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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 I 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 its 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 drive 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! Revolote!

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

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