

YAWN

January 1, 1990

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.detrinet.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 from the supermarket or the dept store, any store, any service (nearly)— its all a big cycle you cant do shit about— dont fall prey to the idea that what clothes 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 yrselfes 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 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 *tobe 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)!

YAWN welcomes letters from its readers. Please be advised that anything sent to **YAWN** may be used for publication without specific prior consent being given by the senders. Also, be it known that **YAWN** will not attribute work, unless the content of the work benefits from such attribution. Inasmuch as this is an interactive information sheet, **YAWN** depends on its readers for support in the form of responses and work created for its sporadically appearing output. You need not address the Art Strike in your work: there are many problems to be solved. Tackle one.

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