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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 naive, 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 anaesthesia 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 grammar 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

craannies 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 required life: a traumatic 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

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