

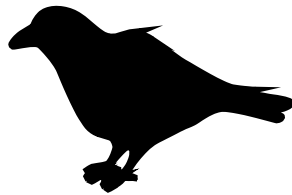
WHAT MEANS THIS

ART

SUBVERSIVE



(Social Movement and/or "Bad Idea"?)



**Shawn P. Wilbur
1994**

What Means this “Art Strike”?

“Art Strike”?

The “strike” ran for three years, without much fanfare. Most of us missed it. However, during those “Years Without Art,” artists—an unknown number of them, in countries scattered around the globe—answered this call:

We call on 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. We call for all galleries, museums, agencies, ‘alternative’ spaces, periodicals, theatres, art schools, &c., to cease all operations for the same period.¹

What are we to make of so provocative a demand? And what are we to make of the resounding silence with which it was greeted by the mainstream media and the art press alike? Certainly, it seems clear that the years 1990-1993 were not in fact “without art.” Nor does the face of the “art world” seem to have changed in any drastic way as a result of the action. Must we then assume that the “Art Strike” was simply a failure—only a little more successful than Gustav Metzger’s attempted art strike in 1980, which failed to elicit any support from artists?

Such a reading is tempting, particularly in this age of post-sixties cynicism about the possibility of “revolution.” However, one of the lessons of the ‘sixties—a lesson present in the thinking of “new social movement” sociologists and “postmodernist” cultural critics alike—may in fact have been that the old models of “revolutionary” action have become bankrupt. Or perhaps the action has always been elsewhere. In his essay, “Political Consciousness and Collective Action,” Aldon D. Morris follows Gramsci and others toward a recognition that much of the work of oppression is done at the level of consciousness.² But he might just as well have followed Foucault’s understanding of power/knowledge—the ways in which discourses “subject” and “discipline” individuals in explicitly political ways. Or he might have followed the protests of the French students of 1968,

¹ anonymous, “Art Strike,” *The Art Strike Papers* (bound with Stewart Home, *Neoist Manifestos*), (Stirling, Scotland: AK Press, 1991) 42.

² Aldon D. Morris, “Political Consciousness and Collective Action,” *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 351-373.

who, despite their “inclusion” in the system of capitalism, still found themselves managed and marginalized. What these no-doubt uneasy bedfellows have in common is the way in which they ask us to set aside our preconceived notions of what is “revolutionary,” who is a “worker,” what is “oppression,” and what are the grounds for solidarity between traditionally separate groups.

These questions are not, of course, new. However, the joint strangleholds of rigid ideological theories of “revolution” and insufficiently multi-dimensional models of social movement analysis have provided us with a series of litmus tests by which we can perhaps too-easily qualify, or disqualify, potential “movements.” In the wake of the various “failures” of leftist “revolutionary” politics, we need to find new ways to theorize political action—unless we are content to assume that it is a dead issue, outside of the so-called “Third World.” What the “new social movements” scholars seem to point to is the inadequacy of doctrinaire disqualification. Postmodernism—when it escapes “taming” at the hands of (most frequently American) critics who want to reduce it to a kind of apolitical relativism—calls on us to reconsider our investment in “modernist” models of “revolution” and “liberation.” The politics of the student-oriented “Movement,” and of “freak” groups such as the Yippies and Motherfuckers, suggests that there are other consciousnesses beyond those of “workers” or “minorities” that might carry a revolutionary spark, just as the tactics of those movements remind us of the range of actions that social movements scholars must be willing to examine.

If we are to give the “Art Strike” more than just a cursory look, or a summary disqualification, we will have to keep these various critical “calls” in mind—particularly as the strike’s participants seem to have come from a particular cultural milieu where the legacy of both the American “Movement” and European leftist avant gardes, political and artistic as well, seem to have come into particularly fruitful contact (conflict?) with a variety of “postmodernisms.” One needs only to read a small amount of the literature surrounding the Art Strike to get a sense of the richness of its theoretical and historical heritage. What remains difficult is knowing if the art strikers were engaged in a vital continuation of the traditions they cite, or whether they are merely engaged in the game of (empty) citation that is frequently identified as characteristic of a certain kind of “postmodernism.” (A case in point is Frederic Jameson’s work where “postmodernism” is required to stand in for not only the “real conditions” of life under late capitalism, but also for the philosophical

positions, whether radical or reactionary, that respond to those conditions. Others, myself included, are more inclined to reserve the term “postmodernism(s)” to designate specifically those philosophies which the “master narratives” of the modern/capitalist era, using “postmodernity” to fill the uncertain periodizing role.)

After immersing myself in the literature of Art Strike, and conversing with a few participants, I feel convinced that we should at least consider the possibility that the “strike” was indeed a significant event in a particular “hidden history” of social protest, despite the fact that it violates nearly all of our expectations about social movements. What is at stake, finally, is not the actions themselves, but the meanings that they were able to assume, and the consciousnesses—both of individuals and of groups—that they contributed to. But it is a long, twisty road we have to go down.

YAWN

The best guidebook I could find to the Art Strike was *YAWN*, a small “zine” by and for “cultural workers.” *YAWN* was produced by Lloyd Dunn and the Drawing Legion, members of the Iowa chapter of the Aggressive School of Cultural Workers and publisher of *Retrofuturism*, *Photostatic* and several other zines—at least until those other zines were suspended for the duration of the Art Strike. Dunn is also one of the musical group The Tape Beatles, which “create” songs primarily through plagiaristic sampling of existing musical compositions. The Tape Beatles are affiliated with the Copyright Violation Squad, another Iowa Aggressive School/Lloyd Dunn project which has helped to keep controversial sampled music, such as Negativland’s “U2,” in circulation, in defiance of court decisions banning its distribution. Plagiarism, with its inherent assault on original creativity, played an important role in providing a common language for art strikers.

YAWN was the magazine Dunn created specifically for the Art Strike, as he suspended publication of the others. It was certainly less “arty” than other Drawing Legion publications. It consisted of a single sheet, double-sided, filled almost entirely with comments about the Art Strike. The material was culled or submitted from a variety of sources, and included a wide range of responses. For this reason, it serves as the best single source for understanding the “years without art.” I do not want to suggest that Dunn presents anything like a representative sample of responses. We have no idea, for example, how prevalent or well-received any particular approach to the strike

was. Instead, we get the sense that Dunn attempted to show the widest possible range of responses, with the result that the entire controversy surrounding the strike may be magnified in significant ways. However, this choice on Dunn's part only reflects a tendency that had been present in Art Strike rhetoric from the beginning.

PRAXIS and Provocation

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 should create at least as many problems as it resolved.³

—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.⁴

The Art Strike had not even begun before its “problems” began to surface and be discussed. And, curiously enough, proponents of the “strike” that were among those who most clearly pointed out the pretensions and contradictions of their own rhetoric. The range of Art Strike proposals and counter-proposals—such as Word Strike, Art Glut, Art Dump—and the emphasis on individual strategies makes it difficult to pinpoint a particular Art Strike ideology, but we can track down a few primary theoreticians of the action. Lloyd Dunn was instrumental in displaying the range of opinions regarding the “strike,” but the original call came from England.

The individual closest to the center of the Art Strike maze was probably Stewart Home. Home's credentials among “cultural workers” are even more diverse and complex than Dunn's. Besides being the primary promoter of the Art Strike, he has also been instrumental in the Neoist, Generation Positive, and PRAXIS movements. He is among the best-known proponents of plagiarism—or Plagiarism[®], as it is sometimes called—as cultural work, and organized the first two Festivals of Plagiarism. Home has also been the primary theorist of the “multiple names” concept—according to which “artists” or “cultural workers” are encouraged to produce work

³ Stewart Home, “Art Strike 1990-1993,” *PhotoStatic 37/Retrofuturism* 10 (Iowa City: Drawing Legion, 1989) 1380.

⁴ anonymous, “Responses to Questions and Opinions About the Art Strike,” *YAWN* 17 (Iowa City: Drawing Legion, July 15 1990).

under shared names like “Monty Cantsin,” “Karen Eliot,” or “Smile Magazine” in an effort to undermine the notion of individual creativity. He is also a published novelist and a musician. His band, White Colors, issued a call to all other bands in England to rename themselves “White Colors.” Finally, Home has built a reputation as a critic and chronicler of the fringes of avant garde artistic and political culture. *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, is among the best sources for understanding this largely unknown samizdat tradition. It continues the “secret history” of works like Greil Marcus’ *Lipstick Traces* and Sadie Plant’s *The Most Radical Gesture*, and provides an interesting, if clearly polemical, dissenting view on the importance of the Situationist International.

The Art Strike provided an arena where most of Home’s various projects could be explored more broadly than they had been previously, and it challenged “cultural workers” worldwide to take what might otherwise have been merely art history or critical philosophy and attempt to forge some sort of explicitly political practice from it. However, before we can assess the possible utility of this synthesis, we will need to understand the various elements that went into it. In the process, we’ll begin to build a sort of genealogy for the Art Strike.

Why a “Strike”?

In unpacking the rhetoric of the Art Strike, we might begin by questioning the appropriateness of the term “strike” for the kind of action proposed. Charles Tilly, in his discussion of “repertoires of collective action,” reminds us that social movements do not have unlimited choices for modes of action. Only a certain number of actions will be intelligible as oppositional under any given set of social circumstances.⁵ What is interesting about the Art Strike is that Home and the PRAXIS group did not choose types of action that would be more recognizably a part of the repertoire of “art” movements. Another sort of “art” movement might have chosen to act through gallery shows or festivals, or perhaps through non-traditional artistic forms such as street theater or performance art. However, those sorts of actions would have required an initial belief in the possibility of “art” to function as protest. This was precisely what the Art Strike’s organizers wanted to contest.

⁵ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978) 151-158.

Art is conceptually defined by a self-perpetuating elite and marketed as an international commodity. Those cultural workers who struggle against the reigning society find their work either marginalized or else co-opted by the bourgeois art establishment. . .

To call one person an ‘artist’ is to deny another the equal gift of vision; thus the myth of ‘genius’ becomes an ideological justification for inequality, repression and famine. What an artist considers his or her identity is 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 reification, that we must reject.⁶

Repeatedly, organizers and supporters defended the Art Strike on the basis of its potential to increase “class conflict.” The use of “strike” is undoubtedly at least partially determined by this neo-marxist rhetoric. The term “cultural worker” is also significant in this context. As a replacement for “artist,” it emphasizes the labor of the individual painter, writer, musician, or sculptor—and his or her position as oppressed worker within the capitalist system—while rejecting the particular reified hierarchies of taste and talent represented by “art.”

This choice of terminology led some critics of Art Strike to accuse the organizers and participants of “proletarian posturing.” However, there is a well-established, and explicitly political, tradition to back up this attempt to bring artists into the proletarian fold. In particular, the informed reader will hear echoes of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* in many Art Strike writings (most often in the form of unattributed, or plagiarized, quotes). Debord’s critique of modern society dealt precisely with the way that consumer capitalism had developed into a “spectacular” system which turned consumers into “spectators,” doomed to consume a seemingly inexhaustible and ultimately empty mass of pseudo-events and worthless products. In such a culture, recuperation and co-optation are the great fears. “Revolution” can be used to sell beer, but retains little or no political force. (With enough circuses, you can ration bread—and forget the roses.)

Home is critical of Debord’s theory—claiming that the “specto-” branch of the Situationist International was the least interesting fraction of that movement, despite its greater renown⁷—but it seems

⁶ anonymous, “Art Strike,” *The Art Strike Papers* (bound with Stewart Home, *Neoist Manifestos*), (Stirling, Scotland: AK Press, 1991) 42.

⁷ Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Stirling, Scotland: AK Press, 1991) 41-49.

clear that he shares some of the same concerns about reification and co-optation within consumer society. Of course, these ideas did not originate with Debord. Paul Lafargue had seen the coming shift toward consumption-based society in the late nineteenth century. And Debord undoubtedly was influenced by the group Socialism or Barbarism—of which he was briefly a member—as well as French Marxist thinkers as Henri Lefebvre and (eventually post-marxist, postmodernist) Jean Baudrillard—both of whom he collaborated with at one time. Home's use of Situationist phrases might still seem a little strange, except that it is likely that Home's potential audience would have known those phrases, and the philosophies behind them, quite well. By borrowing (plagiarizing) them, Home was able to insert that entire critique into his Art Strike propaganda without reinventing it.

Before turning to other elements of Art Strike rhetoric, it may be worth noting that home's invocation of "cultural work" fits a larger pattern of extending the boundaries of labor from within the traditional labor movement. Recall that the industrial union movement, represented by groups like the IWW and CIO, was largely dedicated to organizing workers who were previously considered outside the realm of organizable labor. In more recent years, despite some declines in union power, that expansive trend has continued among more radical unions. The IWW now recognizes both "housework" and "reproductive labor," as well as "sex trade work," among the categories of labor it will represent. "Artists" are represented in the IWW as "entertainment workers." European labor organizations have more consistently reached out to non-traditional workers, particularly in places like Italy, where the Autonomia seem to have been intent on extending the notion of the working class to include all manner of laborers.

The Decentralized Mail Art Network probably received a dose of this broad, and broadly syndicalist, notion of "work" from European correspondents. Recently, I received an invitation to a Mail Art "networker congress" in Florence, Italy—"Free Dogs in the Galaxy," a planning session for the 1995 "telenetlink" between the mail art community and the internet—which was couched in explicitly anarchosyndicalist language. And John Held Jr.'s announcement for a 1993 exhibition contains the following explanation of "cultural work:"

The term cultural worker is used purposefully at the expense of the word artist. Seeking as it does to eliminate the distinctions between artist and non-

artist, between art and life, International Networker Culture views everyone as having the potential for unlimited creativity, whether or not it is in an activity recognized as acceptable or commercially viable by the mainstream artworld. Thus the cultural worker is free to engage an audience beyond an increasingly isolated art community. . .

International Networker Culture is a new movement derived but separate from the mainstream artworld. It is composed of Mail Artists, the telematic community, zine publishers, rubber stampers, fax radicals, visual poets, political and environmental activists. The glue coalescing these diverse communities into a coherent network is shared participation in an open structure. Rather than controlling expression, networking insures individual expression by allowing ideas to bubble up from the bottom.

The Art Strike and the International Networker Culture are by no means identical. The status of “mail art” among cultural workers is contested, but its radical rejection of hierarchy certainly seems to have informed the Art Strike. The desire to (re)integrate “art” with “everyday life” is another manifestation of what Debord called the “critique of separation,” a strand of thought which has occupied nearly every European avant garde from the Italian Futurists on until the present.

Plagiarism(*R*)

“Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it.”

This phrase, attributed to Lautreamont—but more likely plagiarized by him from some other source—has served as a slogan for elements of the Western avant gardes since at least the time of the surrealists. The desire to unite art and everyday life has manifested itself in a variety of ways, but one of the most common has been the notion of “a poetry written by all”—another phrase attributed to Lautreamont. The “automatic writing” of the surrealists was at once an attempt to tap a general reservoir of “artistic” material and a renunciation of the position of genius. (Of course, such renunciations are always problematic, and Breton’s high-handed dealings with a surprising number of individuals demonstrate that renunciation can become the platform upon which another sort of genius is asserted. Stewart Home came under fire for being the “genius” behind the Art Strike, and event which we cannot easily divorce from the realm of conceptual art.) The Situationists dissolved as a movement at a point at which they felt they could claim, “our ideas are in everyone’s

heads.” And while we might be cynical about this particular renunciation as well—and Home certainly is—the desire to live in a world where artistic-political vanguards were unnecessary is a recurring notion in situationist writings.

What is at issue is finally the ownership of art. Home’s PRAXIS group, the Surrealists, and the Situationist International all had ties to the marxian traditional, although these ties were frequently uneasy. The critique of art as commodity, and of the alienating force of the commodity form in general provided much of the fuel for various avant garde assaults on “separation.” The phrase from Lautreamont has been a touchstone because it attacks the myth of individual creativity which props up property relations precisely on the terms of a culture of “progress.” It foregrounds the role of appropriation in modern culture. “Art” in the reified, institutionalized sense is theft, in the sense of the marxian chestnut “property is theft.” Artists support a marketplace which functions primarily to keep the sense of creative possibility in the smallest possible number of hands.

A logical response to this system of artistic property is some form of artistic theft. Duchamp’s readymade’s laid bare the role of the artist’s position in determining the significance, or value in a purely monetary sense, of a given work of art. There is a fetishism at work when urinals are transformed into “art.” The Situationists approached the reification of everyday life into alienated, fetishized categories with two related techniques. Derive, or drift, consisted of wandering through urban settings with no fixed destination, or perhaps with a map of another city. This psychogeographic exercise was intended to encourage the wanderer to see the urban setting differently, in an attempt to break through the glamor of city planning, advertising, and the other methods by which a particular kind of order is laid down over the everyday lives of individuals. Detournment, or subversion, was a technique of recoding existing cultural texts—artwork, advertisements, comic strips, etc.—in such a way as to turn them against the “spectacle.” The famous situationist tract, “On the Poverty of Student Life,” was published in a detourned comic strip form at Strasbourg in 1966.⁸

It is the traditional of detournment that probably interested Home most as he assembled the theoretical arsenal for his Art Strike. His particular approach to subverting existing texts is one of direct appropriation. In the Art Strike literature, it is common to see the

⁸ See Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1977) for an introduction to situationist thought.

words of Lautreamont, Debord, and Raoul Vaniegem used without citation or even quotation marks. Even more common was the cannibalization of earlier Art Strike propaganda, with bits and pieces being used in new writings. Reading through the entire run of YAWN is a very strange experience. One has a sense of endless recombination, which both undercuts the voices of individual participants and parodies the mock-dogmatism of the earliest Art Strike manifestos. It is difficult to escape the sense that while the strikers may have denied their labor to the gallery system, they did not swear off creativity. Neither did they swear off fun. As a friend of mine, who was an Art Strike participant, is fond of saying, "I had a very good Art Strike."

Plagiarism has grown into something of a movement among cultural workers, separate from the Art Strike context. Kathy Acker's fiction—including *Don Quixote* and *Great Expectations*—employs plagiarism extensively. Her *Empire of the Senseless*, for example, plagiarizes a chapter of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* with only minor rewriting. Lloyd Dunn's *Copyright Violation Squad*, as well as his band *The Tape Beatles*, are other indicators of the extreme edges of the plagiarist movement. But "sampling" is widespread, particularly in various forms of rap and dance music. It is the primary ground on which the battle between an essentially imitative form—popular music—and the capitalist system—which must insist on the alienated, original nature of a given commodity—is being fought.

Will the Real Karen Eliot Please Stand Up?

The multiple names concept represents just one more phase of Home's assault on individual creativity, but it is one which may help us to understand the purposes or uses of the Art Strike as a whole. Multiple names were not Home's invention, but he has been the most active promoter of the use of "Monty Cantsin," "Karen Eliot," "Smile Magazine," and "White Colors" as joint identities. In the Art Strike literature, a significant number of essays and interviews are attributed only to Karen Eliot—sometimes with an explanation of the multiple names concept, and sometimes without. (Multiple names have also invaded more scholarly arenas. The journal *Post-Modern Culture* recently published an article on mail art which consisted of an interview with "Karen Eliot." The authors were actually mail artists "Crackerjack Kid" and "Honorina.") The significant difference between multiple names and plagiarism is that the use of multiple names requires that the cultural worker perform a self-effacement.

Plagiarism can much more easily be recuperated as an artform, with “star” plagiarists like Acker and Home forming a sort of standard. Multiple names, if widely enough used, draw attention away from their creators. The difficulty is in balancing the distribution of authorship with a certain abandonment of individual style. In the case of Karen Eliot, the “multiple” has altogether too often spoken with the voice of Home, or Dunn, no matter who was actually providing the words. However, the Art Strike provided some of the best conditions to date for demonstrating the possibilities of multiple names for undercutting the myth of genius that props up the artworld.

Assessing the Art Strike

To this point, the Art Strike has appeared as a “social movement” more by assertion, or self-assertion, than by any of the conventional measures of such activity. It is clearly not a “strike,” in the sense that we ordinarily think of, just as the cultural workers’ movement is not strictly analogous to the mainstream labor movement, despite some connections. If we are to weigh the Art Strike on the scales of immediate costs and benefits, it is hard to see how strikers could have hoped to seriously impact the system they opposed. Resource mobilizations models don’t help us much in dealing with such an amorphous, consciously decentralized—even anonymous—movement. The tools of the “new social movement” approach, however, may prove useful, provided we are very careful not to attempt to shoehorn the Art Strike into some pre-cut “social movement” mold.

The Art Strike displays many of the characteristics of “new social movements.” Strike participants were very anti-hierarchy, and the strike itself was aimed at attacking the hierarchies implicit in the institutionalized notion of “art.” The demographics of the movement were also characteristic, with a predominance of white, middle-class participants. This “revolution” of the relatively privileged could not have been based on the same kinds of issues that drive more thoroughly marginalized group, but focused instead on “quality of life” issues. One of Lloyd Dunn’s fliers for the 1989 Festival of Plagiarism in Glasgow, Scotland used as its (unattributed) caption a key quote from Vaniegem: “We don’t want a world where the guarantee of not dying of hunger is paid for at the risk of dying of boredom.” While this may seem a frivolous sentiment in a world where the issue of hunger is far from dead, my experience of teaching “situationist” analysis to undergrads is that “quality of life” issues

have an often-overlooked potential for showing otherwise privileged individuals that systems like capitalism still do not work solely in their interests. This may be an important step in radicalizing polity “members” against status quo politics.

It is very important that we develop a clear sense of the aims and audience of a movement like the Art Strike, before we try to determine if it is indeed radical. The Art Strike was criticized for being an “in joke,” and there is some justice in that characterization. However, particularly when dealing with “postmodern” or “new social movement” organizations, we need to make sure we can distinguish between the “local” and the “elite.” It seems fairly clear to me that the Art Strike maintained a generally anti-hierarchical philosophy despite the fact that its impact was directed at a fairly limited group. This “local” orientation points to one of the ways in which the Art Strike differed from many social movements. It functioned as a provocation to its participants, as much as it constituted a frontal attack on the artworld. Art strikers were, in essence, withholding from themselves the usual justifications for their particular sort of labor. It was not necessary for painters to stop painting or poets to stop writing, but for all cultural workers to refuse the role of “artist.” If we understand the Art Strike as a local, voluntarily self-directed campaign against a certain kind of consciousness by elements at the fringes of the institutionalized artworld—who nonetheless felt no hesitation about confronting the artistic mainstream with “strike actions” whenever possible—the conscious contradictions and playful atmosphere or the strike may make sense as mechanisms for defamiliarizing too-familiar roles. Play, and the carnivalesque, have largely disappeared from mainstream strikes, although they clearly had a privileged place in earlier labor cultures. The Art Strike is interesting for reintroducing the sense of play into the realm of the “strike,” just as it works to extend the meanings of “worker.”

A “Postmodern” Theory of Social Movements

In examining the Art Strike, I have a sense of working against the social movements literature. Certain oppositional possibilities of decentralized movements don’t, alas, seem to translate well into the languages of conventional social science. It might well be much easier to talk about actions like the Art Strike if we had a more fully developed “postmodern” approach to social movement activity. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to operationalize postmodern concerns without simply eliminating the value of postmodernism in

the first place—its sensitivity to flux, and to the discursive limits imposed on experience. However, we certainly might imagine a sort of postmodern theoretic bricolage—using existing theoretical models (as I have appropriated bits of Tilley), but reorienting them slightly. After Foucault, for example, it becomes harder to talk about simple oppressor-oppressed models. A postmodern social movement orientation probably cannot afford assumptions of “innocence,” either on the part of the researcher or the oppressed groups. It would have to be more sensitive to issues of complicity, without falling into the trap of “blaming the victim.” This would mean that the notion of recuperation would have to be dealt with in a more nuanced manner, since most social groups or actions would always already be implicated in the dominant power structures. A postmodern analysis might also pay closer attention to the ways in which otherwise ineffectual organizing functions to help create “revolutionary subjectivities.” Rather than thinking of movements with a low profile as being “in abeyance,” we might consider a wider variety of kinds of action that we as researchers can recognize as social movement activity. Particularly now that traditional forms of social movements seem more prone than ever to co-optation, we may need to extend our own repertoire of intelligible social actions to accommodate the full range of resistances to power. We don’t yet seem to have a language that will deal effectively with the networks, shifting alliances, and temporary autonomous zones of the post-sixties social movement scene. We need to learn how to analyze leaderless movements, and the roles of individuals as networkers (or network nodes.) Perhaps we have learned the wrong lessons about power. It seems clear that oppression under late capitalism most often takes the commodity form. We are packaged as members of nationalities and “races,” as “healthy” subjects with sexual “identities.” But the packaging process doesn’t change much. Power, on the other hand, seems to spring precisely from the ability to elude packaging, to be multinational, to interlock. Recent feminist and postmodernist thought should have taught us to be suspicious of identitarian movements.

Conclusion: Die Young, and Leave an Exquisite Corpse

By an (as-yet crude) postmodern yardstick, the Art Strike was successful to the extent that it allowed several “theoretical properties” most closely associated with Stewart Home to circulate more freely, and become joint properties. Home constructed a movement doomed to fall under its own contradictions, but also

destined to leave a wake of “artists” less secure in that role. The Art Strike was not finally about overthrowing the artworld right now, but about freeing cultural workers to be more effective participants in the networker culture. Home’s ideas are not yet “in everyone’s head,” but neither are they so clearly his ideas anymore. Karen Eliot and Monty Cantsin made a recent appearance on the internet, when a group of individuals on a MOO site conducted an experiment with multiple names. Spunk Press, an anarchist collective, has begun networking with mail artists, and both have networked with my own zine *Voices from the Net*, which reaches a general audience of nearly 1200 internetworkers who might otherwise not be exposed to any of these currents of oppositional thought. And all of this electronic networking spills back over into the international zine scene, which reaches many people without the money or access to use the internet.

None of these coalitions is particularly promising by itself, but the reach of the combined network is considerable. We must consider whether, beyond the limits of identitarian politics, there is a potential “politics made by all”—not an innocent politics, but one which does not rely so heavily on its discrete (alienated?) status as a realm apart. One in which the networking techniques of power can be countered by counternetworking. Such a “movement” will be hard to recognize, given our current categories, and hard to study. But it will also be hard to recuperate and sell back to us.

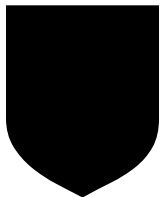
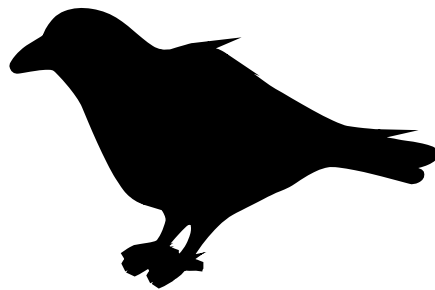
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