

TOWARD REVOLUTIONARY ART

INRA



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If you're a painter or writer, dancer, musician, actor or photographer, haven't got rich relatives & not on welfare or into a hustle, if you want to survive & continue your work, you're going to have to turn it into a commodity or a trade. Relate your art to the market: create objects for sale or hire yourself out as a skilled worker.

What alternative is there? A part-time job? They're hard to find. And few of us can survive long on what we can make that way. Besides, some media don't lend themselves well to part-time artists. And few of us possess skills outside our chosen medium, so we are often stuck with oppressive, socially useless & low-paying jobs.

In that however, we're no worse off than most people, & great numbers of us do moonlight part or full time at a different kind of job.

This situation has its advantages. You can avoid much of that terrible feeling of isolation that often afflicts artists, particularly those who work by themselves & relate mostly with other artists. And you can discover that freedom from pressures of professionalism can have a great liberating effect on your art. Many choose this as a permanent situation.

The artist/worker (or worker/artist) is a tradition in itself, a powerful positive tradition that can lend strength to artists who are conscious of it & who work consciously within it, a tradition much more ancient than the professional one, & it will last longer.

But most artists, at some point in their lives at least, want to practice their art full time, & that usually means (under present circumstances in our country) trying to go professional. Which in turn means being at the mercy of the vagaries of the market, & the market means control by businesspeople. Since their basic interest is profit, you've got to find some way to make your work profitable to them.

Further, the vast majority insist your work push ideas & attitudes that support the system through which they're exploiting & controlling you. At least don't reflect the people's struggles against them; or veil your politics in ambiguity & metaphor.

Otherwise they won't print your book, let you sing on their stage, show your film on their screen.

Art,

&

JOHN CURL

Even if you're willing to orient your work to the market, modify it to their demands, even so, the market is tight, & you're in desperate competition with thousands of other artists. They keep things this way to make us weak & disunified, to get them cheap labor anxious to please.

Perhaps a patron, or a foundation grant?

More likely you'll wind up looking into the art trades & services industry (a novelist does piece-work, a studio musician is proletarianized).

Teaching is lowest paid, advertising most oppressive.

Most teachers & commercial writers, painters, photographers are essentially white collar workers, usually low to medium income.

Entertainment is less steady or predictable work, but offers the possibility of rewards in the higher salary & ego ranges, at least in those modes pushed by the mass media (in "fine art" modes you're offered mostly ego). The images are already there, painted on cardboard. If you want

Work, Class

to make it, stick your face into the hole & smile, the machine will blow you into a phantom 1000 feet high, much in the manner of the Wizard of Oz (& for similar political reasons).

But most likely you won't find work at all. Most likely you'll either be unemployed or work at a different kind of job, maybe still dancing or painting at night, or maybe you'll be too tired.

Art is work; artists are workers. The vast majority of artists are working class, employed & unemployed, with many of us so chronically unemployed we become lumpen. This lumpen condition is extremely widespread, enveloping large sectors in all media. Among those working in modes downgraded as "high" or "fine" art, such as poetry, it is so universal it presents itself as a natural state. But while a poet starts out with no hope for making a living, a singer may struggle years expecting any moment to sky-rocket to the top. In those modes peddled as popular entertainment, the actual conditions of one's life are

not to be dealt with, they are to be considered either temporary or due to lack of talent. Our poverty is our own fault. Ironically, many of us practice our art because it is the least alienating work we know. But only the surface layers of alienation can be dealt with individually. It is not only a state of mind, but a general social condition, structured like poverty into the system.

Every society supports artists. Art arises from social needs & has social functions; every social fabric must be woven, it is socially useful work.

But there are choices involved. Art can serve many & contradictory functions, some constructive, some destructive.

Which artists should be supported, what works of art made available to the people?

Who decides?

If it were simply a matter of who is most talented or productive, which work is technically superior, if popular & financial success really *were* reward for genius or even competence, then many of our greatest artists would not have lived & died in poverty & obscurity.

In our society it's the businessmen who decide, & they fix culture like they do elections. They support an art that serves their interests, & they see their interest in protecting & perpetuating the system of money & property through which they gained & wield their power in exploitation & oppression of us.

Although business may control culture, it is really the people who produce it & who pay for it, mostly indirectly. Every time a rich person buys a painting, every time a company sponsors a television show or supports a magazine with advertising, every time a foundation awards a grant, it is you & I who pay. And we are being forced & tricked into paying for propaganda aimed at keeping us enslaved.

If we want our art to function in our interest, in the interest of the artists & the interest of the people, then the people & the artists must control our media of production & distribution, the television & radio stations, the galleries, publishing houses, recording studios, movie lots, theaters, concert halls. And the only way we can gain that control is through social revolution, gaining that control *is* social revolution.

It is a class issue, a question of power: whether a small corporate elite can continue to police-enforce us in their slave system or whether the people will seize the power to set up our own system of sharing & cooperation; whether they can continue to police-enforce their class privilege, enforce their class' very existence, or whether we will seize the power to abolish privilege.

It will be only then that we the artists & the people will be able to set up our own democratic structures to support each other.

It is time to take the offensive. As artists we have powerful weapons; together we are strong. We cannot solve our problems within this system, & only if we are united with the rest of our class can we change it.

The struggle has been going on a long time; right now in the United States the people are beginning to rouse once more after a series of great defeats. For the entire lives of many of us the people's movement has been scattered & weak. Our corporate masters have many guns, some loaded with bullets, others with dollars; one way or another they have atomized every organization among us before any could come to full bloom as the people conscious, organized & armed.

But now the American Empire is quaking with liberation struggles in the colonies, economic war with other national ruling cliques, now Europe is burning with class war & the entire capitalist world hurtling into depression, now it is becoming clear to all that on the one hand we have been forced to collaborate in the horrors of imperialism & share in its spoils, on the other hand, it is really just the surface of our society that has been bloated by those spoils. Most of what has not gone to expand business' capital, has gone for military patrol of the empire & of us; we have been kept poor, weak & dependent by this super-exploitation of other peoples: while the bosses steal piles they toss us just enough pennies to eat, which we desperately need because they've stolen our tools & resources. We are an internal colony.

Now it is becoming clear to all that beneath the mask of "freedom" & "democracy" is a scam run by a bunch of international crooks, the dictatorship of money.

What can we as artists & workers do?

Speak to each other about our common oppression, form study groups & workshops: analyze & clarify how the system functions in each different artistic medium, help each other deal with our collective personal problems of work & survival, learn how to organize among ourselves, create collective works, contact other groups moving in similar directions, together rediscover our revolutionary history, discover our revolutionary path.

Begin to work for the people, turn our art against our oppressors. Tie into the organized struggles raging around us, contribute work.

Discover ways to circumvent media-control, take our art to the streets, parks, walls, factory gates, anywhere the people are.

Fight back any way we know how.

Those of us in unions can form rank-&-file caucuses to strengthen them, turn them to revolutionary directions. Together we can refuse to do fascist work, shut them down if they refuse to serve the people.

Those of us unhappily caught up in the propaganda monster that disguises itself as mass culture, can organize & sabotage from within, learn how to run the machine so we are able & ready to take it over.

And those of us who are members of that large almost totally invisible section of talented artists who have let their art drop into limbo, long unpracticed, who stopped working because they saw no alternative to working for the beast, can begin to come out, to renew.

We do not have to release our rage harmlessly against our canvasses, through our chisels, horns, cameras or typewriters; we do not have to take it out on ourselves; we do not have to squander our lives & talents working in modes of decadence, alienation & despair, sell our art to the service of the corporate fascist state & soon watch it burn in the garbage heap of a dying culture.

We can come out into the sunlight, give our art away to the people, strike with the strength of revolutionary artists, help express & create the culture groping to be born, help weave the fabric of social revolution, join the struggle to take back our world.