

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.us/>.

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 sundry 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,

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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 communitarians, 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.

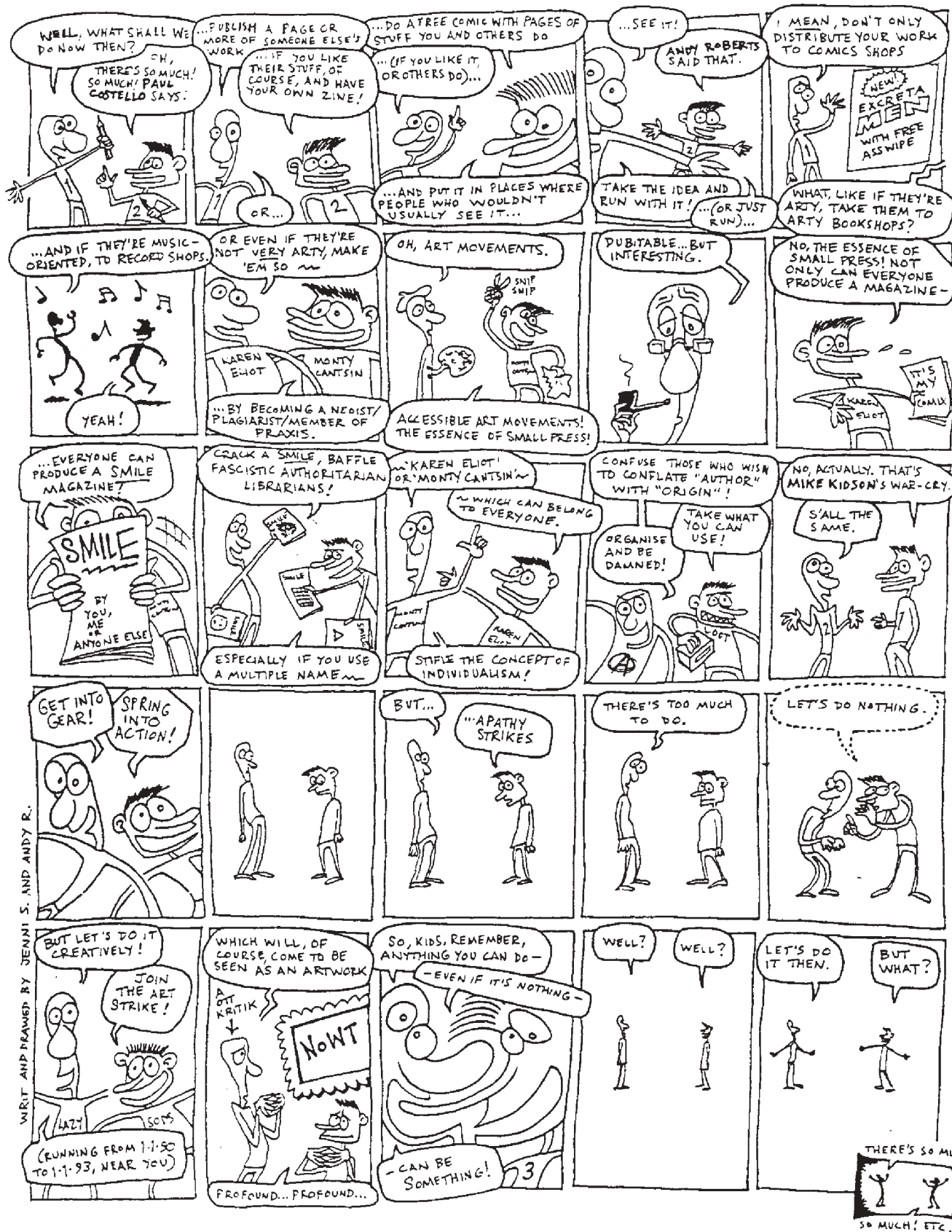
In an article supporting the 1991–1993 [*sic*] "Art Strike," called "Give Up Art Save the Starving," art is painted as the single most cause of the world's ills. I would imagine that the organizers of the art strike are artists of the self-hating variety. Although I'm not enamored of the "art community" 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

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