

Ake

Richard Alpert

Andrews $\frac{1}{23}$ $\frac{2}{15}$

Apotheker

Armantrout $\frac{1}{31}$

Bernstein $\frac{1}{27}$

Child

Davies $\frac{2}{4}$

EAR $\frac{1}{27}$

Fayne $\frac{3}{4}$

Fischer $\frac{1}{27}$

Fraser

Gray $\frac{1}{28}$

Grenier

Gustafson /

Hanlon

Harryman $\frac{2}{7}$

Heckelman

Hedlund $\frac{2}{3}$

Hejinian $\frac{2}{7}$

Highsmith

Jaffe Bromige

Kenny $\frac{1}{25}$

Kos

Lally $\frac{2}{4}$

Lance $\frac{2}{15}$

La voie $\frac{1}{21}$

Loeffler

Malone

Marks

McAdams $\frac{1}{26}$

Mills

Moran

Morice

Nunez

Pearson $\frac{1}{24}$

Robinson $\frac{1}{26}$

Scott

Shaw Perelman $\frac{2}{5}$

Sherry $\frac{1}{27}$

Shurin

Silliman $\frac{1}{26}$

Skratz

Vincent $\frac{1}{31}$

Watten $\frac{1}{13}$

Welt $\frac{1}{26}$

Wilk

Winet $\frac{1}{24}$

Withers

Young $\frac{2}{10}$

Benson $\frac{2}{3}$

Morrison

1051 Hampshire St.
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1/17/78

I'm going to talk on February 16 at 80 Langton St gallery on careers in the arts. This questionnaire is part of my research effort. I'd be interested in any response you care to make, taking into account the questions raised and their raison.

(I'm enclosing SSAE so it will be convenient to return in whatever shape you want.) (The questions are written impersonally and you can replace someone with yourself.) (I'd rather get these back by the beginning of February than later.) (I don't expect you to do this.)

1. What major problems face someone cultivating a career in the arts?
2. Did things used to be different?
3. Are these problems useful or detrimental to artists and art work?
4. Choice question: (a) If there is a problem is there a solution? (b) What are the ramifications?
5. What is the hidden assumption I am/you are making?

24 jan 78

steve,

getting yr questionnaire today & it already seems needed, so just off the top of my head & real fast (the time to, as this always a rush to get to what seems the important business but which gets pushed to the corners because the real Bu\$\$ine\$\$ we know to be commercial--ie it pays with bucks & this all must be made to fit in where you can, literally, make the time, rather than being--making "art" I mean--a recognized--"official"--activity & so you cd make your way as that--not one year out of ten get a few thousand in a grant--if at all.

SO: What major problems face someone cultivating a career in the arts ((tho:cultivating is a word i dont like in the context)): MONEY (wd be the one wbd answer--ie you do that & if you really do that *you do it at* the "sacrifice" (disregard, rejection) of that ~~XXXXXXXX~~ "career" that cd make you somebody in the world of commerce, public affairs--a homeowner & so on --but anyway don't you not want that in any case, i mean is it ever really a "choice" that you cultivate or isnt it just a necessity & if you don't do it than yr just denying what is necessary for you so that to live out ones life so that it can be meant every step of the way immediately makes you ~~XXXXXXXX~~ misplaced, a misplaced person, which is the condition of a person in this society/period, undr this economic system, so it's not by any means the exclusive situation of the artist but of the person--so another, maybe better one word answer to question one is simply CAPITALISM)

2. Did things used to be different? NO.
3. Are these (this) prblm useful or detrimental to the person & the work? DETRIMENTAL (or else you say, in effect, that oppression is useful ie we wdnt have had a Kafka w/o that society had gone awry, or Hamlet, or...or..... but thats not an argument & no one can want this.
- 4a: sure--change in the economic system--i mean "solution" is too big for a discussion here--i mean the "solution" is the solution ~~XXXX~~ of all the prblms of the society--the artists prblms are exactly the opposite of "isolated problems" & really the "good wrk" gives us a glimpse of what the "solution" might look like by giving us a means of viewing our situation. alternate answer to 4a: STRUGGLE--((wch is to do this wrk))
- 5: What are the hidden assumptions::: ~~THEXIREXOFXHXDXHXJATXZSL~~ THEY'RE NOT HIDDEN AT ALL.

hope this is of some use, if fast--kind of thing that cd bring out some length, but not now--

best,

Charles

8th

Steve, Misplaced ^{your questionnaire} this letter all during last few weeks with houseguests, now I find it write out fast what is here included. Wish you best of good fortune facing the major problems of talking Feb 16th. When can I see transcript of your Dec. work?

It will be wonderful to see how all this is not used! One word really does suggest the whole rest of the history of the world and language without end but many words limit the world. Somewhere in that axis, between Everything, and What We Really Want Isolated and a prehistoric sloth nails me to this moment.

Have fun Mr Benson.

Gene

I like "The Pain tonight is worse..." booklet!

Steve

1.

Major problems, besides not displacing the career (getting sucked into Art Services, as role), is to produce important work. Work a step ahead of yourself. Not just an idea but a great idea, not just a perfunctory execution but a terrific one. Stamina and good luck play a big part in generating good works, but talent alone means nothing. To be right, yes in some ineluctable way, is paramount. Not in argumentative fashion, but to touch on deep urgencies in a style wholly your own, made up no doubt ~~of~~ of 100 influences all of a sudden left in their own lurches, while you take a drive into the night. There are only the jobs you make for yourself out of the necessity of your work. To be an artist is to make art. To make a career in the arts as an artist you must make art. It is the most demanding attention. No running from it leads to it. Educating oneself one's self to the vitality of whatever fugue of traditions is useful seminal jocular tuneful. And for Christmas give her a big drum. Your peers keep handing you drum sticks. And one graciously thanks the Colonel.

2.

No.

3.

I don't want to mention money. You don't sweep the floor, you don't eat. Writing is the broom, the chopstick. Problems are ~~useful~~. Clarifying. One must cultivate problems, major ones. Because very possible ~~that~~ no one really wants the shit.

4

a) yes b) Personal solutions to personal problems lead to artistic solutions to artistic problems until the two dimensions are going along on parallel tracks and frequently toward the same sense of tomorrow. You do what you can, will; there is a context and there are the texts. The Pantheon is filled with enough heroes to allow for a tremendous reverberation choosing. Still water runs deeper, but heavy reins swell the power river. Being loved by others to the degree that you imagine for yourself while still making the rent has nothing necessarily to do with art. You scratch out a career in good deeds convincing others.

5. The hidden assumption: since career is activity, and art is dead, long live Fred. But since you asked, I demur, I remit, I duplicate the brain damaged adult paperboy's response to life "Final Edition." Truly hidden assumptions remain hidden, are our myths. But making art is very making love. Parallel tracks. One in one, sequences. Meanings emerge from the activity, that are our own, hidden no more, if we understand ourselves aptly. Draw a circle, step outside it. If it looks like art it ain't. Beldesseri was getting \$1400 for a large work in 1972 when Sonnabend picked him up and showed him a \$2500 a large work. He had passed his orals. How did he get the nod to have the Artforum cover in May 73...or Sept 73? John went to New York slot, drank with the artists at Mex'...slowly, the strong-arm artists gave Coplens the OK for a Beldesseri cover. Peers decide the fate of their peers. But a mag editor is cranky. Coplens said, You can have any work you want on the cover. John chose one of himself blowing cigar smoke into the shapes of clouds. Coplens said fuck you, and put a different work on the cover, something about Mondrian's white pants and pink shoes. Election, elective affinities, charm, personality, solid achievement, true grit. Tough, gentle, intent. No one has to buy a work they don't want. But you do want something for your money, if you're buying. Ditto the act of reading. If everything's in order, fuck it up. Daddy Raw, yesh. ...and my ho's do the rest, Yesh, Daddy Raw. All the way Federal. The hidden assumption, the nature of ambition, the need to yes, express oneself complexly, ~~has~~^{is} an activity (like writing) with a wide enough index on experience that it can satisfy our urges to fill it up, or strip it bare, stutter or sing. I like the term career, because it was held in low repute for so long, by the hippie press. For some it's their work, the pages alone. Others thread their bodies into the blend. Still others propose their bodies first, and only later a sense of their production. Nowhere mentioned is the total time progression along whose axis the next work is written with whatever compression bearing down upon a word phrase succession of rapid feints into the ear canal where the moment meets memory in your own words. The future is too important to be left in the hands of friends. How to work, working, "in full humanity."

Wednesday 2/1

Dear Steve, I don't know if I should answer the questionnaire or the letter or both or what. Or if I have to do the questionnaire separately and officially etc--I hope not--the thing is I can't really answer it, at least not intelligently, because my thoughts haven't been running in those grooves as yours obviously (from what you say at least) have. And obviously the questions are recognizable, universal etc enough that one's off the top of the head opinions would be worth exactly nothing, they would be merely obvious and what everyone else already knows, in other words I could only come up with anything original or deeply felt or true if I'd been thinking, worrying about, dealing with those questions myself. And I haven't. I hope that's clear, it's certainly not well put. Anyway at the moment I'm generally too exercised about getting ANYTHING at all down and done and finished to worry about things like careerism. I should be so lucky. And I don't think the questions relate to what I'm doing now, unless I'm being extremely literal-minded about them, which I no doubt am, I'm literal-minded about everything. But one of the things I want to do in the thing I'm working on now is NOT write about artists or artistic types in any way at all, precisely because that's my usual temptation, as it's everyone's, and we all know that's ~~not~~ a bad thing--I'm not altogether sure it actually matters, since practically the only people who read literature or fiction these days are people of some intellectual or artistic bent (that's the answer to questions 1 & 2 I guess) so they don't mind reading about themselves--and also it sometimes seems (I hope this isn't true) that the only people who have anything going on in their heads at all are those types, and I personally don't like to read or write about people without things going on in their heads... Robbe-Grillet me no Robbe-Grillet.

#3--I think the problems (voice in the wilderness etc) are probably more useful than not, it's probably more stimulating to think of yourself as a persecuted minority than to be read by all them poetry-loving Russkies. The lefty writers of the 30s thought they wanted a mass audience (they sure didn't get one) but their wooing of the masses didn't improve their writing much. Scratch that, it's a non sequitur.

See what paralyzing banality I'm capable of?

I assume you're not talking about anything as totally obvious as the tactless issue of Money, and how to pay the rent while you're cultivating your career in the arts, and whether it's better to have a job or not, and grants, and patrons, and all that. Are you? It's all too self-evident for me to add anything anyway.

Thursday

Oops. That looks as if I were trying to put down your questions--I wasn't--just trying to indicate the worthlessness of my contribution. Anyway, I gathered you weren't expecting much & just mainly sent it because I'd be interested. I may well go listen to your talk--depending on weather, energy, etc.

Your letter sounded as if you got sick more or less on going out the door--I hope you don't mean sick in the English sense--i.e. I hope you didn't throw up on the sidewalk. That may not have been a very appealing dinner...

Meanwhile I was wondering, how you feel about unexpected

interruptions--I've been in your neighborhood several times lately, on the way to a movie or just cruising, and thought of calling and seeing if you wanted to come out for coffee or something. I ask because I'm doubtful about it myself--that's one advantage of not having a phone--I'm hardly ever on enough of a hot streak that it makes any difference, but just occasionally...But if you don't operate that way, if you like answering the phone during the day say so and next time I'm around there maybe I will.

I'm sorry I didn't get this off sooner but things kept coming up over the weekend and I sent me a film paper to criticize at the same time and and and...so it goes.

So I'll mail this now without re-reading it or improving it, so take it as it is.

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January, 1978

Steve: ...the sense of response ...

The first problem is one of definition: to determine what, if any, 'problems' do arise from the circumstance in question, one would have to determine how the terms of that comprise the question are intended, are, in fact, to be taken, to mean. Thus, 'cultivate', 'career', 'the arts', and therefore 'problems'.

Eliding the primary, etymologically grounded denotation that is generally assigned to 'cultivate' -- specifically, to till land in preparation for agricultural production -- one comes to meanings derived from the primary by analogy, which derivations have predictably to do with nurturing, promoting growth, fostering, &c. These usages in turn yield that of 'to form and refine'.

'Cultivation', as an act, could therefore be taken to require organic matter as that which is acted upon. By use of parallelism (otherwise, extending the given analogy), one could therefore take 'career' (that which is acted upon) to be (intended as) an entity whose characteristics are properly subject (available to) formulation and refinement.

'Career', then, as the object of such action (given, that it is the subject of the inquiry), as noun (suppressing its alternative function as predicate, or more simply, ignoring the rime) denotes either a chosen pursuit (e.g., a life's work) or success in one's profession, the latter a clearly predictive usage... which begins to suggest the perhaps considerable differences involved in both the kind and the order of 'problem' one is being asked to consider -- qua problem.

These difficulties (my difficulties) are further 'enhanced' by the unstable or potentially discordant connotations adherent to the terms in question. The socio-economic (class) implications of 'cultivation', both as an act and as an attribute, would be an obvious instance, an instance subject to attenuation rather than dismissal in the event that irony is intended, i.e., informs the choice of term.

In combination with 'career', a phrase results which, depending on the degree of ingenuousness (if any) one 'allows' the questioner, signals an identifiably class-determined matrix of associations, or else results in a markedly matchbook-cover 'feel'-- A CAREER IN BROADCASTING, A CAREER IN MODELLING, A CAREER IN ELECTRONICS, CAREER COUNSELLING,

'A CAREER IN THE ARTS.'-- which returns us to the problem of how 'the arts' are to be taken, and I'm not about to accept/be satisfied with some notion that we all know what we collectively intend to be understood as 'the arts'. Simply that 'I' is not 'we', nor is its understanding a collective process.

Given the range of responses elicited by mention of 'art' -- from derision, to indifference, to claims for sublimity/truth/beauty, et. al. -- it is clear we can proceed to do as we please, can, in the event, continue doing as we please, independent of the contentiousness that attends a definitive statement of 'What Is Art?'. Unless... we find ourselves involved in the predictive sense of 'career', which sense, as I understand it, is rife with problems of essentially the same order and relative degrees of solvability as any other business venture. In contradistinction to which one recalls Blake's saying: WHERE ANY VIEW OF MONEY EXISTS, ART DOES NOT, BUT WAR ONLY. And I think it is clear he means 'profit'. And the difference is quite relevant to your talk as talk. "So that:" I can begin to address your questions, given all-of-the-above, ill-constructed and hasty as it undoubtedly is.

(1.) Assuming that someone has undertaken to formulate and refine a conscious choice to engage in any of those life-activities we otherwise designate as 'art'/'work', the problems, if any, confronting him or her will be determined in large part by the intentions, demands, expectations, &c., they bring to their working.

(a) insofar as the above choice is a personal/private decision, informed by an experientially derived sense that involvement in such activity is of use, significant use, apart from any concern with subsistence (in the usual sense of the word), it could be suggested that there are no context-specific 'problems' relevant to your discussion. That is, implementation or practice is seen as congruent with conception or theory, even as equivalent. There having been no appeal for validation from the outside at the point the choice became truly 'conscious', there is a corresponding independence of the need for external validation of the activity in situ. or

(b) insofar as the above choice is more publicly situate, and includes a concern for subsistence as at the least a corollary of one's engagement, there will be at some several points a corresponding dependence on public/external validation-- however ambiguous or overdetermined (i.e., the issue is never simply economic) the relationship between the one and the many is felt to be. In this latter case (b), it is clear there are numerous 'problems' to be dealt with: among them, ego, economics, and 'social awareness' (of a functionally boring order).

For either individual, the major problems would be..... nourishment, shelter, transportation, health care and access to information (curiously, the same 'major problems' confronting the overwhelming majority of humans on the planet. That these problems are MORE major for 'artists' is rather doubtful, as is any claim that 'artists' are more deserving, are more clearly 'owed a living').

(2) Not if one agrees with the proposition that the health and physical survival of the organism (individual) is in fact the major problem. And probably not if one is involved in a careerist notion of the practice of 'art'.

(3) Time is only money if you're 'on the clock' or otherwise salaried. Money being the persistent medium of exchange in these states, the actual cost of 'free' time is exorbitant. (Obviously this excludes any privileged minority whose financial situation is adequate, relative to chosen lifestyle, to liberate them from 'using' their time 'up' in life-maintenance activity.) The only detriment to art work is inattention on the part of the art worker, while engaged in art work. Whether or not, and to what, if any, extent one's other work-activities are detrimental to one's self is an absolutely individual matter. Simply, that there is a matrix of inter-related choices-to-be-made, priorities to be established, &c. This always gets done... regardless of whether or not any art-work does, and for 'similar' reasons. Was it Pound who said that more artists fail from lack of character than lack of talent?

(4) If there is a problem, there are solutions. However, satisfaction is NOT guaranteed. What ARE the ramifications? Put it this way: one's medium, or media, may well require more or less time, money, equipment, &c, &c, than another's. Therefore, significantly different problems, and solutions. During the years I worked as a musician and organizer of sounds, I did indeed find need for (of) various equipment and environments. I also found, increasingly, that my solutions tended to obviate rather than 'satisfy' these problems. Minimal necessary equipment: ears and brain. Finding I possessed this equipment, I became increasingly interested in 'other' things, eg., language & writing. Result: add eyes, hands, paper & pen. Nothing fancy really. I know 'things' are generally different for practitioners in more 'involved' media-- I am both sympathetic and relieved to be outside those 'problems'.

(5) My hidden assumption is that I am/you are making any sense of this at all. Do let me know.

Sincerely,

PS: this is a hasty response, but i'm otherwise involved in my own work and did want to honor your request, and your 'deadline'-- however inadequately.

Steve Benson
1051 Hampshire St
San Francisco 94110
648 4251

1/17/78

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Steve — just some random jots = putting the little free time elsewhere.

1. The act of defining the terms = "career" & "cultivating" — & to what extent such activities differ from the artwork itself.

If we assume they do diverge (i.e., one does art & then [or simultaneously] concerns oneself with 'career' 'cultivating') then the problems might seem like = lack of employment opportunities enabling the artwork to go on [due to capitalist market structure, etc. etc.], & , if employment is not at issue, then = problems of audience [so small, so retrograde, so diffuse, so inattentive] & of access to it being mediated by those able to construct official hierarchies [e.g., NY publicists/critics "deciding" which artists will get a national reputation that will be 'sent' to the 'provinces', where the countermeasures of artists are unheard, etc.]; also difficulties in

Later: Please send me anything you use from this (type) please send me notes for the talk which refer to what transcript, xerox of notes, since I'm not keeping track. (say, etc) Write soon, too! Love

Zwie
[LATE] [SSAE] [mailed bulk rate] [!!!!!!] [NO] [DAY] [!!!!!!]

creating that audience yourself

2. Some — employment? audience? some art forms no longer attract attentive audiences [did they ever?] Mechanics of distribution is less controllable. Also: bureaucratization.
3. Can't see much use: they deter ~~some~~ people from pursuing art as life work, & deter artists from working as much & as un-neurotically as they might. Do they serve as a useful 'screener' — only statistically, no assurance that motivation & talent will coincide
4. (a) not necessarily (b) might need overall (& unimaginable) transformation in the whole 'ground' of everyday life — & for that, change in constitutive features of the major ^{social} systems at least, & for that, change in basic nature of state relations & the global political economy, and for that, the ~~origin~~ aforementioned transformation in everyday life ~~on~~ which seemed to depend in turn on the global shift. Reciprocal preconditions!!
5. That careerism is an issue worth focusing attention on (here, as I write this, there, as you read & speak of it) — & that it can be thought of a problem apart from the problem of the art itself — i.e., that cultivating a career in the arts may only mean the aesthetic problems of: composition, expression, representation, what to do, how to perfect, how to problematize, how to embody, etc. & that all other problems are simply issues in political economy ^{concerning} ~~about~~ which it is only the typical hubris & amateurism/dilettantism of artists that makes them assume they have important things to say [~~is~~ this, possibly a holdover from the Romantic or Shamanist conception of the artist as one who can totalize everything & anything in a decisive way]

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1. career means \$\$ and social credibilsty. The main problem for people in the arts is that "art" & "career" do not let each other live. The choice is a) live marginally doing other work or b) make your art worthwhile to those who run the country & believable in Peoria, Ill. or c) be a superstar

2. Somewhat in the days when there was free enterprise in the arts, and when "counterculture" was not necessary.

over

3. useful in that the artist is forced to give up specialization. useful in that his/her involvement in the world will produce new forms. detrimental in that the forms that take full time effort will now be practiced only by career artists (see 2 b) and the independently wealthy.

4. I think my answers to the previous questions are sufficient.

5. that terms "art" & "career" are not synonymous.

January 25, 1978

Tassajara

February 15

Dear Steve,

Here is a brief response to your questionnaire. Hope it's of some use to you, + apologize for its lateness.

I probably won't be able to make your talk tomorrow p.m. Commitment to "breathing group" in Marin. Good luck + will hear you next time.

Enclosing magazine I publish.

Best,
Jeanne Lance

Answers to Questionnaire

1. Problems: Audience--who and what is it? Can you be a serious artist and still have no audience? How can you build an audience? Does it matter to your artistic productions. ^{Whether you have an audience}
Earning money to live on while you're doing art. Does ^{or not?} this cut into the time you'd otherwise be doing art?

Belief in the artistic productions you do (whether they're "your own" or not). This is critical in every career, art or ~~work~~. I'm not certain it matters, but it's nice to have in the face of competition or criticism.
2. I don't think so. Except for private rather than government patrons. Perhaps private patrons made for better art. I think it's something we can't know, i.e., no one in the 20th century can know what our art is going to look like in succeeding centuries.
3. I don't think it matters. Art will be produced regardless of problems. Problems may make better art--"useful thorns in one's side."
4. a. Yes, you can say "if I have no audience, how can I build one?" You can "acquire readers one-by-one," as Bromige would say. It's possible to acquire money and belief in your productions as significant.

b. I'm not sure even if problems are solved, it will matter in terms of how ^{an} artist's work will change. Also, I believe that when one set of "problems" are solved, another set moves in.
5. My assumption is that you want answers. I'm not sure what your assumption is.. .that our languages have something in common?

Jeanne Lance
4279 22nd Street
S.F., CA 94114
285-3660

1) TERROR of the unknown; fear of criticism leading to an insular social life (only preaching to the converted); money worries (art takes lots of energy, time, stimulation); the need for secretarial persistence (actually grinding out all those great ideas); AUDIENCE (great poems need great audiences)

2) (Answers correspond to four categories in #1) No; Yes & No (depending on particular sociology, economics ((tribe, city state, empire, backwater, the big apples, etc))) No; No (except maybe in those cases where established, successful artists had helpers (H James dictating his novels; contemporary NY art biggies, etc); Yes (At times & places there have been GA's. Symbiosis
artist & Audience

3) "The most interesting (best, strongest, longest,...) art arises out of confronting the greatest difficulties." (b) these days, the intuition ~~is~~ says, it has something to say about personism, personalism. Re our discussion around kitchen table before Kit's reading. Personal problems, historical particulars making common problems too big to be easily seen; 300 years later, we know what the novel was all about.

4) That it's worth it.

B.B. Packer

Dear Steve,

The typewriter here at work is at the shop, so I'm hoping you can read this. I'm really glad to see your questions.

CANNOT STRESS THIS TOO HIGHLY: IT IS THE CRUX

1) The major problem facing someone "cultivating a career in the arts" is the impact on the work of long & short term survival needs. Opting for the tenured creative writing prof. job more often than not distorts the work of any poet (viz. the caution in M. Davidson, R. Loewinson) whereas hoping to "make it" in the free market ~~can~~ transforms a lot of poets into novelists (Eustafson, Abbott, Codrescu, Brantigan, Barock).

2) Yes. Before the 19th century, poets & other writers either came from the upper classes or those other groups which most closely mingled with the upper classes (e.g. Swift, Chaucer, Milton), so that writing was not seriously altered by survival considerations. The change begins in earnest in the 19th cent & rapidly in the 20th due principally to the extension of higher education to lower class youth (Kerouac at Columbia being the quintessential example)

3) Detrimental. Survival considerations force any work toward common denominators & the tendency to seek agreement (rather than transformation) as an audience response. The # of writers who still produce work in their 50s & older is so small because of the tremendous drop-out rate which occurs (usually because one has opted for a compromised art & this attempt at self-prostitution most often fails).

4) (a) I don't know "the" solution, but I do know a few of its preconditions: (1) Poets have to be "loyal" to poetry, not to individual careers; (2) we have to develop our own institutions away from the existing career-based world of universities & corporate publishers; (3) it has to be part of a general program of conscious & principled class struggle in which artists

e.g. worker control

recognize their function as cultural workers

- 5) That the function of art in the lives of at least many of its practitioners is as a career (i.e., work, labor, a mode of production); that it is neither a hobby nor a religious (or otherwise metaphysical) path. I agree with a certain important exception: I think everybody should write, paint, dance, play music, etc., but that only a few really ought to conceive of it as work/career.

For Bill

- 3) Practical. Survival considerations force and work toward common denominators & the tendency to seek agreement rather than transformation as an audience response. The # of writers who still produce work in their 50s & 60s is a small because of the Transformers drop-out rate which occurs (usually because one has opted for a compromised art of this attempt at self-protection most often fails).
- 4) I don't know "the" solution, but I do know a few of its practitioners: (1) poets have to be "loyal" to poetry, not to individual careers; (2) we have to develop our own institutions & ways for the existing career-based world of universities & corporate publishers; (3) it has to be part of a general program of conscious & principled class struggle in which artists



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CAREERS IN THE ARTS

CARE OF STEVE BENSON, FONE 8AM PST

1051 HAMPSHIRE

SAN FRANCISCO CA *94110*

ONE NEED CONSIDER THE WAYS THAT AVANT-GARDE ART CAN FUNCTION TO
PRIVATIZE CONSCIOUSNESS WHILE IT AT THE SAME TIME REPRODUCES A
SYSTEM DESTRUCTIVE FINALLY OF OR AT LEAST DETRIMENTAL TO ITS
ELEMENTS THAT IS THE ART IT PRODUCES THE INTER-RELATED NETWORK OF
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS ETC.

JON VINET 3-15-78

DUPLICATE OF
TELEGRAM TO COLONY

NNNN

8F-1201 (75-00)

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Apart from the obvious necessities which are so often referred to with uncritical insistence on being "an artist"-- what bothers me so often is "me" talking--so the problem must be first of all in how thoroughly one decides to be "an artist" and what that is, and secondly whether that is possible--or what are the grounds of that possible life, and whether they are acceptable--so "the work" is the first problem, doing it with as much clarity as one can muster-- if one feels possibly clear about anything from the start-- so it must have been the early knowledge of clear choice to be doing the work that is the fundamental problem of a career-- from which everything else follows--what were the psychological as much as aesthetic and equally social facts going into that choice--which due consideration for background-- someone says that many artists' mothers are frustrated artists--this is true in "my" case--so there must be an environmental will--at the same time a sense of particulars-- at the point the choice is made--one doesn't have a spread of information to sort through, or alternate life--either the material in front is what is wanted--want meaning to lack--but not falling into some kind of existential drama here--but consistency is important, because "art" every since DuChamp speaks with a partial voice trying to convince patron--patron ending in state--state being unbounded--the problem with "cultivation" is distance--distance must be an aesthetic choice--but how have distance when the immediate and particular were the original motive force--in memory by now--why so many fakers as artists seem genuine, because everyone understands this problem more than they will admit-- the problem is continuous, contextual--what is wanted is statement, a sentence (not this)--so the reconciliation between style, writing mind and first social fact (distance) is a problem for any career--career meaning course of an analysis-- a given analysis (partial voice intending whole) goes so far in relation to quality of analysis--whether one is right or not--first of all the language of science is so close to the social formation of the arts--that forgetting science and forgetting social formation leads one to 1970's Henry James-ian American "literalism"--or any literalism--so literalism of style must mean that being an "artist" is non-problematic in social context for the range of that style--so one must find an area in which being an "artist" is non-problematic in order to do the work, not worry about the outcome--whether correct to contradictory outside--this place may be only in the head--in which case no motive can be assumed congruent in writing mind and outside--so only like-minded individuals can read--so the art is political, trying to speak for the whole, convinced of value of going inside, working in narrow areas--to invalidate the false social context--so "an artist" is an act as a whole, the terms given are produced from inside recognition, and the "career" may be tragic stoppage

as easily as it could be getting something going--the problem of a career in the arts is intellectual--what is the meaning of one's work, how is it made, and what outside will take it up--obviously, if one doubts social justice, one might as easily doubt the organs of social justice--like the lower East Side is an organ of Manhattan--so that one recognizes and admits to how much "social command" he can receive in good conscious--as opposed to operating in a social world--better eyes open--if I do this what happens--how do I know what I'm doing--am I right.

2. What is generation?

3. They are the same as the work--one sees partially into the problem at any one time--nothing should be taken for granted--there is nothing in language which should be left out--you can't hurt yourself by reading or thinking about anything--in stylistic terms, which is analysis, a value is how much of the world which is not part of the learned range of art is let in--so to ask any question leading away from "integrity" of the artist as its assumed is good--the condition of doubt is both whole and dialectic--this question is dialectic--too much of an answer would be a false or easy analysis--the ear is analytic--how to know when to stop.

4. (a) The solution at this point would be more coherence, which would involve total reinvention of the social order--how to avoid war--"limits are what any of us are inside of"--a greater literacy, starting from elementary education, different form of city, more or less stringent economic demands--abolition of private property--interpretation of "personal life" consistent with being able to operate on a larger scale--seemingly the solution is a problem of style. (b) Personal.

assumption

5. The ~~assumption~~ is that we are being useful to ourselves, the "art", and the world as interpreted by that "art"--the assumption of having "talent" not just typing speed might be behind this--social assumptions of given world already at war with psychological pressure--how to measure--say in period of social breakdown, would we still be artists--more or less--greater need to live meaningful life--as opposed to less expectation of reward from outside--challenge of new situation with education, training, accomplishment--was I right--example of Rene Char and Francis Ponge in hiding in WWII--Char writes "Leaves of Hypnos" which is sentimental, to-be-preserved account of what happened--heroism is seeing oneself from outside--why not, a desperate situation--Ponge writes "Notebook of the Pine Woods" which is precisionist evaluation

--as if war would be the perfect opportunity for doubt--
 why not, it's extreme--but why the care--if doubt means
 disbelief--so Char shows greater disbelief in needing to
 see himself from outside--for Ponge the responsibility is
 more toward his art--so Ponge's work carries farther into
 historical time--this does not question either's self-im-
 portance, already long-since socially defined--but makes
 a metaphor at this distance--Mayakovsky's choices might have
 political ~~an~~ much larger scale than style--so he can be
 seen now as involved with style, because no social context
 going in that direction--so the hidden assumption here is
 one of being--which is a class assumption--"middle" class--
 the middle class wants to win, and will win--I am a partisan
 of the professionals--the "biological waiting room" doesn't
 need us--language and meaning is continuous--one occupies
 a narrow ledge--one would lie to oneself not to feel the
 weight of outside--those literal-minded self-absorbed art
 careerists have their eyes closed to scale--immodest self-
 absorption--which will not work, for them, because they are
 interpreted--my assumption is not therapeutic--one being
 ripped out of "normal" progression early on feels like
 fighting back--that is a reflection of outside, however
 personal--it all is--one shows respect by setting oneself
 at odds--what can you deal with but what in front of you,
 again--but no rest--not to rest in categorical thinking.

Barrett Watten

CAREERISM AMONG ARTISTS II

1. I'm depressed this morning because I wasn't really invited to the party. Why do I/we write? For attention? Respect? Love? To some extent this must be so. Still, there are other ways to gain these things and we chose to be writers. Why do we write? An instinctive attraction to form? To create beauty: the play of variety within continuity? But beauty can be enjoyed passively, what motivates you to "work." I feel strange, ill at ease. I'm trying to make myself at home in the world with words. Can someone else tell me if I've done that? Logically no, but I'm depressed this morning because I wasn't really invited.

2. Yes, probably.

3. What if they all say your poems are unclear, too difficult or too simple, too short, too long, too linear, too weird, etc.? They may be right. Some of them are very intelligent. Some of them are the possessors and distributors of glossy pages, perfect binding, liver pate, knowing glances, secret kisses, jobs. But I feel like I can always spot the poems of a poet who's writing because he wants to be a Writer i.e. wants the role. Lifeless poems, abstract no matter how concrete their references may seem. You can't start from that point and get "anywhere." You have to be talking to yourself. But say you are, and others are listening and they do like it and because of that they are your friends. Beautiful, magical friends like you used to only dream of and they call you on the telephone! They like some of your poems more than others, of course. If you would just write more like that...

4. Well, if the idea that love, respect, rewards of all kinds are totally conditional, go only to the "victor" could be uprooted. When we think in terms of "careers" "winners," "successes," "victors" we are thinking in the language of soldiers, industrialists, bureaucrats, etc. There are those among the people we know who are closet social darwinists. I feel a bit like that myself sometimes. Sometimes I feel very arrogant. But it's crazy.

5. I assume that you're interested in this subject because you feel oppressed by some of the competitiveness and egotism on the scene. Maybe you're wondering how much a successful career as a writer is determined by skill and private dedication and how much by forceful social maneuvering, Maybe you doubt you're capable of the latter. Or maybe it's me who feels like that.

[This is a newly typed version of Rae Armantrout's 1978 statement, modestly revised at her request for posting on the slough website in 2004. Steve Benson has retyped it to conform as closely as possible with the presentation of her original statement.]

23 January 78

Dear Steve,

1. It depends on what you mean by a career. I don't like to think of artists themselves as having "careers" -- I like to think of us as people who have a really good time doing things we profoundly enjoy doing, and coincidentally receive fabulous sums of money from anonymous benefactors. One of the major problems is certainly locating such benefactors.

Another problem is "Is what I'm doing morally right?" I mean, if I'm doing this as a career meant as a kind of life-work (in the sense one might say, "He's made a career of avoiding unpleasantness of any sort") or even as what you do that you get money for, and live thereby, then in either case you have to ask yourself whether there's not something you're equally well-suited to that might be of more help to mankind, as for instance applying yourself to the study of methods of feeding the poor or how to get the ERA passed or fomenting revolution, particularly in Africa, where there hasn't been nearly enough revolution. This is something one has to think about very seriously, but that gets into question three.

Also you have to ask even if there's nothing greater you could do for mankind whether there's not something that could make you happier, and there always is, but it's rarely something that one would have to choose over art, it's usually something like love that you tend to associate your fallure in with being an artist -- this is certainly a received idea, but it seems to work out that way with most people I know, especially me, because we're all so "sensitive."

Now, as for careers in the arts other than being an artist, I don't know, I have a very strong prejudice against them, most jobs in the arts are like management except the people you're exploiting don't happen to work in a factory. This is Capitalism at its worst and it is abhorrent to all decent right-minded persons. But there is criticism and reviewing and all that and that's great, everybody should do more of it. The major problem there is you ought to know what you're talking about, and even if you do, you can always be seized up with fear that you don't.

Then there is always the problem that whatever you do, if you're really good at it, your audience is bound to be small, which is something I think people mostly spend too much time and effort complaining ^{about} since there's no way it couldn't be like that. Unless you're really really terrific, in which case, no sweat.

2. Yes. Things have always been different. They have been more different during certain periods than during others, it's true, but they have always been to some degree or other different. We have very good reason to believe that they will always be different. Even now, as I sit here typing away on my Smith-Corona thinking of you, they are different.

Or, alternatively: Yes, they used to be different, but now they're all the same.

Or, even more alternatively, and not without a coy, ingenuous smile: different from what, dear?

3. To get back to what I was saying before, or above, depending on whether your orientation is spatial or temporal, in the reverse order (this is really getting pretentious, isn't it?), these problems are detrimental only to the extent that your courage fails, and some people, lots of them probably, ought to give up anyway. There's way too much Art around as it is. They're useful in that they're very real serious questions you must occupy your mind with and continue occupying your mind with and if you don't care very deeply about some things your work will be shit. Despair makes really terrible art, or rather no art at all. The remembering of despair is another thing. Similarly, you have to be smart and not dumb, or at least smart about your dumbness, and if you are smart, you can always find something to worry about, and you might as well worry about things that have terrific import in your own personal life, like what exactly you're doing with it.

There are certainly problems that can be detrimental to one's work -- if one allows them to be. Usually it is ~~prakt~~ solutions rather than the problems themselves that hurt you.

4. (a) As a rule, no.

(b) They are legion. Once you get started, it soon becomes clear that there is nothing that cannot be construed as a ramification.

5. Each of ~~xxxx~~ assumes that the mother is "being amusing." This is not a ~~xxxx~~thing that one does but a state one may be in: that is, "being amusing" isn't like "being in bed," or being in the middle of preparing dinner, it's more like being guilty of a crime. Or like being innocent of one. The ~~xxxx~~assumption underlying that assumption is that we bear good will towards one another. These assumptions aren't really hidden, though.

I hope your talk goes well. Yours in extremes,

Bernard

Steve Benson
1051 Hampshire St
San Francisco 94110
648 4251

1/17/78

I'm going to talk on February 16 at 80 Langton St gallery on careers in the arts. This questionnaire is part of my research effort. I'd be interested in any response you care to make, taking into account the questions raised and their raison.

(I'm enclosing SSAE so it will be convenient to return in whatever shape you want.) (The questions are written impersonally and you can replace someone with yourself.) (I'd rather get these back by the beginning of February than later.) (I don't expect you to do this.)

1. What major problems face someone cultivating a career in the arts?
2. Did things used to be different?
3. Are these problems useful or detrimental to artists and art work?
4. Choice question: (a) If there is a problem is there a solution? (b) What are the ramifications?
5. What is the hidden assumption I am/you are making?

With rare corporate exceptions, in which a W. Wiley, or a Rauschenberg, or a James Dickey is "incorporated" into a corporate structure, there are no "pure" careers in the arts. Those careers are usually administrative ("arts administration"), or auxillary ("art teacher", "poet-in-the-schools", etc.) For the artist as maker, doing what he does by the definition of what he does ("paint", "write"), the direct funding for that process, either through grants or actual payment for the created object, is probably at anything from a 5/1 to a 100/1 ratio(n) of what it currently takes to survive (food, rent, pleasure, etc.) It is the artist as administrator or teacher (most often) who is on the other side of that ratio (though those persons handling the art) are often not artists. But the people who fulfill these functions do have a career, in the sense that they can survive for a consecutive number of years at it (even take paid vacations) by virtue of their particular association to the making of art, though they are not making it at all. Salaried clerks in these situations (schools, museums, etc.), in fact, receive a much greater income than most artists related to any such programs as artists. These conditions leave the artist, at least the artist who wants most to survive at what he does, with two or three options: (1) he or she can organize with other artists to insist that all government arts funding be at fair labor value. That, for example, no program be funded in which the artists are paid at a rate lower than the value of their work (or, conversely, paying off the critic through one's own work or other). (2) He or she can consider other options. (3) He or she can consider other options. (over)

than ~~any administrative function, that is,~~ the highest administrative function. This would insure that programs would be funded adequately, that both administrator and artist would receive wages that would be comparable to their actual work, and the "slave labor", or at least very cheap labor function of the artists in these programs would be eliminated and replaced by fair salaries. If it is a school situation, the artist would be give 50% of his/her time for their own work.

(2) Wherever possible the artists (this includes writers & performers, of course) should work to eliminate the division between artist and arts administrator. Artists should be required to assume responsibility for the dissemination and protection of what they create. Artists are constantly ripped off because they are told, often for a variety of psychological reasons, that they are incapable of organizing or administering any process beyond the perimeters of their own work. This leads to the "well qualified, high paid administrator versus the starving artist motif" that dictates the motion of most art in this country.

(3) The artists could withdraw from any implication with these processes all together. That is given the limited funding available for the actual artists in both government and private sectors, and the operation of that funding currently ends up exploiting the artist even more, it might be more advantageous to withdraw from any participation in such funding. In such a space, free of such implications, it's possibly conceivable that artists would continue to make public work among friends, and audiences that would begin to adhere to such work for its own intrinsic value, and not because it was generated by some government scam, or corporate promo. Once the value of the work is restored to the object and its artist maker, then it might be possible that a legitimate balance could be struck with the funding sectors, whether government or private. For whatever value the government or private sector derives from its support of the art and the artist (prestige, investment potential, whatever), that value should never be gained, as it is now, at the expense & exploitation of the individual artist. On a concrete level, for example, writers could unite to withdraw from any participation, or application to the Creative Writing Fellowship program. The funding of that program is entirely inadequate in terms of the number of eligible and "qualified" writers, the size of the awards pathetically small (\$7,500), and the consequent effect on the total writing community divisive and depressing. (Among applying poets, for example, only 6.5% of the applicants received awards, and this is a program that is only funded every other year. A boycott of the program, done on a public level, would either help eliminate it all together, or force a re-valuation of its administration & funding. Otherwise participant writers, or those who apply will remain subject to a very feudal system of management.

Questions to you? Are you being paid to give this talk? Is the person who asked you to give the talk being paid by someone? If so, who is the funding agency? What are the assumptions behind their willingness to support such a talk? Given that there might be a funding body behind the talk, what effect does this have on the shape of criticism made of such funding bodies during such a talk? What is the form of response that such funding bodies often make to criticism of their funding policies by participant artists? For example, does the NEA have a benign policy of not funding critics of its methods of funding, disregarding in that process the significance and value of the artists work (or, conversely, paying off the critic through one kind of award or other). Do these considerations put the context of your talk, no matter its content, in a delicate position?

Sincerely,
Stephen Vincent

1 31 78

Steve ---

Thanks a lot for your response to the questionnaire which I can use too. "Career: a chosen pursuit, life work; success in one's profession; a path or course; speed." The economics of career (a measure of success in this work for us?) has been the main focus of attn in the answers to the questions, rather than how to do best artwork in a continuum that is a career or to deal with the issues of success, maintaining the choice, living real life while making "unreal" art -- it's fascinating to me how, given the openness of the questions and the significance of the word career denotatively, the train of thought inevitably given rise to (or the only one allowed to manifest itself semi-publicly and at length) in this process of the questionnaire...

To answer your Qs at the end you asks:

I'm not being paid by Bob P or by 80 Langton to give the talk. The gallery tends to pay artists and to require a pretty strict admission fee (usually \$2 & up, with exceptions only for a comp list). The gallery is considered an 'alternative space', financed by grants etc., administrated by artists chiefly (R Pritikin currently is chairman of the board), everyone who presents work there becoming a member and thus eligible for all sorts of administrative input & participation, if they want to get involved. Finances being what they are, and in an effort to promote the financial integrity & self-sufficiency of artists, the gallery pretty much insists that those presenting performance work of any kind be paid and require admission (the gate is split between the house and the artist, so, for instance when I did a collaboration at this gallery 1½ mos. ago, the gallery paid \$50 for it and the gate was something like 40, so \$70 went to my collaborator & I, which we split in ½, for putting on the show, which required most of that in expenses, so in fact there is little to be said of reimbursement) for creative energy, inspiration, practice, development of skills ~~xxx~~ which were essential factors in that particular performance and involved many many hours, as well as becoming a controlling factor in my life for over a month). (It's all worthwhile simply because it's what I want to do, I'll be glad for the opportunity to do it and that's the point.) Back to the point though: I didn't want to require a gate admission fee for this, so the gallery reciprocally will not dole out a base honorarium, so there's

no payment, except I imagine we may set up a lowkey request for donations which anyone can ignore -- reason: whether it in fact is useful or not, to others, a crucial factor in my aesthetic and interest in the piece is that it be 'a community service' to air some material which I've noticed in and out of myself and which I feel can profitably be opened out . . . How to do it well is my problem. Anyway, requiring admission would turn away physically or psychologically persons of low income or understandable tightfistedness (I am one, as I earn under 250 mo. in part-time bookstore business), and these are some of the people I want to be there if they're interested in making it. I am utterly uninterested in profiteering from it, though it will be / is plenty work and I'd be glad to get money for it. The questionnaire to 50 persons is an investment of about \$17 not to mention time, for instance, and I need shoes. Underwear! So, for this reason, and its place in the aesthetic intergrity of my piece, which if it is or isn't an 'artwork' still has aesthetic sense that rules as well as I'd hope I can develop political sense that can work with that (a central issue to the piece) for me, for the group, (There's no way to satisfy the group 1st, before myself.), I'm not asking admission & therefore not getting paid by gallery, which is okay. If they paid me I don't believe I would behave any differently, but it's certainly an issue -- i.e., if I were bucking for an NEA grant or a place in the 80 Langton board, I would be cautious perhaps about criticizing the gallery &/or the govt policies, but I hope that I will be able to be clearly critical of the gallery's methods of choosing appearances & relating to the federal government as I am of your relationship to your press or the SFRB if it seems in line to do so. There is no one enemy in a great black iron coat.

Perelman asked me to give the talk and he isn't being paid. He asked 80 Langton if the talks cd be held there, because he & Francie were tired of using their home for it, understandably, and felt 80 Langton was a knowable, workable space, local, central, good parking, etc., decent policies though troublesome at times.

So the funding, so far as I know is out of pocket, & donations. I want to do it. (The idea of topic is my own.) (I cd have spoken on anything, even Communist China about which I know nothing.) BP's willingness to support said talk is based on his respect for my work as writer & performer & probably my integrity as person & doubtless his warm friendship. 80 Langton trusts Bob to run the series, barely.

So, I agree with the gist of yr questions that financial economic context of the event is very significant -- it is obviously significant in this case, whereas I argue that it is deeply significant in everyone's work, and I have some serious reservations about govt funding, even the most benign. I find it hard to imagine Kafka, Joyce, Thoreau, Whitman, on govt grants, getting anything done.

The nonprofit element in the talk is intentional and not opportunistic: i.e., I'm not trying to make a point about it, or with it, but trying to keep the space open (no, to open a space in which I can make points that will jab rather than be blunted by the narrow focus, which context often determines: a small depth-of-field, if you will, or a sort of lush gauzy blinders -- the connotations of art in our immediate culture and in the contemporary Amer culture generally are that it has effects on us which won't affect us, except perhaps aesthetically or developing faculties of insight -- this seems to me an assumption of the role of artwork in most people's lives, artists or nonartists.

More later.

Also sincere,

Steve Beuron

February 4, 1978

Steve Benson

Dear Steve,

Thanks for your kind response to my letter in response to your questionnaire. Look, hopefully my intent was not to question your integrity, or that of Bob Perleman's (I did not realize this was the first in the new series of Talks - I thought what you were doing was arranged independently through 80 Langton St. which, I understand, is in part dependent on NEA funding for its survival, and thus my criticism of the context of the talk).

I think that discussions of the kind you propose, given that they will inevitably provoke criticism of, especially, government funding of the arts, should be held in a context as independent as possible from any identification with the NEA, CAC, etc. I think that's been one of the very positive points of Bob's coordination of the Talks (they have flourished without Government stipend). (Did you know that the original Poetry Center was located, or occurred at a community center on Telegraph Hill. They were offered what seemed like a good institutional deal (salaries, office space, some budget) by San Francisco State. What went down the tubes in terms of what held the possibility of becoming a City identified Poetry Center, eventually, as it has become now, became a campus identified, student center, with a minimum of City participation. ('cuse that sentence!).

But my point is really not to criticize the acceptance of government funding. I certainly do, and would not have gotten my press in the door (?) without it, though I do think part of our rescue is going to again have to come from the private sector. But I think it's important, crucial, that these discussions be a way, finally, of organizing artists in some manner so that we can actively criticize all grant giving groups without fear of retribution. (My own personal experience is that individual criticism is self-destruction. The grant gives isolate you off, cut your funds, and give just enough money to others to put the damper on criticism, at least public criticism of what, for example, the Literature Panel is doing, or not doing.)



steve

vincent

momo's press

box 14061 san

francisco ca 94114

So, frankly, I would rather see you paid for your work by people who come to the talk. & ideally, he says with rose colored glasses, I would like the audience, at least those in agreement to group and make public their position and criticism. I think the financial cost of organizing, and paying people like yourself for your work, is a small sacrifice in terms of what leverage might be gained in terms of having real effect over both government and private grant giving boards. Otherwise, as long people want & depend on that grant pie to make their art, these feudal conditions (essentially government with the consent of those governed) will continue. Or, as you suggest, revolution is resignation from any participation in the feudal arrangement. Just do it on our own, building the audiences one by one, and getting what financial support we can from those audiences and continue surviving in those bookshops, bars, wherever the survival salaries can be found.

OK see you the 16th.

P.S. An N.Y. rumor for the mill/ Len Randolph is on his way out as NEA Panel Director and will be replaced by Daniel Halperin.