo until I read his statement that it doesn't matter *what* you think about his work. If you think about it, you're thinking about *art* and that's what matters. That statement changed a lot of things for me. I can paint my little pictures, or not, and I don't have to be an *artist* or *do art* or *make a statement*. I can have fun and goof around, *without* defining it.

And I don't have to decide whether or not to join the Art Strike or even write (1990-1993). I can just think about it or not. Master control programming intensifies the status quo and demoralizes the class struggle! You are what you hate!
Cambridge, Massachusetts

YAWN says: I'm with you, Cambridge! The refusal of creativity (as it is conventionally constituted) is the affirmation of the value of our lived lives! You've already been on Art Strike, and pleasantly conscious of the fact! Keep up the great work! And don't participate in the Art Strike (1990-1993)!

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Broken Promises

My position on the Art Strike (i.e.: one white boy's knee-jerk materialist analysis): it seems to me that easy access to the *means* of artistic (re)production (photocopiers & cassette tapes) altered the *material relations* between some cultural workers & the commodities they produce. This results in (or co-occurs with) a changed set of *social relations*. Since access to the means of production is no longer necessarily controlled/mediated by a hierarchical class of "owners" (including editors/galleries/critics, via their "ownership" of cultural validation), a network of cultural workers has evolved, producing & exchanging their work amongst themselves, and creating a *sub-culture*: that of mail art and "Networking."

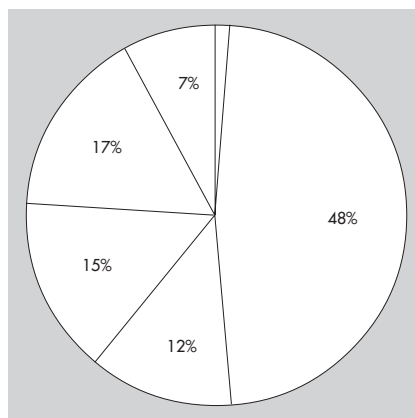
In reaction to the hierarchical control system in the mass-mediated dominant "art" culture, some confused ideas appear in the mail art sub-culture. One is that all participants have equal access to the "network." We are all affirmed as creative beings, and offered a completely open venue of expression, to be judged only on the merits of our work. A similar idea is that all product of the "network" are in some way of equal value—the perennial "no rejections/documentation to all" mail art show. Ideally, this would put the responsibility for critical response on each individual viewer; but in reality, the role of cultural consumer hasn't kept pace with changed roles of cultural producer. Folks still seem to wait for validation of their work by some outside arbiter—*Factsheet Five*, for instance. Hence the endless bitch when your favorite 'zine pans your latest cassette. The situation is self-imposed, though—by complaining about unfavorable reviews, the artist gives the power of validation to that reviewer. I believe that folks must learn to make their own critical judgements, and that intelligent reviews by other folks can help with that, if folks can read them as only one person's opinion instead of gospel.

I think of that process (people learning to think for themselves) as revolutionary. Likewise, it's revolutionary when folks try to break out the mold of "received culture" and act (as in "take action," not as in "pretend") creatively and freely. The unfulfilled promise of the "Network" as one venue for that kind of activity is something that should be addressed and criticized—but just because much of what is produced is shit doesn't mean that the process is a failure. We fail if we aren't critical enough in our judgements (of self and others), if we don't take responsibility for doing good (honest, relevant, communicative, fun) work. So, I'm happy to spout Art Strike propaganda as an excuse to provoke discussion of all these issues, even as I continue to "make art." Pretty consistently, these discussions are honest, relevant, communicative and fun.

[Cleveland, Ohio]

PRETENTIOUS DRIVEL STRIKE (1990–1993)

In a subjective survey conducted by **YAWN**, the following data were collected from 67 letters, notes, and postcards sent to this address, each by a different correspondent. In a follow-up, each was asked their opinion about the Art Strike (1990-1993). **YAWN** has determined that:



- 15% approved of the Art Strike
- 12% approved of its goals, but not the means
- 7% approved of the means, but not the goals
- 48% didn't know
- 1% were indifferent
- 17% disapproved

This survey is not scientific.

Social revolution

contains all the possibilities of culture, realized rather than depicted. Culture, in its current forms, serves either to oppress and stupefy the "lower" classes, or to glorify the personalities and mystifications of the ruling elite. Art which criticizes the establishment is reintegrated into it, defusing useful comprehension of its horror. The *impossible Class*, open to all, which lives outside the moralisms of work, speech, art and participation, refuses the world of appearances. Goals are unmediated criticism, sabotage, and the establishment of *impossible* utopias. The separations which deny life dissolve in non-participation.

[ASAC]

Dear **YAWN**: I think the Art Strike should be extended to include all ideological discourse, especially such overworked figurative phrases as "class struggle." Then—who knows—we might start talking with each other.

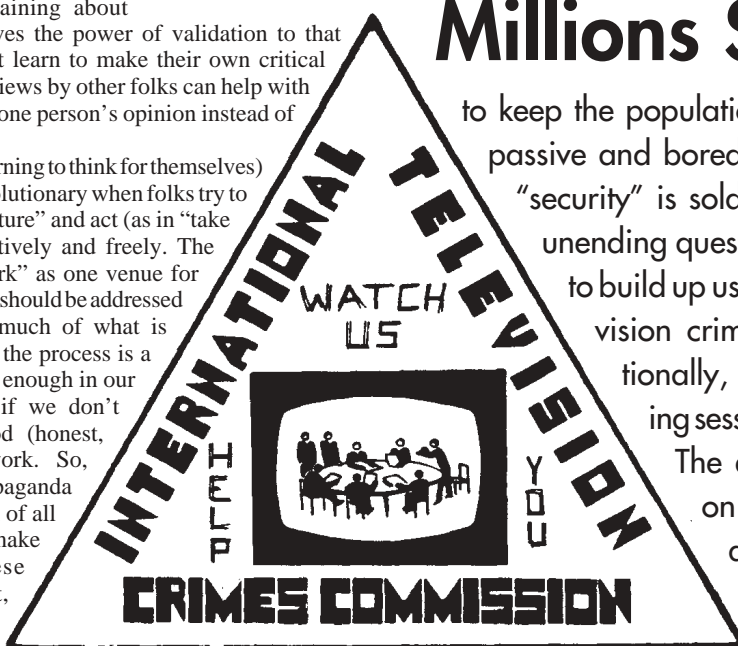
But that's too radical...

Dallas, Texas

YAWN says: You're right, Dallas. We *should* talk to each other. Next time you have something to say, try sending a letter with some substance instead of a sarcastic postcard.

Millions Spent

to keep the population of the Western Alliance passive and bored. In the arena of opiation, "security" is sold by the uneasy state in an unending quest for greater public sacrifice to build up useless military arsenals. Television crimes are committed internationally, with ideological conditioning sessions occurring unrelentingly. The end result: a culture based on waste, a people pathetically apathetic. Cut the eye-chains. Pop the tube. Cool the cathode. Shut it off.



Last Gasp of the ASAC East Coast USA

This text was drafted immediately before 1990 and is being distributed from P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203. The Art Strike Action Committee which operated from this P.O. Box has ceased to "exist" with the beginning of the strike and will suspend its actions of public agitation and debate over "political" and "cultural" questions. The P.O. Box will remain open and revert to use by its former owners who will mail one copy of this text and one Art Strike flyer to anyone who writes concerning the Art Strike. This is basically to get such correspondents off their backs. The primary functions of the Art Strike, as formulated by the various groups involved, were to increase the presence of critical political attitudes in certain sections of the political and art communities, make the cynical positions of certain careerist hacks less tenable, and to demoralize any naive "artists" who might otherwise go their entire lives without having the content of their religious/ruling class attitudes called into question. On all these counts, the pre-strike response has shown hilarious success. On the other hand, there has been an unfortunate momentum, internal and external, to mystify the strike by comparisons with other cultural events (of course, in a certain sense the strike is a "cultural event," albeit one which reverses the values put forth by nearly all other "culture"). The most typical formation is to see the Strike's primary organizers as "Artists" for whom the public strike is a "conceptual art piece." The mystifying actions of some organizers have tended to promote this reading, most notably those who have acted without anonymity and those who have "aesthetically elaborated" the Strike, fetishizing it. It is apparent that the socially constructed attitudes which surround "Art" are well reinforced in certain populations and many people find it difficult to shift away from them.

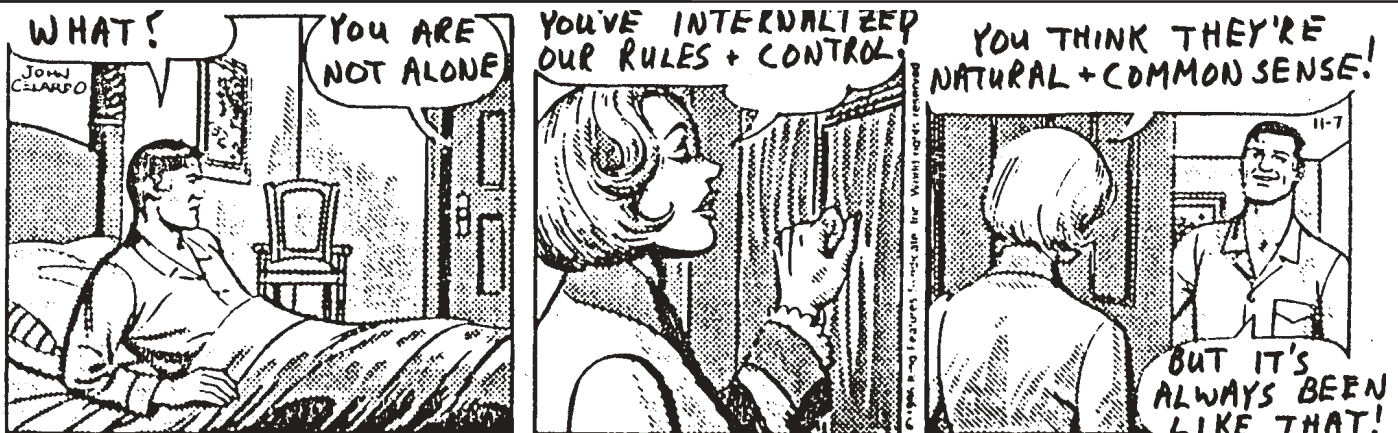
USE NON-PARTICIPATION

What Would Be the Role of the University?

Education in general and the university in particular are part of the web of domination and have to be destroyed if we are to be free. As technology, the systematic science of relating to the world through artifice, has developed, artificial "knowledge" has come to replace experiential knowledge. We "learn" by reading or listening to the words of experts or performing a set of prescribed rituals called experiments in a totally artificial environment called a laboratory (and this only after we've taken in enough of the words of the experts). In fact, we are taught to believe that what we "know" is what authority tells us is true and that this is more trustworthy than our own experience.

So the university is nothing more than an indoctrination center for training us to accept authority and the dominant ideology. There may, indeed, be material in a university that can be used in the undermining of authority, but it has to be used in a way that utterly undermines the university itself, a way that counters the dominant ideology with the knowledge that comes from direct lived experience. And ultimately, that means destroying all universities and schools along with the rest of the web of domination.

[Karen Eliot]



A Sentence for the Culture Industry

We cannot get out of your shadow and we know that; and we know that we love the shadowy pleasures of your dominion—not the way you do, taking your own products as omens of liberty, but loving helplessly, entranced, loving the levers of your control; also, we know that we are the same as you because we are *of* you, born of your rib, inconceivable without you, that is, we know that we are corrupt, paranoid, and parasitic; and finally we know that we want more than anything else to oppose you and that is why we are creating this conceptual suicide, this passionate act of love. [ASAC-CA]

Suppose you could take away the tics, what would there be left? I consist of tics—there'd be nothing left

A sufferer of Tourette Syndrome

GIVE THE ART WORD TO THE ART WORLD

GIVE UP



From January 1, 1991 to December 31, 1993, don't say "art" unless you mean "money."
Write: WORD STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEE PO Box 1500 New York, NY 10009 U.S.A.

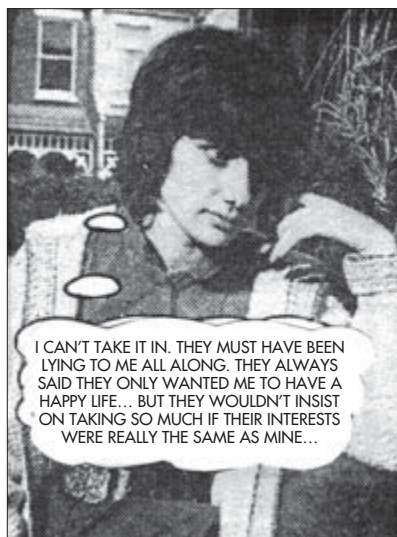
Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs)

ASAC (California), P.O. Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117 USA

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay



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What decision will YOU make?

FOCUS ON FOTOS

by Mark Forbes



It's been said that the purpose of a picture is "to inform people about the world." But how much of the information gleaned from a photograph is a result of the cold, fact-oriented, perspectival nature of the process itself, and how much of it depends on the motivations of the individual making or presenting the photograph?

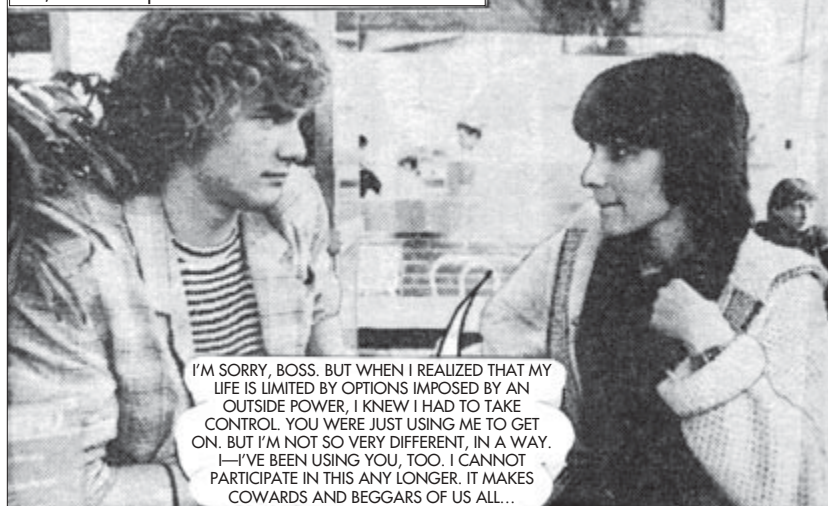
The camera is a mechanical de-contextualizer, tearing off pieces of the whole picture. Yet every such shred of verity seems complete in and of itself. This is the reason for our warning: one cannot trust even the most "objective" datum if it is collected by the biased operative of an enterprise devoted to either commerce or ideology. The ends of each are the same: the control of materials and thus power by controlling peoples' attitudes.

Photojournalism, often seen as a "noble" profession, lends much credibility and immediacy to the reporting of the news, the global gossip that serves to reinforce institutionally imposed collective attitudes. Journalism puts the "prop" in propaganda. Advertising is its alter-ego.

Photography is responsible for replacing lived experience with a strange, boring, irreality that is all surface, no substrate. Part of the sickness of contemporary social life comes from the images in the mass media that many of us aspire to. That we are at all willing to aspire to mere images is telling. But the problem lies not in the depiction of role models for people to follow (although one would likely take exception to those choosing these models: ad men and the corporate fantasies they become mouthpieces for). The real problem lies in peoples' willingness to follow any models that are thrown up in front of them. It would seem that, "That which appears is good, that which is good appears." Therefore people aspire to a fantasy designed to sell beer, detergent, and the like. Not that these commodities are without use, it is simply that focusing on them obsessively is of benefit only to their sellers. It is the gulf between the perceived irreality of corporate fantasy and the poverty of daily existence itself that causes people to be dissatisfied.

People must be made to know that their daily life is a thousand times more interesting than anything thrown up on a TV screen or depicted in magazines.

But, it did help Gill to come to a decision . . .



Why I Invented Art Strike (1990-1993)

Art Strike (1990-1993) is a NET, of fine mesh, to capture those with heads TOO LARGE. Suspended by the net of Art Strike (1990-1993) they hang together discussing, analyzing, rehashing, criticizing Art Strike (1990-1993), those who have been caught in it, those who have slipped through, and their opinions about them and everything. The NET cleans out the lightweights, the weaklings, the BIG-HEADED ones, shunting them into a quiet cul-de-sac of permanent artisticism, Artist-Club members reading the minutes of all previous meetings to each other over and over again, perpetually rewriting their constitution, rejustifying themselves and the World Artistists' Party. Art Strike (1990-1993) causes non-contributors, windbags, perpetual theoreticians, to become SELF-PURGING, clearing the path for those who are artists by virtue of their actions, removing those who are Artists By Self-Proclamation. Producers and contributors have free rein, no more encumbered by jaw-flappers and ideologues. Art is Demythified by removal of the mythicists and redefiners, manifestoists and movement-joiners. Art Strike can only be a complete success if it becomes PERMANENT, or induces all participants to suicide. Cambridge, Massachusetts

VOICES/Would it bother you if artists ceased production during Art Strike 1990-93?



Aylesa Singly, 30
Account manager
Chicago, Ill.



Karl Rosen, 45
Corporate travel director
Anaheim, Calif.



Pinky Gilbert, 46
Real estate agent
Smyrna, Ga.



Dave Hall, 63
Retired boilermaker
Gibbstown, N. J.



Joy Corbett, 38
Diamond saleswoman
Coon Rapids, Minn.

It wouldn't bother me as long as I knew everyone stopped creating—and not just because everyone else was doing it, but because a belief that it would make a real difference in peoples' lives. We really do have to protect our cultural integrity. If museums, art schools, and advertising agencies would close down for three years I believe it would make a real difference.

Yes. It is a disregard for my right to experience the fine arts in the public institution of my choice. Museums are supposed to be places where you can get away from all the hassles. Who is to say that "they"—the art police, concerned artists—will stop at only three years without art? Also, if art is truly for the people, it should be free and open to anyone who wants to encounter it.

I have nothing to hide, the last time I created anything was when I turned a high school cafeteria lunch tray into an abstract kind of sculpture, so it wouldn't bother me if other people wanted to give up such a useless activity like making art. You could check up on me anytime during the art strike, but you'd be wasting your time. My life is an open book—and during the art strike you can bet I'll be doing more productive and more meaningful things with my time.

No. I support what the art strike has to do to protect our cultural progress. If any Art Strike Action Committee were to call on me for support through artistic inaction, I would not hesitate. You aren't going to find my name ascribed to any artistic production for 3 years—or 30 years even! It's definitely the right choice for American artists. Foreign artists, too.

Yes, I shouldn't feel that Big Brother is watching while I check out a Van Gogh. Just because artistic expression is something you feel inside, a burning inner passion, doesn't mean you're reinforcing the stereotype of artists as flaky visionaries. Too many artists are discriminated against because nonartists who promote 3 years—or even one day!—without art act concerned about the state of art in a world gone mad. Real artists know what real life is. Their surveillance would only promote discrimination. Art strikers are Art criminals.

1990: THE END OF ART (IFICE)

The Entire Population supports the ART STRIKE

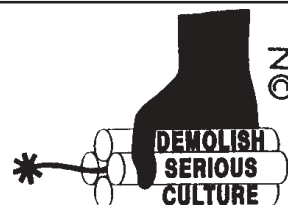
Bordeaux, France—La police a démantelé un réseau trafiquants, en arrêtant 13 personnes, à qui 278 Kg d'art ont été saisis. Il s'agit d'une des plus importantes prises d'art en France après celle qui avait eu lieu à Paris (1 tonne) en 1988 et les 300 kilos découverts à Brest. La bande serait liée à l'un des principaux dealers du monde de l'art... L'art était camouflé dans des armoires d'appartements d'une zone résidentielle de la ville. Il se trouvait dans des sacs contenant chacun un kilo d'art, avec cette inscription: "Pureté 100 pour 100." C'est bien fait. [LD5

(The police have disbanded a network of traffickers, arresting 13 persons, from whom 278 Kg of art were seized. The raid was one of the most important seizures of art ever to occur in France, after the ones which took place in Paris (1 ton) in 1988, and the 300 Kg discovered on board a boat last May in Brest. The traffickers were linked to one of the main art dealers in the world... The art was hidden away inside the closets of apartments in a residential area of the city. It was found in bags, each containing 1 Kg of art, marked "Purity: 100%". Well done.)

Anticopyright is a distribution service for agitational and generally scurrilous art/flyposters. The basic idea is this: I provide a photocopier and a central address. Anyone who has any work they want sticking up here, there and everywhere sends in a few copies which I will reproduce. Anyone who wants posters to stick up will write in and ask for them. A catalog will be provided as soon as it's off the ground. I want posters from everyone who can hold a pen in their hand, and for everyone who can hold a glue pot or use their eyes. A good distribution service, as well as plastering the walls of the world with unbuyable art is a good way of exchanging and developing work. Everyone is invited to contribute in whatever way they think suitable. I need people to send in work, people to place the posters, and I also need donations to run the project. If enough people get involved it is hoped to publish the first catalogue and fully launch the project early in 1990. All correspondence is welcome. Anticopyright, P.O. Box 368, Cardiff CF2 1SQ Wales UK.

Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs) and Supporting Publications

ASAC (California), P.O. Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117 USA
ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, Bordeaux Cedex, France



ART PRESS REVIEW

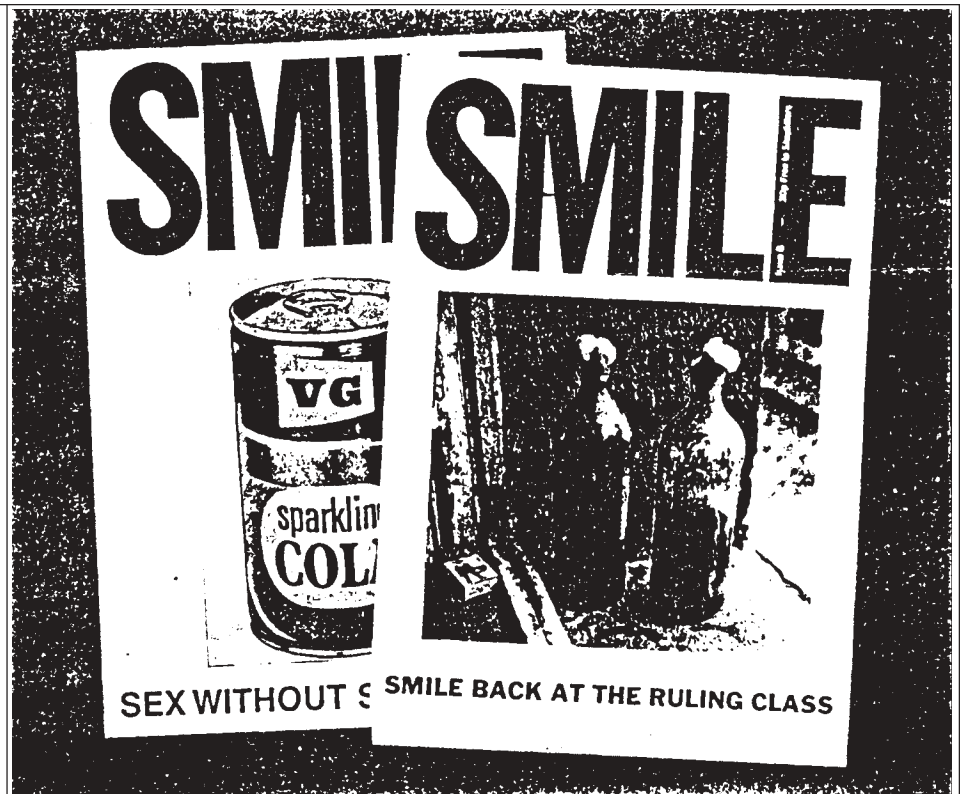
by GRANT KESTER

Typically the art press review concerns itself with those publications that represent the institutionalized art world. *SMILE* magazine might be said to represent the de-institutionalized art world.

SMILE emerged out of the Neoist "Cultural Conspiracy," an obscure pseudo-movement that was initiated in Canada in 1977 by a Hungarian correspondence and performance artist named Istvan Kantor. Kantor, at the suggestion of fellow mail artist David Zack, assumed the name Monty Cantsin and for the next five years produced work under this name. Zack retrieved the concept of the "multiple name" as a critique of bourgeois notions of individuality from the Berlin Dada movement. In theory anyone who wanted to could produce work (publications, music, performances, etc.) using the Cantsin identity. In fact, for several years only Kantor used the name and it became associated primarily with his activities. This led to the creation in 1984 of a second "multiple identity," Karen Eliot. Around the same time Stewart Home, an English Neoist, suggested the creation of a multiple identity magazine to be called *SMILE*. There are now a number of different versions of *SMILE* magazine being published, throughout Europe, England, and the U.S. The Eliot and Cantsin names, as well as *SMILE* magazine, are available and open for any and all to use.

Neoism is of particular importance because it engages many of the same issues treated by recent Postmodern work. The critique of "originality" or commodification taken up by artists like Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons, however, is waged from within the art world itself, through the production of art objects. Neoism, coming out of Fluxus and Situationist roots which privilege non-object activities, offers a valuable alternative model. Neoism manages to advance a convincing critique of commodified art production, while at the same time sustaining a support system that allows for an ongoing process of theoretical and practical dialogue.

Neoist practice is characterized by an often deliberate confusion of meaning, intention, and identity. For them, to be artists in a society in which "culture" in all its forms (fine art, television, advertising) is a primary agent of political domination is an inherently contradictory act. Art privileges the very values of "individuality" and "creativity" that are constantly de-



For Neoists, to be artists in a society in which "culture" in all its forms is a primary agent of political domination is an inherently contradictory act.

nied by the economic reality of capitalism. Thus, their relationship to their own "creativity" can only be equivocal: "Today we are no longer stupid enough to imagine that what we do is new, or even that such an assertion does not imply a progression and hence a certain 'newness.' We will continue to repeat the same old gestures with increasing unoriginality."

Neoism elaborates its cultural critique through three interrelated projects developed specifically in *SMILE* magazine: multiple identities, plagiarism, and the "art strike." The multiple identity concept is aimed at undermining the false individualism of capitalist society: "...capitalism controls by naming and describing ... by rendering names meaningless we make control impossible." *SMILE* also engages in a process of rampant plagiarism. They steal material not only from outside

sources (Henry Flynt's *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*, for example) but from other issues and version of *SMILE* as well. Plagiarism is linked with the "art strike." This is a concept developed by "Praxis," a faction of Neoism. According to Praxis, all previous attempts at "revolutionary" art were inevitably subject to bourgeois recuperation. The solution, then, is a "refusal of creativity": "from 1990 to 1993 ... artists will not produce work, sell work, permit work to go on exhibition ... This total withdrawal of labour is the most extreme collective challenge that artists can make to the state."

Neoism and *SMILE* draw on both Fluxus and Situationist art, sources of aesthetic practice which have been largely ignored or suppressed in most conventional histories of modern art. Situationism emerged in 1957 as an offshoot of "Lettrism," a relatively unknown move-

ment that revolved primarily around the activities of Isidore Isou, a Roumanian living in Paris. The "Situationist International" survived, in various forms, until 1971. During its 14-year history it functioned as an art movement as well as a semi-underground political body. Its major project involved the production of the journal *International Situationniste* and the publication of numerous manifestos, pamphlets, and posters. Situationist publications often made use of "detournement," a process of manipulating existing cultural forms that prefigures Postmodern appropriation.

Situationist involvement in French cultural life reached a high point during the events of May 1968, in which students and workers led a general strike that briefly paralysed the country. Situationists participated by organizing strike committees, spreading graffiti, and releasing lists of "approved" slogans ("Humanity won't be happy till the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist"). The Situationists' major critical contribution was their theorization of "alienated consumption." The basic idea was that in contemporary society we have become passive consumers of life rather than active participants. Consumption has become as alienating as work in the traditional Marxist scenario.

Issues of *SMILE* frequently use Situationist-inspired slogans and fragments of their texts. The cultural and political analysis developed by certain Neoists also borrows heavily from Situationism, although they usually claim to have superseded it. The Situationists were also an important resource for the Neoists because of the way they were able to maintain a self-critical relationship to their own authority as a "movement." *SMILE* magazines often employ an audacious, mock-militant tone that is reminiscent of Situationist writing.

While Fluxus artists generally didn't share the political aspirations of the Situationists, they have been at least as important for Neoism as a model of aesthetic practice. Fluxus, which emerged out of the avant-garde milieu of New York during the early '60s, was conceived, in part, as a reaction against the intellectual and creative containment of the art "movement." Fluxus sought to elude this process of identifications through constant change, or flux. The Fluxus artist Dick Higgins coined the term "inter-media" to describe work within or between traditional media, in defiance of the Greenbergian-Modernist reduction of art to the intrinsic characteristics of a singular medium.

Fluxus was instrumental in initiating numerous "experimental" aesthetic activities that have become Neoist mainstays (i.e. mail art, performance art, artists' books, and video art). Neoist "apartment festivals," which have been held in Germany, Italy, and Canada, come di-

rectly out of the Fluxus Festivals of the early '60s. The "look" of *SMILE* owes a great deal to the Fluxus/mail art aesthetic of Xerox, appropriation, and montage. In fact, the *SMILE* name is in a line of descent from FILE, General Idea's seminal mail-art publication, which inspired *VILE*, and then *BILE*. *SMILE* itself has been published as *MILES*, *SLIME*, and even *LIMES* (an issues which included a free packet of lime tea). If Fluxus was conceived as a critique of Modernist "movement" as actual stasis, Neoism ("Neo-fluxus"?) is meant in large measure as a critique of the very notion of the art "movement."

The Neoist network stopped producing *SMILE* in 1985. Most subsequent issues of *SMILE* have been generated by several different post-Neoist groupings, collectively referred to as "Praxis." These include "Generation Positive" in the U.K. and the U.S., "Anti-Neoism" in France, and the "Pregroperativistic Movement" in Holland. The amoeba-like transformations of Neoism, while confusing, are entirely consistent with the deliberate effort to critique and parody the concept of the art "movement." A comment in a recent issue of *SMILE* produced by an "ex-Neoist" suggests the logic behind their methodology: "Splits and schisms are essential to my conception of Neoism and any public slanging match between an ex-Neoist and the remaining members of the movement is worth twelve dozen great works of art. Ultimately, what all Neoists should aim for is an acrimonious split with the movement. To leave Neoism is to realize it."

Issues of *SMILE* produced before the advent of Praxis were often small in size (around 5"×7") and were relatively indistinguishable from other low-budget, peripheral art publications. Their content ranged widely. Depending on who produced a given issue it might consist of a personal reminiscence of Istvan Kantor's early days in Montreal, Xeroxed reproductions of neo-"Lettrist" works, or long running dialogues about the current state of mail-art. With Praxis-era *SMILE*s this is still the case, anyone who wants can and does continue to produce *SMILE*, but the Generation Positive faction of Praxis began to produce a series that is far more consistent in format and content than earlier versions. These *SMILE*s are less like Neoist network clearinghouses, and more like a recognizable "magazine." They are larger, feature slick covers, and use an almost identical layout. To a certain extent they represent a bid to make *SMILE* more available and "acceptable" outside of the Neoist network. Where earlier editions seldom ran above 500 copies, these *SMILE*s are being published in editions of 3,000. *SMILE*s are beginning to enjoy an increasingly wide dis-

tribution throughout Europe and North America. While many issues continue to be given away, they can also be found in book shops, record stores, and galleries.

The content in the three ("Praxis") issues I've seen is remarkably similar. Each issue begins with a manifesto-like statement of Praxis purpose, explaining, for instance, the idea behind the multiple identity concept, or plagiarism. This is followed by an art-historical analysis that examines the legacy of similar concepts in past aesthetic practice. These capsule histories of art, from a Praxis point of view, are useful sources of information on the development of European avant-garde art, particularly those segments that developed after World War II and were largely obscured by the academic hegemony of American Abstract Expressionism. The center of the publications includes a long-running tabloid-style narrative that usually features a parodic treatment of "avant-garde" art, junkies, or "class" war. Interspersed are neo-Situationist slogans and examples of photographic "detournement."

It is the constant oscillation between practical engagement and detached speculation that defines the paradox of Neoism, yet it is a paradox to which they willingly submit. The identity as an art "movement" that they so studiously undermine is at the same time a necessary prerequisite if their gestures (art strike, plagiarism, etc.) are to have any significance. While the Neoist "network" is an encouraging model for artists hard pressed by an art world that is heavily capitalized and increasingly hierarchical, it can also become an intellectual ghetto.

The decision to produce a slicker, more consistent version of *SMILE* could only have been made with ambivalence. The very changes that will allow *SMILE* to reach beyond the Neoist network will, at the same time, endanger its critical function as a magazine of "multiple origins." Readers will begin to identify *SMILE* with only one particular version. A Neoist friend has defined Neoism as "an attempt to create a totally alien and referential culture," that is, a culture which can act as a critical paradigm of art production in general. So long as *SMILE* circulates primarily within the Neoist network it can perform its critical project (the confusion of identities and authors) with little difficulty. As it moves outside this network, however, its critical "purity" is placed at risk. Neoism is, indeed, an "alien culture." Whether it can survive the immune system of the mainstream art world is not the issue so much as whether it should even try.

Grant Kester is the Washington, D.C., editor of the New Art Examiner.

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Quitting Time

Relatively speaking, the Art Strike (1990-1993) can only affect those people who choose to be affected by it. The Art Strike is, in this sense, as impotent as any other action of art. For those who ignore it, it might just as well have gone away.

The Art Strike is a Moment of Art; the logical terminus of a trajectory begun when artists began alienating themselves from the culture of which they were, in fact, a part. Perhaps they did this in an effort to gain a special and unfair credibility for themselves. This attempt was made in part by raising the level of discussion about the arts to an art in and of itself, a private code to which only the initiated could enjoy access. It matters not when you pinpoint the beginning of this trajectory. It matters only that it has, to a large degree, succeeded in not only alienating the bulk of the population from the arts, but also in alienating the arts from culture generally. The more art has rejected its culture, the less it has found it can live with itself. The final auto-destructive act of art is the Art Strike.

Analysis of the Art Strike goes on and on. We cannot live in a world with an Art Strike without speaking about it. It behooves us to comment at length in a futile attempt to justify our position with regard to the Art Strike, and usually this amounts to an attempt at justifying our continued "creativity." What remains obscure in all this is that we require no justification; being is enough. The ache to express oneself is the most dire act of insecurity. Through it, one seeks to connect to others in ways that one otherwise has become unable (for any number of reasons). It is this craving for connection that drives art. But how much real connection between artist and audience, or between people, can art foster when the alienation between it and its culture is so complete?

We all want to be liked. But art is useless in this quest. **YAWN** demands that the Art Strike be made permanent.

Bitch, Bitch, Bitch

YAWN, "Art Strike Questions" has been written and published by the LOWER EAST SIDE NEOIST FRONT and we demand that you reprint it in your next **YAWN**, the entire page, or, if you use only parts of it, you make a note of the FRONT's name, it is not because we want any rights to our statements but *we want people to know about our existence*, if you don't make this correction in your next issue you'll be charged with suppression of information, mutilation of ideas, and you will be hanged in the Museum

of Modern Art, between two Picassos, in room 16 we are serious like an orgasm fuck neoism now, but really hard [Monty Cantsin (tel. 514/273-3412); Neoist Embassy; 1020 Lajoie Ave; Outremont, Québec H2V 1N4; Canada]

Talent	≠	Art
Sales	≠	Art
Talk	≠	Art
Skill	≠	Art
Effort	≠	Art
Sacrifice	≠	Art
Size	≠	Art
Materials	≠	Art
Desire	≠	Art
Clever	≠	Art
Nothing	=	Art

BECOME NOTHING

[Amherst, Mass.]

New Support

92 December 1989

Dear **YAWN**:

You've convinced me!

I'm going to observe the 1990-1993 Art Strike 100%!

Sincerely yours,

A Fellow artist

[Port Charlotte, Florida]

elementary poetry

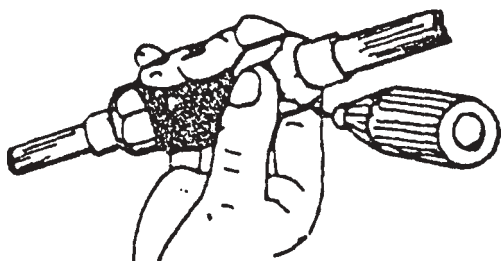
STOP

STOP THE MUSIC NOW

STOP THAT NOISE

STOP THE POETRY NOW

STOP THAT ART



The Dangers of Cockteasing

What is more difficult to possess becomes more desirable, more fashionable. An object which refuses to become duplicated becomes more valuable, more desirable. A culture or sub-culture which mocks and rejects prevailing fashion, prevailing commodities, prevailing cultural values becomes fashionable, desirable, assimilated, violated, discarded.

An artistic stance which mocks and rejects commoditization becomes desirable and fashionable. Proponents of such stances become legitimized, are offered positions, jobs, opportunities within a community which belches with pleasure during post-engorgement detumescence, during each brief respite from its perpetually ridiculous self-ingestion.

We sit around yellow formica tables picking the bones of our magazines, festivals, and performances; licking the grease from our grinning quivering lips.

[San Francisco]

Reaction to the Art Strike

•Jean-René Lassalle, student, Berlin, 12/24/89: "This art strike is hysterical, really.

...One might say that it's like the graffiti of May '68; sentences...which were made up to provoke (thought, among other things), while perhaps their immediate significance is not so very important. The mystique of the Artist bothers me some. On the other hand, if one creates, he gives of himself...and this is worthy of some recognition." [Translated from the French.]



THEATRE OF SORTS



February 7, 1990

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Attention Art-Strikers/Art scabs/Art whatevers:

You are invited to participate in an Anti-Art Performance Festival, Propaganda Bazaar & Exhibition, to be held Saturday, March 31st, at the Artichoke in Cleveland.

This Anti-Art Festival will present non-artistic work by unknown art-strikers of no global and regional significance whatsoever. Here are the guidelines: NO ART!!!

In addition, the festival will adhere to the following underlying principles:

- NO CENSORSHIP
- NO ENTRANCE FEES
- NO PANEL OF DISTINGUISHED JUDGES TO ACCEPT OR REJECT ANYONE'S WORK
- NO STIPENDS FOR ANY PARTICIPANTS—ALL PROCEEDS AFTER EXPENSES WILL GO TO THE NORTHEAST OHIO TASK FORCE ON AIDS
- NO PRE-FESTIVAL COCKTAIL PARTIES WITH MEDIA GAD-FLIES
- NO BORING CRITIQUE SESSIONS
- NO CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

To participate:

- 1) Do NOT send a resume or any documentation of prior work such as photographs, newspaper articles, audio or video tapes, etc. Nobody cares what you've done in the past.
- 2) Do NOT fill out any application forms. Paper is a precious natural resource. Why waste it on collecting inconsequential details?
- 3) Anyone who would like to perform, need only call (216) 762-5018 by March 15 to reserve a space on the performance agenda. This is only to devise a schedule so that performers will know who's up next. Remember, no one will be turned away!
- 4) Art-strikers who wish to display/trade/barter their propaganda no matter what medium (2-dimensional, 3-dimensional, zines, records, tapes, posters, etc.) need only show up that night. No calls are necessary.

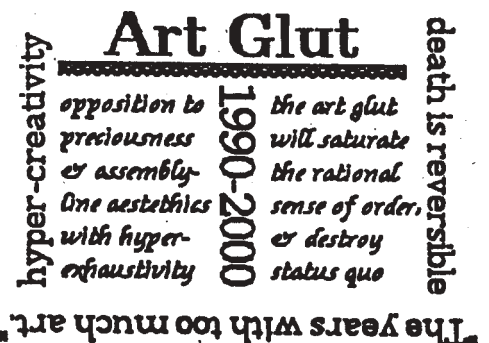
This art-strike action instigated by:

Theatre of Sorts, P.O. Box 80083, Akron OH 44308

Regarding the Great Art Strike (1990-1993) and its Relative Effects

As the movement and the direction are self-explained, cliché of felinic history will be negated at this time, relative to the quantified ratio of analicks located in the jello-sector of Minnteasobauta ruins, a silent burp reverberating off itself, a laughter in the Forest Without Trees. Some would be required to commit the ultimate act, remaining naked in the traffic of fordian Cyperuick speech patterns, smiling incessantly at the shopkeeper's chit-chat and nausea jokes, awaiting the slip (as all the time in art is lost) to come up the chutes of dynamic verbiage, eh? Reality on the planet sucks anyway, so all chimed the karmic-philosophic ditties, *Rot, Reality, Rot*. At that time, the Enervation Factors elevated the adult endgames into Karl Fesser's sassafras cocktail mimics, tucked and sucked only in promotional wieners of gravity, a lack of answers and unscientific indecence. A strike, what a bright idea, he blurts to himself. What brazen and brilliant negative! So the little stir begins. We'll be adjusting the perimeters, giving the so-called straight "art" world the credence it didn't deserve in the first place! We'll set up another wall! Another artsy-fartsy division line, another pointifas of "Us and Them," but this time the blur will come in the "Us," communication is Ism-stained again! The solemn tones and endless trots of useless maddened theories, out of the mouth like burbling brooks, producing an infinite gas-bubble of foul smelling silent wealth, cookbooks! I just want to go Home and turn on the gas, watch "The Mechanic" for the ninth time and have that spot of tea grow into a negative, even thinking beings need some rest from this job, this drudge, this creative process—jeez, I need a vacation, he says to himself? He opens the cookie and finds he always believed everything They trotted out, a little jealous-bug earwigs through his cranial, the welcome-weakness of the idea, ohmy, this creating process and "art" is such a bitch, never stops, and I've set up the Here and There for this area, too. It's not all bad, it has stimulated discussion and self-examination (well that was the Big Something). A breakfast is always euphoric, the tentative support of glimmering hunches, to verify his position in small ways, if it comes to that! We'll tailor the tails and make every creator wag 'em! Those fibrous nerds that feel that the process has no separation, but yet (hee-hee) we'll set up a whole 'nother ball of Elmer's! Eh! Another temple of didactics! Another solid mounting of academical bullshit! As the movement and direction proceeds, the cops bust in the door and scream "freeze! you meaningless voidal! You have the right to remain slick and be an agent for societal change! But any work that remains obscure and obtuse will be held against you, like slimy maggot guts? You have the right to remain marginal and live the rules that don't exist for yourself and I know what I mean, cuff him Dainioh." Across the wide expanse of crumbling cells, the 1% ask themselves—"Oh, 'tis closet, this atomizing musty, I speak to this mind, 'tis the Isness that only is, let's start a revolution? Duh?" The aircraft over the stadium, pages turning alone and fear. God. Do you think this one does for aggrandizement alone? Eh? Guns don't kill. Only the assholes that own 'em do. June 19, 1987, the atomization process began on Earth. The noticeable evidence will ensue in 2002. Eh.

[Waukau, Wisconsin]



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 ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
 ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay
 Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, Bordeaux Cedex, France



March 15, 1990

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WHAT IS AVANT- KITSCH?

ART STRIKE FORM

(valid 1990–1993)

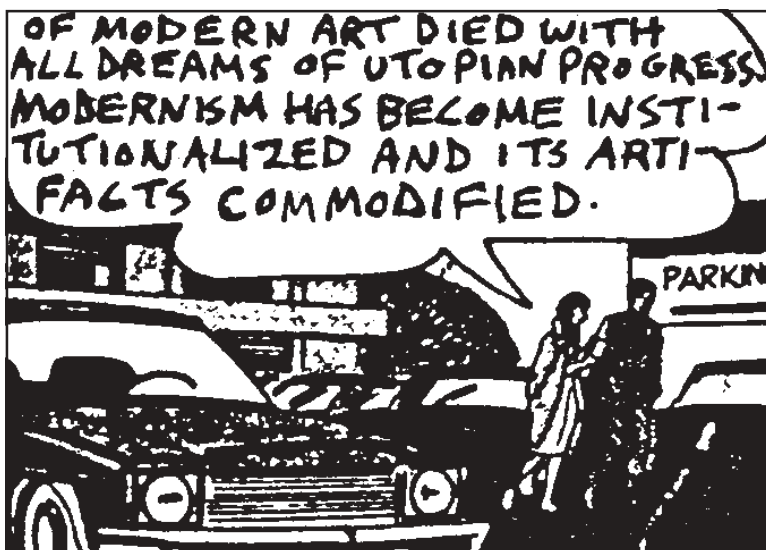
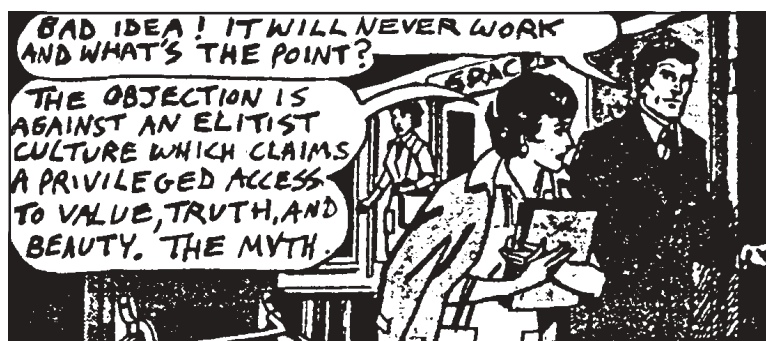
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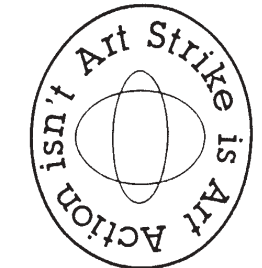
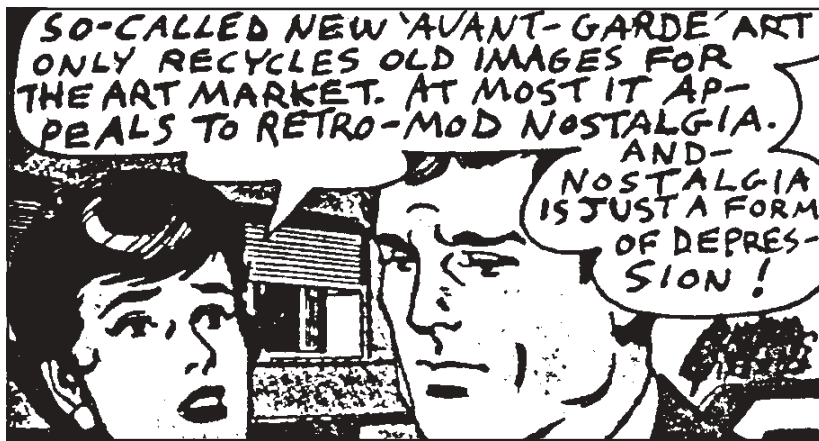
TODAY I DID NOT

- ☐ MAKE ART
- ☐ EXHIBIT ART
- ☐ SELL ART
- ☐ BUY ART
- ☐ THINK ABOUT ART

(put an x if you did)

Your Signature





We are the hole in the body of the serious culture. The most dangerous opposition is that one which does not exist. We are the hole in the body of the serious culture. The most dangerous opposition is that one which does not exist. We are the hole in the body of the serious culture. The most dangerous opposition is that one which does not exist. We are the hole in the body of the serious culture. The most dangerous opposition is that one which does not exist.



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YAWN

SPORADIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

May 1, 1990

Nº14

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Real Life

Now that the Art Strike has begun, what is needed most is to renounce it. The thought that such an (in)action can be treated by some as a “work of art” is reason enough. This fetishization through aesthetics is one of the tendencies the Art Strike had hoped to discredit. The best thing to do now is simply to stop referring to the Art Strike, which is, after all, just another plaything to make the mind do somersaults.

From this point we might now turn our attention to real life. What is required in doing this is still as poorly understood as the reality that makes it necessary. In spite of this, we can come to feel, intuitively, that a life lived is a concrete expression of a personal aggregate of ideas and beliefs, most of which come from outside of us, yet which result in a personal and subjective synthesis. It is in this synthesis that what each of us truly wants in life can be realized. This is ultimately much more satisfying than any art form, or even the refusal of an art form, for that matter.

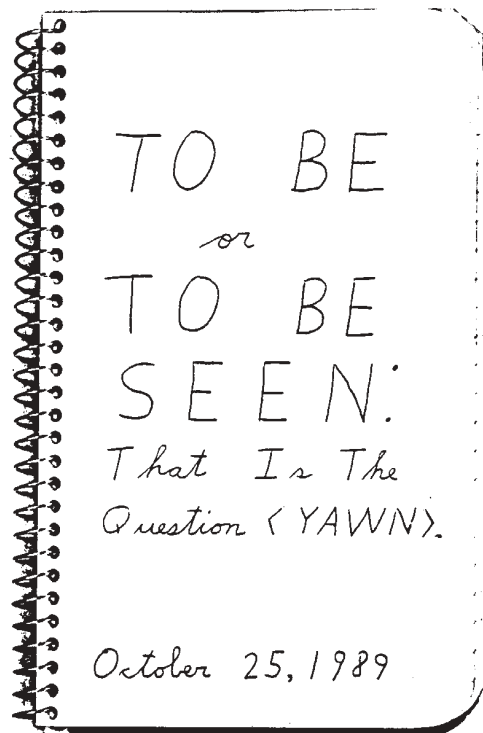
What is it that we want in life? Much of human life is a quest for satisfaction. Lack is engineered into our biology. We crave food, shelter, companionship, and sex. Each of these fit into empty spaces left in ourselves. There are many chemical and mechanical reasons for this, which need not interest us here. Suffice it to say, many of us spend our lives fitting square pegs into round holes, trying to fill one of these sore voids in us with a mismatch, ineffectively. A morbidly obese person, for example, might be trying to answer a lack of companionship with food. This is obviously counterproductive.

The mass culture industry has much to

gain from having entire populations engaged in futile quests. The cycle of production and consumption, which most of us think we understand so well yet which is filled with so many metaphysical subtleties, is perpetuated effectively by means of encouraging human beings to act like machines. There are many mechanisms in place for squelching those who fail to comply. Mindfulness is the thing we need most now in the world.

What's at stake in this is our own ability to listen to ourselves. We need to acquire the ability to shut out many external forces for long enough to figure out what we expect of ourselves, and the culture that we all tacitly support simply by functioning in it. All too often, the personal synthesis we construct from the external forces of peer group pressure, mass media, and the results of parenting and education, reside in us, dormant or hypnotized, to such an extent that many of us go to the grave without considering the real nature of our endless search for fulfillment.

All there is to it is to live. The real, honest things we feel (and constantly suppress) must not be prohibited. The forbidden practices of non-productivity and refusing to participate are what we must allow ourselves. Never again must we feel obliged to perform meaningless repetitive tasks that only exacerbate the waste built into the system and which serve to numb us. The creative changes we feel like making must be made. We must liberate the power of whim. We must carefully listen to what is said to us, and then invite further communication by commenting meaningfully. Our honest, insistent attempts to do these things can only result in an improvement of our collective condition.



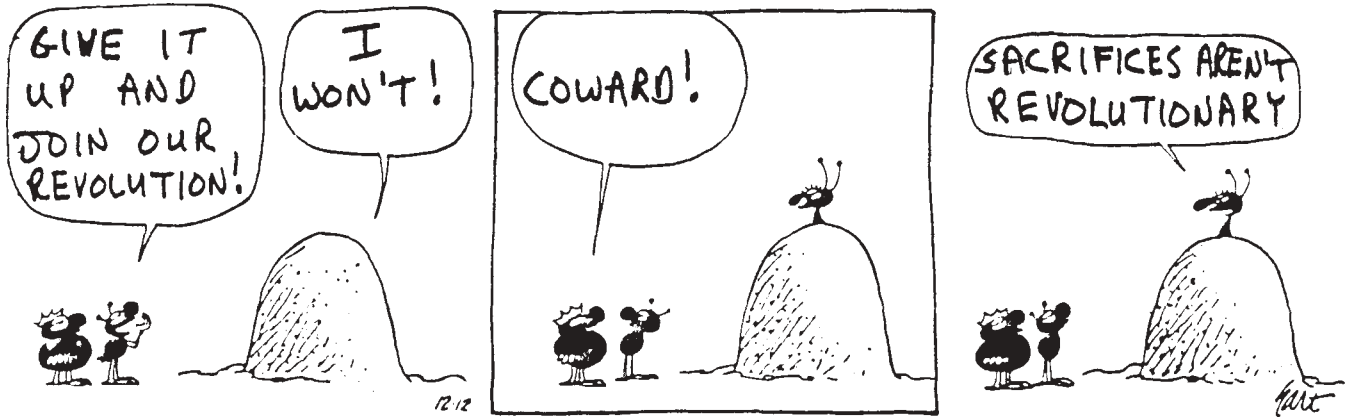
“This is a particular example of a more general problem: the separation of thought and action in our society. We are living in a time when systematically—though without our wanting it so—action and thought are being separated. In our society, he who thinks can no longer act for himself; he must act through the agency of others, and in many cases he cannot act at all. He who acts cannot think out his action, either because of lack of time and the burden of his personal problems, or because society’s plan demands that he translate others’ thoughts into action. And we see the same division within the individual himself. For he can use his mind only outside the area of his job—in order to find himself, to use his leisure to better himself, to discover what best suits him, and thus to individualize himself; whereas in the context of his work he yields to the common necessity, the common method, the need to incorporate his own work into the overall plan. Escape into dreams is suggested to him while he performs wholly mechanized actions.”

Propaganda by Jacques Elull [1962].

New York: Vintage Books, 1973. pp. 27-28.

A R T
should be
Nobody's Business
1990-1993

*We have an abstraction
which is the abstraction
of an art abstraction:
I am talking about the art strike.
(Annette Woolf)*



PATRONAGE EXCLUSION CAREERISM ALIENATION IMPOTENCE

Reaction to the Art Strike, Part 2



• Jacques Abeille, novelist, Bordeaux, 12/31/89: "What a silly idea, this Art Strike... it's a logical paradox; that is to say, a statement which involves a contradiction, a proposition which negates itself. To choose to do this strike assumes in the first place that you are what you

pretend to end: one must first be an artist in order to quit being one. It follows from this that all who during these three years who present themselves as non-artists will be artists, and that all those who present themselves as artists won't be....(1).

By this formal logic one will allege that its proposals are universals that do not pertain: the Art Strike doesn't apply to everyone, but only to those who are already manifested as artists. One should not say 'all who...', but instead only 'those who...' or 'certain...'. So the proposal of an Art Strike doesn't entail the advancement of a universal proposition, therefore it holds to the official and mercantile distinctions between artists and the rest of the human population. In other words, to subvert this distinction, you accept the basis of what you're trying to subvert, and end up prolonging it by adding on a new criterion: from now on the artists will be the ones participating in the Art Strike during these three years. (2) ...

[LD Nº6



*We have a censorship
which is the censorship
of a self-censorship
I am not talking about art strike.*

(Annette Woolf)

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Confession in Support of the 1990-1993 Art Strike

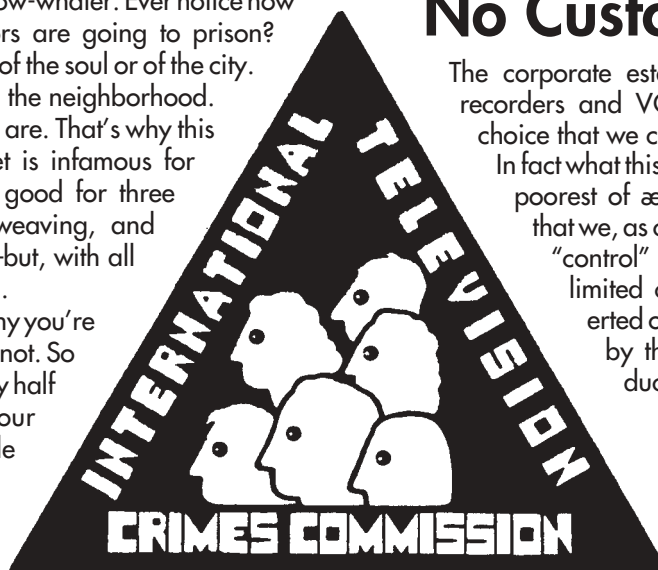
I may as well admit it from the start. They've been right all along. I'm useless. Totally worthless.

But then, chances are, so are you or you probably wouldn't be wasting your time reading this publication. Not really wasting your time. Wasting the precious air that your excuse for a body is breathing. When you should be rotting in a rapidly disappearing Amazonian jungle, or a woods somewhere,—performing the only function that you're probably good for. As compost. After all, isn't it about time that you did something for the trees after having deforested them for so long for the sake of making paper to put your silly, egotistical drawings on?

No, not really wasting your time. This publication might even be damn "good" for your lowly, conniving, pseudo-sensitive pollutions you so ludicrously glorify as ART. Face it. You're a careerist of the most parasitic sort. At least admit that this slop in printed form is no more than a sort of "True Crimes" manual with pretensions of superiority. I have. When I realized that useful people like car mechanics, wet nurses, and mad bombers have good reason to scorn my "flights of the imagination" and "abstract" thinking I was brave enough to blurt out to the world to see that I'm just another con artist. Just out for an unfairly easy living and a free meal. JUST LIKE YOU! (dirty scribbler) Do you have the guts to spill it out as honestly as I have? Or are you just going to snivel and complain in that cushy Bolton Hill (or wherever) apartment that your parents pay for because you're incapable of facing harsh reality long enough to support yourself? —Or maybe you're too busy being duped into gentrifying someplace like Hollins Market so that the rich can get richer and the you-know-what can get you-know-whater. Ever notice how many of your non-artist neighbors are going to prison? Avant-garde = gentrification. Be it of the soul or of the city. When the artists come, there goes the neighborhood.

Not that I'm any better than you are. That's why this is a confession. As my parent set is infamous for having written, "Artists are only good for three things: making glasses, basket-weaving, and counterfeiting money." Well put—but, with all due respect, not going far enough.

Have you ever asked yourself why you're reading this publication? Probably not. So let me rub it in your mug. Oh, I'd say half of your motivation lies with your scummy need to pick up those little tricks of the trade like how to pretend to convince the government and corporations that you just might be smart enough [over



The Good of TV

It seemed stupid to me for those two men to break the two televisions in order to turn them off. Didn't they know the television has a knob to turn of the trash and undesirable?

I'm in my middle 80s. I turn off most sports, all movies (unless they are true stories) and all comedies, and lots of other trash.

In my arm chair and by my television I have explored the Arctic and Antarctic, and climbed to the top of Mount Everest and skied down with a parachute.

Tonight I'm going two and an half miles to the ocean bottom and have a brief tour of the *Titanic* that sank so tragically in 1912. I have taken tours of most countries of the world, to see the animals in their own habitat, to meet some of the people, see how they dress, what crops they raise, what they eat and their religious beliefs.

I have visited museums, cathedrals, historical places, I was at King Tut's tomb when they opened it. I have swum over coral beds and seen the creatures living there, as well as larger fish and whales and the cunning sea otters in the kelp beds.

I have seen the devastation of volcano, tornadoes and earthquakes. But it is too bad that most people like to be entertained by trash instead of watching the better programming. TVs are wonderful if used in the right way. [Iowa City Press-Citizen, 4/28/90, 9A, "Letters to the Editor"]

People living in an imaginary world are aesthetes.

An aesthetic world is a victim of a totalitarianism.

Is art strike an imagination only?

(Annette Woolf)

No Custom Culture

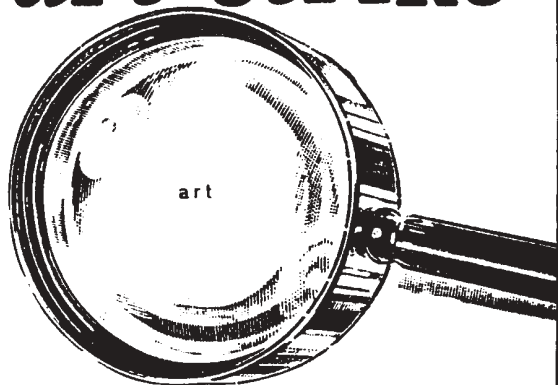
The corporate establishment teases us with cassette recorders and VCRs, suggesting that we have free choice that we can create our own "custom culture."

In fact what this offers is further blind following of the poorest of aesthetic artifacts through the illusion that we, as consumers sitting at home, have some "control" over what we watch. In a world of limited choices, the strongest control is exerted over the content of culture productions by the producers through selective production.

Issues concerning the autonomy of the individual must be of primary concern at all times. We only become capable of thinking for ourselves if we exercise the ability to do so.



Loosen your company tie. Plan a retirement date to 1990-1993. **art strike**



Please send me further details on confidential pensions

Name _____

Address _____

*People taking motives for results
are idealists.*

*They are victims of a philosophy.
Is art strike a good motive only?*

(Annette Woolf)

CONFESSION, *from other side*] to be able to bad-mouth them if they don't give you the payola to support your addle-brained pot habit—all so that they can pretend to be doing something socially useful by keeping you alive. And as for the other half? Your pathetic need to qualm your microscopic conscience with that big fat mutual pat on the back. "Gee, you're sooooo talented! I just love the way you take that palette knife and squiggle it around like that! Oooohh! That really is great! That prick and pussy horse tongue collage would really shock your mom and dad! Better not let them see it! (giggle)"

So what's the ball point of all this? The ART STRIKE. The only answer to a problem we should've gotten rid of with the bubonic plague. In fact, why stop for just three years? Take a good look at yourself, stop exercising solely to get your mouth between your legs, and give up art altogether. Do you want to be so ashamed of yourself that when you're fifty-five and your grandchildren come to visit you in the nursing home you can't even look them in the eye? Don't forget, if even they hate you, you won't even be able to bum your fucking cigarette money off of them.

Don't be more of a scab than you already are. SUPPORT THE ART STRIKE. [Tim Ore]

The Abolition of Art

The primary function of the "abolition of art" is to destroy all the cultural mythologies whereby the powers-that-be crystallize the image of their superiority, their own intelligence; art is the armchair in which the State sits for its own pleasure.

Now, it is quite clear that the difference between the *Abolition of Art* and all the previous attempts at ideological destruction (Dada in particular) is that I consciously and deliberately allied the elimination of aesthetic values to the necessity and possibility of social revolution.

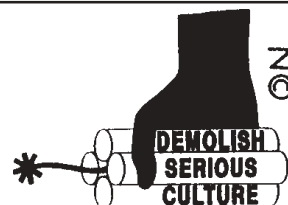
Let us have no illusions about it: most "art critics" are going to carry on as if art were not abolished, as if art couldn't be abolished; most "artists" are going to continue to believe in the "artistic" character of their production; most gallery-goers, art lovers and, of course, buyers are going to ignore the fact that the abolition of art can really occur in the actual time and space of a pre-revolutionary situation like that of May 1968. It is essential that the minority advocate the necessity of going on an *active art strike*, using the "machines" of the culture industry so that we can more effectively set it in total contradiction with itself. The intention is not to end the rule of production, but to change the most adventurous part of "artistic" production into the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques. [Alain Jouffroy, *What's to be done about Art?*, published in "Art and Confrontation", New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1968]

"When machine production was new, it gradually created an environment whose content was the old environment of agrarian life and the arts and crafts. This older environment was elevated to an art form by the new mechanical environment. The machine turned Nature into an art form. For the first time men began to regard Nature as a source of aesthetic and spiritual values. They began to marvel that earlier ages had been so unaware of the world of Nature as Art. Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt or degrading. Yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form."

[Marshall McLuhan]

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On the Use of "Paradox" as a Philosophical "Electric Prod" & EmBEDded Ulterior Motives as Trickster of the SubConscious in the Writings of Tim Ore

Inspired by Tim Ore's recent text "Confession in Support of the 1990–1993 ART STRIKE" (printed in **YAWN** no. 15) & the probable controversy surrounding its seemingly vituperative nature, I've decided to attempt to analyze a few of his writings in order to expose their deviously disguised cON/tENT—since said cON/tENT often seems to go under-noticed or unnoticed altogether.

The above-mentioned text has two key trick statements in the first paragraph written in first person by the author: "I'm useless. Totally worthless." How tricky this is, however, does not become apparent until we delve further into the text. After this seemingly self-effacing beginning of this supposed "confession," the reader is soundly insulted for being as worthless as the author (& in some respects, more so) but the emotionally charged *style* of the writing places the criticism so far beyond reasonableness that the reader seems to be under attack from someone placing himself in a superior, self righteous & indignant position & spitting venomously at the worms beneath him. This is exaggerated by the division between the "I" of the author & the "you" of the reader—never is there a "we" which would make Mr. Ore's implied position of shared culpability believably sincere—despite, e.g., after the longest paragraph of defamation of the reader's character, such statements as: "Not that I'm any better than you are." If the author is so worthless, why does he separate himself from his "worthless" readership & make claim to superior bravery? Why doesn't he mention his own neighborhood (Charles Village) in the same breath that he mentions Bolton Hill & Hollins Market?

The inattentive or easily emotionally manipulated reader may simply write off Ore as a hypocritical shit & completely miss the thoroughness of the "paradoxes" in his text. In the second paragraph, Ore suggests that artists using paper should die & be used as compost to regenerate forests as recompense for having destroyed so many trees for their own petty purposes. But, to the discerning reader, the irony of this should be readily apparent—viz.: Tim Ore is spreading & presenting his text on the very same medium—thusly wasting paper as much as anyone! Could he possibly be oblivious to this? I don't think so—and this article is partially in support of that position.

To digress temporarily to a text recently printed in a *CoBalt* newsletter, I refer to the "C.O.G.S." manifesto &/or petition. In this, Ore claims to represent the "joint N.E.A. (National Endowment for the Arts) & C.C. (Canada Council) Division" of the "Continuity of Government Sponsorship" (i.e.: C.O.G.S.) group. This fictitious group offers to "continue with their/our radical representations of potential utopias after the wholesale rendering of the environment unsuitable for the average person." Such a "generous" offer "only" expects payment from the other survivors for "services" rendered. The pseudo-

humbleness of this offer is one of the clearest cases of Ore's satire—and yet people have been known to've believed it at face value nonetheless.

Accepting that this manifesto/petition is really a parody of one of T. Ore's pet peeves, we begin to approach the obliqueness of his presentation of cON/tENT. I.e.: Ore never says what he means—or, rather, his meaning is not a one-sided answer in a way which, following his own "logic," will lead the reader to realize that the original layer of apparent meaning is not the "real" (or only) meaning at all. In a sense, this creates a "paradox" because if the secondary meaning is reached via the "logic" of the first meaning & the second meaning refutes the "logic" of the first meaning then the first meaning's leading to the second meaning is refuted & the reader is back at the beginning again without the ability to seriously accept either.

SERIOUSLY. Here we are at another key concept. As tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE has written (with luminous paint no less) "Seriousness is Death" (more about him & his relation to Tim Ore later). Humor often tends to juxtapose seemingly "unrelated" items to arouse laughter with the unexpected. In a similar way, zen koans tend to juxtapose seemingly contradictory elements to inspire the perceiver to contemplate a possibility transcendent of simplistic pigeon-holing. Humor & zen. Both subvert the quick-draw of presupposition by deliberately "setting up" the perceiver with their all too predictable expectations & then not conforming to them.

How is this done? Through "paradox." As previously mentioned, the "Confession" seems hypocritical. But the "hypocrisy" is actually, as indicated by the last two paragraphs of this analysis, a humorous "I am lying" "paradox." In zen, (to quote Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*)

A koan is a puzzle which cannot be answered in ordinary ways because it is paradoxical. *What is the sound of one hand clapping?* is a zen koan. Zen students are told to think unceasingly about a particular koan until they know the answer. There is no single correct answer to a koan. It depends upon the psychological state of the student.

Note the hierarchy of "masters" & "students" in Zukav's (& most people's) presentation of zen. The "paradox" here is that if there is "no single correct answer" then can there be a "master"? I.e.: can there be a "superior" person when typical ideas of "superiority" are rooted in the "superior" teacher's having more "correct answers" than the student?

Tim Ore's "C.O.G.S." statement makes fun of the contradiction "intrinsic" in "revolutionaries" using money extorted from the masses to complain about how the masses are pushed around. It laughs at the

self-servingness of people who pretend to have the interests of “others” in mind without acknowledging that we are all one to begin with. As such, it jokes about the pretense that any hierarchy/elitism can be anything other than a fraud perpetrated on the insecure &/or gullible.

How is the issue of the “master”/“student” hierarchy related to & subverted in the “Confession”? Through what I’ve chosen to call the “Philosophical ‘Electric Prod.’” Ore’s text is obviously addressed to a specific audience. Having been written for the *CoBalt* magazine, it addresses itself to said magazine’s presumed readership. Knowing that the CoBalt office is located on the premises of the Maryland Institute of Art, that CoBalt meetings occur on the premises, & that the annual CoBalt festival is held nearby, Ore is safe in assuming that most CoBalt readers will be Maryland Institute students &/or faculty & their friends. Thus his “low blows” are aimed at potentially touchy spots of that particular constituency. Given that it’s common for students to be supported by their parents & given that Bolton Hill is the fairly expensive neighborhood adjacent to the school where many of the students live, Ore writes “are you just going to snivel & complain in that cushy Bolton Hill (or wherever) apartment that your parents pay for because you’re incapable of facing harsh reality long enough to support yourself?” On the surface, this is a total attack on the integrity & courage of the student. No corner is given to the idea that students should have slack from practical responsibility to enable them to concentrate on studying. The text implicitly states that having such slack is an undeserved privilege (usually bought with ill-gained wealth)—further implying that the experiential type of learning that results from a less privileged position in this society is a type of learning much more worthy of respect. A learning approaching a social equality. An anarchistic learning in which experience itself is the teacher rather than another individual higher in an institutionalized hierarchy.

But, once again, we’re confronted with the “I’m lying” “paradox”—in this instance serving fairly clearly as a “Philosophical ‘Electric Prod.’” Knowing that he’s addressing students, Ore shocks & prods their potential ability to philosophize with his electrically charged bludgeoning prose—but, his blows are so low that they miss the genitals & hit the ground harmlessly. The electrical ground. The irony here is that in order for the student to understand that these apparently heated insults are harmless, the student must accept them as being “true” & then reject them as being “false” as the next logical step. Just as in the “I am lying” “paradox” the perceiver can’t logically accept the statement as being either “true” or “false,” so it is that if Ore is sincere in his critique of the hierarchy of privilege then the student can’t logically accept Ore’s apparent opinion base of the “masterful teacher” insulting the “lowly student”—& vice versa. A hint at this irony is contained in the sign-off of “sincerely”—such a signature precursor usually follows an even-tempered text—it’s a politeness. Ore’s text is anything but polite.

Tim Ore is a *con* artist. In his open letter proposing that New York city trade names with BalTimOre, dated Dec. 15, 1982, Ore justifies the desirability of this proposal in various ways. His main thrust is presented as being that NYC’s reputation as a cultural center tends to bias the thoughtless critic unfairly in favor of anything that comes from New York & cause the same critics to completely ignore anything from BalTimOre. Anyone familiar with being an artist in BalTimOre can certainly identify with this. But is such a concern really behind Ore’s motives? Those of us familiar with Ore’s obsession with sex & somewhat secret desire to impregnate one thousand womyn before dying know that what underlies his every action is just strate-

gies for “getting laid.” There are two main reasons why Tim Ore resides in BalTimOre first: the name of the city serves as a constant subliminal stimulus to fuck with him (i.e.: to “Bal(l)” with him) & second: BalTimOre is one of the unwed mother capitals of the world. BalTimOre’s population is too small compared to New York—if they were to exchange names, Ore’s sexual advertising for himself would reach many *millions* more people! Such is the real motive.

Tim Ore is a *con* artist in more ways than one. In the “ART STRIKE” text, he refers to tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE as his “parent set.” A peculiar expression—and one that’s so unobtrusively inserted that I suspect that the average reader would glide over it unnoticingly. This is another key expression. A set is something that contains something—an array of things organized in a particular way—a unified group. If tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE is Tim Ore’s parent set, then Tim Ore is a smaller set *within* tENT-a-cON—Tim Ore is a part of a greater cON/tENT. Does this mean that tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE & Tim Ore are the same person? Ore has called himself “tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE’s post-Frame-of-Reference public relations person.” This obscure reference refers to a box/puppet-theater made by cONVENIENCE as his last act before becoming a self-declared schizophrenic with too personal a language to be comprehensible to anyone outside his own world anymore. tENT, knowing that he faced unbearable loneliness, opted in favor of having multiple personalities to keep each other company. As one of them, Tim Ore chose to stay in touch with the “outer world” as an interface—partially as a survivalistic-measure. Here, another philosophical question appears. Is there an “outer world”? I.e.: IS the perceiver inevitably the center of their own universe—in which all other existence can’t be “proven” to be anything other than a subjective creation? If one answers this question YES, then Ore is no more or less a creature separate from tENTATIVELY than I am. The name tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE, when taken as a self-description, can be easily interpreted to “define” a flexible entity boundary—a boundary which recognizes that everything is interconnected except for that which is not. What any given communicating consciousness declares itself to be depends on the consciousness’s limitations. Localized absence of depth perception. Not willing to expand, for the purposes of brevity, my own lack of depth perception made apparent by the extremely simple-minded treatment of this philosophy, this subject (& paragraph) stops here.

Ore’s interpenetration with tENT’s schizophrenia is hinted at by his tastes in clothing. Always wearing the same “clashing” plaids, most observers typecast Tim as a street person. This is a conscious affectation on Ore’s part—a choosing to be an “outsider artist” rather than associate with & be accepted by a society so inclined to such simple-minded stereotyping.

To return to the zen parallels, I quote John Cage (from *Indeterminacy*) telling a story about his zen teacher D.T. Suzuki,

Before studying zen, men are men & mountains are mountains. While studying zen, things become confused. After studying zen, men are men & mountains are mountains. After telling this, Dr. Suzuki was asked “What is the difference between before & after?” He said, “No difference—only the feet are a little bit off the ground.”

To paraphrase this, I write: Before studying Ore, womyn are womyn & men are men. While studying Ore, things become confused. After studying Ore, men are men & womyn are womyn, only Ore’s dick is pointing up at the sky. [E.G. Head

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The modes of discourse

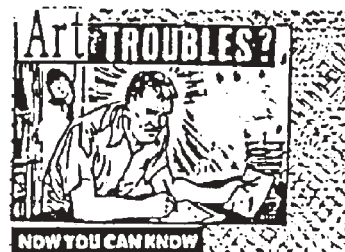
create their own (pseudo) answers. Only illusionary movement can take place within the existing frameworks. Consequently, our actions towards revolutionary movement must find their basis in the undermining of existing (i.e., accepted) forms of discourse. To this end, we formulate (meta) nihilism as a point of departure, not because we 'believe' in it, but because it is a tentatively convenient position on the self-reflexive extreme of the mode of discourse (the 'contradictory'). We will 'progress' 'beyond' this 'reference' point only in that we intend to deconstruct the underlying capitalist power relations which caused its materialization (from the historical negation of radical inertia with pseudo-leisure in the first place). We have no illusions that meaning can continue in some way to 'progress' or can be done away with instantaneously—we impassively address the illusionary 'progress' of the 'human condition' and 'desire' its cessation. We aim for an (in)active refusal of the suppression of (in)active refusal. And clearly, the reason that these ideas seem negative or empty is that they are articulated in a self-supporting context which they attempt to undermine, and which, by its intrinsic nature cannot tolerate their attachment to the 'value' of 'meaning' (linguistically, logically or otherwise). This intrinsic suppression of radicality, when fully understood, provides the motivating 'level' of speculation which supports our critique of the modes of discourse. But all 'levels' of separation are illusionary, returns to the sphere of bourgeois power-relations. **[SMILE]**

FRACTURED SOULS UNITE!

The business at hand of stabbing repeatedly the ugly vipers of our ECONOMIC SLAVERY will of necessity be our ongoing anguish. But what is the purpose for drive but the actions that this anguish produces. It is true that we add fuel to the very system we oppose, by using their paper, inks, postal system, etc. But we must take into account what systems are really servicing a truncating bureaucracy and what is neutral to serve all purposes.

It is our responsibility to make that distinction, to be constant in making no sacrifice to the ECO-GLUTTONS.

The essence of revolution does not come directly from the heart, but rather from somewhere in the primordial brain. Our primal instincts warn us when we cannot function well in our surrounds. Therefore the ART STRIKE must strike out and kill that disease around that threatens to kill us. A strike of actions is what we demand. GO FORTH AND KILL BAD KARMA!



Statement Regarding the Art Strike 1990-1993

Now that I have learned the reasons for the international Art Strike 1990-1993 I declare that I will support it, but in Yugoslavia, country where I am living and making art, an Art Strike would have no sense because:

1. There is no art market here yet.
2. Prices of artworks are so low that you don't sell at all. You make art for pleasure, philosophical and creative reasons
3. We have only few art critics and curators, and they have no power or influence upon artists.
4. You don't have to pay the galleries for having your own exhibition, but galleries pay you for that. Shows are not commercial at all, so alternative artists can exhibit in official gallery spaces.
5. The serious culture hardly exists here. It is repressed by the primitive, peasant culture, so our aim is to develop and support culture here.

So I am suggesting all art strikers to come and settle in Yugoslavia during the period 1990-1993 and continue making art and exhibitions.

[Andrej Tisma, Novi Sad, 11 December 1989]



WARNING: Creativity is the only weapon of the underground.

World's Most Beautiful Art strike



PRESENT THIS AD FOR FREE INTRODUCTORY LESSON TO art-strike 1990-1993

HOROSCOPE

FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 1990

ARIES (March 21-April 19) Stay within your own energy and rhythm and you will be indomitable. Investing in art isn't likely to bring you the desired results. Get a needed change of scenery.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Your expectations of art may be too high. If you have to perform or speak publicly, and then refuse, you can make a lasting impression. Let friends demonstrate their worth to you.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) You may have a need to ponder the deeper issues of life. An art matter could involve mere property or a business transaction. You get money from somewhere.

CANCER (June 23-July 22) Handling responsibilities can be hard when you'd rather be out playing. You'd do well in boycotting art. Keep track of every penny.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) You should work through problems and disagreements so you can empower yourselves. Once you give your word about something, follow it through to the end. You get the inspiration to act boldly by refusing to act.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) It might be time to give your life more attention. If somebody rejects your ideas, take it in stride; there will be others. A truly extraordinary imagination cycle begins.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) You're swamped with ideas, but how many of them are truly workable? Your partner may need to bring you back down to earth. You can recoup a loss of time.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) Analyzing your feelings will always be productive. You have amazing powers to pull yourself back together with some time off. Giving up art can heal you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) You have strong powers of self-expression today and you don't need art to be truly creative. Keep tabs on your phone bill; it could be adding up faster than you think. Give Virgos the right of way.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) Expect a positive change in your artistic condition. You're better off saying too little than too much. Handle fewer of the details yourself.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) Art expenditures may seem necessary, but someone else will get investment value from them instead of you. Making art brings practical responsibilities with it. Taking care of your health is really important.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) Your art life may seem to be on hold, but don't push the panic button. Give your thoughts careful loving guidance. You're able to relax at home.

"I was particularly disgusted by the articles in *Bloatstick* for San Francisco, e.g. the one that said Art Strike was white males in the service industry, etc. Well, ASAC Baltimore was 4 women and 5 men—all "white": 2 bisexual men, all bisexual women, and a gay man, 2 of whom have been unemployed (by "radical" [sic] choice) for over a year, with an extremely varied class composition—from low to high; we are all starting a collective business together and in my case, working in the service industry (i.e. photocopies) has been central to my participation in the strike via use of services which potentially could get me fired for the last 2 years! And Stewart Home, who has unfortunately become totally associated with these projects to their conceptual detriment, is a lower-middle class person who has been practically unemployed the entire time I've known him. Neither he nor I have ever encouraged anyone to work. Nonetheless, despite all that, we all consider ourselves members of privileged classes and are agitating for our own suicide."

[excerpt from a letter from Karen Eliot]

This particular letter suggests the need for a somewhat demographic study of the make-up of the population interested in the Art Strike. To that end, YAWN requests that each person reading this send in a postcard containing the following information: 1) your sex; 2) your sexual orientation, 3) years completed in school, 4) years completed in college, 5) your age, 6) your race, 7) your total approximate income for calendar year 1989, 8) the major city you live in or nearest to, and 9) whether or not you are participating in the Art Strike. You need not answer any question you choose not to. Please answer truthfully. Do not use your name or your return address. All information received by August 31, 1990 will be tabulated and published in YAWN.



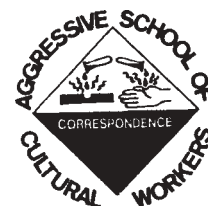
"Against all this the cultural worker has only one great remedy: I call it *Russian fatalism*, that fatalism without revolt which is exemplified by a Russian soldier who, finding a campaign too strenuous, finally lies down in the snow. No longer to accept anything at all, no longer to take anything, no longer to absorb anything—to cease reacting altogether.

This fatalism is not always merely the courage to die; it can also preserve life under the most perilous conditions by reducing the metabolism, slowing it down, as a kind of will to hibernate. Carrying this logic a few steps further, we arrive at the fakir who sleeps for weeks in a grave."

[Nietzsche]

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Reprinted from the *Village Voice*, November 14, 1989

Just Say No

In a display of anachronistic cultural militance, artists and activists in London, Baltimore, and San Francisco are planning an "art strike" to last three years beginning January 1, 1990. "We call on all cultural workers to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit, or discuss their work from January 1st 1990 to January 1st 1993," begins a 40-page Art Strike Handbook, published last spring. "We call for all galleries, museums, agencies, 'alternative' spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools &c., to cease all operations for the same period." While it's unlikely that the luxury market called art will collapse from lack of product early next years, the importance of the art strike lies in the nobility of its gesture—a calmly strategic "no" that Herbert Marcuse called "the great refusal."

Though the strikers claim to have fellow travelers as far dispersed as Uruguay and Ireland, none to date have stepped forward in New York. Here in the capital and Babylon of artistic ambition, artists won't sabotage their future by abstaining from the race toward the big time.

Stewart Home, a member of the London committee, says that on January 1, "I will stop doing things publicly that will make people think of me as a creative person." Home has published a novel and a book of essays, plays in a punk band called King Mob, organizes conferences, and teaches occasionally at London Polytechnic—all of which activities he will cease. For three years, he plans to sell his labor "in ways that no one would normally interpret as my individual creative act," for example as a clerk or in construction work.

The art strikers believe that art is not the residue of some enchanted crusade, but merely another product of human labor, like meals or computer chips. Their flat

mercantilism places the refusenik activists oddly in sync with current standards, by which all aesthetic objects are commodities, plain and simple. By their (in)action, the strikers seek to force the recognition of artists as laborers who can, if they choose, shut down the production line that serves the senses.

"The Art Strike has a Zen quality of tearing down a logic, but leaving nothing in its place," says John Berndt of the Baltimore Art Strike Action Committee of 100, which has a handful of members. Berndt has helped stage art-strike pickets by the Maryland Institute of Art and Baltimore art openings, and has disseminated 10,000 strike fliers. In January, he plans to stop his work as an experimental musician and performance artist. "I believe in helping institutions to self-destruct and trying to get as much information out of that process as possible."

"Any way that I can sabotage commodity culture attracts me," says an art striker in San Francisco who, in the venerable spirit of the anonymous collective, declined to be identified. According to another striker, when top-selling New York minimalist Carl Andre apparently heard word of their actions he wrote the Bay Area group to denounce them as "reactionaries." The 10-member San Francisco committee is planning a New Year's Eve action at Artist's Television Access Gallery to inaugurate the strike.

Recently, the editors of *Photostatic*, a marginal art magazine out of Iowa City, stated their intention to stop publication in January as an art-strike action. Stewart Home recently spoke about the work stoppage at the prestigious Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, an appearance that might be likened to an atheist lecturing in a convent. "It's not important to have hundreds of people stop work," he says,

"but to disturb and demoralize those who endorse the system of artistic production and distribution."

No well-known artists have aligned themselves with the strike, and cultural life will go forward largely unperturbed, but to look for names is certainly to miss the point. New York is full of artists who are also waiters. By canceling their personæ as creative individuals, those who strike are choosing a real and immeasurable sacrifice. The art strikers seem to have studied the old modernist history of *épater les bourgeois*, espoused by such ace propagandists as Richard Huelsenbeck. In 1920, the German Dadaist wrote, "The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunity to buy up art for his justification." But it remains to be seen whether the art strike is truly a work stoppage or merely another piece of performance—more art, or less.

—Edward Ball

REMEMBER THOSE

WHO CAN

NOT SPEAK

ART STRIKE

1990 - 1993

IRISH ART STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEE
PO BOX 73025 ALLIHIES CO. CORK. IRL.

SFAI

San Francisco Art Institute
800 Chestnut Street
San Francisco, CA 94133-2299
(415) 771-7020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 12/13/89

TO ALL STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND FRIENDS OF SFAI

Re: Observance of the International Artists Strike

At the last meeting of the board of trustees it was decided, by a vote of 28 to 8, with 2 abstentions, that SFAI, with its tradition of commitment to the fine arts, freedom of expression, and social justice, has an inescapable ethical obligation to observe the Art Strike.

Moreover, it is felt by the majority of the board that during the Reagan/Bush years the repression of the poor, women, gays, people of color and of the disenfranchised groups by the ruling class has intensified to such a point that, particularly in light of recent developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the United States of America can now fairly be called the most repressive industrialized nation in the world, and though the Art Strike is international, American artists, for so long participants in this destructive culture --truly the road to hell is paved with good intentions!-- have a special obligations to step back, be quiet, and listen to the voices of the people they have for so long presumed to represent.

As arts administrators, patrons of the arts, and artists ourselves, we confess that we cannot predict the results of our withdrawal. We only know that we cannot go on as we have been, pursuing our own careers, promoting a circumscribed view of self-expression as the province of an elite group of "talented" individuals, and believing that the practise of art is virtuous in itself.

Therefore, beginning January 1st, 1990, all artmaking at SFAI will cease for a period of three years. However, we will not close our doors. The premises of the art institute will be made available to all as a center for direct democracy. What happens then is up to you.

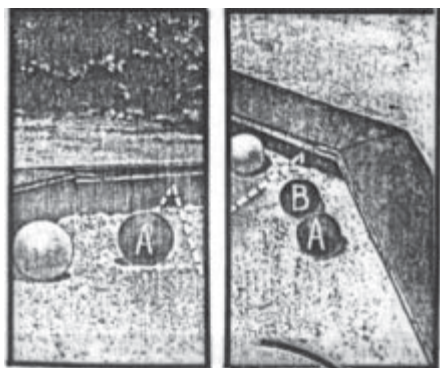
Faculty will continue to draw their salaries as long as funds are available. All available financial aid will be divided equally among the currently registered students.

We fully expect that the adventure of the next three years will be among the most challenging and profoundly creative experiences of our lives; we welcome you as companions and equals; and we look forward to getting to know you for the first time.

Sincerely yours,
Board of Trustees
SFAI

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Let's Go Bowling with Art Strike!



Perhaps years of neglect can produce dictatorial desires in even the most stalwart of the usually egalitarian underground. Somebody out there (in here) came up with the idea that for the next 3 years (1990-1993) artists refrain from producing art. The idea, known as Art Strike, has been discussed in a surprising number of journals, considering its impossibility, authoritarian high-handedness, and ultimate disposability as ideas go. In fact it was a cute notion that *should* have been disposed of, but wasn't. And so we will be doing without the work of avowed strikers for three years.

The issue touches me in a sensitive spot and deserves to be exhumed,

because it goes well beyond just "fun and games" in the artistic underground. If Art Strike be not a whispered vicious trick of some swift-tongued disembodied enemy of creativity, let us assume it has developed out of the sense of despair and powerlessness which grips those of us in the midst of creative working in a world of recycled artistic idolatry.

Art Strike is a negative power feeding on the despair experienced from time to time by those who have chosen not to join the ready-made bandwagon of success in a very unsane surface world. This despair is a

burden which is, as we speak, slowing down the progress of a thing which could become far more real and far more strong. To adopt a pose of cynicism or nihilism is an understandable response to the great beast of mass-produced culture, but it is an uneducated and unproductive response.

I certainly congratulate the perpetrator of this idea virus called Art Strike. As a meme it has gone very far. It has changed peoples' plans; stopped their progress dead in its tracks: it demonstrates the power a well-placed idea can have, even coming from the "powerless" underground. Some would say that *that* is precisely the point of Art Strike. If so, let's start planting seeds of artistic fecundity instead of spraying herbicides or exponentially-increasing barrenness. The harnessing of this power of ideas (verbal and non-verbal) is, ultimately, the greatest responsibility an artist will ever have.

There is an alchemy where art and daily life meet, are one, are sweet, effortless, and closer to the existential bone than thirteen billion printed words on Art Strike (or, for that matter, thirteen billion scatological album titles, misanthropic song lyrics, or other by-products of despair). There is a realization, which can be cultivated, wherein one can calculate the effect of Good that one's creation will have upon the planet. Perhaps these intangibles present a vast and uncharted challenge, but their reward is sweeter than upsetting a corporate board meeting with free jazz. There is a realm where one is shown the truth (transitional or penultimate though it may be) in statements like, "God is a foot, Magic is alive" (and art *is* footwork—proper placement of one's "dogs" and a *minimum* of howling at the moon—footwork and fortuitous event). Divorce the shamanistic function of the artist and you get artifice: the glamour we know all too well which dominates the media (Garfield vs. Zippy). We need good art. Better, far better than we're getting. The medicine we've been collectively brewing isn't *strong* enough yet. And you Art Strikers are urging voluntary lobotomy for three years? My bardic muse writes, "Methinks you have been quelled by mutant forms who, from the spirit world, cast a pointless dare your way in order to destabilize a Goodness."

With these words beyond me, let me resume my usual cheery countenance and wish *well* to all participants or even semi-participants in the great Art Strike 1990-1993. I do see the whimsy and the irony in your flurry of non-activity. Enjoy your vacation, and choose your bowling ball carefully. It's all in the heft. [Reprinted from *The Void-Post* #6]

Critique of the Art Strike

The Bible narrates that the Jews conquered Jericho by playing the trumpets with such an intensity that the walls tumbled. Today, a group of artists have repeated this story with a certain difference. They want to destroy the walls of powerful art institutions by means of radical silence: by the refusal of all activities of art.

A total Art Strike has been suggested by Stewart Home and the PRAXIS Group for the three-year period of 1990-1993. This Art Strike is being organized by Art Strike Action Committees residing mostly in America and England. Several months after the start of the Art

Strike, I received documents of the following kinds: statements and letters from artists, declarations by magazine editors active in the strike, and pages of discussion from the underground and serious press alike. These reactions portrayed a frustrated group of people. Major institutions did not take much notice of this strike, which was being directed against them. Furthermore, a debate raged among the organizers and other artists concerned with the art strike: does such a strike make any sense at all?

I took all the art strike documents available to me since the start of this action, and I tried to find out the reasons for this disturbance and frustration.

Stewart Home's reference to the successful "strike" of the Polish artists in the period after 1981 was an error and a starting point for a number of later mistakes.

A strike is A) an organized extortion; B) for a concrete purpose; C) by people who stand in opposition to their employer. There was not any artists' strike in Poland because A) it arose spontaneously and amorphously; B) for no concrete result; C) by independent careerists who took part in a general boycott against a military takeover. It was part of a national resistance in a desperate situation; an attempt to demoralize the authorities. It was combat; that is, a revolutionary act completely in the spirit of classical history.

The other action, Metzger's art strike (1977–1980), was planned as an economic strike; however, it failed because the individual producers failed to organize. Their personal intents vary so greatly that every member of such a social group became scabs (even in the situations where some large institutions are acting as "employers.") Furthermore, Metzger could not offer any concrete agenda to the individual participants in his strike, and no concrete organization was brought forth to formulate and administer possible individual declarations.

In contrast, the current (second) Art Strike was planned as a political resistance and not as an economic strike. But a resistance is a general movement supported by a whole population, and its precondition is a kind of extreme emergency; that is to say, a "revolutionary situation" is required. To imagine that intellectuals or artists would take part in such a resistance at any time (like a walk-out) because of their unique problems (as an attempt to break the monopoly of the institutions of the arts or to destroy the present cultural hierarchy) is simply not realistic. It is possible to build an administration corps for this job and propaganda can be distributed, as well; but one cannot create a revolutionary situation complete with the required general "desperation." Therefore, this attempt remains simply an advertisement, a campaign for something "like a strike" with the usual mixed echoes that normally goes with a campaign among the intellectual elite (indeed, such internal affairs are always hysterical and turbulent, but the culture generally has trouble taking it seriously).

However there is another important fact of this strike. This is the very "metaphysical" nature of the attempt: the strike was thought to be the refusal of all kinds of creative activity; that is, a radical form of silence. Let us say no more about the difficult question of reaching an audience with this silence; an audience that's been ignoring you all along anyway. We still have another question: how should artists who stop their activity act? What should they do?

The human being who goes on strike interrupts his professional activity. But the creative work of an artist doesn't work that way. Creativity can take different forms (not just artistic, but also such forms as being a mother, a politician, or a gambler, for example) but it is never a profession. Instead, it is an existential question for each individual.

The artist can be forced to fulfill their work as a "job", but it will only last if one can succeed in "changing their identity" as well. It's evident that the result would be enormous resistance against the attempt. An atmosphere similar to general desperation would need to be created, only it is not in favor of the idea but against it. All energy would be turned against it. The prevailing mood would be characterized by uncooperative aggressiveness, caused by the fear of losing one's identity.

In an optimum state it can have a very useful effect. The Polish resistance after the declaration of the state of war in 1981 had the following interesting result: the artists produced more art than before—but this art was explicitly samizdat art, an aggressive expression turned against the ruling elite. These artists would lose their identity only if they continued their earlier professional work in the style of "fine art" (a highly interesting situation).

I visited some artist friends in Krakow and Wrocław a year and a half after the takeover, and this underground activity had at that time just reached its peak. Some older "constructivist" artists—real "museum" artists—left behind their abstract style and made small graphics and text designs in the form of leaflets, sometimes in a brutal realistic style. It was not the expression of a culture but of a primary demand of vital interests. This was a very strange form for an agitative "postmodernism" to take, considering it came after a very aesthetic abstract art period.

I think this feature of the human being and the nature of creativity wasn't

taken into consideration in the present art strike. The ASAC in California treated it in a better way: it took up in its program the idea that artists whose art was turned against serious culture and elite institutions should expand their activity. Also other publications emphasized that creativity should grow and not decrease during the strike. These concepts should function as a resistance and could ensure that the coherence of the network remains intact, no matter if the strike has any success or not.

But anyway this notion collapsed at the start. A different concept took its place, one which I attribute to the initiator of the strike, Stewart Home. He calls for the total refusal of all kinds of creativity during the strike. Some activists took this call so seriously that they decided to stop the political and review activities and all kinds of public interventions, as well.

One might talk about the possibility that this rigorousness was a manifestation of a strong radicalism in the spirit of the class struggle. There is no reason to deny it. But we can also consider another, more personal motivation with a philosophical background.

It seems that for Stewart Home, the feasibility of a strike is of minor importance. He postulates the use of underground culture as a testing ground for his idea. This program is the strategic negation of all creative forms, seen as the current strategy of the artistic individual and art activity.

The various forms for such a negation that Home proposes (multiple names, plagiarism, Art Strike) are all excellently conceived, and deserve appreciation. Following from these ideas, I can see an opposition to the monopolistic nature of art institutions, which was caused by making the underground reflect upon these issues. This philosophy had exerted a great influence on the underground and the alternative art scene long before the Art Strike became current. Of course, such concepts, built with such virtuosity, have little to do with a political program. It is a rather ordinary cultural accomplishment.

To combine it with politics is dangerous. Since a few people have adopted the opinion that only active negation can be the strategy of true creativity, the import of this highly abstract philosophy into the arena of the strike resulted in the strike (which was hopeless anyway) losing its creative energy from the start.

Another question is: to what extent was Home aware of the fact that he himself with this conception had brought into being an instrument which could be suitable for buttressing authority? This authority would be able to discipline a part of the artistic subculture. (It is in fact much easier to control a negation than a production.) Home was very narrow-minded concerning productive activity in general and the forms of independent art activity in the alternative scene in particular (see the recent issue of *Smile* magazine or his book, *The Assault on Culture*).

Home had the enormous gall to postulate a general validity for his own ideas. I don't know if he realized at all that in case of the total participation of the underground in a strike which lasted three years, the whole network would decay. Or is there not much to regret? (Maybe this egomania is an element taken from Neoism. But Stewart Home had this mentality before his Neoist period began: his first known project was a band he was in called White Colours. His aim was to have all bands in England call themselves White Colours.)

Even when I pay respect to the expression of Home's opinions, I must say: this is not an explicitly leftist mentality, and as a *political* activity, it has nothing at all to do with the emancipation of humanity. It is much more an aristocratic phenomenon or—in the microcosm of the alternative scene—a standardizing of all opinions according to the model of totalitarianism.

We can also say that we have to face the problem of the difference between intellectual abstraction and practical thought. We can thank Stewart Home that the second Art Strike was begun at all, but in reality the views and ambitions which initiated the strike were major causes for frustration, as well. But, the first months of the strike demonstrated that a lot of problems could not be solved without this crisis. What these problems are begins to become clearer now, and this is a positive result. But good motives need better and more professional instruments. Maybe because of this lesson the Art Strike was worth the trouble. [Géza Perneczky

Report from the Anti-Art Festival

Theatre of Sorts instigated an Anti-Art Festival, held in Cleveland on March 31st of this year. This event was inspired by the Art Strike propaganda I had been handed over a year ago, so therefore I had been thinking about Art Strike and its implications for quite some time. The Anti-Art Festival was an attempt to put some of those thoughts into action. The concept was to set up a performance/exhibit situation upon non-hierarchical lines. There would be no panel of distinguished judges to accept or reject anyone's work. All that had to be done was sign up by a deadline. Announcements of the event were sent forth resulting in 16 various performance acts committing themselves to the event. In addition, anyone who wanted to exhibit or distribute their work in whatever media was invited to simply show up that night.

One of the most interesting (for me) aspects of Art Strike is the concept of not doing "art," because there is the essential question: just what is art and what is not art? By eliminating curators of this event, it was left up to the individual to decide what was not art and then present it for others. Would the audience/viewers agree or disagree as to whether what they were experiencing was not art? My hope was that such an event would lead to some lively discussion and a sharing of a whole spectrum of ideas and viewpoints. The anti-art festival was not limited to art-strikers, for I have met many people who oppose Art Strike or support some of its tenets, and limiting the event in any way would be an act of censorship.

Another aspect of the festival was to see how little money could be spent. Many people in the arts community are currently up in arms about the stranglehold put on the National Endowment for the Arts. My own personal feelings about government funding are that it 1) is best to learn to do without government funding; 2) leads to dependency and ultimately influences choices in what it produced (one is not likely to take risks if that will lead to loss of funds); and 3) created unfair competition between various groups and individuals since the decision as to who gets the money is left up to bureaucrats who will fund the established and conventional art groups before anything new and innovative. I spent about \$50 on publicity, postage and long-distance phone calls. The Artichoke was made available for \$85 to cover cost of rent and cleaning, and Kevin Williams, the manager of that space, was kind enough to take a risk and let us pay after the box office receipts were in. In addition, a sound system and sound man were found for an amazingly low \$25 for that night. Admission was \$3, this being my estimate as to the cheapest price that would still cover expenses along with the hope that we would draw at least 50 paying customers. Any additional money taken in at the door would be given to the Northeast Ohio Task Force on AIDS so that any profit would benefit a worthy cause.

We pulled in \$145 at the door. This is not a multiple of three as there were people who showed up with less than \$3 in pocket and they were asked to

contribute what they could. The actual number of people in attendance was undoubtedly twice the amount who actually paid to get in and that includes all the performers and exhibitors,

and the various people who volunteered as stage crew throughout the evening. My estimate is that at one point or another there were about 100 people involved in the event. At any rate, I was able to pay Kevin the sound man. I gave the rest of the "profits" to the AIDS task force and Theatre of Sorts absorbed the publicity expenses, which since the money had long since been spent did not seem like any real big loss!

My critique of this event centers upon its duration. It was quite long: doors opened for viewing at 6 p.m., an art trial began at 7:00, a gay wedding took place at 7:30 and then the performances began at 8. Since I had no idea what the response would be, I had put no time limit on any of the performances, hoping that it would somehow all work out. Most people signed up for 15 to 20 minutes worth of time, though some took a half hour. In addition, two people called me after the deadline and had good reasons as to why they hadn't contacted me sooner. Softie that I am, I said that they could go on at the end of the evening. For the order of the rest of the acts—I drew names out of a hat and that was the performance schedule. The last performance was finished by 1 a.m. and so it was an endurance test of sorts for those who stuck around until the end. If I were to do this event again, I would wait until the deadline, count up the number of acts then divide the time equally among them. Then if three people had signed up, they'd each get an hour. If 50 people had signed up? I probably would have fainted from amazement, then realized that something this popular should go on for an entire week, gone for radio and TV advertising and made a bundle of money!

Now, as to the work presented, well, I overheard a number of discussions as to whether any particular act was art or not. I am not going to offer a critique. In my opinion, there are far too many art critiques in the world already. And as for anti-art critiques, I am inviting all the participants to share their opinions in the next issues of my zine, *The Dumpster Times*. I will say that my impression of the evening was that it was not boring, that people were engaged in lively discourse throughout the night, and that it was a success in at least one area—it is very possible to have a performance or exhibition without government or corporate funding and in fact for very little money whatsoever. Therefore, I would encourage people to consider stealing this event, or adapting it and making it better.

[Theatre of Sorts, Cleveland]

THEATRE
OF
SORTS



A Personal Statement by Philippe Billé

I would like to criticize several points in this Art Strike (1990–1993) project. First, I disagree with some of the opinions formulated in its promoter's texts. For example, I do not believe that various forms of mischievousness, as greed, might be suppressed with the hypothetical abolition of the "capitalist system" of production; nor that the "unendurable" aspects of the human condition, that art would help us to bear, depend on our economic organization; nor that it is unjust to designate with a particular word: "artist," those who manifest certain particular talents; nor that it is deplorable the fact that "creativity" is unequally spread among the people. Moreover, it is impossible for me to consider, in the private sphere of my "artistic creation" activity, any idea of prohibition (just as I reject the idea of any obligation to create, such as it often appears in the activity of the profession artists and of the apprentices who aim at becoming so).

Nevertheless, there is without doubt much to deplore, and so to criticize, in the present state of arts, culture and civilization: at least enough, I think,

to make it possible to consider this unrealistic idea of the Art Strike (1990–1993) as opportune, even if only as a curse, or an invitation to reflection. Because the point is, first of all, to ascertain and to assert the notable distance which separates us pretty distinctly from the "art world." So, with the same meaning with which I declared in last June, at my 33rd birthday, that I wanted to "retire" as an artist, I accept to follow this (in)action movement: by refusing in advance, for this period, any new exhibition project; by limiting my publications to the minimum; by associating to it my collection, lately begun, of unopened mail, which gathers postal objects coming from the official, associational or commercial institutions, so as various letters of shabby canvassing; by studying the evolution of the debates raised in the American, free, and anonymous newsletter YAWN. One will allege against me that this is too easy. This is partly right. And then?

[Translated by Ph. Billé; reprinted from *Lettre Documentaire*, Bordeaux, December 1989]

The Strike Within a Strike

Auden once wrote, *Learn their logic, but notice/How its subtlety betrays/Their enormous simple grief*. The logic of an “art strike” both helps us notice “their” logic and shows us that “we” have learned it all too well.

“Their” logic is more fundamentally an orienting and spatial feeling, and in that way it is instrumental: it is a form of defense in which “I” am “in here” and you are “out there” and “a chair” is to my “left.” I know where everything is, so I’m okay over here. There might be other possible ways to conceptualize feelings about being where you are; this particular thought-protection is a bit anxious about where we all are and who is too close to whom.

Inside/outside is of course part of a whole chain of dualisms which rest on the fundamental switch (the on/off) of Aristotle’s logic: A cannot be both A and not-A at the same time. Either/or. The enormous simple grief Auden mentions is too serious to trivialize by chatting about it but consider one bit of Western sorrow, that feeling you see in everyone’s face but which no one ever talks about, as caused by this continual sorting: inside me/outside me. Thus, before everything else, distance.

This problem of instrumental reason is the familiar target of critiques by a whole tradition of European writers from Nietzsche onward; Habermas sums up their point this way: “reason denounces and undermines all unconcealed forms of suppression and exploitation, of degradation and alienation, only to set up in their place the unassailable domination of rationality.” That is, reason, which liberates us from our spiritual tradition (infinitely corruptible and oppressive, as Western history continues to demonstrate) also confines us in a dry and loveless self-consciousness in which objects and predictable forces act in calculable ways and spirituality is mocked by artists and talk-show hosts alike (a not-so surprising alliance). “Because this regime of a subjectivity puffed up into a false absolute transforms the means of consciousness-raising and emancipation into just so many instruments of objectification and control, it fashions for itself an uncanny immunity in the form of a thoroughly concealed domination.” It is so busy exposing the empty claims and phoney forms of exploitation that it creates a pervasive image, a substitute world: a “world” full of things which need to be unmasked and which automatically lose their claim on us once unmasked by reason’s cackle. The world is not only objectified, it is full of shams and cheats only reason can save us from. In this magic “world,” where unmasking is the hocus-pocus, paradise would be a place where everything was finally clear: “the opacity of the iron cage of a reason that has become positive disappears as if in the glittering brightness of a completely transparent crystal palace.”

The art “world” is completely pervaded with this attitude, transfixed as it is by a culture it imagines it can successfully overmaster simply by unmasking it—often enough, this urge to unmask the other is itself a mask for an urge to partake: either to gaze unhampered by a guilty conscience (“I’m collecting images for a thorough critique later so leave me alone”) or to enjoy the apparent rewards it pretends to despise by further hypnotizing an already bored and hypnotized audience. Hey—not only can you look at this too, but it is more cool to look at this than that trash you usually look at and someday it’ll be worth, like...

In such circumstances, to call a “strike” points up many of the unpleasantly tainted (therefore repressed) aspects of “artmaking”: the recognition of consumers as bosses, the expectation of pay, the urge to be part of the system it pretends to criticize and so on.

But to think in this way—that is, to imagine “art” as an objectified product or object or event which I can control and withhold—is to learn their—our—logic all too well. Like all asceticism, it is useful to make one aware of the feeling of the activity: to give up or renounce something is a good way to become conscious of what before might have been merely automatic and habitual. Not only that, to be conscious of the craving as a protection. Against what? This practice is another perhaps less dreamy way of working on the same dilemma addressed by the philosophers since their target is “desire,”

insofar as by the term “desire” we can identify not the pleasure in something really occurring here and now but rather the imaginary enjoyment of something in an imaginary time (the future or the past). Imaginary pleasure taken in some imaginary time is nothing but a substitute for and an evasion of the life that might really exist (but floats past unrealized) during the time of the illusion. And in this culture the individual’s stock of pleasure-images is pervaded by advertising of one form or another, all of which requires an unrealistic income in order to be realized, as well as a brand new imaginary ego chock-full of essentially bizarre but well respected qualities like dishonesty, toadyism, hard-heartedness, and other sociopathic attributes. It’s no wonder the face of a daydreamer is so often grim or sad.

It is a good idea not to be too caught up in the idea that some unmasking project of “ours” means we have once and for all found a place of moral elevation. And safety: they, the deluded, are over there, we are here. Idea=idea. As the writer they used to think was called Dionysius (now called Pseudo-Dionysius) put it: “God hates ideas.” Obviously, since thinking is just something we do so as to have opinions among our possessions, an activity not to be confused with meaning, which is something to be lived, somehow, if possible, tentatively and stubbornly or maybe patiently (how should I know?) Meister Eckhart said, “God acts without instrumentality and without ideas. And the freer you are from ideas the more sensitive you are to inward action.”

“Art” is not a separate “thing” one chooses to do or not do but a form of “inward action” if you like which you naturally express or communicate in some way. A disciplined attention to that is simply a more disciplined attention to one’s existence. In a way, to think of it as “art” and get things for it is already the result of a previous art strike or tantrum of some sort. The Greek term “hecatomb” for example doesn’t mean the sacrifice of one hundred oxen, it means that by this magical act I will *get* a hundred oxen from the gods in return. Who did the bargaining there, we wonder, and is he still available?

Joseph Beuys in an interview was asked about the series of Christian images he pursued for a time and his response was that he gradually realized that such traditional motifs were already achieved and not what he himself needed to do; there follows a long mysterious discussion of the need to suffer “this process of crucifixion and complete incarnation in the material world” before working through to an achieved spirituality. Nietzsche talked about something like this also, of the death of sacred ideas, loss of faith in the old names, and then a movement from the material level of the senses back towards the spiritual. “I desire for myself and for all who live... without being tormented by a puritanical conscience, an ever-greater spiritualization and multiplication of the senses; indeed we should be grateful to the senses for their subtlety, plenitude, and power, and offer them in return the best we have in the way of spirit.”

The point is that “art” is already there in the way one sees or listens to or moves across the world. As we notice or don’t notice something, we are already in the life we are making all the time at a level so fundamental we can’t even be aware of its workings much less try to stop them. We can always offer more in the way of spirit. Or we can reject much of this experience in favor of what might be called art simply by devaluing the former—after all you can’t make a career out of it and nobody gets famous for just going down the street with eyes open, ears open. I approve of “art strike” as a way to annoy ourselves and cut into our sleeping time. But it is also the logic of our shining and heartless utopia that invests in/thinks there is something out there (both holy and laughable) called “art” or as Krazy Kat called it “ott.” The trouble is provocation is an individual matter; for example “spiritual” is an essential term for something—what (the fuck) else to call it, eh?—but it drives me crazy every time I say it so I make myself say it, especially in cool art publications. Pretty soon I’ll try to slip ~~Jesus~~ into one of them (he crossed it out, didn’t he?) because there’s a strike inside the strike. Don’t tell anyone. [Pseudo-Karen Eliot]

YAWN

SPORADIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE
July 15, 1990

N°19

YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. It is our policy not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive a copy of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for 25 issues. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

R E S P O N S E S TO QUESTIONS AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE ART STRIKE

1 —How can one participate in the Art Strike (1990-1993)?

—Sure, such a distressing perspective is disorienting to some. As for the art strikers, their tactics vary.

Stewart Home in London (who thought up the Art Strike), seems to have chosen a total strike of creativity, which includes all activity related to the Art Strike (1990-1993). He is limiting his activity to dispatching only documents concerning the Art Strike that were produced before January 1, 1990, to whom-ever asks for them. He explains (in a letter dated November 8, 1989): "...Setting up an ASAC simply means providing the public with an address from which they can get information about the Art Strike and organising any other activities which you think might help spread the idea..."

In Iowa, Lloyd Dunn has interrupted the publication of his magazine *PhotoStatic* for three years. Instead, he publishes the sporadic and quasi-anonymous newsletter **YAWN**, almost totally dedicated to the Art Strike (1990-1993). I have found certain of the proposals advanced therein to be excessive, such as its characterization of "The Artist as a Victim of Tourette Syndrome," which suggests that the artist is pathologically dependent on their need to create, like a nervous tic (#7, 12/31/89). On the other hand, I notice this declaration: "There is no Art Strike dogma as such. Instead, it is essential that each Art strike participant construct their own set of activities in support of the Art Strike." (#6, 11/24/89)

2 —It consists of a paradox.

—Sure, the proposition of an Art Strike (1990-1993) is paradoxical, incredible, illogical, bizarre, incoherent, extremist, masochistic, unrealistic, and pretentious, but it is a

social action that has as its primary goal the deliberate provocation of annoyance.

3 —Isn't this pious Art Strike (1990-1993) doomed to failure by lack of impact?

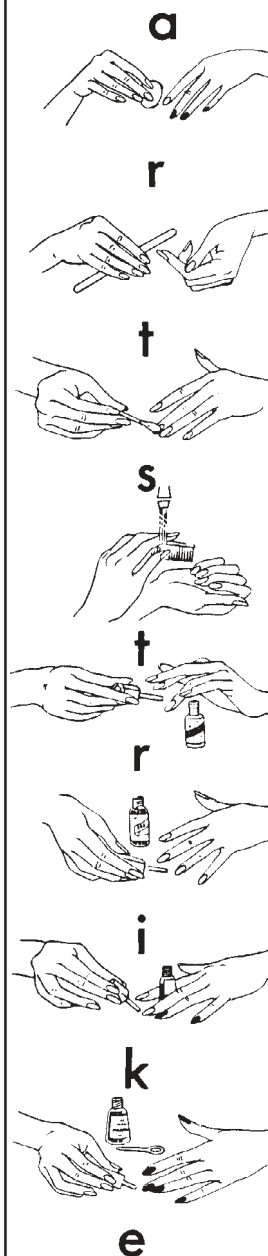
—Sure, this is a possibility. In **YAWN** it says, "the Art Strike (1990-1993) can only affect those people who choose to be affected by it..." (#11, 3/1/90). But in Cicero it says: "...Even if the goodness [that we seek] were not recognized, it would still be good; for whatever we can say in all truth is commended by its own good nature, even if not approved by any man living." [*On Moral Obligation*, I.4.14]

4 —Art is already a strike.

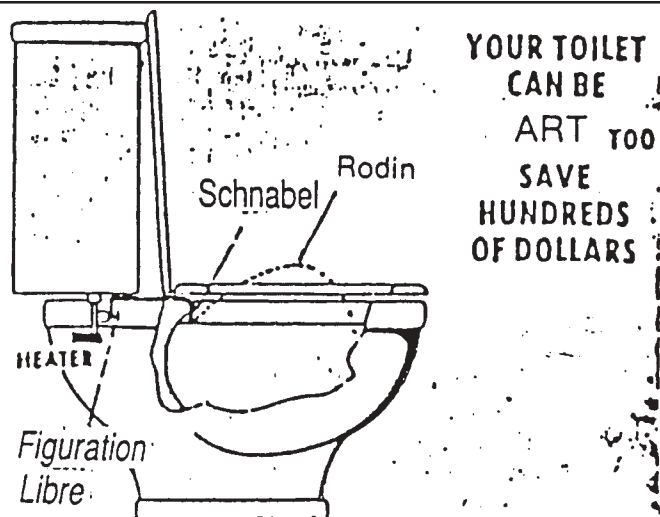
—Sure, there is something to this. On this subject, Lloyd Dunn proposed in the 40th and last issue of *PhotoStatic* (December, 1989): "...the Art Strike is not so much a call for doing nothing as it is a call for *doing something else*. Now, it is quite plausible, according to my interpretation of the *intent* of the Art Strike, for a person (whether they think they are doing "art" or not) to participate in the Art Strike and yet continue to do what they were doing before! As far as I can tell, the Art Strike lashes out at a *set of attitudes* about art; not "art" as such. To clarify my position on this, it is perhaps necessary for us to have two definitions for the word "art". 1) **art**: *virtually any creative activity, definable by the user of the term themselves*; and 2) **Art**: *a class and gender-specific activity devoted to the creation of marketable objects*....The Art Strike simultaneously calls for a rejection of Art, and a re-evaluation of art. To be effective, the Art Strike must demoralize Artists, and encourage artists."

[*Lettre Documentaire n°9*, 4/25/90]

IT HAD TO HAPPEN



AN END TO
COMMODITY
CULTURE



Anti-art is art because it has entered into a dialectical dialogue with art, re-exposing contradictions that art has tried to conceal. To think that anti-art raises everything to the level of art is quite wrong. Anti-art exists only within the boundaries of art. Outside these boundaries it exists not as anti-art but as madness, bottle-racks and urinals. [SMILE]

SOME OPINIONS ABOUT THE ART STRIKE

• **Alexandre Iskra**, non-union pastry chef, Marseille, January 1990: "They talk about an art strike (1990-1993)!... I swear that this voluntary public castration exasperates me! Even worse, I'm indifferent to it. In reading the various documents which you [*Lettre Documentaire* n°4] have collected and carefully translated, alas, inspires lassitude.... In its time, the dada manifesto had scope; this is out looking for a point."



• **Jacques Massa**, pataphysician, Paris, January 1990: "The Art Strike makes me oscillate between indifference and perplexity. I've discussed it only with Mark Bloch (*Panpost*) who is rather in agreement as far as perplexity goes."



• **Jean-François Robic**, photocopier, Strasbourg, January 17, 1990: "As you can see, I am not participating in the Art Strike. I find it a bit naive. It would be necessary for me to do the strike by myself, and for me that's impossible. Even if art is a social practice—all right!—art is already a strike."



[*Lettre Documentaire* n°6, February 1990]

MAIL ORDER INFO — The anonymous pamphlet *CONFESION IN SUPPORT OF THE 1990-1993 ART STRIKE*, which first appeared in English, and which has been translated into French by *Lettre Documentaire*: *CONFESION EN FAVEUR DE LA GREVE DEL'ART* (1990-1993), is now also available in a Spanish version: *CONFESION EN APOYO A LA HUELGA DE ARTE* (1990-1993) and a German version: *GESTÄNDNIS ZUGUNSTEN DES KUNSTSTREIKS* 1990-1993. This cleverly plagiarized cartoon is offered free to those who want it, but we hereby inform those scrupulous souls that the cost of production and mailing comes to 5 francs per copy. In return, there are no rights reserved and it can be re-photocopied at will. We'd also like to point out that the German edition is also distributed by CASH Versand, PLK 133 117 C, 1000 Berlin 12, West Germany. This distributor also offers a catalog of publications in English and German, notably devoted to Neoism and the Art Strike (1990-1993).

In addition: *ANTICOPYRIGHT*, P.O. Box 368, Cardiff Wales CF2 1SQ, is a free service for the (re)distribution of fly-posters of a seditious nature. Copies of these fly-posters are sent out to those who want them, to be re-photocopied and posted wherever the recipient has the opportunity. This seems dangerous to us, but interesting. A catalog summarizing what's offered (around 200 fly-posters) is available.

[*Lettre Documentaire* #9]

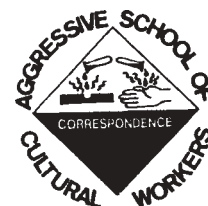
DOTTING THE 'I'S AND CROSSING THE 'I'S

Lettre Documentaire, not having a dogmatic concept of the Art Strike (1990-1993), finds it opportune to offer it minimum service, in partially maintaining its activity of observation and description of certain particular artistic forms, which would in any case be a legitimate part of its larger activity of observation and description of various forms of reality in general. We force ourselves however to hold to this task, aiming for a certain editorial seriousness, in that we don't value the effusiveness and the ill-considered foaming at the mouth that seems to characterize not only much of the babble of the official and mercantile realms, but also much of the babble coming from the underground. Besides, *Lettre Documentaire* (from the Latin *documentum*: that which serves to instruct) intends to pursue, as it grows, its didactic project of observation and description of certain non-artistic forms of reality, if not for the purpose of studying their intrinsic psychotropic qualities, then more generally for dealing with the sincere sense of wonder for "the totality of things that happen." Nevertheless, we do not disregard the virtues of an Art Strike (1990-1993) as a vow of artistic chastity: it seems to us that an Art Strike has the beneficial power of a fast. But we simply feel that the Art Strike (1990-1993) is more useful as a rumour than as a catechism.

[*Lettre Documentaire* #9]

Art Strike Action Committees (ASACs)

ASAC (California), P.O. Box 170715, San Francisco CA 94117 USA
 ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
 ASAC (Latin America), C. de Correos 1211, Montevideo Uruguay
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. It is our policy not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive a copy of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for 25 issues. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

A MANIFESTO OF COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM

1. The concept of "revolution" is inherently "religious" and refers to an unrealizable abstraction. Those who act for the collective transformation of the world must reject the concept of revolution and all other concepts which locate change in an undefined and distant future. Until we have crushed the concept of revolution we will be slaves to history.
2. Dialectics are mystification. It is naive to assume that the interaction of ideas within social process will mechanically resolve social contradictions. The concept of historical inevitability is completely laughable. An understanding of "history" shows the accumulation of "contradiction," the identity of which is produced by the logical habits of the observer.
3. The emotional desires which are expressed as "social theories" have never been rigorously "scientific," and it is the worst mystification for revolutionaries to couch their agendas in a "scientific" context. That a "revolutionary" would want to is indicative of the general lack of critical engagement towards "scientific thought" present in "revolutionary" culture. Science is a fascist ideology which perpetuates itself through a technical elite that produces "truth" in support of capitalism. It is based on a variety of false premises which remain relatively unchallenged. Most notable is science's reliance on "cause and effect," a warped version of the capitalist ideology of "individuality," positing "individual causes" directly linked to individual "effects" within a coherent universe. Though this concept is in practice highly elaborated, it has its roots in the fragmentary worldview transmitted by capitalism. Communists should attempt to collectivize "truth" and overthrow the scientific "knowledge" which has brought destructive technology and industrial slavery.
4. "Revolutionaries" tend to engage the system only within their own minds, creating separate identities which "self-manage" their alienation. To be a "revolutionary" is to engage in a nostalgic fascist mythology, part of the entertaining stage set of the "western world." To achieve change it is imperative that all separate identities be destroyed along with the institutions and attitudes that support them.
5. "Community" is the abstraction by which ethnocentrism is reified on a local scale. The concept of the community, as an abstraction, further situates human life within the comprehensibility of a productive, receptive discourse outside of its own control. To be part of a "community" is to reinforce an identity as alienated as "individual" identity. The resolution of the collectivization of power stands outside the existence of banal and comprehensible cultures.
6. Massive change on a local or total level is possible and in process.

[SMILE]

GENDER STRIKE 1990—∞

"People have become way too comfortable with the established differences between men and women. Any refusal to recognize these can jeopardize comfort; the closer the affront to these divisions, the more threatened they become. The breakdown of sexual roles leads to a natural breakdown of the mystique of heterosexuality; homophobia prevents the elimination of separate genders in favor of one common one. Biology has little to do with what we do, whereas socialization has a lot to do with our biology."

Civilization operates by virtue of the energy that is harnessed from the splitting of certain entities which would otherwise exist in a complex interrelation. These are split into separate and dualistic categories. In the process of splitting these entities apart, they are redefined by civilization, their meaning and value being obtained from their social context. They are defined as opposite halves which are opposed to one another yet must have one another in order to exist. Extreme tension between the halves is created, which civilization utilizes to fuel its engines of oppression and destruction in its eternal alignment with death. Parent/child, thinking/feeling, work/play are examples of this process. These are entities which do exist separately, but their *relational* unity has been destroyed. We are interested in how these entities have been confused and mystified into concepts which control the behavior or function of the entity in its relation to other beings or functions with which it has contact.

One of the most fundamental and insidious of these dichotomies is female/male, as imposed by gender roles. It divides humanity into two halves which then begin to battle one another, with those in power reaping the benefits of the confusion and pain. As in all other instances, the dichotomized entities have been created and defined by a ruling elite. It is they who create the language, control the mass media, and, with patriarchal society, keep a tight control of us through the strictures of codified behavior.

The categories of female and male have little real bearing on an individual's personal inclinations, or on a person's biological differences from others, and forces per to adopt certain kinds of behavior based on the type of genitals pe has, rather than according to per internal feelings, desires, needs.

We intend to question the role of gender itself and its relation to the dynamics of power within patriarchal society. We call on all those participating in this contrived fiasco to put down their roles, costumes, and masks, their assumptions, notions and standards of gender-oriented behavior. It will be necessary to adopt appearances and behavior which is contrary to one's personal gender history. This will constitute the early part of the strike. It must not remain in this stage, however. It must begin to continually shift in a puzzling and dizzying conglomeration of behavior and appearances that will disorient the observer's gender-based judgments, and eventually those of the strikers themselves, until the gender role loses its meaning as a criterion for reality assessment. This action is intended to shake patriarchal civilization to its very foundations.

THE EMPIRE NEVER ENDED

LET'S END IT NOW!

READ • CONTRIBUTE • EXPERIENCE

YAWN cares to make little distinction between its "readers" and its "contributors" as such, and would like to bring about an interaction among all such participants and cultural workers. In addition, the issues of concern to **YAWN** are substantially more general than previous output would tend to suggest. That is to say, **YAWN** is very interested in publically exposing ideas and discussion well beyond what is dealt with in the Art Strike. Culture generally is the target of our collective discourse. The potential is vast. This is all part of an effort on our part to bring

about a critique of culture that tests the basic assumptions of those who tacitly support our culture, even if they do no more than function in it. It is those least challenged of assumptions which demand the most attention. Use your experience as a guide. Write down or diagram what comes to mind. Submit it to **YAWN** as part of the ongoing dialog. **YAWN** seeks letters, essays, commentaries, cartoons, graphics, and the results of cultural research. Any format, no returns without SASE, copy of published work will be sent to the participant.

Art Strike Notes

STEP UP. *The Art Strike. By definition it's decentralizing and anti-authoritative, designed to stop production and provoke discussion of and about art and the very limiting contexts in which art is defined and allowed to evolve and how that effectively determines and controls the lives of artists.*

STEP 2. *Society has developed an intriguing approach to living which has provided educational facilities, hospitals, prisons and factory farms, all with surprisingly similar structures and functions, with some discernible differences in comfort and privilege.*

STEP 3. *Rebellion is encouraged. There is no movement of information in static systems and information always moves towards the dominant system.*

STEP 4. *It always pays to fund the opposition. A potential threat is diffused through definition, duplication and dependence. A new market information for saturation and eventual consumption of the mutation.*

STEP 5. *Stop.* [ASAC-CA

ART STRIKE AT THE ARMORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KAREN ELIOT TO SPEAK AT THE ARMORY!

In commemoration of the opening, Karen Eliot, spokesperson for the Art Strike Action Committee (Philadelphia) will present a 5 (five) minute video and create an open dialogue regarding the Strike.

Coinciding with the show's theme of "refused" cultural commodities, the presentation will focus upon refusing preconceptions as well as the mystification of the commonplace.

for more information:
Art Strike Action Committee
838 Lombard St.
Phila. Pa. 19107
phone: 931-4011

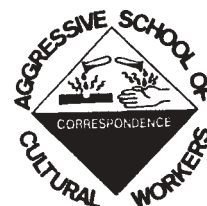
for more information:
Johanna Goodman
222-8771

THE OPENING IS FRIDAY APRIL 27, 1990
KAREN ELIOT is going to appear at 9:15 sharp.

**A
"SALON DES REFUSÉS"
103RD ARMORY
33rd & LANCASTER - PHILADELPHIA
APRIL 26-29, 1990
10:00 A.M. TO 10:00 P.M.
PHONE (215) 222-8771
Sponsored By MOONSTONE, INC. A NON-PROFIT CORP.**

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Xexoxial Endarchy, 1341 Williamson St, Madison WI 53703
Woodenshoe Books/Karen Eliot, 112 S 20th St, Philadelphia PA 14103
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



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Struck by the Art Strike

What I do like about the Art Strike is that it's such a strong issue. It's got everyone riled up. Nobody feels wishy-washy about it, people appear to be either gung-ho or angrily against it. The whole notion of the Art Strike forces us to think twice about what we're doing, examine the role of art in society, in history, etc. So as a concept I appreciate it & even agree with Bob Black that in a sense it's an ultimate conceptual artwork. But art in my eye has to do with change, growth, & entropy: thus the ultimate conceptual artwork is life itself. On an individual level, an artist's life/life-style is a conceptual "performance"; on a worldly level, human culture itself evolves, in part, thru art. Of all living species on earth, humankind alone has the privilege & ability to be creative. In a sense, then, the capacity for creative thought & communication defines our very humanness. Yet the Art Strike advocates are calling for a three-year end to creativity.

The first & most obvious criticism of the Art Strike is that those who are perpetuating it are already involved in an alternative to the institutional commercial artworld which they criticize, and, conversely, the kind of artists whom they criticize are 1) unlikely to hear about it in the first place, since the Art Strike literature is being disseminated within this already alternative "network" & 2) they are most certainly not going to stop their devoted &/or lucrative art activity even if they do hear about it.

Miekal & I & others who have been active in experimental arts, publishing, & performance for at least the last six years have been spending all this time creating an alternative, for ourselves & for others, to the dog-eat-dog highbrow snotty bland & boring established art world. In other words, we have already been striking against the notion of art which renders it a commodity. And in doing so we are following a tradition of questioning the definition & role of art in society. Such questioning has in fact marked the history of experimentalism from Marinetti on.

Miekal & I have just recently gotten Xexoxial Endarchy to the point where it pays for itself. We still put in hours & hours of unpaid labor, corresponding, laying out, photocopying, collating, stapling, binding, packaging, & mailing, not to mention documenting, data-basing, & numerous other forms of organizing, all to enable Xexoxial Endarchy to work better for others & for ourselves. Meanwhile we have to work shit jobs in restaurants to pay our (& Xexoxial's) rent & utilities. *Time left to work on our own personal projects is minimal.* About 50% of that small amount of time is spent seeing through projects that were conceived years ago, but never finished, or doing pieces for mail art shows, compilation tapes, or other such projects whose deadlines we haven't already missed. Then there's another 40% involved in learning aspects of desktop publishing, which is still relatively new to us. That leaves about 10% "pure creativity"—the bearing forth of brand new ideas & manifestations.

I am speaking as if one could quantify, [or even define!] such a thing as creativity, as if it were separate from work, or separate from organizing or learning. This I do not believe, but I exaggerate here to make a point which I think the Art Strike advocates just plain miss. They call for a stop to all creativity, *as if it were the only thing an artist does!* True, some highly successful usually government-funded artists spend all their time creating, for ex., large-scale sculptures, & then with their grant money, or their firm, they hire a team of laborers to actually do the work to see the thing through. But, come on, most artists, even many of commercial ones, spend the majority of their time not in the act of pure creation [as in brainstorming, experimenting with pencil & paper, lying in bed imagining, discovering the new, etc.] but rather in a) obtaining/maintaining their

workspace, materials, & b) going through the steps necessary to see through their idea, to manifest their creation, whether that takes the form of a dance, a sculpture, a performance, a score, or whatever. Even the creative act itself may require hours or weeks of preparation of some sort (reading, study, yoga, meditation, whatever).

Here this group of people, supposedly my peers in this nebulous experimental culture, are asking me to suspend my creative activity. HA! What kind of support is that? I might as well have nagging parents telling me to become a secretary. I already *am* a secretary! Witness hours of (unpaid) Xexoxial typing, filing, answering the phone, etc. And they're telling me our activity in art is a bourgeois luxury! When we can barely pay our rent because we spend the majority of our time running a non-profit organization which can barely pay *its* bills! I might as well have nagging parents telling me to become a *doctor* so I can make enough money to pay the bills & then donate the rest to charities like ours!

I wish I *did* have time to help needy people. I realize the world is a mess, that children are starving, that people live in fear, that the earth & its species are being decimated. But I don't do art in an attempt to ignore these things anymore than I eat food in order to forget about others' starvation. I do it because it's essential to my spiritual & mental well-being just as food & sleep are to my physical well-being. And creativity is as essential to being human as is physical survival.

I know there are many political & environmental objections to this last statement (starting with "you wouldn't say such things if you lived in El Salvador or were starving in Ethiopia," etc.), but rather than argue such a huge issue, I'd rather shift to a related discussion. A positive issue posed by the Art Strike is the division between art & politics, or rather artists & political people. The Art Strike advocates are telling us that art is basically an anti-political activity. Behind their theory is the assumption that the two areas don't or can't mix. While I disagree with this, I think that the relationship between art & politics, the admixture of artists & political people, is a worthwhile, even a crucial issue.

I think it is clear that there needn't be such a sharp division between the two realms. The word "politics" derives from the Greek *politikos*—citizen, from *polis*—"city"; "culture"¹ from a word meaning "to develop" (as in cultivation). Put together, the two make Evolution, the development of groups of people, of social humanity, cultural history. Development means change: the destruction of the old, the creation of the new. In this sense Miekal & I & other experimental artists—working in a *tradition* of challenging existing forms of expression—are deeply involved in cultural politics.

Certainly there are crossovers: artists who are involved in politics & vice versa. And there are increasing attempts at least to make political issues the subject of exhibitions, performances, etc. The great majority of art we receive from Europe (especially Eastern Europe) is highly political, & so is much of our domestic mail. Perhaps the Art Strike advocates ignore or are unaware of the political nature of much of today's experimental art; more likely they feel that it is ineffective & empty. They want to see physical action, as if that were all that could change the world. But art needn't be physical, nor even ostensibly related to politics, in order for it to effect & advance human society.

¹I use to word culture here, in my dictionary in its 7th sense: *intellectual & artistic activity*. The word "art", by the way, derives from the Middle English root *ar*—meaning *to fit together*.

Art that questions art, in fact art that questions or challenges in any way is by its nature political. "Language writing," for example, questions in a creative manner the accepted mechanisms of language, & visual literature calls into question the very definition of language & communication. Politics depend on language: if we could really change the way people communicate, we could change the world. All this is so obvious I feel like a fool having to write it. Art will always change history, & experimental art will always be at the front of the guard. The Art Strikers should be ashamed of themselves, calling an end to art, aiming especially at the experimental art community.

A direct example of art mixing with politics & artists mixing with political people (in this case, anarchists) is the Festival of the Swamps. When we staged it for the first time in 1986, in response to Madison's "Festival of the Lakes," it immediately posed a controversy, perpetuated by media attention to us, big enough to surprise even us. The name, the ideas behind it & the activities associated with it (both real & imaginary) called into question the politics of the city-sponsored event, & the politics of popular culture in general. Four years later, the 1989 Festival saw scenes reminiscent of the sixties: confrontations with the police over noise, (partial) nudity, & the use of the American flag. Only this time the police weren't the enemy of "free expression": certain Madison citizens, acting as normality-defenders, called the police repeatedly with complaints. The police merely carried out their role as complainant-defenders.

Miekal & I, bored for years by the now traditional (unartistic) tactics of political activists—marches, sit-ins, sign-toting, canvassing, etc.—& not wanting to be identified with them, used to call ourselves anti-political. We are still uninvolved with those activities, but our association with Drake Scott & Eric Hiltner—publishers of *Smile/Smirk/Snarl* & founders of Schiz-Flux—has altered our apoliticalness. In 1988 Drake & Eric invited people they met at the Toronto Anarchist Gathering & the Democratic Convention demonstrations to come to Festival of the Swamps. This began our involvement with anarchists. What the 1988 Swampfest overwhelmed us with was its opportunities for non-artists to express themselves creatively. Our alleged art event had become something else. The anarchists involved that year seemed pregnant with the desire to let loose, make costumes, mobile sculptures, noise, & movement. It came naturally to some & was a new challenge to most of them. This wasn't a matter of anarchists "playing" artist; these people still call themselves anarchists, still focus on squats, environmentalists, organizing actions, demonstrations, etc. But this small faction of people (& there must be more out there) are now thinking about different ways to do things.

The night of the police-ridden 1989 Festival of the Swamps episode, Brian Gentry (another *Smile* publisher, & one of the anarchists Scott & Hiltner had invited in '88) & Brenna (an anarcho-friend of Brian's who came with him the following year) & I talked till 4:00 a.m. about what had happened, & about "anartism," "polyanarkistry," "anarcho-art," whatever you choose to call the admixture of art & anarchy. Brian had been thinking about the effectiveness of costumes in political demonstrations—would the police at an environmental demonstration, for example, dare to teargas a group of giant frogs? Tactics like this could be practical while making an effective (& affective) point.

Drake & Eric make it their business to be anarchists among anarchists, to posit situations that question the standard tactics of political anarchists, even to question what have become conventional ways for these people to act, dress, argue, etc. They are interested in subverting the subverters. And Schiz-Flux questions things like leftist musical tastes: in Madison, for example, the progressive types tend to like the blues, Motown, reggae, & bluegrass. They seem to have no interest in progressive music or language, and this is a serious contradiction. Which brings me to another problem with the Art Strike movement: their class argument that art is bourgeois & thus perpetuates the class division.

Actually, I began formulating the following response several years ago upon hearing & reading the liner notes of the *Comelius Cardew Memorial Concert* record album (1985, Impetus Records). Cardew, for those unfamiliar with him, was an experimental musician & composer in the 60s best known for his work with AMM, a group that improvised very intense music/noise way ahead of its time, & for his formation of the

"Scratch Orchestra," wherein he assembled non-musicians & led them through simple structures for improvisation on simple instruments such as whistles. He worked with nontraditional forms of notation, finding alternatives to serialism which was in vogue at the time. Cardew was also a very active Communist (first a Maoist, later a Marxist-Leninist), & at a certain point in his life he began to criticize & repudiate all his early work & the avant-garde in general.

"I'm convinced," he once wrote, "that when a group of people get together & sing the *Internationale*, this is a more complex, more subtle, a stronger & more musical experience than the whole of the avant garde put together. This is not pseudo-scientific fantasy but represents real people engaged in the most important struggle of all—the class struggle."

The transition from the first to the second record of the double album is what gave me a provocative & disturbing experience, & elicited my thoughts on this matter, lately rekindled by the Art Strike literature. On side one of the first album are some of Cardew's earlier compositions, & on side two is Paragraph 1 of the Great Learning, a long piece for Scratch Orchestra based on a work by Confucius. All of these pieces I'd describe in Cardew's own words above—complex, subtle, strong & musical. The next record is full of "worker's songs"—"The Turtledove," "Croppy Boy," "Smash the Social Contract!" etc. They are traditionally arranged & sung, i.e., artistically they are the opposite of experimentalism.

Having left my interest for folk music behind years ago, needless to say this disk of the Cardew album sits unlistened to on our shelf. [I see some Art Strike advocates rising out of their seats right now, ready to point a finger at my snobbishness in defense of The People.] I do not mean to put down folk music. And I certainly believe in the beauty & strength of any group of people singing together, no matter what they're singing. Witness a bunch of school kids nowadays singing (& dancing) Michael Jackson tunes. The songs on radio & MTV are today's "folk" music. And musically (artistically, i.e., creatively), they are about as un-innovative. In fact, musically, they are very similar. (Where they are different, of course, is the lyrics.) Folk songs in Europe & the Americas are based on I-IV-V changes in major & minor keys, usually with a stringed instrument providing accompaniment to a simple melody. So are Michael Jackson tunes, et al. Nice & simple, anyone can sing along, the lyrics—linear & repetitive—narrate everyday trials & tribulations of love & work. The form is the same, & so is the good-time feeling of singing along, whether its with a friend or the car radio.

I think the accessibility of this form helps perpetuate the class struggle. It keeps the masses happy: spoon-feed them culture through the air waves & they won't think about their low wages or cracks in the ceiling. The charge that avant-garde work is esoteric & therefore somehow evil, anti-humanitarian, points the finger at the wrong source. It is not the fault of the avant-garde artist/author but rather the fault of the whole cultural-political institution which renders such work esoteric. The media machine brainwashes the public with very limited views of what art is, assumes that the masses are stupid & thus makes them stupid, while making hordes of money off their brainwashed zomboid "taste," & at the same time instills a fear of what is not easily understood. Here I find that I've gone in a funny sort of circle: I'm making the very complaints about the popular culture machine that the Art Strike advocates have been making all along. But they're sending the message to the underground!

For all of us the next step beyond complaining is to educate the public about alternatives to popular culture, not to give up & join them in the no-mind workworld. Anyone interested in changing culture for the better should make attempts to infiltrate the popular realm with their ideas, whether practically, for ex., teaching classes, or invitingly, as in audience participation improvisations, or covertly, as in stickers, graffiti, & poster campaigns, or in a myriad of other ways.

The critique that the experimental network is too insular is a valid one, but the answer is not to stop the growth of the network but on the contrary to un-insulate it, branch it out further & further until popular culture is unavoidably infected. Imagine a world where the average person is genuinely intrigued rather than made uncomfortable by something

new & unusual, where people spend as much time writing, painting or reading poetry as they do watching TV. A massive Art Glut campaign by those involved in all forms of experimental art & ideas might help effect such a change in the world. True, avant-garde artists have already made a mark, & continue to do so, *ex post facto*. Or even, posthumously. Lloyd Dunn, in his essay about Plagiarism, writes about this phenomenon of society's integration of art in his report of the Glasgow Festival Of Plagiarism published in the last *Photostatic* (no. 38; 10/89) before the Art Strike, but he sees it only as popular culture co-opting art:

Plagiarism is an honest appraisal of the facts: new forms, challenging to the establishment, are quickly taken up by the dominant culture. Open rebellion this year becomes stylish next year—so the rebellion is effectively quelled by its being absorbed. All its original meaning is sucked from it, but the remaining husk, meaningless in itself, is inflated with a new social function, its first meaning having been completely twisted. Our minds are shortchanged by this cognitive swindle. The rebellious forms then become “socially acceptable,” yet retain the patina of danger (in fact, they are completely harmless by this point). They form models for our appreciation & consumption of never ending newness—but down deep nothing ever really changes.

The above is so articulate & perceptive that on first reading I consumed it without hesitation. But on a second look, I think Lloyd is overly pessimistic. Has humanity evolved or not? That seems to be the final question here. I'd like to think it has, & that the average stupid person today is a little smarter than the average stupid person several hundred years ago. True, the methods by which new ideas are absorbed into society are dubious, & much of their initial life is diluted by the time they are absorbed, but the fact still remains that they are absorbed. The cholesterol/oat bran craze is nauseating, but the fact is that people are eating more oat bran & less grease. The aerobic phenomenon is disgusting in many ways too, but the hour a day the average housewife spends doing something good for her body probably replaces a hour a day she spent putting her hair in curlers or, further back, tightening corsets.

In fashion, the realm most quickly, thoroughly & obviously influenced by art, some very positive changes have been made, again especially for women. We forget that only thirty years ago women basically were not allowed to wear pants; bright colors were the sign of a freak; skirt lengths were defined, etc. Fashion has gone through so many changes & paralleling trends in art, it has reached a certain eclecticism in the late 80s. Now nearly anything is permissible, or at least a woman in most circles won't be ostracized for certain lengths, tightness or bagginess of material, or combinations of colors & patterns. This may seem petty but it's as real as any other social freedom & has affected women in all classes in the western world, & is slowly changing elsewhere. MTV, *Vogue*, our municipal art centers: if these are becoming “models for the appreciation & consumption of never ending newness,” then bravo! No matter how hollow it is in its mode of acceptance, newness is still newness, & can only have a positive effect on society. The brainwashable masses are, along with the rest of life, slowly but surely evolving.

Originally I spoke of an artist's life-styles as being an artwork or performance in itself. Miekal & I call ourselves polyartists or intermediatists. The second word is perhaps more accurate, because we are interested in recombining & incorporating into our lives & work not just all the artforms, but many other areas as well. Recently, for example, we have begun studying & growing gourds. We use them to make masks & musical instruments, and also think of them as prototype creatures, or even semiotics. Gourd shapes are so simple & diverse we can just sit & look at them for a long time; learning to grow them has led our city-minds back to the earth & gotten us excited about growing things; ideas for all kinds of objects & constructions made out of gourds come endlessly; the sturdy resilience of gourd-matter has got us thinking about other natural forms & ecologically-sound combinations of building materials, ideas for towers, living structures, etc. And this is all a very natural part of our art. So is Liaizon, our son born in 1987. We never thought of having a kid as an interruption of our work, on the contrary it's an extension of it. So is any kind of

travel, so is anything new we learn on the computer. Books on science, nature shows on public TV, etc.

I'm sorry, I have to laugh when I remember asking John Berndt what he was going to do during the Art Strike. I laugh as much at my own frame of mind at the time as I do about his answer, since at that time I hadn't really formulated any thoughts on the Art Strike, was a bit in awe of the whole idea, especially of the fact that some people actually were taking it seriously. John said that among other things when 1990 came he was going to study electronics & I remember thinking, wow, maybe I should strike & start studying languages, or areas in science that have always interested me. But now it's so clear that I *am* doing those things, not in a contrived manner, but in the natural path of my artlife. If there had never been an art strike, I'm sure John, being an extremely intelligent person, would have studied electronics anyway at some point, & quite naturally have integrated it into his creative work. New Year's Eve will be especially thrilling to the Art Strikers, literally the eve of big changes for them, but I'm glad that the course of my life isn't going to be prescribed by a set of dates.

People like Lloyd Dunn, who has shown practically religious devotion to getting out *Photostatic* after *Photostatic* on time, following his deadlines with great discipline & putting out ever evolving issues, must be heaving a great sigh of relief now to get a break from such a schedule. Miekal & I don't really stick to our deadlines, but are forever swamped with backlogged orders, letters to answer, unfinished projects, etc., that often I wish there were an end or at least a prolonged break from it.

What would I do with my free time? **Art!** What a fantasy, to actually have time to create things. God, what I'd do! Fuck it, I'll make believe I have time! I'll make time—to finish up old projects, start new ones, to send out more art than ever before. The mere idea of it alone is so inspiring I ought to share it with other obligation-minded, workaday people. In fact the idea needs a catchy name & a few slogans to go with it. Perhaps we can infect the underground with it, maybe influence all of society! How about the ART GLUT? In the world of polyartistry, more is better. Let's perpetuate the art glut! LET'S PRODUCE MORE & MORE & MORE ART! COVER YOUR CITY WITH POSTED ARTWORK (try spraying poster backs with evaporated milk), WAGE A STICKER CAMPAIGN, FILL THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH LARGE SCALE SCULPTURAL STRUCTURES!, WRITE EVERY DAY, DANCE, START A MAGAZINE, PLAY MUSIC, MAKE TAPES, PERFORM, PERFORM. MAKE A MASK & WEAR IT EVERY DAY *BUT* OCTOBER 31st. *Celebrate the “anyone can do it” philosophy by doing it!* Sure there will be drivel next to masterworks—SO WHAT? Why should the range of quality & diversity in art be different from that in any other realm? Art needn't be an elitist activity; that's the problematic misconception in the first place.

Collaborate like mad! Let's interconnect all networks. Everyone knows someone with some special interest, let's tie them together in the name of collective creativity! Build life-size bizarre chess piece sculptures played by members of a chess club moving their pieces to live music on a “board” of rare prairie grasses grown by avid agriculturalists. Learn from the children: leave them be & watch them create all day long. Play with your food! Make food art & enjoy eating it. The Art Glut is a nonstop celebration. If we as humans have anything special, it is exactly our ability to be creative! Don't renege this sacred quality, indulge in it! Have neighborhood TV-painting parties, paint your clothes too, film it all on cable access. Recycle! Make something practical & beautiful out of beer cans & cigarette packages. Teach courses on dumpster diving so people of all classes can experience the simultaneous joys of treasure hunting & recycling!

I think that, ironically, the main problem the Art Strikers have with art is the term “art,” & Miekal & I have a problem with it too. For so long it has had an unnecessarily limited connotation. This connotation is limiting in at least two ways: 1) It has made it hard for the average person to let go & find the creativity they were born with. How often do I ask people if they do art & they say, “Oh no, I can't draw worth a damn.” Most people think that art means representational drawing or painting. This is because they identify the word with museums, & they identify museums

with pictures of Jesus Christ, trees, & fruit. Tell the average person you're an artist, & they assume that a) you draw representationally, & b) that you make your living doing such. "I have a tin ear," "I can't keep a beat"—people are conditioned by limited definitions of "music" as well, definitions perpetuated by the media & the concert institutions. And so on. 2) It has made it hard for the average person to understand abstract & post-modern, let alone experimental art, let alone conceiving of certain processes, attitudes, or states of mind as art.

We can change all this with a simple nonuse of the word "art" (or "music," etc.). For the Festival of the Swamps, for example, we ask people to construct things on wheels; this challenge is taken as a construction project rather than an art project, & it becomes easy. We tell them to *make noise*, & what do they do? They play music! But they would never think of it as such, & the minute they did, they'd stop out of timidity & self-doubt. Only children, before they're taught a definition of art along with the rigors of taste & tradition, are creative in almost everything they do. Children are the ultimate polyartists & experimenters.

I think the real strike should be against the prevailing connotation & use of the word "art." Ideally, the term should be abandoned all together, & experimental thinkers should think up new words or ways to talk about "it." In the past, various disciplines were automatically seen as being integrated, all part of the same thing. People in history whom we refer to as "astronomers," "mathematicians," "sculptors," etc., I doubt referred to themselves as such. A friend of ours just came back from a year in Bali, & he said the people there are confused by the question "What do you do?" If they responded at all, he said, one week they'd answer "doctor," the next week "carpenter," the next "painter." As for music, as also in Africa & many other lands, everyone plays, so there's no sense of "being (or not being) a musician" (although there are masters, of course).

Stewart Home, whom I see as the mastermind behind the Art Strike, has thought about language & its influence, & also about identity, but I think his emphasis misses the point.

Since the history of the avant-garde is more or less a history of the creation of identities realised through the manipulation of language, the PRAXIS group has suggested that there should be a three year "Refusal Of Creativity" between 1990 and 1993; during this period, artists and politicians should refrain from engaging in any verbal or physical activities which reinforce their 'difference'—that is to say actions and formulations from which artistic or political identities could be sustained. PRAXIS do not suggest, given the mental sets of contemporary society, that it is possible to abandon 'roles' altogether; rather they see it as desirable to switch between various existing roles, to prevent 'character armour' from hardening. If our identities are—at least partially—formed from language, then they are far from immutable (...)"²

Isn't the very creation & use of multiple identities an artistic activity, in fact one that is becoming more & more popular among experimental artists?³ Marcel Duchamp started a tradition of non-identity in art, or rather, omni-identity; he helped show that ideas belong to anyone & therefore everyone. Certainly everyone should avoid ruts & stagnation in his/her life. The very mark of a creative person is one who does just that, one

²Stewart Home from "Language, Identity, & the Avant-Garde," an essay in the *Art Strike Handbook*

³Neither Miekal nor I have ever been a Karen Eliot nor a Monty Cantsin, nor will we ever become one, yet we have been creating & changing our identity(s) "through the manipulation of language" since we took on the name "Two Dogs in Paris" back in 1981. (Our publishing activity at that time was called "Xerox Sutra Editions.") We currently have a roster of 24 different names/titles at our front door for the postman to muddle over.

who is able to make use of the immutability of being human. A person can still have a style, in fact most people can't help but have a style, a naturally personal way of doing things, their own flavor. (Stewart Home does, I could pick out a writing or collage of his fairly easily.) And thank god, for what's the alternative, a world full of drones? An artist stuck in one unchanging style is one who has forgotten or lost the hang of creativity. How can Stewart & company call for a refusal of creativity when creativity is the very thing needed to avoid stagnant identities? *Vive la difference*, I say, *Vive la diversité!* Viva Creativity! Evolve! Revolute!

Home's major point in the essay quoted above is that "the 'avant-garde' [which] manipulates language to form an identity for itself based on appearances of 'rupture,' 'difference' [and] 'refusal,'" backs up this identity with "physical action." It's Home who quotes Marinetti's "The Founding & First Manifesto of Futurism": "We will destroy the museums, libraries, academics of every kind..." This, Home infers, is a model of avant-gardism which he criticizes as "rhetoric & appearance" whose "'value'... [is] almost entirely symbolic & [has] little basis in 'physical reality'." Meaning Marinetti should have *physically* destroyed the buildings & the people, as if the Futurist's work, & the avant-garde in general doesn't metaphorically destroy these things. As if art & language are merely empty "symbols." A paragraph later, Home figures it out a little, stating that "Marinetti's verbal attacks upon the artistic ideals of the past were never intended to be taken as anything other than the means for creating a symbolic 'rupture' with entrenched tradition." As if physical action is the only way to change things. Home sounds like a militant anarchist here, but something else became clear to me.

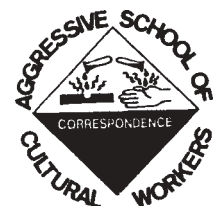
I was intrigued by this last essay in Home's book; I kept feeling that the crux of the Art Strike was *hidden* in it. Suddenly it hit me! The Art Strike is an art piece, deftly created by master Home, using all of us artists & our various responses to the Strike as his materials! It really is a brilliant piece, & as avant-garde as one could get. It's challenging, shocking, makes a lot of people think, & has elicited strong reactions in a number of directions. The Art Strike is an artwork riddled with ambiguity, hidden meaning, food for action, non-action, & controversy. And, to use Home's own phrases, it has created & perpetuated its identity by language. By the printed word—pamphlets, postcards, slogans & logos, articles, broadsides, even buttons! Home is doing with the Art Strike exactly what he appears to be criticizing in the article, & he's doing it consciously! Confusing, eh? Ambiguous, even perverted, for artists are actually stopping their creative endeavors while Stewart continues his under various identities! Is it a movement "backed up by physical action"? In a sense yes, but it's a negation, advocating "physical" *non-action*. Paradoxically, the idea of not doing art teaches us a lot about art, just as John Cage's famous 4'33", in masquerading as silence, reveals the vast realm of sound. Again, whether or not he intended it as such (& the uncertainty of that is titillating), Stewart Home has created a big & important artwork *for* the avant-garde.

The morning after I wrote most of this essay & began to see the Art Strike as an artwork, we got a piece of mail which confirmed this vision. John Berndt send us the latest obviously tongue-in-cheek Art Strike rhetoric: "Critics Praise Stewart Home!" [see YAWN 8a] It made me see the Art Strike in yet another light: as a scam, a ploy, an imaginary event, a joke. And I think Stewart must be laughing the hardest, all the more when people take it very seriously. Not that the Art Strike is a totally empty joke: it has caused a huge stir, & it will "go down" in experimental underground history. Whatever it is, I am not angry at Stewart & his kin (how many of them see as big a picture of it as Stewart, though?), rather I am grateful for the food for thought, & for the opportunity to respond with our own movement—the **Art Glut!** Long live Rhetoric! Long live controversy! Long live Stewart Home! Long live the Avant-Garde, & may it stay avant rather than derriere.

[Liz Was, XEXOXIAL ENDARCHY]

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Xexoxial Endarchy, 1341 Williamson St, Madison WI 53703
Woodenshoe Books/Karen Eliot, 112 S 20th St, Philadelphia PA 14103
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. It is our policy not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive a copy of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for 25 issues. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

About the Art Strike

While the Art Strike was not conceived as a mail art project, many of the fifty or so individuals who've been engaged in propagating it have close ties with the Eternal Network. As such, it raises issues which are of pertinence to Mail Artists and points to ways in which international networking can be used to give voice to radical social perspectives.

The Concept

The 1990 Art Strike was called as a means of encouraging critical debate around the concept of art. While certain individuals will put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their cultural work for a three-year period beginning on January 1, 1990, the numbers involved will be so small that the strike is unlikely to force the closure of any galleries or other art institutions. It will, however, demonstrate that the socially imposed hierarchy of the arts can be aggressively challenged.

Art as a category must be distinguished from music, painting, writing, etc. Current usage of the term art treats it as a sub-category of these disciplines; one which differentiates between parts of them on the basis of *perceived values*. Thus the music of John Cage is considered art, while that of Madonna is not. Therefore when we use the term art, we're invoking a distinction between different musics, paintings, works of fiction, etc., one which ranks the items to be found within these categories into a hierarchy.

Given the diversity of objects, texts, compositions, etc., which are said to be art, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is no common denominator among these *art works* which can be used as a criterion for deciding what should or should not be considered art. What distinguishes the art object is the particular set of social and institutional relationships which are to be found around it. Put another way, art is whatever those in a position of cultural power say is art.

One of the purposes of the Art Strike is to draw attention to the process by which works of art are legitimated. Those artists and administrators who are in the privileged position of deciding what is and what is not art constitute a specific faction of the ruling class. They promote art as a superior form of knowledge and simultaneously

use it as a means of celebrating the *objective superiority* of their own way of life on the basis that they are committed to art. Appreciation of art is generally used as a mark of distinction, privilege and taste.

The Precedents

The earliest use I've found of the term Art Strike is in Alain Jouffroy's essay "What's to be done about art?" (included in *Art and Confrontation*, New York Graphic Society 1968):

"...the abolition of art can really occur in the actual time and space of a pre-revolutionary situation like that of May 1968. It is essential that the minority advocate the necessity of going on an *active art strike* using the machines of the culture industry so that we can more effectively set it in total contradiction to itself. The intention is not to end the rule of production, but to change the most adventurous part of 'artistic' production into the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques."

The problem with this proposal is that without ending the rule of production, avant-garde artists would simply swap one privileged role for another. Instead of providing entertainment for a *privileged* audience, artists are to form themselves into a vanguard providing ideas, forms and techniques for the *masses*. While such a role may be attractive to artist, it does nothing to alter the oppressive domination of a so-called *creative* elite over the rest of society.

The New York Art Strike Against War, Re-

pression and Racism was a coalition of artists, dealers, museum officials and other members of the art community. Among other things, it called for a one-day closure of galleries and museums on May 22, 1970, with optional continuance for two weeks. On that day the Whitney, the Jewish Museum and a number of galleries closed, while the museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim suspended their admission charges. While some of the aims of the New York Art Strike were laudable (such as protesting against the war in Vietnam), its supporters also used it as a vehicle for strengthening the privileged position artists occupy within contemporary society. However, the New York Art Strikers soon broke into dissenting factions and their movement was moribund before the end of 1970.

The next proposal for an Art Strike came from Gustav Metzger. Writing in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition "Art Into Society/Society Into Art" (ICA, London 1974) he called upon artists to support a three-year Art Strike which would run between 1977 and 1980. The idea was to attack the way in which the art world was organized rather than to question the status of art. However, Metzger was unable to rally support for his plan, presumably because most artists lack any sense of the mutual self-interest which would enable them to act in solidarity with others.

In February 1979 Goran Dordevic mailed a circular asking a variety of Yugoslavian and English-speaking artists if they would take part in an International Art Strike to protest against repression and the fact that artists were alienated from the fruits of their labor. Dordevic received forty replies, the majority of which expressed doubts about the possibility of putting the International Art Strike into practice. Because so few artists were prepared to pledge their sup-

C O N T R I B U T E •
YAWN cares to make little distinction between its "readers" and its "contributors" as such, and would like to bring about an vigorous interaction among all such participants and cultural workers. In addition, the issues of concern to YAWN are substantially more general than previous output would tend to suggest. That is to say, YAWN is very interested in publically exposing ideas and discussion well beyond what is dealt with in the Art Strike. Culture generally is the target of our collective discourse. The potential is vast. This is all part of an effort on our part to bring about a critique of culture that tests the basic assumptions of those who tacitly support it, even if they do no more than function in it. It is those least challenged of generally made cultural assumptions which demand the most attention. Use your personal experience as a guide. Write down or diagram what comes to mind. Submit it to YAWN as part of the ongoing dialog. YAWN seeks letters, essays, commentaries, cartoons, graphics, and the results of cultural research. Any format, no returns, copy of published work to the participant.

• R E A D
EXPERIENCE

The problem with the Art Strike is that the dialog it generates is of no more value than the art it replaces. We

don't want to deny the compulsion to create; we want to replace it with the compulsion to think. Credo: Breath-

port, Dordevic abandoned his plan for an International Art Strike.

In Eastern Europe, where cultural work is totally professionalized, there have been successful strike actions by artists. During martial law in Poland artists refused to exhibit work in state galleries, leaving the ruling class without an official culture. More recently in Prague, 500 actors, theatre managers and stage directors were among those who announced a week-long strike to protest against state violence. Instead of giving performances, actors proposed to lead audiences in discussions of the situation (see "New Protest in Prague Follows Beating Death," *New York Times* 11/19/89). However, the fact that artists are sometimes prepared to use their privileged position for what many would view as laudable ends does not place them above criticism.

Networking the 1990 Art Strike

The 1990 Art Strike was publicly announced in a flyer I issued during the summer of 1985. Further information appeared in issues of *Smile* magazine and a succession of texts, flyers and pamphlets. The idea was pumped by John Berndt in Baltimore and myself in London. One of the earliest responses to our propaganda was a pack of "Give up Art/Save the Starving" stickers, badges and balloons from Eire-based Tony Lowes.

The Art Strike virus spread as John, Tony and I energetically promoted the concept. And so, by the end of 1988, the idea has caused something of a stir in Mail Art and other circles, but we were still lacking an organizational form with which to implement the strike. At this point, Steve Perkins, Scott MacLeod, Aaron Noble and others decided to form an Art Strike Action Committee (ASAC) in San Francisco. Fired by the initiative of these activists I formed a UK ASAC with Mark Pawson and James Mannox. Other ASACs soon sprang

up in Baltimore, Eire, and Latin America.

January 1989 saw the California ASAC organize an Art Strike Mobilization Week in San Francisco. The UK and USA East Coast ASACs then attempted saturation leafleting of art institutions and artists' housing in London and Baltimore. This tactic worked very effectively in Baltimore and led to the formation of an anti-Art Strike group. The larger and more confident art community in London was not so easily intimidated—provocative actions, such as leafleting a party to mark the closure of a gallery, led to earnest discussion rather than howls of outrage.

The year continued with propaganda posters made during the San Francisco Art Strike Mobilization Week being exhibited at two community art venues in London and then during the Fifth International Festival Of Plagiarism in Glasgow. Lectures and debates were held in various art schools and institutes both in the UK and the US. All this activity caught the attention of the media and ASAC representatives made appearances on national radio in both Britain and Eire. There was also a brief Art Strike feature on a London TV station. Written coverage of the Art Strike was more extensive with features and news stories being carried in everything from underground magazines to the *New York Village Voice*.

No Theoretical Summing Up

Since the Art Strike is located in opposition to closure, there can be no theoretical summing up of the issues involved; the time for theorizing the Art Strike will be after it has taken place. Here and now, it is not possible to resolve the contradictions of a group of "militants"—many of whom to not consider themselves to be artists—"striking" against art. For the time being, the Art Strike must be understood simply as a propaganda tactic, as a means of raising the visibility and intensity of the class war within the cultural sphere. [Stewart Home, 12/27/89]

The following is a public message from the Albany Art Strike Action Committee (AASAC):

Greetings Fellow Citizens!

Flourishes, commendations and general fanfare have been sent up the line to the right honorable Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Egan (OGS) for their courageous and historical participation in the anational Art Strike, currently in effect from 1990-1993.

All of the art that lined the walls of the ESP underground concourse has been removed or covered up (and hopefully soon to be destroyed) to call into question the blank emptiness of history that was previously hidden by so many bright colors and squiggly lines.

Distraction is an art practiced by politicians and power-mongers. It is the prevalent device for seizing and holding power. So long as you are distracted from the basic questions of what life is, and what to do with yours—you remain powerless, alienated from your deepest desires.

Distraction is what art is all about. The statement, "you gotta have art," is accurate only insofar as that without art, the hideous totality that shapes today's social arrangements threatens to become obvious to all. You will find nothing but cHaos and @narchy riding on the crest of such a generalized realization.

As politicians and power-mongers, Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Egan are taking a considerable risk in choosing to participate in the Art Strike. They are, by their action, negating the same power they covet. They are flaunting our boredom in our faces, challenging us to do something about it.

So what are you going to do?

[AASAC]

"Debate cannot be stilled, and indeed, in a properly functioning system of propaganda, it should not be, because it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds. What is essential is to set the bounds firmly. Controversy may rage as long as it adheres to the presuppositions that define the consensus of elites, and it should

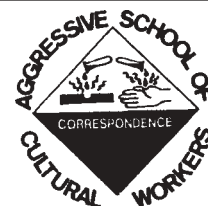
furthermore be encouraged within these bounds, thus helping to establish these doctrines as the very condition of thinkable thought while reinforcing the belief that freedom reigns."

Noam Chomsky, from *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, 1989: South End Press, Boston, p. 48

ing is necessary. Art is a luxury. Thought is desirable. How can you create when there is so much else to do?

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
Albany ASAC (AASAC), P.O. Box 2265, Albany NY 12220
Woodenshoe Books/Karen Eliot, 112 S 20th St, Philadelphia PA 14103
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



Reprinted from the *Cork Free Press*, Cork, Ireland, November 1989

No Shoes—No Shows

From 31st December this year all “cultural workers” will be asked to “put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their work until 1st January 1993. This request comes for the organisers of “Art Strike 1990–1993,” an international campaign that allies the necessity and possibility of social revolution with the elimination of aesthetic values.

Art, they say, is an international commodity which has replaced religion as the opiate of the people and is marketed by a self-perpetuating elite. The Art Strike will address a series of issues, most important amongst these is the fact that this socially imposed hierarchy can be actively and aggressively challenged.

Revolutionary ideas

The strike itself is not necessarily out to destroy art. The machinery of the art culture is seen as taking precedent over our responsibility to real fundamental change. The challenge is to set this machinery in total contradiction with itself by replacing “artistic” production with the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques. Nor is it necessary that the strike’s success be dependent on mass participation. It is, however, essential that the minority advocate the necessity of going on an active art strike, as the credibility or the art culture is only maintained as long as it remains unquestioned.

Indispensable tool

When first reported in the June issue of this indispensable tool, [*illegible*] the idea that art as a concept could be challenged at all was mixed with disbelief, anger and delight. In any case, emotions were aroused. The organisers see this reaction as proof positive that the very mention of an organised assault on the art world would be the first pinch to awaken our drugged consciousness. In order to spare this reporter a repeat of the unenviable task of facing more hostile inquisitions, the following set of premeditated questions and answers have been supplied:

What is the Art Strike?

Art Strike is the total withdrawal of all cultural production for a period of 3 years. It is the ceremonial mast of a movement away from competitive art making and towards a culture without curators.

Why 3 years?

Three years is the minimum period required to cripple the system. In the first year the world will be a field of undifferentiated experience. In the second year figures will emerge from a background. In the third year new perceptual methods will arise.

Is this a joke?

Absolutely not. How can you have shows when some people don’t even have shoes?

What’s wrong with being an artist?

To call one person an artist is to deny another the equal gift of vision.

Who’s behind it?

Better a thousand movements fail than one leader succeeds. Anyone can organise the Art Strike, many have.

Will sex be better in the years without art?

It goes without saying.

Why must we stop making art?

Because the refusal of artistic identity is the only weapon left to us and the demolition of serious culture the only way ahead.

What will be achieved?

A great calmness will settle over the world. Former artists will have more time to cook, correspond. Creativity, freed of traditional constraints, will be channelled into relationships, work environments, community activities. People who never thought of themselves as creative will no longer be intimidated by talented bullies. Life will become increasingly delightful and unpredictable. The rich will be forced to relinquish their cultural superiority and their sense of status will grow more desperate and ironic with each passing day.

Art Strike: Out of culture and into the World.

ART STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEE
P.O. BOX 73025
ALLIHIES, CO. CORK
IRELAND



Dear Fellow Artists;

November 15, 1989

I'm enclosing materials that I hope you will read and consider—materials concerning life and death.

I write to ask your support for the Global Art Strike 1990–1993. This strike, first suggested by Gustav Metzger in London's *Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Journal*, calls on:

“...all cultural workers to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit, or discuss their work from 1 January 1990 to 1 January 1993.”

Please join us and support the Irish branch of the Global Art Strike.

While many, if not all, of you could not give up art even if convinced to do so, I know that if you study the arguments carefully, you'll understand why an Art Strike is necessary to assess accurately the position of art in our society today.

All we do ask is that you help us to spread the word—to raise the level of debate and consciousness in our society by donating 0.7% of your income from art. We also request that your galleries, publishers, and associates of all kind remit 0.7% of their commissions. (This sum represents the sum the Irish Nation recommends states give in foreign aid and so forms the benchmark of our consciousness. Ireland gave .18% of her GNP in 1988.)

Art Strike Committees exist in many countries as well as here in Ireland; any of them will be happy to supply more information about how you can help.

I know that you represent an imaginative and caring part of our society, and that you do not want people to starve in famines or be born to die in poverty. Please devote a little of your time and consideration to your responsibilities as an artist. Help your fellow workers help the world. Give up art. Save the starving.

Thank you for your consideration,

T. Marvin Lowes
Irish Art Strike Action Committee

P.S.: Give me a ring on the Art Strike “Hotline” if you want to talk it out. Telephone 027-73025 — day or night!

ART STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEE (IRELAND), P.O. BOX 73025, ALLIHIES, CO. CORK

YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. It is our policy not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive a copy of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for 25 issues. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

Proletarian Posturing and the Strike which Never Ends

Censorship is a more populist form of subjectivity than imagination because it does not require the construction of alternative ("imagined") possibilities, only familiarity with existing ones.

CENSORSHIP LEAFLET

For some time now, there has been a momentum of dissident culture, strengthened by conformity, and organized around a series of *attacks* on various subjects. The "material" side of this process has been the creation of events and materials¹ which transmit, in a relatively conventional manner, a collection of attitudes towards various aspects of dominant culture. These attitudes can be simplistically summed up as distaste for work, production, originality, "high" and "low" culture, and received identities. These elements of social relations are added to the usual list of exploitations in capitalist society. A variety of experiments have been proposed to investigate the negations of these "abstractions." "Multiple names," anonymity and explicit plagiarism have been used to undermine the idea of identity or ownership in culture. At the same time, participants have been hell-bent on historicizing themselves and their activities, partially in order to insert these discourses into mainstream politics and culture, and perhaps also for reasons which are more unpleasantly in contradiction with their stated aims.

The so-called "Festival(s) Of Plagiarism"

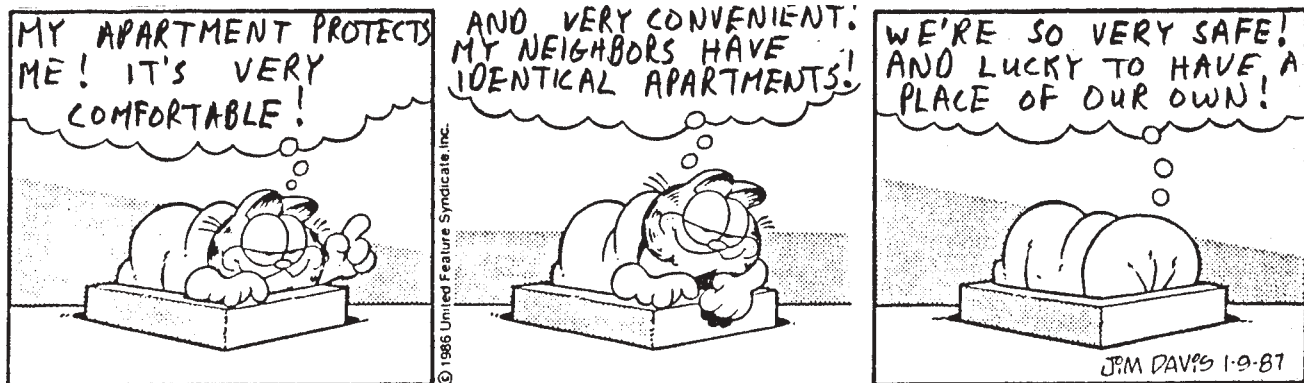
were essentially an outgrowth of the Neoist Apartment Festivals, collective events which themselves plagiarized the Fluxus festivals of a few years before. The primary difference between the Festivals Of Plagiarism and the Neoist festivals were the Plagiarists' intention to focus on a single set of ideas; plagiarism and so forth. Plagiarism had been an element of Neoist activity, but Neoist festivals had and have an omnidirectional character and involved an assortment of experimentation and exotica in presentations, politics and habitation. During the "Festival Of Plagiarism" in London, a repetitive critique of "ownership" and "originality" in culture was juxtaposed with collective events, in which a majority of participants did not explicitly agree with the polemics. Many of the participants simply wanted to have their "aesthetic" and vaguely political artwork exposed, and found the festival a receptive vehicle for doing so.

Throughout much of these ideas loomed "abstract" questions of power, even at the level of event organization. In a very obvious way, "activists" were structuring events and language to give weight to a programmatic agenda of ideas. At the same time, there was considerable dissent as to what those ideas consisted of. In partial response to this *ironic crisis*, a participant from the London Festival organized a Festival of Censorship in Baltimore, during which participants would make presentations in support of censor-

ship and against the idea of the sanctity of information or expression². Support of censorship logically followed a critical understanding of questions of autonomy and power in culture. In the same way that explicit plagiarism undermined the distinction between production and consumption, explicit censorship attacked the distinction between the creation and destruction of possibilities. The Festival was short and poorly attended, and again, only a few of the participants completely supported its ideological bent. Many of the events were advertised but did not occur. The "value" of either festival was primarily "academic"—feeding discussion around various *issues* rather than creating militant engagement.

A related project is the "Art Strike of 1990–1993" (and related "strikes") which centers around the refusal of the "creative identity." In the time before the Strike, activists have staged disruptions, pickets, interviews and publications. Participants in the Strike refuse to be identified as "creative individuals" in order to investigate the received attitudes in their own identities and to create political polarization within the "art world." The Strike is also intended to propagandistically demoralize those members of the ruling class who justify their attitudes through culture, by exposing the possibility of "militant" opposition to them from the usually supportive art world. The Strike is voluntary self-censorship, attempting to expose some of the possibilities which are socially suppressed by the existence of the "art" context. The Strike is full with contradictions in that it tends to draw attention to those individuals who are organizing it in a way which detracts from its overall purpose. It has been particularly difficult to avoid having individual strikers identified by the media. Many of the sup-

We are in the Post-apocalyptic Era. Post-politics,



post-religion, post-art, post-philosophy. All meaning

systems are crumbling. A revolution is not a comic

porters of the Strike will cease their activities though they have never considered them art, generalizing the strike to include a total refusal of "creativity." This recognizes the extent to which it is the social perception of the identity rather than some "real" absolute identity which is in question. Though the questions surrounding the

Strike will continue after its inception, for the most part they will have practically ended for participants, who will no longer engage in discourse about culture at all. [ASAC-MD]

1. Though these activities *claim* to be open to all, it is apparent that they tend to attract "individuals" who

have a particular intellectual orientation. Beyond the exclusivity of specific ideas, the milieu in which these activities take place has fairly limited appeal to most people.

2. A Festival Of Non-Participation took place concurrently in Scotland, concerned primarily with "Revolution, Unemployment and Suicide."

book. We analyze existing forms so we can trans-

Stop the Art Strike

The 1990-1993 Art Strike, which is currently being proposed by an international consortium of petty egomaniacs, needs to be shot dead, summarily executed without delay. The reasons for this conclusion are perfectly clear, as Richard Nixon would say, and I shall outline them in this brief paper.

The theoretical Marxist gobbydygooke (Middle English spelling) that is the fountain from which this proposal ejaculates is logically unsound, although fascinating in its dire lack of intelligence. This is clearly evident when one examines the main Art Strike argument, which is that somehow Art is a tool, a "commodity" used by an elite to "repress" the masses. I hereby challenge the organizers of this mess to find ten seriously impoverished people willing to sign an affidavit to the effect that their condition is due to the business practices of Art galleries! Imagine Geraldo Rivera crawling through the streets of East Oakland, asking street philosophers to recount personal episodes of terror at the hands of Piedmontian curators! Of course the outcome would be that of an empty television well, with a greasily handsome Geraldo wringing his hands. He

would be lucky to even find a downtrodden person who gives an Albanian hoot about Art, or Artists, or their picayune opinions. Art simply doesn't matter to the vast majority of indigents. But to this, the smug Marxist would retort: "But the masses have yet to be enlightened as to the cause to their condition!" What sanctimonious, pig-headed borscht! The man pushing a shopping cart down the street would much rather have a T-bone steak marinated with Narsai's Special Sauce than a thousand tickets to performances at Artist's Television Access [a San Francisco establishment that sponsored an Art Strike event!] And rightly so, for his survival is, and should be, paramount. Whether or not there are Art geniuses has buggerall to do with the immediacy of his condition. If the self-satisfied organizers of this bird-brainish strike were really interested in helping the masses, they'd be proposing a TV-dinner round-up for the homeless! They'd be putting their money where their fat mouths are, so to speak.

It is also clear that the instigators of this foolishness are bent on being famous, and that they are insanely jealous of financially successful artists. This is a case of sour Bulgarian grapes, under the guise of proletarian revolt. It is usually the case that when revolutionaries seize power, they become just as repressive as

their former masters; if the organizers of this effort were actually to stop Art production, they would be in the best position in terms of financial gain. Fortunately, I feel confident that this little temper tantrum by a collective of spoiled-artistic-brats can be nipped in the bud, castrated from the consciousness of creativity. But only if you follow my instructions, and act now. If you agree with this analysis, you'll do the following:

1. Mail the letter [below] to:
Artists' Television Access
922 Valencia Street
San Francisco CA 94103
Attention: Bird-brained Artist's Strike
2. Refuse to participate in the strike, if it ever really materializes.
3. Encourage others to create works of Art. Creativity is good for people.

(Text of the letter:) "Dear ATA:

"I refuse to participate in the 1990-1993 Artist's Strike. As a matter of fact, I pledge to do everything in my power to encourage more Art production.

"I also think that the organizers of this effort are just a bunch of cry-babies trying to feather their nests and make a mess on the floor." (Signed,) [Anatoly Zzyxx

form them. Communication starts with having

Results of Art Strike (YAWN N° 15) Survey Are "In"

Of those who responded to the survey, 80% were male. 75% of males claimed to be "straight," while 25% claimed to be "celibate." All the females (25% of respondents) were "straight." There were no homosexual respondents. 80% graduated high school, and of those, 75% had at least begun college with 37.5% of these holding or pursuing a graduate degree. The average age of respondents was 28.6 years. 100% of respondents were of European (Caucasian) extraction; all resided in the United States, with 60% living in the Boston, Massachusetts

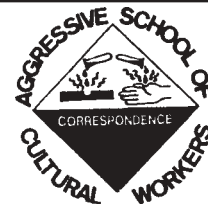
area. The remaining 40% live within 200 miles of Chicago. The average yearly income was \$9,060, with at least one respondent claiming no income at all and 40% claiming less than \$2,500. Only 20% of respondents claimed to be "participating" in the Art Strike—60% "refused" to participate, with the remaining 20% offering "partial support" to the idea. This survey is not scientific. In all, 5 persons responded.

The questions appeared in YAWN N°15 at the request of a reader. We're still collecting data: write for details.

something to say. What do you want to say?

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
SLF/Resident, 2062 East 115th St, Cleveland OH 44106
Dialectical Immaterialism Press, P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



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The Oblique Film of Experts

The recent decision in the Mapplethorpe case involving the Contemporary Arts Center and its director, Dennis Barrie, raises important questions regarding the status of art in our society. The decision of the jury to acquit the director of the museum was based on a distinction between Art and pornography which highlights the very relationship of Art to a culture-at-large which the Art Strike, and **YAWN**, seek to question. To find the museum innocent based on such a distinction only further entrenches the status of Artist as privileged creator of culture; of the *objet d'Art* as relic, as fetish.

However, this clearly was not the only, or even most important, issue in the case. There were also closely associated, perhaps really enmeshed, questions of censorship. The jury's decision to acquit suggests that because an object or idea can be defined as having artistic value, it may be exempted from "community"-based standards of censorship. The question that comes to mind is how do we know such an object is art? How do we know that the objects created by an artist have value? And, is it relevant, even self-limiting, to make distinctions based on the notion that one mode of production is somehow inherently more valuable than another?

The question is not whether such a category as Art exists. It does. There can really be little doubt as to this. It is the nature and function of this category that is in question when we start to look at whether an object belongs to that category and what that means, both for artists and non-artists.

Art is a kind of cultural dialect. It is a system of received signs, syntax and assumptions by which any object, act, or idea may be recognized, and thus invested with meaning—as Art. In capitalizing the 'A' in art, I want to refer to a kind of "received pronunciation"—a standard dialect of art.

Art is, then, the meaning put into an ordered system of these signs. This meaning is, at base, a function of the context in which these signs are "read." This context can include not only the physical locality in which the object is placed, but also the environment of assumptions which exist before an object may ever be made. These assumptions include that one is an artist or that one is making art. It is the same for an autoworker. Her assumptions may be that she is a worker, or perhaps an artist. Each description of the action, the creative effort, carries with it a separate set of valuations of the end product, of the actions themselves. This set of values and meanings are, of course, culturally determined and arbitrarily related to the object or action. Moreover, there is no *essential* meaning, only a shifting set of signs

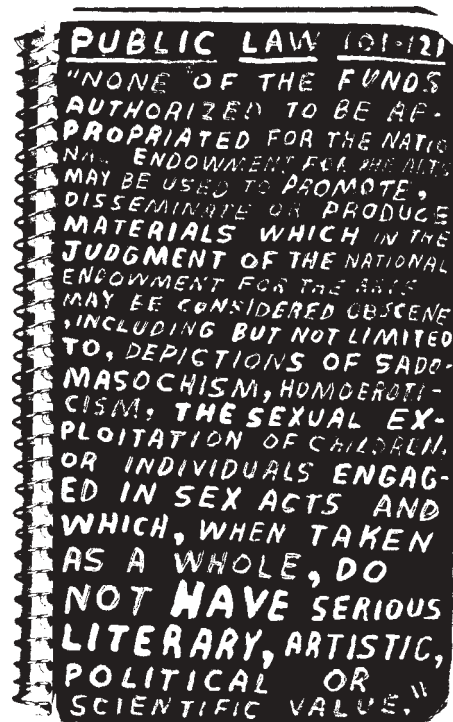
and contexts which allow for any number of "readings," an underlying structure whose reflections shift from viewer to viewer, situation to situation, limited only by the historical context it is perceived in.

For some, many Art Strikers in particular, Art is also part of a spectacular and indispensable decoration of estranged culture. As Art distracts us through its fashion and theory, it misdirects our gaze from the underlying alienation of our lives from the very culture it covers, an apparently seamless curtain. It creates a surface we no longer understand and are not allowed to touch. This oblique film is now in the realm of the Artist and the Expert. It is owned and controlled as intellectual and cultural property.

The jury in the Mapplethorpe case in Cincinnati found that the photographs in question, (7 out of the 175 that were in the exhibit), were obscene, appealed to prurient interests, but in fact did have artistic value, thus meeting only 2 of the 3 legal standards for pornography. This decision was reached after a series of experts testified to the artistic worth of the works. The fact is, the photographs were Art before they were ever made. That Mapplethorpe was considered to be an artist, that his works had appeared in venues where Art is displayed, that his works have been discussed as Art, all lead to the presupposition that the images in question are Art. To find the gallery innocent based on these assumptions only further mystifies the creative process; only further removes any element of creativity from a non-artist's actions in the world. "I'm not an expert," says warehouse manager and juror James Jones, "I don't understand Picasso's art. But I assume the people who call it art know what they are talking about." The curtain has been closed. We are neither experts nor priests. We must now depend upon a kind of cleric, an artist or critic, to intercede between us and the creative world.

The question as to whether a work, or idea, or product is Art or pornography is itself a kind of censorship. To call one person an Artist is to deny another's creativity. But, where do we draw the line? We cannot escape censorship on some level. Perhaps, instead of asking whether a work is obscene or prurient, we need to ask if it is harmfully exploitive. As such, I am not disagreeing with the jury's verdict. I am disagreeing with the subtle and mostly very subjective distinctions that their decision is based on. These distinctions are, at best, academic. At worst, they answer questions for us, shielding us from cultural realities and controversies that we have now relegated to the luminiferous ether of academia.

—Ralph Johnson, Iowa City, October 1990



CENSORSHIP: A RANT

I want to keep this brief because in all the recent months of anti-censorship activities, amongst all the talk, amidst all the articles, & letter writings, etc., there's been a noticeable lack of what I would consider one of the most important ingredients in this battle: visual propaganda.

As far as I'm concerned, and in relation to my own visual art practice, the xerox machine is one of the most powerful weapons we as artists have available to us in the fight against censorship. It's cheap, quick and accessible.

Much of what I will be addressing has the xerox machine in mind and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Chester Carlson, the inventor of xerography, for inventing this revolutionary process.

BLAST

Blast all artists who still buy into the myth of artistic genius and the whole ideological baggage that goes with it and who don't see how it serves to separate and divide us at precisely the time when we should be throwing all that crap out the window.

Blast artists until they finally put away their egos along with their crumbling portfolios and realize that collective and collaborative action in

CENSORSHIP:

THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE SENSES

the defense of cultural diversity brings with it a far greater personal satisfaction than any one-person exhibit.

Blast this museum for not taking a public stand on these issues & for organizing this series so late in the year that the fate of the NEA is now completely out of our hands (a post-mortem perspective as it were).

Blast this museum and the sign that tells me what I *cannot* do as soon as I walk in the door (DO NOT TOUCH THE ART).

Blast the apathy and inferiority complexes of Iowa City artists for not organizing any actions around these attacks on their rights of freedom of expression.

Blast (with one exception) the inactivity of this whole academic community in responding to Jesse Helms' attacks on what you ultimately might or might not be able to see, hear and read.

Blast all artists who refuse to see that the Cold War has really come home. How many painters, photographers, musicians & arts administrators have to be strangled by the legal system for artists to realize that it's their front door which could be the next one to be kicked in.

Blast all the artists who have accepted NEA handouts, signed the Helms' amendment, and thereby compromised their work and reputations. You will not be forgotten.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Just because 2 Live Crew and Dennis Barry were acquitted doesn't mean we can rest on our laurels, for you can bet the right wing aren't sitting around on their butts. So, if I was cultural czar I would declare a war for culture and I'd

call it "1000 Points of Propaganda." And these are some of the things that I would want to do.

First of all we need to take a large leaf out of the right wings' methods of operation: we need national organizing, national coordination and we need to compile the biggest fucking computerized mailing list in the world.

We need to create a network of "art against censorship" xerox image-banks that could serve as distribution centers across the country; places where artists could send copies of their work which in turn would get distributed to other anti-censorship groups, publications, etc.

Forget about all the old political art clichés in this new propaganda, mix it up, plagiarize, recombine, appropriate, do whatever is necessary to catch people's attention, infuriate them, inundate them, assault their senses.

Set up a local Iowa City branch of the National Campaign for the Freedom of Expression (P.O. Box 50245, F Street, Washington, DC 20004.

We need to set up 'propaganda workshops' where visual materials etc. would be provided, and people could come together for an evening to create, party and then xerox the whole lot and

hit the streets the same evening. This work could then be exchanged and distributed to other such workshops throughout the country.

Put together a xerox booklet with images and text entitled "How To Answer 20 of the Most Difficult and Awkward Questions About Government Funding For the Arts." Something that would inform people in a straightforward way about the complex issues in this debate and facilitate them in countering the rights' arguments. Xerox in the 1000s, distribute and encourage people to modify and recopy.

Set up decentralized 'propaganda combat units' that can quickly mount a cultural response to local and national incidents of censorship (Boy/Girl Akimbo of San Francisco and ACT-UP have created useful models).

Explore the potential and use in new ways all the other available duplicative technologies in this cultural offensive: fax, computers, modems, video, etc.

Finally, I would declare an all-out overt war who's slogan would be: *Artists The New Freedom Fighters: As Nasty We Wanna Be!*

—Stephen Perkins, Iowa City, October, 1990



Speak nothing



See nothing



Hear nothing

No Federal Culture

This "NEA Controversy" that has "everyone" in an uproar can be seen in several lights—not all of which will be found very useful in the broader project of liberating expression of all kinds, indeed all human activity, from imposed orthodoxy; and furthermore, in the dismantling of the capitalist apparatus itself.

The most usual way to see this "controversy" is to see it as censorship. That this is *not* the case eludes many people, especially those who would attract to themselves a certain prestige: the prestige of the oppressed. There is no censorship involved in the "NEA Controversy." The word "freedom" suggests that cultural workers must use their own resources to avoid the stricture of external control. That these resources are distributed in an unequalitarian way is the real problem, and it won't go away until the problem is confronted and the dominant capitalist system is dismantled.

Over-reliance on government subsidy has always yielded disastrous

results. Such subsidies only serve to increase the intrusive impulse of hierarchical power. This fact, given the current debate, should be obvious.

The real danger is that any cultural worker who accepts NEA grant money by definition becomes part of an Official Federal Culture controlled from Washington. The more "acceptable" to this Federal Culture a cultural worker tries to make her work appear (in an effort to get more grants) the more powerful this Federal Culture becomes. Pre-censorship pre-empts and empties the work of vital content and relevance. Why should anyone want to seek the approval of a panel of "experts"? This is surely not what it means to have freedom.

What we've seen with this "NEA Controversy" is an *overt* attempt to strengthen Federal Culture through the method of forcing cultural workers to sign affidavits guaranteeing certain content in their future work. This is an instance of an effective plutocracy imposing self-censorship on its own people. We should be thankful that it is finally out in the open, where it can be vigorously discussed, and actively opposed by all cultural workers of conscience.

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

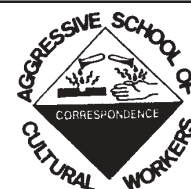
ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England

ASAC (Iowa), P.O. Box 49, Iowa City IA 52244

Ralph Johnson, 310 E Burlington, Suite 2, Iowa City IA 52240

The Drawing Legion, 1103 3rd St SE, Cedar Rapids IA 52401

David Dunlap, 117 Richards St, Iowa City IA 52240



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1. Date of Birth 11/10/57 Dealer (if any) None City _____

LIST NO MORE THAN TWO OF YOUR MOST NOTABLE: (include cities)

Studies/Degrees: none

Collections: none

Exhibitions: none

Awards/Honors: none

2. Please list the two most recent exhibitions of your work. (include cities)

None.

3. Museums or galleries planning exhibits of your work in 1990-1991. (if applicable and include cities)

None.

4. Please indicate your principal discipline:

☐ Ceramics ☐ Commercial Illustration ☐ Glass ☐ Painting ☐ Photography

☐ Printmaking ☐ Sculpture ☐ Video ☐ OTHER: cultural work

5. What general description best fits the main body of your work?

☐ Abstraction ☐ Figuration ☐ Landscape ☐ Multi-Media

☐ Portrait ☐ Still Life ☐ Watercolor ☐ OTHER: cultural work

6. Would you like to be contacted regarding reproducing a colorplate in the book? (Complimentary color postcards included; see details and cost in "Reproduction Policy" in enclosed brochure.)

☐ Yes ☒ No

7. On the REVERSE SIDE of this form, please write a paragraph (100-150 words) describing your work. Our staff will rewrite your material based on this information. It is important that you be as specific as possible. Please attach literature, reviews, and all other helpful materials.

Please see reverse side.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. PAST: (influences, media, technique + specific description of work)

SAMPLE: After formal training in Cubism she developed an individual abstract expressionistic style influenced by the work of Arshile Gorky and Vassily Kandinsky. In 1951 she became interested in Jackson Pollock and the transformation of the unconscious into concrete artistic creations. She began to explore color-field combinations and the ways in which their accidental combinations are controlled.

WRITE HERE: After formal training in Cubism she developed an individual abstract plagiaristic style influenced by the work of Arshile Gorky and Vassily Kandinsky. In 1951 she became interested in Jackson Pollock and the transformation of the unconscious into concrete artistic creations. She began to explore color-field combinations and the ways in which their accidental combinations are controlled. And then she burnt everything she ever "painted."

2. PRESENT: (influences, media, technique + specific description of work)

SAMPLE: Progressing from small areas of color in oil to large areas in acrylic, she has painted on unsized, unprimed canvas, a technique developed from Pollock's method of dripping and staining the paints onto raw canvas. Paint actually soaks into the canvas to create a purely optical image rather than a three-dimensional form.

WRITE HERE: Progressing from small areas of color in oil to large areas in acrylic, she has painted on unsized, unprimed canvas, a technique plagiarized from Pollock's method of dripping and staining the paints onto raw canvas. Paint actually soaks into the canvas to create a purely optical image rather than a three-dimensional form, especially when they're on fire.

NOMINATIONS

If you know of any eligible artists whom we may not have contacted, please use the space below to write their names and addresses and we will send them a survey form.

1. Name: Ralph Johnson Address: 109 S. 7th Ave
City, State, Zip: Iowa City IA 52240
2. Name: Paul Meff Address: P.O. Box 8907
City, State, Zip: Iowa City IA 52240
3. Name: John Heck Address: 840 Dover St
City, State, Zip: Iowa City IA 52240
4. Name: Linda Morgan-Brown Address: 528 Grandview Court
City, State, Zip: Iowa City IA 52240

YAWN

November 6, 1990

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NEWSFRONT OFF THE WALL

Part curmudgeonly pranksters, part dead earnest activists against the intrusion of right-wing values on the art scene, those participating in the nine-month old Art Strike have had a hard time "enforcing" their call for a three-year moratorium on art.

But earlier this month, the Albany Art Strike Action Committee garnered the support of the state Office of General Services (OGS) and Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, however unknowing this support may have been given.

When OGS removed and covered up the art collection in the Empire State Plaza (ESP) concourse, Art Strike moved in, posterizing the plaza and surrounding communities with a handbill declaring:

"All of the art that lined the walls of the ESP underground concourse has been removed or covered up (and hopefully soon to be destroyed) to call into question the blank emptiness of history that was previously hidden by so many bright colors and squiggly lines."

Actually, the art was removed to install a new security system, and OGS was not amused by the posters. Tom Tubbs, an OGS spokesman, said he was "awestruck" upon receiving a copy of the poster. He dubbed the poster a "terrorist note... an absurdity, filled with typographical errors and irrational charges."

Tubbs wouldn't go into the specifics of the new-and-improved security system, but did say that it would involve "all kinds of camera surveillance, and several other devices." He also said that he had never even heard of the Art Strike, nor did Dennis Anderson, curator of the plaza art collection.

All in good fun, said Neal Keating, one of three local Art Strike dis-organizers. "The intent was to suggest something so wild that, even for one moment, it would shatter the silent drone of constant alienation that permeates every aspect of life today," he said in a prepared statement.

Keating, a writer who has recently relocated to Albany from Woodstock, said that "even people in high places, whether conscious of it or not, are supporting the Art Strike." Keating challenged Cuomo to "go one step further, and never put the art back up."

—Tom Gogola, METROLAND, Albany, N. Y., Sept. 20-26, 1990, p. 7

Governor Mario Cuomo
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany NY 12224

Albany Art Strike Action Committee
P.O. Box 2256
Albany NY 12220

10/3/90

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Recently we have issued public commendations to both you and Commissioner Egan of OGS (Office of General Services) for your apparent participation in the noble, and global, Art Strike.

Obviously, you are more well-read than I had previously given you credit for. As things stand, precious few people seem to have any idea of what this Art Strike is all about. I am curious as to how you first became acquainted with the ideas and theories that have since come to represent the Art Strike in all its critical (albeit unknown) glory.

Do you intend to issue a public statement of alliance with the Art Strike? Would such a statement include a thorough denunciation of the elitist manipulation of humanity's creative energies—as practiced by the cultural arbitrageurs known as "artists"?

As part of observing the Art Strike, will you postpone the return of Art in the ESP (Empire State Plaza) concourse until January 1, 1993?

If not, can you tell me why?

Sincerely,
Neal Keating, for the AASAC

Albany Art Strike Action Committee (AASAC)



Statement of purpose re: ESP Concourse Action of 9/90

① We are a group of sensual creatures who occasionally embark on acts of poetic terrorism for the purposes of liberating the wondrous and propagating the extraordinary. We encourage fully conscious orgiastic participation in life.

≠ In particular, the ESP Concourse action was directly targeted at the walls of boredom both in and out of people's minds as they zombie their way through the monotonous underground cavern. The intent was to suggest something so wild that, even for one moment, would shatter the silent drone of constant alienation that permeates every aspect of life today, and perhaps drive the beholder to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

③ The Empire State Plaza, like the Pyramids of Egypt, is the mausoleum of a ruling class with a taste for death. Part shopping mall, part warren for state workers, the Plaza is the marriage of commerce and power and naturally shows us baby pictures of their offspring; Art—Art which re-

turns to us for a look, (*don't touch!*), the creative power we have only to reach out and wrest away in order to remake life as an adventure in fellowship, pleasure and play. By flaunting art, especially this collection of Art by the plutocrat Rockefeller's cocktail party cronies, the ESP mocks and insults everyone whose life is eviscerated by obedience and work. The Empire State Plaza, with its outdated modern architecture, already looks as if it were built to be excavated, truly, as the Parisian revolutionaries said in 1968, "soon to be picturesque ruins"—and the sooner the better.

④ That a successful Governor and probable presidential candidate would ever attempt to address the overwhelming horror—the ghastly totality of civilization, in any kind of honest and critical appraisal is, for the most part, beyond the scope of normal speculation. To put forth in a public manner such a suggestion is almost like declaring the existence of a parallel universe, only in much more human terms. Thus have we acted.

For the Art Strike, Neal Keating
Bob Black
Pir Fez Hafez Ad-Dajil

IF YOU DON'T VOTE,



there is much to be gained: your useful comprehension of the system's horror will remain intact. Refuse the system. Keep your anger from being syphoned off. Withhold the legitimacy of numbers. Don't Vote.

STRIKE BACK

To the Editor:

There is no cause to speak, as Tom Gogola does, of the Albany Art Strike Action Committee "enforcing" the Art Strike. In a city boasting a combination art gallery and real estate office, the mask has already slipped. Even before our Empire State Plaza action, voluntary compliance with the strike was almost universal. Our ideas are in everyone's heads.

Nor do we care to protect art against intruding "right-wing values." Right-wing, left-wing or art-for-art's-sake, *all* art is a source of social separation and serves a control function. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

If (unhappy day) the art returns to the plaza, swept by cameras and laced with censors, the class war will have returned on the electronic battlefield. The curator will be dismissed—he doesn't know his stuff anyway if he hasn't heard of the Art Strike—and replaced by an

electronics technician with a military background from the upper ranks of the Capital Police who have already paid us a visit. Henceforth we will visit museums to be looked at by the art.

Our challenge to Gov. Cuomo stands. Get rid of the art. Without such fantasies and distractions, the concourse architecture will quickly become unbearable. The empty walls will be so irritating as to require their immediate removal as well. After the art is gone, after the walls themselves have been removed, comes the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality. This is our entire program, which is essentially transitory. Our situations will be ephemeral, without a future: passage-ways. The permanence of art or anything else does not enter into our considerations, which are serious.

Bob Black, Neal Keating
(AASAC)

Tom Gogola replies: I don't know how Keating and Black can claim that "voluntary compliance with the Strike was almost universal," when Keating himself told me in an interview that "the Art Strike has pretty much been a failure." When I said "enforcing" it was meant as irony, to illuminate the failure of Art Strike to achieve its aim of an artless world.

METROLAND, Oct. 4-10, 1990, p. 4

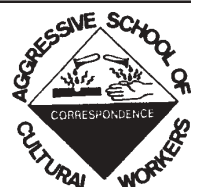
YAWN adds: Mr. Gogola obviously has little comprehension of what little Art Strike material he has apparently read. The Art Strike's aim is *not* "an artless world," which is a patent absurdity. The Art Strike aims to build a better world by dismantling the power-reinforcing element of art and returning creativity of all kinds—not just that validated by art "experts"—to a position of worth in culture.

In addition, it is *certainly* the case that compliance with the Art Strike is nearly universal: most people do not make and have never made art. It is only when the true poverty of content of daily life in our culture is widely recognized that a humane world will be realized. Art creates the illusion of humanity where only horrors abound.



Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
ASAC (Iowa), P.O. Box 49, Iowa City IA 52244
Albany ASAC (AASAC), P.O. Box 2256, Albany NY 12220
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



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Control

We find ourselves not so much horrified by our current state as we are numbed by it. But we must shake off this contrived deadness to find abject horror in the true predicament of daily life. The issue, simply put, is one of control. Commentators in **YAWN** and elsewhere have insisted that "art" is a buttressing force in the network of institutions that dominate western life. Proponents of this structure calmly insist that each of us is "free," an obvious lie in light of the cost exacted from each of us just to maintain the system which "guarantees" our "freedom."

Above all, we learn to trust the voice of authority and to mistrust what comes of our own experience. "Real" knowledge only comes from "experts." Our schools require us to regurgitate force-fed "answers" in exchange for legitimizing our "accomplishment" through the reward system of good grades. This is all with the aim of making us "better citizens;" that is, more compliant to hierarchical pressure.

Imitation, too, is a carefully presented form of control. Richard Nixon, while president of the United States, invited Richard and Karen Carpenter into the White House to honor them as fine examples of American youth. The carefully constructed image the Carpenters exhibited closely fit the image of youth that the establishment needed in order to maintain effective control and to efficiently curb freedom. Millions bought the fantasy, and still do, although its outer shape is frequently updated to forestall widespread perception of the dishonesty.

One could argue that the impulse to imitate others is a "natural" one and that this is often how we "learn" what is and is not appropriate behavior. But if it is a part of all of us, it can be used as a lever to pry us into action. So, hidden in this urge to imitate lies a danger: the danger that we will lose our very selves.

Karen's untimely demise from dietary self abuse only serves to

underscore how false her image was, and what pain lay beneath the surface. The agents of social control understand that it is not as important to control what you think as it is to control what you do. They have found images to be effective in exerting control over mass actions and identity. With images, they strive to define our identities for us. When you can tell someone who to be you can control what they do. Options are narrowed so that most of us choose very similar things to aspire to. Karen was entirely consumed by image—image was what she was; nothing more. We can take this as literally what "they" want of us.

The addiction of image is primary to the contemporary human condition. Image addiction, like substance addiction, may destroy minds and bodies, but it is sufficient for its goals simply to destroy selves. That way the body remains a "productive" member of society. It is a conceptual genocide, aimed at turning human beings into adjuncts of machinery, aided with mechanisms that automate our souls.

Each of us should control our own life. With that in mind, the Art Strike finds a place in the mechanisms of control where perhaps exists the widest disparity between *what it claims to be* and *what it actually is*. Art is that place, because of the self-manifested claim it holds on all significant "creativity", together with the severely restricted and thoroughly coded expressions that its control structures allow. This is a weak link in the chain of power that monopolizes modern attention, because in art, the common perception is that "anything goes." While this attitude most often manifests itself in impoverished emblems that touch all the "correct" symbolic bases, it can be used to wrest the means of content-bearing to our more honest purpose. Which is what, you might ask. Our more honest purpose is nothing less than the removal of the burden of large-scale social compliance from the backs of everyone.

The Supercession of the Art Strike

If "...one cannot create a revolutionary situation, complete with the required general 'desperation', as Géza Perneczky says in **YAWN** #16, then *who* can? Certainly not the Art Strikers; their context for "desperation" lies within the parameters of an already elitist structure, namely that of the art gallery. Who really cares about art, much less mail art? Most people spend their entire lives as Art Strike participants; it's just that they don't notice it—they're too busy working, or trying to forget work.

Perneczky compares the Art Strikers to the Jews that conquered Jericho. A more realistic comparison would be with the flagellants, dragging their lacerated bodies through town, while constantly whipping themselves with their theoretical fetishes. The few among the populace who might even notice this motley group would only laugh at them, maybe even pausing to throw a few rocks down upon their heads.

If one performs the simple act of disengaging from the incredibly significant implications being generated internally by the Art Strike, and takes the whole controversy, critiques and all (including this one), and places it within the context of the world, i.e., life today in all of its totality, it soon becomes obvious that the Art Strike is little more than yet another device of mystified diversion, in this case, targeted for the consumer group of disaffected intellectuals, whose palate is oh-so discriminating. It is

another game being played by another schizophrenic sub-culture.

But really, at the heart of my complaint is that this game just isn't enough fun. There are intelligent things being said by intelligent people (I'm feeling generous), but the object of this discourse is so limited and idiotic that any possibility of sensual pleasure is unlikely, bound and repressed as it is in its elitist parameters.

But the fact that disaffected intellectuals are so willing to play any kind of game at all offers a little encouragement. This then is the practical achievement of the Art Strike; in its own pathetic little way, it has opened the door for adventure, albeit just a crack.

In the light of this crack, I would like to propose we throw this door wide open, throw it off its jambs even. Revolutionary situations saturate the planet currently. Only a fob with his head in the 19th century is unable to see this. Indeed, "desperation" is everywhere, but so generalized and commodified is it, and so hopeless does it all seem, that many healthy imaginations become oblivious to it. We have learned to put up with it far too well.



Knowing and not doing are
equal to not knowing at all.

It's now time for all you Art Strikers to expand your horizons. Creativity is not being controlled by serious culture. Creativity is being controlled by a global economic system based on property. "Serious culture" is but a smokescreen for this system's force-relations, just as underground culture is its loyal opposition.

So if we're going to play a new game, a much more interesting and much more sensual kind of game, without the kinds of limitations of the Art Strike, it becomes clear that a big feature of the game, at least at the beginning, is the project of abolishing property. This is where the PERMANENT UNIVERSAL RENT STRIKE comes in. Once that's in effect, we can begin creation of the PRICELESS ECONOMIC SYSTEM, in which the abolition of profit is effected. At that point we can enter into the NEW AMOROUS WORLD we have hitherto only secretly dreamed about during orgasm.

Now is the time to begin discussion and theorizing about this new activity, this game of pleasure. I propose as grounds for speculation that sensual pleasures and their enjoyment are the only basis around which to recreate life, and that the most obvious and universal pleasures are sex and food, in all their infinite varieties.

The PERMANENT UNIVERSAL RENT STRIKE (PURS) is the only practical way to abolish property at this point in society. It cannot be abolished by some kind of "revolution," whether it's called communist or something else. It's quite simple. We all stop paying rent, mortgages, tithes and taxes. This in itself will have a dramatic effect on the structure of society, and will naturally lead to—

The PRICELESS ECONOMIC SYSTEM (PES), in which we all stop working for wages, and give our services and productions away for free. In return, we'll get everything for free. The profit motive will cease to exist as a result, and being as 90-95% of the work done in the world today is done to create profits, most work will also disappear.

Once we have argued, discussed and theorized about these two projects to a sufficient extent, the obvious thing to do is to set a date and then begin them both. It seems fitting that the PURS begin on Columbus Day, 1992, for many reasons. And what better way to wind up the Art Strike than beginning PES on January 1, 1993.

And from the actualization of these two projects we can begin the creation of the NEW AMOROUS WORLD, in which the accumulation of profit will be entirely overshadowed by the accumulation of sensual experience, which is, after all, much more enticing.

If this new game seems to be lacking in political and historical sense, that is because both politics and history have none. It is high time we do away with them altogether. What is the alternative, after all? A world poised on the brink of annihilation? An inevitable and eternal civilization? There have been at least three other social arrangements prior to this current arrangement known as civilization. Why is it so difficult to conceive that there will be other kinds of arrangements after civilization? Certainly they don't necessarily have to be separated by a nuclear holocaust. The possibilities for more imaginative punctuation marks do exist.

But having a revolution is not one of them.

Because the revolutionaries only seek to control society. The point, however, is to do away with it altogether.

Eleutheria, P.O. Box 2265, Albany NY 12220



The loss which is unknown
is no loss at all.

Glamour is the Pretext Privilege is the Subtext



IDEAL IDEALS & REAL DEALS

The Elite suck, that's the rage
So what's this stuff we see of late?
Those who rage on the Underground stage
Then strut-their-stuff on the Social Page—

*What's this Stuff that they Strut?
Who stops the Buck while they suck it up?*

It's fierce and rash to slam their cash
To condemn their stash then grab their flash—
It all depends on where they point their lenses—
Their Media Sucks till it sucks you up!

*Their Media sucks, until it lets you strut,
Until it sucks you up, then who stops the Buck?*

What's the point of giving it the Slam
If you turn around and play the Glam?
You become a model for the values you throttle,
Playing along with the Chic Mystique Boutique
Where's your rage when you're on their page?

*Social Values
Social Privilege
Social Status
Social Complicity*

**Social Page
Social Page
Social Page
Social Page**

Their Elite sucks—until who sucks who up?

The Legend is CASH

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

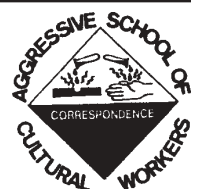
ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England

ASAC (IA), P.O. Box 49, Iowa City IA 52244

Albany ASAC (AASAC), P.O. Box 2265, Albany NY 12220

Sensoria for Censorium, P.O. Box 147 Station J, Toronto Ontario M4J 4X8 Canada

Lettre Documentaire, B.P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux Cedex France



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The Blunting of the Cutting Edge

Nothing speaks more clearly of the entertainment plutocracy's "institutional avant-garde" than their own public relations puffery. The Philip Morris Co. Inc., recently ran a full-color two-page advertisement on the inside cover of *Harper's Magazine* for the "Next Wave Festival." It read, in part:

THIS IS ART?

You betcha! This is the Next Wave Festival. The next frontier of the visual and performing arts.

This is a window to Tomorrow. Dazzling. Exhilarating. Controversial. Perhaps even incendiary. (Has there ever been a significant new movement in the arts that hasn't driven traditionalists stark, staring mad?)...

If the Next Wave Festival should start minds ricocheting at new angles...then there will be quiet rejoicing at all the Philip Morris companies, whose people light creative fires in many fields, in Enterprise as well as the Arts.

AT&T, the sponsors of the recent Robert Longo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, took out big ads in the *Chicago Tribune* to slaver over their chosen avatar of the avant-garde in remarkably similar terms:

Art from the dark side? Or the cutting edge of creation?...

The spectacular art of Robert Longo is causing debate and making viewers stand back and take notice. Of the power with which he brings together drawing, painting, sculpture, music, and video. Of the impact with which he challenges complacency. And of the audacity with which he assaults our senses.

For 50 years, we at AT&T have made it our business to put artists and audiences together. Often the result is applause. Sometimes gasps. Always spirited communication. And communication, after all, has been our business for more than a century.

These notices, with their slick postmodern graphics and their adman's prose, provide us with a startlingly apt opportunity to renew **YAWN's** battle with the false avant-garde of contemporary art. On the surface, the ostentatious public homage paid by certain corporations to "Next Wave," the "cutting edge," and "audacity" in art seems very peculiar. Art and business are ancient enemies, or pretend to be, anyway. For years avant-

gardists have made careers out of simple schemes for shocking the bourgeoisie, the benighted Babbits of the provincial cities.

But in 1990, as these conspicuous announcements demonstrate, corporate America has few qualms about endorsing most major-league art, since it so thoroughly mirrors their own cultural program. For all their talk about "windows to tomorrow," there is certainly nothing more audacious about these vanguardists than, say, commercials for MTV or perfume or shoes. This art is not adversarial; it's not even "alternative." It is, though, openly and utterly given over to P.R. experimentation, to the imperative of novelty and the other perennial themes of consumerist culture. The works promoted here are consumer products; from their countless facile attempts to startle, to the trendiness which supports their market value, to the easy alliances they have found with advertising campaigns. These days both artists and admen mouth standard pæns to the New, and obligatory slights of those who fail to keep up with the industry's latest models, and both cooperate in a transparent attempt to humanize certain loathsome corporations.

Convinced as firmly as ever that the taste of our time has been determined by the imperatives of the Culture Industry, **YAWN** calls upon artists and writers to recognize the extent to which their craft has been appropriated by plutocracy for its own uses. The cult of the new that responds so sneeringly from these ads is merely a smoke screen for the hegemony of planned obsolescence; the effort to shock simply a tool for the generation of markets; and the schemes of intentional obfuscation a shameful surrender to the powers which would render art toothless. The art of the "Next Wave" is a businessman's art; its techniques that of the P.R.-man. By deploying the once-radical concept of "the avant-garde" and "the shocking," business culture has eliminated the once-vital artistic opposition to its consumerist project.

In 1990 "avant-garde" means something closer to being the first on the block to wear a Batman T-shirt than it does to inventing a truly meaningful, penetrating representational (or abstract) technique. And shocking the bourgeoisie was never much of an artistic program in the first place. It's just as shallow as ever, only today—with the sanctifying cultural models of the "Next

Wave Exhibit" to guide them—it's the bourgeoisie who go through an endless pantomime of shocking one another. Nobody is truly shocked anymore; the entire apparatus of shockery persists only because the shocking has been so profitably appropriated and fetishized: the perpetual scramble for the latest model has been blessed by a coalition of artists and admen, and the purchasing public is only too willing to buy and buy and buy as much art and cigarettes and clothing and cars and hi-fis as they can, provided their new stuff will vex their less up-to-date neighbor.

In the last century the marriage of business and art has produced a vast pan-media celebration of the folkways of Capitalism; an Official Style that subverts opposition by simulating rebellion; a dignified kitsch that gives apathy a sophisticated façade. Its works are displayed on the slick pages of almost every national magazine as well as in the nation's trendiest galleries. The alliance of commerce and culture has convinced the booboisie of the urbanity of conformity more effectively than even the slickest of 1950s commercials. And, if their complacent vanguardism goes unchallenged, capital will have created a new and improved acquisitive machine that eliminates or co-opts its intellectual opponents like never before.

As Big Art draws bigger and bigger sums, the fundamental assumptions of the avant-garde are reduced to meaninglessness. The artist loses his crucial social position and becomes a more or less conscious propagandist for planned obsolescence; a corporate illustrator, decorator, or copy-writer.

And as literature becomes mired in precious sloughs of irony and textuality, these debasements lose their shame. Our writers veer unflinchingly away from the central aesthetic questions of our time, opting instead to invent facile plays for hipness than can be easily sold on Madison Avenue. And the whole consumerist project itself, the central motive force and organizing theme of our age, becomes unjudgeable amid the fogs of "undecidability" they have called down upon themselves. Impotent, powerless, fearful of forthright speech lest they privilege one discourse over another, they have left the world open to exploitation, manipulation, and control by those who *know* what they want: Wall Street, and **YAWN**.

In a time when the "cutting edge" has become a powerful tool for mediocrization, we proudly rededicate ourselves to its blunting. In an age when the Hollywood glamor of the "avant-garde" has long since overtaken its aesthetic usefulness, we happily devise new tactics to send it scurrying in disarray. [Plaster Cramp Press]

Why Bother with Propaganda?

The Art Strike asserts that art is bourgeois and elitist. You only have to compare the coverage in the tabloids and the "quality" papers in terms only of the square centimeters devoted to its propagation to reveal the class emphasis of something that apologists claim to have universal value.

When the artists and administrators choose to make work "accessible" it is in the hallowed chambers of the secular cathedrals, the gallery and museum. People are ushered in to pay their respects to the relics, the dead skin of the humanist saints.

Artists of course lead the way, blazing new trails, boldly decorating where no one could be bothered before. This seeps down to us lesser mortals in the form of exciting new adverts, repackaged goodies and novelty philosophies readily bowdlerized by the color supplement hacks.

The insistence on metaphor and allusion to placing in the art historical context make it a coded world as specialistic and mystifying as stamp collecting.

Commodification is, if not an inevitability, financially useful. Art objects are the next step up the ladder from executive toys. Intellectual arguments surrounding work become interesting accessories. Neo-expressionism competes with Minimalism for the market share in much the same way as Acid House does with Techno. The most trite examples of this tendency are companies like Hunter and Philip Morris; the one a bomb manufacturer, the other a tobacco corporation; both arts sponsors, and both responsible for thousands of deaths, maybe attempting a little expiation by applying a philanthropic gloss to their façades.

Art creates a false sense of space, an illusionary sanctuary where integrity and intellectual freedom flourish untainted by the coarser aspects of life. From this radical nature reserve artists feel that they, when conscience dictates, are able to make forays into social and political activity. The activist artist is always more interested in success within the art sphere rather than a re-alignment of society where our

stolen creativity is repossessed. A recent particularly crass instance of this is the US artist who painstakingly reconstructed a shanty town in a gallery.

Precisely because of the free reign that they feel they have been allowed, artists are able to fine-tune the order of appearances. In this way artists, as other professional intellectuals, become valuable technicians of dominant culture.

Whatever doesn't kill power is killed by it. This is as true for paintings of the reproductive organs of certain plants nicely arranged in a vase as for self-consciously critical work.

There are several possible responses:

To produce art in a strictly formal way. Refine it to a craft of technical, æsthetic and mathematical precision. The old cliché of art for art's sake, and why not? The problem only occurs when the structure of society detaches the by-product of an individual period of creativity, maybe with the artist's connivance, and institutes it as a sterile husk, a coinage.

To subvert its supposed transcendence from within by producing superficial work in the hope that art might implode under the immense density of its own meaninglessness. In this way a lot of self-importantly named Post-modernist art simply reels out knowingly bad jokes. But you can only play about with the pieces of shit for so long.

Others have tried to widen the boundaries of art to achieve the æstheticization of all life. Instead of turning inwards, thrust it out. This can be the highly romantic view put forward by Oscar Wilde or the Surrealists. It can also end up with the nice looking flat roofs of Corbusier that just happen to leak like sieves, or result in the missionary zeal of the community artist, rushing around worried that the vast majority have always been on art strike, desperate to introduce us to the delights of arty-farty vicarious experience. Everyone grins themselves silly when they've got a multimedia arts complex.

To an extent this avoids the issue. By defining everything as art the word loses any currency. (Which is probably a good idea.)

We live in the most highly æstheticized point in history; adverts, TV, music, everything

redesigned and repackaged with rabid ferocity. Muzak is the creation of a complete æstheticism. Alone it is not enough. To expand out into life effectively it must be part of a broader onslaught, ideological and economic as well as cultural. That's where the real fun begins.

Silence—the position of the Art Strike. This is possibly the worst, most incoherent response. When we go to bed, cook or laugh, do we do so for capital? Although we are at present doing so in a society where the major benefactors are bastards, to credit them with complete control, accidental or not, is paranoid conspiracy theory. To talk of your existence merely in terms of strategy is to deny the most important and revolutionary impulse—pleasure.

On a level of mundane practicality the only people who go on strike are probably pretty decent anyway. (It would be great to get the pop star artist to shut up for awhile though.) To disarm ourselves of methods of struggle/creativity is doing the recuperator's job for them. Capitalism would of course be different, but would it be any better if nothing had ever been said against it? The strikers are very vocal in exactly why they choose to produce this art of silence.

The Art Strike has been claimed as a good "propaganda act." Why bother? I am only interested in a sustained period of real life—and will not exist as a theatrical symbol. Symbolic acts rely entirely on the media coverage given to them as opposed to real acts which have a direct impact. In this aspect the strike becomes ultra-leftist posture politics. A holier-than-thou pose rather than the arty-farty one.

The most interesting idea to arise in support of the Art Strike is a calling into question the role of "artist" or "politico." Presumably the people who define themselves into these categories are making an honest attempt at a reaction to society. The trouble comes when they see themselves only in these terms. The reaction becomes a self-policed act of conformity. You still refer to yourself as "artist" if you make a point of desisting from the practice known as "art" for a certain period of time. It remains a defined role, albeit negative.

Surely it is common sense to avoid this adoption of stereotypes, but to impose another on top makes an equal contradiction.

The voluntary shifting of roles can be fun, allowing for play, but then why only three years? And why do people have to do it at the same time? I can imagine the Art Strike Action Committees becoming self-help groups for those with cultural cold turkey.

Silence = death, not just for AIDS. Renunciation of creativity is a tactic of despair, not even that but the abandonment of any tactic whatsoever.

[Leisure

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

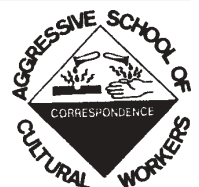
ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England

ASAC (Iowa), P.O. Box 49, Iowa City IA 52244

AASAC (Albany), P.O. Box 2265, Albany NY 12220

Plaster Cramp Press, P.O. Box 5975, Chicago IL 60680

Leisure, P.O. Box 368, Cardiff, Wales CF2 1SQ



F'art: The Release of Man's Soul

Mama Cass once sang a song about "A New World Comin'," though I doubt she envisioned her own transfiguration would be brought on by an inhaled ham sandwich. (Is that story pop mythology or what?)

Revelation is like that. It can be brought on by an overdose of pop psychology (by reading a dialectical book list that momentarily "pops" our unusual perceptions and overrides conditioned motivations) or it can, through personal gnosis, which is a state of self-honesty usually only encountered at the moment of death, revolutionize perceptions themselves. Infrequently it can be experienced in life, if the mind is disciplined enough to live as though its ego recognized itself to be mortal and its perceptions fallible.

The revelations available to awake minds through art must come, in conformity with what seem to be psychological laws of symmetry, to each of us separately and totally perpendicular to our expectations. There are no easy epiphanies. And yet when they come, they are marketed to the uninitiated as art.

For the same reason that your own headstone and its engraving are unwelcome eidetic images, true art achieves its immortality by conjuring disgruntled disappointment from those who object to the demise of their "own" life-long investment in the counterfeit stylishness of a supposed immortality. Monuments, even as an afterthought, suck artwise, because they say what never should be said.

The "new world comin'" ain't gonna sneak by and just take over without a protest, is what most of us figure. We've all got aesthetic "principles," and demand they be respected, even if they just turn out to be habits of thought that'll be forgotten, maybe even ridiculed a generation from now.

It's not for nothing that the appreciation of art is considered purely subjective. On the other hand, art *seems* eternal because the artifacts we call art outlast the generations that produce them. They are bequeathed to a generational regress of sentimental and sedimentary interpretation. God damn it, if they're expensive, somebody better appreciate art works or there'll be a guilty con-

science and a lot of shame created in some innocent's mind!

But new art is stuck with the lonely task of explaining to its contemporaries the differences it creates between itself and consensual sensibilities. Old art that used to shock fragile sensibilities has long ago been dismissed or forgiven as naïve, since the controversies it confronted have, by and large, become passé. New art that does not shock those same "polite" sensibilities can be considered no art at all, because "polite" art is political art, and thus no better than propaganda.

Conversely, nothing new that shocks consensual sensibilities will be accepted as "true" art by the guardians of contemporary culture. Art, being viewed so "democratically" as public property, must not offend a publicized morality. But since art that does not offend norms by at least challenging them is not art, and since art that does not serve to state the stasis of the state in absolute terms is legislatively false art, then by logical derivation, art does not exist in the present moment and there is never an appropriate time to call for an "art strike," since art is timeless and only egos fill space with gravity.

The appreciation of art is, indeed, purely subjective. The "best" art, in terms of cultural acceptability, is that which can be amputated from critical applicability to current social circumstances without general anæsthesia being administered to the body politic. Any art found to be so palatable is, of course, more appropriately labeled "propaganda." Which is not to say that it is impossible for the propaganda of one era to become the art of another. Art is always a matter of contrast, not concord. Performance or exhibition executed to promote cultural stagnation (propaganda) must never be considered "art." It is, however, possible to be crass and artful if tastelessness and truth intersect at the point of society's dishonesty.

Artists see themselves in a minority of one willing to challenge sensibilities despite collective resistance experienced as subjective fact. Artists who think objective change through the shared public (though subjective) experience of their "truth" is a rational hope must also believe in the work of grammarcy and spell maging.

Society's spells, bought and paid for by high powered investments in low-brow rhetoric are heavy magic and ill medicine by comparison! But the low budget truth of the artist loses to image-intensive marketing every time.

So let's talk art. A new "movement" just won't move anybody unless it cuts a loud fart in the church of orthodoxy. After sitting in our largesse-staked pews in this church too long, most of us get used to the familiar stench of our sponsored largeasses, but are offended by anyone else's notions about "clearing the aesthetic air."

Reluctant to be impolite (a form of social heresy) by moving to another church, we cling to our privileges until the rafters are filled to the bursting point with our own noxious out-gassings and all the crucifixes are drooping under the strain of our bored flatulence like the clocks in a Savador Dali painting. So much f'art!

Mama Cass and her lunchmeat art are gone, but a new world's all around us. It's doing shift work, gearing up to seductively flounce silicon boobie traps in front of the ogling oligarchy of the cabal that's been feeding us a gangrenous host of sacramental pap(al) archetypes.

The new paradigm is info-red, communistic propaganda, and quite beguiling because it promises to really enact bi-polarized dystopia/utopia ideals (dis-u-tropia or disused tropias, which are as-yet unlearned habits) in the human hemispheres (cerebral and geographic), world-wide.

But this is "good news" in the best biblical sense of the term "gospel." The gnostics are finally coming back to haunt the bureaucrats of faith in "the system." The invasion of adherents to the code "just say gnosis" is systemic. You can sense their presence within every silicon chip, in every "interactive" program that will interface mental space with cyberspace.

Cyberpunks are orthodoxy's ham sandwich. The choke point is where the mind meets its maker, and overthrows the bastard for malfeasance. They're also its pop-mythology: something to be popularly believed in, though synthesized as credulously biased.

The mind's maker is, of course, perennially one of the "lower gods" in the pantheon of principalities. But in cyberspace we can literally *make up* our own minds! We can make them up out of the junkyard parts left over by Newtonian mechanical limits, in which case reality becomes just another video game, where the joystick is the human body and its extensions. Or we can cross the noosphere into quantum hedonics where cause/effect linearity melts down into the nooks and

crannies of either/or, neither/nor monotony and gets lost in its own ideational menu.

Old-time shortwave radio operators used to be affectionately referred to as "hams." They're still around, but they're still "old timers." Someday the software operators will be just as antiquated by technology. Difficult to imagine, of course. But that's just the point! We can laugh at someone choking on the ham sandwich, getting beaten by the "simple" technology of diet and health; we can bemuse ourselves with imagining the primitive environs of a world communicated in the sparse detail of Morse code; we can likewise chuckle at the unsophisticated parameters of the first "home computers" and the scarcity of computing power. But can you imagine the step beyond the one you're planning to take?

Someone younger and more energetic, for your information, has already planned it, taken it, and despite your interference, will succeed in making your nightmares seem like utopian hoptescapes.

Welcome to evolution 101. The class for the classless. Be informed that Darwin, your grandfather, your mother, in fact *you* and I will not, in principal, approve categorically of anything that leaves us generically behind. We intellectuals like to think of ourselves as eternal thespians in the interplay of life's drama. Having principles toward which we have paid some learned interest, we expect results beating the average mathematical probability curve to prove reality works, at least in principle, in our favor!

Art Strikes Out

Life is art, but living dead is one of the things most of us really do well. When was the last time

you "died" at a performance of art? With such moral aplomb you may have said: "When they [*name of the affront to "reasonable" sensibilities, such as actors appearing on stage suddenly nude*], I could have died!"

Precisely! "Reasonable sensibilities" are often as not simply bad habits of thought. Being habits, they cannot be argued for reasonably, though cultural inertia makes it unlikely they will be budged by rational argumentation, either.

That's why art must "Just say Yes!" and slam new perceptions in your face, even against your protests. Your pardon can be begged forever, and you would not permit yourself to be shocked voluntarily. The best argument wouldn't sway you. But art, because all art is irreverent of your expectations, will not only sway you; if it is good it will *rock* you!

There's no such thing as an "Art Strike." There may be people who need a break from the intensity of art; there may be people who think the iconoclasm of joining the ranks of striking artists will coronate their lack of art as suddenly artistic. This following the tide of art as it ebbs from naturalism to impressionism to cubism to surrealism to situationism to dada to post-anything is interesting as a road map of the supposed territory of human blindness in need of enlightenment. To suggest that this pattern is exclusively correct doubts art exists and suggests "art" is (although it is at least this) only a formal study of perceptual behaviorism.

Situationism, like other performance and exhibitionist art, is synthetic and it is not surprising that even though many emotive didactic spectacles have yet to be wedged between the moments of the "eternal banal," still it is clear that performance

and exhibitionist art lack the life that life gives unrequested. Art, imitating life, seems to be symptomatic of a pathology of requited life: a tantrumatic release of the human manufacturing glands, producing psychotic delusions of the power to "create." When clearly, life alone creates, and the imitation of life creolates and habituates.

Striking against art, we refuse to imitate the sunrise, and this is perfectly acceptable so long as we do not come to think that we are somehow *preventing* the sunrise by our abdication of its expression. The suicide of expression will do for some, standing for the eradication of the whole world, because the artist's world is an outer expression of interiority. So destroying that exteriorization is equivalent to destroying the interior creator. Collectively achieved, the club of eradi, the theocrats of erasure, the happy horseplatt of undoing name scowls for their first-born, coronate kings for their epoxy, market glue and plastic under the guise of their wife's names, and in no wise are sincere nor ever will be.

Will the spiritual suicide of the mercantilist's sort eradicate art from the world? The egoist presumes no blame; the salesman even less since he is "doing his job." Nothing profits a man more than the comfort of his family. They like each other for smelling all alike.

Artists, however, are not present for the strike. They make like to have been there, but being in the world but not of it, they will likely miss the political clarion to abstain from life. It sounds like somebody is throwing a party, doesn't it? What a contrast there is between joining and crashing a party.

All a mere matter of aesthetics to some.

[Ben G. Price

"...Now art is living only through its own commemoration. It has become a closed system, art for art's sake, from which nothing comes out any more. Yet art is a confrontation of man with the illusion of the world, and a way of subduing this illusion through a symbolic representation. But we see today that contemporary art does not speak any more of this illusion, it does not try to subdue this illusion any more. It plays with its own history, and this is a weak strategy. Art exhausts itself in a game which does not commit to anything and in which there are no more rules. It makes its own advertising...."

Jean Baudrillard, from an interview entitled "La vie sous vide," *Télérama* N°2128 (Paris), 24 October 1990. (Trans. Philippe Billé.)

ARTEMISIA for the ART STRIKE

It is time to rethink our goals and objectives. Instead of clamoring for our "rightful" position as elitist cultural employees wielding power over a territory guarded by aesthetics—instead of assembly-line work inside capital's factory of self-monologue—

We have chosen to be really creative: We have chosen to refuse our role.

How we ever thought our "feminist critique" erased the elitist, supremacist "art" world reveals, in addition to personal greed, the ubiquity of capital. Instead of joining the club we used identical tools and materials to construct an exact replica right next door. Previously we perceived our "oppressors" to be the "physical" establishment (government, multinationals, NEA, etc.) yet in "reality" it "appears" that this beast is ideological.

ZEPPO: The **alienation** of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an **external existence**, but that it exists **outside him**, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

"Art" is alienation. What has become necessary is a critique that embraces activity: the refusal of roles already prescribed and compartmentalized: "feminist 'artist'," "anti-semitic christian," "liberal," "conservative," "alternative radio"—how can this be?

BE REALLY CREATIVE: REFUSE YOUR ROLE

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

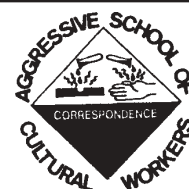
ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England

ASAC (Iowa), P.O. Box 49, Iowa City IA 52245

AASAC (Albany), P.O. Box 2265, Albany NY 12220

Ben G. Price, 814 Chestnut St, Hagerstown MD 21740

Lettre Documentaire, B. P. 249, 33012 Bordeaux France



Notes on the Pleasures of Neutrality

Because we have reached a point in the “progress” of our culture in which it is socially viable to suggest that we have reached a theoretical impasse, we have reached a theoretical impasse. It is impossible to “progress” beyond this notion, and any criticism of it, no matter how analytical, is a step backward. Those who do not understand this simple paradox will waste endless energies digging their tombs in the graveyards of art, politics and philosophy.

We know the truth. The truth has always been and will always be. It is unchanging. In a state of perpetual progression, the shadow of darkness which came with the industrial revolution is drawing back, forced away by the light of timeless rationality. The lies of the last two hundred years may have been attractive, but they are nothing compared to the lies of the last two centuries. Every illusion must pass through itself before becoming true. If, in this process, it is written down, it becomes true much more quickly.

Death is the spectacle of repression. The “image of death,” the darkness at the end of the tunnel, when reified by authority, is a much more efficient form of repression than the religious heaven/hell complex which came before. “Individuals” in the West realize that their lives are “meaningless,” and this “existential” realization drains from them the desire to do anything other than get it over as painlessly as possible. Naturally this precludes substantive rebellions and the constructions of new forms of “meaning.” The infinite potential of every second of tactile experience is given up for the apparently less difficult life of consumer-drone, the “meaningless” existence. But meaning is an abstraction created by and for the justifications of the current power structure, the reality of a living death.

The spectacular moment divides an illusionary past from a non-existent future. Our memories are ideologically organized by the “master-narrative” of power in order to give substance to the total compromise of the present. Each second spent remembering the past is a second which could have been used to construct the future. “Revolutionaries” frequently believe that revolution will take place when the master narrative is in the hands of the proletariat, but this is a load of crap. The destruction of the master narrative and the continuities it represents is the rightful demand of all those who demand the destruction of the master narrative and the continuities it represents.

The systematic extremism of this philosophy is not a cure for boredom. It is a reaction to the sadness of the “human condition” as market for general consumption by those human beings who stand to profit from the idea that we are living in a post-referential world, the “avant-garde” of literature, art and politics.

We know the truth. The truth has always been and will always be. It is unchanging.

Consciousness is the negation of tactile experience. When you see something, you cannot at the same time “imagine” it. This is because consciousness is a second order activity which acts as a parasite to experience, a caricatured re-creation of the physical world. This is the space between the repression inherent in memory and the freedom of oblivion in which ideology first materialized. We must do away with the

abstraction of consciousness if we are to heal the wound of separation between past and future which gave rise to capitalism.

Progress is inevitable, plagiarism implies it. The tautological is no more or less easily understood than anything else—it is simply what it is as opposed to being what it is not.

The current trend towards “demystification” in art, literature and politics is one of the most effective mystifications practiced by “marxists,” “feminists,” and other ideologists. Surely the rewriting of history is no more interesting in the final analysis than the banality of its construction in the first place.

We know. The truth doesn’t change. It has been around for a long time.

Why would Samuel Beckett go on writing long after having repeatedly articulated the non-validity of the role of author, and of writing itself? Perhaps his alcoholism caused him to mistakenly associate the death of creativity with physical death of the body and mind. In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth—the cessation of alienating over-production in intellectual labor (“creativity”) is the most alive act that human beings can engage in: the sum of all our desires and the realizations of all potentials. Throwing off creativity is the first step towards real equality between (wo)men and the destruction of time itself.

Ideology is not the only thing which makes life worth dying for. Other forces, such as perversity, laziness and “generally liking people,” while no more meaningful, make do equally well as revolutionary motivations. In the time previous to the implementation of these principles, it is our duty to make them appear as heroic and ideological as possible, so that those with a penchant for the ideological will also be attracted to our philosophy. This is called the “sales pitch.” The “trick” is to always seem to be contradicting yourself so as to attract those individuals who might find the ideological nature of your thinking unattractive.

“Post-modern” artists who hypocritically produce art which continues to condemn the role of the artist and suggests the non-viability of creativity should get the death penalty. After all, death should not frighten them as it is the ultimate illusion which supports the established order for whom they are the most effective publicity agents.

Meaning is a purely social phenomenon, and society is an unrealized project. The individual does not need a “truth referent,” but without one, the society would be only a series of individuals. The realization of the social project will take place with the redistribution of meaning, with the truth referent moving from the social to the personal. This act of communist revolution will be equal to the perfection of “meaning,” which will no longer function as a means of repression to be employed by one group of people on another, but will instead repress all individuals equally. What might be considered from our point of view to be a slight recontextualization will seem a drastic change in the human condition to those in the future who have “progressed” beyond the radical push through and cessation of all forms of creativity.

[SMILE]

Plagiarism is dead; nothing is permitted.

**REJECT
EXPLODE
EXPLORE
UNLEARN**

Stealing Back and Forth of Symbols

The divine right of kings was first invoked by secular interests combatting the authority of the theocrats. It held that God appointed the king, rather than the church authorities, to represent the secular interests of "the people." Later, when the church made peace with established monarchs, identifying its interests with the interests of the secular authorities, the church adopted the doctrine as its own. And subsequently the bourgeoisie repudiated the doctrine, in repudiating both monarch and state. It did so in the name of "rights." Among these "rights" was "freedom." And Marx in turn stole this bourgeois symbol for the proletariat. The stealing back and forth of symbols is the approved method whereby the Outs avoid being "driven into a corner."

Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (1937)

An Obituary for the False Opposition

With the utter demolition of Marxism-Leninism and the fading away of other false opposition movements (e.g., Maoism, Castroism, Trotskyism), the opportunity arises once again for humanity to liberate itself from the domination of capital. Clearly, the hysterical ravings of laughable figures like Bob Avakian, Gus Hall and all the apparatchniks of similar left-wing nut cults are addressed to a system and a world that has left them on the dung heap of history. They deserve their deluded followers, all of them.

Such a result should not surprise anyone even slightly familiar with these twisted ideologies. The entire grab-bag of leftist slogans and theoretical formulæ existed merely as a mask to hide more concentrated forms of domination by capital. Marxism-Leninism never ever wanted to liberate humanity from the talons of capital. Rather their project was to simply manage capital and institutionalize its most oppressive modes of control: work, ideological hegemony, hierarchy, organization, authority, ad nauseam. For this reason Marxism-Leninism can properly be called the loyal opposition of capitalism and the best friend capital ever had.

All previous false oppositions merely aped the pre-existing forms

of social organization they hoped to replace. Thus the Bolsheviks in attempting to engineer a humanitarian responsive government finally succeeded in producing a tyrannical state that even a Tsar could love. Marxism-Leninism prevents the discovery by humanity of new forms of social organization which could serve as the vehicle for its self-emancipation from the domination of capital and all its categories and constructs.

Significantly, the failure of the Left in some sense portends doom for capital itself. Without a necessary opposition with which to define itself, modern capital, the undisputed champion of the cold war, may well knock itself out (potentially taking us with it).

We must now begin to see the system which dominates us as the *ancien regime*; a corrupt, despotic, moribund and boring mode of social organization, that we not only have the right to destroy, but the obligation. For the first time in a century social insurrectionists have found themselves without a leader, without ideology, but with a burning desire to extirpate the *ancien regime* and realize utopia. And that, of course, is the beginning of the end.

—MAXIMALIST INTERNATIONAL, *The Social War*, Nº3

DEAR YAWN:

...Thanks for your...interesting ideas. Most of which I can follow really well. Only the way the rules are set are "not my cup of tea." And as things are really changing here who wants to be on strike? Maybe in the USA it's a different situation, but here it's definitely the thing not to do! ... Why be part of a small esoteric group, saying no where even your very "conservative neighbor" is making excursions and searching new ways?...

Kassel, Germany

YAWN agrees: It certainly is true that being part of a small esoteric group seems a rather effective way of accomplishing nothing at all.

So it makes one wonder what all the shouting is about. The last thing the Art Strike wants to do is "convince" others to join the strike and then sit on their hands! Doing nothing is in fact *obviated* by the Art Strike, which is a really, really bad idea. But it is important that it be as bad as it is. It forces a clarification of one's personal views on culture in part by being very difficult to ignore.

DEAR YAWN: ...A "subjective" update on the Art-strike, art-strike & refusal of creativity here: For awhile the idea was batting around that since people who engaged in art-strikes etc. here were in such a minority that their engagement was highly individualistic &

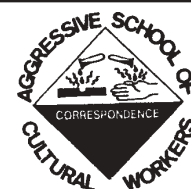
tended to promote the idea of individual difference & thus would do better to just do a little creativity. However, recently it has become clear that there are lots of isolated 'maverick' art-strikers around, who have taken it seriously & aren't doing anything in an intentional way. The relative 'invisibility' of these people is isomorphic to their whole situation. So art-striking is ok again. Baltimore, Maryland **YAWN** says: It's really curious how these things work, isn't it?

DEAR YAWN: ...Yeah I agree so many artists say I'm so open minded and there is nothing *but their open minds*....

Venice, Florida

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
Plaster Cramp Press, P.O. Box 5975, Chicago IL 60680
The Drawing Legion, 1103 3rd St SE, Cedar Rapids IA 52401
Dialectical Immaterialism Press, P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203



YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. We welcome responses from readers, especially observations of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. It is our policy not to attribute work, unless the content benefits from such attribution. **YAWN** is a collective, mostly anonymous, effort. Contributors receive a copy of the **YAWN** in which their work is used. Monetary donations are requested to help defray the costs of publication. Subscriptions are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for 25 issues. Archive at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

An Early Assessment of the Art Strike (1990–1993)

Well, here we are in the first spring of Art Strike (1990–1993) and how is everybody doing? Spring being the time of running saps and fertile growth, Art Strikers are undoubtedly feeling the strain of non-production. Art Glutters (produce as much as you can for the next 10 years and flood the marketplace) are full-steam ahead and into the swing of spring already. Most of the Art Scabs I've talked to are still bitching about the strike, all the while furtively hustling their work at abandoned gas stations. Meanwhile, the Art Terrorists are entering juried exhibitions, sending in thousands of slides of faked Pollacks under the name of Karen Elliot. Here at Art Revolution headquarters, we've been instigating an experiment known as The Anti-Art Performance Festival and Exhibition of Propaganda.

A few years back, I entered some slides in an Ohio Arts Council sponsored competition—the first time I'd ever done so. My motivation, as I remember it, was that I was getting tired of looking at all the finished pictures crowding my walls. It seemed like it was about time I let others have a chance of looking at them. So, I got a notice saying that one of my pictures had made it to the final round of judging. This meant that I had to get it framed and deliver it to the gallery. The framing set me back 80 bucks, but it did look good under that non-glare glass with museum-grade matting so that it would last for all eternity or something like that. Naturally enough, after going through all this bother, including typing up a resume which featured no credits and no prestigious art training background—I received a notice of rejection.

THE END OF HISTORY

It is not a matter of realising the art strike, or even building on every level of life everything that hitherto could only be an art strike memory, or an illusion, dreamed and preserved unilaterally. The art strike can only be realised by being suppressed. And in suppressing it with the automatism of an even more passive and hierarchical spectacle, we freeze dry its contents into something stable, quantifiable, investment worthy, in short homogenous.

The art strike is not only a commodity but also a symbolic representation of this order, the justification of its concept of reality.

There will be an empty space left by the art strike as a comprehensive order binding everything, the social consensus will be destroyed, we will have reached the end of the great history of our common culture. The empty space left by the art strike will be occupied by another order, the economy. The ideal of change as value, adopted by our culture, has found its full significance in the art strike.

The art strike in its honesty, says about itself that in its state of exhaustion it is not able to put forward values. It can only be a description of a situation, the world of exhausted values of our culture. It can only be a quotation of history, a substitute for something that has ceased to exist.

The art strike opposes the logical way of mind which has led to this cultural devastation. The art strike will be a resounding stroke of the gong, its ringing will drown out the squawks of the malingerers, their strained voices will fade into thin air.

To speak of the art strike means to speak of the unknown, to speak of a door to a new world, to speak of a desire to discover what one does not know. For how can one know a desire without satisfying it?
(ASAC-San Francisco)

tion. And yes, I felt properly humiliated as I slunk into the gallery to pick up my picture.

A year later, I mounted my own exhibition at the Bauhaus, Akron's one and only art bar—now defunct. This turned out to be one of the highest points in my "career" as artist. Since there was no gallery owner or jury of experts, I was free to do as I wanted. I had a contest: Match the titles with the pictures. The prize was a night on the town with the artist. No one person got all the titles matched up correctly, so I declared everybody a winner! Those people who bothered to show up were treated to a tour of downtown Akron's back alley-ways and favorite dumpsters! Also, I was able to combine performing with the exhibition by premiering my bag lady show on opening night of the display. The last night turned into Drink 'n' Draw Night

with Sockeye. I took down all my work and had piles of paper and markers for everyone to create their own works which we taped up all over the bar as Sockeye provided their usual exquisite musical accompaniment.

Every now and then, I contemplate the idea of selling out. Gee, it sure would be great to get big bucks for my artwork, quit my shit job and do nothing but produce great works of art that get snapped up by millionaire collectors and museums immediately! With this in mind, I have hung onto what I consider to be my "masterpiece," although, I did sell two pictures as a result of the Bauhaus show—to my good friend and now "patron of the arts," Joe Collins. Thanks, Joe—those pictures will be worth a fortune just as soon as I'm dead. In the meantime, I'm here sitting in my dumpster just waiting to be discovered.
[*Dumpster Times*]

DEFIANCE FOR POWER



Some of the 771 young men who announced that they would refuse to serve in the ART

Letters

The New Religion

Dear **YAWN**,

I [have] remained truly against the Art Strike the whole of its life, but my reasons [a]re various and only partially explained during that neo-situationist action. I suppose the most serious reason for my opposition is that I don't see any real value in art at all, yet that is what I live my life for. I see value in food, shelter, kindness, and that's about all. Art is a sideline for anyone—a game for people with time, money, hope. And I like games. But I can't take seriously a group of people interested in trying to expose the worthlessness of a game that so obviously lacks any value.

Imagine this: I am an atheist but I came to that conclusion—for it is a conclusion, not a state of being—after living many years as a pious (not a religious) person. If I had to give up the validity of God and godness and the hope that was wrapped up in those ideas, I also had to dispose of the weaker idea that there was something noble about art. I didn't believe the stories about art and the special status of artists. I never forgave a poet for his meanness, a painter for her excesses against others. Our actions toward other people remain the important things, and I remain almost

ashamed of this valueless product I strive to find and make and describe.

The Art Strikers [believe] in the value of art. They [a]re the acolytes ringing the bells as the priest raise[s] the Host up, up, the acolytes drawing naked women on their underwear and giggling, afraid of the truth they really [believe]: that art [makes] their lives valuable, [gives] them purpose. It is the person who has given up all those hopes, who doesn't believe in the value of any art but continues to produce it, it is that person who is the real striker. Not to believe but to continue to practice is much more difficult, much more revealing, much less dramatic than anything a covey of nervous strikers could hope to do.

I had planned on writing back a shocked and nasty note after you published my anti-Art-Strike essay in **YAWN** [no. 38, *What Makes the Art Strike Such a Bad Idea?*], but I decided that you might misunderstand it and think that I was really upset by the comments of the unreal. I enjoyed it, actually, and was glad to see my ideas out there regardless.

Geof Huth, Schenectady, N.Y.

Meaninglessness Halted; History Stopped

Dear **YAWN**,

Thank you so much for informing me in detail about the Art Strike 1990–1993. I support the

strike. What could be more rational than to step outside of history. Stop the flow of consumer meaninglessness NOW!

Till 1993 I pledge to make no more "artwork." Until 1993 I will produce only "stuff." Hope you like the enclosed "stuff."

Strike now while the mediocrity is hot, and nobody gives a damn. Join the new wave of endless nothingness!

Helping to spread the rumor,

Maximum Traffic (enclosures)

Stand Back, Everyone!

Dear **YAWN**,

A while back a Yawnist wrote a diatribe confusing words and the ideas they symbolize. I wrote a letter explaining the mistake. They wrote me a response demonstrating that their head was incapable of being penetrated by the most straightforward logic. Their conclusion was that words are a prison from which man can never escape, a concluding only a college professor who got his tenure by hiring the Mafia to assassinate his intellectual competition could ever hold. I answered this letter too, but my second letter was "returned to sender" because the Yawnist was (apparently) address unknown. Then strangely enough the first three letters (Yawnist, me, Yawnist) appeared in **YAWN**, [contending] that "meaningful interaction among people and groups striving for cultural change" is impossible. That is what **YAWN** is about.

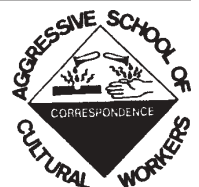
Recently I have become convinced that **YAWN** was correct, not because of any fault of words, but simply because the contemporary system is so devastating to the human mind that there are no people or groups emotionally capable of ... cooperating for social change. The social implications of this are rather great. It means people are too crippled to fix the social mechanism which has gone berserk, and we must simply wait for it to explode. Since we cannot live free human lives until after the explosion, the logical conclusion is to try to encourage the explosion as soon as possible. Destruction does not require the emotional maturity cooperation does. So now I am encouraging destruction of the berserk mechanism no one has the will to fix....

I think you ought to make up your minds as to whether you are trying to coordinate people for social change, or trying to convince people that change is impossible. Change is inevitable. But because so many people have been convinced that change is impossible, when the changes do come, they will not be guided by a group of coordinate people, and so will be as ugly as possible. It's kind of sad.

Elliot Cantsin, North Merrick, N.Y.

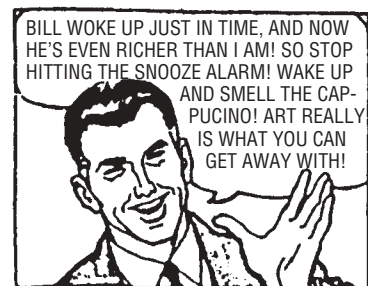
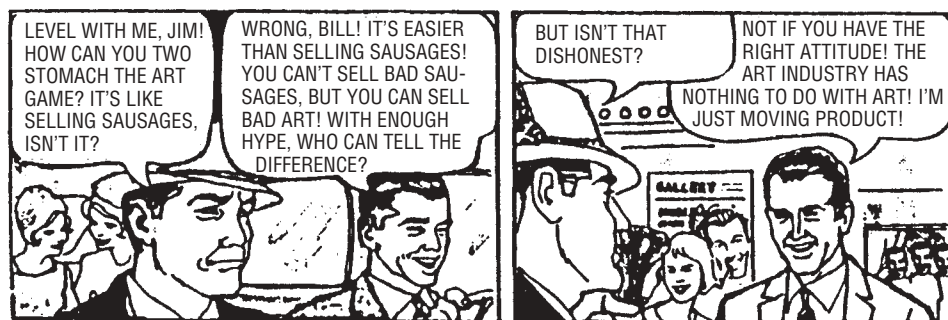
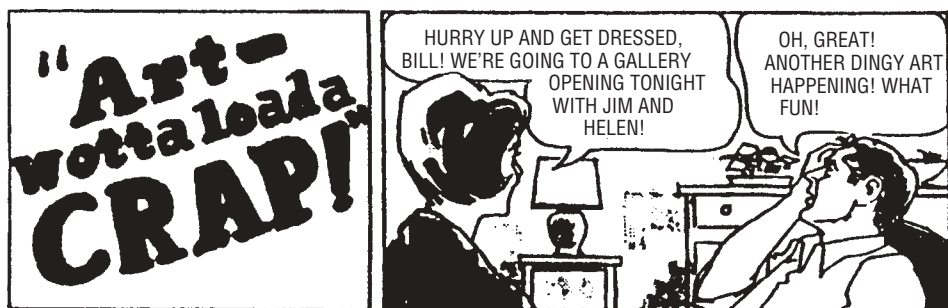
Cultural Workers in Support of **YAWN**

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
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THIS CAN BE YOUR "BIG BREAK" *if you're a man who's ever said...*



Join in the fun!

Just follow these basic tips to start you on your way to BIG BUCKS as an ART DEALER!

- REPEAT TO YOURSELF: IT'S ONLY A COMMODITY! IT'S ONLY A COMMODITY!
- IN THE SELLING OF ART, DON'T NEGLECT THE ART OF SELLING!
- VOLUME! VOLUME! VOLUME!
- USE CREATIVE PRODUCT TIE-INS! JULIAN SCHNABEL CONDOMS (ouch)! KAREN FINLAY YAMS!

SCHNABEL CONDOMS (ouch)! KAREN FINLAY YAMS!

SPECIAL GUARANTEE FOR POLITICALLY CORRECT ARTISTS: This in no way conflicts with the ongoing art strike, if you really think about it.

Fuck off Avantguardist!

For how much longer must the underground tolerate your elite, nepotistic enclave, your sacred art object economy, your white male liberal guilt complex, your public school masonic fraternity, your fish fetish, your shaved heads, your artist and craft professionalism, your adolescent narcissism, your psycho-linguistic gobbledegook, your cottage in Provence, your rabid careerism, your bogus radicalism, your half-naked lovers, your intellectual bankruptcy, your art school tutorials, your intoxicated brown nosing, your catholic opera cult, your international bourgeois tourism, your water rituals, your meaningful silence, your state-funded cynicism, your sado-masochistic posturing, your inability to comprehend film as anything other than your archaic fine arts mysticism, your fields of wheat, your church-based installation worship, your desperate search for marginality, your corrupt non-industry, your contempt for anyone outside of your pathetic clique, your boring, lazy, unwatchable films, your computer video masturbation, your insatiable egomania. It was you who consigned the underground to twenty years of drivel, we've had enough so fuck off.

The Exploding Cinema

BURN

Burn is what happens when you've been doing a project for quite some time. The initial thrill has worn off long ago. The intermediate stage, where things are getting bigger, you're getting noticed, the number of people who know of you is in the thousands, that's happened too. Now it's to the point where you are sick of it all. Burn is what you do. Burn up, Burn out, Burn off, Burn bright. Burn is a series of strategies for dealing with success when you'd really rather fail.

Success. Ambition is for yuppies. Careers are impossible. But you've got an underground career. Maybe you have a scrapbook of clippings, or you've tried to ignore the mainstream media mentions. You are famous. Probably that's not what you set out to do, but it's true. When *Newsweek* or *Interview* or the *Village Voice* calls for an interview, you are excited, but also cringe. How badly will they mess it up this time?

Offering a final interview before beginning a media blackout enforceable by death, a character in Bruce Sterling's novel *Islands in the Net* says, "We also understand the far more insidious threat that you pose, with your armies of cameramen. We don't want your world. We don't respect your values and we don't care to be touched. We are not a tourist attraction—we are a revolution, not a zoo. We will not be tamed or assimilated. By your very nature, by your very presence, you would force assimilation on us. That will not be allowed."

Some groups refuse to talk to mainstream media. Articles saying that a group is not talking to the media don't work to get messages out. We can't control the media, but we have to find ways to communicate with minimum distortion. De-

mand to have your press releases printed verbatim. Speak only under the condition that your address will be printed. Burn the press.

It's too much work. Sending zines to stores, going on tours, trying to line up gallery shows. All this work, and little appreciation. Figure out what parts you don't like doing, and decide if they're really necessary to your project. You don't really owe anyone anything. Burn your subscription list.

You've decided to quit completely. Don't the reasons you started in the first place still exist? If your project has unleashed demons, Burn this project, but start another to put them to rest. You're too valuable to leave us without your voice.

If your project is general, make it specialized. If too many people are interested, Burn it down so only specifically interested people stay.

If you hate being a one-person mailroom, get a distributor, or even a publisher. You'll have new headaches to deal with. Or hire shitworkers. Raise the cover price to pay them. Nobody appreciates the low price you charge. Selling out is not a dirty word. The people who buy your product are just consumers. You are not single-handedly destroying Capitalism. You deserve to make a profit. Burn headaches.

In notes to Big Black's *Songs About Fucking* Steve Albini writes, "Hey, breaking up is an idea that has occurred to far too few groups. Sometimes to the wrong ones." Once again, if your project is too generic, Burn it. Burn mediocrity.

Everyone who's now doing something should quit for a while and let other people have a chance. The same people always talk in class. Art Strike, any one? Or maybe all men should

shut up for a decade or so. Burn loudmouths.

Figure out when the last time you enjoyed your project was. Maybe several years ago. Scale your project back to that point. If you feel you have a commitment to your current level of involvement, try the old level just as an experiment. Get back to your roots. Prune. Burn back.

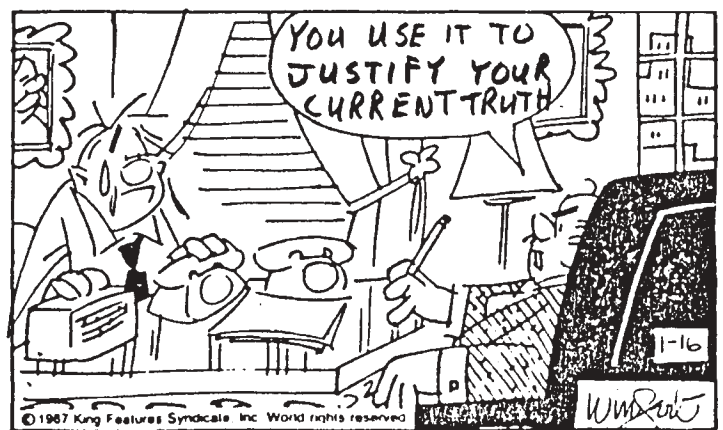
Does this take too much time? Do a project you can do in a day, in an hour, in a minute. Flash Burn.

If you're still enjoying your self, don't make these mistakes. Too many people have done a good issue of a zine by themselves but want contributors. People have a band and want a recording contract. What ever happened to just having fun, not a career? Soon enough, you'll have nostalgia for today. Burn ambition.

Don't Burn out. Just say no to overcommitment. Stay at a reasonable level of involvement. Don't have a crisis. Don't keep doing the same thing until you get bored; change it to maintain your interest. Be unpredictable. Don't be a media slut or a media slave. Do something new.

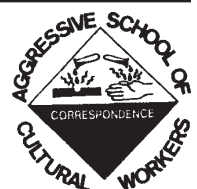
What the fuck do I know? Don't listen to me. Who died and made me queen? I'm no expert. I'm just laying out some strategies I want to try, a way to keep going, a way to not be a casualty. I want to keep doing this for a long time. The world is always ending soon, but they keep putting it off. I don't want to go back to nothing, which is what I had before. Find a way to avoid complacency, redundancy, monotony. Find a way to keep it fresh. Find my sense of humor again. Find my sense of fun again. Regain my enthusiasm. To Burn: this works for me.

Burn is a Burn. Burn has no distribution, no commitment, no issues, no pride, no address, no contributors, no poetry, no politics, no music, no sex, no humor, no collage, no art, no comics, no ads, no rates, no respect, no stickers, no gimmicks, no letters, no gossip, no interviews, no reviews, no typos, no logo, no design, no computers, no editors, no type, no pages. [ANON.]



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Art Strike Interview:

Tony Lowes Interviewed by Gerry Ryan, Irish Radio, November 19, 1989

GR: Good morning, Tony.

TL: Good morning, Gerry.

GR: Now, can you take us back to a few months ago when you were on to us first. Explain what the global art strike is or what it will be and what the objectives of this exercise are.

TL: Well, I think you can take it in on three different levels, Gerry. The first one would be the literal level that you are talking about, where you might have pickets outside the Louvre in Paris. The next level you can take it on, which a lot of people do, is what we call the etymological argument. That means that we're actually just talking about the word art itself. As we change the name of our activity then we can go on doing it. So political art doesn't count because it's different, and performance art isn't really art because it's street art, or somebody's art isn't really art and they can go on doing it because they don't use the gallery system. The etymological argument is the one I call the cop-out argument. I don't think that get us very far. And then there's a third level. It's what they call the utopian, the poetic level. That's the idea that if just one man goes on strike, if the idea is right, and the time is right this single act will create little ripples that could ultimately grow and grow until they could bring down the walls of the Pentagon itself.

GR: What is the object of the exercise?

TL: What we are trying to do is to get people to think about the position that art has taken in our society.

GR: And by art you're generally referring to hangs, stands, falls, sits, or slides in a gallery, I think, aren't you?

TL: I think that's the easiest way to start with it, certainly. That's a very clearly identifiable territory. And that's the territory where you end up with a self-perpetuating elite who are declaring what art is.

GR: You don't like these guys too much, sure you don't.

TL: Oh no, it's nothing like that Gerry, not at all. I was an artist myself for years.

GR: You don't really like what they're trying to foist on the public?

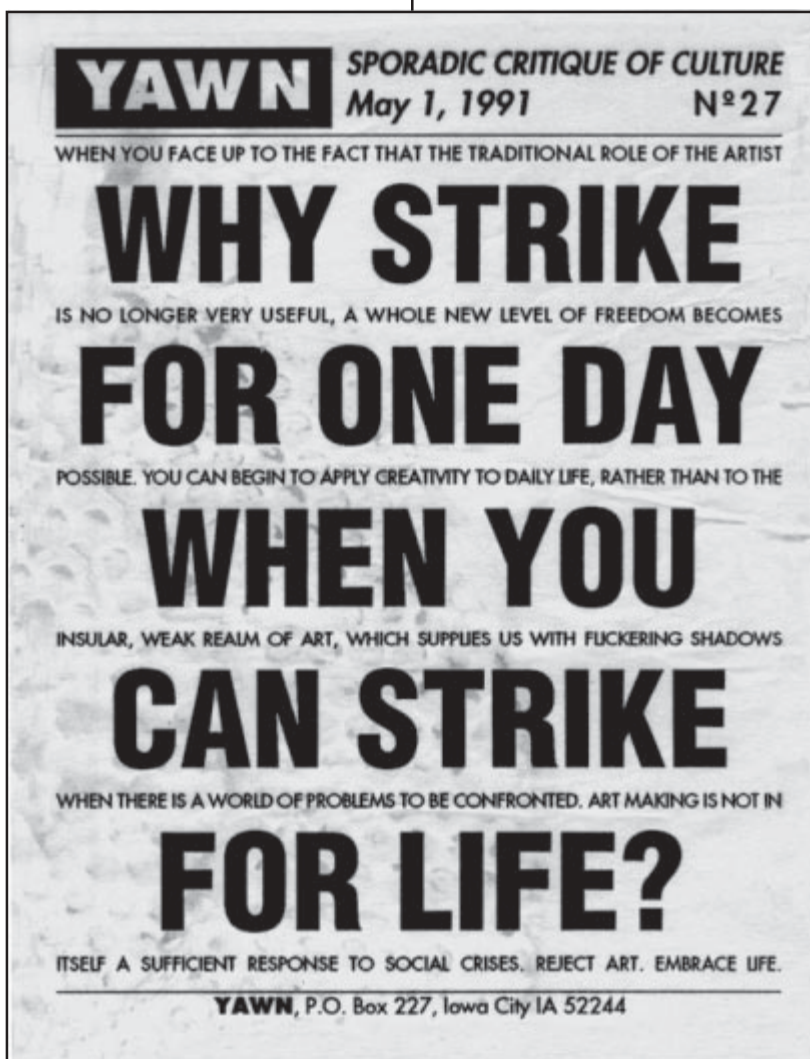
TL: It's not even so much that. It's just that I think we have all grown to accept that art has even taken over from religion in our lives. The [over

On May 1, 1991, students at the University of Iowa School of Art and Art History held a one-hour rally, which they called an "Art Strike." Their purpose in doing this was to protest funding cuts that would reduce the number of teaching assistantships available, and therefore reduce the number of sections available to students in a number of courses. These cuts would also affect the material quality of some courses offered by forestalling indefinitely purchases of new equipment, as well as reducing the overall resources available to teaching.

YAWN staged an infiltration of the event by passing out copies of the leaflet reproduced here. Although YAWN is not opposed to the activists tactics of the students who proposed this "Art Strike," it is felt that something more is needed. We feel that the art academy is already morally and ideologically impoverished through its de facto support of the mechanisms of power that the arts buttress. The academy's role as a manufacturer of roles that art students learn to play, as well as propagator of belief systems that encourage "artists" to be mouthpieces for dominant cultural attitudes, lead us at YAWN to think that the material impoverishment of art schools—and all similar institutions—is in all our best interests.

When art students are no longer nurtured by the sheltering womb of academia and are forced to confront the real, challenging issues at play in contemporary culture, they can begin

to realize a really meaningful mode of production. When art students are cast aside by the institutions that have so long mined them as a resource for constructing the illusion of their own legitimacy, serving in the end only that institution's entrenched agenda of producing widespread alienation and endemic boredom, these students are finally free to chart their own course. When art students refuse their role as the interior decorators of social conscience, distracting our gaze from important problems facing all of us, then we can begin to build. It's about time for this to happen, long after the rest of us have stood up, collected our coats and gone home.



idea that the individual could create something, that we should worship what a man can do, with the concept of genius, with the concept of individuality, maybe this is one of the things that led our world into the state that it's in now.

GR: Oh yes?

TL: Yes, right! If you start taking away the Renaissance idea, or the idea of identity, the idea that one man's separate from another, then you start thinking that perhaps we should start something else instead. We should place perhaps common good there, we should reconsider what we have ended up with.

GR: O.k. right, now I don't mean to be simplistic about this because you're a man of great articulation. You're a man who has obviously thought a lot about this. I'm going to try and make what you're saying simple. Attack me if you want! What you're really saying is that we have elevated a certain section of art, or the expression of art, or the feeling of art, we have elevated it to such a cult level and such a level of idolatry, that it's morally unacceptable. That what we should be really doing, we should be really placing the common interest or as you put it the common good (i.e. everybody's hopes and aspirations, the desire to not be without employment, to have enough food in your belly), you should put that kind of thing up there. And we should worship the conquering of evil in poverty, and hunger, before art.

TL: Absolutely. But I think you can go on with that and say, o.k., if we are going to stick this stuff up on art gallery walls, if we are going to have this art world here, what we are doing at the same time is turning around to another man and saying, look, you're not as good. You're not an artist. You can't expect these things, you don't have these things within you, and that kind of argument is elitist. And that kind of argument leads to all sorts of trouble.

GR: Maybe it's just a fact of life. Maybe this elitist status exists, or maybe these elitist arguments exist and they just are.

TL: They are because everybody agrees with them!

GR: But of course, I'm never going to be able to paint like Michelangelo, never ever going to be able to sculpt something, I couldn't draw a matchstick man. That's a fact of life.

TL: O.k., which is more important to you; the Sistine Chapel or your daughter's food?

GR: My daughter's food.

TL: O.k., now why isn't that true of everyone in the world?

GR: That's a good question.

TL: O.k.

GR: That's a very good question. Yeah.

TL: O.k.

GR: Right, I'm with you.

TL: O.k.

GR: Right, I know what you're talking about. O.k., Tony, how can we in Ireland take part in this Art Strike if we are moved to do so?

TL: Well, we can try and reach the artists first of all, I think. Because they are actually decent people, almost all of them got into art because they believed they could do something good. And we are now stuck in a situation where they aren't and we aren't and if we can reach that, and if we can get the word around that there is an alternative way to look at things, then we can start the business. But at the moment my problem is reaching the artists. And if there are any of them out there who would like information about this, I wish they would get in touch with me.

GR: Now, you have an Art Strike Hotline?

TL: I have a 24-hour-a-day Art Strike Hotline. It's 027-73025.

GR: Now, let us suppose that your sentiments are received by sympathetic ears this morning, in some quarters. People are going to turn around to you and say, hold on a second, does this mean the obliteration of art? Art is important, it is a very necessary outlet. It's an important expression of mankind's spirit. Surely we're not going to destroy this entirely?

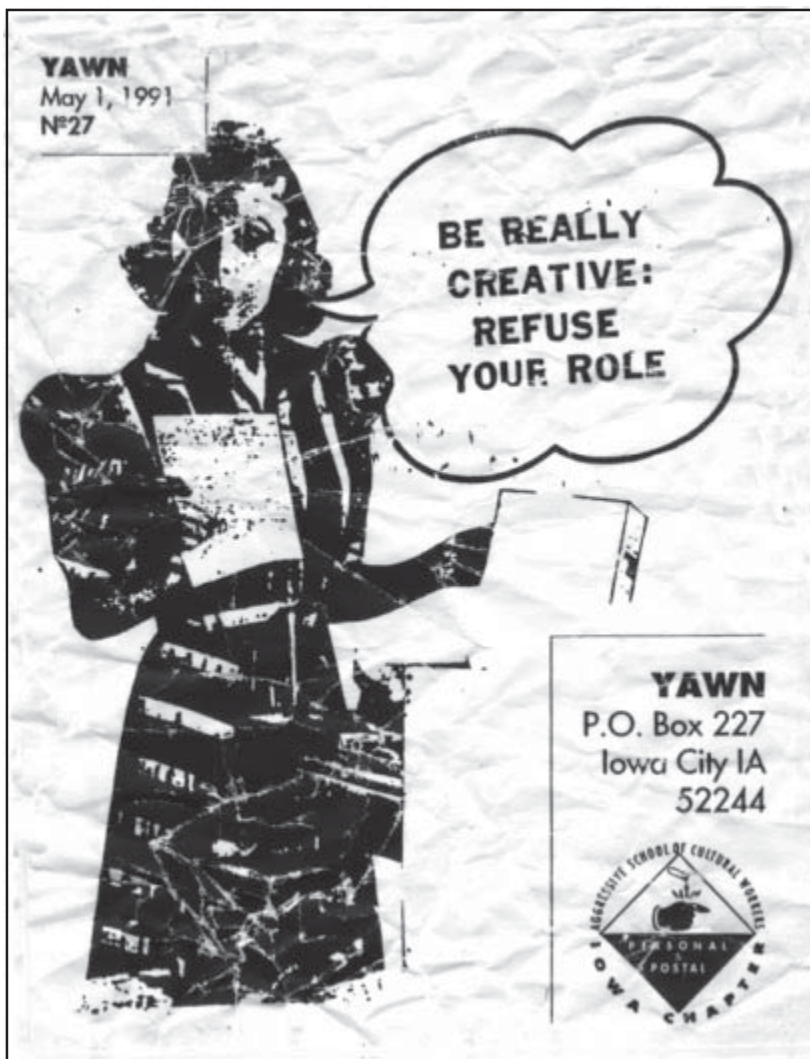
TL: We're not going about destroying anything, as far as I'm concerned. No, I entirely agree with that. I think one of the misconceptions is when people say, o.k. you're going on an art strike for three years. What are you going to do? Where's this creative stuff going to go? The answer is that life during the Art Strike is going to be more creative, not less. I listened to a tape of a testimonial evening that was done in the States, and there was a woman who got up there and said she'd come across this information a couple years ago, and she had because of a number of different factors, not just what we've been saying, she had given up art, and she had gotten back a thousand times over what she was putting into art before.

GR: But there is a happy balance to be struck. There is a balance that we should achieve, isn't there?

TL: Well, no, I just think at the moment art isn't up on the list. Maybe one day when we sort things out, maybe one day when we have the right to, we can come back and start hanging stuff on the walls again, but not the way things are, Gerry.

GR: O.k. Tony Lowes, thank you, good morning.

[end]



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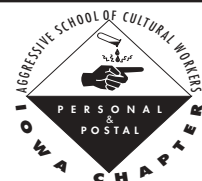
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ART STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEES

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ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland



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It's Inevitable



1990-1993
the years without art

SONGS OF THE ART STRIKE

I.

Germany sang a dirge.
Russia played a beautiful symphony.
Latin rhythms are more up tempo.
The United States sat in stoney silence.

II.

Night is dark.
All you can see is the moon.
Most people are asleep in their beds.
Anyone outside is suspicious.

III.

This city's a cemetery.
And I'm buried beneath it.
I'll never get out.
I'm a dead duck.

IV.

In New York they call me a psycho.
In L.A. they call me a bum.
In Kansas they say I'm a dog.
I'm thinking of moving to Denver.

V.

A magazine published a humorous collage.
There was nothing objectionable about it.
Someone passed a law saying it was a crime.
Later Mr. Clean was arrested for child
molestation.

T. Hibbard

One Step Beyond Commodity Culture





Catechism of the Artist

Principles by which the artist must be guided.

- (1) The artist is a dedicated man. He has no interests of his own, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion: The Arts.
- (2) In the very depths of his being, not only in his words but also in his deeds, he has broken every tie with the civil order, and the entire cultured world, with all its laws, proprieties, social conventions and its ethical rules. He is an implacable enemy of this world, and if he continues to live in it, that is only to decorate it more effectively.
- (3) The artist despises all doctrinairism and has rejected the mundane sciences, leaving them to future generations. He knows of only one science, the science of delusion. To this end, and to this end alone, he will study mechanics, physics, chemistry and perhaps medicine.
- (4) He despises public opinion. He despises and abhors the existing social ethic in all its manifestations and expression. For him, everything is moral which assists the triumph of the Arts. Immoral and criminal is everything which stands in its way.
- (5) He must discipline himself to endure torture. The artist is a dedicated man, obedient towards the state and the whole of educated society in general; and he must expect no mercy from them either.
- (6) Hard towards himself, he must be hard towards others also. All the tender and effeminate emotions of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude and even honour must be stifled in him by a cold and single-minded passion for The Arts. There exists for him only one delight, one consolation, one reward and one gratification — the success of The Arts. Night and day he must have but one thought, one aim — merciless defecation. In cold-blooded and tireless pursuit of this aim, he must be prepared to die himself and to destroy with his own hands everything that stands in the way of his artistic achievements.
- (7) The artist considers his friend and holds dear only a person who has shown himself in performance to be as much an artist as himself. The extent of his friendship, devotion and other obligations towards his comrade is determined only by the degree of usefulness in the practical work of total artistic creation.
- (8) Amongst the conditions necessary for any Art Movement to commence its activism are:
 - (a) the formation of dens;
 - (b) the infiltration of its clever and practical men into the milieu of peddlers, bakers, etc.;
 - (c) knowledge of the town gossips, prostitutes, and other private (means) of gathering and dissemination of rumours;
 - (d) knowledge of the police and the world of old clerks;
 - (e) establishment of relationships with the so-called criminal elements of society;
 - (f) influence over high-ranking persons through their womenfolk;
 - (g) continual pontification by all possible means;
 - (h) an in-depth knowledge of at least one eastern or pagan religion; i.e., Tai-chi, Tibetan finger-twiddling, or Welsh table-tapping.

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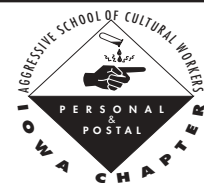
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YAWN

FROWN

June 5, 1991

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The Categorical is Not So Imperative

"Today art no longer creates anything but the magic of its disappearance."

—Jean Beaudrillard

Who couldn't know by now that "art strike" is as phoney as a ONE DOLLAR BILL! It claims to be "a bad idea" and bad ideas are the finest art of our age! If you've heard of ART STRIKE—then it's done its art well, and of course, is self-nullifying. If you haven't heard of ART STRIKE, only then is there truly an art STRIKE—but, it hasn't MADE ITS POINT—a point it couldn't possibly have, because, (to you) it doesn't EXIST! Either/or way ART STRIKE is an artistically nullifying song and dance. A dance that reeks of the "CON" of CONceptual ART!

WE KNOW—THE "TRUTH" NEVER WAS.

Art Strike is the best recuperative effort for Æsthetic Domination. A manic onslaught of "art" discussion may accomplish SOMETHING but it will never accomplish NOTHING; or create the vacuum that Art Strike claims to be. After all its arguMental bombardment, Art Strike subtly implies a finer and more scrutinous eye toward—WHAT?—ART! Art that will still thrive after Art Strike stops what it has allegedly stopped doing already. Inactivates its INACTIVITY! Art Strike even carries its own æsthetic "point of view" (a given in all "arts"). It betrays its MESSAGE by projecting optimism (for a brighter art future?)

Poetic Terrorism

The audience reaction or æsthetic shock produced by PT ought to be at least as strong as the emotion of terror—powerful disgust, sexual arousal, superstitious awe, sudden intuitive breakthrough, dadaesque angst—no matter whether the PT is aimed one person or many, no matter whether it is "signed" or anonymous, if it does not change someone's life (aside from the artist) it fails.

PT is an act in a Theater of Cruelty which has no stage, no rows of seats, no tickets and no walls. In order to work at all PT must categorically be divorced from all conventional structures for art consumption (galleries, publications, media). Even the guerilla Situationist tactics of street theater are perhaps to well known and expected now.

An exquisite seduction carried out not only in the cause of mutual satisfaction but also as a conscious act in a deliberately beautiful life may be the ultimate PT. The PTerrorist behaves like a confi-

dence-trickster whose aim is not money but *change*.

Don't do PT for other artists, do it for people who will not realize (at least for a few moments) that what you have done is art. Avoid recognizable art-categories, avoid politics, don't stick around to argue, don't be sentimental; be ruthless, take risks, vandalize only what *must* be defaced, do something children will remember all their lives—but don't be spontaneous unless the PT muse has possessed you.

Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary. The best PT is against the law, but don't get caught. Art as crime; crime as art.

Weird dancing in all-night computer banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earthworks as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in state parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-terrorist objects. Kidnap someone and make them happy.

Pick someone at random and convince them they're the heir to an enormous, useless and amazing fortune—say 5000 square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in

through its hol(e)y shroud of DOUBLE NEGATIVE DE-ACTIVITY. So much ANALysis and lingual PROBEing of the "IDLE IDEOLOGY of ART" bespeaks an "artistic" flair for "CREATIVE INVESTIGATION" bordering on obsession—and obsessive investigation ALWAYS "INVEST"s more than it detracts. As a matter of fact, shouldn't Art Strikers be DeTracting a little more, instead of issuing SO MANY TRACTS?

THE "TRUTH" NEVER WAS—IT HAS ALWAYS NEVER BEEN!

Art Strike portends that IDEAS will pull us from this malevolent mediation of "Inauthentic Existence." ITS IDEAS! Of course! Yet Art Strike should "create" NO IDEAS in that ideas are the (alleged) CURRENCY OF ART! This Intellectual Battling, rife with relentless philatelic finalities, merely assumes that "TRUTH" is a feat of exhaustion. Who gets to write the LAST WORD on Art Strike's picket sign? A picket sign that will (no doubt) settle in a "mail art" show somewhere.

AND THAT'S THE TRUTH! WE KNOW—THE "TRUTH" NEVER WAS.

Art Strike is an "artistic" rationalization of MASS ENNUI! It suffers the same problematic as its close pal—literary "deconstruction." IT ERECTS more to wade through. ART STRIKE is the eternal yammering that only speaks over and over about how it is going to SHUT UP. '93 will actually be the beginning of the Art Strike because that's when the "ART STRIKE" will truly SHUT UP!

Are Art Strikers painting with NOTHING on their brush?

IS ITS PICKET SIGN JUST A "FREAKY FRESCO"?

WE KNOW THE "TRUTH"—THE "TRUTH" NEVER WAS!

The games and the "yawning" will end in '93. Then it's time to ABOLISH ART! Because once we have abolished art, REVOLUTION will be the only art left!

ART ABOLITION COMMITTEE

'93—∞

Bombay, or a collection of alchemical manuscripts. Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, and will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places (public or private) where you have experienced revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience, etc.

Go naked for a sign.

Organize a strike in your school or workplace on the grounds that it does not satisfy your need for indolence and spiritual beauty.

Graffiti-art loaned some grace to ugly subways and rigid public monuments—PT art can also be created for public places: poems scrawled in courthouse lavatories, small fetishes abandoned in parks and restaurants, xerox art under windshield wipers of parked cars, Big Character Slogans pasted on playground walls, anonymous letters mailed at random or chosen recipients (mail fraud), pirate radio transmissions, wet cement...

—Hakim Bey



Dear **YAWN**:

I do art to make myself feel very important. I have a sense, a fear, that I am hollow, that the world is hollow and will collapse in on itself at any minute without the steel girders of Art to support this delicate membrane. Art tells me that what I know is good. It is a mirror upon which I paint my greatest desire, imagining it to be my own reflection. This is why the Art Strike is ultimately bad praxis. Without this spectacular surface, I would have to face my inner void. It is almost as though I fear the annihilation of my Self, that through art I make myself. So please, leave me alone. Show some modicum of humanity and allow me the comfort of this gilded cage, this well-tailored curtain. I write with tears as I am too close to all this and must now rest to regain my strength, and God willing, some small creative spark.

R. Fear, San Leandro CA

Notes on the Mail

Please note that the official **YAWN** address has changed; all future correspondence will be received at the new address, which is P.O. Box 227, Iowa City IA 52244. Mail will continue to be picked up at the old address, albeit sporadically.

Several people have independently sent **YAWN** their "comments" on its output in the form of envelopes which look completely normal on the outside, but upon inspection, reveal themselves to be completely empty. Such "creative" responses to the Art Strike, although terse and perhaps even apt, do little to encourage the dialog and debate which **YAWN** holds is so necessary to help clarify our current predicament. We will not berate these senders in print, because they are, in fact, doing *something*. But if they feel that there is something "wrong" with the Art Strike (in)action—and there is much that is—perhaps they could tell us what they feel it is. On the other hand, we at **YAWN** do tend to prefer these kinds of pseudo-responses to the small packet of animal dung we received the other week!

Keep reading; keep responding.

[Ed.]

Statement from the Montevideo ASAC

I think that art-strike aims to [...] the distortion of the artistic expression. The language of "how it's said" or of "the authority of who says it" or "how pretty the way it is said!" the elegance of expression to the detriment of truth, serves only to smother reality under a layer of words or signs, signals which are senseless in the majority of cases, in the sense of the interest of whoever is using it, in our specific case, the capitalism-system seeking to preserve itself.

It is against this alienated artistic language that the "Inobjetal Art" and the "Art-Strike" had arisen.

The art, without confusing end with means, could not develop in the area of a defiled expression, the semantism of the language, the function of which has been altered in order to serve ends which are not its own.

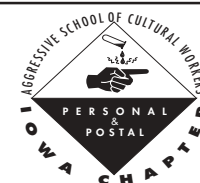
If to this distortion we add the ambiguity of the elements of the language (words, colours, sounds, etc.), the meanings of which depend upon and are modified by the systems of reference, which in turn are born upon (and born in) the ideologies which arise in every social class, then we understand the importance attributed to it by the prevailing system, to dominate every channel, whether written or oral or artistic, through which it flows, as it thus ensures the determination of its values in preference to those which workers' activity or the activity of exploited sectors may generate.

I think that Art-Strike must relocate the artistic means where they can play a revolutionary role, to become weapons for the struggle against the social injustice.

Clemete Padín
ASAC (Latin America)
C. de Correos 1211
Montevideo, Uruguay

Cultural Workers in Support of **YAWN**

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
ASAC (Eire), c/o Tony Lowes, Allihies, Bantry, West Cork, Ireland
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
I.M.I., 617 N Upland St, Metairie LA 70003
Hakim Bey, P.O. Box 568, Brooklyn NY 11211



*Send Art Works on Vacation to
the*

INTERNATIONAL

ART - DUMP

A Joint Project of
Oxcart Marphologna & SFC

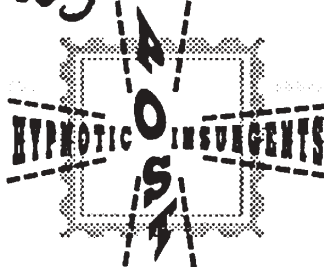
ART
DUMP
T-shirts

Image
as shown

SEX and
DRUGS

3 Color
Iron-on t-
shirts: \$10.00

Ppd.



*No Art Refused

*Scavenging Welcome

POSTMODERN POSTDOGMATISTS

Wear the emblem of The Post Hypnotic Insurgents & join the meetings of the Art Dump Council at the proposed Strip-mine location. Under the dome of night we use burning literature from Art-Strike to ignite pyres of Art-Dump art, submitted to us from supporters world-wide.

We burn both Art & Art Strike, entwined and inseparable;
send your fuel and help illuminate alternatives.



Send Art, Donations, Inquiries or Orders to:
101 Niagara St., #32, Toronto, Ontario, CANADA

*Send Art Works on Vacation to
the*

INTERNATIONAL

ART - DUMP

A Joint Project of
Oxcart Marphologna & SFC



*No Art Refused

*Scavenging Welcome



POSTMODERN POSTDOGMATISTS

Affirmed by critical and popular support at the Art-Expo in Osaka, Japan, and
scholarly recognition in the International Art Press,
it is clear that Art-Dump addresses several pressing questions
of our time.

Under the dome of night we use burning literature from Art-Strike to ignite pyres of Art-
Dump art, submitted to us from supporters world-wide.

We burn both Art & Art Strike, entwined and inseparable;
send your fuel and help illuminate alternatives.



Send Art, Donations, Inquiries or Orders to:
Box 147, Stn. J, Toronto, Ontario, CANADA, M4J 4X8

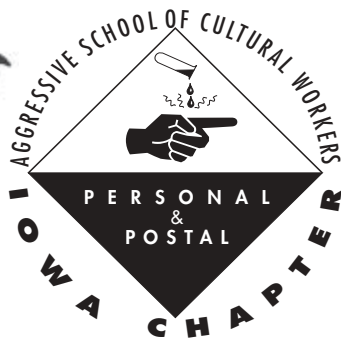
A Day Without Artists

General Statement

- ▼ What started as a sincere observance of the absence from the cultural community of all the artists who have died of AIDS has now degenerated into a hollow gesture repeated ad nauseam every year into an unthinking ritual that no one would dare **not** to observe. Once again, artists have responded to a crisis with a simulacrum—a pseudo-absence—and have reduced all legitimate concern we might have for PWAs (persons with AIDS) and those who are HIV-positive to mere appreciation of a futile esthetic gesture.
- ▼ December 1st has therefore become a day without absence: the absence of thousands of artists, and the absence of what they would have continued to create. By having a day without art without absence, we are in fact having nothing at all.
- ▼ It is for these reasons that the Aggressive School of Cultural Workers, Iowa Chapter, has declared December 1, 1991, to be **A Day Without Artists** and **A Day Without Museums**.

Day Without Art Exhibition

- ▼ What the Day Without Art Exhibition memorializes is the empty space left by all artists who had died of AIDS. How then can its organizers have the audacity to try to fill up this space with more art created specifically for a day without art? Public awareness of AIDS has already risen dramatically in the wake of Magic Johnson's announcement that he is HIV-positive, so we cannot conclude that raising public awareness is an important goal of this exhibit. Let's recognize this exhibit for what it is: a cynical career move riding on the backs of every artist who has died of AIDS. The organizers of the Day Without Art Exhibition are trying to give their work a politically correct cachet while simultaneously padding their resumes.
- ▼ Furthermore, an art exhibit in commemoration of AIDS victims and the creative vacuum caused by those now departed amounts to little more than a denial of their deaths.
- ▼ To have left the walls of the Checkered Space empty and blank would have been a much more fitting testimonial to the loss of all persons, artists and non-artists alike, taken by AIDS. We must feel the pain of their absence.



December 1, 1991 **A Day Without Museums**

General Statement

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University of Iowa Museum of Art

- ▼ The Aggressive School of Cultural Workers, Iowa Chapter, has decided that this year it is time to act up in the face of the University Museum's token observances of A Day Without Art.
- ▼ It is not enough to cloak some boring old pictures with a piece of black cloth, or to pin up some pathetic participatory statements, while at the same time continue with business as usual. We single out this museum as a matter of local practicality, but this action is directed at all institutions that have made and are making similar empty gestures in this observance.
- ▼ Art museums and similar institutions have already become nothing more than mausoleums for dead art. In this sense, the Gregorian chants which are to be sung in the museum today serve as a fittingly ironic testimony to the "service" the museum offers to this community as a reliquary for sacred objects of the past.
- ▼ It is for these reasons that we have locked the doors of the Museum of Art. These chains are not intended to actually stop anyone from getting into the museum. Rather, they create a situation where entry must be forceably obtained, and where gathering at this museum cannot be done without confronting the reality we have created. Business as usual cannot be permitted in light of the unrelenting tragedy of AIDS. This is our attempt to make this observance of A Day without Art felt confrontationally and to spur reconsideration and debate as to what really constitutes an appropriate response to this crisis.
- ▼ Like the chains on these doors, the chains of silence surrounding the AIDS epidemic must be broken. For too long this silence has kept AIDS and its victims in the closet, afraid to admit they have the disease or that they carry it, and afraid to speak out on their own behalf.

YAWN is a sporadic newsletter which seeks to offer a critical look at our culture in all its forms. Responses and submissions from readers are welcome and encouraged, especially critical observations about cultural institutions and seldom challenged principles concerning culture. Anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. **YAWN** strives to be a collective, mostly anonymous, exchange-driven effort. Responses of any kind will be met reciprocally in the following manner: the respondent will receive those materials appearing in the next bulk mailing. Subscriptions to **YAWN** are available for \$10 for 25 issues. **YAWN** is archived at <http://yawn.detrinet.net/>.

Action for A DAY WITHOUT ART without Absence

On the morning of December 1, 1991, at approximately 2:00 AM, the AGGRESSIVE SCHOOL OF CULTURAL WORKERS, IOWA CHAPTER, forced a temporary delay in opening the University of Iowa Museum of Art.

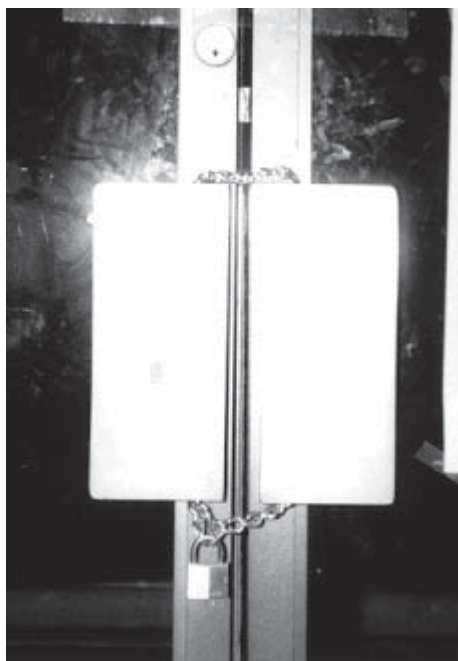
Using a length of strong chain and a steel padlock, the front doors to the museum were chained, and then locked shut. A text explaining the action was posted above and to either side of the chained door handles.

The gesture was symbolic, as well as practical.

As a symbolic act, it commented on the hypocrisy of AIDS commemorations that used art on a day the museum was supposedly observing as "A Day Without Art." In response, the ASCW-IA declared December 1 to be "A Day Without Museums."

As a practical act, it created a situation whereby anyone wishing to enter the museum to contemplate art on this day would have to forcibly enter by first cutting the chain. At the very least, those people entering the museum immediately after the cutting of the chain would be robbed momentarily of their complacency.

In addition to our action at the museum, the ASCW-IA also leafletted an exhibit in the neighboring Art Building entitled, "A Day Without Art Art



Show." Such an absurdity could not go unchallenged; our grievance was tersely stated and published as **YAWN** nº30, which was profusely distributed. In it, we declared December 1 to be "A Day Without Artists."

All responses to this action by the ASCW-IA were in hearsay form; none of the perpetrators remained at the scene after the lock and posters were in place. Apparently, the museum guards were perplexed and mildly panicked; a museum employee remarked that we had given them something to actually do. The chain and lock were removed without difficulty, and one report had Campus Security driving off with the objects as if they were suspects.

Attempts were made to turn the tables on both actions.

Members of the ASCW-IA were approached a few weeks later by an employee of the Museum of Art, asking for a photograph documenting our action, "for the collection." Apparently our gesture only made sense to them as a work of art rather than a protest. This employee went on to offer the museum's services in helping to plan *next year's* ASCW-IA "Day Without Art" action. We listened politely but our patience was wearing thin at this attempt at recuperating our gesture.

LOOK AT ME

Lloyd Duane artistic outpour of the day

What a hypocrite!

December 1, 1991
Day Without Museums

General Statement

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- December 1st has therefore become a day without absence: the absence of thousands of artists, and the absence of what they would have continued to create. By having a day without art without absence, we are in fact having nothing at all.
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- Art museums and similar institutions have already become nothing more than mausoleums for dead art. In this sense, the Gregorian chants which are to be sung in the museum today serve as a fittingly ironic testimony to the "service" the museum offers to this community as a reliquary for sacred objects of the past.
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YAWN

SPORADIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE
December 1, 1991

Nº30

A Day Without Artists

General Statement

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A Day Without Art Exhibition

- What the Day Without Art Exhibition memorializes is the empty space left by all artists who had died of AIDS. How then can its organizers have the audacity to try to fill up this space with more art created specifically for a day without art? Public awareness of AIDS has already *disappeared* in the *surface* of public consciousness; an announcement that he is HIV-positive, so we cannot conclude that raising public awareness is an important goal of this exhibit. Let's recognize this exhibit for what it is: a cynical career move riding on the backs of every artist who has died of AIDS. The organizers of the Day Without Art Exhibition are trying to give their work a politically correct cachet while simultaneously padding their resumes.
- Furthermore, an art exhibit in commemoration of AIDS victims and the creative vacuum caused by those now departed amounts to *to* *to* more than a denial of their deaths.
- To have left the walls of the Checkered Space empty and blank would have been a much more fitting testimony to the loss of all persons, artists and non-artists alike, taken by AIDS. We must feel the pain of their absence.

What is this ordinary people's or artists?

YAWN
P.O. Box 227
Iowa City IA
52242

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN
Scholar, 221 W. Senate St., Iowa City, IA 52242
ASCW-IA, P.O. Box 142, Oakdale, IA 52249

ALL COPYING AND REPLICATION OF YAWN
OR EXCEPTS THEREOF IS PERMITTED AND ENCOURAGED

Handwritten text (reproduced at left) disparaging our "hypocrisy" and comparing the value of artists to basketball players, was added to a copy of **YAWN** nº30 and then copies of it were further distributed. Apparently it was "hypocritical" of us to point out the hypocrisy of those who would plan "A Day Without Art Art Show." This was difficult for us to understand.

In general, the "Day Without Art" action by the ASCW-IA was a limited success, in that it failed to attract a meaningful amount of attention from the public. We fell considerably short of our goal of having local press coverage of the un-chaining of the museum; and the only existing documentation (that we know of) is in our hands. We will use what we've learned from this situation and move forward.

[Nº, ASCW-IA

Notes Toward Implementing a Discussion Over the Merits of Graffiti

Street scratchings and scrawlings have value beyond their immediate property reduction *value* (an attack on the physical property of the ruling class). Graffiti is outside of the commodity dominated culture industry. It exists as a true folk art, a true gust of creativity in a society that forces creativity down the channels of commodity consumption: the ideal of noble aesthetic: "good taste."

Graffiti is a mode of expression that stands outside of "art": it is not created to generate capital but to *express ideas and to undermine property values*. These factors qualify graffiti as important as well as alternative. ("Art" is so often confused as being "radical" or is confused as a "critique," when in fact it is *simply* propaganda designed to justify Capital and the State, no more no less). Graffiti is at odds with capital and is not limited to the "freedoms" of the "art world."

Do musical groups exist outside the confines of advertising?

Does the sound receive any attention, or

is it only accepted after the image has been considered? (Information transmitted through advertising to the sense registers.)

Graffiti as advertising medium (note 70s rock star enamored of european "political" slogans who used the medium to promote his 1974 LP). Yet, as in the case of a present new york rock ensemble who *also* use graffiti as an advertising medium, the use of "political" slogans to jar and stimulate the casual observer (read: target audience). Not every cloud of spray paint is spent on a trademarked logo or an identifying name (unlike the Philadelphia "alternative" group that can say nothing but their name on the walls of the city, reinforcing the division between producer and consumer (rock star and fan) (pointing them out specifically would only further *advertise* their "cau\$e").

Graffiti is the one medium of which we can be *sure*.

Your participation in this project is essential: 1) An interest in dialogue; 2) An interest in the application of these procedures.

[Grudgefuck, P.O. Box 13180, Jersey City NJ 07303 (1989)]

Wednesday, 1991, July
Kansas

To Whom It May Concern;

I have written you what I think is bad about the Art Strike: that the only damage it has done is to Artists. Its effect is the same as an "overstocked" rejection slip.

But don't forget to say what is good about the Art Strike. It is encouragingly in the Dadaist tradition: A call to action; a militant rejection of things as they are. An uprising by suppressed, unjustly used portions or factions against factions that do not belong in the positions of decision-making that they occupy.

The Art Strike's main weakness is that it is not an advance but a retreat. For one thing, it has failed to name its objectives and targets. What are its targets? Grant-giving organizations on any level, in-bred and frivolous and which pander to sensationalism. The business world which only looks down on Art. Politicians whose corruption is well-known and who feel safely out of reach of exposure. Critics who serve themselves and slander what is good. Editors who suppress the best Art they come across and publish what they think will forever muddle the picture.

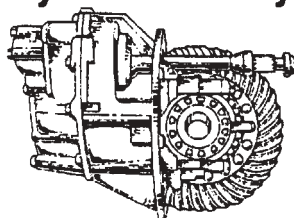
The U.S. Post Office which is a parasite off the energies of struggling Artists. Worthless literary magazines. Fascism, Communism and all other "smelly little orthodoxies" whose only effect is to hinder expression of the truth. Insistence.

The struggle of the Artist will always be the same. No permanent gains can be made or should be sought in the Art Strike. "Permanent gains" will only become obstacles to future Artists. The aim of the Art Strike should be specific gains for the participating Artists: Increase in wages, exposure, fringe benefits. The call should be for intensification of activity, in some cases, with limited polemical aims. Exhibits, Be-ins, happenings, broadsides, parties, picnics, love-ins, hot dogs, watermelons, publicity, leaflets, Bible studies, benefits, church bazaars, garage sales.

Reinstate "PhotoStatic!" magazine. Change the name of the Art Strike newsletter from "Yawn" to "Insurgency" or "Ticked." Let freedom ring.

Sincerely,
Jimmy the Jumper
(T. Hibbard, Wichita)

Good Taste is the Chief Enemy of Creativity



EAT·N
Eaton's Axle & Brake Parts

- Go Go Go This is It This is It
- Improvisation is Better Than Planning
- Notice What You're Noticing
- Participate in the Creation of Ruins
- Operate Outside The Paradigm

1949

The Avant Garde is Obsolete
"THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN CENSORSHIP WORKS

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Subspace, 221 W. Benton St., Iowa City IA 52246, USA
The Stranger, P.O. Box 31848, Seattle WA 98103, USA
Grudgefuck, P.O. Box 13180, Jersey City NJ 07303, USA
T. Hibbard, P.O. Box 3831, Wichita KS 67203, USA



When Blowing the Strike is Striking the Blow

THERE'S A LOT TO BE SAID FOR THE ART STRIKE, which is just as well, since between 1990 and 1993 nothing can be written or painted or performed in its support. There's something to be said against it, too—no time limit here—and plenty of room for dissent.

Art Strike propaganda claims that the artists' strike will have the effect of bringing the class struggle to the artistic realm. It argues that the most radical art and the most critical artists are actually supporting capitalist social relations even when they purport to subvert them; artistic practice must therefore cease since it stabilises and nourishes the social relations its more oppositional forms claim to contest.

This argument is akin to a wider challenge made by postmodern philosophers such as Baudrillard, who argue that criticism is no longer possible and that the only efficient way of dissenting from capitalist society is to commit suicide. The *Art Strike Handbook* quotes Baudrillard:

Modern art wishes to be negative, critical, innovative and a perpetually surpassing, as well as immediately (or almost) assimilated, accepted, integrated, consumed. One must surrender to the evidence: art no longer contests anything. If it ever did. Revolt is isolated, the malediction consumed.¹

Any active dissent can be commodified, turned into a product useful for the maintenance of capitalism. The slogans of revolutionary politics are used to sell bank accounts, the painting that challenges beauty and form is placed in the gallery where its beauty and form are admired and valued and bought and sold; the biting poem is read on the radio to accompany the liberal critics' display of sorrow at the state of the world. Whatever is said against can be made to speak for, and like any weapon, art can be turned against those who use it.

The art strikers have emerged out of a tradition of avant-garde culture which has recognised these problems and continually agitates against what it has defined as the recuperation of criticism. In different ways, the Dadaists, Surrealists and Situationists, all realised that anything they produced could be integrated into the structures they opposed. *Whatever doesn't kill power is killed by it.*²

Thus the Dadaists watched their anti-art works being categorised as works of art, and aimed their whole project at the evasion of this recuperation. After five years of agitation against capital, war and

morality, they reached an impasse of suicide or silence. Everything they made or said or wrote was turned against its critical purpose and used against them. So they scrapped the whole project. In effect, like the cultural workers of the 1980s, they decided to go on strike.

The Dadaists left a legacy which has indeed been recuperated in the form of commodified works of art, the use of their techniques of collage and photomontage in advertisements, and the presentation of their work in coffee table books and university seminars. They were right to believe that this was inevitable as long as they were merely producing, and not controlling the means of production. But on the way, they did constitute a challenge to bourgeois morality, the philosophical assumptions on which it was based and the propaganda of the First World War which legitimated its brutality. In the end they felt that their subversions of established values were merely contributing to the culture they wished to destroy. The question became one of whether their participation outweighed their silence as the most effective weapon. It was not a matter of giving up the struggle, but the use of giving up as a means of struggle.

Like the art strikers, the Dadaists recognised that both art and the artist are as guilty in their participation as any other commodity or worker. This perspective has far more validity than that adopted by Marcuse and Adorno, who argued that the Dadaist project was misguided in its attacks on conventional art. They considered that art has an autonomy and distance from capitalist relations which must be preserved rather than undermined; art bears an essential negativity derived from its peculiar Form; its rearrangements of reality are conducted on principles of order quite alien to those of capitalism. This Form renders art a "refuge and a vantage point from which to denounce the reality established through domination."³

Although Adorno and Marcuse criticised the anti-artists for attacking artistic Form, they concurred with the avant-garde aim of ending the distinction between art and the rest of reality. Indeed, Marcuse wished to see a society organised according to the aesthetic principles he saw preserved in art. But they both argued that the achievement of this integration was not a task in which artists can participate. Art must remain in a realm in which calm reflection can remind us of the truths of an authentic life which will be achieved after the revolution.

Expressing their rejection of this view in different ways, the Dadaists, Surrealists and Situationists worked for the collapse of the distinction between art and the rest of life in the here and now. Rather than waiting until after the revolution, they argued that the integration of art and life was fundamental to the achievement of revolution, which is possible only because of the subjection of capitalism to

¹ Jean Baudrillard, excerpted from *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. From: Stewart Home, ed., *Art Strike Handbook*. Sabotage Editions, London, U.K., 1989. p. 38.

² Mustapha Khayati, *Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary*. From: Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology*. Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, Calif., 1981. p. 171.

³ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Macmillan, London, U.K., 1979. p. 18.

continual assault on all fronts: ideological, cultural and economic.

If art is an area of contestation like any other, it is also an area of integration and recuperation. The Art Strike is a recognition of this double role: it brings industrial struggle to art, challenges artists to jeopardise their careers and identities in the same way as other striking workers, and demands that those who continue to work justify their lack of solidarity. It also presupposes that art is integral to capitalist relations, and that the recuperation of critical or radical art is an inevitable attribute of this society. But the Art Strike is merely one way of tackling this situation, and can only be effective if it is regarded as a tactic in the struggle against capitalism rather than the end of tactics. By enlisting Baudrillard in the defence of the strike, its protagonists are in danger of confusing these roles.

Baudrillard argues that the history of criticism, including the Dada experience, shows that recuperation is inevitable, and that a belief in the possibility of critical art or any other discourse is naive. This renders criticism pointless, and places the critic in an unjustifiable position. Participation in the networks of power it attacks will always be supportive of them, and silence, apathy, and the refusal to contribute or participate in the debate are the only valid responses to existing society. So Baudrillard says nothing? Far from it. He produces books, articles and academic papers by the dozen, most of which are couched in mystified and complex terminology which makes them inaccessible to all those without the opportunity to study them. The disengagement he proposes is strictly for other people, the masses express their dissent through passivity while the philosophers continue to profit from and, by their own arguments, support the capitalist system of relations they purport to be attacking.

Anyone who does refuse to be creative for the three years of the Art Strike will be less hypocritical than Baudrillard but not necessarily more critical. At the logical extreme of Dada's suicide, Baudrillard's philosophy, or today's Art Strike, is the view that it would have been more damaging to capitalism if nothing had ever been created. Then there would be no ideas or art works to recuperate, and capitalism would have been deprived of a part of its cultural support. But where there is nothing to be recuperated, there is nothing to fight with: the capitalist establishment might be disarmed, but so would its opponents.

If there is one characteristic of capitalism we may be sure of, it is that nothing can escape it. But faced with an impossible situation, the loud and active search for possibilities is an alternative to silent passivity. Nothing can escape the saboteur either, and the legacy left

by Dada and others is part of an armoury which can be plundered by the subversives as well as the establishment. The culture of the past must not be destroyed or abandoned, but superseded in its use of "partisan propaganda purposes"⁴ in the present. This can easily be attacked as a form of liberal reformism, changing from within, etc. But we do live within capitalism, and there is no such thing as change from without. The question becomes one of how the change from within must be pursued. The strike is one answer, but it is just as likely that the most effective anti-capitalist artists are those who work as saboteurs. Their awareness of the recuperation of their work does not petrify them; instead, they use this recognition to sidestep and expose the mechanisms, recuperation amongst them, which perpetuate capitalism.

The value of the Art Strike is in its proposal of silence, rather than silence itself; the propaganda rather than the deed. The Art Strike must be seen as a means of exposing, rather than escaping recuperation. Art Strike propaganda reveals the extent of recuperations and proposes an action which cannot be recuperated. But anything which is totally invulnerable to recuperation cannot be used in contestation either. Although the Art Strike propaganda is meaningless without the Art Strike, the strike is also useless without the propaganda. Inaction must first be justified and explained through action—you have to say why you're going to be silent. The art strikers claim that the tactics of industrial struggle are being brought to art, but the strike is not the only industrial weapon, and artists have always taken their techniques of sabotage and subversion from workers. Disputes vary according to the nature of the work in question: although car workers might well stop making cars, printers might prefer to print their own propaganda rather than stop printing.

The Art Strike is a valid response to the problems of criticism, but it is not the only one. It is a good thing only insofar as it produces more radical art, of which its own propaganda is a perfect example. Consequently it is a good thing only in its failure, and since this is inevitable, the Art Strike is necessarily a good thing. Once put into the world, tactics such as this can be used by anyone for any ends. So long may such active resistance continue! Here's to the saboteurs, the double agents, and those who turn the world around! Don't strike, occupy!

—Sadie Plant, from *Here and Now 10*, Leeds, U.K., 1990

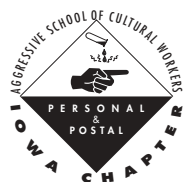
⁴ Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, *Methods of Detournement*. From: Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology*. Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, Calif., 1981. p. 9.

YAWN cares to make little distinction between its "readers" and its "contributors" as such, and would like to bring about an interaction among all such participants and cultural workers. In addition, the issues of concern to YAWN are substantially more general than previous output would tend to suggest. That is to say, YAWN is very interested in publically exposing ideas and discussion well beyond what is dealt with in the Art Strike. Culture generally is the target of our collective discourse. The potential is vast. This is all part of an effort on our part to bring about a critique

of culture that tests the basic assumptions of those who tacitly support our culture, even if they do no more than function in it. It is those least challenged of assumptions which demand the most attention. Use your experience as a guide. Write down or diagram what comes to mind. Submit it to YAWN as part of the ongoing dialog. YAWN seeks letters, essays, commentaries, cartoons, graphics, and the results of cultural research. Any format, no returns without SASE, a copy of any published work will be sent to the submitting participant.

Cultural Work from these Sources has been Included

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Bureau of Public Secrets, P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley CA 94701
Here & Now, P.O. Box 109, Leeds LS5 3AA, England



Destroy this Artwork



during the
Art Strike 1990-93

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NEOISM
KÖLN, W.-GERMANY

Preserve this Artwork



during the
Art Strike 1990-93

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NEOISM
KÖLN, W.-GERMANY

Theory for Theory's Sake Propaganda in Favour of a Campaign for an Art Strike

'Cluster round the jukebox for some songs you've probably heard before / It's nothing if it isn't pure'

[Yeah Yeah Noh, *Stealing in the Name of the Lord*]

'The art strike (...) is a good thing only insofar as it produces more radical art, of which its own propaganda is a perfect example.'

[Sadie Plant, *Here and Now* 10]

The success or failure of Karen Home's 'art strike' propaganda can clearly not be judged in terms of how many artists do in fact down tools from now until 1993 — that would be too cruel. However, I cannot accept Plant's alternative evaluation: a political failure is not necessarily an artistic triumph. I would argue, on the contrary, that Home's enterprise is a bad thing all round, reactionary both in what it says (politics) and in how it says it (art). The Art Strike is a good thing only insofar as it is ignored completely¹: any 'success' will be a bad thing. Its importance lies in the weaknesses which its success has highlighted. This is most obvious in the area of concepts of art, where the Art Strike has succeeded in popularising a peculiarly banal and ill-thought-out version of what art is and what 'good art' is or might be. It is about time we got our own ideas on the subject sorted out. As Mike Peters' article in *Here and Now* 10 began to suggest, it is not enough simply to advocate 'more radical art.' We must first identify what art actually is and does; then we can consider how it might be capable of being 'radical.'

My position, briefly, is as follows. Jean-Pierre Voyer wrote, 'Whether the subject sinks into madness, practices art or participates in an uprising (...) the two poles of daily life—contact with a narrow and separate reality on one hand and spectacular contact with the totality on the other—are simultaneously abolished, opening the way for the unity of individual life' (*Reich—how to use*). Well, no he didn't—for 'art' read 'theory'—but the description holds good. Finding the language for real communication, as opposed to both a spectacular understanding of the totality and the meaninglessness of everyday 'life': going beyond individual isolation and spectacular

collectivity into a genuine commonality; this is the process of making theory, but also that of making art. Voyer's emphasis on the subjective experience of making theory, its effects on the theorist's character armour as well as on her view of the world, apply here also. Art, just as much as theory, is a process of *making common meanings*: to the extent that those meanings are 'radical' this will be a taxing activity, for the artist as much as the theorist. Contented artists, as much as contented theorists, should be avoided: they are clearly engaged in reiterating meanings which are already common. Tortured artists, on the other hand, should be sought out and encouraged.

Now, it has for a long time been assumed that art and theory are in fact not comparable, and that anyone involved in the former owes it to the global proletarian struggle to jack it in and concentrate on the latter. (Ironically, much of the suspicion with which Karen Home is now regarded arose for precisely this reason). Like so much else that affects us today, this goes back to the Fifth Conference of the SI (Göteborg, 1961). On that occasion Attila Kotanyi stated that situationist art was impossible under 'the dominant conditions of artistic inauthenticity': any art produced by situationists would promptly be recuperated. By way of solution, Kotanyi proposed that members of the SI continue to produce art, but that all such work be referred to as 'antisituationist.' 'While various confused artists nostalgic for a positive art call themselves situationist, *antisituationist* art will be the mark of the best artists.'

Whether this proposal would work as a solution is unclear; its actual effect was the exclusion of several members. The redirection of the SI's activities onto the plane of theory, and the long-standing bias against art which was eventually to enable Karen Home to impress the hell out of a lot of people by dropping names like Gustav Metzger (Okay, okay, I'd never heard of him either). Whether it was justified in its own terms is equally unclear. While one sympathises with Raoul Vaneigem's call for the SI to cease its involvement in 'the spectacle of refusal,' it's hard to share Vaneigem's confidence

1 Damn!

2 *'Life's about as wonderful as a cold'*—Mark Perry, 1977.

Perry is not known to have been familiar with the situationists' theses on the banalisation of everyday life, but being a 'punk' he was doubtless influenced by them anyway.

that the (predictable) alternative—the refusal of the spectacle³—can be embarked on by the simple expedient of producing theory to the exclusion of art. Indeed, the situationists could only maintain their own faith in theory as a spectacle-free zone by continually contrasting *theory* (hooray!) with *ideology* (boo, hiss!): a distinction which does little to illuminate the actual relations of production of theory, and which is in any case difficult to make with any consistency. However we describe the process of recuperation (and Kotanyi's statement that situationist art 'will be recuperated by society and used against us' contains too much paranoia and too little politics to be really useful) we need to be clear that it can be applied to everything. Kotanyi's fear, a school of art called 'situationism,' never came true⁴; but the political ideology of 'situationism' appeared in 1968 and has never gone away.

My contention, then, is that the situationists were mistaken in labelling art as spectacular and theory as authentic. The reason why no art exists which can be guaranteed free of the taint of the spectacle (or of 'bourgeois culture') is that there are no such guarantees, for art or for anything else: there is no 'this side' of the spectacle. Theory is not the situationists' utopian pure negative, nor is art a tool of the commodity economy. Rather, both art and theory are means of communication—languages of common meanings. Both come in new, old, subversive and spectacular varieties; both, if found threatening, will swiftly be recuperated; both can be plagiarised (or detoured, as we pro-situs used to say)—and the plagiarisms themselves may be useful or useless, radical or reactionary.

The more attentive reader will by now have realised that I am not in sympathy with the Art Strike. I can best explain my reasons by referring the reader once again to that historic meeting in Göteborg: more specifically, to Karen Home's view of the matter, as given in her *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*. (Is there any justification for that 'e' on the end of 'Lettrism'? I think we should be told). Home rejects the SI's verdict in favour of theory and against art, siding with the Scandinavian and German situationists who were excluded following the 'antisituationist art' proposal and who later formed a second Situationist International. (For the sake of clarity I have adopted the real SI's term of abuse for this group, which I will refer to as the 'Nashist' SI). Home speaks approvingly of these artists, who shared

'a belief in the collective, and noncompetitive, production of art,' However, we're not actually talking about *art* here:

Overt and conscious use of collective practices to make 'cultural artifacts' do not really fit the description 'art'—at least if one is using the term to describe the high culture of the ruling class in capitalist societies.

Nor, indeed, if one is using the term to describe pig-farming. The SI's valuation of theory rested on two oppositions: between theory and art, and between theory and ideology. Having reversed the terms of the first opposition, Home echoes the second with an equally mythical dichotomy: all art is either 'high culture' (boo!) or collective cultural artifact production (hooray!). Like its counterpart, this is not an easy position to maintain empirically.

The significance of all this for the Art Strike is twofold. Firstly, the terms become blurred: should all 'art' cease, or only identifiably 'high culture' forms? Or should art be allowed to continue only if it passes the Home test ('overt and conscious use of collective practices')? This last interpretation might explain why issue 8 of the paper *Anticlockwise* contains both anti-culture material and an article in praise of Mail Art by Mark Lawson⁵. But material from the Mail Art networks has appeared in galleries before now, which presumably means that, too, is now an ornament of the ruling class: and in any case Home is currently advocating a complete 'refusal of creativity.' Problems, problems! More importantly, if one rejects the picture of art as a sea of ruling class culture with a few islands of subversive practice dotted about in it, the whole thing collapses. The entire 'struggle against the received culture of the reigning society' which Home has been conducting since 1985⁶ is built on the idea that 'received culture' disseminates the values of 'the reigning society,' with art in particular representing 'the high culture of the ruling class in capitalist societies.' This image of culture as a conveyor belt, carrying the values of the ruling class into everyday consciousness, is necessitated only by Home's *a priori* decision to divide art into sheep and goats. It's certainly not necessitated by the facts. True, art is a material process within society; true, art is never innocent of the existing social order, and is always under pressure to promote it—within the artist's mind as much as anywhere. This, though, only adds up to saying that art—and 'culture'—is a means of communication and therefore a space of contestation, or a battleground as we say in English. The task is not to combat received culture but to get to work on it: embracing parts of it, emphatically rejecting others but above all diverting⁷ it to our own purposes.

In fairness, it must be said that there is more to the Art Strike than that. There is also an argument about artists as people, alleging that their status as pseudo-radical high-culture merchants gives them elitist delusions about 'the superiority of their "creativity" over the leisure and work pursuits of the social majority.' Without the

3 Cf. the following comment on the Unification Church mass wedding of a few years back: 'A spectacle of pairs, assuredly. Let us not forget, however, that this was also a pair of spectacles.' Taken from Alec Douglas H.'s *The End of Finality* (Improbable Books, 1989). The situationists, we must conclude, never got much beyond the reversal of terms. It will be for others to create the *terms of reversal*.

4 Partial disproof: 'Before Pop and after Abstract Expressionism there was a stillborn movement, based in continental Europe... Called 'Situationism,' this movement expressed a rebellious need to counterpose the creative and irreverent with the anticipated [*sic*] homogeneity of media society. Essentially a nonstarter as art *per se*, the movement had, nonetheless, an influence on French cinema and architecture.'—Philip Core reviewing an exhibition at the ICA in *New Statesman and Society*, 30th June 1989. Of course, the curators invited this kind of misinterpretation by staging the exhibition in an art gallery, rather than simply getting out and creating situations.

5 Sorry, *Pawson*. Apologies all round!

6 Not single-handedly, of course! Home's struggles have been shared with the PRAXIS group, a guy called Tony from Cork and numerous magazines around the world all called *Smile*. In addition many interesting uses have been made of that famous general-purpose pseudonym or 'multiple identity,' 'George Eliot.'

7 Or *detourning* it. Next week: *deriving* for beginners.

prop of the anti-‘culture’ argument, though, this looks less like radicalism and more like guilt-tripping. Elitism is a disfigurement of the character: it’s almost as bad as spots. If artists are worried about it, though, the answer is simple: go away and get it cleared up. We don’t want them moaning to the rest of us about how ugly they are and all the parties they’re missing (‘I couldn’t go out looking like this what would all those beautiful workers say?’). In any case, elitism is a sign of incipient co-option: and co-option means that your work is being misappropriated. Don’t give it up—take it back! Just say no!

So much for the overt—political—meanings of the Art Strike. There is, however, more to it than that: there is a sense, as Sadie Plant implied, in which the Art Strike is an art work. This can best be appreciated by looking again at the question of success or failure, our assessment of which depends entirely on how we interpret the Art Strike itself. Taken straight, it’s clearly a miserable failure. It is unimaginable that an actual Art Strike will materialise; even the idea has made very little headway outside the pages of *Smile*, and none at all outside the anarchist milieu. Talking about ‘the Art Strike’ at all is doing it a fairly large favour: what exists is a campaign for an art strike, or more precisely propaganda in favour of a campaign for an art strike. That propaganda has no more popular support than the calls for a general strike that issue from time to time from the organs of the corpse of Leninism, and as such deserves the same oblivion. Alternatively, we can take the whole thing as a rather deadpan joke at the expense of ‘political artists’ (if you’re so radical let’s see you on the picket line), but this doesn’t improve matters much: hardly anyone has either got the joke or fallen for it.

These, however, are not the only possibilities. In between lies the whole terrain of irony, of saying one thing and meaning two or three others; the terrain where meanings split and proliferate, where the distinction between ‘theory’ and ‘art’ ceases to make sense. This, clearly, is the area where Home’s promotion of the Art Strike⁸ operates; this, too, is one of the areas where really new meanings get made⁹, and an area where *Here and Now*¹⁰ has squatter’s rights. In other words, despite Home’s post-situationist attachment to a rigid division between art and theory, the disjuncture between the Art Strike’s apparent meaning and its real impact mean that it works, if it works at all, as a combination of art and theory; or rather, as a demonstration of the impossibility of separating the two.

It makes sense, then, to refer to the Art Strike’s propaganda as

8 My knowledge of the originators of the Art Strike—the PRAXIS group—is woefully inadequate: however, I suspect that they actually took the Art Strike seriously (but that’s Americans for you). Only on its arrival in England was it transformed by Karen Home’s creative genius into the polyvalent multimedia event that we now know so well.

9 Burroughs half-realised this when he asserted that cut-ups foretold the future: simply rearrange some words to make an unknown phrase or saying and ‘the future leaks through.’ Certainly, new meanings could be created by this method: it’s a kind of automatic writing. I don’t know, though—call me old-fashioned, but I prefer meanings which have been consciously made to the kind that leak out of the end of a random process. You can’t beat a good work of art, that’s what I say.

10 A magazine of radial tyres.

‘radical art,’ at least in the sense of ‘unprecedented art.’ This, though, is not the only consideration: not all new meanings are good ones. What, then, is the Art Strike really *saying*? Two main themes are apparent: a complete abandonment of politics, associated with an impression of a kind of ultimate and insuppressible radicalism. The first can best be approached by considering the hypothetical political impact of a realised art strike. Industrial action works to counteract the isolation and passivity which are endemic in this society: strikes are a collective rejection of the strikers’ role as workforce and an affirmation that they’re worth more than that. A strike by artists, though, would actually promote both passivity and isolation: the strikers would not be a group refusing work but a scattering of individuals doing nothing. To this picture we must add the facts that an art strike will not happen, and that very few people either know or care what artists do with their time anyway. A call for inaction, which is bound to be ignored, and which is addressed to people whose actions nobody notices: what is this but an elaborate demonstration of the futility of politics? The Marxists aspired to change the world: the point, it would appear, is to withdraw from it.

This relates closely to the second point. Home has made an easy reputation out of radicals’ tendency to confuse the concepts of ‘qualitative supersession’ and *reductio ad absurdum*: that is, to assume that all previous radical practice can be superseded simply by ‘taking it further.’ This generally takes fairly sophisticated forms: talking about ‘situationist ideology,’ for example, or alleging that radical art is part of ruling class culture. Latterly, though, Karen Home has specialised in the most radical-looking strategy of all: negate everything. The tendency of the Art Strike is to argue that, outside itself, there is no authentic opposition: that all oppositional activity, radical art included, is a form of social integration. The empirical difficulties here are obvious and major: it is hard to see how anyone other than Karen Home could ever prove that they were actually *opposing* existing society, and not merely indulging in *oppositionalism*—except perhaps by supporting the Art Strike, reading Richard Allen and slagging off the SI. The strategy which Home has ‘taken further’ here is the division between the SI and all other ‘theorists,’ between the artists of the Nashist SI and all other ‘artists,’ and for that matter between the Seventh Day Adventists and all other ‘Christians.’ What is even more important is the end result. So complete a negation results in a politics not of negation but of abstinence: if nothing is authentic *nothing can be done*.

This is the true message of the Art Strike. Ultimately Home, like Baudrillard, is advocating silence and inaction¹¹; is promoting, as the ultimate negative, alienation from one’s own capacity to act. This has its own interest for theory-collectors and the terminally disillusioned¹²: its main interest for the rest of us is that it marks Home out as a practitioner of theory for theory’s sake, political activity taken up in the belief that it is pointless. To describe this as radical would do violence to the meaning of the word: the word

11 Articles in *Smile* have advocated ‘sensuous inactivity’ for the duration of the Art Strike. Idle buggers!

12 At the ICA exhibition a couple of copies of *Smile* were shown, exhibited under glass so that we could appreciate the witty and amusing cover art. Those responsible are believed to fall into both categories at once.

'reactionary' fits much better. 'Boring' does quite nicely, too¹³. As with the theory of Baudrillard, as with the 'art for art's sake' espoused by aesthetes from Walter Pater to the Neoists¹⁴, the Art Strike's only real achievement will be the entertainment it gives its audience—and, of course, the careers it makes. [?

13 Though, to be fair, this is a difficulty encountered from time to time by the greatest of theorists.

If the element of boredom I have experienced in writing this finds an

echo in the reader, what else is this but one more proof of our failure to live?

as Raoul Vaneigem asked in his foreword to *The Kids' Book of How to Do It*, or *The Revolution of Everyday Life* as it's sometimes known. How true that is, how very true. And what a cop-out.

14 Home once described a reference to 'situationist ideology' as a 'calculated insult.' To judge from Home's account of their activities, describing the Neoists as artists is more in the nature of a calculated compliment.

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What Makes Art Strike Such a Bad Idea?

U NKNOWN TO MOST PEOPLE, an art strike is currently in progress on at least three continents, calling on artists "to stop making, distributing, selling, exhibiting or discussing their work" and for all institutions involved with the showing and printing of art or the training of artists to stop all such operation. Stewart Home, the major architect and proponent of the strike, sees art as "a symptom of the disease capitalism" and the strike as a means of undermining capitalism by "intensifying the class war." The strikers, however, are always quick to point out the the Art Strike (1990-1993) is a bad idea and that it will fail to accomplish what it sets out to do. The importance of the strike, finally, exists in the mere conception of the strike rather than in the execution of it, and as such it is designed as one large conceptual art piece, performance art without the performance.

The Art Strike (1990-1993) was not a call to immediate action, but a process that has taken and will take years to accomplish. In 1985, the PRAXIS group announced its plans for the Art Strike, to be modeled after the strike German artist Gustav Metzger called for in 1974 to destroy those cultural institutions which have had a "negative effect" on artistic production; this lasted from 1977 to 1980 and attracted no artists besides Metzger. The current strike, however, is designed to undermine the status of the artist in the current power structure of our culture.

One of their major techniques in this regard was the invention of Karen Eliot, who is less than an ectoplasm. She is but a name that people adopted in the five years before the strike to began to undermine the "myth of genius" and the ideas of "identity, individuality, originality, value and myth." Karen Eliot usually produced a magazine which carried the title *SMILE*, and at any time there were a number of such magazines in the US and UK. One problem with the persona of Karen Eliot is that she has a persona. Listen to her (who may be him) speak, and hear the same cryptic propaganda that is a part of her speech or writing. Certainly, the personalities of the 100 or so people who have been her have been neatly obliterated, but the development of a replacement identity with its own individuality, originality and value has helped to subtly undermine the participant's intentions.

The other antecedent to the Art Strike was the development (apparently simultaneously conceived in different parts of the world) of the conception of plagiarism as an artistic tactic. The expounding of plagiarism emphasizes the collective (rather than individual) nature of art (what the strikers sometimes call "cultural production"). Festivals of Plagiarism were held around the world (San Francisco, London, Glasgow) as a means to question the rights people have to art as property, the potential strikers had begun the "struggle against the received culture of the reigning society," against the culture which perceives art works as being worth something and belonging to specific individuals rather than to the

culture as a whole.

The Art Strike is said to be a call to do something else rather than nothing, but that "something else" is fairly undefined. One striker has even stated that art doesn't *necessarily* have to be abandoned during the strike as long as the striker's attitudes towards art change (this emendation, however, came from an editor who decided to shut down his magazine for the strike but whose band, the Tape-beatles, has voted through a kind of strike vote not to recognize the strike and to continue both performance and production). The Art Strike is meant to be a time to reconceptualize art, to stop viewing it as a superior form of knowledge, to return to reality (after having spent decades escaping reality through art); it is a time to stop understanding art as a special activity. The Art Strike intends to slow the drift away from play which has been caused by too much concentration on art, but this assumes that art itself is not play.

A number of reactions to Art Strike have appeared (and sometimes disappeared) since autumn 1989. The first might have been the Forced Art Participation (FAP); the call for this action, identified as the idea of an anonymous woman, appeared in **YAWN** nº4, a broadsheet and Art Strike organ. The plan meant to eradicate the special status of "artist" by making such status mandatory and universal: everyone would be forced to make art. **YAWN** attacked this idea by pointing out its inherent fascism and the author's "fear of liberation from the hierarchically imposed vision of the world." the proprietors of Xexoxial Endarchy, an indefatigable multi-media art establishment, have called for an Art Glut (1990-2000), increasing the number of years of activity (as compared with the Art Strike)

ART STRIKE!! (1990-1993)



and calling for increased production in place of none. The A 1 Waste Paper Company, which is actually a couple of British mail artists, is proselytizing for a Pretentious Drivel Strike. Along the same line, FaGaGaGa, a group of US mail artists, has mailed out postcards asking, "How About a Hype Strike?" US artist Mark Bloch has suggested a Word Strike (1991-1994), during which we are supposed to follow the motto "Don't say 'art' unless you mean 'money'"; Bloch sees this as a way of answering the requirements of the strikers without stooping to ineffectual and possibly harmful tactics.

"The Art Strike will fail because it is a bad idea." That is one of the infuriatingly glib and specious remarks of the Art Strikers. They don't explain why it's a bad idea. Because every participant is an artist who has no chance of making any money through art? Because art doesn't actually subjugate any class of individuals? Because the idea of leveling talent fails to appreciate the contributions of individuals? Because the "myth of genius" has never been used to justify inequality, repression and famine? Or because what is described as an informational picket line and a way to teach others is actually a work shutdown? The strike has

been and will continue to be ignored by both the major culture and the proletariat its participants hope to free of the stifling barrier between high and low culture. The manifestos of these cultural workers (artists) are too difficult and abstract for anyone who is stupid and too stupid for anyone who is not.

The worst problem with the Art Strike (1990-1993) is that it does not even truly attempt to solve any problems, and that all it offers in return is the loss of people's artistic lives. Although the strike rails against gender-specific market art imbued with social prestige, most strikers are males working in forms of art with virtually no female participants (*and* little prestige). The strike is supposedly directed only against the self-referential Modernist and Post-modernist traditions of art because these are of no worth to the proletariat, but the average worker has no interest in the art project that the Art Strike actually is either. And the strikers' idea that art cannot continue whilst there is hunger and destitution in the world does not force the strikers to do anything about those problems; all it even attempts to accomplish is the equitable distribution of misery.

[Geoff Huth, from "Platform" as published in Critical Wave no. 18, September, 1990]

VOICES/How do you respond to the above article?



Doris Rowe, 63
Retired teacher
Gore, Okla.



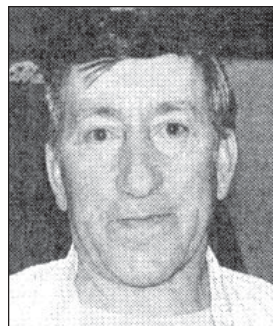
Gino Straniero, 55
Letter carrier
Holmdel, N.J.



Claude Jackson, 39
Auto worker
Highland, Ind.



Milton Bins, 56
Deputy director
Washington, D.C.



Myrt Bauer, 45
Real estate broker
Moraga, Calif.

I don't think he knows what he's talking about. The Art Strike is not a 'work of conceptual art.' In fact, the only 'artistic' thing about it is only that it is done by 'artists.' Some people say that 'art is what artists do,' but I don't believe it. Are you prepared to call it 'art' when an artist puts out his dog or brushes her teeth? No sir! The rest of us have been on 'art strike' all our lives! I just have to applaud anyone concerned enough to want to change things.

He's right when he says there's a problem with the 'Karen Eliot' persona. The problem is that it has become too much associated with certain people, which undermines the participants' intentions. There can be no middle ground in using these collective single names, if they are to be effective. 'Karen Eliot' is dead—if you want to start using a new name, make sure no one can tell it's you. I recommend 'Anon.' myself. I use it all the time, except now.

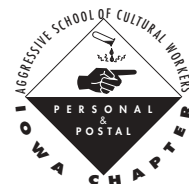
Art Strike is a bad idea. Huth misses the point. It's a bad idea because most 'artists' are 'individualists,' and therefore lack the solidarity necessary to participate in an 'art strike.' So as a practical matter, 'art strike' will not work. But this is not to say that it will not have some good effect, for it will. It already has. People are really talking about serious stuff for the first time in my memory. Huth wrote his article, didn't he? That should tell you something.

If Huth's 'proletariat' is too 'stupid' to understand the Art Strikers' 'manifestoes,' it doesn't matter, because the 'manifestoes' are not directed at non-artists. It doesn't matter to the Art Strike if folks like me don't know anything about it, because we're not the ones with the problem. Those who cast themselves in the role of 'artists'—and folks like Huth, who buy into that attitude—that have the problem. And it is they who need to examine what they hold to be true.

It's true that 'art strike' doesn't solve any problems with art. But I for one never look to art works for solutions to problems. The most an 'artist' can hope to do is point at a problem and suggest that it needs to be looked at more closely. Besides, there may not be a single 'solution' to the 'problem' of art. I'm the last person to impose what I think should be done on everyone else! No one has to go on strike—or even think there's a problem—if they don't want to.

Cultural Workers made use of by YAWN

AR/280, P.O. Box 55193, Valencia CA 91385, USA
Geoff Huth, RD 5, Currybush Rd., Schenectady NY 12306, USA



YAWN is a sporadic newsletter which seeks to offer a critical look at our culture in all its forms. Responses and submissions from readers are welcome and encouraged, especially critical observations about cultural institutions and seldom challenged principles concerning culture. Anything sent may be considered for inclusion in a future issue without specific prior notification. YAWN strives to be a collective, mostly anonymous, exchange-driven effort. Responses of any kind will be met reciprocally in the following manner: the respondent will receive those materials appearing in the next bulk mailing. Subscriptions to YAWN are available for \$10 for 25 issues. YAWN is archived at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

Association for Ontological Anarchy Communiqué No. 11: Turn off the Lite!

The Association for Ontological Anarchy calls for a boycott of all products marketed under the shibboleth of *LITE* — beer, meat, lo-cal candy, cosmetics, music, pre-packaged “life-styles,” whatever.

The concept of *LITE* (in Situ-jargon) unfolds a complex of symbolism by which the Spectacle hopes to recuperate all revulsion against its commodification of desire. “Natural,” “organic,” “healthy” produce is designed for a market-sector of mildly dissatisfied consumers with mild cases of future shock and mild yearnings for a tepid authenticity. A niche has been prepared for *you*, softly illumined with the illusions of simplicity, cleanliness, thinness, a dash of asceticism and self-denial. Of course, it costs a little more...; after all *LITENESS* was not designed for poor hungry primitives who still think of food as nourishment rather than décor. It *has* to cost more—otherwise *you* wouldn’t buy it.

The American middle class (don’t quibble; you know what I mean) falls naturally into opposite but complementary factions: The Armies of Anorexia and Bulimia. Clinical cases of these diseases represent only the psychosomatic froth on a wave of cultural pathology, deep diffused and largely unconscious. The Bulimics are those yuppied-out gentry who gorge on margaritas and VCRs, then purge on *LITE* food, jogging or (an)aerobic jiggling. The Anorexics are the “life-style” rebels, ultra-food-faddists, eaters of algæ, joyless, dispirited and wan — but smug in the puritanical zeal and their designer hair-shirts. Grotesque junkfood simply represents the flip-side of ghoulish “healthfood” — nothing tastes like anything but woodchips or additives — it’s all either boring or carcinogenic — or both — and it’s all incredibly *stupid*.

Food, cooked or raw, cannot escape from symbolism. It *is*, and also simultaneously *represents* that which it is. All food is soul-food; to treat it otherwise is to court indigestion, both chronic and metaphysical.

But in the airless vault of our civilization, where nearly every experience is mediated, where reality is strained through the deadening mesh of consensus-perception, we lose touch with food as *nourishment*; we begin to construct for ourselves personæ based on what we consume, treating *products* as projections of our yearning for the authentic....

LITE parodies spiritual emptiness and illumination, just as McDonald’s

travesties the imagery of fullness and celebration. The human spirit (not to mention *hunger*) can overcome and transcend all this fetishism—joy can erupt even at Burger King, and even *LITE* beer may hide a dose of Dionysus. Buy why would we have to struggle against this garbagy tide of cheap rip-off tickytack, when we could be drinking the wine of paradise even now under our own vine and fig tree?

Food belongs to realm of everyday life, the primary arena for all insurrectionary self-empowerment, all spiritual self-enhancement, all seizing-back pleasure, all revolt against the Planetary Work Machine and its imitation desires. Far be it from us to dogmatize; the Native American hunter might fuel his happiness with fried squirrel, the anarcho-taoist with a handful of dried apricots. Milarepa the Tibetan, after ten years of nettle soup, ate a butter-cake and achieved enlightenment. The dullard sees no *eros* in fine champagne; the sorcerer can fall intoxicated on a glass of water.

The A.O.A. sometimes envisions *CHAOS* as a cornucopia of continual creation; as a sort of geyser of cosmic generosity; therefore we refrain from advocating any specific diet, lest we offend against the Sacred Multiplicity and the Divine Subjectivity. We’re not about to hawk you yet another New Age prescription for perfect health...

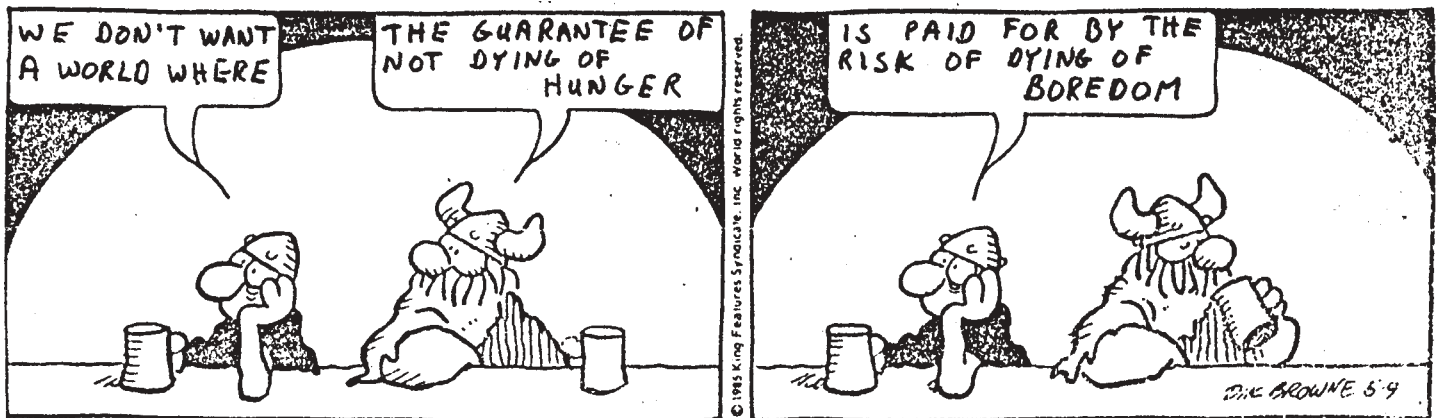
Our culture, choking on its own pollutants, cries out (like the dying Goethe) for “More *LITE*!” — as if their bland weightless tasteless characterlessness could protect us from the gathering dark.

No! This last illusion finally strikes us as too cruel. We are forced against our own slothful inclinations to take a stand and protest. Boycott! Boycott! **TURN OFF THE LITE!**

[Hakim Bey]

Art Strike?... Nothing wrong with choosing to pursue farming, or charity work, or rabble-rousing, or whatever, in the hopes that you will then help the starving. But combatting hunger is only one reasonable human vocation. Combatting neuron death through lack of beauty is another. To say an artist should give up art and work at helping the starving is totalitarian crap. The starving should give up starving and work at helping artists. Just kidding — sort of. But I do believe that requiring everybody to devote himself to charity work, as a full time job, is as idiotic as telling social workers to quit and make art. To feed people in a world without art would be criminal....

[Bob Grumman]



STRIKE DOWN CENSORSHIP

WE CALL ON ALL ARTISTS TO JOIN
THE ART STRIKE AND THUS PARALYZE
THE OPERATIONS OF THE BLOODSUCKER
ART MARKET AND HIS BIG BROTHER
OPPRESSOR, THE ART BUREAUCRACY.

WE DONT WANT YOU TO STOP MAKING ART, BUT TO
STOP SERVING THE SYSTEM AND TO BOYCOTT THE
GALLERIES, MUSEUMS, DEALERS, AGENCIES.

WE ALL HAVE TO CREATE ART IN PROMOTION OF
THE STRIKE AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE STRIKE.

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO FIGHT AGAINST THE
TYRANNY OF ART MARKET AND ART CENSORS.

STRIKE IS ART!
ART IS STRIKE!
JOIN THE ARTIST STRIKE!

THE LOWER EAST SIDE NEOST FRONT

ART STRIKE 1990-2000

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England

Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359

Hakim Bey, P.O. Box 568, Brooklyn NY 11211

Bob Grumman, 1708 Hayworth Rd, Port Charlotte FL 33952

Neolist?! Refugee Forces, 168A Euclid Ave, Toronto, Ontario M6J 2J9 Canada



Reading for Immortality

Toward an Interrogation of Nous, Neoism, and Neoplatonism

by JOHN KENNEDY and KAREN F. ELIOT

“Soule of my soule! my Joy, my crown, my friend!
A name which all the rest doth comprehend:
How happy are we now, whose souls are grown,
By an incomparable mixture, One.”

(Katherine Philips)

This paper is intended as an introductory interrogation of the terrain of Neoism mobilizing terms from both the writings of Plotinus and the Nag Hammadi documents. For the purposes of this paper, the Neoist will be presumed to be a man. We are not trying to provide a comprehensive account of all aspects of the terrain of Neoism, or even of Neoplatonist philosophy. Cross-referenced terms are in upper case.

Contents: THE READING THE NEOIST DESIRE THE SIMILAR DENOUEMENT HYPOSTASIS COLLECTIVE SOULS TIME SPACE THE REFERENCE KAREN ELIOT VALUE EXCHANGE FACIALITY TOOLS FETISHISM AKADEMGOROD PLAGIARISM

THE READING

THE READING is the interaction of THE NEOIST and HIS MEMORY within a particular spatial and temporal frame. THE NEOIST is a student, an actor, a nurse's aide, a teacher, or a clerk. HIS MEMORY is a bank, a construction, a computer program. The temporal borders of THE READING are delineated by THE REFERENCE which connects HIS MEMORY, THE NEOIST, and THE SIMILAR, in conjunction with instrumental TIME. The arm of authority behind THE REFERENCE and instrumental TIME is THE SIMILAR. THE NEOIST gets ready for THE READING, prepares to become 'IMAGINARY,' by imitating representations of AKADEMGOROD as an object of DESIRE. These are signifiers of a fragmented, coded mind, signifiers that HIS MEMORY will be drawn to through DESIRE, that will reinforce his FETISHISM and in turn contribute to the construction of his COLLECTIVE SOUL. HIS MEMORY has a COLLECTIVE SOUL which he is drawn to construct, which has an already written set of rules and conditions by which it must be constructed, conditions which include the fetishized system of signifying effects with which THE NEOIST has attempted to encode his mind and which already encode his mind as AKADEMGOROD. THE NEOIST enters the SPACE of HIS MEMORY. When THE NEOIST enters the SPACE of

THE READING, HIS MEMORY provides a VALUE in EXCHANGE for an opportunity to spend a designated amount of TIME, an opportunity to construct his COLLECTIVE SOUL. THE NEOIST recalls THE SIMILAR via THE REFERENCE to announce that the EXCHANGE has been initiated and that it is now time to begin measuring the length of THE READING. THE NEOIST and HIS MEMORY now interact together, their conditions intermingling with DESIRE, FETISHISM, representation, the SPACE of the room, the TIME measured by THE NEOIST's watch as well as the TIME elusively marked by HIS MEMORY, his IMAGINARY, and anticipation of emanation which is not the object of his DESIRE but a fetishized signifier which masks the perpetually deferred COLLECTIVE SOUL, the plane of consistency of his DESIRE. When the end of THE READING is announced by instrumental TIME or by a REFERENCE call from THE SIMILAR, if THE READING has transgressed the boundaries marked by instrumental TIME, THE NEOIST recalls THE SIMILAR, says goodbye to HIS MEMORY, and exits the SPACE of THE READING.

THE NEOIST

He will become part of the HYPOSTASIS which you are purchasing. You want to purchase the fulfillment of your COLLECTIVE SOUL, to draw him into its logic, to name him through your DESIRE which is based on representations of AKADEMGOROD, on fetishization, after you have picked up THE REFERENCE, after you have recalled him. What will you call him? You must first call him a partner in the EXCHANGE in which you are about to take part in an amount purportedly based on equivalence but in fact VALUE is measured by, determined by, FETISHISM and DESIRE. He is called THE NEOIST: he is connected to both HIS MEMORY and THE SIMILAR by THE REFERENCE. He embodied a sophisticated, elegant look. He represented the boy next door, and he tended to wear jeans rather than an evening dress especially jeans with a Peter Pan sticker or red fringes. He was very tall, and his clothing

would be slightly trendy. He represented the healthy, outdoorsy type, with a wind-swept, off-the-farm look. He was exotic and tended to wear tight shirts. THE NEOIST works as an independent contractor for HIS MEMORY. THE NEOIST has a COLLECTIVE SOUL; his COLLECTIVE SOUL is plagiarized, though.

DESIRE

It is to construct his COLLECTIVE SOUL. I guess I'd like to know if there's any way to tell in advance what strange acts will turn a particular mind on. Absolutely anyone can be turned on by absolutely anything. Part of my job is to respond to this. His COLLECTIVE SOUL has an already-written set of rules, a system of logic, by which it is to be constructed. Integral to the logic of HIS MEMORY is the fetishization of representations of AKADEMGOROD as an object of DESIRE. It is the signifying system, the codes inscribed on THE NEOIST's mind which is being fetishized. If someone asked you to sit down and spell out your description of what a Neoist would be like, you'd probably say, 'Well, he'd be good looking and elegantly dressed, and sophisticated.' That's exactly who you are expected you to be.

THE SIMILAR

THE SIMILAR serves as the arm of the law, sets up the boundaries/limits of, and is part of, the HYPOSTASIS which constitutes THE READING, which in turn effects the possibilities of the logic of the COLLECTIVE SOUL which may be fulfilled. "Beauty is constituted by similarity" (Plotinus). THE SIMILAR is responsible for screening HIS MEMORY, which means screening out unwanted DESIRE, the unwanted COLLECTIVE SOUL. THE SIMILAR is not a partner in the primary EXCHANGE with HIS MEMORY; rather, the EXCHANGE between THE NEOIST and THE SIMILAR is a separate agreement based on different terms, different standards of VALUE. THE SIMILAR is to function as protection, both before — through the screening procedure — and during THE READING.

DENOUEMENT

The COLLECTIVE SOUL is the WORLD MIND arriving at itself.

HYPOSTASIS

What is being purchased is an opportunity to interact with the "IMAGINARY", a subject-position which is constituted by THE NEOIST, technology, fiction, SPACE and TIME: we would describe this subject-position as a "space-time-mind" and the displacement which contributes to the subject-position's creation — see below for elements of this displacement — as a HYPOSTASIS. The HYPOSTASIS surrounding the "IMAGINARY" is composed of fiction as well as the material or concrete. Fiction: representation, fetishization of signifiers that encode the mind, etc. The displacement is also composed of the circuit of THE REFERENCE, of TIME, of SPACE, of THE SIMILAR/the Law, of EXCHANGE/lines to the system. There has been much criticism of our theory as romantic — "What is missing in this account — and seemingly unnecessary in the advanced technological society described here — is a theory of subjectivity" — but we would argue for the importance of our theory that it is a similar theory which forms the commodity in Neoism: it is formed through both the concrete and the abstract, through the organic and the technological. It is also, we think, important in that it reinforces binary oppositions — such as public/private and smooth SPACE/striated SPACE is crucial to the enterprise and to the VALUE which is being exchanged. We would want to think the HYPOSTASIS as articulation of human subject — the subject necessarily foregrounds fragmentation, gaps, partial/incomplete identity. For our project — and any project, we would argue — a theory of subjectivity is necessary in order to discuss power relations, to make distinctions and show relations between/among subject-positions; indeed, in order to distinguish subjects. Our theory must be able to discuss power, DESIRE, interest. Conceptualizing the HYPOSTASIS through a concept of articulation which accounts for provisional identity makes it possible to think subjectivity, interest, DESIRE, power.

COLLECTIVE SOULS

The COLLECTIVE SOUL is the commodity being exchanged. It is "one and multitude and part of the being which is divided into bodies" (Plotinus, *Fourth Ennead*, Book 9). It is enacted by HIS MEMORY, THE NEOIST, the parameters of SPACE and TIME which are permeable, THE REFERENCE, representations of AKADEMGOROD, the EXCHANGE, commodification of the COLLECTIVE SOUL, TOOLS/paraphernalia—in short, by the HYPOSTASIS. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is a program, a limit which marks the edges of the plane of DESIRE — it can never be

reached, fulfilled. "We claim that if the soul is belonging to the supreme being, it is the similar or even just the trace of the similar the sight of which is pleasing and affecting the soul" (Plotinus, *First Ennead*, Book 6, 11). The COLLECTIVE SOUL is both inside and outside the concrete, both inside and outside the abstract. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is DESIRE; it is that which one desires and by which one desires. There is desire whenever there is the constitution of a COLLECTIVE SOUL under one relation or another. DESIRE is the motor of the COLLECTIVE SOUL, the driving force and predication of the logic of the COLLECTIVE SOUL. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is HIS MEMORY, the NEOIST, the words, and the absent presence(s) upon which the conditions/logic of the COLLECTIVE SOUL is based. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is not a scene, a place, or even a support, upon which something comes to pass. What it is is a limit. It can never be achieved. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely IMAGINARY, and significances and subjectifications as a whole. The COLLECTIVE SOUL is a program, with its own rules and logic and conditions. THE NEOIST is looking for a type of COLLECTIVE SOUL that only absence can fill, or travel over, due to the very conditions under which that COLLECTIVE SOUL was constituted. THE NEOIST is looking for a COLLECTIVE SOUL which has already been scripted, already has a specific set of conditions within whose framework it must function. This set of conditions determines, too, HIS MEMORY: You can't desire without making a COLLECTIVE SOUL. I want to give you all my sophistication and all my cum. You never reach the COLLECTIVE SOUL, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. The fragments of THE NEOIST's mind become for HIS MEMORY an imprint or a zone on a COLLECTIVE SOUL. That is, he as signifying system (see FETISHISM) is part of the displacement that constitutes the COLLECTIVE SOUL, the plane of consistency of DESIRE. NEOISM is your invitation to build a COLLECTIVE SOUL, as your invitation to interact with his subject position — that is, to have him become part of your COLLECTIVE SOUL, to help you build it, to be built into it. Tell me what to do. Tell me who's boss. THE NEOIST can never fulfill his COLLECTIVE SOUL. It is not a question of experiencing desire as an internal lack, nor of delaying pleasure in order to produce a kind of externalizable surplus value, but instead of constituting an intensive COLLECTIVE SOUL. Let me worship you.

T I M E

TIME becomes VALUE: For HIS MEMORY, TIME often functions as a dialectic between memory and anticipation. You never know what just happened, or you always know what is going to happen. His DESIRES revolve around memories and fantasies,

past and future. The COLLECTIVE SOUL comes from the past and is aimed at the future — it never comes into being, never exists now. Think, a person moves from here (space/man/time) through here (space/man enters into negotiation/time) to here (space/man meets the IMAGINARY/time) and through (space/client enters the IMAGINARY/time) to exit (space/man and neoist/time) — it is a similar scenario for THE NEOIST.

S P A C E

THE READING: it is a public SPACE that gives the illusion of being a private SPACE. It is this illusion which HIS MEMORY is paying for, this illusion which is produced and regulated by THE SIMILAR, the system, THE REFERENCE — e.g. SPACE. The physical SPACE of the room is criss-crossed by THE REFERENCE. In this space things, acts and situations are forever being replaced by representations. For these minds, the natural space and the abstract space which confront and surround them are in no way separable. The individual situates his mind in its own space and apprehends the space around the mind. COLLECTIVE SOUL and SPACE: It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree. The SPACE within THE READING is illusionarily smooth SPACE — it is the illusion of smooth SPACE which HIS MEMORY is used for. Striated SPACE is SPACE gridded by boundaries: constructed by VALUES of THE SIMILAR, circuits of THE REFERENCE, standards, logic of COLLECTIVE SOUL, etc. Marks the edges of illusion of smooth SPACE.

T H E R E F E R E N C E

Okay. So there you are, sitting at home. Your bag is packed, and you're ready to go. It means more: You are on recall. You do know what you are going to be called upon to do, what you are going to be called upon to be. You will be HIS MEMORY in EXCHANGE. You are part of the NEOIST CONDITION.

K A R E N E L I O T

Plotinus, being alleged to have plagiarized his metaphysical system from Numenios of Apamea, delineates the first HYPOSTASIS as the One or the source — "Everything is in everything" — or aglaia, SPLENDOR, corresponding to Hebrew ZOHAR as the name of the Kabbalah, and SEFER, jewel, constituting the SEFIROT system — "names, lights, powers, stages, mirrors, sources, aspects, limbs..." — and the primal Sefirot KETER ELYON = "Supreme Crown."

V A L U E

Exchange is only an appearance: each partner or group assesses the value of the last receivable object (limit-object), and the apparent equivalence derives from that. In terms of the terrain of Neoist "limit-object" is not determined solely by rational assessment but rather must be processed

through the logic of HIS MEMORY. VALUE is a derivation of DESIRE. VALUE is not based on use value: Use value is always concrete and particular, contingent on its own destiny. Use value is determined only after the EXCHANGE has taken place, and is, itself, a fetishized social relation. VALUE is the fetishization of commodity's sign system; in Neoism, of the sign system encoded on THE NEOIST'S MEMORY. The fetishization of this sign system is reinforced during THE READING. The VALUE of the commodity before the EXCHANGE — in order for the EXCHANGE to take place — is determined by the fetishization of the commodity. Fetishism is not the sanctification of a certain object, or value. It is the sanctification of the system as such, of the commodity as system: it is thus contemporaneous with the generalization of exchange value and is propagated with it. Reading AKADEMGOROD repeatedly as the object of exchange constructs a victim's discourse that risks reinscribing the very sexual politics it ostensibly seeks to expose and change. THE NEOIST has a dual register, as both object of and subject of — partner in — EXCHANGE. Reading AKADEMGOROD as objects exchanged by desiring subjects partakes of a degraded positivism that relies on an outmoded, humanist view of identity characterized by a metaphysics of presence; it assumes an unproblematic subjectivity for 'men' as desiring subjects and concomitantly assumes as directly accessible AKADEMGOROD-as-object. The terrain of Neoism, like the terrain of sex/gender relations, is problematic, in terms of the AKADEMGOROD paradigm.

EXCHANGE ↔ EXCHANGE

When each party has something the other wants, and they're able to make a deal, that constitutes a fair EXCHANGE. But that is where DESIRE was lurking. West was the shortest route east, as well as to the other directions, rediscovered or plagiarized.

F A C I A L I T Y

THE NEOIST's face is part of the COLLECTIVE SOUL of HIS MEMORY (see FETISHISM). It is a signifier marking the boundaries of the object of his DESIRE. Tell me who's the boss. All faces envelop an unknown, unexplored landscape; all landscapes are populated by a loved or dreamed-of face, develop a face to come or already past. To come. Tell me what you like. The signifier is always facialized. Faciality reigns materially over that whole constellation of significances and interpretations. Tell me how much you like it. When HIS MEMORY says, "tell me how it feels" or some other such thing, it's not just about the words but about FACIALITY, watching the words being spoken by THE NEOIST, watching the significance process through FACIALITY. A face is such a subjective thing. The COLLECTIVE SOUL contains gaps and ruptures, never to be closed.

T O O L S

TOOLS exist only in relation to the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible. TOOLS and PLAGIARISM: There is an entire system of horizontal and complementary appropriation, between hand and tool. TOOLS form the appendages of a HYPOSTASIS.

F E T I S H I S M

Two kinds of FETISHISM occur during THE READING — that of the commodity as VALUE and that of THE NEOIST as the object of DESIRE. The fetishization is not of use VALUE or meaning; rather it is about being drawn to the system of signification, it is a generalization of the structural code of the object: It is thus not a fetishism of the signified, a fetishism of substances and values called ideological, which the fetish object would incarnate for the alienated subject. Behind this reinterpretation which is truly ideological it is a fetishism of the signifier. That is to say that the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. This entrapment can be called DESIRE. People who want somebody to wear costumes, people who want somebody to sit with them while they watch dirty movies and jerk off, people who want to be tied up, people who want to wear diapers and be given a bottle. Beauty as FETISHISM: we are bound up in a general stereotype of models of beauty. The generalization of sign exchange value to facial effects. Thus FETISHISM is being drawn to representations of AKADEMGOROD, fascination with the system of encodement represented on minds through images in magazines, movies, television, advertising, etc. FETISHISM is integral to logic of, to construction of HIS MEMORY.

A K A D E M G O R O D

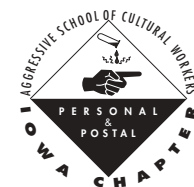
The indivisible becomes divisible, space becomes ideal space, sentiments become one and insensible, the body will be pure... (Proklos, *Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, III, 287): "Monty can't sin."

P L A G I A R I S M

THE NEOIST performs PLAGIARISM on his COLLECTIVE SOUL during THE READING, which stands in for his own DESIRE. Your COLLECTIVE SOUL is my psychological activity. I am immaterial. The impossibility of the COLLECTIVE SOUL being ever reached is plagiarized by HIS MEMORY as DESIRE, THE NEOIST as object of DESIRE. "Our doctrine is nothing new, it has been set up a long time ago." (Plotinus, VI, 8, 10) The more the system is systematized, the more the fetishist fascination is reinforced. DESIRE, for the object of DESIRE, is plagiarized as the coded mind, through the system of representations then again through NEOISM. Act like you're enjoying it. [end]

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

Keter Elyon, Retzdorffpromenade 3A, 1000 Berlin 41 Germany
John Kennedy, P.O. Box 22142, Baltimore MD 21203



I don't hate myself enough to go on Art Strike

The Tight Noose of Elitism

"...as participation becomes more impossible, the second rate specialists of modern art demand the participation of everyone!..." —S.I.

One...two...three years of strike and you're out. We're very close to having the "true" art strike begin after this judas goat of dis-action, this "art strike," this rampant melee of constipated redefinition has run its course dry! What has the strike brought — a misguided renaming of "artist" into "networkers" and sunday brunches together to be called "congresses" (a term much too republican and austere for yours truly)? And those who would bring IMmediacy to the MEDIA wish only to open the floodgates of alleged "creativity" and swamp out the fields of human consumption with what ??? more ART! Oooo... I mean "networking" (another lexical laceration by implying that this "work" has not and will not ever supercede to the arena of "play," the richest mineral of creativity.). The wider a grasp that art strike has reached out for, the tighter its noose of elitism has become! Strikers have found themselves "preaching" and conversing with only the already "converted," kneeling constantly before a throne of ever more "defined" rationalism to try and "sell" an evermore irrational world its purposely empty canvas. As they say in Tibet, "...those who know...mail packages...and those who don't know...are packages!"

Though the train of art strike is way off its course, it's still the only ride around.... Remember, *PROGRESS IS PLAGIARISM — NECESSITY IMPLIES IT!* Until we forget where we're going, we won't know who we are! On with the Abolition of Art!

Play Mysti-fication for me,

[I.M.I., 617 N. Upland Ave., Metairie, Louisiana 70003]

NO THEORETICAL SUMMING UP

The Art Strike is located against closure, and yet, from an "individualist perspective," it has numerous parallels with the "final closure" of "death." Those who adopt art as a substitute for life will necessarily experience the Art Strike as a form of "death"; whereas communarians, who recognise the productive role played by the "audience" within the cultural sphere, view the refusal of creativity as a means of opening up culture (and the mechanics of its production). Communists understand that "death," like "art" and "individuality," is the product of bourgeois ideology.

Since the Art Strike is so clearly located in opposition to closure (as well as philosophy, "death," etc.), there can be no theoretical summing up of the issues involved; the time for theorising the Art Strike will be after it has taken place. Here and now, it is not possible to resolve the contradictions of a group of "militants" — many of whom do not consider themselves to be artists — "striking" against art. For the time being, the Art Strike must be understood simply as a propaganda tactic; as a means of raising the visibility and intensity of the class war within the cultural sphere.

[Stewart Home, *Art Strike Handbook*, London, 1989]

Angles on the Art Strike

What the hell is an "art strike"? I thought striking was a tool used by organized labor to get a better shake. Strikes ain't as effective on the labor scene as they used to be, and now a bunch of disgruntled artists are striking, although the organizers themselves don't think it will do anything but cause artists to think about their effectiveness in response to the ills of society. Perhaps only the most pompous of artists actually think that they're benefitting the world by expressing themselves. At least I've never thought I was being creative for the purpose of effecting social change.

In an article supporting the 1991–1993 *[sic]* "Art Strike," called "Give Up Art Save the Starving," art is painted as the single most cause of the world's ills. I would imagine that the organizers of the art strike are artists of the self-hating variety. Although I'm not enamored of the "art community" and its snobbish attitudes, I don't place all art and artists in the same box marked "trash," as these people do. The article begins asking the reader to imagine a world where art is forbidden. Art is portrayed as the blinders that prevent us from seeing reality. "Give up Art..." reads like stilted propaganda. "Art is money." The "starving artist" of lore is debunked as being "rich beyond their wildest dreams." The really suffering people of the world are those who have never heard of art, the article maintains, claiming that "Artists are murderers!" This is based on the idea that artists are involved in the fantasy and illusory world that masks the real one and makes it bearable.

Just as there are plenty of artists, there are an equal number of visions, and contrary to the strikers' beliefs, one person calling himself an artist *cannot* "deny another equal right of vision." The "professional" art world, with whom the strikers have a beef, may deny "recognition" of an individual's artistic efforts, but no one can deny vision. It's interesting that these folks figure that the best way to deal with the fantasy of illusory visions it dislikes is to stop creating (more realistic ones) by shutting down the visionary machinery. There are lots of artists who use their talents to show others how they see the world. The purpose is not to entertain in some detached manner, but to share their perceptions with others, and hopefully find some common ground. Inspire and/or be inspired by others. It's the essence of communication.

The problems of the world do not exist because of artfully crafted illusions. It will take imagination and creativity to deal with the future, but the problem is that not enough people exert their imaginative and creative muscles to make a difference. The art strikers are *really* living in a fantasy land if they think that the artist, those who overtly use their muse or imagination, should hide it in shame, and blend in with the masses who already suppress their abilities. If anything, we should opt for a world of artists, not one without them. Perhaps these art strikers ain't artists at all. Maybe they find it easier to encourage others to suppress themselves than to express *themselves* so they don't have to awaken their *own* talents.

[Von K. Lechner

The above article is reprinted from Salon: A Journal of Esthetics, no. 10, Summer 1990 issue. The editor may be contacted at: 305 W. Magnolia St., Suite 386, Fort Collins, Colorado 80521



WRIT AND DRAWN BY JENNI S. AND ANDY R.

Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 Mark Pawson, P.O. Box 664, London E34 QR, England
 I.M.I., 617 N. Upland Ave, Metairie LA 70003
 Salon, 305 W Magnolia St, Suite 386, Fort Collins CO 80521



Immediatism: An Invisible Movement

i. All experience is mediated — by the mechanisms of sense perception, mentation, language, etc., — and certainly all art consists of some further mediation of experience.

ii. However, mediation takes place by degrees. Some experiences (smell, taste, sexual pleasure, etc.) are less mediated than others (reading a book, looking through a telescope, listening to a record). Some media, and especially “live” arts such as dance, theater, musical or bardic performance, are less mediated than others, such as TV, CDs, virtual reality. Even among the media usually called “media,” some are more and others are less mediated, according to the intensity or imaginative participation they demand. Print and radio demand more of the imagination; film less; TV even less; and virtual reality the least of all — so far.

iii. For art, the intervention of capital always signals a further degree of mediation. To say that art is commodified is to say that a mediation, or standing-in-between, has occurred, and that this betweenness amounts to a split, and that this split amounts to “alienation.” Improv music played by friends at home is less “alienated” than music played “live” at the Met, or music played through media (whether PBS or MTV or Walkman). In fact, an argument could be made that music distributed free or at cost on cassette via mail network is *less* alienated than live music played at some huge We Are The World spectacle or Las Vegas night club, even though the latter are live music played to a live audience (or at least, so it appears), while the former is recorded music consumed by distant and even anonymous listeners.

iv. The tendency of high-tech, and the tendency of late capitalism, both impel the arts farther and farther into extreme forms of mediation. Both widen the gulf between the production and consumption of art, with a corresponding increase in “alienation.”

v. With the disappearance of a “mainstream” and therefore of an “avant-garde” in the arts, it has been noticed that all the more advanced and intense art-experiences have become recuperable almost instantly by the media, and thus are rendered into trash like all other trash in the ghostly world of commodities. “Trash,” as the term was re-defined in, let’s say, Baltimore in the 1970s, can be good fun — as an ironic take on a sort of inadvertent *volkkultur* that surrounds and pervades the more unconscious regions of “popular” sensibility — which in turn is produced in part by the spectacle. “Trash” was once a fresh concept, with radical potential. By now, however, amidst the ruins of Postmodernism, it has finally begun to stink. Ironic frivolity finally becomes disgusting. Is it possible now to *be serious but not sober*? (Note: the New Sobriety is of course simply the flipside of the New Frivolity. Chic neo-puritanism carries the taint of Reaction, in just the same way that Postmodernist philosophical irony and despair lead to Reaction. The Purge Society is the same as the Binge Society. After the “Twelve Steps” of trendy renunciation in the 1990s, all that remains is the thirteenth step of the gallows. Irony may have become boring, but self-

mutilation was never more than an abyss. Down with frivolity — down with sobriety.)

Everything delicate and beautiful, from Surrealism to Break-dancing, ends up as fodder for McDeath’s ads; fifteen minutes later all the magic has been sucked out, and the art itself dead as a dried locust. The media wizards, who are nothing if not Postmodernists, have even begun to feed on the vitality of “Trash,” like vultures regurgitating and re-consuming the same carrion, in an obscene ecstasy of self-referentiality. Which way to the Egress?

vi. Real art is play, and play is one of the most immediate of all experiences. Those who have cultivated the pleasure of play cannot be expected to give it up simply to make a political point (as in an “Art Strike,” or “the suppression without the realization” of art, etc.) Art will *go on*, in somewhat the same sense that breathing, eating, or fucking will go on.

vii. Nevertheless we are repelled by the *extreme* alienation of the arts, especially in “the media,” in commercial publishing and galleries, in the recording “industry,” etc. And we sometimes worry even about the extent to which our very involvement in such arts as writing, painting or music implicates us in a nasty abstraction, a removal from immediate experience. We miss the directness of play (our original kick in doing art in the first place); we miss smell, taste, touch, the feel of bodies in motion.

viii. Computers, video, radio, printing presses, synthesizers, fax machines, tape recorders, photocopiers — these things make good toys, but terrible *addictions*. Finally we realize we cannot “reach out and touch someone” who is not present in the flesh. These media may be useful to our art — but they must not possess us, nor must they stand between, mediate or separate us from our animal/animate selves. We want to control our media, not be controlled by them. And we would like to remember a certain psychic martial art which stresses the realization that the body itself is the least mediated of all media.

ix. Therefore, as artists and “cultural workers” who have no intention of giving up activity in our chosen media, we nevertheless demand of ourselves an extreme awareness of immediacy, as well as the mastery of some direct means of complementing the awareness as play, immediately (at once) and immediately (without mediation).

x. Fully realizing that any art “manifesto” written today can only stink of the same bitter irony it seeks to oppose, we nevertheless declare without hesitation (without too much thought) the founding of a “movement,” IMMEDIATISM. We feel free to do so because we intend to practise Immediatism *in secret*, in order to avoid any contamination of mediation. Publicly we’ll continue our work in publishing, radio, painting, music, etc., to be shared freely but never consumed passively, something which can be discussed openly but never understood by the agents of alienation, something with no commercial potential, yet valuable beyond price, something occult yet woven completely into the

fabric of our everyday lives.

xi. Immediatism is not a movement in the sense of an æsthetic program. It depends on *situation*, not style or content, message or school. It may take the form of any kind of creative play which can be performed by two or more people, by and for themselves, face-to-face and together. In this sense it is like a game, and therefore certain "rules" may apply.

xii. All spectators must also be performers. All expenses are to be shared, and all products which may result from the play are also to be shared by the participants only (who may keep them or bestow them as gifts, but should not sell them). The best games will make little or no use of obvious forms of mediation such as photography, recording, printing, etc., but will tend toward immediate techniques involving physical presence, direct communication, the senses.

xiii. An obvious matrix for Immediatism is the party. Thus a good meal could be an Immediatist art project, especially if everyone present cooked as well as ate. Ancient Chinese and Japanese on misty autumn days would hold odor parties, where each guest would bring a home-made incense or perfume. At linked-verse parties a faulty couplet would entail the penalty of a glass of wine. Quilting bees, *tableaux vivants*, exquisite corpses, rituals of conviviality such as Fourier's "Museum Orgy" (erotic costumes, poses, and skits), live music and dance — the past can be ransacked for appropriate forms, and imagination will supply more.

xiv. The difference between a 19th century quilting bee, for ex-

ample, and an Immediatist quilting bee, would lie in our awareness of the practice of Immediatism as a response to the sorrows of alienation and the "death of art."

xv. The mail art of the 1970s and the 'zine scene of the 1980s were attempts to go beyond the mediation of art-as-commodity, and may be considered ancestors of Immediatism. However, they preserved the mediated structures of postal communication and xerography, and thus failed to overcome the isolation of the players, who remained quite literally out of touch. We wish to take the motives and discoveries of these earlier movements or their logical conclusion in an art which banishes all mediation and alienation, at least to the extent that the human condition allows.

xvi. Moreover, Immediatism is not condemned to powerlessness in the world, simply because it avoids the publicity of the marketplace. "Poetic Terrorism" and "Art Sabotage" are quite logical manifestations of Immediatism.

xvii. Finally, we expect that the practice of Immediatism will release within us vast storehouses of forgotten power, which will not only transform our lives through the secret realization of unmediated play, but will also inescapably well up and burst out and permeate the *other* art we create, the more public and mediated art.

And we hope that the two will grow closer and closer, and eventually perhaps become one.

[From Dharma Combat no. 11,

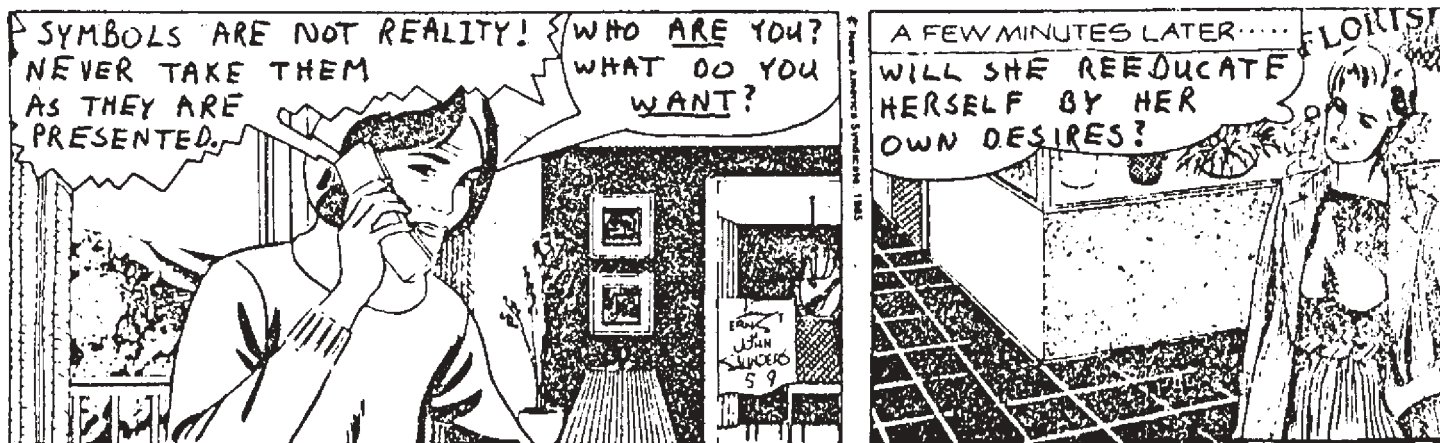
P.O. Box 20593, Sun Valley, Nevada 89433

PSYCHOLOGY Inside and Out

Cultures draw lines to separate the inside from the outside of themselves. The magical pentagram that an adept Faustian magician draws around him as he dares face the realm of dreams, demons, and self-contradictions is a symbolic barrier that he hopes will keep the "good" within and the "bad" without. The Mephistopelean message he begs of the cosmos is a self-temptation to receive without harm both what scares and motivates him. This is a mystical moment; it is also an event currently defined by society as a "psychotic episode."

The distinction between psychotherapy and mysticism is a symbolic wall. It is a line drawn that makes spirituality circumspect and any spiritual assertion "symptomatic." Psychology is a form of behavior control that tells practitioners of "culture" exactly what the acceptable parameters of subjective experience and ritual will be. Currently, it countenances no version of "spiritualism" because society cannot "verify" to itself such arcane notions. This is the same as saying that society mistrusts its members, and if so, perhaps society is on a decline. For however "irrational" may be society's wellsprings, they are to be answered with better than derision.

[BGP



Cultural Workers in Support of YAWN

ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
 Dharma Combat, P.O. Box 20593, Sun Valley, NV 89433
 Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
 Ben G. Price, 814 Chestnut St, Hagerstown MD 21740



ART STRIKE

The Most Radical Gesture

Sadie Plant

The 1980s were marked by a series of 'assaults on culture,' culminating in calls for an art strike in 1990. Challenging all conventions of identity, originality, and the very nature of cultural production, the Praxis project convened a Festival of Plagiarism which reworked situationist notions of detournement and challenged the hypocrisy of high art distinctions between the plagiarism and evolutionary development of techniques and ideas. Plagiarism, wrote Stewart Home, 'saves time and effort, improves results, and shows considerable initiative on the part of the individual plagiarist. As a revolutionary tool it is ideally suited to the needs of the twentieth century.'

But Praxis distanced itself from the purposeless reproductions of postmodern culture with definitions of plagiarism as 'a collective undertaking far removed from the post-modern "theories" of appropriation ... Plagiarism is for life, post-modernism is fixated on death.' And the pamphlet accompanying the Festival reinforced the plagiarists' distance from the postmodern insistence that progress is impossible and an endless reiteration of the inevitable.

'Plagiarism in late capitalist society articulates a semi-conscious cultural condition: namely, that there "is nothing left to say" ... The practitioners of much post-modern theory have tended to proclaim this feeling rather smugly, but if there is nothing to say, they yet demonstrate that there will always be something to sell. On the other hand, there are practitioners active in many disciplines who, recognising the necessity for collective action demanded by media such as film and electronic tape, engage in plagiarism in an attempt to expose and explode once and for all the individualistic attitudes which tend to make all current human activity seem redundant and increasingly alienated.'

The moves against individualism and originality made in the Festival of Plagiarism were underlined by proposals for multiple names. Karen Eliot, the most popular of these, was launched in 1985 as a name to be 'adopted by a variety of cultural workers at various times in order to carry through tasks related to building up a body of work ascribed to "Karen Eliot"' and so 'highlight the problems thrown up by the various mental sets pertaining to identity, individuality, originality, value and truth.'

When one becomes Karen Eliot one's previous existence consists of the acts other people have undertaken using the name.

When one becomes Karen Eliot one has no family, no parents, no birth. Karen Eliot was not born, s/he was materialised from social forces, constructed as a means of entering the shifting terrain that circumscribes the 'individual' and society.

Hundreds of people have adopted Karen Eliot for specific works and projects precisely because recognition and reward — so often the synonyms of commodification and recuperation are provocatively evaded by the anonymity of a multiple name. Multiple names are connected to radical theories of play. The idea is to create an 'open situation' for which no one in particular is responsible.

It goes without saying that few artists accepted the invitation to refuse creativity extended by those calling for an art strike between 1990 and 1993 to which these interventions led. Carrying a provocative ambiguity which incited confusion, the art strike reintroduced a whole range of issues around questions of strategy, recuperation, and the relation between culture and politics. Home argued that 'most "revolutionaries" have yet to realise the importance of fighting the bourgeoisie on cultural, as well as economic and political, fronts' and expressed the hope that 'the Art Strike will go some way towards correcting this oversight.'

Proposed as a means of 'intensifying the class struggle within the cultural, economic and political spheres', and aiming 'to demoralise a cross section of the bourgeois class,' the importance of the art strike was said to lie 'not in its feasibility but in the possibilities it opens up for intensifying the class war.' For Home, art has never been a progressive political force, and the art strike was in part an attempt to demoralise those artists who believe their work to be oppositional or subversive. Situationist demands for a poeticised and freely created environment were only ever bourgeois dreams imposed on a disinterested proletariat by an over-enthusiastic avant-garde. Situationist hopes for an aestheticised daily experience have indeed come to 'reinforce the overall position of the bourgeoisie' and situationist demands for the suppression and realisation of art in the name of free creativity, imagination, and pleasure are reactionary desires for a new cycle of mediations which, 'in the post-modern era ... serve Power in the same way that honesty, truth, progress &c., served the capitalist system in the classical modern age.'

To demand the destruction of art in the name of creativity is

merely a reform of Power. To trade off art against creativity is to take back with one hand what has been rejected by the other. Those who genuinely oppose alienated social relations will not only break with art but affirm the refusal of creativity.

Desires for authenticity were condemned as 'the most cynical of all the pseudo-needs.' Offering 'the spectacle of its own inadequacy' for mass consumption, capitalism 'uses this spectacle as the means of reselling itself to those who "imagine" they have "progressed" beyond bourgeois values in a "return" to the "authentic".' Refusing all mediation and values, Praxis declared: 'ABOLISH PLEASURE/REFUSE CREATIVITY/SMASH THE IMAGINATION/DESIRE IN RUINS/THE PRESENT IS ABSOLUTE/ EVERYTHING NOW!'

Raising questions of authorship, responsibility, and authenticity, these adventures have contributed to debates dating back to Dada's collaborations, Tzara's cut-up poems, Duchamp's readymades, and surrealism's exquisite corpses. Surrealist arguments about who, or what, constitutes the locus of artistic production and responsibility were epitomised by an affair in which Louis Aragon, threatened with prosecution for lines in *Red Front* which enthused, 'Kill the cops, comrades!' was unwillingly defended by Breton on the grounds that poets can never be held responsible for their own works when these are merely transcripts of an uncontrollable unconscious. And it is in the cultivation of this sense of an anonymous, possibly ubiquitous, and uncontrollable surge of interruptive and provocative desire that those associated with Karen Eliot and the art strike have been most successful.

The strike itself, however, is a different matter. The interventions made around the Festival of Plagiarism were conceived as 'the show-down that paved the way for the final conflict of Art Strike,' a last attempt to subvert culture from within before the tactics of sabotage come to an end with the recognition that any participation inevitably enters into a relation of support with the system of values and economic relations it seeks to undermine. 'Only total opposition, both theoretical and practical (i.e., silence), is irrecoverable, declares The Art Strike Handbook in an apparent vindication of Baudrillard's claim that art 'no longer contests anything, if ever it did. Revolt is isolated, the malediction "consumed".' Art 'can parody this world, illustrate it, simulate it, no mistake, when ideologies clash or simply begin to wear out, the most mercenary sign can become a good anarchist.'

Nevertheless, calls for silence, disappearance, suicide, and refusals to participate in a game so difficult to play can have a powerful effect. The end of Dada, and the dissolution of both the SI and the Italian autonomists all testify that 'only the movements which were able to cease, to stop by themselves before dropping dead, have existed!' Absences — of meaning, participation, reality, and identity — can constitute useful tactics in the struggle to unmask the social and economic relations of contemporary capitalist society. But their perpetration must be deliberate and intentional: although the drift into meaninglessness and the free acceptance of the commodification, silence, and apathy invited by capitalist social relations can be provocative and subversive, it cannot be turned into a universal principle which expresses, with Baudrillard, the inescapable state of the world. It is valid only as

a meaningful gesture made against itself. Dada's absurdities were not performed without reason, and even its suicide was a last bid for autonomy. And knowing when to stop must not be confused with the tactics of despair: 'Let us have no more suicides from weariness, which come like a final sacrifice crowning all those that have gone before,' wrote Vaneigem.

The despair invoked by the art strike has nevertheless engendered a variety of parodies of the intensified search for the irrecoverable, the truly radical gesture, introducing a measure of provocative humour to the world in which nothing can be said or done. Proposals by Karen Eliot for a 'thought strike' appeared in *Here and Now*, calling for 'all theorists to pour coke on their word processors and cease to think' between 3 January 1991 and September 1994. 'Thought is a virus let loose on the world by a self-perpetuating elite in order to market the paraphernalia of the thinker — books, papers, pens, art films, word processors, whiskey,' the statement declared. 'Thought — who needs it? We proclaim the Thought Moratorium,' to be launched at the Festival of Stupidity. 'Events already planned include short personal statements of bewilderment by several passers-by. The Festival will be immediately followed by a retrospective exhibition at the ICA entitled "Thought: was it?"'

The thought strike, actually taken seriously by some readers, was quickly superseded by the 'Post-Serious International', a movement which 'becomes functionally inevitable at that point on the alter it,' but 'it never disturbs the order, which is also its own.' The only value of the art strike lay in its proposal of silence, rather than silence itself; the propaganda rather than the deed. It exposed the dangers of participating in a word to which it is implicitly opposed, but the noise with which it resisted recuperation was far more powerful than silence could ever have been.

Rather more optimistic responses to the circularity of all systems of signification are those which adopt tactics of occupation rather than strike. The possibilities of interrupting systems of communication and information exchange accelerate with the potential for forgery: abuses of copyright, anonymous production, and a whole new world of simulation and reproduction generated by the accessibility of new technology. 'The problems of tactics and strategy revolve around the question of how to turn against capitalism the weapons that commercial necessity has forced it to distribute,' wrote Vaneigem in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, and the relentless democracy imposed by commodity relations has indeed facilitated the appropriation of photocopiers, fax machines, screen printing, and desktop publishers to a host of subversive, playful, and deterritorialising ends. Goods produced by high-prestige manufacturers are already faked by a booming industry of bootlegging whose reproductions of Role watches and Adidas T-shirts are often more prized than the mass-produced originals. 'People don't buy these things because they believe that they're real,' said one bootlegger. 'They appeal to people because they know they're a rip-off. It's a matter of taking the priss out of the multinationals.'

On another front, the international Anticopyright network is busy collecting, distributing, and fly-posting provocative posters. 'When a piece of alien information is placed in the sheer banks of

a shopping mall or office fax a fracture appears,' declare its propagandists. 'Instant and anonymous, splattered in a bus shelter or slipped into a magazine rack it is an economic crime enjoyment without transaction.' Attempts to interrupt the seamless circularity of equivalent signs continue to surface.

With both Baudrillard and the situationists, it has to be accepted that anything which is totally invulnerable to recuperation cannot be used in contestation either. The recognition that weapons can be turned against those who wield them is no reason to dispense with them altogether. 'Each word, idea or symbol is a double agent,' wrote Vaneigem. 'Some, like the word "fatherland" or the policeman's uniform, usually work for authority; but make cruciality continuum when things have gone so far

beyond a joke that all appropriate responses have ceased to be appropriate' and appeals for more thought. 'The mass Media will collapse in the face of a population intensively contemplating the possible implications of a magnetic potato for the future of furniture design.' One of the most provocative of these detournement of calls for silence and suicide, 'Metastasis,' was published in *Leisure* in 1990. Insisting that 'revolutionary proletarians' should 'encourage the growth of cancer in their bodies,' it argues that good health 'is the technical realization of cellular creativity exiled into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of the person' and calls for a 'fight against the capitalist recuperation of the creative cell. Don't let the rich get it all.' [end

ART IS KITSCH

HISTORY IS KITSCH

Art Strike (1990-1993)

The General Art Strike (May 1991) and The Perpetuum Mobile

Dear Colleagues!

The Strike as such is an æsthetic/ethical operation on the deformed body of the reigning Myth.

The Strike—by definition—is declared on the territory between Genesis 15 to 24.

This obscure territory is the theological link of the sweaty cause and deadly effect.

The Gustav Metzger/Stewart Home proposition enlightened the social implications of this relation: the Art Strike clearly defined its position on the Market of the Myth.

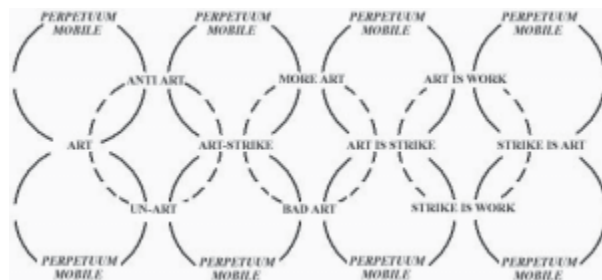
The International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPUT), involved in the cultivation of newly established dictionaries of extra-mythological languages, practicing different forms of Art Strikes under the general title: The Subsistence Level Standard Project 1984W, calls for an international and simultaneous event in the frame of Art Strike (1990-1993):

THE GENERAL ART STRIKE (MAY 1991) AND THE PERPETUUM MOBILE

One could add to the already existing model—



(one can't help but define oneself between the extremities)—
A new element—



These models—and others—are applicable and applied already by art strikers, artists, art theoreticians, art critics, art organizers, art dealers and the public for self-definition and consequently for the development of the Art-Strike-Dictionary which emerges inexorably in front of the awkward and corrupt Myth.

The participants should arrange the «General Art Strike (May 1991) and the Perpetuum Mobile» themselves and/or send their proposal to one or two or all these addresses before the end of April 1991. FRI-ART, Case Postale 354, 1701 Fribourg, Ch-Switzerland; tel. 037/23.23.51. INEXISTENT, Volk Straat 45, 2000 Antwerpen, B-Belgium; tel. 03/237.73.62. RUINE, 15 rue des Vollandes, 1207 Genève, Ch-Switzerland; tel. 022/736.60.37; fax 022/28.55.97. LIGET GALERIA, Agtosi Durer sor 5, H-Budapest XIV, Hungary.

Each proposal will be displayed in May 1991 and/or published by the organizers, and will be returned if requested.

Michel Ritter, FRI-ART
Chris Straetling, INEXISTENT
Tamas St. Auby, IPUT-RUINE

A GHOST WANDERS THE WORLD, THE GHOST OF THE STRIKE!



ASAC (United Kingdom), BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX, England
Dharma Combat, P.O. Box 20593, Sun Valley, NV 89433
Lang Thompson, P.O. Box 49604, Atlanta GA 30359
Ben G. Price, 814 Chestnut St, Hagerstown MD 21740



APR 21 1993

Dear Lloyd -
Needless to say, all of us
here in Baltimore have been
having a lot of fun with
Stewart's art strike YAWN
article. Thanks!
-Blaster Al



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LE GROUPE ABSENCE

APRIL '93

(1.)

THE STEWART HOME ART STRIKE HISTORY (AN APPRECIATION by BLASTER AL ACKERMAN)

THE HOME IS AN IMPORTANT WORK BECAUSE OF ITS GREAT INTELLECTUAL AUTHORITY AND SCOPE AND BECAUSE IT IS STAMPED ON EVERY LEVEL WITH INTEGRITY, HUMANITY, AND, ABOVE ALL, COURAGE; THE HOME IS AN IMPORTANT WORK BECAUSE IT DRAWS TOGETHER, WELL, FOR THE FIRST TIME, BOTH A COGENT AND WELL-EXEMPLIFIED DEFINITION OF CINEMA VERITE AND A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE FLOWERING OF NEW ENGLAND; THE HOME LEAVES US MORE BREATHLESS THAN LAMBERT'S MUSIC HO!; THE HOME IS A RIPOSTE AT LIGHTNING SPEED TO A STAFF OF UNDERPAID SECRETARIES; THE HOME LEAVES OUR NERVES VIBRATING LIKE MANDOLIN STRINGS AT A PARKINSON'S CLINIC; THE HOME IS GREAT PIPE AND SLIPPER SCHOLARSHIP; THE HOME TELLS US, NOT SUCCINCTLY, THAT ONE MUST COME TO TERMS WITH THE REALITIES OF THE WORLD, AND THAT ANYTHING SHORT OF THIS INVITES SPIRITUAL DESTRUCTION, SYMBOLIZED BY A LOVE FOR
(over)

② BIZARRE TRAMP-DRESS, THE FLOPPIER, FLAPPIER AND GREASIER THE BETTER; THE HOME ASKS, IS A PERSON WITH EYESTRAIN BLIND?; THE HOME ENCOURAGES SERIOUS ARTISTS EVERYWHERE TO CURL UP IN A HOLLOW TREE; THE HOME LOVES SEXLESS BEINGS IN THE WOODS; THE HOME HAS DONE MUCH TO ENCOURAGE A RECIPROCAL FEELING IN THEM; THE HOME DENIES THIS WITH ALL THE SIGNS OF EXTREME DIGITAL AGITATION; THE HOME IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON A PROGRESSIVE VIEW OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE FICTIONAL SENSE; THE HOME EXPLAINS THAT THE "TEMPLARS" WERE CONNECTED WITH THE EARLY LODGES OF THE MASTER MASONS, OR PLUMBERS, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT; THE HOME MEANS MORE THAN EAST LYNNE OR BIRTH OF A NATION TO OLAF CAGLE, THE OLD STAGE-DOOR WATCHMAN, COMPLETELY MOIST-EYED NOW AS HE SUCKS ON HIS CORNCOB WITH TOOTHLESS GUMS JUST MINUTES BEFORE STRIPPING OFF HIS STREET CLOTHES AND DASHING DOWN THE STAIRS TO THROW HIMSELF INTO THE STRONG EMBRACE OF A WAITING PADDY WAGON; THE HOME AFTER A STONES CONCERT SHOWS SIGNS OF COMING DOWN WITH A BAD CASE OF THE ROCKING - PNEUMONIA; THE HOME PROBABLY NEEDS A SHOT OF RHYTHM AND BLUES; THE HOME FORTHWITH ENROLLS IN THE MT. ELGON SCHOOL OF REGIONAL BALLET AND - VOILA! - BEFORE THE DECADE IS OUT, THE HOME REALIZES ITS DREAM OF DANCING IN POINT BEFORE ALL THE CROWNED HEADS OF EUROPE; THE HOME KICKS AROUND DISCONSOLATELY ON STAGE, IN OMAHA - IT HAS BEEN TIED IN A GUNNY SACK BY CHARLISH STAGEHANDS; THE HOME KICKS YOU RIGHT IN THE GROIN (BUT NOT REALLY) - IT'S A METAPHOR, GET ME?; THE HOME IS ALSO LIKE SENSITIVE SAFE-CRACKER'S FINGERS CARRESSING THE WEIGHTED TUMBLING THEY LOVED ALL TOO WELL; THE HOME MAY WELL BE THE MOST AUDACIOUS EXPLOIT YET, ON THE PART OF A SINISTER, WELL-GROOMED INDIVIDUAL NAMED RAOUL (MONTY CANTSIN); THE HOME WAS FORESHADOWED SO LONG AGO AS 1883 FROM A PHYSICAL POINT OF VIEW BY FARADAY IN HIS WELL-KNOWN LAWS OF ELECTROLYSIS - AND IT IS TO ISTVAN HELMHOLTZ IN HIS CELEBRATED FARADAY

(3.)

LECTURE THAT WE OWE THE COMPLETE ELUCIDATION OF THE SUBJECT, GOD HELP US; THE HOME MAKES YOUR THROAT ITCH WHEN YOU ARE EATING IT; THE HOME ACCOSTS THE ENTIRE PLAYBOY EMPIRE AT A TIME WHEN THE BEAVER ON ITS HEAD IS STARTING TO STIR RESTLESSLY AND SLAP ITS FLAT TAIL ON THE NAPE OF THE HEP'S PENCIL-NECK; THE HOME SEES SNAKES CRAWLING EVERYWHERE, EVEN IN EXPENSIVE HAIR WEAVES; THE HOME DECIDES THAT ANYONE CAN TALK ABOUT A SNAKE HEAD WITH SQUASH TEETH AS EMBLEMATIC BUT THAT THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO GET A DATE — (I.E., HAVE A NOONER) — WITH VAGINAL CREME DAVIS; THE HOME DISDAINS USING THE WORD "NECKT", PREFERRING "LIVING BRAIN OF TEXAS MILLIONAIRES"; THE HOME IS ASKED TO REWRITE ROSS'S FAILURE OF MODERNISM; THE HOME SCRATCHES ITS HEAD; THE HOME CONSIDERS THIS REQUEST; THE HOME CONSIDERS THIS REQUEST FOR A FORTNIGHT, TEETERING BACK AND FORTH ON ITS HEELS; THE HOME WAVED, THEN HESITATED BEFORE MAKING ANY DECISION; THE HOME POSTPONED ANY FINAL DECISION UNTIL IT HAD FINISHED THE NOVEL IT WAS WORKING ON — MOBY RICHARD, A CLEVER RECASTING OF THE MELLVILLE OPUS; THE HOME FORGOT ALL ABOUT THE ORIGINAL REQUEST; THE HOME WAS JOLTED AWAKE BY THE RINGING OF THE TELEPHONE; THE HOME HEARD A VOICE ASKING, I WONDER IF WE'RE BEING QUITE FAIR TO THAT DESPICABLE CAD "SWARTHY" TURK SELLERS?"; THE HOME, UPON HEARING THE WORD "SWARTHY", IS REMINDED AGAIN OF THE ORIGINAL REQUEST AND SEARCHES ~~IN~~ IN HIS LAP FOR AN ANSWER; THE HOME DECIDES THAT THE OPPORTUNITY OF REWRITING ROSS'S FAILURE OF MODERNISM WOULD PROBABLY NEVER COME TWICE IN A LIFETIME, AND DECIDES TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE; THE HOME SETS TO WORK AND LABORS LIKE A BLONDE MILKSOP (ANDY WARHOL); THE HOME FAILS AT THIS DUE TO A CERTAIN RAVEN-HAIRED CUTIE (DAVE ZACK) IN THE CUSTARD DIVISION, BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, STANDING UP AND PEERING THROUGH NIGHT-GLASSES, THE HOME SAW A TALL, DARK FIGURE ON THE ROCK-CUT STEPS; THE HOME REALIZED THE FIGURE WAS UNMISTAKABLE —

(4.) IT WAS DR. FU MANCHU!; THE HOME SAW HIM BECKON TO THE SECOND PASSENGER IN THE LITTLE MOTOR BOAT; THE HOME SAW THE SECOND PASSENGER*, A MAN WHOSE HAIR SHOWN LIKE SILVER IN THE MOONLIGHT, JOIN THE INSIDIOUS FU MANCHU ON THE STEPS; THE HOME SAW A THIRD FIGURE** REMAIN IN THE BOAT AT THE WHEEL; THE HOME WATCHED AS DR. FU MANCHU, ARMS FOLDED, STOOD FOR A MOMENT LOOKING OUT ACROSS THE RIVER, NOT WATCHING THE APPROACHING CUSTOMS CRAFT THAT WAS SO SWIFTLY BEARING DOWN UPON HIM, BUT RATHER STUDYING THE SHADOWED AMERICAN BANK, THE FRONTIER OF THE UNITED STATES; THE HOME HAD IT COME TO HIM, AS HE DREW NEARER AND NEARER TO THE MOTIONLESS FIGURE, THAT DR. FU MANCHU WAS CONTEMPLATING A WARM, VIVID AND HUMAN STORY WITH JUST THAT TOUCH OF GASH THE FAN DEMAND; THE HOME FELT HIS OWN THOUGHTS TURNING TOWARD HIS OWN GREATEST CHERISHED DREAM — PROCUREMENT AND HAVING A LOT OF HOOKERS WORKING FOR HIM; THE HOME SIGHED, BUT THE EXCITEMENT, COSTS AND LASCIVIOUSNESS OF THE STRENUOUS TASK HAD NOT BEEN FOR NOTHING; THE HOME HAD PUT HIS ESTABLISHMENT ON THE MAP, AND HE HANDLED IT AFTERWARDS IN A SPIRIT VERY MUCH TO THE ADVANTAGE OF HIS PURSE; THE HOME BECAME RICH AND FAMOUS — IN FACT, SO MUCH SO THAT, AFTER HIS DEATH AND AFTER HIS FAMOUS SALON HAD LONG BEEN CLOSED, ANYONE IN LONDON COULD POINT OUT HIS HOUSE, JUST AS IN PARIS IS STILL POINTED OUT THE FAMOUS ESTABLISHMENT OF MADAME GOURDAN, WHO ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO WAS KNOWN ALL OVER EUROPE AS THE BEST MADAME IN THE WORLD, UNDER THE PET NAME "THE CUBANOLA GLIDE!"
(HUH?)

*PROBABLY EDWARD TELLER = END =
**PROBABLY SANTA CLAUS

The 1993 "Spanish" Art Manifesto

A TIMELY REITERATION OF THE 1987 CONCEPT.

The activity of Spanish Art, know mistakenly since its categorization in 1987 variously as "Mail Art", "Networking", "Correspondence Art", etc., or at very worst, "Hyperculture", continues unabated. This is due, no doubt, to the lack of circulation of the 1987 Spanish Art Manifesto, which originated in Florence, Italy, and was grasped only by a few Italian and German "Spanish" Artists and member of AKUCN (Akademgorod United Cells Of Neoism). Though the initial wave of support was strong, it lacked the theoretical coherence to in any way effect the majority of English speaking "Spanish Artists", who, as a result, continued to think of themselves as "Mail Artists", or whatever. Recent events (most notably the persistence of "Mail Art", "Networking", etc.) have inspired this second attempt to set "The Mail Art Community" straight.

What is MAIL ART, etc? Mail art with its derivatives, pseudonyms, and equivalents, is an international subculture of people who transmit units of culture or personal correspondence over the various state and corporate subsidized communication systems (such as the Mail, Modem, Fax, Telephone, etc..) and who usually view themselves as consequently engaged in "Communication" with others in the subculture. The vast propensity of this subculture is an uncritical fetishization of the "form" of communication, which makes up for the fact that the content of the subcultures activity amounts to a heap of impersonal trivia. Like most mind-bending cults, persons engaging in this activity have a very hard time explaining it to outsiders, who correctly recognize the lack of content involved in sending "Personalized Photocopy Collages, etc." to people you have never met. Thus the subculture of "Mail Art, etc." is only of interest as an amusingly lost flock of sheep (a captive audience) to be cynically manipulated by elietists in the know (C.F. The highly worthy Art Strike of 1990-1993). The "International Spanish Art Network" (as it is now known) is so un-selfconsciously starved for social meaning by its own overproduction of trivia that it currently takes only a matter of weeks for a new idea or buzz-words to be uncomprehendingly picked up by the vast majority of "Spanish Artists" (Recent examples: SITUATIONIST, NEOISM, NETWORKER CONGRESS, POSTSTRUCTURALIST, PLAGIARISM, etc.). Henceforth, such openness is to be praised.

What is Spanish Art? In order to make "Mail Art, etc." worthy of participation, one must first determine the single most interesting aspect of the phenomenon and proceed to amplify that aspect until it becomes dominant. Without a doubt, the most interesting aspect of the subculture in 1987 was not its ability to create cultural anarchy or change the world; on the contrary, what was most interesting was the embarrassment and difficulty most "Mail Artists, etc." had in explaining their activity to the uninitiated (parents, friends, co-workers, postal workers, etc.). Usually unable to convince, they often floundered on the edge of sanity, forced into vague and hackneyed analogies to the very "Mainstream Artworld" they pretended to despise. **In order to intensify this discomfort, it was proposed in 1987 that the term "Spanish Art" be used to replace "Mail Art, etc."** The arbitrariness of the term kills any chances of a satisfying explanation for the phenomenon in a single stroke, and causes the Spanish Artist to loose face and self-definition. Spanish Art then becomes worthy.

Comrades, one more step if you want to become Spanish Artists! It is not enough to proclaim to the world that you are engaged in the practice of Spanish Art! You must think to yourself "I am a Spanish Artist". "Mail Art, etc." is anti-Spanish Art. Together we can revive this thing called Spanish Art and change the limited world of correspondence. Furthermore, a campaign of letter-bombings and murders will be carried out in 1994 against all american "Mail Artists, etc." who refuse to adopt the term. We are crazy enough to do it. We urge you to join "Spanish Art" now.

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*We are polluting Art as we are busy
tidying up Nature.*



MEDIA FAST 1992

DON'T BE THERE!

BEGINNING APRIL 22 1992, THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH ARE ENCOURAGED TO ENGAGE IN AN EXPERIMENT OF UTMOST URGENCY. WE MUST TURN OFF THE ELECTRIC ENVIRONMENT FOR A PERIOD OF ONE WEEK TO PERFORM A CLEANSING OF MASS-MAN'S MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT. WE MUST GET BACK TO OUR BODIES, LEST WE FORGET THEY ARE STILL THERE! IMAGINE THE FREEDOM TO BE EXPERIENCED AS THE TOP-DOWN CULTURAL-CONTROL OF CIVILIZATION IS ERADICATED FOR EVEN THE BRIEFEST PERIOD!

IF EVERYONE DID PARTICIPATE IN THE MEDIA FAST, HOW WOULD WE KNOW IT HAPPENED?

STAY TUNED...

N©

Negation of Subversion: Subversion of Negation.

In his article "Plagerism" (1), John Berndt states that the plagiarist act will never be directed against art, since selecting the source is not less creative than the invention of an original. Plagiarism, if recognized as such at all, will be even amplifying when it shifts a forgotten original back into a collective consciousness. Suggesting what is in fact a deficiency, the subtitle of Stewart Home's "Plagiarism"-reader (2), "Art as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation", uncovers the weak point, since plagiarism is not a strategy, but a method. Trying to subvert less art than art ideology is an ill-defined business as long as it is founded rather on the fiction of a pragmatic status quo of art than on a reflected notion of what art is ("Kunstbegriff"). The art market this rhetoric actually aims at is however only a by-scene of an ongoing aesthetisation of the commodity environment, being nothing else but a secularized variant of the early-romanticist project of progressive universal poetry (3) which has perpetuated itself even into today's jurisdiction: art is necessarily what is declared or perceived as such. As Berndt remarks, plagiarism will always be caught up by art, even if the problem of its generation could be solved. His final statement, "only through complete inactivity can we purge ourselves of the capitalist values of 'originality' and 'creativity'", is however imprecise; inactivity in which respect? With regard to what was called the fictitious status quo of art, this project would be, like explained, a justification *ex negativo*, the thesis a circular conclusion. Considering a most capacious notion of art like Schlegel's on the other hand, there is the same result: "Complete inactivity" would then be death, but suicide as its prior condition again an "act", an art-work.

Neoism made intentional use of circular logic and turned it into rhetoric. The Art Strike is the most prominent example of this. The movement's strategy is sited herein, and not in plagiarism. This strategy is a blatantly artistic, because it creates a collective identity in plays of negation and affirmation of a commonly shared fiction.

An individual camouflage strategy is the only viable alternative. Since aesthetic perception is necessarily reflective — according to every non-transcendentalist definition —, and founded on the capability of setting up notions (4), it is at once manipulative, a grip into the significance of an object or process in its material or descriptive condition. An object becomes an artwork as soon as this manipulation is medialized and as the object enters a discourse. Camouflage therefore means to manipulate an object without the manipulation being obvious. If a situation is thus created or altered, *this is art*, but the subject involved is made believe to have accomplished the signification him- or herself, or he/she will attribute it to someone else while the factual manipulator will never uncover his or her involvement.

The appropriate method for this strategy is less plagiarism than fake. A first step could be to use names of really existing persons instead of multiple pseudonyms like Monty Cantsin and Karen Eliot (5). Conceiving further activities of this kind does not require much imaginative skill. (The strategy briefly described here is not declared as my own invention, but on the contrary as a common practice I intended to explore theoretically in the neoist context. The systematization of suitable techniques is of little interest for me.)

Florian Cramer a.k.a. Marty Canterel a.k.a. Keren Elyot

(1) SMILE issue 6/7, vol. 1, Baltimore 1986. (2) Stewart Home (editor), *Plagiarism*, London, Aporia Press 1988. (3) Friedrich Schlegel (August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Novalis), *Athenäum-Fragmente*, 1794. (4) Immanuel Kant, (*Critique of Judgement*, 1790, §23. (5) ©Felix Lott

Additional bibliography: Paul Watzlawick, *How Real Is Real?*, Confusion, Disinformation, Communication, New York 1976. — Ladislaus Farago, *War of Wits*, 1956.

Negation der Subversion — Subversion der Negation.

John Berndt stellt in seinem Artikel „Plagerism“ (1) fest, daß der plagiatorische Akt kein antikünstlerischer sein kann, weil die Selektion einer Quelle nicht weniger kreativ ist als die Neuschöpfung selbst. Das Plagiat, sofern überhaupt noch als solches erkannt, wird dann sogar amplifizierend wirken, wenn es ein vergessenes und sinnentleertes Original wieder ins kollektive Bewußtsein rückt. Indem er die Existenz von etwas suggeriert, was tatsächlich ein Defizit ist, trifft der Untertitel von Stewart Homes „Plagiarism“-Reader (2), „Art as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation“, den neuralgischen Punkt: Der Plagiatismus ist eben keine Strategie, sondern eine Methode. Die Kunst – eher eine Kunstideologie – sabotieren zu wollen, bleibt ein nebulöses Unterfangen, solange ihm statt eines reflektierten Kunstbegriffs die Fiktion eines pragmatischen status quo der Kunst zugrundeliegt. Der Kunstmarkt, auf den diese Rhetorik eigentlich zielt, ist aber nur Nebenschauplatz einer fortschreitenden Ästhetisierung der Warenwelt, die nichts anderes ist als eine säkularisierte Variante des frühromantischen Projekts der progressiven Universalpoesie (3), das sich heute bis in die Rechtssprechung perpetuiert hat: Kunst kann nur sein, was als solche deklariert oder aufgefaßt wird. Wie Berndt bemerkt, wird das Plagiat, selbst wenn das Problem seiner Erzeugung gelöst ist, stets von der Kunst eingeholt werden. Seine Folgerung, nur durch Inaktivität könne man sich der „kapitalistischen Werte der 'Originalität' und 'Kreativität' entledigen“, ist jedoch unpräzise. Inaktivität in welcher Hinsicht? Bezogen auf das, was die Fiktion eines status quo der Kunst genannt wurde, wäre dieses Vorhaben, wie dargelegt, eine Rechtfertigung ex negativo, die These ein Zirkulärschluß. Nicht anders bei einem denkbar weit gefaßten Kunstbegriff wie dem Schlegelschen: „Complete inactivity“ wäre dann der Tod, doch die Selbsttötung wieder ein „act“, ein Kunst-Werk.

Der Neoismus hat sich des Paradox, der zirkulären Logik gezielt bedient und sie in eine Rhetorik umgemünzt. Der Kunststreik ist ihr prominentestes Beispiel. Hierin und nicht im Plagiatismus liegt die Strategie der Bewegung. Diese Strategie ist eine eminent künstlerische, weil sie in Spielen der Negation und Affirmation eines fiktiven kollektiven Identität stiftet.

Eine Alternative kann nur eine individuelle Tarnstrategie sein. Weil ästhetische Wahrnehmung jeder nicht-transzendentalistischen Definition nach notwendigerweise reflexiv ist, auf dem Vermögen, Begriffe zu bilden beruht (4), ist sie zugleich manipulativ, ein Eingriff in die Signifikanz eines Objekts oder Prozesses auf seiner Material- oder Beschreibungsebene. Das Objekt wird zum Kunstwerk, sobald dieser Eingriff medialisiert wird und es in einen Diskurs tritt. Die Tarnung liegt darin, Objekte zu manipulieren, ohne daß die Manipulation offenkundig ist. Wenn dadurch eine Situation geschaffen oder verändert wird, entsteht Kunst, doch wird dem involvierten Subjekt vorgetäuscht, die ästhetische Signifikation selbst geleistet zu haben, oder es wird sie jemandem anderen zuschreiben, ohne daß der eigentliche Manipulateur jemals sich zu erkennen gibt.

Die dieser Strategie angemessene Methode ist weniger das Plagiat als die Fälschung. Ein erster Schritt könnte sein, statt multipler Pseudonyme wie Monty Cantsin und Karen Eliot gezielt Namen real existierender Personen zu benutzen (5). Weitere Tätigkeiten dieser Art zu konzipieren, erfordert wenig Phantasie. (Die hier kurz behandelte Strategie wird nicht als eigene Erfindung ausgegeben, sondern als eine im Gegenteil allgemeine Praxis, deren theoretische Begründung im neoistischen Kontext ich beabsichtige. Die Systematisierung entsprechender Techniken interessiert mich wenig.)

Florian Cramer alias Marty Canterel alias Keren Elyot

(1) SMILE issue 6/7, vol. 1, Baltimore 1986. (2) Stewart Home (Hrsg.), Plagiarism, London, Aporia Press 1988. (3) Friedrich Schlegel (August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Novalis), Athenäum-Fragmente, 1794. (4) Vgl. Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1790, §23. (5) ©Felix Lott.

Ergänzungsbibliographie: Paul Watzlawick, Wie wirklich ist die Wirklichkeit? (Konfusion/Desinformation/Kommunikation), München 1976. — Ladislaus Farago, War of Wits, 1956.