

A new dynamism exists — one which has followed Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism to a point where they must be left behind. Where they attempted to revolutionise 'art' we must change life. We seek a form of action which transcends the separation between art and politics — it is the act of revolution.

Each culture determines those forms which its art will take and we seek nothing less than the destruction of this culture. We have an art which is a substitute for living, a culture which is an excuse for the utter poverty of life. The call for revolution can be no less than 'total'. To change the wielders of power is not enough, we must finally change life itself. One must seize direct control of their environment — socially, economically and culturally. We can recognise no power outside of the people, no elite (whether it calls itself revolutionary or not) which determines the political direction, no separation between politics and the rest of life. The same must be done culturally — a 'total' culture needs no experts, no artists — it needs only us.



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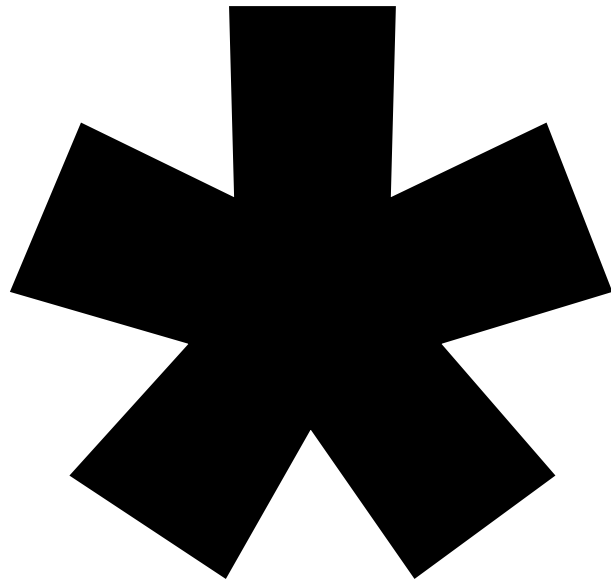
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# LICK MY ART HOLE

THE RIVET GUIDE TO ART

If art and design is understood as the expression and reflection of a particular set of values, systems and interests, then most artistic practice today tends to express the interests of the class that controls and profits from society — the bourgeois or corporate class and their markets. It is these interests that dominate and control the standards of value in art — that defines its emphasis, and excludes its more subversive, egalitarian alternatives. ‘Art is the armchair in which capitalism and the state sits for its own pleasure.’

Likewise, when our society places so much importance on the individual, technical virtuosity of an artist instead of the social motivations and commitments of that artist, one doesn’t have to look much further than the world of art and culture in our society to see where fascism breeds.

These are heavy and rather confrontational definitions of western, mainstream art, but one only needs to experience the fishbowl of a typical art opening to take them as truisms. Herein, the use of the term ‘art’ should be understood in the above terms.

But what of alternatives? For practitioners of a completely different kind of art, these dominant understandings make using the term ‘artist’ rather problematic. Does identifying as an ‘artist’ deny another the equal gift of vision? If so, are we artists, or something else? Should we separate ourselves from the term ‘art’ altogether — or reclaim it for an entirely new set of standards and values, values in tune with our political, social and economic realities? Or, do we completely destroy the separation of art and everyday life, as the Situationists

tried before us? Do we take it one step further, to 'give up art and save the starving', to 'paint all the paintings black and celebrate dead art' as Tony Lowe, Neoists and advocates of the 1990 - 1993 Art Strike would have us do. And why not? Why should we have shows when there are people without shoes?

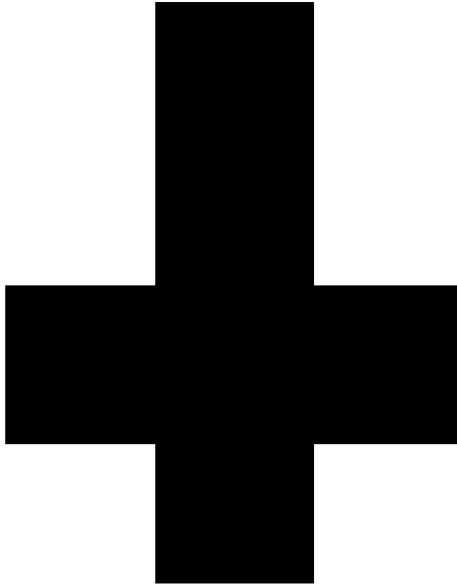
If we decide not to leave art for dead, and instead embrace its omnipotent potential for radical, social change, it will be important to collectively create perspectives and values which clearly illustrate the realities of everyday, working life, and the possibilities of libertarian alternatives. Capitalism and the global financial crisis continues its drunken march of exploitation, playing havoc with the millions of working people who always suffer the effects of the hangover while never being invited to the party. For practitioners truly willing to empower more than just themselves — the barricades — and not the gallery, may be the new canvas on which to create.

Of course, practitioners with any kind of decent analysis should already be 'on the barricades'. Cultural production plays an integral role in the current way of life — it is the means by which a monopoly of content and control by a few over the many is kept in check. Consumption, and the spectacle of consumption, contribute to the alienation and social poverty we currently experience. And yes, that includes hip, avant-garde, 'edgy', political work supposedly with 'something to say' while continuing to hang upon the white (or brick) walls (or pages) of our capitalist utopia. And yes, that includes what you hold in your hands now.

Art which 'criticises the establishment' is reintegrated into it, defusing any useful comprehension of its horror. Since this kind of 'edgy' work often defines itself in opposition to the very thing it critiques, the work — and the artist making that work — has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. In the end these sub-cultures within the art world only serve to diffuse the potentially radical energies of the creative public so that they pose no real, collective threat to established culture. The critique of the spectacle remains an integral part of the spectacle itself, and in turn legitimises it.

It should be plainly obvious by now that art making, in itself, is an insufficient response to social crisis. The libertarian possibilities of disavowing art as an individualistic activity that is somehow special or superior to other human activities are endless. Creative energies could be channeled into any (or every) action one could imagine. To give up artistic privilege, consumption and productivity — addictions which capital has convinced us gives our individualistic lives value — is the negation of art, the negation of domination.

Rearrangement of our institutions — cultural ones included — is simply evasive. A tree that has turned into a club cannot be expected to put forth leaves. Frankly, art — as a privileged, individualistic, elitist and non-participatory act — should be left to die.





The use of term 'art', which distinguishes itself between different musics, literatures etc emerged in the seventeenth-century at the same time as the concept of science. Before this, the term artist was used to describe cooks, shoe-makers, crafts-people and so forth.

When the term art emerged with its modern usage, it was an attempt on the part of the aristocracy to hold up the values of **their class** as objects of 'irrational reverence'. Thus art was equated with **truth**, and this **truth** was the world view of the aristocracy, a world view which would shortly be overthrown by the rising bourgeois (upper or ruling) class. As a class, the bourgeoisie wished to assimilate the 'life' of the declining aristocracy... (and) when it appropriated the concept of art it simultaneously transformed it. Thus beauty more or less ceased to be equated with truth, and became associated with **individual taste**. As art developed, 'the insistence on form and knowledge of form' and 'individualism' were added to lend 'authority' to art as a 'particular mental set of the new ruling class'.

Thus, rather than having a universal validity, art is a process that occurs within bourgeois society and which leads to an 'irrational reverence for activities which suit bourgeois needs'. This process posits '**the objective superiority of those things singled out as art, and thereby, the superiority of the form of life which celebrates them, and the social group which is implicated**'. This boils down to an assertion that bourgeois society, and the ruling class within it, is somehow committed to a superior form of knowledge.

From this we can deduce that art will continue to exist as a specialised category until capitalism itself has been abolished.

— Stewart Home in 'The Assault On Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War'.



Art, education in general, and the university in particular are part of the web of domination and have to be destroyed if we are to be free. As technology, the systematic science of relating to the world through artifice, has developed, artificial 'knowledge' has come to replace experimental knowledge. We 'learn' by viewing, reading or listening to the words/images of experts or performing a set of prescribed rituals called experiments, in a totally artificial environment called a studio/laboratory (and this only after we've taken in enough of the words of experts). In fact, we are taught to believe that what we 'know' is what authority tells us is true and that this is more trustworthy than our own lived experience.

So the university is nothing more than an indoctrination centre for training us to accept authority and the dominant ideology. There may, indeed, be material in a university that can be used in the undermining of authority, but it has to be used in a way that utterly undermines the university itself, a way that counters the dominant ideology with the knowledge that comes from direct, lived experience. And ultimately, that means destroying all universities and schools along with the rest of the web of domination.

— Karen Elliot

"Art—  
wotta loada  
CRAP!"

Hurry up and get dressed,  
bill! we're going to a gallery  
opening tonight  
with Jim and  
Helen!

Oh, great!  
another dingy art  
happening! What  
fun!

That's the art business—  
how else could we mix with  
our social betters? They  
pay our bills!

For this I  
went to art  
school?

Say, Jim and Helen sure  
have a nice place here! I  
wonder where they get  
the money...

Oh, they're  
both art  
dealers now!



Level with me, Jim!  
How can you two  
stomach the art  
game? It's like  
selling sausages?

Wrong, bill! It's easier  
than selling sausages!  
You can't sell bad sau-  
sages, but you can sell  
bad art! With enough  
hype, who can tell?

But isn't that  
dishonest?

Not if you have the  
right attitude! The  
art industry has  
nothing to do with art! I'm  
just moving product!



The whole art thing — artists, art works, art schools, art theorists, art critics, art galleries, art money, the whole dismal show, is so compromised, so hopelessly fucking with the state — fame, greed, wealth, prestige — that it's best left to its own degradation. I just don't want to be associated with it, it sticks to the sole of your shoes. It really stinks and you can't scrape it off. For working people... it's just another part of the show that has to end.

— Clifford Harper in 'Art Against Authority'.



# THIS IS NOT A MANIFESTO

JARED DAVIDSON

**"It is no longer enough today to lock ourselves in our studios and produce culture. We must engage in our world in as many ways as possible. We need to ground our artistic production in the realities of our lives and those many others around us."**

— Realizing The Impossible: Art Against Authority

Graphic design has predominately been, and still is, the tool which beautifies, communicates and commodifies a set of ideas, ideals or products within various tenets of our social and economic relations. Unfortunately, it is fair to say that this creative tool is overwhelmingly used in an economic/commercial sense — consciously or unconsciously using its talents to exploit — to raise profit margins and material wealth for the benefit of a select clientele. While graphic design lends its talents outside of the commercial realm in the form of an informative and communicative visual language, and in academic or self-authorship, research-based practices — the primary role of graphic design as a medium is that of the visual instrument of the powerful; the seller of sales, the convincer of consumers — employed by the corporate body or state-sanctioned by capitalist/socialist totalitarian governments in order to perfect and reinforce their hegemonic positions. And while design academia can wax poetic about the virtues of graphic design and its specialised visual language — conveniently side-stepping more tangible issues — the design industry practitioner, whether one chooses to acknowledge his/her role or not, must realise that their labour is nothing more than the harbinger of consumerism, used in the service of monolithic capitalism and all of its ills. Without graphic design those who sustain these ills of society have no face, no visual identity, no point of reference, and most importantly, no effect.

While recognising in the libertarian tradition that no individual designer, group, government or institution has the right to define the role in which graphic design should play,<sup>1</sup> it is important to explore and encourage alternative design practices in an attempt to counter the exploitative position it has consciously stepped into. Analysis of the capacity inherent in design practices to alleviate current ideologies, and to aid in more alternative modes of social organisation is needed, and has begun in limited pockets of the design world.<sup>2</sup> Design then, must explore the peripheral space outside of advertising; totally devoid of any commercial use — or more specifically, for the movement towards a more humane and libertarian society, that is to say, a more autonomous existence based on self-management, mutual aid, solidarity and direct participation and control over one's affairs. As the potential producer, educator and visual face of social change, graphic design could weld its creative future with more important and pressing concerns than market shares, profit margins and consumption rates.

**"One cannot, in the nature of things, expect a tree that has turned into a club to put forth leaves"**

— Martin Buber

It is interesting to realise the power that graphic design holds within the current capitalist system. Corporates, and likewise, governments, have all tapped into the powerful and almost unrivalled marketing resource that is graphic design. Better By Design,<sup>3</sup> hand-in-hand with business interests, has marched towards a better future for consumerism. And no wonder — what other non-physical coercive technique can instill a company logo in the public and private mind as early as two years old.<sup>4</sup> Unchecked, the increasing role of graphic design as advertising's lackey will continue to have irreversible effect on our mental, visual and physical environment.

In 1964, and again in 2002, the concerns of above were brought forward in the form of the 'First Things First Manifesto', signed by designers, photographers, artists and visual practitioners interested in steering their skills along a more viable and worthwhile path. "Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention...charitable causes and other informational design projects urgently require our expertise and help". Calling for a shift in graphic design's priorities, the signatories of the manifesto recognised the potential for their skills to aid more humanitarian causes. The 2002 manifesto, as a tentative step in reviving Ken Garland's original ideas for today's practitioners, and as a step towards visual 'reform', is greatly noted. However, regardless of how well meaning and sincere the ideas brought forward in these documents were, it is necessary to critique their statements in more radical terms.

While proposing 'a reversal of priorities in favour of more useful, lasting, and democratic forms of communication', the manifesto falls short in recognising any kind of tangible and radical change. The 'First Things First

Manifesto' of 2002 fails to recognise that the 'uncontested' and 'unchecked' consumerism they wish to re-direct is so engrained in the very system we participate in, that anything short of the complete transformation of social priorities, structures and organization will never effect true social change. Proposing the shifting of priorities within the system rather than the shifting of the system itself — as history has proven in both state/democratic socialism, and the farce of parliamentary democracy — will do nothing more than file down the rough edges of our chains. The fact that rampant globalisation and totalitarian corporate hegemony go hand in hand with the current system is the real issue concerned graphic designers could be questioning. In fact these systems, "far from being a guarantee for the people, on the contrary, creates and safeguards the continued existence of a governmental aristocracy against the people."<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, the following text proposes to explore the graphic designers role (if any) in revolutionary, direct action towards the transformation of society, in specifically anarchist terms.

**"It is said that an anarchist society is impossible. Artistic activity is the process of realising the impossible."**

— Max Blechman, "Toward an Anarchist Aesthetic".

he basic ideas of Anarchism have been mis-informed, mis-interpreted, and mis-understood throughout its existence. The anti-authoritarian stance of Anarchism have tended to, in the majority of peoples minds, associate its theories with chaos and disorder. This is simply not the case.

Anarchist communism, or libertarian socialism, is the concern — whether it be social, political, or historical — of human beings living, interacting, and relating in a way that is the most fair, equal, involved, and ultimately free of any kind of exploitation. This includes the many forms that oppression takes — economic or political, capitalistic or communistic, hierarchical or patriarchal, racial or sexual. "A mistaken, or more often, deliberately inaccurate interpretation alleges that the libertarian concept means the absence of all organisation. This is entirely false: it is not a matter of 'organisation' or 'nonorganisation', but of two different principles of organisation...of course, say the anarchists, society must be organised. However, it must be established freely, socially, and, above all, from below."<sup>6</sup> The idea of non-hierarchical forms of organization are central to libertarian socialism — only through direct action and self-management will we enjoy complete emancipation in our lives and the daily decisions that they entail. These ideas are far from utopian or fruitless, as those who fear its potential would lead us to believe — they are no more utopian than the thought that far-removed, parliamentary 'representatives' can intimately and effectively answer our many wants and needs as individuals and communities.

Therefore anarchist communism is not a fixed, self-enclosed social system but rather a definite trend in the historic development of society, which, in contrast with the intellectual guardianship of all clerical and governmental institutions, strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life. For anarchists, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but a vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him/her, and turn them to social account. The less this natural development of people is influenced by religious or political guardianship, the more efficient and harmonious human personality will become, the more it will become the measure of the intellectual culture of the society in which it has grown.<sup>7</sup>

**"As anarchists, we have seen our politics denigrated by other artists; as artists, we have had our cultural production attacked as frivolous by activists."**

— Realising the Impossible: Art Against Authority

It would be wrong to view this text as some kind of blueprint for anarchist design action. This is not a manifesto. Nor is it the justification for graphic design as a specialist, elitist profession to continue in its current form for the 'aid' of social change. As Proudhon wrote to Marx, "Let us not make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance. Let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic, of reason".<sup>8</sup> And while there may be a place for the graphic designer in an activist role, both in an educational and provocative sense, designers must not make the mistake of becoming some kind of vanguard group of directors. Whereas most tenets of Marxism is often justified in both political and academic fields in this respect — defending the role of a necessary vanguard party towards the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' — anarchism vehemently refutes and rejects this concept.

The everyday individual or anarchist design practitioner, through the basic act of joining their libertarian principals with their material production, should, and could, greatly contribute to the transformation of everyday life — towards a more just and humane existence. As educator and mediator, it is the responsibility of anyone with an understanding of visual communication to instill in people's minds a broader sense of possibility, using the communicative powers of artistic imagery to empower, encourage and enrage. It is important to shift societies' many urgent concerns from the fringes and into the public realm, in a direct and unavoidable manner. However, purely negative and angst-ridden critique (while sometimes useful) can only go so far — it is the sense of positive possibilities that need to be associated with the ideas of anarchist communism. The marginality of current grassroots movements must be overcome — the isolation of both activist groups and concerned individual's thoughts must be rendered public, transparent, and shared.

Mainstream media do a rather convincing job of keeping our private thoughts as seemingly isolated and

illogical. It is an important task to illustrate that the critical and questioning ideas we may be having individually are, more often than not, shared as a whole, rather than letting them be diffused and disarmed by hegemonic structures and institutions such as the popular media, the church and the state. Graphic design can publicly and prolifically become the visual manifestation of these shared ideas. "Ideally, art can inspire hope, encourage critical thinking, capture emotion, and stimulate creativity. It can declare another way to think about and participate in living. Art can document or challenge history, create a framework for social change, and create a vision of a more just world. When art is used in activism it provides an appealing and accessible entry point to social issues and radical politics".<sup>9</sup> As the initial point of contact with more in-depth and varied forms of activism, graphic design can act as the essential catalyst for further education, involvement, and more importantly, direct action.

However, images alone are not enough. Further exploration of participation and facilitation in design and the design process can only set the basis for future non-hierarchical, organic organisation. Structures and ways of working with others raised in one's practice could essentially form patterns and guides for the self-organization of a more libertarian society. Therefore the act of making work could be as empowering as the visual message itself. Both collective and personal processes of making work could lead the way in eventual liberation on a more macro level, exploring the 'unlimited perfectibility' of both design activity and social organization. "Anarchism is no patent solution for all human problems, no utopia of a perfect social order, as it has so often been called, since on principle it rejects all absolute schemes and concepts. It does not believe in any absolute truth, or in definite final goals for human development, but in an unlimited perfectibility of social arrangements and human living conditions, which are always straining after higher forms of expression"<sup>10</sup> Allowing libertarian inspired design to collectively explore and illustrate those 'higher forms of expression' can do nothing but broaden the scope and awareness of the anarchist movement as a whole.

#### END NOTES

1 — In relation to the anarchist concept of 'no gods, no masters' — or, that the exploitation of one by another and the dominion of one over another are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other.

2 — Design collectives such as Justseeds, The Street Art Workers, Drawing Resistance, the Beehive Collective, Paper Politics, Taring Padi, and the Prison Poster Project are just a few examples. See 'Realising the Impossible: Art Against Authority' by Josh Macphee and Erik Reuland (AK Press, 2007).

3 — A government initiative aimed at helping New Zealand companies 'increase their exports and profits through the better use of design in their products and services'. Check it out at [www.betterbydesign.org.nz](http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz).

4 — See 'Fast Food Nation' by Eric Schlosser (Penguin Books, 2002).

5 — Michael Bakunin in 'Anarchism' by Daniel Guerin (Monthly Review Press, 1970).

6 — Voline in 'Anarchism' by Daniel Guerin (Monthly Review Press, 1970).

7 — Paraphrased from Rudolf Rocker's 'Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice' (AK Press, 2004).

8 — From 'Anarchism' by Daniel Guerin (Monthly Review Press, 1970).

9 — Colin Matthes, 'Realising the Impossible: Art Against Authority' by Josh Macphee and Erik Reuland (AK Press, 2007).

10 — Rudolf Rocker, 'Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice' (AK Press, 2004).

NO GODS

NO MASTERS

NO ART STARS

communication, conversation, love, collaboration, experimentation, transformation, interdependence, responsibility, exploration, organization, autonomy, play, cooperation, freedom, fun



# LOLA RIDGE: THE POETRY OF ACTIVISM\*

MARK DERBY

In a poem about her childhood in Ireland and New Zealand, the anarchist poet Lola Ridge wrote:

When you tell mama  
You are going to do something great  
She looks at you  
As though you were a window  
She were trying to see through,  
And say she hopes you will be good  
Instead of great.<sup>1</sup>

Her mother's hopes would be disappointed. Lola Ridge was never very good, but in certain ways she achieved greatness. Her published collections of poetry won the most prized literary awards in the US. She was a close friend of Emma Goldman and other well-known anarchists, and also of the leading US writers of the 20s and 30s, including William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth and Marianne Moore. Unlike many of the leftwing writers of her time she had authentic experience of working-class life, most of it gained in mining towns on the west coast of New Zealand. Above all, she showed through her life a commitment to combining avant-garde creative work with political action.

Born in Dublin in 1873, Lola Ridge's father was a medical student and after his early death she arrived in New Zealand at the age of five. Her mother Emma had relatives on the West Coast and in 1880 she married

a goldminer in Hokitika.<sup>2</sup> Her daughter's dedication to writing emerged early and Lola's first poem was published in a Canterbury newspaper when she was just 19. Later work appeared in other New Zealand papers and magazines and in the Australian Bulletin. When she was 22, Lola also married a miner, Peter Webster, a partner in a gold-sluicing operation in the small settlement of Kanieri, near Hokitika. The marriage was not a happy one. Webster seems to have been a heavy drinker and at the age of 30 Lola divorced him and moved with her mother and three-year-old son to Sydney, where she studied painting and continued to publish her poems and short stories. When her mother died a few years later, Lola and her son moved again, this time to the US. She settled in New York's Greenwich Village and became active in the anarchist movement. In 1909 her poem 'The Martyrs of Hell' appeared on the cover of Mother Earth, the anarchist monthly edited by Emma Goldman.

Ridge spent the rest of her life in the US, becoming a celebrated figure in New York's radical literary scene. To support her writing she initially worked as a factory worker and artists' model. Soon she became organiser for a radical educational movement, the Ferrer Association, established by followers of the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer. An early advocate of education as a liberatory activity, Ferrer was executed in 1909 during a purge against anarchist activity in Catalonia. Through the Association Ridge met David Lawson, a young Scottish-born engineer and fellow anarchist. They lived together for almost ten years before marrying.

The couple became a focus of the revolutionary social protest in the period around and after World War One. Their "large, barely furnished, windswept, cold water loft... in downtown Manhattan" became a meeting point for New York's radical intelligentsia and Ridge gave a party there every time she sold a poem or an article.<sup>3</sup> Her first collection of poems, *The Ghetto*, appeared in 1918 and described the life of the working-class Jewish immigrants she saw around her on New York's East Side. Two years later another sequence of poems, *Sun-up*, drew on her unconventional Irish and Antipodean childhood. Together these books established her name for socially engaged free verse.

While her writing was widely admired, Lola Ridge's astonishingly intense personality and revolutionary zeal contributed to her reputation. People "felt the necessity of either defending or abusing her whenever her name came up".<sup>4</sup> She was an early advocate of women's rights, gay rights and of blacks, Jews and other immigrant groups, and she used her poetry to advocate publicly on behalf of the issues she felt most passionately.

*Firehead*, published in 1929, is a long poetic allegory on the execution of the Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, perhaps the worst miscarriage of justice in US history. The two men were charged with a bank robbery in which two guards were killed, convicted in a ludicrous trial and sentenced to death. A worldwide campaign and a full confession by the real robber failed to prevent this sentence being carried out. On the

night before the execution in December 1927, Ridge was part of a large group of people holding a vigil outside Charleston Prison in Boston. Mounted police charged the protestors to move them back from the road. According to an eyewitness:

“One tall, thin figure of a woman stepped out alone, a good distance into the empty square, and when the police came down at her and the horses’ hooves beat over her head, she did not move, but stood up with her shoulders slightly bowed, entirely still. The charge was repeated again and again, but she was not to be driven away. A man near me said in horror, suddenly recognising her, ‘That’s Lola Ridge.’”<sup>5</sup>

An earlier poem, *Frank Little at Calvary*, describes the death of the part-Native American labour organiser Frank Little, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, or ‘Wobblies’, during World War One. Both Ridge and Little had protested vehemently against the war and the repressions that accompanied it. Little said that the war “will mean the end of free speech, free press, free assembly, everything we ever fought for”.<sup>6</sup> In June 1917, 200 miners at a copper mine in Butte, Montana burned to death below ground because the mining company ignored safety regulations. Two months later Frank Little arrived to organise a union of the surviving workers. He was tortured, castrated and lynched by hired thugs in the pay of the Anaconda Copper Co.

Ridge’s poem imagines Little in his final moments, tied to a railway trestle and awaiting death:

Then all that he had spoken against  
And struck against and thrust against  
Over the frail barricade of his life  
Rushed between him and the stars.<sup>7</sup>

During the same hysterical wartime repression another labour activist, the San Francisco watersider Tom Mooney, was charged with a terrorist bombing which killed ten people during a military parade. Mooney had earlier warned that agents provocateurs might disrupt the parade to smear the labour movement. He was convicted on the basis of paid perjury and faked evidence and sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. The long campaign for his release made Mooney perhaps the most famous political prisoner in the US. As one part of his extraordinarily creative defence campaign, during the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics six young people entered the stadium with Free Tom Mooney signs pinned to their tracksuits, and ran around the track shouting this slogan until they were arrested.

In the late 1920s, when Mooney had been in San Quentin prison for over ten years, Lola Ridge wrote a poem about him titled Stone Face. It was printed on a poster alongside a photo of a haggard Mooney behind bars

and in prison clothing. This was distributed throughout the US and elsewhere, selling hundreds of thousands of copies at 15 cents each or ten for a dollar. "This poster travelled across America as a popular form of political protest, affixed onto facades of buildings and steel girders of bridges. It decorated union halls and night school classrooms; all in hopes of raising money on Mooney's behalf."<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps the most widely distributed poem by any New Zealander, and eventually achieved its objective. In the relatively liberal atmosphere of the Roosevelt era, Mooney was given a full pardon and released from jail – after serving 23 years.

Lola Ridge was described by her friend and editor as "The frailest of humans physically and the poorest financially".<sup>9</sup> She was seldom in good health and died of TB in 1941, aged 67. Her *New York Times* obituary described her as one of America's 'leading contemporary poets'.<sup>10</sup> Her reputation is now being revived in the US and a number of her poems are back in print, but she is barely known in the country where she grew up.

\* Adapted from the paper '*Where the Light of their Glory Leads - the international context of the Blackball strike*', given at the centenary conference of the 1908 Blackball Strike, Blackball, 23 March 2008.

#### ENDNOTES

1 — L. Ridge, *Sun-up and other poems* (BW Huebsch, 1920) p. 21

2 — Information on LR's early life is taken primarily from a 2006 paper by Michelle Leggott, 'The First Life: A Chronology of Lola Ridge's Australasian Years', available online at [www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/features/bluff06/leggott.asp](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/features/bluff06/leggott.asp)

3— H. Gregory, cited in P. Quatermain, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 54, (Thomson-Gale, 1980) p. 355

4 — K. Boyle, cited in *ibid*, p. 354

5 — K. A. Porter, cited in N. Berke, 'Politics and pain in Lola Ridge's poetry' in *Women Poets on the Left*, (University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 55

6 — Cited in Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 196 In June 1917,

7 — L. Ridge, 'Frank Little at Calvary', in *The Ghetto and Other Poems* (BW Huebsch, 1918), p. 56

8 — N. Berke, 'Politics and pain in Lola Ridge's poetry' in *Women Poets on the Left*, (University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 61

9 — A. Kreymborg, cited in P. Quatermain, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 54, (Thomson-Gale, 1980) p.354

10 — Cited in Berke, p. 83

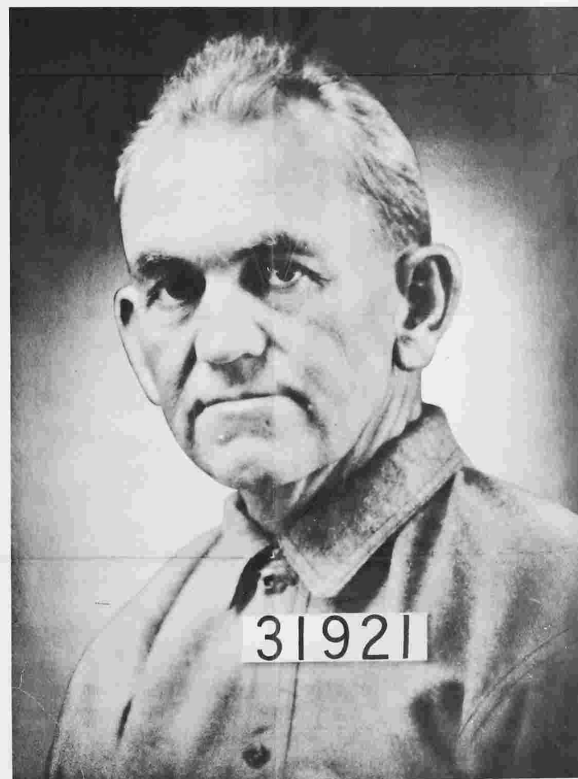
# LABOR MARTYR IMMORTALIZED IN POEM

**STONE FACE** By LOLA RIDGE

They have carved you into a stone face, Tom Mooney,  
You, there lifted high in California  
Over the salt wash of the Pacific,  
And your eyes . . . crying in many tongues,  
Goading, innumerable  
Eyes of the multitudes,  
Holding in them all hopes, fears, persecutions . . .  
Forever straining one way.  
Even in the Sunday papers,  
In your face, tight-bitten, like a pierced fist,  
The eyes have a transfixed gleam  
As they had glimpsed some vision and there hung  
Impaled as on a bright lance.

Too much lip-foam has dripped on you, too many  
And disparate signatures are scrawled under your crag face  
that all  
Have set some finger on, to say who made you for the years  
To mouth as waves mouth rock — you, a fighting grain  
Cast up out of the dark Mass, terribly  
Gestating, swarming without feature,  
And raised with torsion to identify.

Now they -- who wrote you plain, with Sacco and the fish-  
monger and Ella  
Wiggins, on the scroll of the Republic —  
Look up with a muddled irritation at your mass face —  
It set up in full sight under the long  
Gaze of the generations, to be there,  
Haggard in the sunrise, when San Quentin  
Prison shall be caved in and its steel ribs  
Food for the ant rust . . . and Governor Rolph  
A fleck of dust among the archives.



**TOM MOONEY** A VERY SICK MAN in  
San Quentin Prison, May, 1928

“THE NATION”  
NEW YORK, N. Y.  
September 14, 1932

Order also POSTER, 26x44 inches, for Labor Day, May Day, Working Class and Mothers parades and demonstrations, mass meetings,  
Unions' halls and Workers' headquarters. Price: Single copy, 15c; 10—\$1.00, 25—\$2.00, 50—\$3.50, 100—\$6.00, 500—\$27.50,  
1000—\$50.00. Payable in advance to the TOM MOONEY MOLDERS' DEFENSE COMMITTEE, P.O. Box 14733, San Francisco,  
California.

5

ABOVE — Produced by Tom Mooney Molders' Defense Committee, the poster — along with the powerful poem, 'Stone Face' by Lola Ridge —  
not only raised political awareness through the combination of art and activism, but successfully completed its objective: the release of Tom Mooney.



**AREO**

**FEDS**

CELEBRATE PEOPLE'S HISTORY

An important part of my artistic practice has been to explicitly avoid the design industry and all that it encompasses — advertising, profitability, marketing, consumption, and ultimately, the advancement of our current exploitative and illogical system — capitalism. By setting myself up independent of this mainstream conception of design, I have been lucky enough to participate in projects which have been far more worthwhile and productive than encouraging profit margins, consumer culture, and an elitist design minority. Work for the Labour History Project, in the form of Blackball and May 68 posters, as well more recent work for the 'Celebrate People's History' project initiated by Justseeds (a collective of US based printmakers and illustrators) reflects the sort of artistic endeavors I see particular value in.

As my interest in the role graphic and cultural work can play in political agitation and education has grown, I've come into contact with other like-minded practitioners at home and abroad. Justseeds Visual Resistance Artists' Co-Operative, like myself, realise that cultural production plays an integral role in the continuation of values and systems that prevail today — including our sense of identity, and equally important, our understanding of history. Hence the 'Celebrate People's History' project — an ongoing collection of educational and agitational posters designed to illustrate aspects of our past often marginalized, overlooked and outright ignored. When I was asked to contribute to the project I immediately knew I wanted to concentrate on an aspect of Aotearoa's past, or more specifically, our vibrant labour history. A poster on the 'Red Feds' and the influence of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in Aotearoa seemed a natural choice.

It's fitting that my growing understanding of labour history in Aotearoa (especially militant ones such as the forming of IWW locals and the advocating of direct action tactics) was stoked by the Blackball celebrations of 2008, hosted by none other than the Labour History Project. Before that I had tended to look elsewhere for evidence of agitation and class struggle, for traces of politics similar to my own — understandable, considering the relative obscurity of radical labour history in my own (and the majority of people's) upbringing and education. To find concrete evidence of syndicalism, revolutionary unionism and class struggle outside of the parliamentary arena right here in Aotearoa was a truly empowering experience — one I felt I had to share.

So, a growing consciousness of labour history, Erik Olssen's 'The Red Feds' and the opportunity to educate, thanks to Justseeds, has meant a slice of Aotearoa's working class history will be printed and shared with the wider world — in an edition of 4000. And not just as a nostalgic fragment of a past long gone. For me, this type of historical awareness is a reminder that we still live in a society deeply divided by class.

The actions of the 'Red' Federation of Labor, the various Wobbly locals, and other militant individuals between 1908-13 in Aotearoa stand as an inspiring, but unfinished movement to continue to build upon in our present situation.

— Labour History Project newsletter, February 2008.

MATT COSTA

JOURNAL OF THE MENTAL ENVIRONMENT | WWW.ADBUSTERS.ORG | ISSUE 18, 82 | US \$4.00 • £2.10

# ADBUSTERS



## Capitalism

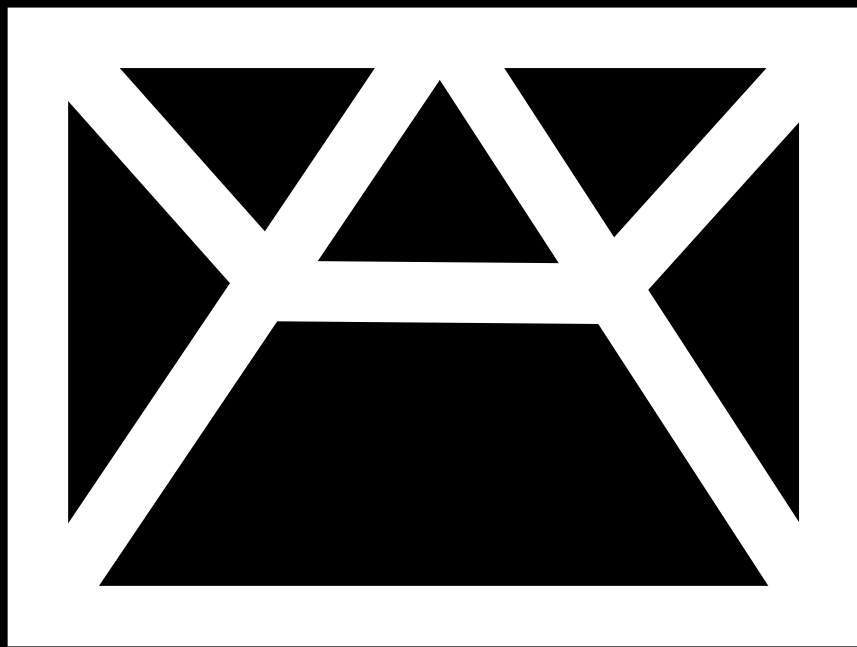


WORLD NEWS  
THE STEALING OF A FUTURE SUPERSTOCK

HOW BRITAIN SOLD OUT ITS CHILDREN

Artists speak out against the war for one week but serve the capitalists all year.

— Black Mask #4



From a materialist perspective mail art is not art, despite the insistence of many of its practitioners. The democratic nature of the mail art network clearly situates it in opposition to the elitism of art (if art is defined as the culture of the ruling class). The sheer numbers of people involved in mail art preclude the movement from being 'officially' recognised as a manifestation of high culture for at least as long as it continues to be practised on such a wide scale.

Most art movements would seem to number between five and fifty members — mail art by comparison numbers thousands. For a formal and organised art movement to number even a hundred members would pose a threat to its elite status — art critics would resist elevating such a mass of individuals to the pantheon of genius simply because such an elevation would bring the category 'genius' into question. Such numbers can only be dealt with by art critics under broader umbrella terms such as Romanticism, Modernism and Post-Modernism.

As an open network the mail art system has enormous possibilities, but for these to be realised the majority of participants have to become fully conscious of the subversive current of which their mailings form an incoherent part.

— Stewart Home in 'Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War'.



# DO-IT-OURSELVES

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHERRY BOMB COMICS

**RIVET:** So I'm not sure if you would remember it, but a few years back I was lucky enough to help my friend Claire Harris with her Frail Sister/True Lives photo comics — I did a logo for her and helped with the cover design. At the time I had just made my first ever zine and Claire had decided to send a copy, along with her stuff, to Cherry Bomb Comics. It was the first time I had heard of the store, and well, I soon forgot about it as I was submerged with uni work — also being in Christchurch meant I didn't look into it much further (this is pre-mailorder discovery!). So when Rivet got going, I decided to ask around. I had heard that it was no longer a physical shop — some even said it was long gone, so it was great to get in touch with Cherry Bomb all this time later. So, my complete lack of knowledge intact, has things changed at all since 2005? Where is Cherry Bomb at currently?

**CHERRY BOMB:** Nah, Cherry Bomb's not long gone at all, in fact, we only closed our doors to the physical shop space in November 2007. We'd been there since July 2004, so we'd had a pretty good run considering we are a not-for-profit store (ie. any money made from sales just goes back into buying more stock). We used to live behind the shop so managed to cover the rent that way, but it was getting harder and harder, so we decided to move out, but it was a pretty hard decision to make, as it was an awesome experience to live in a comix and zines store! Now, we sell our stuff online and also organise events, such as the Zine Fair at Ladyfest Auckland 2008, and turn up to do stalls at things like Craftwork. I'm actually moving overseas in a month, so Cherry Bomb will cosy itself down into its virtual home, a bit less present on the street, but we'll still be operating!

Cherry Bomb Comics achieved quite a lot since we opened. Our reading library expanded heaps as we received a bunch of zines from the Misfit Theatre zine library. That was a punk and zine store in Auckland which closed around the time we opened. We organised a DIY skill share day for young women, held spoken word and film nights, put on a couple of gigs in the shop (which was pretty interesting as the physical space wasn't that big!), ran a book club and a stitch 'n' bitch, started a self publishing space with typewriters and a (bung) photocopier and other stuff too. So you can see why we were sad to close the space, it wasn't just cos it was fun for us, but it was also a bit of a portal for feminist zinesters and dissidents, and a bit of public space that wasn't the mall. Hopefully we can continue to exist as some kind of entity, organising similar events, and maybe one day in the future we can re-open as an actual shop. In the meantime, people can still get their comix and zines fix at [www.cherrybombcomics.co.nz](http://www.cherrybombcomics.co.nz).

**Seeing all the stuff you grrls have done outside of just 'selling' zines really hits home the emphasis on DIY — or more importantly, the level of involvement and process beyond just a final product. I mean in terms of 'art', it's not just a finished work on a wall somewhere, or a zine in a store — there seems to be more emphasis on community in zine making and other alternative artforms.**

Maybe because zines are so swappable, the act of making them becomes less about the object and more about the fluidity of human interaction, the way they move thru the world passed from one fringe-dweller to the next. Also maybe because the art of zine-making is so non-hierarchical and anti-capitalist, anyone can do it, there's no intimidating art-wank scene that you have to suck up to, the community around zines is all about love and inclusiveness! (ha ha ha....) Often the point of producing a zine is to impart knowledge or share experiences with other like-minded people so I guess making a zine is all about community really. In terms of Cherry Bomb, our thing was to make a space and a distro to help propagate zine-making, DIY all the way.

**I was going to ask you where you thought Cherry Bomb fits into the scheme of things — as more of an artistic project, or an activist/political thing — but if you're anything like me, the two are one and the same.**

Yeah, you're right, I think that we pretty much see Cherry Bomb as both an artistic and a political project. We have occasionally come across the feeling that we are too one or the other way for some groups of people (being a community based project, sometimes people expect a whole bunch of different things!), but Tui and I have always been quite clear about how we want Cherry Bomb to look and how we want it to be run, so we're happy with the outcome. Definitely, many of our own artistic outputs are done through the shop, eg. our own zines and comics, as well as music and writing we do, and obviously, being a comic store, aesthetics plays a big part. But in saying that, our aesthetics arise from DIY which is a political notion.

I think the original idea of Cherry Bomb being a place to promote and support comics made by women and queers etc was a political one, and every decision we make, from who/what we stock, to what music we played in the shop, to what posters we put in the window had a grounding in our own political views.

**So with that in mind — are you artists, or activists, or something else altogether?**

I would say that Cherry Bomb is more about culture and community than art and activism though perhaps that is just different language for the same thing... We could also be described as organisers (of gigs, zines, meetings, launches, parties...) which places us firmly in the long traditions of both camps, art and activism: rallying supporters and creating space for alternative thought to be aired in whatever art-form it may take.



**Tui Gordon**, born in Rotorua, currently lives in Auckland with 2-yr-old Lola and four other amazing people. Cherrybomb resides in boxes and on shelves in her bedroom, available for persual by appointment.

**Melissa Steiner**, born and raised in Auckland, recently moved to London where she is a library assistant, and attends many zine events and generally hangs about having a lovely time.

**Check them out at:**

[www.cherrybombcomics.co.nz](http://www.cherrybombcomics.co.nz)

**Or write to:**

Cherry Bomb Comics. PO Box 68533, Newton, Auckland 114.

<b>type of art:</b>	<b>object-based</b>	<b>community / dialogical</b>
<b>general work process:</b>	the object is produced and consumed separately (banking model: artist deposits art work, recipient withdraws it for aesthetic experience — referring to Paulo Freire)	performative, emergent, contextual, situational, communication with audience constitutive of work
<b>methods:</b>	usually one artist forms material into object; often experiential, resonant on emergent work; sometimes contextual / erratic, sometimes executing a plan or scheme, sometimes a scheme with rules for changing rules	<p>a scheme for the event(s), with a defined place for the lay actors or audience; often a three-step process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— planning + preparation of event(s)</li> <li>— the event / performance / dialogue, etc.;</li> <li>— the post-production: generation of documentation, tapes, press releases, exhibition material etc.</li> </ul> <p>This in a recursive fashion, where the process is itself one step in a larger process of artists' course of action</p>
<b>intended effect on viewer / witness:</b>	epiphany, shock, shatter complacency, step beyond alienation, challenge faith in rational discourse	basically, well-meaning rational discourse; cumulative process of exchange and dialogue; 'break free from preexisting roles and obligations' [2]
<b>audience expertise required:</b>	prior aesthetic education, background knowledge of culture and art history will be beneficial to achieve 'adequate reception'; may be vital to appreciate the object	<p>assumption that no prior knowledge of art history is required, but one can distinguish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— first level of direct and immediate insights, communication effects, and any knock-on effects;</li> <li>— second level concerning the sophistication of method and the role of a piece in the history of performance / socially engaged art that will only be appreciated by the art crowd</li> </ul>
<b>intended effect on world:</b>	providing refugium, antidote, point of reference outside system, place to recharge energies (mainly directed towards art-loving cultivated individual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— personal level: contribution to social or political awareness and self-reflexion (all individuals involved: a cluster of possible effects and distributed ramifications);</li> <li>— political level: consulting to effect social change, brokering consensus: 'communicate outside rhetorical demands of official status', reform-oriented</li> </ul>

# ART AS DIALOGUE: MORE DIALOGUE ON ART

RIVET RHETORIC AND REPLIES

The recent discussions I've been having with various people on art has made me revisit both old and new ideas on the subject (as well as the contents of this zine), including a great but rather academic book on dialogical practices, and the separate but not oppositional idea of 'art as intent'. Below is my original post and some great responses I got via email.

Grant Kester's 'Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art' (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) has been particularly helpful in exploring dialogical or community art as a framework for social change, as well as ideas on the avant garde and theories around 'authentic' art. The table from [oturn.com](http://oturn.com) draws on the definitions in the Kester book, though not exclusively.

A dialogical practice based on the process of dialogue, collaboration, and participation in the process of the work often stands in contrast to the 'banking' model of art (to use Paulo Freire's term) — a process whereby 'the artist 'deposits' an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer'. Typical understandings of the avant-garde (not my speciality, I should add) also cloud the understanding of a dialogical practice:

Beginning in the early twentieth century the consensus among advanced artists and critics was that, far from communicating with viewers, the avant-garde work of art should radically challenge their faith in the very possibility of rational discourse. This tendency is based on the assumption that the shared discursive systems (linguistic, visual etc) on which we rely for our knowledge of the world are

dangerously abstract and violently objectifying. Art's role is to shock us out of this perceptual complacency, to force us to see the world anew. This shock has borne many names over the years: the sublime, alienation effect, *l'amour fou*, and so on. In each case the result is a kind of epiphany that lifts viewers outside the familiar boundaries of a common language, existing modes of representation, and even their own sense of self.

While the projects I am discussing here encourage their participants to question fixed identities, stereotypical images, and so on, they do so through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight precipitated by an image or object. These projects require a shift in our understanding of the work of art — a redefinition of aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate.

The belief that to resist being co-opted art must resist comprehension or interpretation, has hindered understandings of dialogical work. 'It is inconceivable for Bersani and Dutoit that one could ever speak with viewers, only at or against them'. The fact that these strategies did nothing to prevent such works being both 'salable' and 'graspable', or the fact that this viewpoint tends to privilege the maker with some kind of moral superiority to the untrained and subsumed viewer, should indicate the need for the move towards fresh understandings. Instead, dialogical work, while retaining similar ends of the avant-garde, has taken a different path, and this is what Kester tries to illustrate in his text.

A dialogical aesthetic, then... involves identifying their salient characteristics and linking these to aspects of aesthetic experience that have been abandoned or redirected in some way during the modern period. As I have outlined so far, these would include a critical sense that takes into account the cumulative effect or current decisions and actions on future events and generations. This represents an attempt to think outside, or beyond, immediate self-interest. The second important aspect of the aesthetic concerns a form of spatial rather than temporal imagination: specifically, the ability to comprehend and represent complex social and environmental systems, to identify interconnections among the often invisible forces that pattern human and environmental existence. The third aspect is a concern with achieving these durational and spatial insights through dialogical and collaborative encounters with others.

These loose definitions question the hierarchy of the object maker/artist, authentic art and its perceived values, and art as a privileged realm of free expression. As Kester notes on Loraine Lesson: 'Lesson defines herself less as an object maker than as an artist who facilitates shared visions'. While not quite 'giving up art' as I noted in other discussions, it is a logical move away from the object and towards more non-hierarchical forms of collaboration.

The second notion I have been interested in is one more relative to my previous posts. Based in the women's art movement and such groups as Black Mask, Situationism etc etc is the idea of art as everyday life. What this means is that art or the creative act could be understood as INTENT being acted out. Whether this intent is a painting, a poem, a propaganda poster, making a cup of tea, street sweeping, changing a nappy, burning down a factory, throwing a rock at a cop's head, or simply living life ó and whether this intent or act is carried out by the cultural worker, 'artist', mother or cleaning woman should be irrelevant. In this way we can 'give up art' and cherish all acts of life, by all walks of life. That this challenges the status of art as high culture should illustrate it's privileged position, and the fact that this approach may seem utopian or unachievable should not negate its worth.

In this way, art could be understood in terms of an activity de-institutionalised and practiced by all, removed from the pillars of the gallery and based back in everyday, creative life. That art has become institutionalised and privileged as an activity to be practiced only by a few 'is a relatively recent phenomenon. The making of art was a central part of people's lives for most of human history — that is, until the relatively recent advent of a capitalist, commodity-based culture in Europe and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At that time the emphasis in art shifted from participants, who could satisfy their own artistic needs, to specialists, who demanded a paying, non-participating audience to buy their 'products'. Essentially, the art-commodity came to replace participatory-art in most people's lives, and art increasingly became a source of alienation.' (G.S Evans in *Art Alienated*).

From *The Assault on Culture*:

The use of term 'art', which distinguishes itself between different musics, literature, crafts, activities etc emerged in the seventeenth-century at the same time as the concept of science. Before this, the term artist was used to describe cooks, shoe-makers, crafts-people and so forth.

When the term art emerged with its modern usage, it was an attempt on the part of the aristocracy to hold up the values of their class as objects of 'irrational reverence'. Thus art was equated with truth, and this truth was the world view of the aristocracy, a world view which would shortly be overthrown by the rising bourgeois (upper or ruling) class. As a class, the bourgeoisie wished to assimilate the élifeí of the declining aristocracy... (and) when it appropriated the concept of art it simultaneously transformed it. Thus beauty more or less ceased to be equated with truth, and became associated with individual taste. As art developed, éthe insistence on form and knowledge of formí and 'individualism' were added to lend 'authority' to art as a 'particular mental set of the new ruling class'.

Thus, rather than having a universal validity, art is a process that occurs within bourgeois society and

which leads to an 'irrational reverence for activities which suit bourgeois needs'. This process posits 'the objective superiority of those things singled out as art, and thereby, the superiority of the form of life which celebrates them, and the social group which is implicated'. This boils down to an assertion that bourgeois society, and the ruling class within it, is somehow committed to a superior form of knowledge.

Now you can agree or disagree with that statement, but it does have value in describing how art has become separate from everyday acts or intentions.

An example (rather dated now, I must admit) of creative act/s formulised by the women's art movement, or in particular, by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, illustrates the idea of life and art being one and the same, therefore denying the privilege and hierarchy that currently exists in the art world:

The chores that accompanied the raising of children became meaningful as she refused to define her domestic role as being anything more than a neutral work-system. Thus, by rejecting the standard "housewife" ideal, Ukeles hoped to revive the idea of housework as a functional endeavor—a ritualistic series of activities that maintain the hygiene of the family unit. Thus, she intended to confront the apprehension and anxiety of falling into a role and of being handed a social image she abhorred. Rather than disavowing her existential dilemma, Ukeles chose to "perform" housework as a maintenance system—a literal art of work existing in real time.

Having read the Freudian historian Norman O. Brown some years earlier, the artist was able to identify her struggle between housewife and artist as resembling the familiar life-against-death conflict used in psychoanalysis. By accepting the reality of her situation as a necessary role in maintaining the household, she discovered the reality of maintenance as a means to the survival of personal freedom, art and all other social institutions. In other words, maintenance art was a necessary part of the human condition. Through this approach to the problem, Ukeles began to extend the references in her work outside of a purely feminist content in order to reveal the conditions of work, and the stereotypes handed to maintenance workers on all levels, whether in public, private, or corporate enterprises. Her mode of "doing" art became a series of actions that acknowledged the basic human operations that supported various institutions and perpetuated the idea of culture. In the course of redefining her own domestic role, she caught the meaning of art as action, art as gesture, art as circumstance within an appointed system or any designated structure.'

As I have mentioned before, I am excited in the holistic approach a creative praxis could take, or more specifically, how creative practice could help bring about positive social change towards a classless, stateless

society based on the premise 'from each according to ability, to each according to need'. The libertarian possibilities of disavowing art as an individualistic activity that is somehow special or superior to other human activities are endless. Creative energies could be channeled into any (or every) action one could imagine. To give up artistic privilege, consumption and productivity — addictions which capital has convinced us gives our individualistic lives value — is the negation of art, the negation of domination. By approaching art in a dialogical manner in tandem with organising for radical, social change is something I feel is worth exploring — no matter if it seems idealistic, utopian or propagandist. As noted in *Community Development* by Ife:

Positivism, modernism and the Cartesian world view has lead to the de-emphasising of visionary thinking. The rationalist, pragmatic paradigm easily dismisses it as 'unrealistic' and impractical... The importance of an alternative vision is not necessarily that it will ever be achieved in full, rather it serves as an inspiration for change, and as a framework for interpreting and seeking change from the perspective of medium and long term goals, instead of being purely reactive. It allows one to seek an alternative, whereas purely reactive 'problem-solving' and it's insistence on being realistic mean being permanently imprisoned within the existing dominant paradigm. If we are to change the world we must be able to say 'I have a dream' and seek to share and live that vision of a better world.

### **DAVE (GROUNDWELL COLLECTIVE):**

First, thanks for continuing to share your thoughts and research with us. I really value the opportunity to have an exchange like this, as it's seldom that I get to actively discuss our work - it's more typical that I make my comments aloud while reading and that's basically analogous to the tree falling in the woods.

I agree with you about the vanguard, and its problematic pseudo-transcendentism. It drives me fucking crazy. The idea that we can shock people out of so-called complacency is riddled with huge issues, the most salient of which being the assumption that individuals lack agency. It serves only to poise the speaker (artist) as enlightened and the listener (general public) as stupid. There's a real violence in it, as it's as hierarchical as the boss/employee relationship, no matter the pretense given to being pro-revolutionary.

The "descent into the everyday" used to be a vanguardist argument, and to some extent it's impact is what we see in the resurgence of social practice today. Ideas tend to have impact over time, and (blasphemous statement number one) perhaps this is the benefit of the institutionalization of the Situationists and other subversive groups — it leads to a proliferation of their ideas that wouldn't necessarily have otherwise occurred... even if it's a watered down version!

I'm intrigued by the idea of art as intent, particularly the notion of "art as circumstance within an appointed system or any designated structure," because of its potential for multiple implications. You can imagine it in several contexts — the art of work can be as multiplicitous as the nature of work — but probably most important for our concerns would be art as self-definition of the parameters of a system. Granted, Ukeles was pointing to a pre-established system (patriarchy), but the potential for self-governance through a constructed imaginary is huge, and essential. You can bring Hakim Bey into it here — the Temporary Autonomous Zone is basically just that, an imaginary with material repercussions that, while liminal, are liberatory. Imagining similar structures that grow large and strong outside of capital is our task, I feel.

One last note on struggle: I was reading this morning about the age-old debate over language — do we say Anarchist or Horizontalist, LGBT or Queer, etc. — and there was a rather basic but profound observation in the article that if we're not taking action, who cares what we call it? Some cultural production smacks of that same lack, so here's to figuring our shit out while we're embedded! Are you familiar with the War Machines folks in New York City? They were my introduction to militant research, which I've been fascinated by lately.

Love and rage,  
Dave.

### **JOSH [JUSTSEEDS VISUAL RESISTANCE ARTISTS' CO-OPERATIVE]:**

Just one more thought, in relation to Kester and the rest of these "relational aesthetics" hucksters: Why call it Art? The drive to pull community-building, organizing, eating, housing, and everything else into the realm of "Art" is nothing more than another neo-liberal scam and vortex, dragging every aspect of existence into the gaping mouth of market relations. At this point the only reason I can see to put anything that appears outside the purview of "Art" into its increasingly vast gaze is to push for the activity's commodification and to render it mute in the face of power.

Yes, we should eat, sleep, organize and fuck, but why the hell call it Art? Who gains from that? The real world effect of Kester et. al. seems to be (at least in the US) thousands of recent art student grads running around doing things that normal people do (having potlucks, organizing walking tours, playing games in the street, setting up community gardens, etc.), but instead of these things and the relationships they develop being ends in and of themselves, as ART they become the stepping stones to cultural capital and Art careers. Otherwise fine activities are magically turned into the compost (read: shit) of privatized art practices and grant applications.

## **MY REPLY:**

No no, they are valid comments, and something to think about.

However, my initial reaction (while reading this at work) is that 'why not call it art?' Could it be reversed? Could some people's goal be to pull art downwards? I can see the way a liberal dialogical practice could become a new kind of professional/managerial class, but why write off all those interested in dialogical practice as liberal? Doesn't object making do the same thing? I fail to see how the same couldn't be said about screenprinting or other cultural production.

It comes down to ends — and while you are correct to say what you say, its not worth negating tactics involved in dialogical methods because of those methods being used elsewhere.

"At this point the only reason I can see to put anything that appears outside the purview of "Art" into its increasingly vast gaze is to push for the activity's commodification and to render it mute in the face of power. "

So you recognise that making 'art' is in itself a commodification, and renders the act mute in the face of power? If so, then surely object making is the same? If you are saying that to call something art is to negate its impact in the wider struggle, to co-opt or to render it impotent, then why continue to make the distinction between social struggle and object making with the term art? Ie do you consider what Justseeds' does as something different? I'm not trying to be a dick, I'm just trying to learn from your experience in these matters.

## **JOSH:**

I think object making is already squarely in the camp of commodification and ART, it is already understood as "outside" of existence. From that vantage point we need to figure out what potentials it has. The trouble with relational art is that it is bringing NEW material into the sphere of neo-liberal accumulation, and entrapping aspects of life that prior-to existed largely outside the purview of market relations.

Art and Culture are one of the main new formats and locations for accumulation in the economics of Western capital. In the drive to subsume all aspects of life under the market in order to extract value which can be converted into profit, capitalists have turned to the culture industry (as well as biology, etc.). Massive investments were made into the arts (particularly in places like London, Barcelona, etc.) in order to try to capture the excess value produced by artists, and financialise the potential value of our production.

Object making is already at the center of the art market, and we (i.e. groups like Justseeds) can try to struggle around the problems and contradictions that arise from that. We can attempt to build a system where artists capture their own surplus value and reinvest it into attempts at increased autonomy.

I want to fight against the submersion of increased aspects of life into this same contradiction. Why would I want to have to fight against the commodification of my dinner party, and someone documenting it and selling it as a "performance" in a gallery context? Don't we have enough to fight against? Right now the struggle is against the base commodification of existence, and the contextualizing of things as art have historically been a move towards enclosure. I understand that making posters thrusts me into the realm of commodification and market exchange, but how do I benefit from turning the borrowing of a cup of sugar from my neighbor into an art project, and thus moving it from a non-market exchange into the sights of capital as a possible location for value extraction? I believe there is a difference between the passive totality of capitalist relations (everything is potentially commodified, all things that maintain life are parasitically used by capitalist relations to keep us alive and producing profit), and the active enclosure and extraction of value from aspects of life previously not directly commodified, and that difference is important to struggle around.

Ultimately I don't think the value of an action in the "wider struggle" is dependent on what you call it, it is dependent on the social relationships it develops in the context it is done. I can see no result of the naming of things as art except as an entry into further commodification.

Josh.

# SMILE

Issue 3 30p Free to Sheffilters



**SMILE BACK AT THE RULING CLASS**

SMILE emerged out of the Neoist 'Cultural Conspiracy,' an obscure pseudo-movement that was initiated in Canada in 1977 by a Hungarian correspondence and performance artist named Istvan Kantor. Kantor, at the suggestion of fellow mail artist David Zack, assumed the name Monty Cantsin and for the next five years produced work under this name. Zack retrieved the concept of the 'multiple name' as a critique of bourgeois notions of individuality from the Berlin Dada movement. In theory anyone who wanted to could produce work (publications, music, performances, etc.) using the Cantsin identity. In fact, for several years only Kantor used the name and it became associated primarily with his activities. This led to the creation in 1984 of a second 'multiple identity,' Karen Eliot. Around the same time Stewart Home, an English Neoist, suggested the creation of a multiple identity magazine to be called SMILE.

There are now a number of different versions of SMILE magazine being published, throughout Europe, England, and the U.S. The Eliot and Cantsin names, as well as SMILE magazine, are available and open for any and all to use.

Neoist practice is characterized by an often deliberate confusion of meaning, intention, and identity. For them, to be artists in a society in which 'culture' in all its forms (fine art, television, advertising) is a primary agent of political domination is an inherently contradictory act. Art privileges the very values of 'individuality' and 'creativity' that are constantly denied by the economic reality of capitalism. Thus, their relationship to their own 'creativity' can only be equivocal: 'Today we are no longer stupid enough to imagine that what we do is new, or even that such an assertion does not imply a progression and hence a certain 'newness'. We will continue to repeat the same old gestures with increasing unoriginality.' Neoism elaborates its cultural critique through three interrelated projects developed specifically in SMILE magazine: multiple identities, plagiarism, and the 'art strike.' The multiple identity concept is aimed at undermining the false individualism of capitalist society: '...capitalism controls by naming and describing... by rendering names meaningless we make control impossible.' SMILE also engages in a process of rampant plagiarism. They steal material not only from outside sources (Henry Flynt's 'Blueprint for a Higher Civilization', for example) but from other issues and version of SMILE as well.

— From 'Art Press Review'.

**X**

# ART STRIKE 1990-1993

KAREN ELIOT INTERVIEWED BY SCOTT MACLEOD (1989)

Karen Eliot is not a specific, or identifiable, human being. It is a name adopted by a variety of cultural workers at various times in order to carry through tasks related to building up a body of work ascribed to 'Karen Eliot'. One of the purposes of many different individuals using the same name is to highlight the problems thrown up by the various mental sets pertaining to identity, individuality, originality, value and truth. 'Anybody' can use the name Karen Eliot but the extent to which it is used is limited by the fact that 'multiple name concepts' are neither widely known nor understood. Since the Karen Eliot project was launched in 1985 (at the same time as the proposal of the 1990-1993 Art Strike), around one hundred individuals have operated within the parameters of the 'identity/context' (at the time of writing — Ed). Considering the difficulties involved in persuading anyone to 'invest' their time in something which is unlikely to bring them much 'personal reward' (in terms of cultural recognition etc.) this number is not without significance.

## **SCOTT MACLEOD: Tell me about Art Strike.**

KAREN ELIOT: The premise is that an Art Strike should be held from January 1st, 1990 to January 1st, 1993. The strike will force the closure of galleries, 'modern' art museums, agencies, 'alternative' art spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools, etc. All the educational, distributional, and critical mechanisms by which art both as an ideology and as a commodity is propagated.

## **What do your artist friends think of all this?**

Their reactions are a mirror image of the response we got to an earlier project — the Festival of Plagiarism.

With the festival, everyone was initially confused about what the relationship between plagiarism and what they thought they were doing. Then they got very excited by the idea and saw lots of possibilities in it. With the Art Strike, most people's initial response is favourable, it's only a bit later that fundamental disagreements arise.

**So you think the use of the word 'strike' could be responsible for the initial enthusiasm?**

Yes I do. The term has certain connotations in England which I don't think it has here (ie. in the United States) — there's a very different experience and perception of labour movements in Europe.

**Was there a conscious decision to use the term 'strike' which was based on those connotations?**

A conscious decision? Gustav Metzger used the term 'Art Strike' in 1974. He called for a strike between 1977 and 1980, so there's a historical precedent. However there are significant differences between that earlier Art Strike and our own — Metzger's activity was primarily directed towards destroying those institutions, commercial galleries and so on, which appeared to him to have an adverse effect on artistic production. It was set up in the classic hero/villain model. Which might account for the difficulties Metzger had attracting support for the strike. In fact, no one joined him! (Although it wasn't a complete failure — by rejecting the role as artist and refusing to produce art, Metzger demonstrated the fallacy of the popular idea of artists as individuals possessed by an uncontrollable and unique creative urge).

**It must have been, must be, hard to convince artists or anyone else that going on strike is a good idea.**

Well, the Art Strike is not a good idea. It's a bad idea from the point of view of anyone trying to make a career out of art. It's a bad idea from many perspectives, and that does make things a bit more difficult — even though our aims in organising an Art Strike is completely different from Metzger's. We're addressing a far broader range of issues than Metzger and unlike him we don't necessarily expect the mechanics of a strike to operate in the same way within the realm of culture as they would in the economic sphere. Rather than attempting to disrupt and destroy those institutions which affect production and distribution of art products, the 1990 Art Strike is principally focused on the role of the artist. On how the artist defines her or his identity, on how that identity affects the artist's ability to engage with the surrounding culture.

**So, Art Strike is a bad idea and it's not really what it says it is, it's not really a strike against the gallery system or the commodity system.**

We've had endless discussions about the appropriateness of the term 'strike', about its efficacy in this situation. At one point we tried to change the name to 'Refusal of Creativity' but this phrase just didn't catch on. We found that people responded to the term 'Art Strike' because it's confrontational and brings together ideas from what are traditionally considered to be two autonomous realms — the economic and the cultural. In the syndicalist tradition, which has had an influence on our thinking, the strike is ultimately the means

of revolution — far more is at issue than a simple hourly-wage increase. As far as we're concerned, the Art Strike is a strike. It's a denial of product and a denial of labour. Like the syndicalist general strike, the issues being discussed range from economic to those of revolution and self-determination. We're trying to achieve large-scale change in our relationships with what the bourgeois art establishment alleges are 'aesthetic' objects and relationships. We decided to describe our activities as a strike to make our political, economic and moral motivations explicit. And we hope the use of this term will encourage active rather than passive engagement with the issues.

**And yet you've said the Art Strike is a bad idea.**

It probably is a bad idea if one conceives of it as taking the shape of the classic strike within the economic sphere, and for several reasons. If one were naive enough to attempt to disable certain forms of commodity culture through the organisation of artists along trade union lines, then one would be bound to fail because the vast majority of artists would scab. Artists typically view themselves as isolated producers in competition with each other — they lack the solidarity upon which successful strikes are built. And even if all the artists in the world did without labour for three years, or even ten or twenty years, such a strike might still fail to have much impact within the economic, or even cultural, sphere. Within capitalism, art is a product which, if withheld, can easily be replaced by classic cars, artificial sex partners, and the like. However I'm not trying to say that art is a mere appendage of economics. Anyone can see that there is a dynamic interaction between culture, economics and politics. All I'm saying is that there are an almost infinite variety of substitutes for the ideological and economic functions with which art services capitalist society. The whole point of the Art Strike is that it is a means of intensifying the class struggle within the cultural, economic and political spheres. If the art strike succeeds in demoralising a cross section of the bourgeois class then it will have succeeded.

**So artists form a faction within the bourgeoisie and you're hoping to demoralise them?**

Yes, artists are one group our activities are intended to demoralise. There's an attitude among artists that they're in touch with a higher discourse, a meta-ethics if you will, which frames their activities within different ethical standards to those of other people. So what we are trying to do with the Art Strike is call into question this notion which artists hold, that they are somehow exempt from the responsibilities of engagement with the issues of their own culture. The attitude that artists are engaged in a pursuit which is somehow separate from other human activities. This attitude creates an ideological justification for hierarchical divisions. It will be difficult to convince 'art producers' to take an objective look at their own attitudes and activities but this is no reason to be pessimistic about our chances of significant success, to demoralise a sizeable proportion of artists so they will abandon their present cultural pursuits.

**YAWN**

SPORADIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

May 1, 1991

Nº 27

WHEN YOU FACE UP TO THE FACT THAT THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE ARTIST

# WHY STRIKE

IS NO LONGER VERY USEFUL, A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF FREEDOM BECOMES

# FOR ONE DAY

POSSIBLE. YOU CAN BEGIN TO APPLY CREATIVITY TO DAILY LIFE, RATHER THAN TO THE

# WHEN YOU

INSULAR, WEAK REALM OF ART, WHICH SUPPLIES US WITH FLICKERING SHADOWS.

# CAN STRIKE

WHEN THERE IS A WORLD OF PROBLEMS TO BE CONFRONTED. ART MAKING IS NOT IN

# FOR LIFE?

ITSELF A SUFFICIENT RESPONSE TO SOCIAL CRISES. REJECT ART. EMBRACE LIFE

YAWN, P.O. Box 227, Iowa City IA 52244

**What I'm trying to do is point to a future when art will no longer exist as a category separate from life.**

— Jerry Dreva

# BLACK MASK

No. 1

NOV. 1966

5 Cents

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A new spirit is rising. Like the streets of Watts we burn with revolution. We assault your Gods - - We sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS - - our struggle cannot be hung on walls. Let the past fall under the blows of revolt. The guerilla, the blacks, the men of the future, we are all at your heels. Goddamn your culture, your science, your art. What purpose do they serve? Your mass-murder cannot be concealed. The industrialist, the banker, the bourgeoisie, with their unlimited pretense and vulgarity, continue to stockpile art while they slaughter humanity. Your lie has failed. The world is rising against your oppression. There are men at the gates seeking a new world. The machine, the rocket, the conquering of space and time, these are the seeds of the future which, freed from your barbarism, will carry us forward. We are ready - -

LET THE STRUGGLE BEGIN.

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Bourgeois culture is the enemy as is the bourgeois system itself. Not only the Rembrandts and Goethes but modernists/post-modernists also will find themselves on the scrapheap of western culture. Our history merely teaches us how to succeed at the expense of others. No artist can be anything other than the bedmate of the business man and the imperialist. Therefore it is not enough to institute a revolution of style and content (which only perpetuates the culture by giving it new blood) — culture itself must be destroyed. For no matter how dissident the revolt, the bourgeoisie enjoys it — it creates subjects for its magazine culture — they absorb the scene without living it. And so their lust for distraction is satisfied by every multiplying shit-isms. A whole new business has grown on the end of culture announced by Dada and Surrealism — a new slick non-culture, Institutionalised Dada...

Though the early movements (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism etc.) were vital as a spirit, a state of fury, their degeneracy into object art was already inherent in their safe adoption of the 'ism'. All 'isms' and ideologies are the rendering of thought which is alive into formula which are easy substitutes for real activity...

It is not enough to talk — we need to place dynamite at the very foundations themselves, not just tear off its branches. Art as alienation — the inevitable outcome of a culture (itself the result of a socio-economic system) which is divorced from real life. Nothing short of a complete social revolution can end the separation which exists between culture and life — the two are inseparable...

Can any system which is economically based on hierarchical organisation be free from the cultural hierarchy of artists and the tyranny of experts?

Yet we ourselves must not fall into the trap. Either we are propelled to action or it is meaningless.

— 'Culture and Revolution' by Black Mask. Taken from 'Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker'.



It is a great irony that the myth of the artist celebrates suffering, while it is those who have never heard of art, those enduring famine and drought and endemic diseases, who are the true poor and wretched of our world.

Art is now defined by a self-perpetuating elite to be marketed as an international commodity, a safe investment for the rich who have everything. But to call one person an artist is to deny another the equal gift of vision — and to deny all people equality is to enforce inequality, repression and famine.

Fictions occupy our minds and art has become a product because we believe ourselves and our world to be impervious to fundamental change. So we escape into art. It is our ability to transform this world, to control our consciousness, that withers on the vine.

We need to control our own minds, to behave as if the revolution has already taken place. Paint all the paintings black and celebrate dead art. We have been living in a masqued ball — what we think of as our identity is a schooled set of notions, preconceptions that are imprisoning us in history. From our own belief in our own identity flows ceaseless misery — our isolation, our alienation, and our belief that another's life is more interesting than that of our own.

It is only through valuing all the world equally that any of us will find liberation. An end to history is our rightful demand. To continue to produce art is to addict ourselves to our own repression. The refusal to make art is the only alternative left to those who wish to change the world. Give up art. Save the starving.

— Parts of Tony Lowe's 'Give Up Art/Save The Starving'.

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