

The MAIL-INTERVIEW project
by Ruud Janssen – Netherlands

A compilation of some mail-interviews

After the first publication (interviews with
Ruud Janssen – celebrating the 25 years in
Mail-Art) this is the second publication with
16 more mail-interviews

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These mail-interviews were done in the years 1994-2007 by Ruud Janssen. This publication contains a small collection out of the 80+ interviews that he did in these years.

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INTRODUCTION

All these 16 mail-interviews have been published before. Mostly on the Internet, and sometimes in small booklet form with cover and illustrations after an interview was finished. Small circulations always, and sent to the subscribers at that time and some archives like e.g. the MoMa, in New York,

This book is published with a selection of mail-interviews that have historic value and are worth reading for a broader audience. The amount of illustrations is kept to a minimum to make the publication not too thick. Also the Fluxus-related interview are collected in this book. A third and maybe fourth one will appear next year with the other interviews that I did.

I invested several years in gathering all this information. Honoria (Texas, USA) even devoted a complete chapter in her thesis about this project, so I guess these source interviews from the past are worth saving on paper too.

Besides the mail-interview I did with others, there is a selection of mail-interviews some people did with me. Those are published in another book with title "25 Years in Mail-Art". Also published at www.lulu.com.

Enjoy reading this collection,

Ruud Janssen

Breda, April 2008.

MICHAEL LEIGH (A1 Waste Paper Co Ltd.)

Mail-interview with Michael Leigh (UK)

Started on: 6-11-1994

Ruud Janssen (RJ): Welcome to this mail-interview. So far we met twice and have discussed certain things about mail-art already, but I still forgot to ask you what your 'firm' A1 Waste Paper Co. Ltd. is all about. When did you found it and what is it all about?

Reply on: 17-11-1994

Michael Leigh (ML): Well, it was soon after I had chanced upon the mail art network in 1980 at the Artlink International exhibition at the Greenwich Theatre Gallery in London that I decided I too could have a weird and wonderful nom de plume that many of my fellow mail artists had contrived for themselves. Also it would be nice to have a name other than my own to attach all my mail art to so as to distinguish it from the other art I was doing at that time (Landscapes and animals in oil on canvas).

I forget just how many names I'd thought up at the beginning but two I remember were ART ACHES

REPOSITORY and the BAD ART DELIVERY SERVICE. Both remained on the back burner until I chanced upon a couple of battered rubber stamps at a flea market in London's East End - both were the address stamps for a defunct (I assume so since they didn't crop up in the telephone directory at that time) recycling firm called the A.1.Waste Paper Company Ltd. I couldn't believe my luck - just the name I had been looking for! Not only did it sound good but could also be shortened to A.1. and covered all aspects of the recycling ethic I had seen as key element in all the networking material that I had used or was going to use in the future. It also has the happy ability to put itself at the very front of any address lists made in an alphabetical order!

RJ : This recycling is something I recognize in most mail-art I have seen from you. Some mail-artists keep all the mail they receive in their "Archive". Do you have an "Archive" or is almost everything recycled?

Reply on: 26-11-1994

ML: I think most sensible people realize that RECYCLING in everyday life is very important now if we are to put back something rather than take take take from the Earths limited resources. In art too this has become more and more important - not only from a ecological point of view but as a way of saving valuable time and money.

My "archive" consists mainly of dozens of cardboard boxes from the supermarket which are stuffed full of old mail in no particular order or design. I've never been very good at

organizing such things and so I'm afraid if I need something from my "archive" it takes me ages to find! Fourteen years of correspondence takes up a lot of space so I've been very ruthless just lately (since Archie was born) - sorting through it all and sending the stuff we didn't want to Michael Lumb's archive in Ipswich. On a day to day basis I still recycle envelopes and boring xeroxes get letters written on the back of them.

RJ : So this 'boring xerox' gets personalized and probably will end up in someone's else's "archive". Do you think that these "archives" are important for other people than the mail-artists? Is it possible for a 'non-mail-artist' to understand that mail-art is more than art sent by mail?

Reply on : 8-12-1994

ML: Archives are important because they contain the history and development of mail art. Artists can benefit by using their archives in a constructive manner - making exhibitions from them and showing the work to outsiders who don't understand what the postal network is about. At the moment Hazel and I are showing our artwork in conjunction with pieces from our mail art archive at the WEIDORAMA show in Walsall Museum and Art Gallery in the West Midlands of England. This exhibition is an attempt to show how mail art interacts with the other work we do and to show outsiders just how diverse and multi-disciplined it is. Archives should contain the best work and ideally made available to other mail artists and interested parties who wish to see it or part of it or the works of one particular artist for Commemorative works or book projects etc.

These outside the mail art network will never understand what mail art is without becoming part of the mail art network. I'm not so sure we should crusade to make the mail art understandable to those outside its circle. Those interested enough will discover it for themselves eventually. It's not a RELIGION to be thrust down peoples throats. One must carry on doing ones best and hope that others will see for themselves through mail art shows like WEIRDORAMA just how much fun their is using the postal system as your artistic medium.

RJ : You talk about 'the postal system'. Does this include the new communication-forms like using FAX and Computer for communication or isn't this mail-art in your eyes? What are your thoughts about the TELENETLINK 95 project that Crackerjack Kid started?

Reply on : 28-12-1994

ML: I'm afraid I must admit that FAX and computer art doesn't really fit into my idea of Mail Art - it's not something I'm interested in. If you can't stick a stamp on it and post it, then it's not really Mail Art. It's a different medium and should be called something else. I don't know anything about Crackerjack Kid's TELENETLINK project.

RJ: Well, let's stick to the communication-form with postage-stamps. The postage-stamp plays an important part in mail-art. In your work I've noticed the use of rubber

stamped postage stamps. Is there any special reason for that?

Reply on: 7-1-1995

ML: I like anything to do with postage stamps and rubber stamps. So it seemed natural for me to combine the two. They are quick to apply to envelopes and one can knock out sheets for projects and such like quite easily without having to spend ages fiddling around with a xerox machine. Also you can use those tiny collage elements that don't fit into any other format. I seem to collect hundreds of these and so that's why I have so many designs for rubber-stamp postage stamps that have as yet to be turned into rubber dies.

RJ : Another wonderful rubber stamp I noticed on one of your envelopes is 'ADDITIONAL ARTWORK BY ARCHIE LEIGH-JONES'. Is Archie growing up to be a mail-artist raised by two other mail-artists? To ask the question more specific: How does the mail-art that fills your days affect the raising of Archie?

Reply on : 18-01-1995

ML: Well, we like to think that Archie will come to appreciate the finer points of mail art and alternative culture in general through his seeing us work and play with all this stuff. Hopefully he'll find it useful in future years and maybe find a little network of his own to explore. At the moment he is only two and a bit so his attention

span is short - a few scribbly envelopes and he's off with a toot toot train or his cars! Children tend to go against the wishes of their parents so I expect Archie will see our interest in mail art as his poor putty parents wasting a lot of time that could be spent on Game Boy or Cartoons.

RJ : So; why are you wasting so much time on this mail art. Why do you spend so much money on this 'strange' hobby? What brings mail art to you that you keep on doing it?

Reply on : 27-1-1995

ML: Good Question! I really feel I'm not wasting time, after all, I spend more time sleeping then I do mail art! Mail is just as relaxing and therapeutic I think as sleeping, but unlike sleep I have something to show for it at the end of the day! We just had a 2 day mail strike here in London and I realized how much I missed the post when it didn't arrive - I started to get withdrawal symptoms! Yes, mail art is a drug! The more you do - the more you need! I'm a hopeless case I suppose.

RJ : Yes, you are a hopeless case (never argue with a drug-addict...). But to feed your addiction I'll ask another question so you get some mail. On your envelope you used your new stamp in memory of RAY JOHNSON, who suddenly died two weeks ago ("If it wasn't for Ray Johnson, this work wouldn't exist, mail art pioneer 1927-1995). It seems Ray was an addict too. He kept sending mail till he took his own life. I know of more mail-artists from the first

years who are still active. What would be the essence of this mail art that it is so addictive. What is your view?

Reply on : 4-2-1995

ML: It's hard to say why Mail Art is so addictive. Some people seem to kick the habit quite easily, like smoking, they just go on to something less addictive but just as costly - like sucking mints or herbal remedies like slippery elm grass or fever few.

The essence of mail is really the response you get from your sendings. If nobody replied then it would be quite easy to give up I guess. Luckily (or not!) I keep getting back stuff - flopping on my doormat every morning and it seems churlish not to reply.

A reporter came from a national newspaper recently to interview me and to find out what all this networking and mail art was about. I found it very hard to tell him exactly what it was that got me so excited and what still keeps me at it some 14-15 years later. It's communication I suppose and feeling part of a fellowship that knows no boundaries.

Now that Ray Johnson is no longer with us - it seems an ideal time to take stock of what has gone on in the past 40 years, since the early days of the New York Correspondance School of Art, and re-affirm our commitment to the mail art ethic and its concerns. But hopefully not in a boring, pretentious and crusty way but something more in the spirit of play from which it was born.

RJ : It sounds beautiful, what you say, but how will it be in reality? What is the future for the network in your eyes?

Reply on : 10-2-1995

ML: Who can say what tomorrow may bring? I don't have a crystal ball – I wish I had! The network is an organic, growing, shrinking, changing thing - full of surprises! Hopefully it will draw new recruits from different backgrounds, cultures and talents. It does that already of course but perhaps the future will broaden this spectrum even more. It is up to the networkers who already enjoy this wonderful world of art exchange to use their influence in a positive way - to find more time to do mail art, to expand its horizons, to open up new tracks of perception, to glory in its ubiquitousness, unravel the strings of pure art that connect us all!

RJ : In the recent years galleries and even museums are becoming more and more interested in the mail art that some 'famous' artists made and are trying to get this 'art' in their collection or are trying to get works for loan for a future exhibition. Will mail art become traditional art when things go on like this?

Reply on : 20-2-1995

ML: I don't think mail art will ever become "traditional" as you call it, simply because its so hard to define. The occasions when galleries or museums express interest in mail art are few & far between - they cannot cope with the

anarchic elements in it, or the idea that its based on mutual exchange & cooperation.

RJ: We have discussed the subject 'Archives' before. If a mail-artist decides to keep an archive (which normally happens when he decides to keep the nice things he gets by mail), what should happen with it after his death? I know of the archive of Ulises Carrion which was sold and plundered for work of 'famous' artists? Any idea what should happen to the archive of Ray Johnson?

Reply on : 28-2-1995

ML: Of course it's a shame that archives fall into the "wrong" hands and get plundered, but what can you do? Maybe artists should make provision for their work and archives when they are still alive and have some control over what happens to all of it when they die.

I would like to see Ray Johnson's archive kept intact of course, in a museum or library somewhere but I won't loose sleep if it doesn't. After all its the art that happens now which is important, not the boxes of old dusty stuff crumbling away in some gloomy mausoleum!

RJ : Your new project (A1 Waste Cassette Co.) has also a typical recycling-aspect. You write that you will use the cassettes people send to you for recording the final result. In this way you keep your own archive very small indeed. How is the new project going? Can you tell a bit more about it?

Reply on : 6-3-1995

ML: This new project was inspired by Morgan Fisher's "MINIATURES" project of a few years ago. His was nothing to do with the mail art network but it had a similar easy going attitude and commitment and the documentation within the LP sleeve was very like a mail art show documentation, or a sort you'd get if only people had the funds to pay for it!

I did a cassette project a couple of years ago where I asked for songs on a particular theme. This THEMATIC TAPE EXCHANGE went on for several months. 90 or so participants from 8 countries got involved. Everyone got another tape back from the list I sent out - they could choose whatever music they liked.

This time the idea is that contributions must be no longer than a minute so that I can squeeze 60 or so tracks onto one tape when I come to compile it in June. The reason I opted to send back the tapes I'd been sent was to eliminate any people who like to send cheap or very short tapes. This way they only have themselves to blame for the rubbish they get back! Most people so far have sent good quality tapes and so it makes my task somewhat easier. The theme of the project is POSTAGE and people can interpret this in any way they like whether it's a song, jingle, poem, rant or spoken word. So far the spoken word seems the most popular but I'm hoping for a few songs and music to break up the verbiage before the deadline on the 20th June 1995.

RJ : Well, I guess it is time to end this interview. Maybe there is something more you would like to say?

Reply on : 14-3-1995

ML: Just that it was nice being interviewed this way - your questions helped me think about my work and try to articulate some of my thoughts - hard to do, but fun!
Thanks!

RJ : Thanks for the interview!

CARLO PITTORE.

Mail-Interview with Carlo Pittore (USA)

Started on: 10-5-1995

Ruud Janssen (RJ): Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 22-5-1995

Carlo Pittore (CP): In response to your query, I began my Network mail art activity in 1978, encouraged by Bern Porter. Although I had been decorating my letters with pen & ink drawings and water colors for years, inspired no doubt by Vincents' letters to Theo, I also learned that drawing on my letters was good practice.

When Bern Porter encouraged me to send an original postcard off to a mail art exhibition, I was ripe for mail art. Not only had I been a philatelist as a kid, but I was eager for community, and was an appreciator of intimate mailed communication.

By 1980, when I published the first issue of ME Magazine, I was a real part of this expanding Network.

RJ : What was your ME Magazine about? Is it still alive?

Reply on 6-6-1995

(Carlo's answer came in the form of a booklet made out of 12 different colors forming the rainbow. He also wrote below his answer: "I'd like to see you reprint this colorful letter as sent.....what?")

CP: I began ME Magazine in the summer of 1980 after the insult of paying an entrance fee to participate in an exhibition in Rockport, Maine. Similar work had already been accepted to hang in an elegant Madison Avenue Gallery in New York City, so when I went to the exhibition with a friend, I was shocked and humiliated that they had failed to inform me of rejection & that I was paying for the cheese and wine at the opening! That their rejection was merely subjective, and not aesthetic. I wanted everyone to know that I would never pay to exhibit again, that their decisions were strictly subjective anyway, and that I no longer would pursue the carrot at the end of the stick, that in art, I would not allow museum curators to control my life.

Also, I had spent the summer painting self-portraits, and making self-portrait collages - so it seemed that as I was immersed in myself, and yet wanted mail art community, I would call my little publication ME , since it was about ME, yet a putdown of ME-ism, and of course, ME is the postal abbreviation of Maine. I enjoyed the pun, and when I asked recipients to send me a dollar bill to share in my

publication costs, Ray Johnson was right there, circling the ME in America on the one dollar bill. Some understood.

I filled the 1st issue of ME with my art collages on the theme of self portraiture, included pertinent quotes on the self, a personal reminiscence of Bern Porter (who's home I was spending the summer of 1980 at, at his Institute for Advanced Thinking, in Belfast, Maine) and other items of concern to me. When I mailed copies of the publication to Maine artists, and to mail artists, it was the mail artists who responded, not my local friends, and it was at that time that I realized who my real comrades were.... and when I returned to Manhattan in September, I was a wholly confirmed mail artist.

I opened my mail art gallery, La Galleria dell'Occhio at 267 East Tenth St. NYC in December 1980 - (the first gallery in what became the hot East Village art scene) - "a homage to Bern Porter" exhibition, and after the 2nd issue of ME was published in the spring of 1981, essentially on the theme of movement (i.e. motion pictures, or moving pictures, & repetition as in artistamps, I introduced myself, my gallery, my art, and my correspondents addresses to my readers.

The third issue was a play on the theme of ME , on the idea of the universal ME. I also enclosed the documentation of the Bern Porter mail art Exhibition which I curated, and, too, the additional introduction of my POST ME and Bern Porter Commemorative Stamp Series. ME = WE.

The 4th issue was an audio cassette letter, of songs, etc. inspired by Rod Summers. The 5th issue was devoted to

ME, ETC , or METC - to my Maine Art and Mail art communities, with articles by John Evans, John Jacob, Valery Oisteanu, Mark Petroff, Stephen Petroff, and Roland Legiardi - Laura; and a document of the International Mail Art Exhibition *Salva La Campagna Romana* in Montecelio, Italy, which I curated in the summer of 1982, the Boxing international mail Art Exhibition of February/March 1983, with a critique by critic Judd Tully; a declaration of War against exhibitions changing entry fees; a statement on Independence as ME and Community, lists of participating artists, a listing of mail art exhibitions etc. approaching, and other miscellany.

Issue #6, "International Mail Art is the most important & most significant Art movement in the world today" was the document of the Maine International Mail Art exhibition at the Maine Festival in Brunswick, Maine, August 1983. Included were two sheets of artistamps, a Cavellini sticker, a Ray Johnson piece, postcards by David Zack, David Cole, Epistolary Stud Farm, Robert Swiekiewicz, Volker Haman, Ubaldo Giacomucci, Stephen Petroff and Eric Finlay, with a series of stamps by Michael Leigh, and Mark Melnicove.

Tony Ferro published issue #7 in Italy, including a piece that I wrote about the frustration of rejection, following my exhibition of FIST - boxing painting at Buster Cleveland and Diane Sippellès Gallery in NYC.

I have not yet published issue #8, but I am not prepared to say it will not happen. But I must add, that I was hurt by Géza Perneczky's review of ME Magazine in his survey of small Press publications (1993). His criticism was based on

the fact that he failed to perceive the irony in ME, the pun in ME/Maine, and POST ME (after ME) and the playfulness of the entire endeavor.

Even mail artists can be as small minded, rigid and uptight as the dominant culture, although I would not have expected that from Géza, of who's art I have the utmost respect. Let's face it, none of us are perfect, and all of us make mistakes. Even ME.

RJ : How was your correspondence/dance with Ray Johnson?

Reply on June 18th 1995 "Father's Day"

CP : Dear Ruud, You ask me about my correspondence/Dance with Ray Johnson, and because of Ray's exit on January 13th of this year, its been a Season of constant Ray Johnson thoughts, mentioned as he is in almost every mail art communication; and between his memorial service, and Feigen Gallery Memorial Exhibition, & all the articles in the New York Times , Art Forum , etc. , I have reason to reflect on the public Ray Johnson, and the man I knew.

As I said earlier, my first rememberable Ray Johnson communication, was a dollar bill with George Washington saying "ME" , as they do in cartoons, with a megaphone drawn from the mouth with ME from A ME RICA captioned . I thought that was pretty clever. Everyone is a ME in A ME RICA

first ME in the word AMERICA in the 'bulb'like with a cartoon. The second ME in America as a country-sign on the bumper of a car.

The first time I met Ray was when he came to my East Tenth Street apartment (Manhattan) to reunion with Bern Porter. Evidently, Bern had published something with Ray in 1956! , and I don't think they had met up with one another since then. But as both of them had grown into mature artists, it may have been a reunion of mutual appreciators. Bern is 17 years older than Ray, and Ray was always trim and healthy, and he looked like a kid next to Bern. Indeed, he even exhibited some of that shy, nervous discomfit of being in the presence of an inquisitive adult.

One time I joined my family in Locust Valley for an anniversary celebration, and I called Ray to say Hello, and to my surprise, he came right over to meet me, and all of my extended family. The family was slightly discomfited: they knew Ray was not of their ilk. But Ray was very friendly to them and to me, and he made me feel like his equal. I felt very flattered. I told the family how great Ray was, and how important an artist he was, but as they had not heard of him at the time, they were less than suitably impressed.

Another time I hosted a mammoth Mail Art party, and who would have believed it? But Ray came. Mind you, he didn't enter into my apartment at this time, but remained in the hallway outside my door, holding court. As everyone wanted to talk with Ray. The Hallway became the epicenter. He brought the Party to him.

Of course these were the years when the New York mail artists were all my best friends: Buster Cleveland, Mark Bloch, John Jacob, John Evans, David Cole, Ed Plunkett, Jim Klein, Rimma and Valeriy Gerlovin, Ed Higgins and all those pals who were frequent out-of-town visitors, like Random, Banville, Cracker, Saunders, et al. What a community! and what a sense of community! It really was a correspondance - and of course there were those I met directly through Ray like Curtis Wells, Joseph Towne, Coco Gordon, Bill Wilson, Andy Warhol, John Russell, and others - including some local East Village types. Even though he was rarely physically present, the spirit of Ray Johnson always was. And everyone had their Ray Johnson stories, or recent Ray conversations to relate. Ray Johnson always hovered over us.

At the opening of his Nassan County Museum exhibition in February 1984, Ray greeted everyone on the grounds outside the museum wearing a sweater and blue jeans. And at the same time half the New York art world was there! Dressed to the nines! All the New York mail artists, all the Fluxus artists, lots of dealers, critics, painters, pop artists, collectors, and others. It was a New York Gala 20 miles out of New York; what a testament to Ray's visual art, and what a testament to his ever-widening correspondance.

I'm trying to think if I ever saw Ray after that... oh yes, at a Long Island Performance of his; wasn't he funny! He always made a big deal about doing Nothing. Our sensibilities are very dissimilar - but I always appreciated him even when failing to appreciate fully his zen-like

attitudes. He hated prose which he saw everywhere stifling art. His was a war against practicality & the pragmatic. He wanted poetry all the time. Art -all the time. BRAVO!

Since his apparent suicide, I've read a lot about Ray, and wrecked my memory, and thought back on our meetings and conversations, his phone calls to me, especially since I returned to Maine, his mailings, his influence, his relationship to the world-wide community of artists..... so many of whom apparently felt very close, humored, inspired, and appreciative of Ray. If influence determines artistic merit, Ray's influence is quite profound at the moment. There are many who were part of, and who evidently still feel part of his correspondance. Was he the father of mail art? His spirit still emanates and manifests itself throughout the Network.

Of his apparent suicide, one friend thought his act an act of cowardice, but I don't see it that way at all. Jumping off a high bridge into frigid January waters, from my point of view, requires far greater courage than I could imagine mustering.

If his decision was askew, his execution was flawless, regardless. And I am not in any position to judge him, or his action.

RJ : The mail art network has grown enormously in the last decades. Is there still this 'sense of community' as you called it. Or do you see some changes in the network?

Reply on 4-7-1995

CP : Your question Ruud, is not very simple. If "community" is an ideal, let me say that as a classically oriented figurative painter (primarily of the nude) living in Maine, USA, in 1995, I am isolated, if not alienated. The few figurative painters I know are so damn competitive and self-inflated, that there is no dialogue whatsoever. In the world in which my body inhabits, painting is neither chic nor affordable, and complicating this is that it is an extremely difficult activity. Indeed, drawing is often times more difficult and elusive than I care to elaborate. In such a situation, I play mail art merely to keep in touch with my Network pals of almost 20 years.

When I was younger, and more open to whatever I believed Art to be more inclusive, and I engaged in multi-media activities; newsletter, magazine & book publishing, movies, gallery operating, poetry performance art, audio, video, TV, radio, painting & mail-art. It all seemed to be a unit.

As life has become more complicated, and drawing and painting more time-consuming and difficult, I am more focused on my greatest obsessive pleasures: drawing and painting.

While I still enjoy playing mail art with old network buddies of almost 20 years, and some new friends as well, we have all gone in our own directions, and Art is not as facile as it once was (or as we may have seen it) and in my own case, I haven't had the money to publish anything I've done since the middle 1980's ; what monies I have I need to

pay the rent and pay for my art supplies. Postage has become prohibitive. Mail art, as Bern Porter reminded me for years, is not a vocation, but an avocation (I haven't been to Europe since 1984, either)

Having said that, let me not overstate my own private concerns of drawing and painting, nor undervalue my own very important communal involvement with mail artists. I could easily make a list of a hundred mail artists I love, a hundred whom I admire, a hundred to whom I am thankful for inspiration, help, love, concern, encouragement; and there is NO question in my mind that mail art has been an extremely rewarding, and exhausting activity.

If the "sense of community" is not as it was, for me, in the early 1980's - it may be that so many friends have moved on, died, moved away, and too, that mail art has changed, or hasn't changed. Ego, which has always had a major involvement in mail art, is still unrestrained in some very active practioners, and art is, as always, RARE, and more wondrous and desireable than ever. The mail artists I feel closest to are either persons I love, or whose art I admire, or both. And in the case of my own works, which has become so problematic, maybe it is too difficult to love, and consequently, we, as individuals, too difficult to love.

Because art is so fragile, and the artist so insecure, it is easy to fluff oneself up, to grandstand, & to parade. Maybe, when we were younger, that's what we were, a parade of grandstanders. Except that some amongst us have achieved

some aesthetic heights. And some of us may have made Art. Others may have been amusing; others, useful.

Do we today share a common aesthetic? A common goal? A common heritage? A common concern? Some of us are aesthetes. Some poets, some intellectuals. Some intuitive..... and all of us aging, & possibly as well, with diminishing resources, patience, time, etc.

Fifteen years ago, maybe 80% of mail artists would have read this interview, but now, even if 80% received this interview, how many will take the time - will have the time - to read this? And rightfully so. What could I say that is new, fresh, original, energizing, or inspiring? These are just words I am writing out - PROSE. Who has the time, &/or the interest? I much prefer original handmade drawings myself, than words. Printed Matter has overwhelmed all of us in the last decade, and unless it were a four color glossy with reproductions of our own work, who cares?

And who am I, a solitary, living far away in Maine, to talk about Community? And what would this "Community" be? For me, Community would be a community of artists who are different, & yet unique, and who have artistic respect and admiration for each other. The Community to whom I feel that "Sense" is out there. Indeed, it may well be you, dear reader. I can only hope it will also include me.

There are a hundred mail artists with whom I feel that "Sense of Community"; some of whom I love so much that their art is acceptable; others of whom their art is so laudable, they are acceptable. And then there are others

who are both, and others who are not loveable, but then again, they may be useful to the community, and therefore laudable.

Since I do everything by hand, I value those who value the handmade, those who value the maker of the hand-made (especially those who love my figurative art) and who sing and celebrate the hand-made, the one-of a kind.

I do not E-mail. I have NO computer. I may never have a computer. I put my hand into the soil of my backyard and garden and grow vegetables and flowers. And put my hand around the pencil and draw. And around the brush and paint. And around the pen, & write.

I am involved in the community that values my humanistic activity, as I value my friends, and colleagues who ply their activities with equal integrity. I love poetry, music, sculpture, drawing, painting, love, beauty and all those who practice it, celebrate it. obsess on it. They.... (You?) are my community. This is my sense.

RJ : What is a computer for you?

Reply on 28-7-1995

CP: OK. A computer for me is a series of electrical circuits designed to simulate (artificial) intelligence.... and art for me is intuitive, sensual, sinuous, and anti-mechanical. I understand that the computer has great value & uses, but like the TV - it can also lower standards as well as improve some things. Letter writing, for instance, is ruined by the

telephone and Email. I prefer my own slow handwriting to the machine.

RJ : Do you still participate in mail art projects when you get an invitation or have you become selective in answering your mail?

Reply on 26-8-1995

CP : I always try to accept personal invitations. It's not selective as such, that determines my mail art involvement (although who doesn't want some selectivity in where one puts oneself or ones parts) but usually TIME.

I don't know or understand how time has become so fleeting, but it has, and perhaps as well, my priorities have also changed. I always laugh when I tell people that there are only three aspects of life that interest me: Love, Art & Food, and I think that order is generally correct, although food goes to 1st place a couple of times a day, and love has very indefinite borders.

Mail - the nature of my mail is sometimes very thrilling, especially if it incorporates love. I am always turned onto a handwritten note, or a lengthy letter, or something decidedly original, or specifically heartfelt , but much in the mail has become understandably , cold, printed, mass-produced.... alas.

I always appreciate artistic brilliance - even if mass-produced or Xeroxed, but "artistic brilliance" in an ideal, &

since I often fall short of it, I'm not in any position to lament its demise in others.

One reads in mail art circles how a mail artist is so isolated & alone, except for the network, & I understand this, & have felt this, but I am making a concerted effort to relate better with my local community. I think this is more important, rather than less important. Mail is a vehicle for communication. but also, perhaps, of NON-involvement, of selective involvement, of partial disguise.....

RJ: In mail art there are the unwritten rules, actually written down many times, but it seems that in the last years more and more rules have been broken. I remember you used to write sometimes open letters when someone broke these rules. Does it still bother you?

Reply on 19-9-1995

CP: When I wrote my angry letter to Ronny Cohen (1984, Franklin Furnace Mail Art Exhibit) I felt she betrayed us by "editing" the show, putting the classic mail artists in glass cases, and relegating the others to oblivion. I have not hesitated in attacking other art critics, when called for, but I have always been hesitant to attack other artists publicly. It has become quite obvious that some mail artists are cashing in on the system, however, who can entirely blame them? Almost any way an artist can survive in this economy today is acceptable.

I do think "mail art" has pretty much run its course. It is no longer cutting edge, no longer avant garde; it has been co-

opted, and what we are seeing is the end, not a lull. While there are still some very legitimate exciting exceptions, mail art is a misnomer. And who knows what art is anymore, anyway?

At a symposium on Public Art in Portland, Maine, last weekend (September 9th 1995), I heard Lucy Lippard, Suzi Gablik, Suzanne Lacy, and Mierle Ukeles rail against art as precious object, and art as anything less than a relationship with the community. No longer is art an eye, Suzi Gablik said, but an ear. We must learn to listen, and to hear.

Who can argue that mail art is still fulfilling the kind of need it filled before E-mail, before the end of the communist Empire, before the death of Ray Johnson?

Mail is still fun, and the exchange is still valuable, but is it still art? To the believer, the question is irrelevant. One does what one likes.

But as for Art? In an age when Mierle Ukeles shakes hands with 8,500 sanitation workers and calls THAT art, then everything can be art, and consequently, nothing is art. I do what I like. Art be damned. Is it community relevant? And anyway Ruud - the breaking of what rules? The "unwritten" mail art rules of not mixing money & mail art? - Broken! The "unwritten" mail art rules of "No fee, Exhibition & documentation" - how many more lists do you need, with your name on it? Boring! Boring! Boring!

If the art sent is not art, if the exhibition held is not art, if the documentation provided is not art - is it still art?

If so, what is your definition of Art? And who cares?

RJ : Yes, I realize that there is a lot of repetition in mail art, especially when I get those same themes in projects again, and when I get another Xeroxed list of a project. But the advantage of being for a long time in mail art, is that you receive many invitations and you have the luxury of ignoring the projects you don't like and can focus on the interesting things in mail art. Mail art still brings me surprises, and that is why I am still doing it. Mail art still guides me to new aspects I can integrate in my life. I am not interested in a definition of ART or in one of the many definitions of MAIL ART. I just want to have a creative life, but actually sometimes don't really know what I would like to create. Your paintings, the letters that you write and mail. Why do you do it. What do you want to create?

Reply on 19-10-1995

CP : You ask me why I draw & paint, and what do I want to create? Firstly, after drawing and painting for more than a quarter century, I love it. I don't need a purpose beyond the joy, excitement and pleasure I feel while drawing and painting. That isn't the way it has always been, but that is the way it is now, and I assure you I am most grateful for this condition: of enjoying what I am doing, enjoying the process (and the letters that I write, too!). It makes me a very happy man.

I suppose if I had a purpose, it would be to celebrate the joy of living, to celebrate life in all its manifestations, to

celebrate goodness, love, care, concern, beauty. I would try to discourage violence, self-violence, hate, self-hate, bigotry, blindness, ignorance, and detrimental behaviors. For me, there is a real moral component in art - not that there has to be - but I feel compelled to celebrate, and compelled to redeem, to save, to preserve, to defend, to honor, to sustain, to keep, and compelled to fight against evil, injustice, unkindness.

Maybe the mere making of a drawing &/or painting is this: a testament of the goodness in life, a celebration of sober humanity. I want to help create a world where people are motivated by a sense of community, to celebrate beauty in all its manifestations, to enjoy, to appreciate, to hear, to see, to touch, to be..... I am happy, I enjoy living, I appreciate breathe - and I want to share this with others : to love.

Thank you Ruud for your interest in me, & what I think and feel. Being loving, & supportive, as you are, is most creative. Blessings to you, and your projects.

RJ : I also want to thank you, for the sincere answers you gave during this interview and the time and energy you took for writing down your thoughts and feelings.

CLIVE PHILLPOT

Mail-Interview with Clive Phillpot (UK)

Started on 26-05-1997

Ruud Janssen (RJ): Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 28-8-97

Clive Phillpot (UK): Dear Ruud: I guess I got involved in 1972 when I started writing a column in Studio International , the London art magazine. I was supposed to review things that nobody else reviewed - like exhibition catalogues , magazines , artist books , etc.

In the first column I mentioned Thomas Albright's two articles on 'Correspondence Art' in Rolling Stone , also in 1972.

Slowly, in 1972 + 1973, I began to hear from the L.A. Artists' Publication , File Magazine , the Fluxshoe people , the Bay Area Dadaist / Dadaland , Ecart , and received mail art pieces as well as publications from them.....

RJ: Was this also the moment you started to consider yourself a 'mail artist'?

reply on 10-9-1997

CP: Aha! Mail artist! I don't think that I have ever consider myself a mail artist. I have corresponded with many mail artists, but usually about mail art. Though now & again I would correspond with something other than the regular letter. (I have responded to a few calls for mail art exhibitions.....)

The closest I might have come to this description might be as a sparring partner for Ray Johnson, mostly in the late eighties + early nineties. He kind of nudged me into mail art responses to his mail art.

RJ : The term 'sparring partner' is interesting. What kind of 'punches' did Ray send to you?

next answer on 22-9-1997

CP: Given your reaction, perhaps a boxing metaphor was not exactly right. What I had in mind by 'sparring partner' was along the lines of a champion needing lesser lights to keep him sharp and in shape - even if they couldn't keep up with him over ten rounds. Sometimes, in sparring with Ray, I might raise my game to his level - other times not.

RJ : Maybe my question wasn't specific enough either, With 'punches' I was actually asking for maybe a few examples of some 'correspondances' you had with Ray.

next answer on 1-11-1997

CP: OK, here's one where I came off quite well. At some point, on the phone, Ray asked me if I knew who Anna May Wong was? Perhaps he had included an image of her in a mailing? I said I had no idea. He told me she was a 30's (?) movie star.

After that Ray would refer to her - in mailings, or in conversation - because of my ignorance.

Then a while later, in 1992, he sent me a mailing of a bunny head with the words Anna May Shun in it, plus the question: "Who is Anna May Shun?"

I let the question run round my head for a day or two, then responded with a sheet on which I stuck a xerox of a photo of Chou-En Lai - with some additions - and the phrase: "Anna May Shun is the half-sister of Chou-En Gum!"

In the next mail I got a sheet with two bunny heads + a self-photo of Ray. The heads said: Judy Garland (upside down!) and Chou-En Gum! There was also a note telling me to call him about this. When I did, I asked him why he had put Chou-En Gum with Judy Garland? He said it was because Judy Garland's real name (or her sister's?) was Frances Gumm!!!

RJ : Ray was always interested in the names of movie stars and played a lot with names and images. Do you know where the use of the 'bunny' originated from?

next answer on 19-11-1997

(With the written answer Clive Phillpot sent a copy of the text he wrote for the catalog of Ray Johnson's exhibition at the Goldie Paley Gallery at the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia - Pennsylvania in 1991 , which contains a very good list of principal sources).

CP : No, I can't remember Ray ever explaining their origins. In one sense , they just grew. When I was working on the catalog of Ray's 1991 exhibition in Philadelphia, I assembled an evolutionary chart - derived from the letters in the 1976 North Carolina Museum publication.

He did tell me once that when he signed a letter with a bunny head, it was a self-portrait. But when others drew his bunny-heads, they became their self-portraits.

Then there was another shift at the end of the eighties, when the black scared-looking-bunny-heads began to include people's names within their outlines. These heads have now become a kind of Ray Johnson icon.

RJ : In the beginning of the interview you mentioned that in 1972 you started with reviewing artists' books. At the moment you are even lecturing about artists' books. What is so fascinating about this form of art?

next answer on 1-12-1997

CP : The other worlds that books contain are fascinating - these worlds can be conjured up through words or images or both. And sometimes such books are visual, or verbi-visual, works of art.

The idea that some books can be hand-held movies also appeals to me, as well as the book as a random-access artwork.

Thinking about books as art in the context of mail art , I would say that their similar non-institutionalization is also appealing. For me, the multiple - usually printed - artists' books are most interesting because they are conceived to be disseminated to a wide audience. Also books printed in editions can slip into bookstores very easily, but surprise people browsing because of their often unusual content.

RJ : You were the Director of the Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where there are lots of artist's books as well. Do they also have a mail art collection?

next answer on 17-12-1997

CP : Yeah - that's right. I had the pleasure of buying the Franklin Furnace artist book collection just before I left the USA and leaving it to be merged with the one I built from 1977-1994.

As for mail art in the library, there is some. For example, there are a few pieces from Ray Johnson that go back a bit. (He wrote to many of the curators over the years, and some of them passed pages, etc. , on to the library). But on the

whole there is not a lot particularly because I thought it more appropriate for the library to be collecting documentation (as well as multiple art , like artists' books).

So I bought a fair number of catalogues of mail art exhibitions, plus a lot of artist magazines, some of which were related to mail art. Of course, Ray Johnson managed to subvert all this :-

We had worked together on a little book during 1986-88 which was published by the Nassau County Museum in Long Island. After this, when I was writing a piece about him for the Philadelphia exhibition, he suggested that he create a book which would be made up of 26 parts (chapters?) , each of 26 pages, + that he would send me a few pages at a time through the mail.

In due course this is what happened - in 1990. Before the book petered out in the summer, I received about 50 pages at the library - of "A Book About Modern Art" - plus some short sequels.

This book is quite unique - so it went against my normal policy for mail art + for artists' books! Trust Ray to be different.

RJ : I think that - unlike Fluxus - mail art is still quite unknown in the "official" art world. Is this true and will it stay like that?

next answer on 11-2-1998

CP : Yes, I am sure it is - in the official sense. But, on the other hand, Ray - who I keep coming back to (as my exemplar) - sent his mailings to so many critics , curators , directors & trustees of museums, that even if they could not recognize it , they experienced mail art.

I think that mail art will surface in museum exhibitions occasionally. When Ray gets the big retrospective that he deserves, surely mail art will become visible then?

But we must not forget that even as far back as 1970 , mail art was featured in a major museum , the Whitney Museum of Modern Art , thanks to Ray and to Marcia Tucker!

Perhaps a more important question is whether the acceptance of mail art by the "official" art world would be a good thing or a bad thing? Is mail art not more interesting as a personal expression in a guerilla relationship with museums? Museum shows might coopt mail art? Kill it?

RJ : Yes, you might be right there. I must confess that when I visited mail art exhibitions in galleries or museums (especially the postal museums DO exhibit nowadays) I was always more interested in the visitors (sometimes only mail artists....) than in the exhibited mail art. Did you also meet some of the mail artists you were in correspondence with?

(It took some time before I heard from Clive again, so I sent him another copy of the question. It turned out he had moved to another address)

next answer on 24-11-1998

CP : Yes, I did. Inevitably most were from New York and the East Coast; people such as Buster Cleveland, Carlo Pittore, and Crackerjack Kid, but also FaGaGaGa, Steve Perkins, and John Held. Plus artists from abroad such as Ulises Carrion.

Then there are all the fluxus artists. I have met most of them - except for three of the best, George Maciunas, George Brecht and Robert Filliou.

And one time, 1992 I think, I kinda hosted a congress that started at the Museum of Modern Art and finished at the Hilton Hotel in mid-town Manhattan, especially for Angela and Peter Netmail.

RJ : You mention both Fluxus-artists and Mail-Artists. Is the connection really that strong as some Mail-Artists like to make it?

next answer on 04-01-1999

(with the answer Clive Phillpot sent me a brochure of the exhibition "Artist/Author Contemporary Artists'Books" , an exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts at several locations during 1998 and 1999 in the USA. In the brochure there was a text by Clive Phillpot: "A Concise History Of Artists' Books". Together with Cornelia Lauf he curated the exhibition).

CP : Well, when I think of Fluxus I don't think of Mail-Art (except perhaps for the stamps of Georg Maciunas and Bob Watts), but when I think of Mail-Art I do think of Robert Filliou and George Brecht, of correspondence, and of their origination of the idea of "The Eternal Network" in 1968.

The postal system was vital to Fluxus as the principal means for distributing their art, but I don't think that this means that they necessarily created Mail-Art. Fluxus is much more relevant to the histories of the multiple and performance. However, I think that Ben Vautier's 'Postman's Choice' postcard is a Mail-Art classic.

RJ : Are there more "Mail-Art classics" you remember right now?

next answer on 2-2-1999

CP : One that I think of as a classic, was something from Ray Johnson to me. I would guess that it wasn't the first - or last - time that he used the idea, but, as ever, he responded specifically to the occasion.

In 1987 Ray asked me to join him in documenting a performance that he had done at the Nassau County Museum just outside New York. He told me about the event, showed me photos, and suggested that I ask him some questions. later I did just this, and sent him some questions in the mail. He responded subsequently with what seemed to me to be nonsensical answers. I had to admit to him on the phone that I didn't understand his response.

The next thing that happened was that I got a piece of paper folded like a kid's airplane in an envelope from Ray. On unfolding the plane, I found that it was a photocopy from a book on Picasso's work. Ray had underlined odd passages, thereby revealing to me the origins of his mysterious answers. (Though not exactly what he had meant by them.)

Then a week or so later I got a letter in the mail that had been sent to "Monsieur Picasso" at an address in Paris. It was inscribed "inconnu" and stamped "return to sender" (in French). The reason why I got it - since I never sent a letter to Picasso, even when he was alive - was that the return address in the top left corner of the envelope was MINE!

I guess it's an old trick. But a neat one. A letter sent from Long Island had been sent on a long journey via Paris to me in New York, thanks to the efficiency of the post office, and the kindness of the people now living at Picasso's old address.

I was very amused by Ray's manoeuvre. But the final piece of my story took me several more weeks to unravel.

Some time later I looked again at the xerox from the Picasso book. Then the penny dropped. The work illustrated was a cubist work of 1912 entitled "The Letter". But even through the fragmented plane of the painting I was able to make out that the painted letter was addressed to "Monsieur Picasso" at the very same address to which Ray had despatched his letter for me!

I am so glad I got to know Ray.

RJ : Did you save the items you received from Ray or are they in some kind of archive?

(Clive Phillpot's answer came after a few months because he was in New York, to give a lecture on artist books at the New York Public Library.)

next answer on 18-5-1999

CP : Yes, I have saved everything Ray sent me, from 1981 to late 1994 a few months before his suicide. They are part of my own archives. I also have notes of his phone calls over many years - I still need to transcribe and expand these.....

As well as sending things to me personally he also sent a few things to me especially for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with specific instructions that they were for the Library collections. He even asked me to send him letters confirming that these pieces were safely in the Museum. The principal piece was the Book About Modern Art, which was made up of several mailings of three or four sheets each.

RJ : You mentioned your Archives. What do they look like?

next answer on 23-5-1999

CP : Well, I guess they look much like other people's , you know lots of files. As for their contents and arrangements, I

imagine that they too are not very different from other people's solutions.

There is a section on my writing comprising typescripts and photocopies (plus all the eventual books, catalogs and magazines in my library). There are many files of correspondence with artists, and about art. Also artist files - which include announcements of exhibitions, press releases, cuttings and reproductions of articles, essays, etc. There are also some specific files on artist books, and about book artists. And as well as these art-related files there are some others on miscellaneous things, and correspondence from friends and relatives. And if you really want the nitty-gritty of their organization, I think most of these are organized by name and/or by date. (There are only so many ways to skin a cat.)

I suppose that I should add that I have discs that archive most of what I have written on the computer, plus some email messages.

RJ : Yes, that computer. Do you like working with computers?

next answer on 31-8-1999

CP : I like working with some computers. At home I have an old Macintosh; I really enjoy the simplicity and logic of its software. But at work I have a Windows-based PC. Ugh! I find it amazing that this clunky software rules the world. Business has won out over technology.

Much as I enjoy computers, the thing that has really changed the way I work - and maybe think - is word-processing. In fact word-processing helps one to write more like one thinks. I can hardly believe that I once used a typewriter with carbon paper, whiteout, etc.

And almost as important as that facility is email. When I moved back to England I felt so cut off for the few months it took me to settle down, and before I set up email again. When one has friends - and work opportunities - in many countries, email is unsurpassed for keeping in touch, though there are still times when letter writing is important.

RJ : How did you become so interested in letter writing? Is it just connected to your work in which you communicate with so many different people worldwide, or is it the other way round? (So that you got interested in communicating worldwide through letter writing)

(It might look like a strange question, but I wonder because in my case I learned through my father -at the age of 7- the thrills of communications worldwide and because of doing the same stumbled onto the mail-art network)

(answer on 9-10-1999)

CP : I guess I always wrote letters to friends and relatives whom I couldn't see regularly. Similarly when I moved to New York in 1977 the simplest way to keep in touch with people overseas, and across the USA, (since email was not an option) was through letters. When I moved back to

England I left a lot of friends in the USA, so letter writing continues, and not just to the USA, plus a great deal more email.

Finally I think I quite enjoy the time one gives to thinking about a communication when writing letters, and to shaping the language of the communication. Since telephone, for example, is a medium for talking, this is a very different kind of exercise.

(because of a break in the whole mail-interview project, the next question only went out a long time later. Giving an extra time-dimension to this interview).

RJ : Was there anything I forgot to ask you?

(answer on 4-3-2001)

CP : Yes, you didn't ask me about Solong

RJ : What would you like to tell about Solong?

(answer on 10-3-2001)

CP : So long it's been good to know you! Thanks for the interview, I hope it will be useful. Cheers. Clive.

RJ : Thanks for the interview as well. The readers will judge if it is useful. I sure did enjoy it.

DICK HIGGINS

Mail-Interview with Dick Higgins (USA).

(The correspondence that was the basis for this interview was exhibited in the Queens Library Galley in New York).

Started on: 4-6-1995

Ruud Janssen: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 3-7-1995

Dick Higgins: Dear Señor Janssen - I got involved in the mail-art network in July 1959 shortly after I met Ray Johnson in June. He sent me a marzipan frog, a wooden fork and three small letters in wood, which I correctly misunderstood. I sent him some wild mushrooms which I had gathered, and they arrived at his place on Dover Street just before they decomposed.

RJ : Was this mail-art in the beginning just fun & games or was there more to it?

Reply on 27-7-1995

(Together with his answer Dick Higgins sent me his large, 46 pages long, Bio/Bibliography and a contribution to my Rubberstamp Archive, a stamp sheet with some of his old and new stamps printed on)

DH: Indeed it was fun to communicate with Ray. But it was a new kind of fun. I had never encountered anyone who could somehow jell my fluid experiences of the time when I was doing visual poetry (thus the letters), food and conceptual utility (perhaps I had shown him my "Useful Stanzas" which I wrote about then. But what had he left out? Nature - thus my sending of the wild mushrooms, collecting and studying which was an ongoing interest (I was working on them with John Cage, an important friend of Ray's as of mine).

As for rubber stamps, in 1960 when Fluxus was a-forming my home was in New York at 423 Broadway on the corner with Canal Street and my studio was at 359 Canal Street a few blocks away. Canal Street was known for its surplus dealers (some are still there) including stationers, and one could buy rubber stamps there for almost nothing - and we did! I had already made some rubber stamps through Henri Berez, a legendary rubber maker on Sixth Avenue, long gone but he was the first I knew who could make photographic rubber stamps - Berez made a magnesium, then a Bakelite and finally the rubber stamp, And I blocked the magnesiums and used them for printing as well. I had stamps of musical notation symbols made and also of my calligraphies, etc. At an auction in 1966 when he moved to Europe I also bought Fluxartist George Brecht's rubber stamps (mostly of animals) which he used starting ca. 1960;

I used those to make a bookwork of my own, From the Earliest Days of Fluxus (I Guess), which I think is in the Silverman Collection. Others of my rubber stamps are in the Archiv Sohm and perhaps Hermann Braun or Erik Andersch have some, I am not sure. I think there was an article on Fluxus rubber stamps in Lightworks - that must be listed in John Held Jr's Mail Art: an Annotated Bibliography (Mettuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991) and/or in Jon Hendricks's Fluxus Codex (New York: Abrams, ca. 1992). I also composed some music using rubber stamps, notably Emmett Williams's Ear/L'orecchio di Emmett Williams (Cavriago: Pari & Dispari, 1978).

That's about all I can add to the rubber stamp thing at this time. It would be much more efficient for us if I send you my Bio/Bibliography which has facts that need not be endlessly repeated, so I am doing that under separate cover. The curious type face I used on that is one which I designed and named for Fluxmail Artist Ken "Kenster" Friedman, "Kenster."

RJ : Your Bio/Bibliography is quite impressive. The sentence on the first page: "I find I never feel quite complete unless I'm doing all the arts -- visual, musical and literary. I guess that's why I developed the term 'intermedia' , to cover my works that fall conceptually between these" , indicates you are always focusing on all kinds of media to express yourself. Which place has mail-art in this?

Reply on : 4-8-1995 , 29 °C and about 85% relative humidity

(Together with his answer Dick Higgins sent me a poster with title "SOME POETRY INTERMEDIA" explaining metapoetries or how poetry is connected to many other art-forms. Published by Richard C. Higgins, 1976 , New York, USA)

DH : Yes, I am a "polyartist" - Kostelanetz's term for an artist who works in more than one medium, and some of these media themselves have meaningful gradations between them. Visual poetry lies between visual art and poetry, sound poetry lies between music and poetry, etc. But between almost any art and non-art media other intermedia are possible. What lies between theater and life, for instance? Between music and philosophy? In poetry I got into this in my "Some Poetry Intermedia" poster essay. If we take any art as a medium and the postal system as a medium, then mail art is the intermedium between these - postal poetry, postal music, mail-art [visual variety], etc.

Some of these are more capable than others of the subversive function which I value in mail art - it bypasses the gallery world and the marketplace, so it becomes somehow immune to censorship. If used aggressively it can make a reactionary politician's life Hell. And it is not yet played out yet. For instance, while Fax art has no special characteristics (it is like monochromatic regular mail, "snail mail") what is e-mail art? Can't it subvert the rich folks' machines? Ruin their modems? Yet even that is a commonplace, once one has considered it. Little artists can do it. Its power is inherent in its medium. I can tell you stories of how the Poles of Klodsko tortured an East German bureaucrat who has banned a Mail art show in

(then) East Berlin. I happened to be visiting there at the time and was involved in this.

But let's think about more positive areas. Please tell me about the spiritual aspects of mail art. How do you see that?

RJ : Yes, a nice try to end an answer with a question to me. I will send you some 'thoughts about mail-art' for you to read, but in this interview I would like to focus on YOUR thoughts and knowledge. I am in no hurry, so I would like to hear that story of how the Poles of Klodsko tortured this East German bureaucrat who banned this mail art show in East Berlin.....

Reply on 17-8-1995

DH : (today in 1843 Herman Melville signed aboard the frigate 'United States,' this began the journey that led to 'White-Jacket')

It must have been about 1988 and I was traveling through Poland, reading and performing with a friend, the critic and scholar Piotr Rypson. Our travels brought us to Klodsko down in the beak of Galicia to where a group of unofficial Polish artists had gathered to discuss what to do since the Mail Art Conference which Robert Rehfeldt had organized in East Berlin had, at the last moment, been canceled by some bureaucrat. It was a final and irrevocable decision the bureaucrat had made, finalized by his official rubber stamp besides his signature. This was a great disappointment to these artists who had very little

opportunity to meet personally with each other, especially across international borders, and to exchange ideas. However these artists were Poles, from the land of the liberum votum , and they had six hundred years experience at protesting. They made a list of things to do. Having access to some things in America which were problematic in Poland, I was asked to have four exact facsimiles of the bureaucrat's rubber stamp made up and to send one to each of four addresses I was given, one was an official one in the Department of Agriculture in the DDR and the other three were in Poland. I was also asked to buy some homosexual and some Trotskyite magazines in the USA, to send them one at a time to the bureaucrat and, if possible, to subscribe in his name to these things. I did these things and also I appointed the bureaucrat an honorary member of my Institute for Creative Misunderstanding and sent an announcement of his appointment to Neues Deutschland, the main communist newspaper of the DDR.

For a few weeks it seemed as if nothing had happened. But then I received a long letter from Robert Rehfeldt in English (usually he wrote me in German) lecturing me on what a terrible thing it was to try to force a person to accept art work which he did not like. And a few weeks after that I received a post card from Rehfeldt auf deutsch saying "Fine - keep it up [mach weiter]."

In this story we can see the usefulness for using the mails on the positive side for keeping spirits up and for keeping contact with those one does not see, on the sometimes-necessary negative side for creating powerful statements which must have caused great problems for this

bureaucrat. I have no idea who these people were to whom I sent the rubber stamps, but I can imagine that they were forging the bureaucrat's signature onto all sorts of capricious papers and causing great consternation within official circles of the DDR. For me this story tells well one of the main uses of Mail Art.

Perhaps it also suggests why Mail Art taken out of context can sometimes be such a bore. It has no particular formal value or novelty, especially when one has (as I have) been doing it for nearly forty years, so that mere documentation seems tendentious and egotistic. Would you want to only read about a great painting of the past? Wouldn't you rather see it and then, perhaps, read about it? Making good Mail Art is like making a soufflé - the timing is very very critical. Who wants to be told about a decade old soufflé? And documenting the matter is not nearly so interesting as receiving and consuming it at precisely the right moment - with the right people too, I might add. It is an art of the utmost immediacy.

RJ : What was the reason for creating your "Institute for Creative Misunderstanding"?

Reply on 26-8-95 (Apollinaire born today)

(Besides his answer Dick Higgins also sent his poem "Inventions to make")

DH : Kära Ruud, For years I was struck by how little one understands of how one's work will be perceived by others. We can prescribe how others will see it at risk of

discouraging them. Duchamp, when anyone would ask "does your piece mean this or that...?" would smile and usually say "yes," no matter how absurd the question. The impressionists thought they were dealing with light; we see their contribution is one of design along the way towards abstraction. The Jena Romantic poets of Germany saw themselves as applying the philosophies of Kant and Plato to their writings, but we see it as reviving the baroque and providing a healthy restorative emotional depth to their poetry which had often been lacking in the work of the previous generation. The same is true of Percy B. Shelley who knew his Plato well (and translated passages of Plato from Greek into English), but who in poems like "Lift not the painted veil" or "The sensitive plant" moves Plato's ideas into areas which Plato never intended to create a new entity of art-as-concealment. Harold Bloom, a famous academic critic in the USA, was, in the 1970's in books like *The anxiety of influence*, stressing the role of recent art as cannibalizing and deriving from earlier art. I was not satisfied with Bloom's models and preferred to extend them and misinterpret them myself along hermeneutic lines using a Gadamerian model; this you will find in a linear fashion in my book *Horizons* (1983) and in the forthcoming "Intermedia: Modernism since postmodernism" (1996). But a linear presentation does not satisfy me either; it does not usually offer grounds for projection into new areas and it focuses too much on the specifics of my own ratiocinations. To broaden my perspective I conceived of a community of artists and thinkers who could take conceptual models and, with good will (my assumption, like Kant's in his ethics), transform these models - evoking not simply intellectual discourse but humor or lyrical effects which would

otherwise not be possible. This is, of course, my Institute of Creative Misunderstanding. Into it I put a number of people with whom I was in touch who seemed to be transforming earlier models into new and necessary paradigms. I tried to organize a meeting of the institute, but could not get funding for it and realized that it might well be unnecessary anyway. I still use that Institute as a conceptual paradigm when necessary.

So I would not describe the Institute for Creative Misunderstanding as a "fake institute," as you did, so much as an abstract entity and process of existence which creates a paradigm of community of like-minded people by its very name and mentioning. Are you a member of the Institute, Ruud? Perhaps you are - it is not really up to me to say if you have correctly misunderstood it in your heart of hearts.

RJ : Who is to say if I am a member? But I sure like all those institutes and organisations that there are in the network. You spoke of the intention to organize a meeting. In the years 1986 and 1992 there were lots of organized meetings in the form of congresses. Is it important for (mail-) artists to meet in person?

Reply on 5-9-1995 (Cage born -1912)

DH : (laughing) Who's to say if you are a member? Why the group secretary, of course - whoever that is. Perhaps I am acting secretary and I say you are a member. Anyway, to be serious, the question of meetings is not answerable, I think, except in specific contexts. The events planned at K_odsco

could not have been planned without the people being together; but at other times it would seem unnecessarily pretentious to bring them together - frustrating even, since most mail artists are poor and they would have to spend money to be present. At times this would be justified, but if it were simply a matter of pride or of establishing a place in some pecking order, well that would not be good.

Think of a camp fire. Shadowy figures are in conversation, laughing and talking; what they say makes sense mostly among themselves. A stranger wanders in and listens. The stranger understands almost nothing - to him what is said is all but meaningless - and the part which he understands seems trivial to him. The stranger has two options: he can stay and learn why what is being said is necessary, or he can go away and suggest that all such campfires are silly and should be ignored or banned. Mail art is like that. I go to shows, and the work is arranged not by conversation but according to a curators's skills of the past, as if these were drawings by Goya. But they aren't. Their meaning is more private, often contained in the facts and conditions of their existence more than in the art traditions to which they seem to belong. The show therefore doesn't work. Few do. But a show arranged chronologically of the exchanges among some specific circle mail artists - that would have a greater chance for an outsider to learn the language and love the medium. Wouldn't you like to see a show of the complete exchanges between, say, San Francisco's Anna Banana*1 and Irene Dogmatic (if there ever was such an exchange) than the 65th International Scramble of Mail Artists presented by the Commune di Bric-à-Bracchio (Big catalog

with lots and lots of names, but all works become the property of the Archivo di Bric-á-Bracchio).

*1 of course Anna has since moved to her native Vancouver, and I haven't heard of Irene Dogmatic in many a year)

Chance encounters among mail artists, meetings among small groups - oh yes, those are quite wonderful. But I don't usually see the point in large gatherings of mail artists. Actually, there haven't been many of them - thank goodness. Berlin would have been an exception, methinks.

As e'er- Dick (laughing) (Dicks signiture was placed here as a smiling face)

RJ : What is the first 'chance encounter' (as you call them) that comes up in your mind when I ask for a memory about such an event?

Reply on 18-9-1995

DH : By "chance encounters" I mean those meetings which could not have been anticipated or which take place on the spur of the moment. In on Wednesday I arrange to meet you the following Tuesday at 7:30 and if I am unable to sleep Monday night because of faxes from Europe arriving all night long Monday night and the cat is ill on Tuesday so that I must waste half the day at the veterinarian's office, you and I will have a very different kind of meeting from the situation of my meeting you in the post office and the two of us going to spend a few hours together talking

things over, or if I say: "Look: I cooked too much food, please come over and help me eat it."

We have all had such meeting, no? Those meetings are the most productive, I think. Few mail artists (or any artists) can really control their own time, their own scedule. Only the rich can do that, if anyone can. We are mostly poor and must depend on the schedules of others. But there are days when this is not true - days when it works perfectly to see someone. Ray Johnson was a master of this - he would call, "I am with (whoever), we're down the street from you. Can we come see you?" If yes - great. If not, one never felt locked into the situation.

That is how I never met Yves Klein. One night, perhaps in 1961, at 11:15 Ray phoned me from down the street and said that Yves Klein was with him and would like to meet me. I said I'd like to meet him too but I was in bed and it was a week-day. I had to go to work the next day. We agreed that I should meet Yves Klein the next time he came to new York. It didn't happen; Klein died instead.

It is also how I met Alison Knowles, - Ray Johnson and Dorothy Podber and myself had dinner in Chinatown in New York and then they took me to Alison's loft nearby. I had met her briefly before that, but this time we got to talk a little. That was thirty-six years ago, and Alison and I are still together.

And so it goes -

RJ : Yes, and also the forms of communication are proceeding. To my surprise I noticed on your 'letterhead' that you have an e-mail address too. Are you now exploring the possibilities of the internet as well?

Reply on 20-10-1995 (sent on 11-10 from Milano Italy)

(Dick Higgins handwritten answer came from Milano, Italy, where he is preparing a retrospective show of his work.)

DH : Yes, "exploring" is the only possible word, since the internet is constantly changing. You can "know" yesterday's internet, but today's always contains new variables.

In the world of computers, most of the "information" is irrelevant, even to those who put it there. Few of us bother to download clever graphics since advertising has made us numb to those. I only download graphics if the text which I see really seems to need them. I need them no more than I need to watch show-offy gymnastic displays, divers or pianists who play Franz Liszt while blindfolded and balancing champagne glasses on their head. What I like on the "net" are three things:

- 1) Making contact with people whose contributions to the internet shows interest similar to my own. Far from being alienating, as others have said of the web and internet, I find this element a very positive and community-building factor. For instance, I enjoyed meeting on the internet a guy whom I'd met three years ago, a visual poet named Kenny Goldsmith, and had not seen since. Now he does

"Kenny's page " - <<http://wfmw.org>
so/~kennyg/index.html> - where he creates links to
anything in the new arts which excites him. It was
like looking into someone else's library - a
revelation, and one which I could use. It led me to
meet him again in person, a real delight.

- 2) I cannot afford to buy the books I once could. But often I can download and print out things to read before going to bed. For an author, what a way to get one's work and ideas around! Why wait two years for your book to appear, for your article to come out in some magazine which nobody can afford? Put it on the net and it is potentially part of the dialogue in your area of interest. Further, it tells me not only what people are interested in, but what is going on - a John Cage conference , which interested me, was fully described on the net for instance - and it gives me access to everything from dictionaries, indexes and lists of words, people and events. I suppose a saboteur could list false information, and of course commercial interests can tell me about their stuff, but this only sharpens my skeptical abilities - I can avoid their garbage with no more effect than on a commercial television set. I suspect the internet is a blow to the effectiveness of normal advertising.
- 3) As someone whose favorite art, books and literature are seldom commercially viable, I am happy to see how the internet actually favors the smaller organizations and media. If I access a big

publisher's pages with ten thousand titles, I stop and quit almost at once - it takes too long. But a small publisher's page is often worth a glance. Further, the phenomenon of links gives an element of three - dimensionality to the internet. A book sounds interesting. I click on it and I see a few pages of it. This is like browsing in a wonderful book store. A good example is the pages for Avec, a small avant-garde magazine and book publisher in California. I found it through a link on the Grist pages - <<http://www.phantom.com/~grist>>. It's designed by the editor of Witz , a new arts newsletter (address: creiner@crl.com). Perfect. Another good one is Joe de Marco's pages <<http://www.cinenet.net/~marco>> - full of Fluxus things and theater. All this suggests new forms of distribution, which has always been a problem for small publishers. If you can safely transmit credit information to an address on the internet, then, if you live in a small village as I do, it is as if you lived in a large city with an incredible book store near you. Because of links, I do not see how big corporations can commercialize all this. My computer is black and white, I have no money to invest in their corporations, and their rubbish is easily avoided. Thanks to the internet, the damber kind of popular culture will probably begin to lose its strangle-hold on people's attention. Of course it will take time and other developments too, but the internet rips off the conservatives' three-piece suits, remakes them and gives them to us in a better form.

RJ : It seems like publishing is very important for you. In mail art a lot has been written about the book "The Paper Snake" by Ray Johnson, which you published with Something Else Press. What was the story behind this specific book?

reply on 27-10-1995 (internet)

DH: There is no doubt in my mind that Ray Johnson was one of the most valuable artists I've ever known. He was a master of the "tricky little Paul Klee-ish collage," as he modestly dismissed them; most of his work of the late 1950's was collages in 8 1/2 x 11 format-roughly corresponding to the European A3. That was a time when Abstract Expressionism ("Tachisme") ruled the roost in America, and art was supposed to swagger, lack humor, be big and important-looking. Johnson had rejected this long before, had, in the 1950's, made hundreds or thousands of postcard size collages using popular imagery, had also made big collages and then cut them up, sewn them together into chains, had buried the critic Suzi Gablik in a small mountain of them (alas, only temporarily), had printed various ingenious little booklets and sent them off into the world, and, since there was no appropriate gallery for his work, had now taken to sending his collages out along with assemblages in parcel post form. For example, a few days after I had startled Ray by throwing my alarm clock out the window, he sent me a box containing a marzipan frog, a broken clock and a pair of chopsticks, calling shortly thereafter to suggest that we go to Chinatown for dinner.

But Ray could write too. He was always interested in theater and performance, had picked up many ideas from the days when he and his friend Richard Lippold lived downtown in New York City on Monroe Street on the floor below John Cage (all of them friends also from Black Mountain College), and he wrote and sent out innumerable playlets, poems, prose constructions, etc.

I saw Ray around town for several months before I met him, which was at a 1959 concert where I asked him if he were Jasper Johns. "No," he said, "I'm Ray Johnson," we got to talking and soon to walking and not long afterwards to visiting. Years later, when I met Jasper Johns, in order to complete the symmetry, I asked him if he were Ray Johnson. I expected him to say, "You know I'm not-why do you ask?" Instead he said, acidly: "No." And he walked away.

Something Else Press was founded on the spur of the moment. First I did my book "Jefferson's Birthday/Postface" (1964). But before the thing was even printed, I decided the next book should be a cross-section of the things Ray had sent me over the previous six years. So, having little room at my own place, I packed them all into two suitcases, visited my mother and spread everything out on her dining table. I sorted the book into piles-performance pieces, poems, collages, things to be typeset, thing to be reproduced in Ray's writing-taking care to include at least some of each category. I knew the book would be hard to sell, so I didn't want to make it a Big Important Book; I chose the format of a children's book, set the texts in a smallish size of Cloister Bold (an old-fashioned Venetian

face), decided on using two colors to simulate four (which I could not have afforded), and then laid out the pages in a way which I felt would invite the reader to experience Ray's pieces as I did on receiving them. Ray, who had at first been displeased by the project, perhaps feeling it would lock him into a format too much, became very enthusiastic as the project developed. Where at first he had refused to title the book, later he called it "The Paper Snake" after a collage and print he had made. He also wanted the price to be "\$3.47," for reasons I have never known (prices of that sort were always \$3.48 or \$3.98). And when, one winter day in 1966, the book was being bound by a New York City binder, I took Ray over to the bindery to see it being cased in (when the covers are attached to the book). By then he was delighted and wrote me one of the few formal letters ever received from him thanking me for doing it.

As for its reception, the book was a puzzler to even the most sophisticated readers at the time. Even someone who was a regular correspondent of Ray's, Stanton Kreider, wrote me an outraged letter saying what a silly book it was. Such people usually felt that Ray's mailings were and should remain ephemera. There were almost no reviews, but one did appear in *Art Voices*, one of the most scorching reviews I have ever seen, complaining the book was precious and completely trivial, a pleasure to an in-group. These letters and reviews are now in the Archiv Sohm in Stuttgart, where you can peruse them for yourself if you like.

RJ : It is good that you keep mentioning the places where things can be found, if I do or don't persue, now somebody else might do it too. There are a lot of archives in the world. Besides the 'official' archives there are also the privat collections that most (mail-) artists have built up. Are there still things that you collect?

Reply on 29-10-95 (internet)

DH : I feel overwhelmed by THINGS at my home. My letters are one of the main things I have done in this life, and I try to keep copies of each letter I send; but there is no space to save them. For years now my files have been going away - to the Archiv Sohm, for about 1972 to 1989 to the Jean Brown Archive, and from then till now the Getty Center in Santa Monica, California.

I don't think it makes sense for a private individual to have a closed archive if such a person is going to present a face to the world. I have read that Yoko Ono founded Fluxus, and I have seen that quoted as a fact many times. One critic or student picks up errors from the one before. I don't know where that "fact" came from. Yoko is a good, modest person; she was a friend of ours and she had done pieces which are very much part of the older Fluxusrepertoire. But she was not present on that November day of 1961 when Maciunas proposed to a group of us that we do a magazine to be called "Fluxus" and that we do performances of the pieces in the magazine; nor was she in Wiesbaden in September 1962 when we did those performances and the press began calling us "Die Fluxus Leute" - the Fluxus people. So while she, for instance, was surely one of the

original Fluxus people, she did not found Fluxus. Well, if I am going to assert this, it is important that the documents of the time be available somewhere besides in my own files. Too, my writings are complex and full of allusions; this is not to create mysteries but to enrich the fabric and draw on reality. It can be useful therefore that my files be open to anyone who needs them, and this would be impossible if the files were here in my church.

Then there are other collections: from 1977 to 1991 I collected things related to Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), - apart from a passage in Plato's Phaedrus, Bruno's "De imaginum, signorum et idearum Compositione" (1593) has the earliest discussion I know of intermedia - but when Charlie Doria's translation of this work came out (which I edited and annotated) I sold off all the Bruno materials I had. From 1968 to 1990 (about) I collected patterns poetry-old visual poetry from before 1900 - but that too has gone away, most of it anyway. I have collected almost all of the books written, designed by or associated with Merle Armitage (1893-1975), a great modernist book designer, and my biography of him, "Merle Armitage and the Modern Book", is due out with David Godine next year. I will then sell that collection too. Perhaps it was a good experience acquiring these things, but that part is over now. Other collections have been given away. I collected a tremendous amount of sound poetry and information on it, meaning to do a book on the subject. But there was never money to do the book right. Perhaps that collection also should depart. There is too much art work by myself here in the church in which I live and work - it gets damaged because it cannot be stored properly. I would like to move to a smaller place,

since I do not need and cannot afford this big one, and if that happens more things also go away.

There are some phonograph records, tapes and CD's too - too many to keep track of, some going back to my teen years when I used to spend the money I earned by baby-sitting on records of John Cage, Henry Cowell, Göesta Nystroem, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Anton Webern and such-like. I suppose the only books which are also tools and (for me) reference work-books on design or artistic crafts (orchestration, for instance), Fluxbooks and Fluxcatalogs (I need to check my facts), books and magazines in which I am included (so I can tell where such-and-such a piece first was printed). As for objects, I care about my mother's dishes and one table, but that is about all - the rest can go.

No, I am a temporary collector - as Gertrude Stein said of her visitors, she liked to see them come, but she also liked to see them go. I will acquire things when they are needed, but I need to unload them too. I have no right to own art, even by friends, because I cannot take care of it properly. It too must go. This church is dark with things, things, things - and maybe somebody else, somebody younger than I, might like to have them.

RJ : Why do you live in a church?

Reply on 4-11-1995 (internet)

DH : I live in this church because, when I moved to this area from Vermont (where I had lived almost fourteen years, off and on, up near the Quebec border) I bought a

house, garage and church complex. It had been "defrocked" by the Roman Catholic Church in 1974, its consecration taken away and the cross and bell removed, and it was sold to a couple who wanted it to become an antique shop. However there was no drive-by traffic so they found that would not work. But nobody wanted to buy it from them. So I got it at a good price, as they say. My plan was to live in the house- a modest parsonage,- for my wife Alison Knowles to use the garage (where we set up a photo darkroom to be shared), and for myself to use the church as my own studio. For this it was fine.

But in 1985 when my finances began to collapse-with the decline in the US art world, the rise of our Radical Right and neo-Christian coalition, and with the Fluxus syndrome among exhibitors and collectors, I had to rent out the house to survive and to move into the church. It is a nice space, well suited to be a studio, but it is dark in the winter and is quite gloomy and expensive to heat. It has no doors so nobody is separated from anything else that is going on. There are virtually no doors to close, so there is no privacy. Sometimes I think I will go mad here. Maybe I have. I would love to move, but like the previous owners I would find it hard to sell and in any case I have no money to move. Next winter I may have to do without heat here most of the time unless things look up. It is a curious environment for an artist.

I often refer to this "Fluxus syndrome." It is my term for a problem that I face. It goes like this. A gallerist, critic or exhibitor tells me "I like your work. I know you are a Fluxus artist." Then they see more of my work and they

compare it to the work of George Maciunas, whom they take to be the leader of Fluxus instead of its namer and, in his own preferred term, "Chairman" of Fluxus. They note that there are differences and they say to me: "But that work is not Fluxus. Do you have any Fluxus work?" I say yes,-and I show work from the early sixties through late seventies. It still does not resemble the work of Maciunas. It isn't usually even fun and games, which is what the public thinks of as Fluxus. So I am marginalized in Fluxus shows, or I am left out of other collections because "This is not a Fluxus gallery/museum show/collection." The problem is all but unavoidable, and in vain can one point out that if Fluxus is important, it is because of its focus on intermedia, that Maciunas recognized this repeatedly, that he knew perfectly well that there was room in Fluxus for work which did not resemble his at all. If one says anything like this in public, it is taken to be a disloyalty to George or some kind of in-fighting for prestige. I have sometimes been tempted to show my work under a false name in order to escape this syndrome altogether. But even that sounds as if I were ashamed of my Fluxus past, which I am not, even though it is not awfully relevant to my work since the late seventies. Also I still feel affinities to some of my Fluxus colleagues, though the work of others has, in my opinion, become repetitious crap. Many of my Fluxfriends could do with a little more self-criticism, in my opinion. Fluxus also has its share of hangers-on, people who were utterly marginal to the group and who kept their distance during the years when Fluxus had not acquired its present and perhaps false public image, but who are now all too willing to con their way into the list and to enter their colors for the next tournament.

RJ : This story about "Fluxus syndrome," is quite interesting when I compare it to mail art. There is the difference that in mail art most artist try to avoid the traditional art-world, and there is even the phrase "mail art and money don't mix" by Lon Spiegelman, that is used by others too. There are on the other hand also artists who say to organize a mail art show and then start to use entrance-fees and ask for money for catalogues ; try to 'con' people in the mail art network. What do you think of "mail art and money don't mix"? I know it's not an easy question to answer.

Reply on 11-11-1995 (internet)

DH : Money and mail art? Money and Fluxus? Mixing? You are right, I can't answer that one easily. Certainly if somebody got into mail art (or Fluxus) as a means of advancing his or her career- "Gee," says the dork, "ya gotta get inta as many shows as possible, I was in thirty-two last year and here's the catalogs to prove it," -he or she would swiftly learn that is not what the field is for. Rather, its purpose is to combat alienation, and that is only in some respects an economic problem. Mail art has tremendous disruptive potential (and even some constructive social potential), as I described in my story about Polish mail artists and the East German bureaucrat. And it has great community-building power - even my hypothetical dork can say "Wow, I got friends all over, from Argentina to Tooneesia." But I must make a confession: I have probably seen forty or fifty actual exhibitions of mail art, and NOT ONE OF THEM was interesting to see. There were good things in each of them of course, but the effect of looking at

them was weak. Why? Because they did not reflect the function - they always treated the sendings as final artifacts (sometimes ranked according to the prestige of the artist). But mail art pieces are virtually never final artifacts - they are conveyors of a process of rethinking, community-building and psychological and intellectual extension. Thus it is, I think, a distortion to think, of mail art as a commercial commodity of any kind. Because it is typically modest in scale usually and it is usually technically simple, the finest piece may come from the greenest, newest or the least skilled artist. There is no rank in mail art so long as the artist thinks and sees clearly.

Nevertheless, the issue of money is one which must be faced. Lack of it can ruin your capability for making mail art, for one thing. When the heat is gone and you can't afford to go to the doctor, it is very hard to focus on making this collage to send away, even though one knows that do so would bring great satisfaction and comfort. Yet the mail art itself is not usually salable, and nobody gets a career in mail art. One is free to be capricious, as I was circa twenty-odd years ago when I spent two months corresponding only with people whose last names began with M. It is not, then, so much that mail art and money do not mix but that mail art simply cannot be used to produce money, at least not directly, - which is not to say that one mail artist cannot help another. Obviously we can and do. I remember when Geoffrey Cook, a San Francisco mail artist, undertook a campaign through the mail art circuit to free Clemente Padín, the Uruguayan mail artist (among other things) who had been jailed by the military junta for subversion. It worked. And many is the mail artist who, wanting to see

his or her correspondent, finds some money somewhere to help defray travel costs and such-like.

With Fluxus, the issue is different. Fluxart has in common with mail art its primary function as a conveyor of meaning and impact. But Fluxworks are not usually mail art and do not usually depend on a network of recipients. Some are enormously large. Some take large amounts of time to construct, some are expensive to build and so on. Given this, issues of professionalism arise which are not appropriate to mail art. If I insist on making my Fluxart amateur and to support myself by other means, I may not be able to realize my piece. I am thus forced at a certain point in my evolution to attempt to live from my art, since anything else would be a distraction. I must commercialize the un-commercializable in order to extend it to its maximum potential. What an irony! It is, I fancy (having been in Korea but not Japan), like the expensive tranquillity of a Zen temple in contrast to the maniacal frenzy of Japanese commercial life outside it. Peace becomes so expensive one might imagine it is a luxury, which I hope it is not. So one is compelled to support it.

The difference is, I think, that commercial art supports the world of commodity; Fluxus and other serious art of their sort draws on the world of commerce for its sustenance but its aim lies elsewhere - it points in other directions, not at the prestige of the artist as such (once someone once tried to swap, for a book by Gertrude Stein which he wanted, two cookies which Stein had baked, then about twenty-two years before) and certainly not at his or her ego in any personal sense (John Cage musing at the hill behind his

then home, "I don't think I have done anything remarkable, anything which that rock out there could not do if it were active"). One must take one's work seriously, must follow its demands and be an obedient servant to them: nobody else will, right? If the demands are great and require that one wear a shirt and tie and go light people's cigars, then out of storage come the shirt and tie and out comes the cigar-lighter. That is what we must do. But we do not belong to the world of cigars; we are only visitors there. It is a liminal experience, like the shaman visiting the world of evil spirits. We can even be amused by the process. Anyway, that's my opinion.

RJ : Some mail artists say that the mail art network is more active than before. Others say that mail art is history because almost all the possibilities of the traditional mail have been explored, and that all the things that are happening now in mail art, are reproductions of things that happened before. Is mail art a finished chapter?

Reply on 16 December, 1995

(Santayana born today (1863) and Jane Austin too (1775))

DH : Well, I think both sides are right. Mail Art is more active than before if more people are doing it. Of course, for those of us whose interest in exploration I am glad they are doing it even though I see no need to do it AS SUCH myself. Mail Art is [only?] history if all the possibilities have been explored - yes, if one's job is to explore things only formally. Of course I love history - without it I never know what not to do. For me this last assumption is

therefore right so far as it goes, but it does not go very far. Why should we assume that doing something once means it need not be done again? That is what I call the "virgin attitude," fine for people who are hung up on sleeping with virgins but a dreadful idea if it is really love that you want. Aren't you glad that Monet painted more than one haystack or waterlily painting? Don't you have a food recipe which you would hate to change? A "finished chapter?" That has even more problematic assumptions.

After all, a chapter in a book (including the Book of Life) involves reading, and the best books invite reading more than once. Isn't reading as creative as writing?

Mail Art is, in my opinion, not a single form. I am not much of a taxonomist-someone else can decide how many forms it is, can classify and sort it out. What I know and have said in this interview is that Function precipitates Form. So long as new uses for Mail Art can appear, new forms are likely to arise. Just for instance-e-mail letters and magazines are relatively new. The ways we can use them have not fully revealed themselves. The politics of this world are as fouled up as ever; perhaps there are mail art methods (including e-mail methods) which can be used to help straighten things out or at least point to the problems in a startling or striking way. No, I think mail art may be history - it has been with us at least since Rimbaud's burnt letters - but only a Dan Quail (a proverbially obtuse right-wing politician here) would say, as he did in 1989, that "History is Over!" And as long as there are people-artists-living alone here and there, confronted by problems (professional, formal, human or social), Mail Art is likely to have a role to

play in helping to alleviate those problems. What we must not do is allow ourselves to take ourselves too seriously-tendentiousness is a natural health hazard for the mail artist. The freshness and unpredictability of the medium are part of why, if mail art works at all, it really does. Just as we must always reinvent ourselves, according to whatever situations we find ourselves in, we must always reinvent our arts. And that includes mail art.

RJ : Well, this is a wonderful moment to end this interview. I want to thank you for your time and sharing your thoughts.

EDGARDO - ANTONIO VIGO

Mail-Interview with Edgardo-Antonio Vigo (Argentina)

INTRODUCTION

After a long correspondence with Edgardo Antonio Vigo since 1983 it was only natural to invite him in June 1995 for my mail-interview. The interview was almost finished, and on August 28th 1997 I sent him the last question. Later I found out he had died on November 4th 1997, after suffering from a long painful disease. During the interview there were always two letters we exchanged. One for the interview, and one personal letter. This is how more interviews go, the personal letters besides the 'public' interview questions.

Because I want to show with the booklet-version what kind of artists I am interviewing I normally include illustrations of artifacts that came to me during the interview-process. For Vigo's interview I waited some time before I could bring myself to the task of proof-reading the texts and do the layout for the booklet-version. It isn't easy losing a friend and then publish the last words you received from him. The online-version will contain the text of the interview - as usual - and will be put online with the help of Jas W. Felter (Canada). For the booklet-version I have decided to include both the answers and questions as well

as the personal correspondence. This will show you obviously what kind of man Vigo was , and how these last years of his life went.

Besides the interview & the personal correspondence during it the booklet will contain some appendixes as well. A text written by Clemente Padin (translated into English for you and available online already , a letter from Ana Maria Gualtieri (she has the task as 'holder' of the collection of Vigo's work & mail-art and wants to exhibit the collection in Argentina. She can be reached at the same P.O. Box that Vigo used , and she works for the 'Fundación Centro de Artes Visuales)

Ruud Janssen , 31-3-1998

INTERVIEW

Started on: 15-6-1995

Ruud Janssen: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 27-7-1995

Edgardo Antonio Vigo: In the end of 1966 I began contacting some European visual poets - like JULIEN BLAINE and JEAN-FRANCOIS BORY - and we start

exchanging works. Among them some postcards including very creative ways to fill in the space that called my attention. For instance postcards which were real creative pieces, specially made for that communication means.

In 1963 I started editing the 'DIAGONAL CERO' magazine in order to publish there information and articles on our international mail exchanging. But much of the times we had to fight against the Postal Mail system in our countries because governments have its rules and we tried to exchange our information and articles.

Envelopes were treated in an unusual manner which causes real battles before administrations control. To my part I did not know about the existence of other mail art groups which were - in a certain way - "institutionalized" as the concreted case of the "NEW YORK CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL" founded by RAY JOHNSON. Later I go on sending my correspondence under the idea of "COMMUNICATION FROM FAR - via postal". Using frequently postal cards, seals, envelopes printed in a not conventional way, proposals to be answered by original responses.

RJ: Can you give some examples about these 'fight against the Postal Mail system'?

Reply on 5-9-1995

EAV: One of the most divulged cases was GENESIS P. ORRIDGE's one, in England. He made a series of creative postcards by using 'collage' methods. He cuts out photo's of

his country's queen making erotic positions with her pictures. That series is confiscated by the Postal Administration besides a judgement against the author. Defense based its explanations on different positions from some ahierents to that international practice. At the end, Orridge was fined more or less severely but not confined in prisson as State had solicited for him. Later, Orridge edited the complete trial.

Talking about myself and especially during the 'militar junta' times from 1976 to middle 1983, I suffered an open censorship, not only on that correspondence I received but on those sent away. That period was particulary sad to me. That control comprised destruction of postal correspondence to me of from me, letters containing invitations which got me out of time to participate. In sum a cut contact with mail friends. Once an unusual fact happened. An employee put some postal pieces into my mail box but those would have been at Censorship Commitee. He was forced to stop working and he had to accept an early retirement 'by psychological problems'. At present he goes on living in Spain where he had to go because of that uncertain situation. Since then I tryed to modify my way of communication and, in plus I wanted to let people in other countries know what had happened here. Also I made a creative stamp to denounce at international level that my eldest son ABEL LUIS had disappeared (up to now we do not know anything about him). The result of those tricks was satisfactory because I was able to tell people in the world about Argentina's dictatorship.

Anyhow, our Postal Services goes on being corrupted. First they had accepted to practice that control on mailing and then to steal or destroy all sorts of postal pieces.

RJ : Well, I'm glad that my previous question DID arrive, and I also hope this question will arrive. How (or why) did you become so interested in visual poetry?

Reply on 7-10-95

EAV: Well, most of my connections were due of my 'DAGONAL CERO' editions. If I had to give a definition of myself I would choose" 'VISUAL ANIMAL' or 'VISUAL BEING'.

From this position I always liked to make my editions on new researches, toward creative and different results. Ever I had tendency to visual expression -like a sort of 'visual animal'. To me it was better to see a design than a word. By 1960 I made a series of 'poetical compositions' by using rubber seals from the office where I was an employee. As you can imagine those seals had no poetical inscriptions, but anyhow those compositions let me discover the 'poetical space'.

I mean that it was a kind of liberation from a page as a 'real space', doing free use of it (the page) as support of a poem. In plus I did a series of ironical texts where each word (sometimes with an article) formed a long text written in vertical sense and other times, a few words were placed

outside that column to add some move for visual composition.

Later I knew other advanced theories - concrete, spacialism, cinetic, process, etc. - and connection with poets like BORY, BLAINE, SARENCO, CHOPIN and many others. It helped me so much that I could form my personal writings - then 'mathematical poetry' starts.

I must say, I did not try to translate in numbers a kind of code to supply words. By contrary I wanted to show that, using mathematical writing plus adding figures and shapes of geometry, plus color use - well, it could be able - at visual level - to form poetical projection for a possible reader. Those words I usually choose are taken as a support in a composition and real value is in texts which are put as titles - a sort of signal to introduce the reader.

Nowadays, in spite of certain historical discontinuity in visual poetry, diverse solutions make it possible to clarify and understand such divers changes through that course. Rich oppositions, permanent searches, move this visual poetry. This is just my opinion.

RJ : In your wonderful postcards you use always this thick carton, which you decorate with rubberstamps and other additions. Why this choice of materials?

Reply on 29-11-1995

EAV: I think throughout years of MAIL COMMUNICATION development a proper language has been done, full of creativity and expression.

Postcards, stamps, rubber seals, even envelopes which contain our correspondence, have become 'testimonial statements of this tendency'. For instance to compare a postcard or an envelope having official mail stamps to the ones which have creative ones offer a great, particular difference.

Talking about myself I am certain that envelopes are it selves a space and a surface to be particularly treated. They must be a sort of announce for its content. But sometimes there is contrary result, an opposition between both. On the other hand, I am certain of that creative stamps and seals have allowed a great possibility of renovation into mail communication as it happens in these days and I would like pointing out the struggle against bureaucracy in mail administrations -national and international ones-. This has opened a great field almost without restriction and, in plus, helps to concrete all sorts of proposals and brings rich purposes. Postcards are in endless evolution not only ideological but formal too.

If we remember those modified printed cards and now we compare nowadays cards, well, there is a wide transformation. These, in general carry its own message keeping codes proper to postal rules. The sum of these diverse results have been done main possibilities on postcards, stamps and rubber seals - giving an independent field full of creative expression. In plus it is detachable the

diverse intentions into this practice to which I like to add modestly.

RJ : Most participants in the mail art network I know live in Europe and The USA. Only a few from Africa, South America, and Asia. But whenever I participate in a project from South America and get the documentation, I see hundreds of participants from South-American countries (e.g. Brasil). It seems that there are a lot of people in this part of the world that are active in mail art but that they don't reach out to Europe. Is the main reason economics or are there other reasons?

Reply on 9-1-1996

EAV: In Latin America the main problem is an economical one. Especially because of the endless military "coups d'état" there are not accurate plans for material prosperity. So the population cannot afford to go on exchanging correspondence outside. Postal Service costs are high for Latin American people who decide to maintain their mail activity.

To make matter worse, Postal Services in these countries are not a guarantee, there is no insurance against loss. As a result answers become limited to those considerate more important ones. In my case using certified sendings which at least put forward a claim against Mail Services, in the case of being able to prove the sent letter did not reach its destination. Referring to latin American mail friends, in

general, they do not persist in answering letters for long time, so dialogue stops frequently. In general latin american callings find best reply from American people.

Anyhow I think this is a general matter in the world, I mean compatriots accept to participate in national events preferently. Catalogs show this. One can find those participators just under those conditions but not in the wide network. Talking about my personal experience, well, many years ago, Horacio Zabala and I had held an exhibition. We had to accept some participators proposed by the gallerist for he said convocatory should be "oppened" to everybody. But time changes some things and Argetin mail communicators increased in number but because of different reasons. I would like to add another matter, language knowledge even though nowadays English makes it possible to have a wide communication. Finally I have remarked an important increcement of Argentin adherents on diverse catalogs.

RJ : Most mail artists who are active for many years, always get mail from newcomers too. How do you explain mail art to a newcomer?

Reply on 30-1-1996

EAV: As many others I frequently receive requests for information about mail art and how to enter the circuit. Answering I make use of the founding word of mail art, this is "DISTANT COMMUNICATION -postal via". I try to explain -first- the subtle difference between them. Then in

general, I send articles photocopied about that matter, the most clear and pedagogical ones. I advise them to make multiples for sending by mail. I add a list of mail friends who use to answer and exchange works frequently, even to the 'new' mail friends. In general I do not get new contacts with them but I receive letters for most information from those who try to understand after having seen an exhibition or writing articles on mail art.

Later I feel satisfied when I see their names on a list or we go on in mailing contact in future and dialogue becomes interesting. During these last two years - 1994/1995 - I have been receiving frequent correspondence from our neighbor country Brasil. I have no doubt about divulgence in the press on this practice. Publications on popular divulgence publish lists of people who answer that correspondence. Myself I do this and feel satisfied. On the other hand I always insist in adding lists of mail friends on catalogs to know their names and addresses. I am certain this method is very effective.

RJ : In 1986 H.R. Fricker started a new thing in mail art with his 'TOURISM' and in 1992, the next step, Decentralized Networking Congresses (DNC), meant that even more mail artists started to meet. What do you think of these steps. Were you active in these large projects?

Reply on 4-3-1996

EAV: I was not in contact with H.R. Fricker in 1986 so I knew about his 'TOURISM' later. But I got this invitation for 'DNC'. Even if it was not the aim of H.R.F. that kind of

manifestos push 'the institutionalism" of mail art, which I call 'COMMUNICATION FOR DISTANCE - via postal' Which was born as an alternative face to predominance of art structures over creative manifestations.

Mail circuits started and go on - I think - preferring not traditional places for exhibition - Museums, Galleries, Foundations. Also the way to show their works. Not more hierarchies, but an opening proposition to everyone who wants to enter into this way for communication. At first there were altered postcards, mail stamps in transgression to official ones and also creative seals of all kinds. One cannot deny infiltration of mail art into the current and its parallel duration. But I think, as I did take part in both, it exists subtil differences which promote that classic discussion between a genius and a mad.

I assume not to be able to distinguish clearly about this. Anyhow I find a great freedom and permanence of those basic priciples of 'DISTANCE COMMUNICATION - via postal'. As an example I can make comment about the constant reception of postal pieces which do not respond necessarily reach artistic level. I think it is impossible to notice those differences, though, as happens on the classic discussion genious and madness, there is a subtle difference only. Meanwhile I find more freedom in mail art - communication from far, by mail as I like to call this. The denomination comes from that big and constant reception of mail pieces which do not respond any aesthetic line but it is full if one observes and pays attention. I think that Art approches and makes a sort of mimetic with mail works.

This was not a common way to enter into the alternative practice between art and mail expressions.

I agree with this bifurcation and variety of responses before an interrogation. Puralism means richness. In art there are beautiful catalogs and exhibitions have wide promotion opposite to simple messages which sometimes ashamed carrying a content really transgressor and look for having its own space not to be wrong classified. I believe that art mixed to mail communication and finally both got insert in art as an expression.

I do not find anything wrong in this bifurcation, by contrary, plurality means richness. On the other hand, instead of beautiful catalogs, art exhibitions well promoted, mail communication becomes a transgressor work, which makes a continual resistance to be classified in a wrong way.

Everytime a young participator begins his first steps display great, surprisingly ingenuity breaking out what it is accepted as order and beauty. Maybe, after some time he searches for surpassing his primary works or he goes on following the same structures. Each one is free from making his own choice. Luckily each one can choose, for the moment there is a friendly acceptance.

To my opinion mail art or - as I want to call it 'Distant Communication', should not risk to fall down in doing beautiful, de luxe sendings which is not in primary purpose.

I know, we, in the mail art communication have similar problems to artists in general, There are deep, serious deals to carry out. My activity goes on and never has to stop even though I respond or refuse participation as I like. I hope to participate in future as free as always, doing creative works without doing art.

I choose and accept to participate in creative invitations but do not accept certain impositions. So I cannot put conditions face to people appreciation towards my work because in this way I would put conditions limiting the judgement of others. Everything must be 'OPENED' to everyone communication.

RJ : You have probably heard of the new network for communication, the Internet, in which computer-users can communicate by phone-lines. In the USA it has taken over a great deal of the normal correspondance, and the same is happening in Europe. However, this communication-tool is not OPEN to everybody, because one needs still a lot of money for the access (computer, phone, modem, etc.) What are your thoughts about this new tool for communication?

Reply on 26-5-1996

EAV : Actual technology invents permanently new ways of communication. For the moment INTERNET is the "boom" but I think, before this can be used by the artists, it will be another system, better, surpassing its possibilities. I am certain, that dramatic situation is due of a technology

which progresses in a permanent way. Before analyzing the results, there are other ones, more sophisticated and better

This 'CONSTANT DISPLACEMENT' has brought an evident displeasure, its result are rather ominous for Society. Another sign could be the 'crack' of equilibrium between products and work. Unemployment of workers is an universal problem today. In the question there is already signed the problem about a non 'opened communication' and all those who cannot make use of that. Also costs brought another problem: developed countries will have offered those communication systems before, so Latin-America and others will be behind.

I am not in opposition to Internet, a system to which I adhere theoretically, but I must remark parallel problems. There is still another question more difficult. At least at personal level. Since long I am worried about the problem between 'presentation' and 'representation' into creative area. I think this idea was proposed by Pierre Restany. And I think, once more we are faced to an inquiry. The Internet adds to representative methods, with drawing us from real creative product which is the piece itself. It is possible to transmit an image perfectly, also it gets benefite from a widest divulgence and adding a great number of possibilities for communication. But that 'shown' work will remain its author or it will belong to another one.

Then, to be shorter, if Internet systems cannot find its own expression and from it to codify a creative system, it will go on summing another element more to always searched perfection, in this case, communications.

In this way I try to remarque the differencies which I observe but I do not addhere to those who deny today communication ways. The same happened about 'fax' and its succes but nowadays it seems obsolete, at least it cannot destroy mail art and others.

Today the computer is considered as a tool for communication. Means offer solution face to the problem of expression but always man makes it possible to find a creative tool. Communication means do not find solution about expressing matters, only man could reach 'CREATIVE FACT' by making use of the impulse, necessary to change a simple fact of communicative tool into a real 'CREATIVE FACT'

RJ : Your mail art always contains some kind of message. What is the most important message that you are trying to get 'into the world' with your mail art?

Reply on 24-7-1996

EAV: I have always done my works free from imposition. My subjects are very heterogeneous and always as a kind of reaction from some exterior actions. In general those that push my interest to express my opinion come from social and political fields. In 'DISTANT COMMUNICATION - via postal' becomes more extensive into these lands because it is possible to add proposals from outside or by third ones.

There is an extraordinary richness and especially in last time very clever subjects appears. After many years in this

activity one must surpass some old themes. This challenge has made an interesting encrease. On the other hand, very few invitations have 'free theme' so people who invite search for very creative answers. Talking about myself I do not limit myself to political or social subjects. I like very much irony in certain habits, the puns which let us make an alteration in certain established concepts. And, finally, some accepted opinions in the land of genuine aesthetic to which I am fond of. I do not send a message, or at least I do not search for it. I like to keep on being irreverent, but I try to go on following those primary postulates of mail communication. Free from hierarchies, be simple in order to maintain a wide range of possibilities for a communication without limits cause of aesthetical or formal ways which could cause a refusal which is not desired.

These thoughts do not deny my consequent position about certain rules, for instance my permanent concern to improve my works. On the other hand, my appreciation for them is not free from my own judgement, by contrary, another is the opinion from other people - conclusion must be different, at personal level.

RJ : A lot of mail artists nowadays (also the newcomers in the mail art network) use the words Dada and Fluxus in their rubber stamps and artworks. What do these words mean to you?

reply on 3-9-1996

EAV: Based on the origin of "communication from far-postal via" this seems, to me, "natural" it occurs. I do not forget the transgressor character of this tendency in the beginning. Its principles resemble both movements in order to postulate a sort of anti-art. Especially DADA and, in spite of being incorporated as an art institution (let me call it 'official' to make a certain difference between those other intents) and even FLUXUS promote a non systematical rebellion face to most common postulates. I think, DADA and FLUXUS proposed a kind of asystematical postulates face to the most current ones. maybe DADA and FLUXUS begin a new way to aim creative art by basing it in a position.

To do this they started a new way of acting as the result of a new 'communication' towards society - even if they attack it on purpose. But one must signal a difference of world 'affront' because it was not an act of violence but violence against rules which generated 'the conventional'. This started a 'new fact' specially in DADA since change began from actions which became facts. On parallel it started 'creative facts', impelling phonetics and visual poetry, and 'phonic' ones too. FLUXUS retakes dada spirit cleverly and in spite of coincidences it obtained an 'identity' characteristic.

All those branches, DADA starts, FLUXUS continuity undertake many adherents of 'distant communication', postal via, since they want to detach from all that which is considered art. Once more I refuse the term MAIL ART and retake original one more exact of "DISTANT COMMUNICATION - postal via" since in it there is a

strong wish to set apart from what can be considered art. Once more I reject the word POSTAL ART as I tried to explain in this postal report and go on saying "DISTANT COMMUNICATION - postal via". And I find a historical projecting which reaches even nowadays of that "DADA impulse". As Neo-Dadaisme based on American POP ART pioneers and numerous contestarian groups after Second World War. That influence was a sort of revolution never finished. DADA had a short foundation period but it went on living up to now at international level and also in many national ones. Like sea water constantly moving, it comes and goes.

RJ You dated you letter "La Plata, 26.08.2000-4". What do you expect from the year 2000? Is it the start of something, or the end of something?

Reply on 5-11-1996

EAV: There is a popular sentence here, in my country, about the year one is living at present: "THIS IS A YEAR MORE OF LIFE" , but there is a reply -more pessimistic- "THIS IS A YEAR LESS" . But referring to the year 2000 obviously this is the beginning of a new mile age. Multiples thoughts emerge to be able to inaugurate this time.

You ask me on '2000-4'. Well, I just mean we must still live four years to reach year 2000. I am telling you that, when we reached year 1990 I began dating my letters '1900-90'. I emphasized the way to read that date. Going on, arriving at 1991 I wrote '1900-90 and 1' or '1900-90 and one'. This way until 1994. Reaching 1995 and nearest year 2,000 a sort of

backward account so I wrote that year '2000-5'. This way I try to explain how I arrive at 1996. I did not have the intention to sum or to subtract each new year. The same idea prevail referring to the arrival of the year 2000.

I think, the first decades of that new millenium will be determinant ones. If we take, as previous antecedents what happened in 1900 -XX century- that idea becomes certain since 'Industrial Revolution' - be born end of XIX century - acts as foundational element developing new views in many lands. For instance in creative ones, there is no doubt, the two first decades gave all what was developed through the XX century. New techniques produced a great impact at communicational level - as computation and Internet - ends of XX century. Probably a new language will appear as a codified system at creative level. On this point of view I dare to believe the new millenium is the end of certain things and the birth of anothers, as a kind of 'CONTINUITY OF DISCONTINUANCE'. I mean, in general people have certain tendency to accept 'WHAT IS THE NEW' - just because that is newest. Even if it has no basis.

RJ : Is it easy to do something NEW in the mail art network when one looks back on everything that has been done already? Is it o.k if new mail artists are repeating things that have been done decades ago?

answer on 3-2-1997

EAV: All creative manifestation which development attains what is really NEW. In its full beginning, increasement and development personal contributions are richer and diverse because open space is infinite. This way, it is possible to observe how much people succeed in innovating the land with their creative messages: In this case about 'DISTANT COMMUNICATION - postal via' . In these days possibilities to change or surprise have become shorter, just in time to time appears someone who manages to do something really new. On the other hand creative tendencies and their lands for participation can limit or not-improvement towards 'the new' .

'COMMUNICATION FROM FAR - postal via' has made apportations about that new tendency, bringing structural changes to make it richer. Since those postal pieces, taken out from context until what was RAY JOHNSON'S institutionalization in 1960, modified postcards, stamps, seals, and unusual materials to be sent by post, all them show a constant encrease almost until these days. Possibly there is a sort of 'CREATIVE IMPASSE' at present but luckily saved for the constant possibilities that diverse elements bring. As an example - which seems to me more evident and characteristic - I detache hand made 'envelopes'. I observe in them employed materials and their conceptual way to be made , colors and collage of very different elements, in plus their conceptual way of being assembled. Also diagramation in seals and stamps. Many of them bring independent ideas and, recently 'stickers' let us think ideas and are infinite images. Evidently it is easy to find this high degree of rich creativity into a great number of nowadays collections. I do not know if we are

on top of this practice possibilities but to my opinion I feel optimistic. We are in close proximity to a new Century and many changes are expected of course. To my opinion communication 'by Mail' should be replaced by other ways and possibly at present we cannot even imagine how communication should be. What technology would be in use for communication by mail.

RJ : Well, as you probably are aware of this mail-interview project also has to do with all the current available communication-forms. Questions travel by mail , electronic mail, personal delivery, fax, anything that is possible at the moment. It seems that the new ways of communication are mostly technical. Someone suggested however that teleportation would be possible in the near future as well. How realistic are the views we have of our future communication?

next answer on 28-8-1997

EAV: First of all I would like to explain to the reader of this interview that, the dialogue maintained to RAY JOHNSON has allways been through 'COMMUNICATION FOR FAR - postal via' but referring to the question, I think the amount of diverse ways imagined for the future contain so many ideas that will make possible to suggest not only coherent things but other ones near utopia. So, to predict the future remains open to all kind of propositions based not only on techniques in development but in communication means, also those ones based on 'supositions'. In the future reality will show right things, mistakes, approximations and so on....

To my opinion, the situation becomes very difficult - as INGMAR BERGMAN said : "as much as man produces and disposes in communication means - too soft - more encreases ' PERSONAL INCOMMUNICATION ' , this is, one becomes more and more distant from the other. There is no doubt, for us, who need 'DIRECT DIALOGUE' it will be hard to accept all that so complex for understanding that finally expected communication is not reached. This is, one gets more distant from the other one.

For almost all religions a prayer becomes a kind of dialogue between one who supplicates and the divinity listens, this is very touching. But nowadays people must preserve their security so before opening the house door it is necessary to know who is outside. This brings us to certain reced to the other one. Well, today there is a proposal for loving throughout Internet, probably this new sort of communication would bring comprehension of messages, but I insist repeating that mechanical pieces 'cannot cut dialogue from person to person'.

RJ : Well, I guess it is time to end the interview now so others can read about your thoughts as well. Is there anything I forgot to ask?

END

On November 14th I read the e-mail that is sent to my tam@dds.nl account. I received an e-mail from Clemente

Padin (Uruguay) which he sent on November 6th. In this message the sad news that Edgardo Antonio Vigo died on November 4th 1997. A very sad ending to this interview. I will miss the mail Edgardo always sent to me.....

This Interview has also been translated into Spanish Language and has been published in several magazines after Vigo's death.

KEN FRIEDMAN

This mail-interview was done complete with the use of Internet in the period May till December 1995. The appendixes contain some texts connected to the interview.

INTERVIEW

Ruud Janssen: When did you get involved in the mail-art network.

Ken Friedman: In 1966, when I came into contact with Fluxus and with Ray Johnson.

RJ: How did you get in contact with Ray Johnson?

KF: Dick Higgins introduced me to Ray. In 1964 or 1965, Dick published Ray's book, *The Paper Snake*. I already knew the book. In August of 1966, I was visiting Dick in New York. Dick had a huge production camera in his basement where he worked every night, listening to Beach Boys records and shooting plates for *Something Else Press* books. One night, he used the big camera to shoot a portrait of me, the portrait that was published in Jon Hendricks's *Fluxus Codex*. Dick suggested I ought to send something to Ray. I chopped a negative of the photo into a jig-saw puzzle and mailed it. That was our first contact.

In those days, corresponding with Ray was more personal than after he got his Xerox machine. We exchanged a lot of work over the years. Everything was one-to-one with Ray in those days. Even after he got the Xerox machine, Ray remained a spider at the center of his web and tried to mediate as many of the interactions between his contacts as possible. Ray had no philosophical relationship to the Eternal Network. He wasn't interested in social issues or public space. He was interested in a forum for his poetic activity.

Ray's approach was private, personal, poetic and it was different from those of the Fluxus artists who aspired to broad social discourse. That discourse was a key aspect of the Fluxus approach. It was an implicit network approach, a public and social way of working with art and communication. That was one reason I became active in Fluxus. I got involved in the mail art network through Fluxus and Dick Higgins. Dick introduced me to Ray Johnson and the New York Correspondence School. There was a lot of overlap between the groups but different kinds of activity took place in each.

RJ: Fluxus seems to have earned a place in history. Lots of books have been published, most of them by people who aren't Fluxus artists. With mail art, it seems to be different. Almost all books, magazines, articles are written by mail artists. Whenever someone who is not a mail artist tries to write about mail art, it comes out as a strange story. On the other hand, outsiders often

misunderstand what mail artists write. Will it stay like this?
If so, why?

KF: The first people to write about Fluxus were the Fluxus artists ourselves, describing our ideas, our work. Several Fluxus people are skilled writers. Some have worked as editors and publishers. Over the years, we defined Fluxus, writing our ideas and our history in our own words. These writings shaped the first wave of Fluxus literature. Intellectual focus and literary skill were two reasons. The third reason was that we felt we had to do it. Thirty years ago, people didn't know how to respond to the work and it was easiest for critics and historians not to respond at all. If we wanted to put our ideas into play, we had to do it ourselves. We organized our own exhibitions and performances, published our own art and music in scores and multiples, wrote published our theories of art, music, literature and design in essays and books.

We published through several presses, but there were two central Fluxus publishers. One was Fluxus, the publications and multiples organized by editor-chairman George Maciunas in New York, producing mostly multiples. Something Else Press was the other, producing books. Fluxus objects ran in editions of a few dozen and Something Else Press books ran in editions ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 copies. These circulated widely enough to affect the cultural life of the United States and Europe. Along with our own presses, we were occasionally given special magazine issues.

Fluxus friends and enthusiasts typified the second wave of writers on Fluxus. This included critics such as Thomas Albright or Henry Martin, curators and gallerists such as René Block, Jon Hendricks and Harry Ruhé, archivists like Jean Sellem and Hanns Sohm. Fluxus artists continued to write in an environment where there were more artists in Fluxus than critics or scholars who wanted to write about us. The third wave of writing on Fluxus began in the 1970s when trained scholars began to examine Fluxus in papers and articles. The first doctoral dissertation on Fluxus was in anthropology, written by Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1974. Art historians first became interested in Fluxus in the 1970s. The first was Peter Frank. By the late 1970s they included Stephen C. Foster, Estera Milman and Jan van der Marck along with scholars in comparative literature such as Georg M Gugelberger Philip Auslander in theater.

In the 1980s and 1990s, available literature on Fluxus began to expand. Growing interest across several disciplines was one reason. Another was the wide availability of publications by Jon Hendricks. The availability source material made an important difference as scholars and writers who became interested in Fluxus had the chance to examine images of work that had often been a rumor more than a fact.

By the 1990s, art historians and critics began to discover Fluxus and intermedia and make the major focus of their work. These included Europeans such as Marianne Bech and Ina Conzen-Meairs, Americans such as Kathy O'Dell

and Kristine Stiles, Asians such as Hong Hee Kim Cheon, and Keiko Ashino. These were the years of the first significant body of writing by trained scholars specializing in Fluxus: Simon Anderson at the Royal College of Art in London, Owen Smith at the University of Washington, Ina Blom at the University of Oslo, David Doris at Hunter College, Hannah Higgins at the University of Chicago and Karen Moss at the University of Southern California.

The growth of Fluxus writing from the artists to independent scholars was characterized by overlaps between Fluxus artists and their friends; between artists and scholars; between artist-scholars and scholars who began to make art. That era has come to close. Scholars and critics now come to Fluxus as outsiders. Curators and editors now work on the basis of secondary material and they can't always discuss issues and ideas with the artists, composers, designers and architects whose work they present. Even so, there is much source material available. Higgins, Filliou, Williams, Knizak, Flynt, Vautier, Paik and I have all written extensively. Brecht, Beuys, Christiansen, Klintberg and others have written from time to time.

Most important, the Fluxus writers knew their own history and many have been broadly conversant in general culture, culture theory and art history. This makes a qualitative difference between Fluxus and mail art. Few mail artists know their own history well. They tend to oppose historical writing and thinking. They are often anti-experimental and judgmental about intellectual issues, believing that scholarship, theory and intellectual process are the antithesis of the network spirit. As a result, they don't

know that many of the authors writing on Fluxus have also written on mail art.

Mail art seems to be different for several reasons. Most of the books, magazines and articles these days are written by mail-artists. Only a few have a scholarly tone or even a public tone. That tone and a way of communicating so that others can understand gives the basis for others to write on a subject. Only a handful of mail art writers make sense to outside scholars. You can count them on your fingers -- Chuck Welch, Mike Crane, Judy Hoffberg, Anna Banana, Jon Held, John Jacob.

Even so, it's a bit of a myth to suggest that there are always mistakes whenever non-mail artists write about mail art as compared to writing on art in general. Mail artists do as well as any group of artists. There are a dozen excellent writers whose articles were central to developing the network. Those articles often introduced the idea of mail art to new mail artists.

Mail art people have their own, strongly held opinions. When you combine strong opinions with a lack of historical knowledge, what outsiders write on mail art can seem strange. There's another reason people don't write about mail art. It's easy to be attacked. From time to time, a writer or curator who generally does an excellent job offends part of the network. When the offended parties involve their friends in harsh response, the noise grows to deafening proportions. I recall several highly visible examples and they've been a reason for some excellent writers and

historians to stop writing on mail art. Mail art is a minor field for art historians and art journals. You don't get much credit for working on mail art but you can get a lot of anger. In a situation with few rewards and plenty of ways to find trouble, there's little reason to write.

Will this stay like this? It will until mail art people learn broad, public language. Mail artists often claim to seek broad public discourse. They claim to be open to issues and ideas. But many behave like small-town gossips complaining over the strange doings in the next town. There's little tolerance for differences of opinion, style or culture. The reasons for that kind of culture aren't clear. I have some suspicions but no answers. You'd expect a different sensibility on the network, broader, more international, more intercultural. Every times I imagine that things are improving, an unpleasant encounter suggests that the mail art network is what it's been for two decades now. The mail art network has developed a stable culture with a fairly stable population at any given moment and a certain number of relatively stable ways of interacting. It leads me to wonder about the degree to which the mail art network and the Eternal Network coincide. I can't see the Eternal Network in the village morals and parochial behavior patterns of the mail art network.

RJ: You say that the mail art network has somehow developed a fairly stable structure. The last years there have been some new aspects to the network. The use of the FAX-machines, and the introduction of the Internet for some of the networkers. I remember your reply to Guy Bleus's FAX-project in which you explained why you don't

take part in network Telefax Art Projects. Do you take part in Internet Art-projects?

KF: No, I don't, but not for any particular reason. There haven't been many well thought out art projects on Internet. Most art mediated by Internet or e-mail aren't exciting. E-mail works well for correspondence and literature. Web sites make visual art possible. But most artists using the medium aren't doing work that interests me. If the work isn't interesting, I won't take part just because it's presented in cyberspace.

RJ: Since the beginning, the term "mail artist" has been used in relation to correspondence. Now everybody is talking about "networkers" and "networking." Somehow I see that the focus isn't as much on art as it is on communication. What do you think about this?

KF: My use of terms "mail art" and "correspondence art" is flexible. I don't use the term "networking" to describe art. The term I use depends on the aspect of the work to be emphasized. I also use the term communications art. My work with mail or correspondence isn't my main interest. It's part of a larger inquiry. The idea of a network of people doing mail art, correspondence art or E-mail art as "networkers" or "tourists" bothers me. Any group of people communicating with each other constitutes a network. What makes one network different than another? The focus and content of their communication. When a network begins to focus primarily on the fact that it is communicating, it becomes a group of pen-pals, a

small-town social club. The larger networks we can form allow us to step outside the boundaries that were once imposed by time and space. Even though we can transcend the restrictions of local culture, the mail art network has built its own small town culture. This culture is enacted in a fragmented but linked environment. It's described as the mail art network because it grew up around the mail art scene. The culture celebrates its local heroes. Its members set up their own rules and interact in a restrictive and problematic way. The "networkers network" and the "tourist network" are contrary to what interested me in the broad, open-ended phenomenon -- cultural, intellectual, spiritual -- that Filliou termed "the Eternal Network."

I don't talk about networkers or networking. The network doesn't interest me as a network. It's no better and no worse than most social clubs. Networks are interesting for what they can do, what they transmit, what they can achieve.

RJ: What IS the primary focus of your work ? What is the larger inquiry you mention ?

KF: The broad focus of my work is art as a tool for research, creative and rigorous experiments in different domains of culture, meaning and consciousness. Every search has many levels. Some levels are abstract. Some are concrete. I stake out problems that interest me and work them through in different ways. That sounds abstract but the work is quite concrete, a response to specific ideas and situations. The situations and ideas change like conversations or food. There are issues that interest you or foods you like but you don't want the same conversation or

the same meal all the time. That's what makes what I do quite different from what many artists do. Most art is based on a style or format. People play with the style format. It defines their work as artists and enables their public to recognize them. That way of working is characteristic of artists in most media, including mail art.

The whole point of research and experimentation is developing useful tools and interesting ways of approaching problems. The issues that interest me change. The question of tools and problem solving has been constant. Some of my experiments shaped tools or approaches to art that others can use. At one point in the 1960s, I was interested in how experimental artists were communicating, how they worked with one another, how they interacted. That interest led to a series of projects involving mailing lists and 'zines. The lists gave birth to projects such as the File magazine lists and to directories such as Art Diary. 'Zines such as Amazing Facts or the New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder helped to define a way of publishing mail art that has widely used since then. Next, I began to wonder how to open mail art network to a broad public. That gave rise to three mail art exhibitions at The Oakland Museum, Henry Art Galley in Seattle and the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha. Those experiments gave rise to useful paradigms that others were able to adapt and use.

According to Chuck Welch, these three shows became the model for most the mail art exhibitions and projects since the early 1970s. My purpose with mail art wasn't to do mail

art but to engage larger issues. Intermedia and Fluxus projects predominate in the total range of my work. Like everyone, I take part in projects I like. Every situation sparks ideas. I often work in response to an idea from another artist. Sometimes an idea just pops into mind. Every artist has both experiences. The scope of my interests has been evolving for over thirty years. I did many of these things as a child. George Maciunas saw some of those things when I was sixteen and invited me into Fluxus. Thirty years is a long time. That's 360 months, 1,560 weeks or 10,950 days. You can get a lot done in thirty years if you keep busy. The specifics change. The overall approach and philosophy has been the same.

My philosophy and activities are described in a number of articles and serious interviews. They'll answer the question better than a quick reply.

RJ: When I sent the first question for this interview, you sent me a bibliography of books and articles where I could find your thoughts on paper. Here, again, you mention your attempt to describe your philosophy and activities at any time. Why is documenting your activities important for you?

KF: Documentation is the place to look for ideas, art works or events from the past. We continually construct and reconstruct our reality through thought and memory. Documents are a tool. This is natural for artists who work with intermedia and or concept art, including mail art, 'zines, lists, tapes, letters, even interviews. Art media that

function at a distance or over time require documents. Even so, while the document offers an entry into dialogue with the work, it's not the same as the work. The score to an event is the score. It has a valid function as a document and in some cases, it is also a work in its own right. There is also the realized event, and the realization exists in another way. Documents were aspects of art long before the era of concept art and intermedia. Earlier documents include the musical score and libretto for an opera, the text of a play, the blueprint of a building. They're all documents and they're all works in their own right for people who can read them and comprehend them through the act of reading. It is nevertheless true that few people can successfully read and comprehend a musical score or the blueprint of a building. For most people, these documents are more important as keys to a realization.

You can say that I began working with documents of art when I saw the books Dick Higgins was publishing, Ray Johnson's Paper Snake, Dick's own Postface/Jefferson's Birthday, the Great Bear Pamphlets, Daniel Spoerri's Anecdoted Topography of Chance, Robert Filliou's Ample Food for Stupid Thought. These books were documents and through them, a body of work and a way of thinking came to life for me. The Fluxus multiples and publications worked in much the same way.

I'd ask your question another way. We live in the age of information and intermedia. Can any serious artist work without documentation? Don't most contemporary artists cross back and forth between ideas, the representation of ideas and the realization of ideas?

RJ: I couldn't work without documentation. But there may be a danger in documentation if it forms its own truth. Reality -- things that happen in a specific moment -- can never be captured by objective documentation because reality is different for everybody who observes it. Everyone recognizes his own truth through the act of observation. Isn't there a danger in the possibility that those who create the documents dictate the shape of history? Is documentation that powerful?

KF: This is a danger. It's a basic problem that we face in all forms of documentation, no matter who makes them and no matter the purpose for which they're made. It seems to me that there is a strong argument to be made for a variety of clear, understandable sources of document from several views. In the recent past, most documentation on art has been compiled or presented by a handful of journalists, critics and finally by art historians. I suggest that there can be valid approaches to art documentation by scholars from several fields and by artists themselves.

The better, the broader, the more clear and conscious a body or documents is, the better we can understand what's happened. I believe that documentation has valid goals and purposes. These purposes can be realized or abused. How we handle documentation, how much and how well, makes the difference.

RJ: How active are you in mail art at this moment. Do you still send "snail mail," or has the Internet taken over? This question comes out of my personal curiosity. I haven't

had any exchange of mail art with you and I'm not sure if you are still active. I guess that future readers of this interview will be interested, too. I see your name in lots of Internet-related materials and I have only received e-mail from you, so that's the reason for my question.

KF: These days, other projects take most of my time. I'm not active in mail art. I exchange with friends like Dick Higgins or Jean-Noel Laszlo and I follow the work of important figures like Chuck Welch or Dobrica Kamperelic. Even so, I haven't been directly active in mail art for a long time. I do something when I'm inspired by an idea or a message. Mail art always took two forms for me. One was exchange when someone sent me an idea or a work. The other was when I had an experiment I wanted to attempt. Not many people send me mail these days, individual pieces meant specifically for me. I don't respond to printed things or mass-produced objects meant for thousands of people. Once in a while, someone does develop an amazing mass-produced piece, but the normal mail art going about these days consists of photocopy collages that don't interest me.

There are no experiments I want to try using the mail these days, either. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I set out a program of projects and experiments using the mails. I look on much of what I do in art as a form of research. You can consider my mail art experiments as a research program. I completed the research a long time ago. Part of what I set out to do was to test the limits, possibilities and paradigms of the post office with projects like the pieces of furniture

that I mailed or finding different ways to send objects that stretched the limits of postal regulations.

The other series of experiments was an attempt to find ways to define mail art as a system, an opportunity, a network. I described some of these experiments and projects earlier in our interview. Internet is a terrific communications tool, not an interesting artistic tool. The technology is still too crude to make good use of Internet for art. Or, to put it another way, the technology that is sophisticated enough to use for art is time-consuming and expensive. I've like simple, inexpensive tools. That's one of the things I loved about mail art. With Netscape and Eudora, Internet is a simple, inexpensive communication tool. That's what I use it for. Pioneers like Joe De Marco see Internet and the World Wide Web as good art tool, but even the best projects to date have actually been communication projects, communicating art. I don't know what's next.

If you see my name in connection with Internet, it's because I give wide permission to circulate my work. It's likely to be related to my work on the faculty of the Norwegian School of Management. Internet has become an important tool for my work as a scholar and as director of the Nordic Center for Innovation. The reason you and i communicate by e-mail is that we both have it. For those of us lucky enough to have e-mail, there's no better or faster way to send words back and forth.

RJ: I have noticed that most people don't archive their e-mail as properly as they do with the printed matters they receive. I myself save all e-mail on diskette, and I even print out the important parts on paper because I like to re-read things on paper rather than on the monitor of my computer. How do you deal with the e-mail you get and send?

KF: E-mail is easier to archive than snail mail. Paper builds up ... books, letters, files. There's never enough time to file and organize. E-mail is easy. It shows up on my screen. My computer is well-organized and filed because it's easy to handle everything sitting at the keyboard. There's no need to find a file or shelf space or to move around the room sorting and seeking. If I want to save e-mail, which I often do, I copy and paste it into a word processor file. Sometimes there's a reason to make a paper copy. When I do, it gets lost with all the other paper. The electronic copy is easy to find. It's right on the computer where I left it.

RJ: How much do you know about computers?

KF: Very little, really. I use a Macintosh because it works the way I do. Computers are a powerful, sophisticated tool. Now are they becoming smart enough to be useful to most people for most jobs. The breakthrough came with the Mac.

I started using Mac in 1988 when the Mac got smart enough to handle big jobs, including serious design work. A client wanted me to create a design program his staff could use

for internally-generated publications. I went to his office to help him draw up the design. He showed me how easy it was to use Aldus PageMaker and Microsoft Word to do it myself. It took about two or three hours of coaching and then I was working productively. There are people who are excited about what they call computer literacy. Not me. I want the tool to be smart enough to do what I need it to do with minimum special skills on my part. I've done some research and publishing on the ways that the new information will affect society and culture, but I've focused specifically on the human and behavioral effects of information, not on information technology or information processing. Would you like to read the chapter that I've written for a new book on the subject just published by Scandinavian University Press? The title is: Information Science: From the Development of the Discipline to Social Interaction. My chapter focused on social interaction. It won't tell you too much about my ideas about computers. I don't have that many ideas about computers. It will tell you what I think about what computers mean for the rest of us.

RJ: Since I work with computers it would be interesting for me to read, but probably not for all readers of this interview. At the moment, with Internet, it is also possible to publish your texts in a digital form. Is this something you would like to do?

KF: Absolutely. Internet and computers make it possible to transact enormous amounts of valuable information on a useful and selective basis without paying to overproduce. Unlike books, you don't need a minimum

number of orders to break even. That means individual thinkers with proper technical support can publish as easily as best-selling authors. Nam June Paik predicted the information superhighway years ago. He even created the name! Fluxus, mail art and Internet go back to the beginning, before the beginning. Narrowcasting and narrowcast publishing on the net are new version of Nam June's Utopian Laser Television. Before long, computers with small cameras and optical fiber cable will be so common that we'll be able to set up our own television cable broadcasts, the true realization Utopian Laser Television.

Thanks to Nam June, I've been publishing on-line for since last year. When Nam June organized the New York - Seoul Fluxus Festival, he arranged a web site where our work was available on-line. In typical mail art fashion, I'll brag about being first to say that Nam June's show was the first on-line art exhibition. I presented some scores. Now, Joe De Marco is developing a major on-line web site for Fluxus. There are scores, art works, and there will later be documents, texts, historical material. Joe has been in touch with historians like Owen Smith and he's getting in touch with major collections and archives. He hopes to put up a Fluxus archive and museum on the site. There will also be pages for work by individual artists. The Fluxus Home page is < <http://www.cinenet.net:80/~marco/fluxus/> > We already have The Fluxus Performance Workbook on-line. Interested people can visit the site to browse, copy and download scores by Ay-O, Genpei Akasegawa, Eric Andersen, Robert Bozzi, George Brecht, Albert M Fine, Ken Friedman, Lee Heflin, Hi Red Center, Dick Higgins, Toshi

Ichiyonagi, Joe Jones, Bengt Klintberg, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Takehisa Kosugi, George Maciunas, Richard Maxfield, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts and Emmett Williams. The workbook was planned in 1987 or so. I edited it. It was published by Guttorm Nord°, a Norwegian artist who has been active in mail art. It took almost four years to raise the money and publish the workbook. It took about four days between the time Joe De Marco contacted me and the time it was ready to use on the net. You can also find Dick Higgins's Cowboy Plays on the Fluxus Home Page and there's lots more to come.

The most use I make of Internet involves scholarly research and communication. I recently completed a survey using Internet. It took me a few weeks to compile the empirical data at a cost of a few hundred kroner. Before Internet, the same survey would have taken months of work and cost at least twenty times as much. Getting decent results, stimulating people to answer the questions and engaging their interest still requires training and skill. Writing is still writing. But the Internet is a great tool. If you have organization, research and writing skills, every step of the physical process is more simple and the costs go down. Just a few minutes before you sent me the last question, I released the on-line pre-print of a study titled Books in the Age of On-Line Information: Will We Read Fewer or More Books? Statistical Summary and Preliminary Conclusions. The Norwegian School of Management will publish the working paper next month. People can get it on e-mail request and decide if they want the working paper by snail

mail. Everything just moves faster and more effectively. (A few weeks after this questions and answer took place, the study was published as a special report by the American Association of Higher Education. The study was also discussed in the "Cyberscape" column of the International Herald Tribune on Monday, December 4, 1995.)

RJ: Speed is a relative thing. I'm not referring to Einstein's theory. I've noticed that if one can do things more quickly with computers, one starts to do more work in the same time, makes new tasks for oneself in the free time that is given through the use of the computer. Communication used to be a slow process. All technological advances speed up the communication process. This results in more communication, but only for those who have access to the technology. Isn't this scary?

KF: There are two issues embedded in your question. The first issue is that we do more work in the same time. That's not scary to me. The second is that we face the challenge of a world of unequal access to information. That frightens me for many reasons. If you want me to go into it, I will, but to do so, I've got to consider political economics and closely reasoned argument. It's up to you if you think the readers of a mail art dialogue will find that interesting. Let's consider the first issue, the speed of work. I'm happy for the gains in speed. I love to work. The computer enables me to be more productive as a researcher and writer. The information superhighway enables me to travel farther, to gather information faster and more effectively. My one problem with the infobahn is that it's poorly organized. The

structure is frequently confusing and uninformative. We'll see things improve vastly in the next three or four years.

Poor structure is annoying to me. New ways of solving problems, new ways of accessing and organizing information, new structures that emerge from the flow of information should, in theory, permit us to address and use the power of questions more effectively. The ability to work with more kinds of information across broad ranges of time and space and the opportunity to seek information from more sources make it possible for users to work in different ways than were previously possible. Some of these ways are more effective, some are less. Those who have had to work with remote libraries and closed-stack systems find the new information technology a tremendous opportunity. In some ways, it is not much different than the libraries they have been using except that it places access control in their hands. In some ways, it is superior: it puts a vast amount of information and the contents of many documents directly on their desk with far less waiting time than was required when ordering through a library.

Those who have had the opportunity to work in major, open-stack libraries may find the new information technology something of a lateral move. An effective information user with field-specific expertise and solid general reference skills can navigate a multi-million volume library and make use of the materials far more effectively than is yet possible through the new technology. The difference is simple. A good, large-scale library permits effective browsing and grazing as well as hunting. The

physical medium of the book and the way libraries organize books near one another allows rapid access to the domain of what one does not know that one does not know. This allows one to ask general, open-ended questions in a wide variety of ways. While the information superhighway is loaded with documents and ways of finding material that can be surprising and serendipitous, finding useful connections to expert sources can also be surprisingly hard. The infobahn isn't indexed very well. Developing effective indexing and abstracting systems has always been a key problem for information. This is also true for the medium of physical books and documents in paper-technology libraries. The difference is that physical artifacts present themselves organized in some way that rapidly begins to make sense to the user. As a result, the intelligent information user soon structures a conceptual library access pattern. This pattern is an information overlay and navigation chart that becomes an operating system for a multi-million volume paper analog information network. Few information users can master the conceptual content of the Internet. It is possible to master the structure and understand the basic content of a physical library. It simply takes examination, practice and footwork. The Internet is too big, and undergoes too much rapid change to make that kind of mastery possible. Good indexes and abstracts together with good links and pointers will be the only way most people can master the conceptual content of the Internet. There's a big difference between being afraid and being annoyed. As these problems are solved, I will welcome the improvements. If I want to work more, it's fine. If I just want to do more in the same time, it's fine. I may want to do less and use the time in other ways.

We have choices. I've been thinking about these questions for a week now, the week since I released my preprint report. It's been an exciting, productive week. I was able to do more work and better work in less time at lower cost. Within three or four days of my preprint getting out, I've had requests for copies from nearly two hundred scholars and researchers in over twenty nations around the world, including people I didn't meet or contact through the original study. Major international magazines and newspapers have contacted me asking for copies. The American Association for Higher Education asked to publish the preprint on their Web Site. I'm finally beginning to understand why the physical scientists who have used Internet have been so much more productive and resourceful than social scientists or humanists. It's impossible to describe the profound difference in productivity this technology permits. It allows teams, it allows for sharing, it allows people who ought to be thinking and working together despite great distances to do so. It's one thing to read about something in a magazine and think, "Yeah, that's a good idea." It's another to do it. When you work this way, you understand why this technology is a major development in our ability to serve each other. Information technology is the first significant technology that enables us to increase our standard of living while reducing our material resources consumption. That, for better or worse, brings us to your second question. Do you really want my thoughts?

RJ: The problem of access to this digital superhighway is obvious. You have to live in a country with the infrastructure for Internet, you need to have access to a

computer, you need to have the money for an account subscription and the phone. I enjoy the possibilities of this new tool because I live in a rich country with the infrastructure and economy to make this possible. The government in Holland also sponsors servers that make Internet access and e-mail cheap, too. I am interested in your thoughts about unequal access to information. Many mail artists see Internet as a next step for mail artists, the newest way to communicate.

KF: There are two issues to consider. I'll take the simple one first. Most mail artists don't understand what Internet is good for. I'm not speaking in a technological sense. I'm speaking in terms of culture and communication. Mail art has hardly ever been about broad communication. It's based on small town culture writ large. The mail art network is insular, internalized, self-centered. There's little understanding of history and culture, even little knowledge about the history of mail art. The idea of artists who think this way using Internet as a new way to communicate is a joke. The results aren't interesting.

Mail art has become boring. Mail art mottoes don't disguise the fact that mail artists are in many ways a social club. They're like any other club. We don't ascribe any kind of great value to groups of pen-pals or people who visit each other across borders. What would we think if a group of pen-pals claimed to be changing history, revolutionizing art and advancing human progress? Tourism? Networker conferences? The Scouts have been doing it for a century.

Mail art will remain a disappointment without a richer foundation in knowledge, culture and communication theory. The effects of the information society and the knowledge economy are revolutionizing the world. Mail artists haven't recognized the nature of those changes. They're working out of old paradigms that don't make sense today. Perhaps mail art and correspondence art were revolutionary in the 1960s. The world was different. In that distant and more primitive world, mail art was startling and innovative. Mail art had already become self-centered and internalized by the 1970s. The world was shaking. The Cold War was still on but change was in the air. Mail artists were still doing the same old thing, sending the same old messages back and forth to each other. I got into big trouble with a series of essays and pamphlets titled Freedom, Excellence and Choice. I became an outcast in the mail art community. I was startled by the nasty letters and hate cards that I got. I had pursued the same agenda from the start. The network was irritated over the same philosophy and ideas that put me at odds with the art world and gave birth to many of the mail art media now in use. By the 1970s, pursuing those ideas in a thoughtful and critical way put me at odds with the mail art network.

Mail art has no major role to play in the world today. There's no need for mail art on the Internet. The net's a different kind of medium. It needs play, ideas and exchange. It doesn't need mail art. People who see the Internet as an arena for mail art are missing the point. Information technology has opened old fields to entirely new approaches. The technology is helping us to transform information into knowledge by making it possible to work

and play in new ways. The information society is shifting the boundaries of most professions, transforming job descriptions and reconstructing businesses. It would be amazing art were to be left untouched.

The world has moved farther than mail art has. The old paradigms don't hold. Mail artists make too much of their supposedly radical nature without a solid grounding in common human issues. Radical artistic efforts that react against vanished paradigms seem quaint, irrelevant.

RJ: And the second answer, the difficult one?

KF: The second question is extraordinarily difficult. The idea that part of the world will have access to information technology while much of it won't is profoundly disturbing. If the developed world leaves the rest of the world behind, we'll have to build a huge wall to keep out the billions of people who want what we have. That won't work. On the other hand, shaping sustainable development for everyone is a huge problem, just huge.

The flow of information through societies, through organizations, through companies can make a profound difference. But things are difficult. We must make things work in an interlocked system of public policies, business policies and private desires that are headed in directions that don't lead toward the world we need to shape. I am convinced of the importance of these issues and aware of the extraordinary challenges that face us if we are to achieve enough in the next half century for the human race to survive on this planet.

The flow of information and the development of a good life for all are linked. The development of a good life for all with sustainable development is not the altruism of the rich for the poor, but a key to a good future for everyone. This excites me more than mail art. Back in the 1960s, it was possible to believe that art and the postal system could reshape the world.

To some degree, it was possible then. Those challenges excited me when they seemed possible. It was always kind of a dream, but it was a useful dream. Today, other dreams are more productive.

RJ: I think this is a good place to end the interview. Thank you for your time and energy!

APPENDIX-1

Bibliography (Sent in by Ken Friedman together with his first answer)

There are a number of texts and documents you may wish to read:

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APPENDIX-2

WHY I DON'T TAKE PART IN NETWORK TELEFAX ART
PROJECTS (by KEN FRIEDMAN).

A Reply for Guy Bleus

This text was sent by FAX as a reaction to a FAX-project held by Guy Bleus, Belgium, at 'De Fabriek' in Eindhoven, Netherlands, in which Ken Friedman writes about his views to FAX art.

Guy Bleus's statement on Telecopy Art is intelligent and interesting. Much of what Guy writes is true. Even so, I don't take part in telefax exhibitions. I want to explain why.

The telefax is a one-line instrument. When my fax is busy, I can't send or receive other messages. Most network messages are broadcast messages using narrowcast tools. The mailbox is a paradoxical receiver: it is a narrowcast receiver that can receive a large number of broadcast messages at once. Receiving one item in the mail doesn't prevent receiving another.

The telefax is a true narrowcast receiver. When you are receiving one item, you cannot receive another. Today's fax technology is still primitive. The fax cannot receive multiple messages and stack them for later feedout. My fax is a fax, and not a computer. I cannot read messages, choose to print, select among them and dump the rest.

Today's telefax communication is always narrowcast, and I use my fax as a tool of private communication. I want to keep my fax open for incoming private messages. When I travel, I want the paper supply left available for specific communications intended personally for me, not for the network. I am a businessman as well as an artist. I cannot afford to miss a direct communication from a client because

the fax is busy all day - or because a full roll of paper runs out on the third day of a six-day trip.

A friend who directs a gallery was once asked to take part in a fax-show. She agreed. Her fax was busy for four days solid. She ran through several dozen rolls of paper. Her colleagues couldn't reach her. They phoned her to find out why the fax was broken. She wasted hours on the phone every day explaining the problem rather than spending her time getting messages and acting on them. Her colleagues had to spend hundreds of dollars sending urgent information by courier that could easily have been sent by fax if the fax has been available.

This was an instructive lesson to me. The fax should be a tool, not an intrusion. I decided then that I would not take part in telefax exhibitions or projects until the technology changes enough to make it possible for me to avoid these problems. Right now, this isn't with my cheerful, old-fashioned telefax.

I use my telefax as a personal tool. I do use my telefax to send and receive information for art projects and exhibitions. In some ways, it is the tool that Guy Bleus suggests. At this time, it is a private tool, and I am not willing to open my fax line to the network.

I only want faxes from people who want to communicate directly with me as an individual. I do not want telefax communications from people who see me as part of a

network or an undifferentiated member of the category of artists who own telefax machines.

Privacy is an important right. I welcome letters and telephone calls from network friends. I accept network broadcast mailings. I am willing to receive letters and calls from people I don't know; they may be people I want to know. I don't want to use my fax as a tool for mail art. Telefax and mail are very different-processes. I prefer to use them in specific and different ways.

(Ken Friedman, March 1993)

APPENDIX-3

SAMPLE OF AN E-MAIL MESSAGE:

PINE 3.90 TEKST VAN BERICHT Postvak:INKOMEND
Bericht 57/59

Date: Mon, 25 Sep 1995 12:36:24 +0200

From: "ken.friedman" <ken.friedman@bi.no>

To: tam@dds.nl

Subject: Answer

RJ :

Well, I couldn't work without documentation. But isn't the danger of documentation that it forms its own truth, and that reality (things that happen on a specific moment) can never be captured in an objective documentation because this reality is different for everybody who observes it, and everybody recognizes his own truth by observing. Only the ones that document then would form the 'history.' Is documentation that powerful?

KF:

This is a danger. It's the basic problem of all forms of documentation, no matter who makes them and no matter the purpose for which they're made. It seems to me that there is a strong argument to be made for a variety of clear, understandable sources of document from several views. In

the recent past, most documentation on art has been compiled or presented by a handful of journalists, critics and finally by art historians. I suggest that there can be valid approaches to art documentation by scholars from several fields and by artists themselves. The better, the broader, the more clear and conscious a body or documents is, the better we can understand what's happened. I believe that there documentation has valid goals and purposes, and that these can be fulfilled or abused. How we handle documentation, how much and how well, makes the difference

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[EINDE van de tekst van her bericht]

APPENDIX-4

E-MAIL about the E-MAIL projects

STATEMENT: Why I Don't Take Part in E-mail Art Projects

I don't take part in e-mail art projects. I want to explain why. I use my e-mail as a tool for research and communication. I subscribe to several listserv lists that have a combined posting of some 200 or so messages a day. In addition, I usually receive another 30 or 40 messages a day to which I must respond, more if a project is under way.

When I travel, I come back to a full mail box. It takes me an average of two hours for every day of travel to get through my mail. I need the communication -- and I value my time. There's too much impersonal e-mail art communication taking place to interest me.

E-mail should be a tool, not an intrusion. I use e-mail as a personal tool and a research tool. It is a private tool and I do not want to open my line to the network.

I only want posts from people who want to communicate directly with me as an individual. I do not want e-mail communications from people who see me as part of a network or an undifferentiated member of the category of artists who have computers and e-mail access machines.

Privacy is an important human right. I welcome letters and telephone calls from network friends. I accept network broadcast snail mailings. I am willing to receive letters and calls from people I don't know; they may be people I want to know. I don't want to use my e-mail address as a tool for mail art. E-mail and snail mail are very different processes and I prefer to use them in specific and different ways.

THE POST THAT I GOT ----

Subject: Jive Ruud
To: tam@dds.nl (Ruud Janssen)
Date: Thu, 16 Nov 95 7:59:53 CST
From: Chris Dodge
<cdodge@hennepin.hennepin.lib.mn.us>
Cc: interjam@art.niu.edu

If ah' only had time
If ah' only had
If ah' dun didn't need da damn bre'd
I wouldn't do wo'k fo' oders
I would wo'k all de time
fo' mah'self and produce sump'n supa' fine
If ah' only dun didn't need bre'd
If ah' only had 25 hours some day
If ah' had da damn time
to answa' all de quesshuns
dat mosey on down down in mah' mind.

--Karen Elliot for DeSirey Dodge Peace Post

Chris Dodge cdodge@hennepin.lib.mn.us
Hennepin County Library phone: 612-541-8572
12601 Ridgedale Drive fax: 612-541-8600
Minnetonka, MN 55305

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AL ACKERMAN

Mail-Interview with Al Ackerman (USA)

Started on 17-6-1996

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 29-7-1996

(Al's first answer came typed on a paper with a copy of one of Al Ackerman's famous drawings with the text: "Sigh....My most gifted pupil.... too bad her head is bean shaped" on it).

Al Ackerman : At the time I started doing mail art I had already tried a lot of other things, with zero-to-little success. As a kid I'd early on become addicted to the old pulp magazines Weird Tales, Trilling Wonder, Planet, Doc Savage, Dime Detective and so forth -- and my earliest aspirations had to do with becoming part of this world, which seemed to me to be a nicely hermetic three-ring-circus & pocket universe thing where marvels were still allowed to happen.

I'd developed this pulp-ghetto ideal where, by turning out reams of pulp under various pseudonyms for very low pay, you could live a precarious but romantic existence. That was the idea. But by the time I was actually old enough to begin my hand at it, 1953-54, most of the pulp mags had folded, the whole pulp market collapsed, leaving me and my dream bereft. Along with this I had been having some correspondence with Fredric Brown, the late-great scifi and mystery writer. And one of the things he told me, by way of helpful advice, was, "always try to be lucky enough to work in a despised medium." I wasn't quite sure I knew what he meant but I filed it away, at least subconsciously, for future reference.

So -- time passed and I drifted into quite a lot of writing for the confession magazines and then did some TV work, had a nightclub & TV act, did some theatre, wrote plays, etc. None of it very satisfactory from my pulp-dream standpoint. Finally, in 1972, I happened to pick up a copy of Rolling Stone, the issue with the Thos. Albright article "Correspondence Art." I read that and all the names and addresses of these people mailing things, I thought that sounded like it might be right up my alley. I had like this very positive 100% yes-response. To me, the whole mail art thing seemed like an ideal way to realize my long-cherished pulp dream, that is, to do a lot of fundamentally rapid work and use a lot of different pseudonyms and not make a dime.

So I started right in mailing out these nitwit Gnome Club and Clark Ashton Smith Fellowship Chapter doodads. I got

a nice response, people like The Northwest Mounted Valise and Dr. Brute and John Dowd and Image Bank and Irene Dogmatic, and later on Billy Haddock and John M. Bennett, and then Image Bank put me onto Dave "Oz" Zack, etc. And on that basis I got hooked. And now here it is, nearly a quarter of a century later, and I'm still hooked. I also understand what Fred Brown meant when he said "Always try to be lucky enough to work in the despised medium." I've had a very lucky run. In fact, looking back on it all, I have to feel luckier than a moth in a tampon factory.

RJ : It is always good to hear that someone feels he had a 'lucky run'. At "The Online Blaster - Meanderings of an American Ling Master" the text about you starts as: "A master of pseudonyms and of schizophrenia,...." How far do the pseudonyms influence you?

Reply on 23-8-96

AA : Here again -- for me -- the use of pseudonyms is something that goes back to my first early fascination with the pulps. In the old days, when a pulp mag used more than one of a writer's stories at a time, it was common practice to put a different byline on each story -- this helped give the reader the illusion he was getting more for his dime. If a writer was at all prolific -- and some of those guys, like Kuttner and Woolrich, were singlehandedly writing entire magazines -- he very often found himself operating under a half-dozen or more pseudonyms. And somehow this was a convention that held a lot of romantic appeal for my younger self. Probably because of its shady, less-than-honest aspects, the multiple-name dodge became

in my mind a sort of cicerone or ideal. Years later when I began doing mail art I carried the idea of using multiple names over into that. The fact that the mail art network had long favored the use of weird and intriguing pseudonyms - - Dr. Brute , Anna banana, Rain Rien, Andre "The Scientist" Stitt, Art Tar, etc. -- seemed made to order for what I was up to.

I started out mailing under the name of "Blaster Al"-- and I was also "Mrs. Blaster" and "Leonie of the Jungle" and Ralph "\$50,000 Party" Delgado and the critic Ernst Stroh-Symtra (to get what "Stroh-Symtra" was about, read the name backwards) and Eel Leonard ("The Newark Cannibal" -- don't ask him what he had for supper) and Glans T. Sherman and Jana Peruda and Emergency Room Metcalf. (The last named mail art phantom was also known as "The Bleeder" because he suffered from hemophilia and could bleed to death from the slightest paper cut or prick from a postage stamp) plus quite a few other colorful and bogus handles I've mercifully managed to forget.

Along with all of this there were the different club names - Clark Ashton Smith Fellowship Chaper, Scientific Electricity Foundation, various incarnations of Gnome King and/or Kink Club, among others, and, later, when things went really out of hand, the Harry Bates Club scams done in collaboration with Gene Laughter and Lon Spiegelman. It was fun. Eventually the Harry Bates Club doings became so twisted that it would require a whole book (some would say a lengthy court deposition) to detail all that went on, including the postal inspectors being called in to

investigate charges of "menace" and the seeming establishment of Pepeland, a top-secret Harry Bates clinic for maimed and crippled pets.

You mention the Ling Master -- that name came about because I had promised my pal R. Kern a story for his magazine DUMB FUCKER. That first story was called "Confessions of an American Ling Master." I did others. Ultimately, Ling and his mystic pillowcase hood with the single eyehole went from being a character in a series of stories to a pseudonym I adopted as part of a mail art offer ("LING ANSWERS ANY QUESTION FOR \$5!"), something I was hoping would generate a little extra income. As it turned out, Ling was one of those creations that become somewhat autonomous, and go on to lead a life of their own, meaning that as time went by, the Ling persona was picked up and adopted by a number of people who started using it for their own agendas. For instance, there was a seriously disturbed man in London who went around calling himself "Young Ling" until the police stopped him for questioning and found all sorts of unspeakable floatsam taped to his body. More recently, Steve Sleaze Steele's Provident Hot Check Productions Ltd. has done a film adaptation of the Ling story "I, the Stallion!" It just goes to show what small nuts the mighty okum runneth down and around all over the place seeking whom it may to deflower.

Of course, I could go on and provide a long song and dance that would freight across some fairly portentous academic-type theoretical blather having to do with the use of multiple names. I could talk about alternative realities and

personalities as used for mimetic framing devices to create metafictional constructs (and vice versa); also the philosophy behind "Plagerism", "Neoism" , "Carrotism" and "Fletcheritis." Fortunately, though, life's too short. Besides, the truth of the matter isn't all that hard to glim: in the final analysis using a lot of fake names is a neat thing because it allows you to experience more than one reality, and dick around a lot in the process. I recommend it.

RJ : Sounds like a good advice. You have been doing this mail art now for quite a long time (nearly a quarter of a century as you mentioned it yourself). Probably you have noticed some changes in the mail art network over the years. What changes strike you the most?

Reply on 18-9-1996

AA : Well of course the two most obvious changes that come to mind are 1) the hellish (and seemingly never-ending) increases in postage, and 2) the sheer growth & proliferation of the mail network itself.

Back in the early '70s, when I was just starting out, it really was possible to know most of what was going on in the mails, to have at least a fair handle on 80% of the names, the personalities, the shows & scams & projects that were happening. Back then, mail art was very much a world unto itself & not all that populous, either. Plus postage was cheap enough to allow you hit the lists and range pretty widely. It made for an intense -- and intensely rapid -- situation, in which exchange and dissemination seemed to

occur practically in the same breath. Things were very concentrated (hm, I almost wrote "consecrated".)

Whereas today, it all seems a lot more spread out. More diffuse. More "hobbyist" orientated, perhaps. Or maybe after 20+ years I'm no longer quite so able to react in fresh ways. Joyce said we go through the world meeting Kings & Queens, thieves & baby pigs & incredible glycerin beings on legs that keep trying to dart behind us -- meeting all these things but always meeting ourselves. So that may be all that I'm reporting here. I don't know -- as far as today's teeming mail-edifice goes, it's perfectly possible that someone super-industrious, like, for instance, my pal Ashley Parker-Owens over at Global Mail can keep up and keep track of the scene, maintain some sort of coherent overview..... I can't. From my point of view, it's simply grown too huge. These days there seem to be as many practicing mail artists as Wheaties has flakes. Maybe a good thing, maybe not. Who knows. (I tried asking the 14 Secret Masters of the World about it once, but the best they could tell me was, "Think about the life you would like to lead, and will lead, just as soon as you start selling reefer.")

Anyway, I still try to enjoy what small corner of it comes my way. Changez les draps, as Decartes says somewhere.

RJ : You mention "the 14 Secret Masters of the World". Who are they?

(On September 27th I received some copies from Al Ackerman's book where some texts he wrote explain some details of the things he told about in his answer).

reply on 5-11-1996

(Al's answer was typed on paper that started with a special cartoon with title: "I often wonder, am I.....mad?" made by Al Ackerman)

AA : I have been thinking about this one all day, and I wonder if I can come anywhere near answering it without sounding like The Bat Staffel.

I think, for our purposes here, it would be best to stick to the immediate ascertainable mail-art side of things, which means eschewing the palmier and in some ways more fascinating background of ancient mystic lore and eldritch hoodly-doodly that permeated the 14 Secret Masters like white permeates rice. The surreptitious powder theories of Thomas Dalton. The Egbo Assembly, said to have originated at 13th- century fairs. Various ideas about legominism and critomancy. Borges insisting, quite correctly, that "the secret is sacred but it is always vaguely ridiculous."The Mordacaii Brotherhood, so weird and drooling. Leviticon and Maat Kheru, the true intonation, the Flying Legion and Charles Williams and Chullunder Ghose and Mrs. Guppy's famous transit and the eerie Hastraun sect.... Some time I'm going to write a book about the 14 Secret Masters complete with all the esoteric trimmings, but this isn't it.

To begin with, then, let's just say that the 14 Secret Masters, in certain ways, was a lot like RayJo's Buddha University.

That is, a handy all-purpose cover-name for a number of mail and mail-related activities, not all of them strictly "real". In the case of the 14 Secret Masters of the World (to give the thing its full sobriquet; hereafter abbreviated 14SM) the emphasis was on the sort of shadowy secret society that exists somewhere between the dingbat metaphysical realms of the Golden Dawn Society and the more lurid down-cellar activities of Fu-Manchu. The 14SM was meant to seem screwball, but it definitely had its meaningless aspects.

In this respect -- and taken purely as a mail-art entity -- the 14SM functioned on several levels. Sometimes it simply served to designate my favorite core-circle of mailers... or as a convenient letterhead for whatever correspondence scam happened to be going down at the moment. Sample from '75: "Dear Richard Nixon -- ways of filth stand by you and land smell naz creep figure span down toward how long your finger been exhaustingly pleasing little things in big twin hillocks.... (etc., etc. for three more pages). Signed, 14 Secret Masters of the World."

At other times, especially as the 14SM action became more elaborate and mazelike, there would be actual meetings. My favorites were the ones held at Dave Zack's house ("Manderlay"), in Portland, Oregon; this was around '78-'79, when Istvan Kantor was in town. We did a fair amount of plotting, affecting sinister disguises, etc. Zack, for instance, used to don his Arthur Caws mask. I had the beautiful Edgar Allen Poe Head, big and purple and built entirely out of paper mache. Andre "The Scientist" Stitt would cover himself in garish filth. There would generally be someone

dressed in the mystic Ling pillocase hood -- lots of colorful and dramatic outfits.... Some have said Istvan Kantor ("Monty Cantsin") was a bit eccentric. He used to come to the meetings dressed as the Oscar Meyer Wiener, and he may have thought he was that character. Talented guy, though.

In those days, Zack had a crazy man named Jerry Sims living in his basement and Jerry used to rush upstairs, burst in on us and jabber things like "I'm very ashamed of my tiny bone structure! I'm very ashamed of my tiny bone structure!" (For some reason he liked to repeat everything twice.) I remember I used to tell him, "Don't worry, Jerry -- your bones are larger than a chicken's." At this, he would look relieved, somewhat, and return back downstairs. Point being: this sort of unplanned manic interruption was as much a part of what the 14SM was about as anything else that might have been going on at those meetings. maybe more so.

The -- for me -- nice thing about the 14SM was that when I started writing the Ling Stories, in the 80's, I found I had this whole readymade background to draw on, this meticulously built-up pocket universe I could dip into for purposes of verisimilitude. Very handy. Still, what I remember most fondly are the scams and mailings and meetings of the 70's, when things were at their peak, it was all.... I wouldn't say overwrought, but it was definitely stimulating, and there were times when, as the saying goes, we stimulated each other practically to the point of nervous breakdown.

I guess that's all I'm at liberty to reveal about the 14SM.

RJ : Well, the things you write down now reveal already a part of the 14SM. What ever happened to Dave Zack?

answer on 5-1-1997

AA : Dave Zack, now, that glittering guy. There are times when I think he was the most wayward-tragic-doomed figure I ever met, and other times when I think of him I can't stop grinning. (Hm, something not quite right about that last sentence, but hopefully you get my drift.)

"It doesn't make it if my postman doesn't get it," Zack would mutter, shuffling toward the mailbox, his arms overflowing with envelopes, each day's astonishing, and astonishingly arted, output.

"This is this," and as he moved, things would drop from his beard and shaggy jacket: cookies crumbs, flakes of gold glitter, twigs and old leaves. When it came to grooming he was a sort of latter-day Swamp Thing.

There are mail artists, quite a few, maybe the majority, who manage to practice their art and in the same `breath are able to coexist peacefully and even succesfully with the workaday world: they pay their bills and hold down jobs and have families, and never go to jail, and this and that. Not so Zack. Zack was a law unto himself. He was what the scifi people mean when they use the term "mad genius",

and what Aesop had in mind when he penned that cautionary fable about the grasshopper who got punished terribly for dicking around on his fiddle when winter was fast approaching. Zack was brilliant, madding and great. Difficult, visionary and cracked. I would go over to his house in the late- 70's , in Portland, and find him busy as a bee collaging phone and utility bills. As I later explained it in an article, "In those days Zack knew he would never be able to pay all the bills that came to the house, so rather than show any favoritism or partiality he made it a practice to pay none of them, equally. Rather, he would take the various gas and water and electric bills (also the subpoenas and summonses -- never any lack of those) and construct these beautiful 10-foot-high assemblages, which he would then title 'Tall Carefree Clown #27,' 'Tall Carefree Clown #28,' whatever number it happened to be in the sequence, and these he usually sent out and about as part of his mail art. It was a quite amazing continuous year-round project..." Or I'd go over and find him busy petitioning officials at the state capitol, pestering them with his different nutty fundings proposals. Or he'd be playing his cello upsidedown. Or he'd be writing something for the art mags.

At the same time he gave the imprimatur to mail art by being one of the first to write about it at length for a major slick-paper journal (Art in America), he was finding time to come over and live for long stretches in my pantry, and in my dreams I can often still hear him in there, munching, munching. (Like Wimpy in the Popeye strip, Zack's motto was always, "I would like to invite you for a duck dinner -- you bring the duck!")

In collaboration with Istvan Kantor, he helped dream up the "Monty Cantsin" name and concept, and what later became Neoism. He was certainly one of the all-time world-class letter writers, right up there with Henry Miller and Fanny Burney. At some point I gave him the nickname Dave "Oz" -- Oz obviously being the only locale that could comfortably accomodate him, Baum's magic fantasy kingdom where even the animals can talk. By and large we had a lot of laughs and he seldom failed to make me want to chew the rug and pull my hair out.

In the late -70's, true to his history of hairbreadth escapes, Zack gave his Portland, Oregon, creditors the slip by moving to Canada. There he operated a sort of quasi-legal rooming house for drunkard Newfies. A few years later, he left Canada one jump ahead of the mounties and used the money I grudgingly loaned him to lam down to Mexico. Ultimately it didn't make a hell of a lot of difference to the Mexican authorities that, in Zack, they had one of the world's top idea-man and practitioners of mail art. The authorities were more interested in the fact that for two or three years he'd been cashing his dead parents' Social Security checks, which was the routine he'd worked out to support his mail art activities. They tossed him in the jug (I tend to lie awake thinking of this by the hour because if things had happened a little differently I could have gone the same route myself). In '91, after three or four years of who-knows-what-hell , they finally let him out, probably afraid he was going to die on the premises -- by then, Zack who had a lifetime history of diabetes was gravely ill, with (among other things) gangrene of the foot. Somehow he

made his way to San Antonio, Texas, and all praise to Patty Blaster who took him in and did what she could for him until what little health he had left failed him.

Last I heard he was in a country rest home or some damn place, stroked out, largely unresponsive. not long ago -- last week, in fact -- I had an E-mail from one of his former girl friends, Judith Conaway, who'd done a lot to help him over the years, saying she'd heard that he'd died in the latter part of '95. Maybe so. On the other hand, such was my old pal's cantankerousness, his boundless power for aggravation that I wouldn't be surprised to see him pop up again. The way I picture this, I'll be transporting a heavy piano across a rope bridge in Africa and halfway across the chasm I'll meet a figure in a gorilla suit who'll proceed to jump up and down and mess things up outrageously. That'll be Zack.

RJ: Are you crazy enough to be transporting a heavy piano across a rope bridge in Africa, or do you lead a quite normal life nowadays?

answer on 18-3-1997

AA: I don't know if you'd call it "quite normal" but nowadays my life is definitely quieter. Partly, this is due to natural attrition, the slowing-down process that comes with getting older and no longer being able to sit up all night drinking and bullshitting. These days I find that my nightclubbing activities are likely to add up to no more than two or three nights a week. I am no longer such a

rumba addict as I once was. I haven't gone on the wagon but it must be at least four years since I drank enough to fall down in public. I can't tell you how long it's been since I sunk all my money in a get-rich-quick uranium deal, or even bet on a horse. No more harebrained coast-to-coast bus flights with \$ 3,50 in my pocket.

Aside from getting up on stage and performing on the last Tuesday of each month at Rupert Wondolowski's Shattered Wig Night, downtown, which I love and which pretty well satisfies my hunger for making a spectacle of myself in front of an audience, I feel happy staying out of the spotlight unless there's a good deal of money being offered. Fortunately, the people who are likely to offer me this kind of money are not, on the whole, the sort of people I feel comfortable or even safe being around, not the sort I'd want to be trapped in an elevator with, as we used to say in the hospital business. So finding myself tempted into strenuous flamboyant displays is seldom a problem. Living a more sensible life, I often think of myself as a little old character who has survived his own bad habits to become rather monkish and retiring, almost flowerlike.

As I say, getting older accounts to some extent for this new-found mellowness. But partly (and maybe largely) it also has to do with finding myself in this very lucky position, where for the first time in my life I'm able to sit down and devote 6-12 hours a day to just writing. Thanks to the fortunate situation I fell into six years ago when I landed here in Baltimore, I now have considerable stress-free time available, something I never had before, and I am able to

put in as many hours at the typewriter working on poems and stories as I want to. That's where you'll find me at all-hours -- hunched far over the keys, smoking and sipping, my ears ringing. At such times the true bright nitwit light of the fanatic will come into my eyes, I'm told. And once the day's writing gets done, there's generally enough time and energy left over to pursue my mail art activities. At this moment I have a new book out from Shattered Wig Press that I'm definitely happy with in the sense that I was able to go all out on it and not have to stop for anything; I am well along with a new batch of Eel Leonard poems, and this week, in a burst, I finished two other short magazine pieces and am also about to start mailing out my latest "14 Secret Master Reports on Cloning". This last, which is a mail thing, will give me a chance to do up some strange envelopes showing off the new postage stamp series that I and my charming mail pal DKA recently collaborated on. (Which seems as good a place as any to give credit where it belongs, and say that if I still devote a part of each day to mail art it's largely because of terrific mailers like DKA. Terrific mailers like Rudi Rubberoid with his inimitable handmade envelopes and gnomic, nearly indecipherable handwriting. Terrific mailers like Suzy Crowbar and Sleaze Stele, who has raised head-infestation to an art, and John M. Bennett and Gerald "Flash" Burns and Jack the Raver Saunders. Aces all, whose work keeps on coming and keeping me interested.). Anyway, when it comes to the stuff I was able to churn out this month, my aforementioned writing and mail output, I'm happy to report that it was mostly accomplished without too much undue strain or looniness, as distinguished from ten years ago when my life was so crazy complicated that this sort of output

(coupled with the scuffling I was having to do just to stay afloat financially) would have wrecked me, physically and mentally -- and often did. To say nothing of what I put my family through. I don't kid myself that there aren't things about the old hectic life I miss, but as I come creeping up on the Big Sixty, I have to feel very lucky that I've lived to make the adjustments which have allowed me to remain fairly productive and not vagged or institutionalized as yet. So far so good.

RJ: You say "..... that there aren't things about the old hectic life I miss". You can guess that I am curious to know which things these are, or are they too obvious to tell about?

next answer on 2-5-1997

AA: I wonder. That is, I'm not sure I can successfully convey all that I mean about missing -- I might as well put "missing" in quotes -- certain things from a time in my life that, in retrospect, now seems hectic to the point of being chimeratic, if not actually deranged. I look back on those days and I have to wonder how I survived them. In a general sense, the period from 1972 to 1990 during which I was living the mail art life on a full-time basis was not unlike having a job where every day you're required to go down in this pit, and for 10-12 hours, sometimes longer, you have to try to control seven maniacs with just a chair. Along with the maniacs, there are flames down in the pit -- and rats and snakes, etc. And every 10 hours or so you get

to take a lunch break, which consists of preparing a bat over the leaping open blue flames: a bat sandwich. That's the job. You also have creditors and bill collectors trying to get in at you all the time, and relatives and neighbors who think you maybe ought to be put away. It may seem like I'm being excessively metaphoric here, or morbidly fanciful, but consider: on a typical day when I was at my peak and the mail art "life" was running high -- let's say, for instance, on 5-7-83, in San Antonio, Texas, a Thursday morning, I can remember getting Stephanie, my wonderful daughter, off to school and then setting down in the kitchen to work on six or seven separate pieces of mail art. (For years, I've worked at the kitchen table, partly because I've never been able to function in a formal office or studio space, and partly because the kitchen table puts me in closer touch with the cold beers that function for me in lieu of breakfast.) As generally happens on such mornings, I'm having a lot of untoward thoughts, doing a lot of writing in my head, thinking about Pego Von Berndt's proposal that the name "Mail Art" be changed to "Spanish Art," thinking about the neighborhood bruja (witch) who's sworn to get me (a long & complicated story having to do with her mistaken belief that I stole her blouse) etc. On this particular day, I'm also remembering that I have to go over to the stamp place on San Pedro Avenue and pick up my latest rubber stamp. The stamp says "SURFACE FREE LITERATURE FOR THE BLIND" and I'm wondering how that's going to work out, whether it's going to help me realize my dream of significant postal savings or mean more trouble from the inspectors. (Too. there's also the chance that today's the day Dave Zack will pick to arrive from Mexico, he's been threatening all month to pay us a

visit) but for the moment I'm in the middle of making these envelopes, when I detect the unwelcome sound of footsteps coming up the wooden staircase and onto the back porch. I know those footsteps. They belong to the landlord, who's intent on collecting his measly \$ 200 - 300 in unpaid rent and always picks the early morning hours to come nosing around, a fanatic, fanatic character. Well, I've changed all the locks, so that part's O.K.; he can't get in. But I've forgotten to pull the curtain, so he can see in, and to prevent him spotting me (this morning, for some reason, I'm wrapped in my wife's dressing gown) I have to get down on all fours and, with a partially completed envelope to Lon Spiegelman (or Pat Tavenner or R. Kern or John Evans or the Mambo 6-Fingers Club -- whomever) clutched in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other, crawl rapidly into the bathroom. Where I find Sleaze Steele, our current house guest, kneeling on the tiles and talking to Ed on the Big White Phone. Sleaze has been with us two months now. He has serious nerve and gastric problems, no question about it. He should probably try laying off the wine coolers and cough syrup. In the meantime, having to share the bathroom with him while he's pouring out his esophageal wealth and I'm waiting for the landlord to give up and go away, is not exactly my idea of a great morning situation but what you gonna do, Ruud? Through it all, between spasms, Sleaze is rambling feverishly in his mind, saying things like, "The car wash in Spokane failed, and Vi and I set out to see if we could build a life together", "I have never been at ease knowing there's a jealous husband in the picture" , "Vi wasn't much of a talker, so I never really had a chance to find out how much Walter knew, or if he'd hired detectives to follow us, or whether he might be back

there somewhere on the road himself grimly dogging our trail in his ancient black Buick", "I knew the pain the jealous outraged husband in my grandmother's life had caused my father" , "My brother and I were silent witnesses of it all, the whole neighborhood in on the secret from the beginning when my grandmother grew too passionate about being on top, the unexplained giant rodent, etc."

By then, it's nearly 9:30 a.m. and my mail art is just beginning. So to think of doing this willingly -- even happily -- seems hard to believe, but that's how it was, back when I was younger and had the energy. I think that's probably what I mean when I talk about missing certain things.

I mean that I miss the energy I had back then, the energy that allowed me to get through it all and arrive at this quieter, more balanced state where I'm enjoying, as Philip Whalen would say, "Relaxation to write while hearing / Half-misunderstood foreign language in Grant Street."

RJ : I re-typed your answer today (May 30th 1997), just after coming from the dentist, and because I passed the Postoffice, collected my mail also. Not much mail today so I am able to deal with delayed mail. Mail art is fully integrated in my life, and probably it is the same with you (especially when I hear the details of that specific day in 1983). The question that arises now might be a stupid one, but who cares. Are you able, nowadays, to pay your rent? Or do postage stamps still get priority?

next answer on 19-6-1997

(Al Ackerman's answer came in a envelope with a drawing on it stating 'you are the ENTITY' - 'MUY PICANTE' , where a typical Al's Adam & Eve are witnessed by a snake in the tree..... In the envelope also a newspaper-article with photo of Al, where Peter Werbe writes -- among others -- about Al's forthcoming reading out of his book 'The Blaster Al Ackerman Omnibus' at the Detroit's Trumbull Theatre)

AA : As Ed Higgins might say, Blood Red Sun. And honeycomb in the shape of the body from my sleeping on sofas, its expanse stretched in mid-air, nearly weightless, yet already bending a little from its own mattedness. Looking down at this, all this hair and stuff on my comb, made me think of how it would be to restage the Trial of Socrates with just

crickets.

Or maybe you were 2 years old and you had a friend, name of Vennie Lice, with a brother got some Lady-Fingers still had the bandage on his right arm from slamming some clam....never mind....besides us sails a mighty armada of rears, crapping the planet on its upper third....HELP ME OUT HERE, RHONDA!

Ah, I love those Higgins Answers.

Actually, making the rent is always a struggle, always a victory (these days, Ann and I split it on a real hovel) and if I was still spending as much on postage as I was spending back in '72-'91, it wouldn't even be close. Nowadays,

though, postage only runs me \$5-10 per week, a savings of about \$60-70. I thought I might go in the hole, last month, when I traveled to Detroit to appear at the Trumbull Theater but even though I had a slight psychotic episode on stage (very weird, I suddenly found the spirit of Dwight Eisenhower manifesting itself in my voice and gestures, and ran around trying to light various small fires) the theater management was kind enough to pay me, plus I sold some books, so I wound up doing O.K. on travel expenses and was able to pay my half of this month's rent, i.e. , \$160, when I got back to Baltimore. The old story of "Horrible rent / beautiful art , and vice versa" (I just hope Bierce was right about this.) Hi Vennie.

(Perhaps it's snowing?)

RJ : Reading or talking in front of a public is quite different from writing letters or texts which are sent in the mail to others. Do you like to 'perform' in front of a public, or do you prefer the intimacy of the envelope (when there is a choice...)?

next answer on 28-7-1997

AA : The best answer I can come up with runs like this: if you crossed a horse with a spider you'd have an awful odd-looking thing but at the same time it would be something that when it bit you you could maybe climb on and ride it to the hospital. That's sort of how I tend to view (and do) mail art and performance stuff. There's a lot of overlap. It's not always easy to keep the two activities separate. For example -- a few months ago, I wrote

something called "Palookaville" which I sent out as a mail art piece. It's a rather delicate "mood" piece that begins, "The one-way ticket to Palookaville expressing sexual prejudices in witch hunting has been fortunate in that the possessed and their investigators usually couldn't concentrate. But the true success story has been my leaving the marine Corps to investigate the initial charges from a possessed fifteen-year-old girl --" and goes on poignantly in this vein for a page or so, and ends with the words, "Awoke instantly for my mind crossed a rabbit and a fox to produce a thing addicted to bad public relations to the air force."

Anyway, once I'd mailed it out I had no further plans for it. So, and this is what often happens, I more or less forgot about it. Time passed. Then, several months later when I was in Detroit doing a show and I needed something to read on stage -- something brief that would serve as a bridge between two longer pieces -- I remembered "Palookaville" and dug it out and read it, and as an extra added gimmick I read it with a half-empty cigarette pack stuffed in my mouth. When you read something and you have a cigarette pack jammed between your teeth it can impart a whole new dimension, can make the piece seem even stranger than it was originally, which, in the case of "Palookaville", seemed to be what was needed and, sure enough, I had the impression that the thing worked better in performance than it had on the printed page. So that's one way -- using a piece of mail to generate a performance or reading.

The other way is like what I do once a month at the Shattered Wig Nights here in Baltimore. I should probably

explain that Shattered Wig is, first of all, a really terrific magazine -- The Shattered Wig review -- edited by poet and bon vivant Rupert Wondolowski. It's like one of the very few magazines I take seriously. Fortunately it's been around for a number of years. And over the years there has grown out of this publishing venture a tradition of Shattered Wig Nights, monthly blow-outs that happen at a club downtown, involving poetry, music, performance and what-have-you. (I say "what-have-you" because some of the acts can get pretty weird and it's not always easy to tell. I'm thinking here of things like The Montana Joe Project, which involves eroticism with Sesame Street dolls -- and T.

"Justice" Duggan, whose thing is to dress as a Supreme Court Judge and punish people -- anybody who's foolish enough to get up there with her on stage can have their skin flayed with a whip.) So anyway, while I'm nowhere in the same league as these people, I do get up once a month at these evenings and do readings and sometimes I'll push it over into the realm of actual live performance and do things like, well one night I had ten people up on stage with me. They were tied -- they were roped around me in a circle -- with surgical tape. And they'd each been given the task to perform -- : "Crush a bag of potato chips under each arm and go, 'Urg! I'm a party animal!" , "Pretend to knit a straitjacket for Saul Bellow and meanwhile discover turfy things in your hair while squatting and brooding." So I had these ten different activities that were taking place around me while I proceeded to stand up and read this long poem whose text featured the word "muff" over 150 times. It was quite a spectacle. It took me about 45 minutes to read the "muff" epic and meanwhile the helpers around me were carrying out their various repetitive activities and, towards

the end, everybody was becoming frankly exhausted -- moaning, falling down, etc.. -- so that the stage took on the appearance of The Raft Medusae, that old disaster-at-sea painting where the survivors are writhing in agony on a raft. But the point is, I wrote the "muff" piece especially for this particular Shattered Wig Night. In fact, I was working on it right up until time to go on, practically. It wasn't till later I xeroxed it for mailing, turned it into a mail art thing, cut it up and pasted it on envelopes and so forth. Made postcards. That's how it works for me.

Sometimes the performing swings the mail and sometimes the mail swings the performing. I don't really have a preference -- how could I? It's more like falling down the stairs than any pre-conceived programatic thing and I'm just taking it as it comes. I'm usually surprised and I'm always the last to know -- but, I don't know, Ruud, does that answer what you were asking? I'm not sure I haven't gone off on a tangent and missed the point entirely. I have the feeling it may be like the old riddle: "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" Ed Dorn, the poet, has a nice answer to that one, where he says, "The question is not, which came first / the chicken or the egg / the question is which came first / journalism or tabacco." Hell if I know.

RJ: If you missed the point entirely or not isn't interesting at all. Your answer shows clearly how you work, and I am very much interested in that. Just wondered, do the people who see those performances understand anything of the concept of mail art. Do they

participate in the network, or is that part unknown to them?

next answer on 8-9-1997

AA : It varies. I've done readings, especially here in Baltimore, where at least half the audience either had done mail art themselves or knew what it was. So they were certainly aware of the connections. Although I don't know how much difference it made in the long run, as far as my performance went, because, I mean, you can get up in front of a crowd that's primed to bursting with mail art insights and you can still give a bum reading. Again, I've done readings -- at high schools, say, or in front of straight poetry groups -- where nobody had a clue, the 'term' mail art was something they'd never run into before, just a cypher.

In such cases, there are two ways you can go about it. You can either throw out some prefatory remarks, try to explain what mail art is and how it ties in to what you're about to read -- or -- you let it go and just read. I've handled it both ways. I must say that, times when I've tried to explain, I didn't really feel I was making much headway. Trying to briefly explain the concept of mail art to a roomful of people who've never even remotely encountered the term before, is about like trying to explain the concept of model railroading to a Martian. Once, I got up and said: "Mail Art is a sphere whose circumference is infinite and whose center is everywhere" -- and everybody in the audience just looked at me. Nowadays I mostly eschew the explanations. It saves a lot of wear and tear. Nowadays, I'm likely to begin

very softly, I'll have my head sort of lolling to one side -- and speaking in this very affected, very fruity-sounding voice, I'll start by saying something like, "Hello there, poetry povers. I'm Blaster Al Ackerman and I'm not wearing any socks but my ankies are painted with Indian ink. Here's one called 'Yellow Wallpaper Song' that's a favorite of mine and -- I hope -- of yours?" Then I'll jam a cigarette pack between my teeth and yell:

YELLOW WALLPAPER SONG

I'm goin' down Georgia
I'm goin' down Georgia
pelow on my mind
I'm goin'back stay

I'm goin' back this time
today -- really goin'

I see my tie, childish
from gin I guess I'm
freezin' my palm when

them ripplin' eyeballs
insistent up the wall
from full intent to
wed my penis to some

wealthy invalid. Oh my veins are blue
tongue bulgin'
out like
magma--

sing
this song
wherever they make you
wait in line

--Eel Leonard

RJ : Because you have been so long working with this mail art, you must have received tons of materials. Have you kept it all , thrown it away, or to be short: how does your "archive" look like?

next answer on 15-1-1998

AA : You reminded me of how long I've been putting off shoveling up the mess in here. Things are getting way out of hand in my "archives".

Actually , where my methods are concerned. the term "archives" is something of a misnomer -- venture to say a joke. Just as a hen mysteriously lacks lips -- and a snake a navel -- I have always mysteriously lacked the power or ability or whatever it takes to keep an "archive" going. I seem to be incapable of maintaining any sort of systemized filing system. Rather, over the years I've learned to deal as best I could with greater or lesser "accumulations". Mail in boxes, mail on the floor, mail stacked out in the garage, etc.

"Piles" might be not a bad way to describe it, except for certain spurious medical connotations. For years I used to let things pile up, the glut and overflow relieved only by

what I was glomming up on the walls or recycling back into the mail network. From time to time I would make desperate gifts to this or that museum -- the Crazy Kat Archives at St. Andrews (Scotland) got a lot of the early stuff, and later on the Smithsonian took some of it off my hands.

Once, when the walls of my kitchen, in San Antonio, had reached such a state of overload that the layers of mail were threatening to drag down the plaster, I removed everything, peeling it off laborously into a sort of continuous gigantic scroll and, with John M. Bennett acting as go-between, donated it all to Washington University. This vast and lumpy artefact known as "The Ackerman Kitchen Collection", which I packed in a large crate for shipping, comprised five years of nonstop mail art accumulation -- postcards, letters, collages, paintings, manifestos, you name it. Quite a treasure.

Unfortunately, a multitude of roaches had started nesting behind it on the walls and when the art came down and went into the crate a good many "roach hotels" went along for the ride. I never did find out how the people at Washington University reacted to what must have certainly been a lively uncrating scene.

Requests to museums and universities, frantic recycling measures -- no matter what I tried, I could never keep ahead of the build-up. I wasn't the only one. Nunzio Mifune, another top mailer, was also having problems with overflow. I visited him once at his home and found him

staring glassy-eyed at the piles. I asked him if he had any ideas but all he said was, "You may have heard the one about the after-dinner speaker who knew a good story about a gun and wanted to tell it, but couldn't think of any graceful way of introducing it into the speech he was making. Desperate at last, he cried, 'Bang! Was that a gun I heard?' and went on happily to unleash his gag....."

At this point I realized poor Nunzio had gone clean off his rocker. He had become hebephrenic -- just another tragic victim of mail-art buil-up. My living situations have always been on the precarious side, with lots of relocations and moonlight flits. Nevertheless, between '72 and '89 I managed to haul a dozen or so jumbo boxes of mail along with me wherever I went, including two hellish cross-country moves that left me shaky as a kootch-dancer.

Seventeen years of this. What to do? Finally , in 1990, a year of unpredictable weather and heavy rains, the matter was taken out of my hands when a flash flood in San Antonio, Texas, wiped out most of my collection. I think it would be a bit inaccurate to say that just because I was suddenly relieved of carting around hundreds of pounds of mail art the loss came as nothing but a relief. A lot of what I lost was irreplaceable and to this day I still miss it. On the other hand, there are days -- especially moving days -- when I can't stop grinning.

Anyway , my decision after the flood of '90 was to save no more than I could comfortably carry. I've found this to be a challenge but by recycling most of what comes in I've

managed to stay in the clear. As it is I still manage to go on accumulating a hell of a lot of stuff. Even though the clutter and overflow is nothing like it was in the old days, my mail space here at the bookstore is far from tidy. I keep looking around at the piles, which have a way of accumulate glacially, and telling myself that tomorrow, for sure, I'm going to give things a good sorting and cleaning. That's what I keep telling myself.

Well, we live in hope, and when the time
eeeeaaaGGGGHHH!

Excuse me - something just came out of one of the piles and bit me.

RJ : I hope you are O.K. Blaster , this mail art can be dangerous sometimes. I guess it is time now to end the interview so I won't be feeding your mail piles anymore. On the other hand, when I publish the interview it might cause some reactions to your mail box..... Anyway , my last question is always: "Did I forget to ask you something?". But somehow I know I probably did.....

Next answer on 14-5-1998

AA : Yes

RJ : I could have known that..... Thanks for the interview Al Ackerman!

ANNA BANANA

Mail-Interview with Anna Banana (Canada)

Started on: 3-12-1994

Ruud Janssen: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 7-1-1995

Anna Banana: This is one of those questions I've answered so many times, I thought everyone knew by now! Anyway, for the record, here goes. In 1971, I was living outside the small town of Sooke, on Vancouver Island. In an attempt to connect with some creative people, I declared myself the Town Fool of Victoria, capital of the province of British Columbia, some 36 miles from where I was living. That turned out to be an uphill climb, and in an effort to communicate with the populace of Victoria, I started publishing the Banana Rag. I delivered copies of this newsletter by hand to a number of public schools in the Victoria area, and while I was at it, I mailed copies to some of my artist friends in Vancouver.

The response from the schools was varied, and in some instances, I was invited into the schools to do activities with

the students. One of my friends in Vancouver who was then a member of the Image Bank collective, responded with a copy of the Image Bank Request List. This little 2-page flyer brought the first information I had that there was, in fact, a network. It was a list of names and addresses of artists, and the sorts of images they wanted to receive; lips, clouds, 50's cars, that sort of thing.

I went through my stack of old clip magazines and put together an envelope for each of the perhaps 20 artists listed, and mailed them out, with a copy of the Banana Rag, and a note stating that I was interested in receiving ANYTHING to do with bananas; images, news stories, jokes, music, whatever, as long as it had a reference to bananas. Within 2 or 3 weeks, my mail-box came alive, and here I had the sort of enthusiasm and response I was missing elsewhere in my life. Amongst the bananas, there were samples of the others' work, invitations to projects, etc., and before I knew it, I was HOOKED.

In the course of the next year and a half, I responded to all the mail I received, participated in all projects I heard about, and expanded the number of artists I was exchanging with to perhaps 100. When I left Sooke, it was to go on the road, to meet my correspondents, and decide where I would live next. I intended to drive across Canada, down the eastern USA, across the southern states, and up to the West Coast. However, the van I bought to make this trip in turned out to be a lemon, and my start was delayed for 6 months. When I did leave Canada in May of 1973, I went south into Washington, Oregon and California. In the Bay Area, I met with all 12 of my mail art connections, and

decided pretty quickly that that was the place for me to live.

However since I had written to all my correspondents that I was heading their way, I went on with the trip for another 2 months, after which, I realized a number of things:

- 1 The USA is huge, and driving across it more time consuming than I had figured.
- 2 Driving alone across vast stretches of the continent was not all that much fun.
- 3 Most of my correspondents were men, and most of them had wives or lovers who, while they tolerated my visit, were none too enthused about it.
- 4 In San Francisco, I had met my future husband, and I knew that was where I wanted to live. I decided to quit the mega-trip, and headed back to San Francisco at the end of August, where I settled down for the next 8 years, getting even more committed to mail art with the publication of VILE magazine, which I began in 1974.

RJ: This extensive answer arises a lot of questions in me, but I have to settle for one now. Some mail-artists have a private life besides their mail-art life, but in your case it seems that your private life and your mail-art world got completely integrated. I remember the issue VILE (#8, 1983), and it looked like your life and your art were the same at that moment. Some photo's of you and Bill Gaglione indicate the same. Am I right?

Reply on : 18-4-1995

AB : During those years with Bill, we were both very involved with mail art and performance art, and there was very little time for anything else (except the everyday jobs/work we did to support that activity which took up the majority of our time! We just don't write about that stuff.), so I suppose you are right, at that moment, my life and art were very integrated. What isn't apparent from that view you had of us from VILE #8, is that we both DID have jobs or paying work that is never spoken about in the context of the magazine. The humdrum work that just about everyone has to do to pay the bills. Bill had a variety of jobs over the year, and after working in a print shop, and for a weekly newspaper, I started my own graphic design and production company, Banana Productions, which is how I earned the money to publish VILE and the Banana Rag.

Certainly our performing, publishing and mail-art activities did NOT pay our rent, or put food on the table, and we both spent a good deal of our time at those money-earning activities in order to SUPPORT our mail art, publishing and performance work. Further, we both had friends and activities that were not related to art, but our social life was within a circle of art-related friends, and many of my friends in San Francisco were persons with whom I had exchanged mail-art before I went there.

RJ : Why did the VILE magazine stop? What was your next step?

Reply on : 9-5-1995

AB : It cost too much to produce and mail. It took too much time and there were other things I wanted to do. I felt hemmed in by the need to "do the next issue." Bill wanted to take it in directions that weren't consistent with my initial concept of it. My relationship with Bill was falling apart. I was tired of the vile focus, and felt it wasn't an appropriate publication in which to air other sides of my perceptions and activities. I'd "been there, done that," and it was time to move along, do something else.

At the beginning of our cross Canada tour of 1980, we were offered a sublet on an apartment in Vancouver. We had been evicted from our apartment in San Francisco the month before we left, and had put all our things in storage. We decided to take the sublet and move to Vancouver - a MAJOR change. That never happened. I moved and he stayed.

Arriving in Vancouver in late January 1981, I was like a fish out of water. I didn't know at that point that Bill would not be coming up, but I was still feeling very displaced. All my close friends were in San Francisco, and the situation I moved into wasn't quite what I had imagined it to be. In late February I went back to SF to do a final performance with Bill, one we had scheduled before the trip. At that time it became clear that he wouldn't be moving to Canada.

During those first two years in Canada, I tried to quit mail art. I did only one issue of the Banana Rag, in 1981, and I almost let the mail accumulate, unanswered. Early in 1982, I convinced the local TV station to host my 10th anniversary April Fool's Day event; the Going Bananas

Fashion Contest. I applied for a grant to create the new performance work, *Why Banana?* and in the fall of '82, toured it across Canada and the USA. After that, I applied for funding to produce *About Vile*, so that I could bring VILE to an official conclusion, use the materials that people had sent for it, and wrap up that period of my life. (my years in San Francisco '73-'81).

Once I had published *About VILE* (in 1983), the natural place to distribute it was the network. Once I started distributing it, of course, the responses started flowing in.... and I got caught up again in sending and receiving mail. I altered the format and focus of the *Banana Rag*, making it more a mail-art information/forum, than the strictly banana content of the earlier editions. I had overspent the budget to print *About VILE*, and ended up with a debt, no money, no job, and no commercial contacts in Vancouver. The printers wanted the balance due, and I approached them with the proposition; give me a job, and I'll pay what I owe. I was hired and worked there for two years, learning the ins and outs of full-color printing, doing paste-up and camera work, and a lot of in-house design.

In 1984, I was back in San Francisco for the Inter Dada '84 events, and spent 3 weeks working with my friend Victoria Kirkby on a performance, *In the Red*, which we presented in that festival. In '85 I did a performance art workshop with art students in Calgary. We worked with the material from "in the Red," producing a new work, *In the Red, In the Black*. In '85, I quit the producing job, and free-lanced my design services, both to the printer, and to other clients and

connections I had begun to develop. I continued printing and sending the Banana Rag, and in the fall of '86, I did a second tour of Europe, this one solo.

RJ: At the moment you are very active with artistamps. When did you start with those? What is so fascinating about them?

Reply on : 3-6-1995

AB: I did my first artistamp in response to an invitation by Ed Varney in the mid-70's. He reproduced a number of my stamps on one of his many "anthology sheets." The first ones I did were in B&W, and he printed them in black and red. Then somewhere around '76 or '77, Eleanor Kent, who was a neighbor of mine in San Francisco, got a Color Xerox machine in her home, and invited me to come and work with it. I produced my first two editions on that machine, along with many other collages and postcards, and Eleanor introduced me to Jeff Errick of Ephemera, which produced buttons, postcards and stamps. He allowed me to go and perforate my stamps there, in trade for copies of each edition. I believe it was also during that period (late 70's) that Ed Higgins did his Nudes on Stamps book, producing sheets of artistamps from nude portraits of mail artists. On the cover of each issue, he stuck the stamp of the person to whom he was sending the catalogue.

While all of this whetted my appetite for the stamp format, it wasn't until I moved back to Vancouver, and started working at Intermedia Press, that I really got the BUG for stamps. I saw the editions Varney had produced, and

found myself wanting that quality of reproduction and that quantity of stamps so that I could really USE them, not just trade sheets. Through my job at Intermedia, I learned the technology necessary to produce full color, photo offset editions, however I didn't put this into practice right away.

My initial editions done in Vancouver, were reproduced using Color Xerox, and these dated from 1984, when I had an artist in residence on Long Island, NY, and had the time and resources to experiment with the medium. I also did a series that year commemorating the Inter-Dada '84 Festival. The originals of these editions were still collages, as were my 15-sheet Euro-Tour Commemorative edition which I did in 1987 after my '86 European trip. For these editions, however, I utilized the brand new Canon Laser color copier, and was very impressed with the results. However, these were still pretty pricey to produce, and that's when I started doing the figuring necessary to cost out a full-color printed edition. I circulated this information in 1987, and in 1988 produced the first two editions of International Art Post. There are 16 editions of these in print to date, and considerably more of my own, limited editions, for which I still utilize the Canon Laser copier. (Full colour printing is still too costly to use for all my own editions).

There are many aspects of artistamps that engage my attention. I think the first thing that grabs me about them, is that they parody of an official currency/medium of exchange. People still do double-takes when looking at an envelope with artistamps on them. Because they look so REAL, the question always comes up, "are they real/legal?" , "Can I mail a letter with these?" I like this aspect, because

it startles people, and makes them question what IS real. Since I have a healthy disrespect for most government agencies, this is very satisfying.

Another side of this aspect is that of putting ones own subject priorities on a stamp, claiming or assuming power, or the trapping of power, and again, demonstrating that often appearances are deceiving.

Years ago I gave up object making, as it produced too many bulky products that then had to be stored, framed, shipped, etc., all of which took up a lot of room and money. If you put \$200 worth of materials and \$500 worth of your time into a work, it wasn't easy to just give it away, and so one felt obliged to take care of there products. I felt there was already too much "stuff" in the world, and I didn't want to be producing more, especially of things that would tie me down, in terms of mobility, space, and resources. I gave up object making to become the Town Fool of Victoria, creating public events, interactions, and doing mail art.

The beauty of stamp art is that it doesn't take up a lot of room, doesn't require exotic equipment and supplies (other than a pin-hole perforator!). One doesn't have to have a huge studio in which to work. One can experiment with different medium without a big cost factor. One can produce a large body of work, and keep it all in one simple box on the shelf, or in an album. One can produce additional copies of an edition as they are required, rather than having to do a huge run all at once. One can send single sheets, or a whole show around the world without

great expense, trade with other stamp makers, and produce limited editions at a relatively moderate cost.

Furthermore, they have a USE. They are not just for matting and framing, but torn up and put on envelopes, they become a colorful and provocative elements on a mail-art piece. One can make a statement with a stamp, in a very limited space. I LOVE THEM!

RJ : Because you are active in mail art for such a long time, you must have received a lot of mail art too. Did you keep it all? How would you describe 'your archive'

Reply on 28-07-1995

AB : Yes, I kept everything except for chain letters, which I either destroyed, or when I was feeling particularly patient, sent back to sender with a note explaining that I do not consider this form of communication in any way art, or even mail art. I think they are tyrannical and unimaginative, and I have NEVER responded to any of them as requested.

If I had only one word to describe my archive, it would be "humongous," or perhaps more accurately, "comprehensive." Being a "paper addict," and an "image junkie," I treasured the mail I received from the very beginning. When I left Canada in May of '73, driving in a Dodge van which I had modified to be my home, I carried with me my mail art archive which consisted of 2 boxes of material. When I took up residence in San Francisco in

August of '73, one of my first purchases was a file cabinet. During my 8 years in San Francisco, the collection grew by leaps and bounds, partly because I was publishing VILE magazine, and everyone in the network then was anxious to have their works documented by having them reproduced in the magazine. I also continued publishing the BANANA RAG during that period, and that also drew numerous mailings from the network.

When I left San Francisco in 1981, I had 40 boxes of archival material shipped to me in Vancouver. While perhaps a third of that was books, at least half of them related to mail-art shows and projects, and a good many were "network 'zines." For the most part, I have filed the books, periodicals and catalogues separate from the letters and mailings, to make access to them easier. In the absence of a catalogue of the archive, this isn't the most satisfactory solution, since any time I wanted to refer to a particular artist, I couldn't go to just one place in the system to get a complete picture of their activity. I also streamed out postcards, as their own category, and in more recent years, have separated the artistamp sheets from the rest of the materials. The advantage of this system, of course, is that if I want to present a talk about postcards, artistamps, or books and 'zines, I don't have to go ploughing through all fifty boxes of material to find what I want. Maybe someday I'll get around to cataloguing it all, but having recently sold and catalogued 400 pieces to the National Postal Museum of Canada, I don't think that'll be any time soon. Cataloguing is a tedious and time consuming activity which I can't afford to do at this point. That's all for now, over and out-

RJ : It seems that the Postal Museums are very interested in mail art these last years. What are the plans of the Canadian Postal Museum with your collection?

Reply on 17-8-1995

AB : First I'd like to clarify for your readers, that the NPM has only 400 pieces of mail art from my archive; a very small sampling from my 23-year-accumulation. I think the postal museums have taken an interest in mail-art, as they are loosing their primary position in the world of communication due to phone, FAX and e-mail. While stamp collectors will no doubt continue to treasure the little bits of paper the post offices of the world issue, fewer and fewer people resort to the post office when they wish to communicate. And of course, with telephones, fewer people write letters than they did in times past, so where are they going to turn for new support and interest? Mail-art fills the bill very nicely. It's interesting, lively, international, visual, playful, creative, and relatively cheap, as art goes... and ANYONE can do it!

The National Postal Museum of Canada has not been very forthcoming about their plans for this collection. The most I know, is that they will use it for educational purposes, and to that end, will probably mount exhibitions from it, and offer workshops in their little gallery within the Museum of Civilization. They have spoken to me about a second mail-art exhibition which would focus on artistamps. The dates mentioned are well in the future, and from my experience in negotiating with them, it will be some time before anything conclusive will come out of these talks. They did

suggest that they would like me to be the guest artist when this exhibit does come about, and of course I said I would be most interested. However, I'm not holding my breath about this one... the NPM is part of the large bureaucratic structure of the National Museum, and as such, decisions take a very long time. I will certainly keep you posted on developments.

RJ : Especially the last decade a lot of publications have been written about mail art (mostly by male mail artists). Is it always true what is written down?

Reply on 8-9-1995

AB : That's a biggie! What is the TRUTH? People have been searching for that one for centuries. I believe to a larger extent, people write what they BELIEVE to be true, but none of us is objective, and we all have our histories, friends, experiences which filter our perceptions. Further, no one individual can tell the "whole story" of mail art, because no one individual has all the contacts - it's NOT a finite system. An outsider researches the phenomena would never be able to cover the whole picture, because while mail art is not a finite system, it is also a changing one. People are constantly discovering the phenomena and starting exchanges while others quit and go on to other forms of expression. If it were made extinct, by say, the termination of the international mail system, THEN, perhaps, someone could do a complete picture of it, but even then, it is unlike that one researcher could unearth all the persons involved and review all the work that has been

exchanged. Nor do I think it important that every work and every practitioner get a mention.

The whole point of mail art has been to be involved in a creative, expressive PROCESS of exchange, between two or more parties. You send out, and you get back. You have an audience that responds. If they don't respond, you don't send to them any more. This is the nature of mail art, and it can be represented by describing the types of materials exchanged, and the persons one knows of who make these exchanges. But this isn't the same as a history of mail art, and I rather doubt we will ever read one that is completely satisfactory to our own perception of the story, because it will not reflect our view of the thing.

For example, in an essay introducing a bibliography of mail art that sounds like the complete history when you read it, unless you happened to be active during the periods described, and your contribution to the process doesn't get mentioned. This is the situation I found myself in with that essay. I was very active in the 70's, publishing both the Banana Rag and VILE Magazine. I felt both were focal points in the network, and know that many persons contributed material to VILE in the hopes of being published. I felt that VILE was THE show-place of the network during the period of its publication (74-81), yet I nor VILE got a mention in that essay. What was written was "true," but incomplete, yet that essay will be quoted as "the story of mail art."

That essay was published in a mail art show catalogue a couple of years before it appeared in the bibliography. I

wrote to the author and asked why I and my contribution to the network were omitted. He didn't respond to the question at first, and when he eventually did, he really didn't give any reason. Then he published it, unchanged, in the bibliography. I was outraged. He was well aware of my work, and of VILE, yet he decided not to mention it. I reviewed the bibliography in Umbrella, questioning this omission. However, the book is published, and in circulation. It won't be changed. It has authority. It is a massive work and very well done. Why did he choose to exclude me from that essay? I don't know.

In May of '94, he and I were both at the mail art congress in Quebec city. I asked him again, in person, why he had omitted me from that essay, and why he had refused to alter the piece when I raised the issue. He said he just wrote what came to mind when he was writing, and that he never changes a piece once it is written. So, from his perspective, my work in recording the network during the 70's was not important. Who can argue with what another considers important? The problem is, that what is written sounds like the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when in fact, there is a considerable amount of opinion being expressed about the truth, in both what is said, and in what is omitted.

I can't comment on a lot of the other publications on mail art that have come out, as I haven't had the time to read them all. However, I'm sure similar situations exists, and the contributions of many others, often women, have been overlooked, or disregarded in the great move now afoot, to record the history of mail art.

I think that, generally speaking, each person who writes about mail art attempts to tell "the true story." As readers, we have to remember that each person must and will tell it from their own perspective; with all their likes and dislikes, opinions, priorities, and experiences between them and the phenomena we've come to know as mail art.

RJ:Well, in a way I am looking for this "true story" and am currently doing these mail-interviews where I don't edit the answers as much as possible. I already sent you some interviews. Any reaction to the last one I sent you?

Reply on 8-9-1995

AB:I am enjoying reading the interviews, and found the current one you sent, arto posto's to be quite stimulating. I was interested to note her making a distinction between the original mail art network, and the rubber-stamp net being spawned by Rubberstampmadness. I've been watching RSM's development for some time, and note that many of the advertisers are running CONTESTS to get readers to send in artworks, with PRIZES offered for the best work! This is NOT in the mail art tradition, nor is all the "how-to/techniques" articles that are run in RSM. What I see happening there, is the gentrification of mail art, ie. the "taming of the shrew."

Since RSM is basically a commercial magazine, with enormous amounts of advertising which represents a lot of money changing hands over the purchase of rubber

stamps, supplies, papers, etc. all related to THE CRAFT of rubber-stamping, naturally, the results are more predictable. The focus in this rubber-stamp movement - moving into main stream America - is decorative, rather than revolutionary. This focus on craft and technique produces "pretty" art-works, but entirely misses the CONTENT with which mail art rubber stamping began; ie. the usurping of an initially business technology (the rubber stamp) for the expression of radical, anti-established, anti-consumerist sentiment.

I find it amusing and ironic that mail art, which while radical and critical in outlook, was always about inclusive; anyone can do it - everyone has something to say, everyone's work is to be of equal value, etc. etc. etc. , is now being watered down by this great rubber-stamp connection to mail-stream America via RSM. In place of discussion of political, economical, human rights or artistic philosophies, we now find techniques and how-to articles flooding the pages. Criticism of the status quo has definitely taken the back seat, if it has not been left behind all together.

I was also interested in arto posto's comments about how she hasn't time to keep up with all the contacts she gets, let alone deal with all the responses she gets from the internet. That's why I have avoided the internet - I am already overwhelmed by the amount of mail I get, and I can't imagine trying to keep up with more. I am definitely NOT a mail-art crusader, nor do I approve of persons setting themselves up as mail-art experts, and doing workshops to teach others techniques, passing out mailing lists, etc. There are already too many people exchanging to be able to keep

up with it all, without going out and beating the bushes to get more recruits.

The funny thing is, Vittore Baroni, Guy Bleus and other earlier mail artists (myself included) all started out attempting to contact EVERYONE in the network, then after a few years, realized that the more people one contacted, the heavier the burden of reply became. In the beginning, it was great fun to get lots of new contacts, but there seems to come a turning point, when the load gets too heavy, both in terms of one's time and \$\$\$, when it is no longer possible to respond to everyone who sends you mail.... that response becomes a burden rather than a joy. Myself, Baroni and Bleus have all written on this point, and it appears that Baroni has pretty much dropped out of networking, and I have curtailed my mailings to fewer people, and very few shows, aside from Artistamp News to which individuals must subscribe, or I can't possibly afford to continue the contact. Bleus appears to be continuing to attempt to be there for everyone, and I wonder how long he will last at it.

RJ : Should the "earlier mail artists" , as you call them, learn the newcomers what mail art is about, or should they find it out for themselves?

Reply on 26-9-1995

AB : I don't see it as the role of 'earlier mail artists" to instruct newcomers to the field. This is a free playing field, and one of the joys of it was the lack of rules - except, of course, rules were made up and issued - in some cases,

almost as demands. This network is evolving, as it always has, since Johnson's first mailings, since the FLUXUS artists first mailings. In those days (1960's and 70's), it was perpetrated by artists who celebrated their being outside the "real art world." ...but who were none-the-less, big time players in that world. Those initial players were critical of the status quo on many levels; from the tightly focussed elitism of the Art World, to the "american way of life," (ie. consumption).

FILE magazine in the early 70's brought a whole other community of artists into contact with each other, and these were the artists who carried the ball after 1974. These were still persons who perceived themselves as artists, but ones who enjoyed their "outsider" status; artists who didn't get shows in commercial galleries, or anywhere else, and who celebrated their discontent with very dada sorts of artworks. The network became their showplace, and their disaffected attitudes and criticisms of main-stream America were exchanged via the mail; then, more frequently through the late 70's and 80's, were exhibited in mail art shows. The one-to-one exchanges were replaced by growing numbers of mail art exhibits and projects to which one could send one's work, and get one's name in a catalogue. Witness the show listings in Global Mail, if there is any question about this.

In the past five years or so, a number of practitioners (Michael Jacobs, John Held Jr., Peter Küstermann, for example) seem to have become crusaders, and with an almost religious zeal, go about giving workshops to "get everyone to join in," rather than simply continuing to

explore and enjoy their existing contacts. Providing information about the network seems OK to me - if people "get it," and want to participate, fine, one has facilitated that connection. However, these workshops in techniques seem self-serving in that, in the guise of "spreading the word," the motivation behind them is either to get paid the fee for doing the workshop, or to sell products; rubber stamps, supplies and equipment - which is a long way from the original critical stance of those engaged in mail art.

All that said, I must come back to your question and say I don't believe there are any valid "shoulds," in mail art. Mail art is an ever-changing, evolving networking practice, and it is futile to attempt to tell anyone how they "should" do it. For me, it is not as interesting to exchange with persons who focus on how-to/techniques, or concern about producing decorative, saleable greeting cards and the like, as with those whose focus is a critique of the society in which we live. However, if people are getting their creative juices flowing doing these things, then BRAVO. Carry on, do it, enjoy it, send it out and let the network evolve! This is still far superior to spending one's time in front of the tube, and I applaud it.

Maybe this is a good point to end? Unless you have some more provocative questions.... Go Bananas!

RJ : Yes, I think it is a good moment to end this interview. But even after ending the interview, I will keep asking questions now and then....! Thank you for this interview.

JONATHAN STANGROOM

Mail-Interview with Jonathan Stangroom (USA)

Started on: 4-2-1996

RJ: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 2-3-1996

JS: Thank you for the invitation to your interview. I've been aware of mail art since my art school days, in the early seventies. I liked the ideas of collaboration and networking (although I doubt that they called it that back then). I liked that it occurred outside the mainstream art world.....in the elusive underground. Unfortunately, I didn't have an address to mail to! That's not entirely true. In 1972 or so, under the pseudonym "The Guardians of Good Taste of North America," in collaboration with Liz Hardy a mail box/safe deposit box was reserved in a Canadian project conducted by Image Bank (I may be wrong about the sponsor).

To my knowledge nothing was ever deposited in this box and apart from the confirmation of our box reservation, no mail was generated. I continued to send creative mail

(outside of the network) throughout the 70's and into the 80's. On returning to the states after a year in India (where the mail became an even greater force in my life) my ex-wife put me in touch with Kate Lanxner (whom I think once interviewed you, dear Ruud). She, in turn, introduced me to RUBBERSTAMP MADNESS as a source for mail art possibilities. Here, I found an entrance to the network. At this time I was experimenting with the copy machines at my brother's printing shop and produced artworks for Lancillotto Bellini's "The Artist's Family." Other early (for me) projects that I participated in were Jenny de Groot's "Transport/Transportation" and Pascal Lenoir's "Mani Art."

The documentation from these yielded some of my dearest and most consistent contacts. I have to admit that in the beginning I didn't have a clue what was expected from me (that's the way I thought). I was a bit shy about it. Once I was into the network the mail came and I've been involved since.

Alternative answer : 1987-88

RJ : Do you know now what is expected from you?

JS : I suppose I know that nothing specific is expected. In those early days I hadn't seen much mail art and didn't know what it looked like. It is often said that to understand mail art one has to participate.... until I became involved I didn't realize the possibilities or understand the breadth of the network.

Although, I decided early on to use my real name rather than hide behind a pseudonym, I considered my early mail art to be quite separate from my painting and other artwork. Over the years this separation has all but disappeared and I've embraced many of the anti-art establishment concepts that I've encountered in the network. I am no longer so keen to sell my artwork and have become rather particular about how it is presented. (This may be a result of my close work with galleries and art consultants). I've learned that money is not the only gauge of value.... the exchange, the gift is equally enriching. In the meantime my work has matured. My involvement in the network has coincided with my development as a copier artist, original copies being the bulk of the mail art that I send. I also send stampings, collages and the occasional drawing or painting.... usually with a chatty letter. I sometimes create works to address the theme of a particular project (this is expected) but more often than not I already have something lying around that is appropriate.

There is still the odd piece of mail that comes in that I don't understand! Documentation is another story.... decent documentation of a project is not only expected but required. At this point, I've been involved long enough to not have to worry about what's expected from me.... I work to send quality artwork..... I expect the same.

RJ: You mention your development as a copier artist. One might think that it is just a quick way to make an original by putting something on the xerox-machine. How do you go about when you want to make an "original copy"?

Reply on 26-4-1996

JS : I don't see anything wrong with making art quickly.... although my work isn't produced quite as fast as it might seem. I use the copy machine as both a camera (photo) and a printing device (copy). It's another tool that the artist can create with. My work generally employs "direct imaging" that is, I place real, three-dimensional objects on the platen to create a tableau. I rarely make editions of given prints as I'm constantly refining the composition. The objects are sometimes manipulated during the course of the copying process to incorporate aspects of time and movement.... these copies are always unique.

Sometimes I approach the machine with a specific image in mind and bring the appropriate materials (I often use the supermarket as my art supply store). Other times I work with whatever is lying about.... always looking for objects that you're "not supposed" to put on a copy machine. Every new object is an experiment with the limited depth of field. The methods of working are different for the different machines that I use. The color machine makes six passes in the photo mode to make an image, allowing for manipulation between colors. I often create the background colors directly on the machine. Placing and removing a white sheet of paper at the proper intervals during the copying process can produce a specific color. The black and white machine makes only one pass, which allows for bolder movements of the subject. Another machine that I

use has four separate cartridges that print one color at a time. Both this and the black and white machine allow you to send a copy back through the machine for overprinting. Working in this manner takes knowledge of the machine and practice. One has to work with the rhythm of the machine.

I've collaborated with other copier artists (most notably, Reed Altemus and M. Greenfield) and enjoy that process very much. My brothers have a printing business and for a while they had a store that offered copying services... I could use their machines as I liked. Important, as I doubt that I would get a good response if I handed a fish over the counter to a technician. It took some time before I felt that I knew what I was doing. When they dismantled the store I bought a black & white machine from them (not working at the moment)... they kept the color machine which I still travel to use. The color machine is now housed in a shop that is shared by the printing press and my father's woodworking tools (he's a wood carver)... there's a wealth of materials here. The "ORIGINAL" and "COPY" stamps that I use were found in an office supply store and seemed appropriate after a discussion with András Voith. Although we call the images that are made on a photocopier copies, I don't consider my work to be copies in the sense of reproduction... the copy is the original.

RJ : You just finished one of your mail art projects. How many have you done so far and what was this last one about?

Reply on 24-6-1996

JS : I'm far from finished....the latest project is "The found Sketchbook". I sent a call asking for found drawings, sketches or doodles. The response was pretty good, just over 100 participants. Some fine work....of course, my favorites are the truly found pieces. Tire marks, footprints and grit adding to the authenticity. They came from the street, peoples cupboards, trash bins....I even received several complete sketchbooks! I plan to create the documentation in the form of a real sketchbook....spiral bound at the top, etc. The work on this has been going exceedingly slow due to financial and personal difficulties...it will get done. There is also the possibility of me trying to find a space for an exhibition of the work....but the catalogue has to be made first.

My first real project was the "Found Photo Album". During 1991 I asked for found photographs and produced an album including at least one photo from each of the 140+ participants. These too, were found in many ways "from found in the street to found in an underwater camera on the beach, from people's cupboards to errors from the processors" and there was a great wealth of subject matter. There was no exhibition and the whole project was conducted through the mail. A successful and very satisfying endeavor. I've heard that college instructors actually use it as an example!

During 1992-93 I had a call out on the theme of Multiculturalism and in June of 1993 mounted an exhibition at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston (which has a large multicultural student body). An

interesting and varied show that introduced me to several now regular correspondents. One terrific result of this exhibition was that Angela & Peter Netmail used the documentation to contact and meet Wahyuni Kamah in Indonesia, inviting her to a stamp-carving workshop. Networking at it's finest.

Conducting a decent mail art project is expensive and time consuming. Postage alone (both for calls and sending out the documentaton) can easily be a couple hundred dollars. Printing is expensive even though my brothers give me a break and I do most of the repetitive, labor-intensive tasks. Good documentation is essential, though.... and I've found it worth the effort.

RJ : It seems that both in your copy art and in your projects you like to use the found objects or stimulate other artists to go and look for items that they can find somewhere out there. Did you ever think of the reason why you choose these 'found' items.....?

reply on 24-7-1996

JS : The "Found Photo Album" was prompted by R.K. Courtney, of Iowa City, who was collecting found notes for an as yet unrealised project. I had sent him some photos that I had found, telling him how much I enjoyed finding them. He suggested that I put out a call and do something with it. I did.

I, of course, was aware of Duchamp's use of the found object as well as Rauschenberg's and others. During the

course of this first project I also became acquainted with Bern Porter's use of "found". My enthusiasm for the found item is a bit different though. I'm interested in the deliberately made image that's not intended to be a work of art... but which, by its very existence, is as valid as any museum piece. Real art by real people. The fact that we don't know the authors of most of this material or its original intent doesn't alter the aesthetic response. Presented in a formal manner (either in book form or as framed pieces on a wall) the items are no different than any other artwork. The Found Photo Album is as interesting as any family album when we try to discover the meaning of the events photographed. The Found Sketchbook should provide a similar experience to that of looking through any collection of drawings as we respond to the quality of line, composition, etc.

I don't think of the objects that I use in my copier work to be "found". Even if I'm using items at hand.... they're carefully selected for content and visual strength. Banal items, yes... but I think that I'm working in a Dada/Fluxus mode that gives equal weight to all objects/subjects.... "anti-aesthetic", Reed Altemus calls it.... I'm not sure that I agree with him. Regardless, the objects are considered before I use them and not randomly chosen.

RJ : This expression "I'm working in a Dada/Fluxus mode....." is quite interesting. What does Dada and Fluxus mean to you?

reply on 18-9-1996

JS : Both Dada and Fluxus are quite well documented art movements. Dada evolved as a reaction to the First World War and was based on the premise that the war had made aesthetic values meaningless. Considered and chosen utilitarian objects were instilled with the same value as "fine art" objects. Fluxus occurred during the early sixties, and pushed the ideas of Dada a bit farther. Everyday activities were orchestrated to become works of art, proclaiming that everyone is an artist and narrowing the gap between art and life. The focus was social rather than aesthetic. Working outside of the "official" art world they challenged the "art as commodity" norm. This is a very basic description of two art movements that confronted very complex issues.

So, when I state that "I think that I'm working in a Dada/Fluxus mode...." all I really mean is that I'm using the commonplace object as the subject of my artwork, using what's at hand. I'm making art from everyday life in the belief that these simple objects / subjects require contemplation and offer numerous interpretations. Art is a reaction to being human and ultimately it doesn't matter what I put on the machine to photocopy.... it's the fact that I'm doing it that's important.

RJ : Thanks for this short explanation. The envelopes I receive from you are always quite recognizable. The hand stamped address is always there. Any specific reason for this typical use of rubber stamps?

Reply on 9-10-1996

(Together with Jonathan's answer he sent 58 color copy-art works, which will be included in the final printed version of the interview as an example of his work)

JS: When I started out I tried to collage all of the addresses.... this quickly became too time consuming. I acquired this great rubber stamp alphabet and found that the scale was perfect for the 6"x9" envelopes that I use (the envelope is just the right size to send an 11"x17" photocopy with two folds). The activity of stamping the envelopes is a pleasant respite from my other endeavors. I do tend to use consistent formats and this is one of them. Being easily recognizable doesn't hurt, but at this point it's as much a habit as anything. Lately, I've been thinking that the addresses are looking rather dull. The yellow envelopes that I used to use are no longer available.... the white ones seem stark. I may experiment with some kind of background. but the rubber stamping will continue. (I'm still looking for a set of numbers that matches the smaller alphabet that I have).

RJ: Over the years you must have received lots of mail art. Do you keep all you receive? How does your 'archive' look like?

Reply on 18-11-1996

JS: I just spent twenty minutes looking for your question....this may give you an idea about the state of things around here. It's a bit embarrassing. Yes, I keep most everything that comes in. Unfortunately, I'm a very sloppy

archivist. Before I moved to this house everything was pretty much under control. I had a file cabinet close at hand and periodically things would be put in order. Upon moving the file cabinet ended up in the attic (where my new studio is slowly nearing completion) and I've been working in a 6x9 foot room for the past two years. A token attempt was made at bringing a small file box in, to deal with my more active correspondents. It didn't really help and has recently been sent to the attic in anticipation of my move upstairs. At the moment, as I sit at the computer, on the desk to my left is a 5 inch stack of supposedly current mail.... a little excavation reveals an old Global mail, Greenfield's interview booklet and a picture of an ex-wife's kids from years ago. Next is the computer festooned with unpaid bills and photographs atop the monitor and various calls for artwork and other ephemera tucked beneath the keyboard. As we look right there's an ashtray, a pile of rubber stamps and ink pads, my checkbook, photographs and a hole puncher. At the far end is another stack of mail, photocopies, potential collage debris and a 1988 Michelin guide to Great Britain. On the floor under the desk, starting at the right, as a pile of stuff that the cat knocked over while making a nest, jig-saw puzzles and other collage material, boxes containing mail art compilation zines, under my feet is another box of rubber stamps and to my left is a stack of atlases and a waste basket with collage material balanced on top. There are shelves that hold mail art books, computer manuals and various office supplies. A stool holds a big stack of photocopies and a book about Fluxus. In back of me are several wallpaper sample books, empty frames and boxes. It's worse than it sounds. Barely room to move. Soon this should change. The studios

upstairs is almost ready.... a little more taping, trim out the window and doors and paint it. I'll move my piles of stuff up, organizing on the way. Hopefully, I'll be able to keep things in order.... that's the plan. Oh yeah, there are several boxes upstairs containing the "Multiculturalism" show. One of these days I have to put it back together and ship it off to someone who's doing a better job at this.

RJ : Do you think that keeping all this mail art is an important part of mail art? What normally happens is that only the 'good' things are kept in a collection, and that the 'bad' things are thrown away. What is your opinion?

reply on 10-1-1997

JS : Good question. I don't know. Obviously, I want to keep the work of my favorite correspondents. I'm not sure that I'm the one to judge what's 'good' or 'bad' . Most of the mail that I get is sent with a sincerity that transcends 'good' or 'bad' . There are pieces that I don't respond to.... keep them or not.... it's a dilemma. Today I received two postcards among the mail. One was from a regular correspondent from Indonesia.... an address change with a note saying that she enjoys my mail (I'm remiss). The other was from Holland.... telling me that the sender was back into the network. Will I save them? Probably. They illustrate part of the process. That might be important. Can I find them? Maybe not. Mark Greenfield says he recycles all of his mail, adding that he keeps all my letters.... I can't be the only one that he saves. Robin Crozier saves every bit of mail art that he receives... it's a remarkable collection....

has he thrown things away? Probably. You'd never know it. Maybe that's one of the reasons that I keep all this stuff. If I didn't, there would be no record of what happened. Is that important? I don't know. I do refer to it all from time to time.... just to see what I've been up to. Sure, I throw things away... they sit around for a while before I do it. Calls for work that I never got around to doing.... other odd bits and scraps that I don't understand eventually get tossed. My personal network is fairly small and I value most everything that I receive, therefore I save it. I have no specific plans for this collection. When it comes time, I hope that I can find a suitable home for it.... it provides a good study of one small corner of our network.

RJ : You mention two english mail artists in your answer and I know you recently visited England as well. How different is meeting a mail artist compaired to writing to a mail artist?

next answer on 19-4-1997

(Stangroom's answer came from West-London, England)

JS : It's great to meet these people that I've been corresponding and collaborating with. I'm not sure what the differences are..... obviously you're connecting in a different format. I suppose there are certain apprehensions and a kind of curiosity in anticipation of a meeting. For the most part I've known the mail artists that I've met for a long time through the mail. We've known each other well before meeting in person. There aren't many surprises.I recognized Greenfield, as he waited on the steps of the

Tate, by his rubberstamp self-portrait! There are some exceptions. I had not been in contact with Peter & Angela Netmail when they came through in 1992. I was enlisted to drive them from Boston up to Carlo Pittore's in Maine. They were delightful and I had the privilege to witness an over the top post office performance as Peter franked some 200 artist stamps surreptitiously while doing other postal business. We chatted mail art gossip for the whole ride. We still have very little mail contact.

Another exception would be András Voith of Hungary. We'd been corresponding for some time, though we hadn't traded many personal details. In 1993 he hosted an exhibition of my copier work and I traveled to Debrecen to attend the opening and do a copier performance. I really had no idea who I'd be meeting. He turned out to be half my age, but ever so capable. It was a terrific opening and a fine visit. He took great care of me. Since then he has visited me in the States, unfortunately I wasn't able to spend the time with him that he had spent with me in Hungary. We're still good friends, although the mail has fallen off during the past year.

This one on one kind of personal meeting is different than meeting in groups. I've been involved in a handful of group meetings at Crackerjack Kid's , Carlo Pittore's and at Printed Matter in New York. With a group the energy is spread through out the crowd...not that these meetings are less significant than the one on one, but these usually have more structure and the interaction is less intense. (Of

course, this is the case whether it be mail artists or some other similarly focused group.)

Mail art, by its nature is a social activity....and to me, meeting with these people is a natural development. Maybe I'm lucky.... I haven't met a bad one yet!

RJ : To my surprise your answer came from London (England) this time. Any mail-art meetings this time? Have you experienced something 'typically British' while you were there?

next answer on 2-10-1997

JS : You examine your mail very closely...good! (I guessed that you did). The last question was answered and enveloped here at home, then mailed from London on a recent trip that I made with my father. He had spent some time there as a kid but hadn't been back to England since 1941.... I'd been over a couple of times last year and he became interested in returning. I had a free companion ticket thanks to American Express and Virgin Atlantic and off we went.

Yes, I had a 'typically' British experience this trip, as we did a lot of the tourist thing.... changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace..... pigeons on Trafalgar Square.... that sort of thing. We did visit for an hour or so with Michael Leigh and spent the better half of a day with David Dellafiora who also introduced us to Patricia Collins and Peter Liversidge. I wasn't able to visit with Robin Crozier,

but did phone him.... he's adjusting to retirement from his teaching job. All, great people and devoted mail artists.

Dad and I get along fine, but we'd never spent that kind of time alone together.... ever. It was also Dad's first flight! We've got different interests but seem to be able to accommodate each other. I was delighted when a guard at the National Gallery came over to reprimand Dad for getting too close to a painting.... he'd been enthusiastically gesturing and pointing as he described how he liked the piece (a skating scene from the Netherlands!). He's also participated in his first mail art project.... something that Peter Liversidge is working on. No special "male bonding" took place.... we did not tell each other dark secrets nor make up for past differences. We just went on holiday and dealt with the issues at hand.

So the trip was a success, Dad got to visit some of his old haunts (we found the house where he'd lived in 1936) and got to catch up with my friends.

RJ: When people get in touch with mail art and start to be a mail artists it is in the beginning just like a 'small hobby'. For some the mail art then takes over more and more of their lives , also their social lives. In how far is you mail art integrated with your daily life?

(since the next answer took some time I resent the question again. Only years later I re-found Stangroom's e-mail address and sent him the complete interview again with the latest question. I told him I am finishing up the mail-interview project)

Next answer on 23-3-2001

JS : To start with I have never considered mail art to be a "hobby". The term implies an activity that is done for relaxation.... something that kills time. From the beginning mail art has been much more important than that for me. I'm an artist.... That defines me and the artwork that I produce for the mail is every bit as considered as my painting and other art activities. My contacts have become true friends, both those that I've met and those that I haven't. I consider them to be colleagues on the same level as the artists that I work and socialize with daily. Maybe more so since we work in the same realm.

-Years later-

Thank you, Ruud for e-mailing me in regard to finishing this project. The above part of the reply to your last question has been in my computer since 1998!

Since that time I've moved house twice... the first move had me camped out in a friends painting studio for a year. I was quite depressed and did very little mail-art, keeping in touch with only a very few of my contacts. In September of 1998 I again visited the UK, assisting with the installation of my friend, Robert Richfield's photography exhibition in Scarborough. I again met with the Croziers and WACK, who was living in David Dellafiora's old flat (Dellafiora had by then moved to Australia).

In January of 1999 Reed Altemus and I journeyed down to New York to see the Ray Johnson retrospective at the

Whitney and to attend the opening of the Bay Area Dadaists show at Printed Matter where I again met Buz Blurr, John Held Jr., Picasso Gaglione, Mark Bloch, Mel and Mark Corroto among others.

For the next year I did very little mail-art. In October of 1999 I again moved to a new flat.... A bit more civilized than the painting studio. I slowly began working my way back into the mail-art network. I'm still not as active as I was in my heyday, but I am making new contacts, reestablishing old ties and sending to projects. Thank you again for prodding me to complete this interview.

RJ : Thanks for this answer! I myself also had some changes in my life and therefore am finishing of this project. Thanks for the complete interview. Now others can read it as well.

ASHLEY PARKER OWENS

Mail-Interview with Ashley Parker Owens (USA)

Started on: 23-12-1994

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 13-02-95

Ashley-Parker Owens : In 1981, I somehow received a mail art chain letter. I believe the source was through an art professor or one of their assistants. At the time, I was married, living in Cincinnati, Ohio, and attending art school with my husband. The chain letter was really fascinating because it had exotic names and addresses from all over the world. The promise of receiving hundreds of artworks from all over the world was really exciting, and I immediately started fantasizing about winning this art lottery. I made a postcard and sent it to the person at the top of the list who was located in Germany. The postcard was a close up photo of a rock (that I took with a 4 x 5 camera) that looked like the surface of the moon. On top of the rock I had pasted a small cartoon of two people copulating. I crossed off this name, made my copies and

handed them out to other people at school. I waited expectantly and never got any reply from anyone.

Later, after getting my masters degree in New Jersey and then moving to Chicago, I decided I really liked the concept of a mail art show ('85). Specifically, I liked the non-judgmental all-inclusiveness of it. I was very successful exhibiting my "art" work in Chicago and elsewhere, but I also began entering every mail art show I could find. The lack of organized info on this underground I found frustrating.

I still did not have a very good idea about mail art until I had my own mail art show ('89). That is when I became really educated on the depth of what mail art can be, and have essentially become hooked ever since.

Together with Ashley's first answer she sent me the new "Global Mail Info Sheet", in which there is info concerning Global Mail, how it is constructed and can be obtained. Also Info about Ashley herself and some questions with answers that are asked to her often. Besides that the info-zine also contained several statements about mail-art from others, including mine from August 1993).

RJ : Obviously the 'lack of organized info' made you decide to publish the first 'Global Mail', the magazine that is now well-known as a source-magazine for all kind of contacts. Some mail-artists feel that the whole network shouldn't be too organized and centralized. What are your thoughts?

Reply on : 26-02-1995 (internet via Guy Hensel)

AP : The data Global Mail contains is not mail art, and it is not networking. The action on my part in publishing Global Mail is MY personal attempt at networking. I am passing on information passed to me. But Global Mail's content is nothing more than a collection of data. It's just a resource. It records network activity but it has no meaning in and of itself, other than as entertainment. However, it is a tool that can be used to crack out the secrets of mail art and networking.

There is no ONE location of mail art and networking. The real activity is what is going on behind the scenes, beyond the scope of the projects and shows. The real meaning, the real secret, is the exchange between two individuals. That positive energy is the secret.

If anything, I think Global Mail is good for those just starting out, who are trying to build their contact base. But alas, that group of people really don't understand the publication. One of the goals of Global Mail is to educate and suck people in to the net. It is important not to make this a secret club - there's plenty of stamps for everyone.

I would like Global Mail to be free-form. It exercises the imagination. It stretches your limits of what you conceive mail art to be... but I really don't feel that it is the central location of info. Really, more co-op and pass on mailings come my way than publications with listings.

RJ : How important is communication for you? What do you think is the most essential thing about magazines?

Reply on : 19-4-95

(Together with her new answer Ashley sent me 10 copies of the new edition of Global Mail to pass along to friends and people who are interested. The magazine has a bit changed concept now and contains more reprints of letters she received, information about special topics, etc. besides the large list of 500 entries from 45 countries)

AP : How important is communication? The ideas of individuals must permeate our thought space, rather than advertising images, political ideas, or media messages. It is especially enlightening to get information and alternative viewpoints from those in other countries.

During the Rodney King verdict/LA riots period in American history, I asked for international mail art, text, and newspaper articles featuring this event. [In case anyone is unfamiliar with this, Rodney King was severely beaten by a group of policeman, and the brutal incident was captured on videotape. Even with the evidence, the policemen were judged "not guilty." The city of Los Angeles, CA experienced many riots, looting, and arson attacks as a result of this verdict because the people were absolutely outraged].

It was illuminating to view the way other newspapers in the world featured the stories. Even with a language barrier, you could still derive a lot of information by the

chosen photos, their placement, size, body language and color of the individuals, etc.

When receiving mail art and text from individuals, you get a personal viewpoint that is often lacking in a news story. You can understand emotions and feelings and the presentation plays a critical role. Actual handwriting, elaborate art, inappropriate comments, misspelled words and incorrectly translated English all carry a meaning to the person receiving the message.

What is the essential thing about magazines? [by this I'm taking you to mean "zines" - to me there is a big difference between the two]. With zines, an opportunity is given to individuals to imprecisely and perhaps inaccurately present their thoughts, even if they are not completely formed or "wrong." In a zine, you can read a rant, or perhaps a point of view that is not "politically correct". These words are presented unsanitized and unprofessionally. A greater truth, and a greater freedom come from publishing all voices, especially when including those who would not normally be given a chance to share their viewpoints in a public forum.

RJ : Your new Global Mail looks wonderful. GM is not commercial at all. How do you manage to keep the zine alive?

Reply on : 1-5-1995 (internet)

AP : Your question comes at a very interesting time. There are three aspects to how I keep it going:

1. Financial - Up to this point in time, Global Mail has mostly been funded by my reliance on credit cards. I went bankrupt on Good Friday this year (95), so I'm not too sure how I am going to be able to continue with the same high ideals. I have recently allowed myself the possibility of running advertisements on the back page. The distinction is that the ads will be for projects only, not products. I don't know if this is going to work because everyone has access to free project listings, and if you are not making money off of a product, it is hard to justify spending money on an ad. I also have the current rate prohibitively high because I do not want to take many advertisements. This may seem like discrimination of a sort - not everyone has money to publicize their projects in this way.

2. Emotional - Persistence and Drive - I have highs and lows, just as you would expect. When I am close to a deadline, it is very stressful but I also feel very responsible about getting everything accomplished to the best of my ability and on schedule. I get really manic up to the point of dropping it at the printer. After that point, I start a slow sink into exhaustion that leads to depression. It takes a long time to get feedback on the issue and so for a while it seems as though nobody liked it when really they just have not seen it yet.

I really appreciate comments from individuals. I especially like it when I introduce people to the net through Global Mail and they feel like their life has been altered.

I have always loved the variety of listings. Each issue has at least 500 listings, but there are only 4-5 that I consider hum-dingers. By this I mean that they are shocking, or very funny, or cross some kind of boundary for me. I realize everybody's hum-dingers are different, I'm just talking about the sensation of newness and what that feels like. Each issue of Global Mail has been different in some way. It is probably not apparent to the casual reader, but for me there has been the experience of certain patterns, growth, and trends. A couple I can think of is the big surge of dream listings around a year and a half ago, and the current interest in co-op zine publishing and distro. As far as growth or success for Global Mail as a vision, I've noticed a steadily increasing interest from groups that are traditionally not included. Getting listings from Latino and African American networks, as well as political listings from obscure countries means that others are starting to see Global Mail as really open to everyone. That is my biggest accomplishment, and the little successes in these areas is what really keeps me going.

3. Technical Nuts and Bolts - As I have continued with Global Mail, I have steadily acquired more computer savvy to help me process the information in a logical and efficient manner. It may seem counter-network to be organized and geeky about the computer, but there is no way for me to process all the info without this high-tech help.

RJ : Because of the huge address-list that Global Mail includes you must get a lot of mail. Any statistics you know about that? Are you able to answer all the snail-mail and E-mail you get, or do you have to select?

Reply on : 14-5-1995 (Internet)

AP : I get roughly 100 pieces of mail a week, give or take 30 either way. This includes email. I find the mail tends to drop off in the summer and picks up again in the fall.

I certainly do not answer all my mail. Most are simple requests for a sample copy of Global Mail. These are the easiest to process, and I do manage to answer with a copy within a week. I get a lot of zines in trade, and I only acknowledge them with the next copy of Global Mail, unless it is something out of the ordinary, or a big improvement or change from the last version I saw. The people who write for specific items, or have specific questions take the longest time to answer. I refer to this as a pile of "lingering mail," and it may take up to three months to answer some of it. I only have maybe ten or twenty regular correspondents.

Occasionally I do a big mailing of printed matter, hand-made postcards, tubes of art, or boxes. I used to enter almost all mail art shows, and this is something I would like to get back in the habit of doing.

I've been doing much better about answering mail in the last year. I actually have a system in place that keeps the pile low and keeps me from getting bewildered by it. Strangely, those who send snail mail probably will get their questions answered before those asking through email, just because my system for email is not very efficient. Email builds up in the computer until I combine all my logs, print

them out (about once every 6 weeks), and then answer. Whew! What a lag time. I also lost about 3 weeks of email once when my motherboard crashed. Such is life in the electronic age.

RJ : Do you like this electronic age?

Reply on 28-7-1995 (diskette)

AP: Yes, I feel very fortunate and blessed to have grown up in this part of history. I find it ironic that the first little box, the TV (which appeared miraculously in my mothers generation, and is what I grew up with), would be replaced by another box, the personal computer. I feel saved by this transformation of the box I watch every day. Instead of being a passive observer in front of the TV, and feeling alienated from the existence I am programmed to lead, I have created a real world, real networks, and real friendships. I am enthralled by the possibilities for a real development of global community. It's so different than the image presented on TV for our consumption. It actually is a free exchange of ideas.

Now that I have experienced this electrical connection, I feel I am electricity itself, hurling through the universe.

RJ : Because you are active with snail-mail as well as electronic mail, the archiving of all the information you get must be a problem too. How do you deal with that?

Reply on 19-9-1995

AP: I don't, sorry to say. I know that is going to drive everyone berserk. I've received numerous lectures on the topic, and all I can say is that it is not an activity I'm willing to take on. The e-mail I receive gets processed and stored for approximately two months. I do save email numbers when I have the energy, which I compile into an email directory. I also record all project notices in Global Mail. Other than transferring and recording the useful info, I have no interest in electronic data.

Tangible mail (as opposed to electronic data), gets dumped as well. You have to remember that the bulk of my mail consists of requests for Global Mail, notices for mail art projects, zines, and some mail art. All addresses get recorded into my mailing list, and notices get put into the Global Mail database and then dumped. I love keeping electronic records, and do feel that this is an important information base. Zines get recycled to other people, with the overflow going to John Held Jr. , the Chicagoland Great Lakes Underground Archive at DePaul University Library. Mail art gets saved or recycled. I try to reuse all decorated envelopes, and also use any stickers or miscellaneous small artworks in the mail I send out.

There is a collection of mail art I am hoarding (not archiving). I honestly don't know what to do with it. I am waiting for the right person to come and take it off of my hands. I recently gave away all my chain letters to one person, and also gave away a lot of my artistamp collection to a couple of interested individuals. I have a good collection of political mail art I would like to save for posterity, but I manage to fit it in a few small boxes. I am

open to anyone going through and taking any of what I presently have. I don't think it's right to hang onto things. I believe everything should be passed on after use. "I RECYCLE MAIL ART."

(Because Ashley is going to move to San Francisco, she asked me to postpone the sending of the next question and to wait till she will contact me in January next year. She writes that she will then publish a BIG notice in the new issue of GLOBAL MAIL. So I have waited for her next mail to come....)

RJ : After your move from Chicago to San Francisco, the first questions that come up in my mind are: "Is it a big difference to live in another city?" and "Do you plan to issue a new copy of Global Mail?". But I also know that moving and starting with a new part of ones life takes a lot of energy. I will wait for the answer to these questions till you are ready to answer them.

(On November 10th I received from Ashley's new address her booklet "A TRAVEL DIARY" with on the cover "clean restrooms this exit". In this booklets she describes her journey from Chicago to San Francisco together with her brother and cats. The text is written very direct and tells a lot about herself. The booklet documents the period 2 to 6 October, and was published on her birthday, the 19th of October).

Reply on 11-1-1996

(Together with Ashley's answer I also got 10 copies of her new edition of Global Mail. The magazine looks better every time, and contains lots of info' too. I am just one of the distributors of this magazine called "The hole to the underground").

AP: Will there be a new issue of Global Mail? Yes! I managed to move and put together a new Global Mail. It's a wee bit late due to the fact that I ran out of funds to mail it, but given the circumstances, I'm really happy I managed to pull it off. There will continue to be new issues as long as I can afford to produce them. At the point I can no longer afford production, it will probably continue as a web page, which is very inexpensive to maintain.

Has moving to another city changed things? Yes! The most important change has been the weather. I have a nice place in the sunny mission district. It's barely been cold here yet. At night it goes down to 48F and during the day it gets up to 65F. It's quite a big difference from Chicago. I'm used to rushing about to get out of the severe weather. I no longer have to rush, and can stroll through life. Its very enjoyable and life is pleasant here. Anything I need is within walking distance, and there are about five open markets within a block of my home.

I've experienced an earthquake, lots of fog, been up and down the coast, across bridges, in between mountains, stood at the edge of a cliff, been to islands, and experienced walking up a big hill. In general, I'm trying to make each day an adventure as best I can. Oh, I also have a new job in Berkeley, at a computer software firm.

I've begun many new social relationships with long time correspondents, which has been a very fun process. I've been meeting correspondents at the rate of two a week. Obviously I can't keep up that kind of pace (nor would I want to!), but it has been exhilarating.

It's amazing what a new city can do for the soul.

RJ : Well, Ashley, its time to end this interview. I thank you for your time and the chance to interview you in this important period of your life.

JULIE PAQUETTE

Started on: 24-01-1995

RJ : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 17-02-1995

JP : Since you asked this question I've been trying to remember dates. Since I became aware that the network exists I've jumped in with both feet and it's hard for me to remember a time that I wasn't involved.

I've determined that I was introduced to the network in 1991 by 'arto posto' in Atlanta, GA (she was in Chicago, IL, USA at the time). I had been looking at posts on bulletin boards on Prodigy, a computer service network, and found the ones on rubber stamps especially interesting. Some of the discussions weren't, but when I asked a few questions I was immediately drawn to mail art. In fact, I issued my first mail art call within a few months from a documentation list arto had gotten from A1 Waste Paper in London, that she shared with me. My first call was THE SHOW MUST GO ON and I hung it in the rehearsal space of a theatre I worked with.

I've always loved checking the mail (I've done arty things to mail since about 1967 when, as a kid, my family moved and I began corresponding with the friends I'd left behind), but when I was receiving mail for THE SHOW MUST GO ON I couldn't wait to get to the mailbox! I still feel that way.

RJ : You undersign your mail with several aka's like "ex post facto", "Anne Maybe", etc. Did you use these names before you entered the mail-art network already? What is the story behind the many names?

Reply on : 17-3-1995

JP : I do have a thing for new names, don't I? No, none of the names I use for mail art are any I've used anywhere else. Well, except for one that was a childhood nickname (I don't use it for anything anymore and wish I never had!). Each name has meaning for me and I think demonstrates flux in my life. As I got involved with mail art I was also very involved with e-mail and a network of rubber stampers on Prodigy (*P*). Many people there had given themselves mail art names and I found it charming. arto postto struck me as a perfect nickname for a mail artist and when I was doing some reading I ran across the phrase ex post facto. This was me! I'm always late (after the fact = ex post facto) and I liked very much that it had the word post in it. I announced on *P* that I had finally found my name. I got a response from Willy Nilly that it sounded good to her, but didn't I want to add an "o" to "post" in honor of arto postto Yes, I did. She has truly been my mail art mentor

and I was delighted to be able to incorporate a little thank you into my name. *ex post facto* is the name I've used the most in the Eternal Network. Besides all of the sentimental stuff, I find that it's useful to be sexually ambiguous now and then. I think there has been a certain amount of "good ol' boy" networking and a name that is not sexspecific can be a good thing in breaking into a bit.

I went through a time that felt very tenuous and uncertain. I became Anne maybe. I got divorced. I became Nobody's Wife! I became very close to a friend who was also an active mail artist - together we were the Fake Socorro Sisters, Fate and Destiny. When she dropped out of the movement I assumed both identities. (This was an idea JEM and I had that never really went anywhere.)

I don't know if I will continue with all the different names or not. I was amused by it when I saw Rudi Rubberoid's odd list and thought it would be fun, but didn't think I could come up with names I'd like well enough to want to claim. As it turns out, I could probably rename myself almost monthly. Fluxus is with us. Certainly it is evident to me in my little life.

RJ : Could you tell a bit more about that "good ol' boy" networking. Is there a difference between your mail art contacts with males or females?

Reply on : 31-3-1995

JP : This could be a loaded question.... Very different. And as I type that I think it's likely that someone

somewhere is getting defensive. I want to say right off that because something is different doesn't mean it's better or worse. The good ol' boys only have as much power as we give them. I wanted to be part of the movement in a big way when I was beginning and I thought I had to be in touch with the powers that be. Now I'm feeling much more settled in. The power thing is definitely over-rated.

I'm not sure how much one's gender has to do with how easy it is to get involved in the network, but I've heard both men and women say it's tough. I didn't find that to be the case at all. Some suggested that it was because my mail art name didn't tell that I'm female. Since I could see many more active men, I thought they had some control over it all. I now believe that mail art is truly what you do with it. No one has CONTROL. Isn't that the point? Some people like to think they're "leaders of the movement" and spend time and words to make it so. They are whatever they perceive themselves to be, as we all are in this eternal network.

I don't think I'll get into this topic any further. I value my male and female contacts very much and I'd hate to over-generalize and annoy any of them. I'm not involved with mail art to bicker and fight.

RJ: Since you began in mail-art the amount of mail you get must have been increasing all the time. Are you still able to answer all the things you get in mailbox?

Reply on: 18-4-1995

JP : I believe that SENDERS RECEIVE. Since I like receiving so much I figure I need to send, so getting things out is a priority. I document my Fluxus Bucks project when I accumulate ten participants and that has happened every week and a half to two weeks lately. I try to be especially timely with that documentation so that it doesn't build up and totally overwhelm me. Besides, I'm getting some very interesting things due to that and I want to keep it rolling along. It has really expanded my network in a huge way.

As for the other mail I get, it all gets some sort of response eventually. Sometimes the stuff that I'm most impressed with is hardest for me to respond to. Then my answer can be very slow (I'm waiting for genuine inspiration or something).

RJ : Can you tell a bit more about your Fluxus Bucks. How did you think of this project, how did it start, and how is it developing?

Reply on 28-8-1995

JP : Whew! Quite comprehensive questions, my friend! Since Fluxus Bucks have taken over much of my mail art time, I think about why I'm doing them when I get frustrated that I can't do something else. Lately I've been figuring out a more efficient documentation system that will allow me to keep the record on the computer and hopefully not take so much time to produce and reproduce. Since I generally get about 10 responses a week, I'm doing a

Fluxus Bucks documentation weekly. This seems like a lot sometimes, and not nearly enough other times.

Documentation seems to take longer all the time because I've started writing notes to some (many) of the participants and I want to be able to continue to do that but it can hold me up when I want to get mail out. The responses are coming from all over the network -- most of the time I get 6 responses from the USA and 4 from other countries (people in Italy, England, the Netherlands, Mexico, Canada, France, Belgium, Malta, Czech Republic, Korea, Ireland, Uruguay, Japan, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Guatemala, Germany, Ukraine and Finland have sent the bucks home). To date (18 Aug. 1995) I've received about 290 responses! Just incredible. I'm thinking I may do a little zine thing on the back of the documentation. This is still an idea more than an actuality so I reserve the right to change my mind!

Ok, your questions. How did I think of this project...hmmmmm. It had a lot to do with my day-to-day money concerns at the time. Let me grab the ol' journal.

On 27 October 1994 I wrote that the idea of a mail art currency had gotten my attention. "I ought to get a Ray Johnson image on there maybe. Or something Fluxux, DaDa -- I want my address on there somewhere, too, but I don't think it needs to take front and center. I've cut 150 bills. My idea is that they need to circulate amongst the Mail Art Community. I want artists to carry them in wallets or purses, doodle on them, add their addresses, send them to other artists and then redeem them with me. Or not."

On 1 November 1994 I wrote" "Fluxus Bucks, make them show the changes around you, them, etc."

On 10 November 1994 - "My fluxus buck is happening. They're rubberizing my buck while I'm not there at Acme. I've cut and bundled 150 more (sheets of paper). In lieu of a dollar sign I want a fluxus buck symbol. For Global Mail? -- ARTISTS! Tired of worrying about money? Request any amount -- it will be filled in Fluxus Bucks. Ongoing project -- Documentation and Bucks to all."

13 November 1994 - "I've done 550 Fluxus Bucks. I'm mailing a whole bunch of them out. I'm pretty happy about how they turned out, but when I gave them out at the 3'O clock mail art Choir meeting I got a very subdued reaction. I think they were sort of confused...."

Well, there's some of the stuff I was thinking when I started mailing Fluxus Bucks. The response I've gotten has been so good that it's really encouraged me - which brings me to the last of your questions" How is it developing?

I had a fantasy as some point early with the Bucks that people would like them well enough that I would need a couple thousand eventually. And that has happened already (there are over 2800 bucks in existance so far). I love the way my network has grown and broadened. I'm consistantly surprised and delighted by the variety, talent, depth and silliness of the people in the network. The work/play I get in my mailbox inspires, distracts and

informs me. Fluxus Bucks may come and go, the network just goes on and on and on.

RJ : You probably have heard of the statement "mail art and money don't mix" which tries to explain that in mail art you shouldn't ask for (the official) money. What do you think of this statement?

(Via e-mail I got a message from Tim Blackburn (Zetetics) telling me that he asked Julie about the progress of her interview. She told him that she lost the last question, and asked Tim to send me this info by e-mail. So I printed the latest question again and sent it to Julie together with another sample of a finished interview).

Reply on 6-12-1995

(Together with Julie's answer again some Fluxus Bucks and the documentation-sheets. Also included was a nice gift, a rubberstamp about her Fluxus Bucks project. Julie has sent me before such nice gifts).

JP : I LIKE IT! Money seems to take over in too many areas of life. What you can and can't afford even determines who some think you are. Even though mail artists are people (and people are the ones who make judgments based on \$) I find it delightfully refreshing that for the price of a stamp anyone can enter and participate in an international, eternal network. For me the network has been a warm community of generous, talented & amusing individuals. There's gossip, romance, controversy, feuds, ART & anything else you might find in a group of

intelligent people. We enjoy entertaining each other and ourselves. Fluxus Bucks came about to do that.

Unfortunately, the realities of life are that we need money. I can't fault people who try to make money in areas related to mail art (rubber stamps, artistamps, zines, etc.) but I think it is important - and sometimes difficult - to avoid taking advantage of the network for personal gain.

An unrelated aside: Fluxus Bucks have been around for a whole year! In that year, I've seen over 400 responses to the project & sent out as many replies. Wow! That's it for now. I gotta run to work and earn some actual currency so I can continue to afford to play in the network.....

RJ : Yes, mail art is an expensive thing to do, and most mail artist I know have always some kind of job of study they do besides it. I have found out that sometimes the things people do besides their mail art is quite different in comparison to the mail art they send out, and sometimes it combines perfectly. How is this for you?

Reply on 3-2-1996

JP : For me mail art is a distraction from the regular day-to-day stuff that threatens to wear me out. I was so enthused about rubber stamps when I was first getting into the mail art thing I went into the fun rubber stamp biz with a partner. It was going o.k. when I sold my half to her, but I needed to get a job with a paycheck. And I did! Working for an actual rubber stamp company where they made

business rubber stamps. In a lot of ways this was a very good thing, but it was also something that took a lot of fun out of rubber stamps. But! I learned a lot about the whole process and I'm glad to know it! It may even come in handy in the future.

Anyway - these days I work as a cashier at Bingo for a couple of different charities. In fact, handling all that money - especially the PAPER money sort of inspired Fluxus Bucks. I loved the feel of bundles of paper money! Still do. Since it's pretty unlikely that I'll have bundles of real cash laying around to fondle, well, why not come up with my own? Even better - get my friends in the network to help make these slips of paper valuable. That's the genesis of the idea, but it's developed in other ways that have surprised me.

The best: I think I've mentioned before how my network has grown by leaps and bounds and while some folks send bucks once or twice and fade away, many others have become good, dear postal friends.

The worst: Since I recirculate the bucks I receive I rarely have enough bucks around to bundle - they go away much faster than they come in - just like real cash.

To get back to your question, I don't think I've got a job that "combines perfectly", but I manage to blend the two wherever possible.

RJ : To my surprise there is yet another mail artist living in your P.O.Box under the name "Atmospheric Cookie". What does he/she do there?

Reply on 6-3-1996

JP : Your question about "atmospheric cookie" has an easy answer. I heard the phrase on a weather report & it stuck me funny. The description of pressures & counter pressures that followed reminded me of my life so I "borrowed it" Next?

RJ : Together with your answer you sent me again some fluxus bucks. Thank you. The numbers on the bucks indicate that already lots of them are circulating. You always also send me some of the ones you got back yourself, so you are recycling the bucks again. Are you ever tempted to collect the nice ones? Are you a collector of mail art items or are you recycling most you get?

Reply on 15-4-1996

JP : I do get some nice ones! Sometimes I have to keep a buck that speaks to me. Since I originally saw them as ever-recirculating I wasn't sure how I felt about keeping some. I mentioned this to M.B. Corbett and he told me not to worry about this and to consider the bucks I kept to be my salary. I liked it!

Usually though, I like to recycle. I'm seeing the Fluxus Bucks more and more as a networking tool. When I send out documentation of participants and their addresses I am

often introducing mail artists to each other. That's why I started making notes about what I got from the people sending bucks besides the bucks. Then artists could get an idea of those who were doing things they might be interested in. I often hear from people who have contacted one another using the Fluxus Buck documentation and that is terrific! I didn't see, ahead of time, that this documentation would be so effective in this way. But it is! As much as I enjoy receiving the bucks themselves, I think the real contribution to the movement might be in the on-going documentation and the way it provides current information on active mail artists to other active mail artists.

Meanwhile the bucks give an opportunity to do some quick (or not so quick) art that generally goes back out into the network flow of things. More and more people are adding their address to the bucks so that sometimes their address will be out there even if they weren't on the current documentation. I don't think FB resemble most currencies much at all in the way they're used but I think they're every bit as valuable! Yesterday I stamped out 250 more of them - a time consuming project since each buck is stamped at least 4 times - and there are 3850 of them now! I know I'm not the only one saving them because more go out than come back. It's OK with me (people can do what they want with them once they leave here as far as I'm concerned), but I'm thinking about asking - maybe by issuing some sort of mail art call - for mail artists to tell me how RICH in Fluxus Bucks they are. Arte A la Carte (Joan Coderre) told me early on that she was keeping them & I know that John Held Jr. archives EVERYTHING. While I don't mind that

some people are doing this collecting I'm sure glad so many don't!! I recently got some of this earliest ones I did (over a year & ½ ago) back an I was interested to see how the bucks have evolved as I stamp more and more of them.

My favorites are bucks that have managed to travel the world and have evidence of the many places they've been and the artists they've met. I think I've mentioned before that this is how I travel for the most part - vicariously through the movement of the bucks.

Your second question is about mail art collection in general - do I save stuff or recycle? Both. When I first got emersed in the mail art magic, everything I got took my breath away. I was so exited and amazed by the whole process that I just couldn't imagine sending ANY of it away and marvelled at those who did. Lately though, I'm re-thinking that. Practically speaking it's impossible to save everything without building another room on my house - and I can't afford to do that unless they'll let me pay for it with Fluxus Bucks. Also I really like the looks of mail art that a number of mail artists have added to; so more all the time I am recycling my mail art.

RJ : All the mail art I get from you shows no trace of the use of computers in your mail art. Yet you mentioned with your first answer in this interview that you got hooked up to the network through Prodigy. What is a computer for you?

Reply on 18-5-1996

JP : Dear Ruud, I'm in the gymnasium of a Junior High school for my middle son, Sam, to start his basketball game. I'm not really a big sports fan (it's noisy in here & smells funny) but I like to see Sam play. I meant to bring your latest mail art interview question with me but forgot to. I remember enough to answer, I think you asked about me and the computer. My answer:

My computer was very important in my introduction to the mail art network. I was on-line in the early days of Prodigy and there were a lot of people there interested in mail art. For me the most important contact I made was arto posto. She opened the door to the vastness of the network. Now, however, I'm not on-line at all, and although I miss it occasionally, I find that for the most part I'm more than satisfied with all the great stuff that shows up in my mailbox. I really enjoy the tactile experience that's part of creating and receiving mail art. The potential magic of the computer doesn't escape me, though, and I anticipate plunging back into the on-line network again some day (fairly soon). Having had the opportunity to work with arto posto on artistamp sheets on her computer, I look forward to spending time doing that sometime, too. Next Question?

RJ : It seems that your concept of Fluxus Bucks has been taken over by others too. Besides the Fluxus Bucks I produce myself (with your name on it), there are also: the Quid (A1 in England), the Winged Money (Dragonfly in USA), another Fluxus Buck (by Posto del Sol in USA). What do you think of this development?

Reply on 29-6-1996

(Julie's answer came as a computer print-out. She just entered the internet with the e-mail address Julie8P@aol.com and tried to mail her answer to me. She typed my e-mail address as tam@ddl.nl while it actually is tam@dds.nl, so the message bounced back, and the result of that Julie printed out and sent to me).

JP : I think it's great! There's some saying about "duplication is the sincerest form of flattery" (I know that's not exactly it, but you get the idea). That mail artists all over liked the Fluxus buck idea enough to endeavor to do their version of it delights me. There are a whole bunch more than you mentioned and as I write that, I think I've already answered this question. (Not part of interview -- Did I do that? If so, where were we....????)

Let me know if I've got a more current question, ok? Like I said, I can't find anything. If this IS the current question, I'll expound more. Bye for now, ex post facto, the muddleheaded.

(after this part of the e-mail, some 'headers' followed to indicate the route the e-mail had taken. It shows that the e-mail was eventually returned, but a copy of course remained at the 'postmaster' of the NLnet)

RJ : It is quite interesting that you entered the internet again during this interview. Your latest answer came by snail-mail just because of one single typing-mistake. That is typical computer-communication. A postman would just

have brought it anyway. What are your experiences with the current status of the computer-communication?

(I mailed the new question in printed form in an envelope and also sent it to Julie's new e-mail address. The message bounced too, and a day later I found out that Julie had a new e-mail address. I remailde the complete text with all the addings by the computers again to Julie)

Reply on 2-7-1996 (via e-mail)

JP : I'm finding it overwhelming, very exciting and inspirational all at the same time. Things haven't changed completely since I was last on-line, but there is MORE of everything: people, places to go, things to see and do, things to get (download). There aren't enough hours in the day to check everything out. It may take more self-discipline than I have to get anything else done. And since, like many mail-artists, I'm always thinking of MORE stuff I want to do through my mailbox, I'm going to have to work on that discipline thing so I don't get too lopsided.

RJ : The word MORE is quite interesting. How much time do you actually spend each week now on mail art and the electronic communication?

Reply on 15-7-96 (e-mail)

JP : More each week.

RJ : Could you be more specific?

reply on 28-7-1996

epf: I don't think so. I don't keep track of hours and minutes very well. I've noticed that a lot of maintenance stuff (laundry, dishes, washing out the bathtub, etc.) goes longer and longer between getting done. What IS getting done is lots of art related tinkering (which seems to create even bigger messes), some mailings of documentation for the Bucks, and now--answering e-mail. I've found, with the help of my friend, *arto posto*, a group of people interested in discussing mail art (IMAT--International Mail Art Thread) on-line. I'm not fascinated by every word, but darn close. I'm wondering if this is a distraction from the stuff I'm interested in getting done or a great asset that will help me. Either way it's how I'm spending a lot of time these days.

RJ: I myself have had e-mails from newcomers to mail art, and I must say that I never get a clear picture of someones work unless I get some snail-mail from that person. The electronic mail for me doesn't have that much information about the persons I am communicating with. Words and digital graphics are just a fraction of what I can encounter in the traditional snail-mail network, and for the time being I am focussing mainly on the snail-mail still and have the electronic part only for speed and quick communication and spreading text-informations. How is this for you? How much has the electronic mail taken over the snail-mail?

reply on 19-11-1996

JP : I agree wholeheartedly. E-mail and the electronic world seems more suited to information than art for me. I see art when I surf the net, but it's not a medium I'm comfortable with yet. It COULD happen, but I don't see that happening any time soon. Personally, I love the whole process of receiving mail art in my post office box. I like the look, the feel, the smell. I think I get a much greater sense of who I'm communicating with when I hold the artist's mail in my hands. One way that the electronic world has intruded on my mail art is that it takes over too much of my time. I know that I make the choice, but sometimes time just slips away when I'm using the computer (kind of like when I do art at times).

FLUXUS BUCKS UPDATE: I've been thinking about this all for a long time and I've come to a decision about creating and documenting fluxus bucks. I'm done once I reach buck #5000 and participating artist #1000. Both of these numbers are right around the corner so I figure I can move on to other projects. This month marks 2 years of fluxus bucks! I'm thinking I might issue a special series now and then for events or non-happenings, but the amount of documentation is taking too much time for me to do some of the thing I want to do. SOOO... I guess I'll move along. many people are making bucks these days. I'm happy to participate with theirs (yours included) and whatever I see of the ones I've made.

RJ : Yes, I guess there is always a good moment to end things. Also for this interview with you. We have take almost two years now to do this interview, so unless there

is something more you wanted to say, it is time to publish these words and let others read them as well.

(together with my question I sent Julie a print-out of the interview text so far, my latest design of a fluxus-buck value 100,000 and a copy of my report of the travel I did undertake to San Francisco in USA)

reply on 12-12-1996

JP : Hi Ruud! Well, finally the interview is finished, at last! Wow. Thank you for your patience and persistence. Thanks also for the over-view of your SF trip you sent. I hope you are finding time to enjoy some things - you sound so busy!!

RJ : Well, I must admit that I am busy, but I sure do enjoy doing those things that keep me busy. Thanks for the interview Julie, and may the Fluxus bucks come your way.....

ROBIN CROZIER

Mail-Interview with Robin Crozier (UK)

Started on: 2-11-1994

RJ : Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network? Do you have this MEMORY for me?

Reply on: 21-11-1994

RC : If my memory serves me well... I had been interested in Surrealism since being a student in the fifties. In the sixties I discovered a bookseller with a catalogue listing and number of surrealist publications some of which I purchased. The catalogue also listed publications from Something Else Press (ed. Dick Higgins).

I already knew about developments in New York in the sixties but this was the first time I had been able to buy books on/by John Cage, Ray Johnson, Merl Cunningham, Daniel Spoerri, Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, etc... apart from a few I had found in London. From the same press there was also the Great Bear Pamphlet series. These publications introduced me to intermedia and provided me with new perspectives but I still had the problem of finding out how to get into and be part of this new world instead of just reading about it at a distance.

I had also been interested in concrete and visual poetry and towards the end of the sixties I began to make some publications of my own. But where to send them? However, in 1970 a magazine called 'Pages' was published in England. It only came out in Winter 1970, Spring 1971 and in 1972 (three issues then folded owing to financial problems. It was dedicated to promoting the avant-garde and included works etc. by some of those I had met through Something Else but also by numerous other creators from Europe and elsewhere that were sometimes new to me. But what was most interesting was the information section listing publications, magazines, artists, events etc. with contact addresses. So I was able to begin sending my publications out to establish contacts providing me with more contacts and so on. Soon after this a more commercial magazine 'Art and Artists' published an article about Robert Filliou. In it he said he was going to have an exhibition at the Stedelijke Museum in Amsterdam and was asking people to send him material that he will include in the show. What an opportunity! So I sent him a number of little packs of this and that for him to include in works or make into works or distribute as he wished. G.J. de Rook visited the show and he and Robert Filliou made up pages from some of my sendings which de Rook then included in a publication he was putting together called 'Bloknot'. So, from early 1972, slowly but surely, I became involved in the 'Eternal Network' (Filliou) which had been christened 'Mail Art' in 1971 by Jean-Marc Poinot who had organized the envoi action at the Paris Biennale. And then the snowball began to roll.....

RJ : This 'snowball' has rolled a long time already. Has the mail-art network changed a lot or is it in essence still the same?

Reply on : 24-01-1995

RC : No, I don't think the network has changed a lot except in its continuing growth in size. Of course, since the early days there has been more writing about and comment upon the network, sometimes attempts to codify or clarify it, essays about what it might be and critical comments about its directions, quality and so on. So -to a degree- it has become something that people can stand back from and view as an entity. It is also increasingly collected into museums and archives so I suppose its getting quite old. I've also noticed that now items from the network are beginning to appear in catalogues as saleable commodities. Those dealers aren't in the network as far as I know but naturally this notion would go against the spirit of the network. Another observation. At one time there was a rapid growth in mail art emanating from oppressive regimes - South America, Eastern Europe, etc. These 'cold wars' are now largely relaxed and so I've noticed a rapid decrease in mail art from these areas. This may have something to do with my own involvement but I wonder what has happened to the mail artists in the former East Germany now the element of subversion and protest has been removed. For myself and my own activity, when I first began in the seventies then I was into all kinds of things, organizing shows, projects, publications, almost like the joys of spring and a fascination with new toys. "Somebody out there loves me" was a wonderful feeling. I

wouldn't say I had quite reached Autumn yet but I've tuned in on certain activities that are more particular to myself rather than try and do everything all the time. But I still can't resist collecting all those items that come through my letterbox into my archive. I'm always greedy for more

Oh, and another thing. Snail Mail -which used to be mail art before the appearance of more recent technologies- is being ended by these technologies. However, I suppose, I must betray my status as something of an 'eminence grouse' in the network by stating that I still prefer handwriting to typing and the original to the multiple. The personal touch. 'My touch is the touch of a woman' said Ewa Partum to me through the mail and when I met her she gave me a red rose. Lovely.

RJ : This 'being greedy for more mail' is for most mail-artists the reason to keep on sending out mail-art. But you probably also have the problem that you have to select what you are able to answer. Obviously you've chosen for the personal mail as a priority. Am I right?

Reply on : 8-3-1995

RC : To begin with, when one begins to become part of the network one is surprised and happy to receive anything but gradually, as the volume increases, selection occurs. My pet hate is chain letters that go straight into the bin. Does anyone respond to them? Next in line are these photocopied sheets asking you to add something and send them on to someone else. I suppose I do send these on but don't add to them myself - just in case else wants to. Just to

keep the network ticking over. As for individual artists I tend to respond more quickly to those who send me something personal rather than those who send out masses of bland photocopies. Of course photocopies have their place, mostly in publications but are not particularly exiting as a personal greeting. And then there is the question of gender. Being male, I am naturally drawn to respond to female advances (although this statement may not apply to everyone) as there is some kind of sexual fission involved. But, again, why are there more male than female artists in the network? Don't ask me. I've no idea whilst on the subject of response, I generally don't reply to exhibition requests unless they come to me directly. So, yes, as you say, its 'personal mail as a priority'. But then there's the question of whether 'personal' through the mail is better or more than 'personal' through meeting people directly.

RJ : In 1986 there was the 'Tourism'-year and later on in 1992 there was the DNC-congress year. Did you participate in those or did you meet mail-artists on an individual basis? Maybe tell a few memories of some meetings you had and what it taught you?

Reply on : 11-5-1995

RC : I did not participate in the Tourism year of 1986 or the congress year of 1992. On the whole I like to meet people through the mail. I suppose I see the network as a device for not having to meet people. However, over the years I have met a number of networkers..... In no particular order (of time or merit). Anna Banana and Bill Gaglione came to Sunderland to give some Futurist performances and talk to

the students at the college (now University) where I teach. They were on a whirlwind tour of Europe (if this is England it must be Monday - or vice versa) and were highly organized. Anna spent a lot of the time making works of art. Bill seemed rather tired. Emilio Morandi also visited me in Sunderland with his wife and son. They were on a tour of the British isles looking at standing stones and stone civiles. They were very friendly and brought me an enormous ice-cream for my birthday. I visited Neils Lomholt in Hou, Denmark. He was working in a school for handicapped young people and invited several artists over a few months to work with the pupils. I was able to use ideas of communication evolved from mail art to get in touch and receive a response from the young people in spite of physical and language barriers. David Zack had been there just before me and I met him when I arrived. He left the next day but I gained the impression of a chaotic, generous vital person who had been most simpatico with all the young people. Another time I visited Poland and met Andrej and Ewa Partam and a number of other Polish mail artists and artists. Ewa gave me a red rose ("my touch is the touch of a woman"). At that time Poland was still very much part of the regime of "our big friend" (Russia) so I experienced numerous examples of repression at first hand. I stayed with Ulises Carrion for about a week in his flat in Amsterdam. I had an exhibition in Stempelplaats , a stamp art gallery at the time. What an energetic person. Through him I went to see Peter Van Beveren and many others associated with the network. I have been in contact with José Van den Broucke for a long time now. He sometimes comes to Sunderland for a few days and we are in touch on the phone. He is very easy to be with and we

have lots of fun looking for Wanda together. I also met a number of British mail artists when I gave a Fluxus lecture at the Tate Gallery last year.

RJ : Who is Wanda?

Reply on : 22-5-1995

RC : The original Wanda first appeared many years ago in a publication of mine called 'Draw More Ducks'. She was sitting on a sofa pointing a revolver at an advancing gander. This may have alluded to Leda and the Swan. Later I successively reduced this image when trying out a new photocopier. The images were incorporated into a unique book which I titled "Wanda Wanders". It was at this point that Wanda first assumed an identity. Her wanders began with a text which I evolved from a corporate novel I had been working on. The novel began in a modern art gallery. I continued the text incorporating extracts and fragments from my memo(random) project. The search for Wanda then began in earnest as characteristics, types, positions, associations and criteria became more firmly established. I began a 'Wanda Notebook' and included in it found texts and writing evolving from sightings, imaginary meetings and collaborative writing. I also collected found images and collated, collaged and manipulated them to form a web of illusion and allusion in an attempt to define, fix and record some of her fleeting characteristics.

The 'Wanda Notebooks' began to assume the nature of a work in its own right. Fragments of the texts and photocopies of the images were mailed out into the

network with requests for people to send me information about Wanda. I began to receive documentation which I incorporate into the notebooks and keep in separate file. And so the Wanda saga spreads and grows and develops. Wanda is a figment a fragment of the imagination. I see her reflected in windows but when I turn she is gone. I see her in my mind's eye. The perfume of Wanda passing in the street. She breaths on the mirror. She writes her name on the mirror. Her name fades. In the modern art gallery. Wanda crosses her legs. Wanda uncrosses her legs. Two prints. The receptionist. Wanda travels in a taxi going nowhere but pretending to be everywhere. She is lost in the wrong city. In a small hotel for lost times. Her imprint on the duvet. A faint warmth on the pillow. She speeds past in her fast car. Her legs at the correct angle. Her white blouse. Her black skirt. Her dark tights. Her black stiletto shoes. But this is only one version. There are many more. She sits on the sofa smoothing down her skirt. She dreams sequences. She dreams seas. Sees dreams. "The mirror in this room are made of glass eyes" said Wanda. She walks out and strains the memory as she leaves the room. Her heels click in the corridor. A memory. The dead swan. Without light who needs darkness. Wanda drinks a glass of white wine. She is a performance of Wanda. She observes herself in the mirror. She reflects upon herself. A prototype of Wanda. How many Wanda's are there? Wanda reads a text about Wanda not realizing that she is Wanda.

I was sitting opposite Wanda on a train. Her bright red lips and dark fringe stood out from her pale face. As we sped along she looked out of the window. I could see her reflection in the windows. The rushing landscape became

reflected on her face like a film projected onto the pale canvas of her skin. She dissolved and reappeared in a confusion of strobe lightning caused by the sun shining through irregular densities of passing clusters of trees. The flickering Wanda in the window reflected my mind's eye while I observed the young woman who might have been Wanda, but wasn't. Behind glass, in the office. Her dark hair. White blouse. Black skirt. Legs outlined sharply against the immaculate grey carpet. Black high heeled shoes leaving a faint indentation in the pile. She performs her rituals at the keyboard behind the glass. Nimble delicate fingers. Her blouse is open revealing the white lace edging of an undergarment nestling against pale brown skin. Appendant. A gold cross on a slender chain. The transaction completed she places the papers in the tray under the glass partition and our little fingers touch momentarily. A flicker of a smile like the brief illumination of a distant island as passing clouds filter the searchlight sun. Or was it simply an imperfection in the glass. A perfection through imperfection. In the supermarket the legs seen from the side had no volume. Seen from the back or the front they took on degrees of definition according to the light source. As the focus of attention they virtually assumed a life of their own as the person to whom they belonged was not Wanda but they were Wanda. Indeed they would have been mirror images of the same leg or two from an unlimited edition set in motion independently of one another and only occasionally appearing to have the aspect of two different legs as she paused to consider the items on display occasionally leaning slightly to inspect an item more closely. Leaning caused an imbalance and a different function for each leg as more weight was placed

on one than the other. One became active the other passive. They therefore developed (to a degree) individual characteristics for an instant before reverting to the same would.

Of course the repetitious aspect of the items on display may have influenced the observer into formulating the theory that he was looking at one leg reproducing rather than at two different legs. The theory had naturally been evolved some time after the initial observation of the natural event thus proving that the mind crosses out and dissipates an initially strong sexual attraction. Wanda sent this and.....
Your letter was such a pleasure. I am very pleased to meet you. There's so much I want to say. I don't quite know where to start..... Well, let me start by saying that I spent this past week driving back forth to Ohio. As I drove west on the Perma turnpike I wondered about you.... and began to day dream.... about meeting a stranger along the roadway. I imagined meeting him at a picnic area, I caught his eye at the water fountain. We shared a meal of fruit, bread cheese, washed down with wine. A simple picnic among simple roadside picnickers - but somehow we only used the meal as a basis for the fundamental dialogue. As others roadside families climbed back into their cars, we stayed waiting for darkness, waiting for the mantle of night to cloak our true desire. Venus rose, bright against a black velvet sky, signaling that evening had fallen, as we fell on each other....

I drove on & on, imagining how the stranger lifted my skirt to grasp my buttocks and finger the wetness between my

tights, I imagined the shudder of yearning, the pounding of a tempted heart. Oh, golly, anyway, I always imagine....

At my dark room I imagined that once I photographed Wanda on a hot summer afternoon. But as you know I never met her. It was just a dream. A negative print of a male desire. She poses in black stockings with her hands behind her head. Her bra undone to reveal tightly stretched breasts. She is quite thin. One can easily determine the anatomy of her abdomen and public region. She poses naked on a sofa. Kneeling with her elbows resting on its back. Her hair cascades over her shoulders. Her ass just out inviting penetration. Her look is candid and cold. She sits on the floor in front of the sofa. Her back leans against the seat. Her elbows are in the seat. Her legs are apart. Her knees are raised. She reveals her vagina inviting penetration. Perhaps Wanda is somewhere very near to you as you read this. Can you feel her presence. Hurry. Go and look for her. Send her to me. Maybe its too late. She is just out of sight. But not out of mind. Only an impression remains.... her perfume passing in the street. A stain on the memory. Her breath fading on the mirror.

RJ : No, Wanda is not here yet. How much does your search for Wanda influence your mail art? Is mail art also a search for you?

Reply on: 16-6-1995

RC : Well, keep a look out, Ruud, you never know when Wanda may appear when you are least expecting her. I don't think that my search for Wanda influences my mail-

art very much. On the contrary, its probably the other way round. I think that for a long time, even before I became involved with mail-art, I was searching for a Wanda but it was only through the events, contacts and structures of mail-art that I began to find ways of objectifying Wanda, of putting her into words and images. She now travels through the network as a personality molded and fashioned by those who document her as well as being an emanation from my mind. I must say I don't quite know what I'm searching for through my involvement with mail-art. Maybe 'search' is not the right word.

I don't know. Maybe its two sides of the same coin. One side is inward looking. A looking into myself and finding ways to present this looking. Finding ways to combine media which will mirror my complex thought patterns, emotions, obsessions and so on. For a long time I've never thought of myself as being any particular kind of artist. I don't want to wear a label saying painter or sculptor or poet and so on. I just want to produce works whose form and media fit the content whatever that may be. And so the other side of the coin is probably the fact that the mail-art network provides one with all kinds of propositions, challenges and questions to be answered in so many different ways. I suppose that mail-art is as much a finding as a searching process. I also like the idea of working 'with' things, objects, structures, people. Cooperate activities. Recycling. Setting up structures that lead into unknown or unforeseen territories. Chance. Serendipity. External events molding directions. I like travelling rather than arriving. Flux. But this is talking about art. In my daily life I'm a creature of habits, of ritual. But this orderliness no doubt

allows my mind freedom to travel in many different directions. I don't have a car. I sometimes say that I wouldn't know where to drive to if I had one. I could drive anywhere. But where? So I get on a train. I know where its taking me and I'm free to look out of the window. The eternal observer. A network of observation.

RJ : Most mail-artists probably know you because of your memory/memorandom-project, where you ask a memory of a specific day from a mail-artists and in return send him/her someone else's memory. What was the reason for starting this project?

Reply on 28-6-1995

RC : Firstly, a description of how the memo(random) project works, because that's relatively simple. When somebody contacts me for the first time or perhaps when I see someone who I think might be interesting or whose work catches my attention I will send them a memo(random form as part of my initial contact with them. The form requests "what do you remember about.....(a particular date)". On the back of the form it says "please reply on this paper to receive another memory from someone else". When I receive the completed form (which can be completed in any way the contributor wishes) I copy (if it is writing) or transpose (if it is visual) the contribution into a series of memo books. I'm working into book number seventy right now and there are getting on for six thousand individual memories. When each book is filled up I mail it to the Getty Archive in the USA.

When a contributor sends me a memory then I send them another blank form with another request for a memory together with an original from someone else so that they can continue the process of sending memories and forming a collection of originals. I often pick the day on which they sent me the previous memory to ask for the next but not always. And I do exercise some choice as to which memory I send where perhaps looking for some affinity between the memories. But not always. I also copy all the memories from the memo books into a series of files which I have in my archive and very occasionally I use some of these or extracts from these in other works. The reason why the memo books go to the Getty archive is that when I began the project I sent the books to Jean Brown for her to put in her archive in the USA. I had established a strong contact with Jean and she was always very supportive towards me. However, towards the end of the eighties her archive moved to California to the part of the Getty archive and my books went with it so I continue to send them there.

In the front of each memo book is written "Each memorandum contains random memories recording times passing through Robin Crozier who here records the memories for Jean Brown and future times past." I feel that the Getty archive is the right place for the books to be housed as, after all, mail-art began in the States, with Ray Johnson, and I know they will be well looked after there and form a fascinating human document for future generations (unless there is an earthquake!). I know that I began the project in February 1983 as I record each form going out and which original coming in by date and name. I don't record whose memory I send to whom - I have to

have time to do other things! But exactly why I began the project in the first place is, I'm afraid, much more difficult to remember at this stage. I know that I had been involved in other publications in the seventies where I sent out requests for material then published the results and mailed them out as publications to the contributors but I think that I was beginning to feel that this kind of system was a little too ponderous and slow and also lead to an end of the project. Also I was involved in some interactive exhibitions where I had an suitant contact with the 'audience'. I had kept a daily diary since the age of eighteen. I suppose, as I may have said before, the mail art can introduce one in some way into people's private lives, can get behind the facade of the closed front door where only the letter box provides a chink in the answer. So to find out what people had been doing on a certain day could be part of this "being nosey".

Of course by no means everyone reveals themselves in this way. There are many different ways of filling up the forms. And so for various reasons, or non-reasons the idea of a continuous project emerged whereby I would 'publish' the memories to contributors almost like successive installments in an ongoing novel whilst retaining versions of all the memories in one place to be experienced as a whole. Because I am the only vessel through which all the memories pass I suppose in one sense you could say " "did" very little with the project but then without me the project wouldn't exist and so many memories would be left unrecovered and so much would have been lost to the future. Its rather the idea of the artist as instrument or a catalyst facilitating relationships. There are sounds in your

room right now but you can't hear them. If you have a radio, turn it on. You can now hear the sounds. That's what I mean. You may want to return to the memo project again or ask me about some of the projects / exhibitions I worked at earlier or.....?

RJ : As a matter of fact I just had turned the radio on when I opened your letter. It is something I normally do when I get back home, a sort of touch with the outside world when I am inside. Even now I have retyped your answer and am thinking of the next question I also hear the news on the radio. What did you do when you opened my mail. How was your day today?

Reply on 28-7-1995

RC : On the day when I opened your mail I was in a house in the country in the North West of England. The area is known as the Lake District and its famous for being the place where William Wordsworth and other English poets lived and wrote. But I don't know how famous Wordsworth is outside Britain. I once asked an American about him and she had never heard of him. However there are enormous numbers of Japanese tourists who visit the area to make pilgrimages to all the sites associated with Wordsworth. What affinities they could have with the poet I just don't know. But there it is. I'm not at all interested in Wordsworth myself but just about a mile or so from the house is the village of Ambleside. Kurt Schwitters lived there from 1945 and died there in 1948. His grave is in the churchyard and I visit it now and then. Kurt is no longer there as his remains were esdumned and taken back to

Germany. I don't know when. What is curious is that there is nearly always a bunch of flowers on his grave. So I suppose that others who remember him still pay a tribute. I had not been too well in the night and had a number of vivid nightmares but can't recall any of them now. Just as well. In the morning I assisted in a ritual of throwing stones with words written on them into the river. The stones had originally been taken from the river, the words had been written upon them and they had been taken into the house where they were arranged in groups in various rooms. The ritual of return involved the placing of the stones in a sequence in the meadow by the river. The stones were then returned one by one to their natural element. Also a bunch of flowers was thrown into the river to be carried down stream towards Ambleside. I had carried them from there along a lane and they had been placed in the house. I often walk along this lane. It is one of my favorite places.

Soon after lunch I left the house and took a taxi to Windermere which is about six miles away in order to catch a train. As well as my case I was carrying a parrot in a cage. Of course there were a number of Japanese visitors on the train. To travel from Windermere to Sunderland. From the North West to the North East means taking four trains but I enjoy travelling like this as I look out of the window and observe my fellow travelers. I make this journey quite often but there is always something different to take note of. This time a young woman got on one of the trains and almost as soon as it left the station she went into the toilet carrying a suitcase. She went in wearing casual clothing - jeans, sweater etc. and emerged almost ten minutes later like a brightly colored butterfly emerging from a chrysalis.

An amazing transformation had taken place. She was now wearing a suit with a very short revealing beautiful long legs with little bracelets around her ankles. Her long golden hair flowed out over her shoulders. You might suppose she was Wanda but, no, not this time. Not quite right. She sat behind me so that I couldn't see her but her image lingered in my memory. And still does as I write this some time later. I arrived home in Sunderland in the evening and opened the mail which had arrived while I had been away. One of the items was from you asking me "How was your day today?" Well, now you know something about the day but of course there are so many things that happened that day and so many thoughts that have now gone unrecorded. All those events lost forever. And now, looking back, I'm not even sure if what I have related did actually take place in the same day or whether its an amalgamation of different days. A memory of rituals. The rituals of travelling memories.

RJ : When I receive mail from you, I always recognize your handwriting. It seems you never use a typewriter or even a computer. Is there a special reason?

Reply on 16-8-1995

RC : Well, first of all, I suppose I actually enjoy the act of writing. My hand holding the pen to make lines and marks which become words, sentences and paragraphs which follow my thoughts line by line. I enjoy the idea that handwriting is unique, as personal as a finger print. On the other hand I have never been very interested in mechanical things, in learning techniques and processes which I often

saw as hindering rather than as assisting progress. In sculpture I didn't like casting so generally carved directly. I hated framing things for exhibitions and wasn't very fond of printmaking where we had to go through lengthy operations like etching or lino cutting and then put the whole thing through a press before arriving at an image. I think I said somewhere else that this is why mail art suits me as a medium. You make it, put it in an envelope and mail it out. What could be simpler. I know that I can do this even more easily through recent technical innovations but I still prefer the 'personal touch'. Again I think that handwriting gives me time to think. It being a slowish process. I don't think that I think very quickly. I ponder on what I am saying in writing and very seldom, maybe not at all, retrace my steps to make alterations or elisions or to rewrite. I write it down carefully and leave it as I leave this answer alone.

RJ : I've noticed that for you recycling of the things you get is an important aspect. The memories you pass on, the envelopes you recycle. Is there anything you keep? What is your archive like?

Reply on 21-9-1995

RC : I didn't recycle things much to begin with. Still being in the gallery of publishing tradition perhaps where you send something out or exhibit and so on but its all one way traffic with no collaboration. The tendency now is to recycle more but when I receive a particularly interesting envelope - sometimes one I've collaborated on - sometimes not, I keep it in the box of 'particularly interesting

envelopes.' This leads into 'what I keep' - my archive is in quite a small room - say about eight by twelve feet. But as you know an enormous amount of mail art can be packed into a very small space.

Years ago now I remember filling a large space at college with by no means all my archive. Well, this is roughly what my archive is like. I sit at a table looking out of a window onto a street in the town on the ground floor of my house. On the table is a fill containing a record of outgoing mail with dates and a note to say if there was a reply. There are mi-trays for incoming mail and upcoming shows, projects etc. Also a tray of a collection of slides from other mail artists. The other three walls are build with shelves so I'll look around and describe something of what I can see. The box of 'interesting envelopes'. A box of artists postcards. Shelves containing files with works by individual artists - more than fifty of these. More collections of slides and a collection of audio tapes. Books, catalogues and publications mostly predating my involvement with mail art. Below a record of all the mail shows I've been in - requests, cards, reviews etc. Also a collection of artistamps. Below this are a number of publications in boxes like Pips and so on. Behind me are bookshelves. Here are mostly books not to do with mail art but there is quite a large collection of books by Diter Rot and also some Doc(k)s publications. Next to the shelves is a large folder containing numerous posters for mail art shows. Moving into the next wall - the one to my left we find the major part of my archive containing boxes of works by those artists who have sent me a lot of work, boxes of numerous mail art

magazines and other publications and a box relating to Fluxus.

On the shelves are numerous catalogues and other publications arranged in groups such as artistamps, artists books, postage stamps, audio works, publications by individual artists, collaborative works, series like Arte Postale! and Or magazine, concrete poetry, Fluxus and so on. Don't know how many but there quite a lot. Maybe I should start counting them sometime? Then there is all the material relating to Wanda - a box full of contributions from others and my own files and boxes. A pile of incoming publications, catalogues etc. that I haven't read yet. Files containing addresses and a record of all the shows, publications I've been in plus other things like audio works, my own publications etc. There is a collection of one of each of my own publications and another of all those exhibitions where I've been the only exhibitor. Then there are all the files relating to the memo(random) project and memos waiting to be produced. Then there are a whole lot of fills etc. relating to previous projects I've undertaken and a lot of material that I use for recycling. There are also some boxes of this under my table which, I think, is ,ore or less where we began. I imagine that my archive will be similar to many others. It's quite organized but private as hardly anyone else is allowed in. But then there are so many people here with me right now in this little room. So many friends in the mind.

RJ : Yes, your archive sounds exactly like mine. To fill your archive even more I send you a finished interview of someone else. I hope you still have place for this. I guess it

is now time to end the interview or is it I forgot to ask you something?

Reply on 28-9-1995

RC : Maybe I forgot to tell you something, so now we end this interview on equal terms perhaps as a metaphor for the network.

Au revoir.

RJ : Thanks for the interview Robin!

Guy Bleus

Mail-Interview with Guy Bleus (Belgium)

Started on: 3-11-1994

RJ: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on: 8-4-95 (internet)

GB: //GUY BLEUS-42.292: DEAR RUUD, IN YOUR INTRODUCTION OF THIS PROJECT YOU WROTE ABOUT THE MAIL-ART INTERVIEW PROJECT: "THIS PROJECT I MAINLY START FOR MY RESEARCH ABOUT THE HISTORY OF MAIL-ART"// //MEANWHILE YOU MUST KNOW MY SHAMELESS & SICK OPINION ABOUT HISTORY & ABOUT THE HISTORY OF MAIL-ART// //IF NOT, YOU (+ "FUTURE" READERS OF THIS INTERVIEW) CAN FIND IT IN THE FOREWORD "ART AS A COLLECTIVE MYTHOLOGY: MAIL ART" OF THE BOOK OF JOHN HELD JR. "MAIL ART: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY " (1991)// //YOU CAN ALSO FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS ISSUE IN MY PUBLICATION "EEN DIALOOG TUSSEN DE POSTBODE EN ZIJN ELECTRONISCHE SCHADUW, ALSMEDE EEN ALGEMENE DISCOURS OVER

MAIL-ART, MEER BEPAALD EEN ONDERZOEK NAAR DE GRONDSLAGEN VAN EEN COMMUNICATIEF KUNSTFENOMEEN" (1994)// //THE LATTER IS AN ANTHOLOGY OF SOME OF MY TEXTS// //IT'S A COMPILATION OF 1991 FOR THE "KONINKLIJKE ACADEMIE VOOR WETENSCHAPPEN, LETTEREN EN SCHONE KUNSTEN VAN BELGIE"////ANYWAY, HISTORY_IS_A LIE// //(YOU CAN READ MY ARGUMENTATION ELSEWHERE)//

//SO, I NEVER GOT INVOLVED IN THE MAIL-ART NETWORK// //_WE_ (YOU + I + ALL THE OTHER NETLANDERS) _"ARE"_ THE MAIL-ART NETWORK// //EVERY NETLANDER HAS HIS OR HER OWN WEB OF BORING AND/OR INTERESTING STORIES// //MAIL-ART IS COMMUNICATION-ART AND AS SUCH THE _"NOW"_ IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT// //AND THIS SUBJECT WILL INCREASE IN THE _ELECTRONIC_ AND _DIGITAL_ FUTURE// //AT LEAST, IF THERE IS ANY FUTURE AT ALL// //AT LEAST, IF THERE IS ANY FUTURE AT ALL// //AND IF SO, LET'S BARK TOGETHER// //WAF-@-WAF// //WHOOF-@-WHOOF//

//BUT OF COURSE, I COULD MENTION YOU THE _"HISTORIC"_ EVENTS I DID SUCH AS MY FIRST CORRESPONDENCE ART PROJECT IN 1968 WHICH RESULTED IN THE PUBLICATION "SUBTERRANEAN II" (EDITED BY THE ACADEMY OF ART IN GHENT) OR THAT A LOT OF MY MAILINGS WERE CENSORED WHEN I WAS A PUPIL OF 12 YEARS OLD IN THE BOARDING-SCHOOL OF THE "KONINKLIJKE

ATHENEUM OF TONGEREN" OR THAT I FIRST SAW
THE ARTISTAMPS OF E.F. HIGGINS III IN THE
MID-SEVENTIES IN "HET PANDJE" IN HASSELT// //IT
ARE JUST FACTS AND MEMORIES AND ANECDOTES//
//THEY'RE ALL READY TO BECOME NEW MYTHS IN
THE HISTORIC WORLD OF NETLANDING// //&/OR:
RAY JOHNSON IS GOD// //LET'S PRAY// //LET'S RAY//
//IT'S HIGH NOON BY NOW, I THINK I MUST BE
HUNGRY// //DEAR RUUD, KEEP IN TOUCH//

//HAVE A NICE AND WARM SPRINGTIME// //WITH
LUCK & LOVE & ENERGY// //GB-42.292//

RJ : The nice thing about the interview with you is that
you have written down so many views, thoughts, etc...
Most of the things I would like to know about you I can
look up in your books, catalogs, etc. If history is a lie, you
are giving lots of stuff to historians to write the history.
Why do you publish that much? (I hope you did eat well
before answering this second question!)

(because of the long silence I wrote several times to Guy
Bleus if this was the only answer he was going to give, or
that the interview would continue. As usual, Guy is quite
busy, and only months ago I received the CD-ROM that
documented his artistamps exhibition. The first CD-ROM
catalogue in mail art. On July 24th I received a letter from
Guy in which he wrote that the interview will continue in
the autumn of 1996).

On August 23rd I received a postcard from Guy Bleus from
Copenhagen. I guess it is no coincidence that just this

summer there is the large exhibition at the Postal Museum there in Copenhagen, and I am sure Guy Bleus visited that too.

Reply on 28-05-1997 (via e-mail)

(The e-mail was sent twice. The answer was an attachment, and the first time the attachment wasn't found by me. The second e-mail contained an attachment I couldn't decode, so I forwarded the e-mail to my e-mail at the college where I work. There I could decode it and e-mailed Guy that I succeeded in reading his second answer. At home in Tilburg again I fitted the text into the interview so far and e-mailed Guy the next answer. Prints on paper were sent as well).

GB : B. //From (x) To Ruud Janssen (interview via internet)//

//I// //Dear Ruud, today (05.29.1997) i well received the interviews of carol stetser and e.f. higgins III// //thanks a lot// //as you know i keep everything in the archives of the @dministration centre-42.292// //Answering your question// //yes ruud// //you're right, i make it easy for h/i/s/t/o/r/i/a/n/s// //but i really don't know why// //i just make use of the opportunities when they arrive (from the unknown X)// //i take the chance to give the other mail-artists a publication// //networkers have the right to a publication when they send something for a mail-art project// //let's fight for it// //it's not that i want to publish that much// //it's always a series of coincidences// //it just happens// //@/f/a/t/e// //& i follow my intuition//

//II// //1// //from april 1995 until ... two years later. blue
mail came out of the blue///x-ray johnson is dead. jo
42.langenaken (one of my best friends) is dead. sören
kierkegaard is dead (again)////2// //in the meantime there
was (is) @dministration: the 3 cd-roms, the psychedelic
show, the e-pêle-mêles, the scents, the private art detective,
the postal museum of brussels and the e-mail-art archives
in hasselt//

//3// //in may 1997 the smiling network experience is
remastered & digitalized. but i'm still in love with black
vinyl. the savage resurrection (of history), the seeds (of
internet) & the 13th floor elevators (of the mail-art
building)// //electronic thunder simulation is not new, it's
but the logical consequence of an old tradition. art and
philosophy dancing in yellow footsteps of science and
technology. the mystic owl of sister minerva. always-too-
late-mail-art, never in time for the golden deadline//

//III// //Waiting for the PELL-MELL network//

//With Luck & Energy//

//(x)// //Guy Bleus - 42.292//
//THE @DMINISTRATION CENTRE//
//p.o.box 43-B-3830 Wellen//
//gb@pophost.eunet.be//

RJ : How do you experience the Internet and the e-mail
after some years of practice. I know that you wrote texts

about this subject as well (which I could use as appendixes to this interview if you like), but I am also interested in how far the electronic communication is integrated in your daily life.....

next answer on 3-3-1997 (e-mail with attachments)

GB : //dear Question Number 3//

//Dear Ruud//

//It would be nice if you could @ttach (as an appendix of this interview)//

//the following texts: "A Dialogue between the Postman and His//

//Electronic Shadow" (1994)//

//As well as//

//"Telecopying in the electronic Netland" (1991/3)//

//YES -and/Or- NO -and/Or- always//

//The ultimate spinach of the Internetland doesn't "determinate" my ultimate snake-dances//

//Electronic, telecopying or postal communication aren't the issue @t stake//

//Loving the wonderful things one does (and/Or does not --- tomorrow)//

//Following the changing concepts of art - in my blue Velvet veins//

//Experiencing the echO of the white - e-mailed - rabbit//

//Constructing, deconstructing and recOnstructing//

//The non-electronic @dministrative Scents//

//Eating the flowers of the Net-O-land//

//Coming home Again//
//e/v/e/r/y/ night //
//Every night//
//every day//

//Again//

//waiting for the remembrance of the Electronic address//
//the silver rope behind the P.O. Box//
//the silent resonance and suspense//
//W-ithout the ancient platonic//
//W-hite shadow of a stamp//
//W-aiting for the sweet//

//the pleasure//
//Of repetition// //(((thepleasureofrepetition)))/

//Dancing in the ssswamping Inter-net-land//

//While Johnson's Nothings are @t stake//
//& - Nothing is crYptic anymore//
//There is no need for A//
//Young Wittgenstein//
//Anyway//

//With 42.292-Luck and Energy//

//Guy Bleus//
//gb@pophost.eunet.be//

RJ : Can we still find the spirit of the sixties in the mail-art networking? Or is mail-art already absorbed by the big Administrative Monster....?

(this question Guy formulated himself in one of his in-between e-mails he sent to me)

next answer on 31-7-1997 (e-mail)

GB : //A4 TO Q4// //AN _INTER-NET-VIEW_//

//DEAR FRIEND RUUD//

//YOU USE AN OLD INTERVIEW-TRICK: ASKING ME MY OWN QUESTIONS// //IT REMINDS ME TO AN INTERVIEW ABOUT MAIL-ART I DID COMPLETELY ALONE WITH MYSELF (IN 1979) FOR "SPACE Z" IN ANTWERP// //AS FOR ME, THE FREE SPIRIT OF THE QUICKSILVER SIXTIES IS STILL EXISTING IN MAIL-ART// //THE NETLAND ISN'T (YET) ABSORBED BY THE BIG ADMINISTRATIVE MONSTER// //MAIL-ART IS A BELIEF IN COMMUNICATIVE AND POETIC VALUES// //THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM US// //IT ISN'T A SOCIAL OR ECONOMICAL PROBLEM, BUT AN ISSUE CONCERNING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHEDELIC ATTITUDES OF THE INDIVIDUAL NETWORKER// //AS LONG AS SHE OR HE REFUSES TO SELL HER OR HIS OWN DANCING SOUL// //THE ARTISTIC TRIP WILL CONTINUE// //BUT OF COURSE THERE IS THE HUGE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION// //WILL THE NEXT INTERNET-GENERATIONS STILL BE INTERESTED TO

BURN DOWN THE NEW COMMUNICATION MEDIA//
//OR WILL THEY SWALLOW THE FUTURE
MTV/CNN/NBC NONSENSE// //SOME WEEKS AGO I
RECEIVED THE NEWS ABOUT JO KLAFFKI// //IT'S ALL
SO WEIRD// //I SAW JOKI A FEW MONTHS AGO ON
TV// //AND NOW// //WITHOUT YOUTHFUL DESIRES
THE PELL-MELL NETWORK OF THE
ADMINISTRATION CENTRE LOOKS LIKE A POETIC
CEMETERY// //FINALLY, IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT
MUCH// //BUT SOMETIMES I ASK MYSELF: "WHO'S
NEXT"// //AND THEN I HOPE IT'S NOT ME// //NOT
BECAUSE I'M SO AFRAID OF DYING// //BUT THERE
ARE STILL SO MANY PROJECTS I HAVE TO REALIZE//
//I'M NOT READY FOR THE FINAL DEADLINE// //YET//

//FROM WELLEN//
//WITH LUCK AND ENERGY//

//GUY BLEUS - 42.292//
//THE @DMINISTRATION CENTRE//
//POBOX 43-B-3830 WELLEN//
//gb@pophost.eunet.be//

ENERGY//

RJ : (lost question!) - did send participation to Guy's
new project.

next answer on 26-10-1997(via e-mail)

GB :-> //QUESTION NUMBER 05 / VIA E-FAX//

//DEAR RUUD//

//1// //THANKS FOR YOUR "WORKING IN A COAL-MINE" FAX- AND E-MAIL-WORK// //AT THE MOMENT I'M DOING THE LAY-OUT FOR THE CATALOGUE// //VERY SOON YOU'LL RECEIVE A COPY OF IT// //THERE WERE 50 PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING A LOT MAIL-ART FRIENDS SUCH AS BARONI, ALTEMUS, CIANI, FELTER, COLE, GAGLIONE, HELD, HUBERT, GROH, MAGGI, NIELSEN, PADIN, PERNECZKY, ...//

//2// //DURING THIS HOT SUMMER I HAD A LOT OF WORK TO DO IN THE OLD CINEMA TO CREATE A BIGGER SPACE FOR MY NETWORKING ARCHIVE// //SOME ARTISTS ARE SENDING ME (OFTEN WHEN THEY STOP DOING MAIL-ART) THEIR COMPLETE MAIL-ART COLLECTION AND THAT CREATES A LOT OF EXTRA WORK// //IT'S MY GOAL TO DO A BIG OPENING OF THE CINEMA-SPACE "THE SCENTS & ADMINISTRATION CENTRE - 42.292" AT JANUARY THE 1ST 2000//

//3// //MEANWHILE I'M BUSY WITH 2 NEW MAIL-ART PROJECTS: ONE IS CALLED "1001 DESKS/1001 BUREAUS: FOR AN OPEN ADMINISTRATION" IN GRONINGEN (NORTHERN HOLLAND)// //DEADLINE: 31.01.1998// //THE EXHIBITION WILL BE NEXT YEAR IN AUTUMN// //WITH A CD-ROM CATALOGUE// //ONE HAS TO TRANSFORM AND SEND BACK A POSTCARD WITH THE DESK OF THE MAYOR OF GRONINGEN//

//4// //THE OTHER BIG MAIL-ART PROJECT IS CALLED "AMBIORIX - KING OF THE EBURONS / AGAINST CULTURAL OPPRESSION// .//IT WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE CULTURAL CENTRE OF TONGEREN (BELGIUM)// //DEADLINE: 30.06.1999// //THERE WILL BE A PRINTED CATALOGUE// //THE EXHIBITION IS IN "DE VELINX" IN TONGEREN WITH ALL THE ENTRIES FROM JUNE 11TH, 2000 UNTIL SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2000// //ALSO A NUMBER OF MAIL-ART CATALOGUES & OTHER ARTEFACTS FROM THE T.A.C-42.292 ARCHIVES WILL BE SHOWED// //DURING THE "VERNISSAGE", THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION THERE WILL BE A CLONING-FESTIVAL INCLUDING "THE RESURRECTION OF AMBIORIX" AND AN AMBIORIX-MAIL-ART PARADE// //SOON YOU'LL RECEIVE THE INVITATIONS OF BOTH THE PROJECTS//

//5// //THE NEXT EXHIBITIONS IN THE E-MAIL-ART SPACE IN HASSELT ARE: CLEMENTE PADIN (10/97), PASCAL LENOIR (11/97), RUUD JANSSEN (12/97), BEN VAUTIER (01/98), GIANNI BROI (02/98) AND FERNANDO AGUIAR (03/98)//

//6// //THIS ARE SOME OF MY PLANS FOR THE NEAR FUTURE// //BUT THERE ARE HAPPENING SO MANY POST-SURREALISTIC AND MAYBE DANGEROUS THINGS IN MY LIFE AT THE MOMENT// //I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK OR BELIEVE ABOUT THESE "PRIVATE ART DETECTIVE" EXPERIENCES// //I'LL MENION IN A NEXT QUESTION, CALLED NUMBER SIX, THE WHO'S AND WHY'S//

//7// //HAVE A WARM AUTUMN////FROM WELLEN
WITH LUCK & ENERGY// //GUY BLEUS - 42.292// //THE
@DMINISTRATION CENTRE// //P.O.BOX 43-B-3830
WELLEN// //TEL & FAX: +32 12 741415//
//gb@pophost.eunet.be//

RJ :

(I didn't ask a question! However I did send a contribution to a project that Guy Bleus is undertaking, where he selects single short statements. Also he is working on several other things about which he wrote in answer # 5 and again in #6)

next answer on 2-12-1997

GB : To: tam@dds.nl
Subject: Internet Mail-Art Interview

//Interview//Answer/Question/Number 06//

//Dear Ruud//

//6// //The 1400 invitations of the mail-art project in Groningen "1001 Desks/1001 Bureaus: For an OPEN ADMINISTRATION" are sent out. Please participate to this new anti-bureaucratic project. It was not easy to have a photograph of the desk of the mayor from Groningen. In the past I made a lot of installations with desks (since 1978). For instance, in Antwerp, in Amsterdam, Groningen, Hasselt, Gent, Heusden-Zolder, Leopoldsburg, Brussels, Leuven, Munster, Köln, Aachen, etc. I hope that in the

meantime you already received the Fax- and Internet catalogue "Working in A Coalmine / Mail Art Networkers are Miners", distributing last thursday. There are 50 participants.

Tomorrow I'm going to set up your individual exhibition in the E-mail-Art Space in Hasselt. I hope you like it a little bit, because it is always a lot of work. Sometimes there are a lot of visitors (students, artists and art critics). Many people ask me to show their work, but it's only possible to do 12 shows in one year.

I trust that you accept my answer number 5 (and also 6 = this one) for your interview. Of course I also include Statements about e-mail-art for my Manifestos project, even if they are sent by snail mail. I don't care at all. I don't work for an Administrative Institute. I'm completely free. All my work is a parody of the neurotic bureaucracy. Very few artists understand this Irony. Probably they are much too Serious. Your Statement is the only one not transmitted (and received) via the net. There are already 16 participating networkers such as, H.R.Fricker, Jas W Felter, Vittore Baroni, John M.Bennett, Sarah Jackson, Anna Banana, Artoposto, Reed Altemus, Andrej Tisma, K.Frank Jensen etc. (And in order of date and hour, you are number 8).

I always accept all the entries (without rejections). If someone participates in my fax projects and sends it by another medium, it doesn't matter. I never rejected fax-art without fax-transmissions (ask José vdBroucke).

Maybe a little more fair-play, mutual respect and real friendship is needed in Mail-Art. Very few mail-artists can understand how much work it is to organize a project with hundreds of participants and sending "every" participant every time a real FREE catalogue or a cd-rom. This means working day and night, without being paid for it. And sometimes: not even a single word of appreciation for it. But I still continue because I love the Mail-Art-Stress, the Deadlines, the Irony and of course I'm not a quitter before I die.

(Here we can close the Internet Mail-Art Interview)

//With Luck & Energy//

//Guy Bleus - 42.292//

//THE @DMINISTRATION CENTRE//

//P.O.BOX 43-B-3830 WELLEN//

//TEL & FAX: +32 12 741415//

//gb@pophost.eunet.be//

APPENDIX-1

by Guy Bleus-42.292

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE POSTMAN AND HIS ELECTRONIC SHADOW

The position of the mailman as the ultimate man in the (pre-)electronic communication process.

01. The history of communication is a lie. Because the story is only a story and therefore incomplete, selective and interpreted. Blatantly absent in the recollection is the anonymous, that which doesn't have the power to make itself known, but that equally can make sense and be sublime. The conversations between past, present and future are always fragmentary and/or prophetic; a mishmash of truth, semi-truth and fiction, the tension between reality and illusion.

02. It is not actual or postmodernistic (rather postexistentialistic) to move on the historical currents of the social problem of communication. For the mailman is not a son of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, but he is the inevitable sun for Mail-Art. The mailman is no artist, but the moon of communication. The mailman is unknown, yet not without significance within the story of postal arts, day and night.

03. The eclectic novel of the new communicative space threatens to strangle the romantic narrative lines of man in communication. Technology dehumanizes the games between sender and receiver. But who is going to bother with the urbanization of cyberspace? Is there enough space for an ethic of the "social" superhighway?

04. The mailman is a communicative anachronism. But on the other hand he makes that same transfer of information visible. He is an essential trace within communicative reality. The letter carrier is not the owner of the information. But he is more than a symbol or an icon, moving on the level of language, in the language play between word and meaning. The mailman is a referent on the level of reality, a human of flesh and blood. It is of course nostalgic to presume that the 21st century will cherish the same totem animals as the 20th. Electronics are the guillotine of the mail (as a system of information). Postcards, post marks and stamps are the memorabilia of administrative rituals from a recent past.

05. "The end of a workers era is the beginning of..." Even Mercury, the mailman of the Gods, is impotent to complete the previous sentence. Ten years after 1984 we see an Orwellian hurricane approaching and no one knows where and when it will hit. Or are all sceptics wrong and is there an interactive and electronic nirvana lying ahead of us?

06. The spring of communication is over. The installation's artifacts look back and take different positions: where is the (symbolic) center of communication? Which strategies do

exist to save the frivolous adultery of democracy in a so-called "decentralized" cyberspace?

07. The earth loses its cosmic position as a center to the advantage of heliocentrism. Theocentrism is defeated by anthropocentrism and humanism. After God, the (ultimate) man dies, too. One grumbles and talks about eco-facism. Only on the materialistic level egocentrism is alive and kicking. The subject has been buried. Some are waiting for a resurrection.

08. The epistemological question of present communication is (still) possible, is socially and historically irrelevant. The vulture of power relations circles especially around the correlation between the quality and the quantity of communication. Not the values, but the numbers rule the planet. The merchandizing of information is a fact.

09. The distance between people gets increasingly smaller as the speed of communication increases. In theory this implies that the world will end in one point that is situated between nowhere and everywhere.

10. The social function of the mailman (the effective contact with man) disappears because of the increase of telecommunication. The notion of "social" gets a new dimension. One can be alone yet be very social within the myth of cyberspace. The psychology of personal space needs to be reconsidered urgently. Can this be a matter of pathological communication? Indisputably there is an increase of alienation regarding the "really" fellow human being. But what is still real? What is virtual?

11. The contradiction between man and machine is getting smaller. The machine that increases alienation among human beings within the social system, brings people closer together. The paradox of the cyberspace traveller or netizen.

12. A tribute to man seems unsuitable. The letter carrier who contributes to the realization of Mail-Art, who is the carrier of postal art, is invisible. Man has become but a dilapidated metaphor.

13. An individual "pro-mailman" position is not an a-political theme in a time when man is subjected to the machine. De la Mettrie becomes the spiritual father of McLuhan and Gibson. Where is the information-proletariat situated in this process of communicative "progress"?

14. A human approach of the post and communication commits itself on the level of the labor and labor-intensity. The notion of "unemployment" threatens to lose its meaning in a new social reality, and thus get a new dimension. To be unemployed doesn't apply anymore to man only, but to the lack of electronic communication equipment as well. On the other hand, the same electronics create a wave of unemployment.

15. A political subject would be: to recognize the superhighway as a culture of Power. It is being whispered: Internet is an "anarchist" way, without hierarchical structure, without leaders. Gossip or truth?

16. The attention to the role of "man" in the communication system is reduced to a linguistic or semiologic matter. The ethical consequences of hunger, of stress, of feelings, of shortages or of friendship in communication seem to be lost in the wrong millennium. Human activities disappear in the postal process "apparently" by an increase of electronic communication. The monitor estheticizes.

17. Yet one forgets one thing in this interactive story: the sedentary, electronic human being who is enclosing himself in order to do "home shopping" by means of his monitor and his keyboard, will have to appeal to "people" who deliver the parcels home. Hence the post's function to distribute products will increase. Unless everything gets in the hands of privatized courier services. A political option with relation to "cocooning".

18. In the installation the labour of the postal workers is visualized by a series of 60 mail bags, filled with information; also shown are portraits of unknown mailmen. The tools (stamps, ink and paper) used by postal employees are intended to focus on the human being behind the object.

19. The proper functioning of the postal services is accentuated by the individual project "indirect correspondence", this means correspondence via a detour. For instance references to fictitious persons and/or addresses. On the schemes of the itinerary and also on the very same circulating letters appear traces on the post, in the snow of time and space. These traces indicate the

respect for pieces of mail and the accuracy with which the postal system operates.

20. Opposing this are electronic appliances (such as telex, fax, modem) that alienate and/or eliminate man and reduce communication mere efficiency. The long strips of fax paper posted on walls emphasize the shortcomings of electronic communication. Smells or perfumes for instance can't be transmitted.

21. In the construction of the Cathedral of Communication the anonymity of the mailman is an essential fact. His ephemeral contacts with correspondence, the content of which he will never know. An intuitive retrospective of the evolution of (electronic) communication shows a system of objects and traces, in which the letter carrier as a concept accentuates the democratic aspect of the postal services. An extracting sculpture about postal and post-postal thinking, feeling and wanting.

22. The present is always the past to the future.

23. Fall 994.

Guy Bleus - 42.292

The Administration Centre / Networking Archives

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APPENDIX-2

by Guy Bleus-42.292

TELECOPYING IN THE ELECTRONIC NETLAND

GUY BLEUS - 42.292

//1// //THE WORLD IS A FAX-VILLAGE// //AFTER A. THE AEROGRAM, TELEGRAM AND MAIL-GRAM, B. THE TELEPHONE AND TELEX; THERE IS C. THE FACSIMILE OR TELEFAX// //ARTEFAX IS MORE RELATED TO TELEPHONE(-ART) THAN TO MAIL(-ART)// //NETWORKING OR (TELE-) COMMUNICATION ART IS THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR//

//2// //THE MYTHS OF FACSIMILE// //THE FATHER OF THE FAX IS THE SCOTTISH PHYSICIST & CLOCKMAKER ALEXANDER BAIN (1818-1903)// //HIS INVENTION OF 1843 HAS BEEN IMPROVED BY FREDERICK COLLIER// //BLAKEWELL (1847), GIOVANNI CASELLI (1865), G. LITTLE (1867), SENLECO DE ARDRES (1877), SHELFORD BIDWELL (1881), N.S. AMSTUTZ (1892), BUSS (1902), AR-THUR KORN (1904), EDOUARD BELIN (1907), DIEKMANN (1917), AMERICAN TELEPHONE & TELE-GRAPH COMPANY (1924/1925), WESTERN UNION (1924), NEC (1927), WISE (1938), XEROX CORPO-RATION (& RCA) (1950/1961), THE FIRM OF RUDOLF HELL (1965), MAGNAFAX-XEROX (1966), RI-COH (1970), ETC.// //CIRCA 1970 APPEARS THE FIRST PROTOTYPE OF A LASERFAX// //DURING THE EIGHTIES THE FACSIMILE

APPARATUS SPREADS WORLDWIDE// //IN 1990 THE
FIRMS OF SHARP AND STARSIGNAL PRESENT THE
FIRST PROTOTYPES OF COLORTELEFAX//
//MEANWHILE FAX HAS BECOME AN ART MEDIUM//

//3// //FACSIMILE// //N. (< L. FAC, IMPERATIVE OF
FACERE, TO MAKE + SIMILE, LIKE), 1. AN EXACT
LIKENESS, REPRODUCTION, OR COPY: ABBREV. FAC.;
2. THE TRANSMISSION AND RE-PRODUCTION OF
PRINTED MATTER BY A PROCESS INVOLVING THE
USE OF RADIO BROADCAST, MICROWAVE RELAY OR
REGULAR TELEPHONE LINES.; ADJ. OF OR HAVING
THE NATURE OF, A FACSIMILE; V; T; (-LED, -LEING),
TO MAKE A FACSIMILE OF. - IN FACSIMILE, AS AN
EXACT LIKENESS//

//4// //COPY// //(< O. FR. < ML. COPIA, COPIOUS
TRANSCRIPT < L. COPIA, ABUNDANCE)// //A CO-PY
HAS TO BE TRUTHFULLY BY DEFINITION// // "10.- 22.-
38 ASTORIA" IS MOSTLY ACCEPTED AS THE FIRST
TEXT IN THE HISTORY OF THE XEROGRAPHY// //IT
WAS REALIZED IN NEW YORK BY THE AMERICAN
PHYSICIST CHESTER F. CARLSON (1906-1968) AND HIS
ASSISTENT OTTO KORNEI// //YET THE TRUE FATHER
OF THE PHOTOCOPY SHOULD BE THE GERMAN
PROFESSOR JOHANN HEINRICH SCHULZE WHO
REALIZED THE VERY FIRST PHOTOCOPY IN "1727" IN
ALTDORF (NURNBERG)// //THE FACT IS THAT MANY
PRAISEWORTHY INVENTORS NEVER WILL SHINE IN
THE CRUEL SPOTLIGHTS OF THE
PHOTOCOPY-HISTORY// //ANYWAY, TODAY ANYONE
CAN MAKE A PHOTOCOPY AND BECOME AN ARTIST

AT THE PUSH OF A BUTTON// //ALTHOUGH CO-PY
ART & TELECOPY ART HAVE SEPERATE
TECHNOLOGICAL ROOTS THEY CERTAINLY ARE
ARTISTIC NETWORKING NEPHEWS//

//5// //FAX-ART (ALSO CALLED "ART(E)FAX" OR
TELECOPY-ART) IS A LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF
THE ECONOMICAL EVOLUTION OF THE TELEFAX
MACHINE// //THERE ARE NO FAX TRANS-MISSIONS IF
NOBODY CAN BUY A FAX APPARATUS// //TELECOPY
ART DOESN'T RESPECT THE SAME STANDARDS AS
XEROGRAPHY OR COPY-ART// //THE LATTER IS AN
EVENT// //IT IS THE ARTIST WHO INDICATES AT A
PARTICULAR MOMENT WHICH PHOTOCOPIES ARE
ARTISTIC WORKS AND WHICH ARE NOT// //FAX-ART
NEEDS AN ELECTRONIC PROCESS// //IT IS
TELE-COMMUNICATION ART// //THE ARTIST CAN
TRANSMIT HIS OR HER IMAGE OR WORK, BUT HE OR
SHE HAS NOT THE FULL CONTROL OVER THE
FACSIMILE EQUIPMENT OF THE RECEIVER// //SO THE
AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF THE FAXWORK BECOME OF
SECONDARY IMPORTACE IN COMPARISON WITH
THE COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS// //IN OTHER
WORDS A WORK CAN ONLY BECOME FAX ART IF IT IS
TRANSMITTED//

//6// //THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL FAX ART
PROJECTS GO BACK TO THE EARLY EIGHTIES WITH
IMPORTANT PROJECTS AS "THE WORLD IN 24
HOURS" (SEPTEMBER 27 & 28, 1982) AS A PART OF THE
"ARS ELECTRONICA 1982" ORGANIZED BY ROBERT

(BOB) ADRIAN// //OR "pARTiciFAX" (ELECTRONIC MAIL) (JUNE, 1984) CO-ORDINATED BY PEETER SEPP, LISA SEL-LYEH, MARY MISNER, MICHAEL BIDNER, A.O. WITH PARTICIPANTS FROM AFRICA, AMERICA, ASIA, AUSTRALIA, AND EUROPE// //IN THE LATE EIGHTIES FAX BECOMES AN INTEGRATED PART OF THE MAIL-ART NETWORK// //IN THIS RESPECT WE CAN PERCEIVE MORE AND MORE MAIL-ART PROJECTS ALSO MENTIONING A TELEFAX NUMBER, SO THE ARTISTS CAN CHOOSE THEMSELVES IF THEY WANT TO SEND THEIR WORK VIA POST OR FAX// //MANY NETWORKERS HAVE ALREADY CURATED OR ORGANIZED SPECIFIC TELEFAX OR ARTEFAX PROJECTS, E.G. ARTPOOL/GALANTAI, GUY BLEUS, PETER BRANDT, PAOLO BRUSCKY, PIERMARIO CIANI, NA-TALE CUCINIELLO, KO DE JONGE, CHARLES FRANÇOIS, MAURICIO GUERRERO, JOHN HELD JR., GIUSEPPE IANNICELLI, LORA JOST, CHRISTIAN PFAFF, ETC.// //A GOOD ADVICE FOR FAX PER-FORMANCES OR FAX PROJECTS IS TO HAVE PERMANENTLY MORE THAN ONE FAX LINE OPEN// // "WAITING" TO HAVE CONTACT SEEMS TO BE AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF TELEFAX COMMUNICATION// //BECAUSE THE LINES ARE ALWAYS BUSY//

//7// //THE TRANSMITTED OR RECEIVED TELECOPY IS ALWAYS AN ORIGINAL// //THE CONTEXT OR INTENSION OF THE TRANSMISSION CAN BE FALSE// //BUT A FAX DOES NEVER LIE// //IT IS THE INTERACTION AND RESULT OF A SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL PROCESS//

//8// //SINCE FAX ART IS ELECTRONIC MAIL-ART
ONE CAN ALSO TRANSMIT "INDIRECT" FAX WORKS//
//X SENDS A FACSIMILE TO Y WITH THE REQUEST TO
TRANSMIT IT TO Z (NOW Y CAN ADD OR ERASE
SOME ASPECTS OF THE FAX BEFORE SENDING IT TO
Z)// //THIS IS A GOOD AND FAST METHOD TO
REALIZE CO-ARTWORKS IN NO TIME//

//9// //FAXING CAN TRANSFORM THE NOTION OF
TIME// //BY OBSTRUCTING THE "ORIGINAL" (NOT
TRANSMITTED) TEXT OR IMAGE ONE CAN
INFLUENCE THE DURATION OF THE FAX
TRANSMISSION// //FOR INSTANCE, ONE CAN
MANIPULATE THE TELEFAX MACHINE BY
WITH-DRAWING, STRETCHING, PULLING UP,
PULLING FURTHER OUT (A PART OF) THE
TRANSMITTING PAGES// //BESIDES THESE VERTICAL
MANOEUVRES ALSO HORIZONTAL (ZIG-ZAG,
SHA-KING OR WAVING) ACTIONS ARE POSSIBLE//
//MOREOVER THE MISUSE OF THE ELECTRONIC
APPARATUS CAN BE REPEATED// //ALL THESE
OPERATIONS WILL AFFECT BOTH THE PROCESS OF
THE FAXTRANSMISSION AND THE TRANSMITTED
IMAGE OR WORK// //THE LATTER CAN ALSO BE
INFLUENCED BY INTERVENTIONS ON THE
FAXPAPER: HEATING, CRUMPLING UP, THE USE OF
CORROSIVE LIQUIDS, ETC.// //THESE OPERATIONS
CAN GIVE WONDERFUL AND UNEX-PECTED
RESULTS AND CHANGE THE FAX PROCESS// //BUT OF
COURSE ALL THESE ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS ARE
NOT HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR THE WELL-BEING
OF YOUR TELEFAX MACHINE//

//10// //OPPONENTS OF TELEFAX AS AN ARTISTIC MEDIUM CORRECTLY EMPHASIZE ITS SHORTCOMINGS// //FAX "IS" MORE EXPENSIVE THAN POSTAL NETWORKING// //ONE CAN'T TRANSMIT SCENTS OR 3-D OBJECTS// //FACSIMILE MEANS "SELECTION"// //ONE CAN NOT RE-CEIVE SEVERAL FAXES AT THE SAME TIME (WITH ONLY ONE TELEFAX LINE)// //ETC.// //ALL THESE REMARKS AIN'T WITHOUT THRUTH// //BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT "EVERY" ARTISTIC MEDIUM HAS ITS OWN LIMITATIONS// //FOR INSTANCE, MAIL-ART IS NOT THE PROPER OR ADEQUATE MEDIUM FOR A SCULPTOR// //SO, SCULPTURE IS HIGHLY SELECTIVE BECAUSE A BLOCK OF MARBLE OR BLUE-STONE IS MORE EXPENSIVE THAN A FAX TRANSMISSION// //BUT THESE ARTFORMS ARE BEYOND COMPARISON AND DOING SO MEANS CONFUSING CONCEPTS// //SCULPTURE, FILM, MAIL-ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, COMPUTER ART, FAX ART, ETC. ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION// //POSSIBILITY, FEASIBILITY, MONEY, IDIOSYNCRACY AND PREFERENCE ARE SOME OF THE APPLICABLE NOTIONS IN THIS TASTY RHUBARB//

//11// //FROM AN IDEOLOGICAL OR ETHICAL POINT OF VIEW ALL ART MEDIA MEAN "SELECTION", EVEN THE DEMOCRATIC MAIL-ART NETWORKING// //HOW MANY MAIL ARTISTS ARE THERE IN NORTH KOREA, CAMBODIA, VIETNAM, TIBET, LIBANON, IRAN, SUDAN OR SOMALIA?// //ART IS FREEDOM AND LUXURY// //FAX IS FUN// //IT HAS NO "ETHICAL" OR

"IDEOLOGICAL" IMPLICATIONS// //EXCEPT THIS
ONE: THE (ELECTRONIC) (MAIL-ART) WORLD HAS
BE-COME A GLOBAL VILLAGE WITH MANY "BLIND
SPOTS"//

//12// //TO FAX OR NOT TO FAX IS NOT THE
QUESTION// //FAXING OR TELECOPYING JUST ADDS
NEW ELECTRONIC PERSPECTIVES TO THE EXISTING
MAIL-ART ACTIVITIES// //THE CONSEQUENCES
WON'T CAUSE AN INFLATION OF THE NETWORKING
COMMUNICATION OR REPLACE THE PREVIOUS
MAIL-ART RITUALS// //BUT EXPLORING ALL THE
ADDITIONAL ELECTRONIC POSSIBILITIES MEANS A
NEW STIMULUS FOR THE ETERNAL NETLAND//

RAY JOHNSON

INTRODUCTION

In the mail-interviews I am doing I mostly ask also a question about Ray to the people who knew him well. It will give a time-frame of how Ray was corresponding with his friends (NYCS-members and the network that evolved from that)

THE UNFINISHED MAIL-INTERVIEW.

This is the TEXT-VERSION of the two answers Ray give as part of my interview- project. I am still collecting all kind of information about Ray Johnson (before and/or after his suicide on 13-1-1995). In the future I hope to publish a booklet about this research)

Started on: 4-11-1994

RUUD : Welcome to this mail-interview. A lot of mail-artists have stopped with sending out their mail into the network, but you seem to keep it up even till today. Is it true that mail-art is more than art, that it is a way of living your life?

(please put your answer on paper any length you choose....)

Reply on: 11-11-1994

(Ray's answer was written on the original invitation to the project. He reacted to one specific word on the invitation, the word 'LENGTH', and he decided which length the answer would be...)

RAY : O.K. I choose 14¼ Inch length. Another answer -
Dear Lamonte Young, Happy death day. Please send second question.

(The next question was in the length Ray wanted, and to make it more difficult for him, I typed the next question on dark-red paper on which I indicated the length he choose with a golden pen. Ray wrote again his answer on this paper and returned it to me.)

RUUD : With this length of 14¼ Inch the depth of my questions will change (for better or worse, I don't know....)
What kind of color would you like my questions to be? Not to dark a color for this second question I hope.

Reply on : 21-11-1994

RAY : THE MNO QP (mirror view) kind. What about Mimsy Star? She got pinched in the astor bar.

RUUD : Was it a mistake that she got pinched. Was she supposed to be punched. Does she like PUNCH at all?

ENDING

(Because of the long silence I wondered if the third question arrived, and I sent the following letter to Ray to ask him what was happened. As I found out a few days later, he had committed suicide).

Letter on : 21-01-1995

(I hadn't heard of his suicide on this date yet!)

Dear Ray Johnson,

After my third question for the MAIL-INTERVIEW in November last year no reaction from you. So either you are busy or you have no time for the interview or you don't like the idea. My attempt was to get some real views about MAIL-ART from you. If it is in 'WORDS' or in the form of 'COLLAGE', I don't mind, but the idea will be that of every interview I start one booklet will be made. Some others who I am interviewing too by mail already expressed their interest in what you would say, and I must admit I still am curious about who you are and what is behind the messages that you send out. But then again, it is healthy to be curious. You will decide how the mail-interview goes, and I will document in this case too.

Take care R.J.

Best wishes from another R.J.,

* On January 24th 1995 I received two mail-art pieces from the USA in which I read that Ray Johnson has died. Tim Mancusi wrote on his envelope: "Ray Johnson jumped off a bridge last friday the 13th & killed himself. He was 67, what a sha me". Michael B. Corbett (Tensetendoned) wrote: "I regret to inform you of the tragic drowning death of Ray Johnson on Jan. 13th 1995".

* On January 24th 1995 I wrote my last letter to Ray, informing him that he will live forever, and I asked him about his new address, how high it ever might be.....

* On January 24th 1995 I received through INTERNET the E-mail magazine from Guy Bleus where it was confirmed too that Ray Johnson died.

ALLISON KNOWLES

Mail-Interview with Allison Knowles (USA)

(question sent on 5-4-2006 by e-mail)

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to the interview. Before I start with an interview I always like to read through the biography of the person I am interviewing. Looking at such a career in Art I always wonder, do you still remember when you decided you wanted to be an artist?

(answer on 5-4-2006 by e-mail)

Alison Knowles : Yes, I remember well when I decided to be an artist. It was when my grandmother addressed me as one. She looked at my pencil drawing of an osprey's nest built in the cross wires of a telephone pole and hung it over the piano. I was six, maybe seven years old.

(question sent on 6-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : You graduated in 1954 from Pratt University. Looking back at this study, what did you learn there, or maybe a better question is: what didn't you learn there?

(answer on 11-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : My graduation from Pratt Institute was in 1956. I had transferred from Middlebury College in Vermont. Because my father was an English professor at Pratt I was able to enroll at no expense in the Art Department

In the night school for three years I was able to study painting with Adolph Gottlieb a recognized abstract impressionist at the time. He said very little to anyone, but spoke directly in front of the work to each person so it was a personal critical dialogue about art with each one of us. He made me feel I could be a great painter. at the time I intensely admired Helen Frankenthal, and had acquaintance with the work of Pollock.

Franz Kline also taught in the class from time to time. During the day I studied graphic design and commercial layout. My best class in the day school was with the painter Richard Lindner. He was a philosopher and dedicated his thoughts to areas outside painting. We had discussions as a group. We also had an hour to draw together. His concentration drawing technique is really a mediation on time . We would draw for five minutes as slowly as possible with pencil on the paper, not taking our eyes off the subject. We began the class each week in this way. I learned very much from him and use this drawing technique with students today. What I learned there was that I am artist. What I should have learned there was that I am not a painter. However, in those days all artists were painterd.

(question sent on 13-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : In a text I read: "Alison Knowles is a conceptual artist doing performance art, installations, sound art and bookmaking". Quite a variety and definitely no mentioning of painting. It seems that after your formal education some informal education took place. Is this somehow connected to the "New York Mycological Society"1 ?

(answer on 13-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Oh yes, the mycological Society was led by John Cage, who along with my father is my teacher. We went on Sunday walks in Upstate New York near where John lived. We went by bus, Dick Higgins my husband and myself to spend time in the woods together, studying mushrooms and having the time while walking to talk to one another. I find walking together to be the best way to exchange ideas. John was always willing to talk to people proposing an idea or observation. We all became acquaintances and then friends. I knew of John through the New School course he gave in the late 50's and was eager to have some of that wisdom and daring rub off on me. As for painting, my attentions dwindled after a show at the Nonegon Gallery on 2nd Ave. in New York. My diverting to the New School class was gentle and then abrupt. I destroyed all my paintings in a bonfire behind my brothers country house. This is slightly distressing to me now, as they would be easily marketable in Italy.

However, this act of destruction on my part led me directly into the Fluxus family of friends and as I say, connections to the New School and George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Al Hansen and Allan Karpow, among others. On our first

Fluxus tour in '62 I began to write performance events. But perhaps that is another question.

Ciao

(question sent on 21-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : When did you meet Dick Higgins for the first time?

(answer on 21-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : I was invited to a party at 84 Christopher Street by a friend Dorothy Podber 2 and our friend Ray Johnson. It was Dick's apartment. I stayed for three days.

(question sent on 24-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : You talked in your previous answer about "the Fluxus family of friends". When was the word "Fluxus" first used in this circle of friends?

(answer on 25-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : These friends who did concerts together performed under the banner Fluxus. Simultaneously I would say we felt like friends rather than say a group of actors doing a play together. The term family may be my own invention but I like it. No way to put a date on this, but early on.

(question sent on 24-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : The term family is also an indication of how these times must have felt. It is interesting that Ray Johnson also

belonged to this circle of friends. Some say he also belongs to the group of Fluxus people but I also read somewhere that Ray never considered himself a "Fluxus artist". How do you see this?

(answer on 27-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Ray Johnson was a mail artist, and founded the Correspondence School. He never traveled with us, or wrote pieces for performance that we could use. I have many memories of his work, always absurd and interactive.

(question sent on 27-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : Could you describe one of your favourite performances of the early days. If possible I will publish the original score with this interview. But I am more curious on how you think back of the piece you choose.

(answer on 28-4-2006 by e-mail, booklets on 6-5-2006 by regular mail)

AK : like "shuffle3" alot. It presents the group as a group entering and leaving the hall in a snake-like conga line. I would like to send you my pamphlet of early pieces called By Alison Knowles. It lists the event scores from this period. Please give me your mailing address.

(On 6-5-2005 I received two booklets by mail. The first booklet: "by Alison Knowles", 1965, A great Bear Pamphlet - New York.

It contains a listing of 17 scores written by her. The second booklet: "MORE by Alison Knowles", 1979 2nd Edition, Printed Editions New York. "These pieces in MORE are the writings, spoken parts, poems and events from my environments of the 1970's. Given the opportunity to reprint MORE, I decided to leave out several of the shorter pieces in the first edition to make room for Three New Bean Events, The Shoemaker's Assistant, and Bean see also Bein. The collage preface that follows was made by Philip Corner." As a reaction I sent her some samples of previous mail-interviews that I published.)

(question sent on 6-5-2006 by e-mail, booklets on 7-5-2006 by regular mail)

RJ : Thanks for sending me the two booklets. I also looked on the Internet to find details about the performance "Shuffle". Online one only finds fragments of what it must have been. On you own site (url: www.aknowles.com) also a lot can be found on what you did. A booklet fits more to the times these first scores were performed. I probably will use the booklets as illustrations for the finished interview. As I read in your biography you came in contact with computers in an early stage. I quote:

"In 1967, Knowles produced The House of Dust poem, possibly the first computerized poem, which she produced with composer James Tenney following his informal seminar on computers in the arts held at her home with husband Dick Higgins in 1967".

What does a computer mean to you nowadays?

(answer on 8-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Nowadays I use the computer for daily email contact and to sometimes send a picture for card or publication. I don't use it every day, and I am not a computer adept but it is a great tool we all agree. I do not use it to do artwork however. All my work seems to be tactile, touchable and musical sometimes (the beans falling down inside the paper) or performances where real people look at real people.

(question sent on 10-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : When you talk about performances where real people look at real people I am trying to visualize that. The bean performance is probably a superb example of where this happens. It also involves the musical element. I found a photo of one of those performances (I thought it was on the site located at: <http://www.4t.fluxus.net/> Where the 40 year celebration of Fluxus in France was documented. What I wonder is: Why beans?

(with this e-mail I sent the photo that is also besides this question)

(answer on 11-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : beans are not usually used to make art or sound works so my position in using them for both is unique. It opens up the world of art to ordinary things such as edibles.

I discover rare information about beans in libraries all over the world. The first of my publications was the Bean Rolls published by Fluxus in the early sixties. The next was A Bean Concordance published by Station Hill Press in the 70's. I am always collecting new information and I find everyone has something to say on the subject. Also, I think it is healthy for artists to have outside areas of research besides their own world. I am leaving for Venice now so please hold the questions for a few weeks.

(question sent on 22-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : How was Venice?

(answer on 24-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Today Venice is rainy. I am here with a performance and exhibition through July 1st.

(question sent on 24-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : Could you tell me more about what kind of performance you did and what you exhibited in Venice? It is raining here too.....

(since I didn't get a reply in September, I resent the question again with attached the concept for the Mail-Interview booklet. After months of no reply the broken interview was first published on Fluxlist Europe that is moderated by Litsa Spathi. See:

<http://fluxlisteuropa.blogspot.com>)

ENDNOTES

1 New York Mycological Society. Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of fungi, of which the vegetative growth is typically underground or in wood. Fungi serve a major recycling role in nature, breaking down dead trees and other organic material. Fungi also help nourish trees and other plants, thus playing a key role in the health of our forests. And yes, some fungi can also play a destructive role in nature by attacking living things such as trees. Most mushrooms are not poisonous and quite a few are very good edibles. But some are very toxic and a few are deadly! Unfortunately there are no simple foolproof rules to distinguish the edible from the poisonous. One must learn individual mushroom species if one plans on eating mushrooms. The most important point is that no one should ever eat unknown mushrooms! When in doubt, throw it out! Joining a mushroom club is the safe and fun way to learn about mushrooms and fungi. The New York Mycological Society is a non-profit organization of 150 members who share an interest in mycology (the study of mushrooms and fungi) as well as in mycophagy (the eating of mushrooms). The present NYMS was reincarnated some 40 years ago by the composer John Cage and a small group of other mushroom lovers and students. Mycology is mushrooming! (text from the NYMS – Site)

2 Dorothy Podber ran the Nonegan Gallery in the mid-1960s and she was associated with Black Mountain friends, the Mole People, the art world and the underworld. She is famous for shooting a stack of Marilyn paintings in late 1964, which she considered a performance.

3 #1 Shuffle (1961)

The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo: but quietly. Premiered August 1963 at National Association of Chemists and Performers in New York at the Advertiser's club.

Beginning in 1962 Alison Knowles wrote an important series of event scores (instructions for events carried out) which anticipate do it. These event scores were published in *A Great Bear Pamphlet* (1965) which included scores for *Shuffle #7*, 1967 ("The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, all through the audience. They perform as a group or solo...but quietly") and *Proposition*, 1962 ("Make a salad").

NORMAN SOLOMON (Mr. Postcard)

Mail-Interview with Norman Solomon (USA)

(With the sending of the retyped answers I sometimes made typing-errors to which Norman Solomon reacted. Some of the reactions are worth mentioning, and I have done so with the footnotes)

Started on 21-3-1997

Ruud: Welcome to this mail-interview. First let me ask you the traditional question. When did you get involved in the mail-art network?

Reply on 8-4-1997

(Together with the invitation I sent a copy of the text of Ray Johnson's unfinished interview. Norman sent me a photo of Ray Johnson at New York Harbor in 1958, and his answer is a reaction to Ray's answers as well).

NS : Reply on : 21-11-94 RAY : THE MNO QP (mirror view) kind. What about Mimsy Star. She got

pinched in the Astor bar. RUUD: Was it a mistake that she got pinched.....

"Have you heard that Mimmsie Starr

Just got pinched in the Astor Bar?"

is by Cole Porter. The song "Well, Did You Evah?" was written, words and music, by CP in 1940 for a musical comedy, "DuBarry Was a Lady." It was featured in a movie, "High Society" in 1956. WDYE was sung in "High Society" by Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. The drinking in the study scene. The Astor Bar referred to was the one at the old Hotel Astor, owned by Vincent Astor, on Broadway near Times Square in New York City. This was not the newer hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria on Park Avenue. Vincent Astor, the well-known society playboy was a descendent of John Jacob Astor who founded the family's fortunes hundreds of years ago trading trinkets to the Indians of Western Canada for furs, mainly beavers, whose pelts the British had learned to diminish for the making of felt for fine hats. The Astor family, later, continued their fortune-making with holdings in New York real estate and banks.

In the 1950's, Ray Johnson and Norman Solomon went to a lot of movies together. They went to the Roxie, the Paramount, the Beekman, the 8th Street

Playhouse and other famous theatres of that time. They probably saw "High Society" at the Loew's State Theatre on Broadway.

Pinched had a double meaning here. It meant having a bit of one's flesh held between a thumb and a forefinger which then got squeezed together hard. This might elicit a screech or a scream or an "ouch!" Or, maybe, not. Pinched also meant getting nabbed by the police, run in, arrested. If Mimmsie Starr got pinched in the Astor Bar by the police, for instance, she might have got her ass, or a small part of it squeezed (as above), or, she might have been for drunken, boisterous, outrageous behavior, or, more likely, for attempting to solicit an act of prostitution. It was, in any event, all in fun.

I have always depended on strange kindnesses for the nothings that I receive in the mails and I hope I can depend upon you to continue the same.

Ruud: When was the last time you talked to Ray? What did you discuss then?

next answer on 25-4-1997

(With his answer he sent a copy of a photo of Ray Johnson and Willem de Kooning, back in 1959, New York. Also the letter held some small papers with

comments like: "Don't make any corrections, Ruud. The mistakes are all part of the story....." and a photo1 from Ruth Kligman)

NS : Interview. II (pas de tout)

The last time I talked with Ray was the last time I saw Paris.

The Last Time I Saw Paris was the title of a book by Elliot Paul, an American newspaper person. It was published here during the early stages of WW-II ; there was a nostalgia kick. I read it then. EP wrote extensively about an upstairs Left Bank restaurant on the Rue de la Chat Qui Peche, which I visited in 1944. I had biftek² and salad and wine and got so pissed that I threw it all up in the street. There still were cobble-stoned pavings.

I sent all of my Army money home to my poor mother. But, I could sell my PX ration of cigarettes

¹ The photo looked a lot like a film-still, but actually it was a Xerox blow-up of a contact print. The kind of New York photography 1952-64 done by Norman Solomon.

² Biftek, also known as Biftek-frites.

for enough francs to enable me to eat well and to drink terribly. I was living, apparently, beyond my experience.

The Last Time I Saw Paris was used, then, as a title and theme for a song sung mostly by Hildegarde³. She and it got famous and well-played together.

The Last Time I Saw Paris⁴ was made a movie in 1954. It starred Van Heflin and Elizabeth Taylor.

³ Hildegarde, a popular American singer born at Detroit Michigan in 1906, was originally known as Loretta Sell. There are those who have thought that she was Doris Neff. They were wrong. (NS)

⁴ The Last Time I Saw Paris, was a song by Jerome Kern (1885-1945) and Oscar Hammerstein-II (1895-1960). That H. was a trush, a songbird, a canary... you know: all the boys in the band did not at all in any way inhibit the exhibition of her natural and God-given talents before the heads and nethers of all the armed and armored forces, nor those of states or kingdoms, the crowned and the uncrowned. She sang her song and

They and it were dreadful. Walter Pidgeon, Eva Gabor (whose mother just died) and Donna Reed were featured in it. MGM had apparently decided that since *An American in Paris* had been such a great success and big hit in 1951, that they could redo the experience. They were wrong and they could not have been wronger. *TLTISP* was three minutes longer in running time than *AAIP* had been, but that didn't help. Dreadful.

What Ray and I had discussed mostly at that time was that people, especially MGM movie stars, were looking puffy. Puffy, apparently, was coming in.

We also discussed the careers of Franz Kline and Bill de Kooning and the interstitial relationship of those artists with Ruth Kligman, and of hers with Jackson Pollock. I had photographed Ruth after she emerged from the hospital, from the crash results of 1956, and we recalled, looking at my pictures, how the stitches in her face had improved upon nature. She had begun to look like Susan Hayward. Beautiful.

led The Hit parade and even Your
Show of Shows in rousing choruses.
She was a spirit of her times (NS).

We also discussed Ralph Di Padova. Now Ralph wanted to be a gangster, you know. He had also applied for employment to the CIA and to the FBI. They, neither of them, took him on, but -- it was just as well. Gangsterdom was his first love, as a vocation. Ralph had an old-time Packard sedan that he sometimes took us around in. It was rather grand and very gangster. Ralph also had a sweet girl-friend of whom he took great and good care. She'd needed surgical operations for her bone problems and he took care of all that.

I notice, I should mention, some misprints or typical graphic errors in the Interview, I.

"fortune-making wit holdings" of course should have been "with" holdings though it obviously took much wit to make fortunes. All great fortunes are founded on great crimes, of course, but -- what aren't?

"went to a lot of moview" got printed for "went to a lot of moviex."⁵

See how simple it is?

⁵ This error got corrected again by me.

Ray Johnson and Norman Solomon read a lot. They talked often and together about what they were reading and what it meant to them. Books of the 1950's that got into their fields of vision were Zen intros by R.H. Blyth and Daisetz T. Suzuki. They read all of the early issues of the Evergreen Review, and discussed the cover designs of Grove Press books by Roy Kuhlman. They read Alice B. Toklas and they read Gertude Stein and they read Isak Dinesen. They read Edmund Wilson's Memoirs of Hecate County. They read everything and anything by Yukio Mishima. They read the poetry of William Carlos Williams and even more by Wallace Stevens. They read the Story of O.

Djuna Barnes impressed them and something by somebody called Susie von Freulinghausen.

They went to a lot of movies.

In addition to Hollywood fare, they'd watch anything by Fellini, Bergman, Kurosawa. They went to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and saw a history of World film. This was two shows a week for three years. They liked particularly the early German Expressionism, especially the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, which got incorporated into their work and attitudes. They saw everything French from 1925-1931. But, the

very best of all, was everything ever made by Carl Dreyer and by Robert Bresson. They both considered *The Diary of a Country Priest* to have been one of the best movies ever made.

Their favourite painter was Mondrian. De Kooning called Mondrian "merciless" in his approach. Norman and Ray studied Mondrian's *Piers and Water*, noting the movements of the little fishes.

They hung out with composers, musicians and dancers. John Cage. Merce Cunningham. James Waring. Katie Litz. Lucia Dlugaszewski. Morty Feldman. Earle Brown. Norman knew a lot of jazz musicians: Charlie Parker; Sonny Rollins; Bud Powell. Ray did not know any. Norman had connections in the world of Negro music. Ray had not, and did not care to. Often their worlds overlapped, but not always.

There was congruence and confluence and con alma. But not always. Although often enough. Ray sought out Butterfly McQueen and seemed sometimes to be talking endlessly about her. Norman could not have cared less.

Did Ray play games or music? Well, maybe not conventionally so. Norman played chess, drums and poker. For a while, there was a kitten at his studio. Once, after Ray had visited, the kitten was nowhere to be found. Finally, by crying, it revealed its whereabouts. It was inside a drum. Ray played jokes.

Ray enjoyed talking about the power plays in prison movies. Such as who'd be carrying the shit-bucket to be emptied in the morning, before, during, and after a relationship. Ray was also fascinated and open to discussing at any time, whipping, whipping and ritual torture.

Ray Johnson's favourite dish (they had experimented at many of New York's international restaurants) was fetishini.

But, besides food, movies, clothing, make-up, morés, books, painters, paintings and the price of soap, they'd talk about other people.

They visited a lot of studios together. They saw the work of established artists, the know and the unknown, the promising students whom word had got around about and the up and the coming. And

Ray would talk long afterward about studio details, not the art but the furniture, the light, the placements.

Ruud: In the current mail art network, the name Ray Johnson is often mentioned. Since I started in the mail art network in 1980, the history of mail art sometimes is difficult to find. I used the modern research tools from now (like the Internet) to find out who Norman Solomon is. There seem to be a lot of Norman Solomons out there. So of course my next question is, which one are you?

(together with the next question I sent some papers which consist of things written by Norman Solomon. I find them on the internet, but as it turns out this is another Norman Solomon.....I also sent him a photo of the opening-screen of my computer, which shows the image of the unfinished last painting by Mondrian)

next answer on 12-05-1997

NS : The one who is not out there.

"Sorry, I couldn't really understand your question. I don't remember knowing anyone named Ray Johnson"⁶

Using the modern research tools, like the Internet, is like asking if Mae Marsh liked grapefruit.

I thought that you'd be asking questions of greater interest, like what was the price of soap?

Or did that grapefruit, from Mae Marsh, elicit les frissons?

Do you think that it was Djuna Barnes that went to a lot of movies?

What did she see there?

She lived near the Loew's Sheridan Theatre and the Eight Street Playhouse.

She lived across the street from New York City's Women's Prison, at the site of the old Jefferson Square Courthouse.

⁶ This was the answer I got from another Norman Solomon. I e-mailed him a question and got this reply. Obviously another person.....

When, how and where did you first meet Ray Johnson, and what was he wearing?

Media Beat. Not courtesy of Turn Left. Check, but Turn Left Check.

The Victory Boogie-Woogie⁷ does not appear on your screen. Nor does it appear on anyone's. What you think that you may be seeing is actually a copy of a copy. The Broadway Boogie-Woogie doesn't either. You are looking at pictures of pictures of pictures.

And no one "out there" has ever seen PM's "Times Square".

05.02.97 , III. Pas des trois. It's all in the spirit of inquiry.

(to) RJ-II8 : I noticed that you rearranged the numerals in my letter-headings to you. Is this some personal affliction?

⁷ This part of the answer refers to the photo I sent of my computer-screen with the unfinished work by Mondrian.

⁸ Originally I marked the things I wrote with 'RJ:'. But Norman Solomon suggested that I should change it in

"It's all in the spirit of inquiry." What does that exactly mean?

One reads or hears, for instance, so many questions regarding the nature of identity. "Who am I?" "Who is he?" and so forth. Are these in the quest for satisfaction of a scientific curiosity? Or are they a part of the ego-bound eternity of pre-recognition?

Mark Rothko (1905-70) was named by his parents, Marcus Rothkovich.

In the summer of 1954, one day, Mark Rothko and I were standing in the sunshine and on the grass, waiting for lunch. We were discussing the higher things. A pretty girl came up to us and spoke to him. "Mr. Rothko. I've heard so much about you! What are your paintings like?"

"My dear," he answered, "I have devoted my life to beautiful women and I paint the same."

The Groucho Marx of modern art.

'RJ2:' or 'RJ-II:'. I don't see myself as the successor of RJ, so I changed the 'RJ:' parts into 'Ruud:'

Ray Johnson was always asking me, "Who are you, Norman Solomon?"

"Will the real mark Rothko please stand up?"

It is certainly something, the quest for identities.

When I am asked "Who are you?"

I can only think "Yes. Who am I?"

Ray Johnson and Norman Solomon were in complete and total agreement: that all so-called "identities" were synthetic.

"It's Only Make-Believe."

"It's

There was a teacher in India, Ramana Maharshi, who postulated that, among other things, he was not his hair, was not his fingernails, and so on down the list of physical attributes. He then presented another self-portrait, the list of the mental qualities, each time denying that the one in particular focus was him. "So. What am I?", he questioned. "I am not this; I am not that. What then?"

Ruud, I ask you, are we our names?

Here I should follow with the tale of the king and the corpse.

But, it's getting late. There is a book, however. The King and the Corpse. It was written by Heinrich Zimmer. You could look it up.

Ruud: Yes, I can look it up and so can the readers of the published interview. I still wonder who you are, Norman, not that I am expecting a simple answer, but I tried to look in the books I have here where to place you. In the recently published Dossiers-issue from Black Mountain College⁹ I read a small note you wrote on your memories on Ray Johnson, so now I know that you went to the Black Mountain College as well. Looking back at that time now, what did you learn there?

next answer on 9-6-1997

NS : How to write, probably. We used to write notes in lipstick on paper napkins to be passed to each other

⁹ Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center. Dossier 1997 #4 is a special about Ray Johnson. The publication contains a long article by William S. Wilson and lots of illustrations of Ray's work. Also there were small articles from artists that knew Ray quite well. ISBN 0.9649020-4-4

under the dining tables. It was a great thrill to feel someone else's fingers putting their notes between one's legs there. When we got up from dining, we'd watch each other's legs there looking for lipstick's traces.

Ruud: Is writing still exciting for you?

next answer received on 24-6-1997

NS : Yes, writing is exciting for me. To write is to breathe. I don't know what you mean by "still." Writing is a practice. Writing gets better for me every day, each day that I write. Writing never stops. If writing stops, I stop.

The great Truman Capote said that "There's writing and there's typewriting." Do you know what he means?

A flip slogan of recent years, often seen here as graffiti or on bumper stickers and such, said "Question Authority!" This was a statement which I questioned in itself, because: What was meant by "authority"? Hierarchisch Übermenschen, in this case, as 'others'. I thought that it was a slogan by, of and for, victims. Like: "Step on me, please."

I think that the ultimate authority in anyone's life is one's self. Therefore, starting at the top, in life and

in art there is only one question and that is to question one's self.

Now, this is where the craft of writing transcends the mechanics of typing: It's all in the wrist. It's all in the wrist of the mind. It's the ability to question one's self while in the midst of the process of writing. It is, this writing thing, the ability to edit. And, edit one must. One must edit one's own production, in form and in content, and not be dependent on the doing of it for one by other persons.

As the delegation of authority increases, authority of self diminishes and self-authority becomes increasingly diluted. At the finality of examination, there is the question: "Who's writing this stuff, anyway?"

In my case, my write is me. Any questions? Why do you ask?

Ruud: I ask questions because I want to learn. I have been doing so ever since I learned to talk. I have learned already that people can be divided into two groups (.....only two groups...? just one of the ways one can make groups, if one wants to generalize....). Group one: the ones that want to keep learning, and --

group two -- the ones that are just repeating themselves AFTER a learning-process.

But you tricked me, you started to ask me questions. Why do you ask questions?

(On 3-7-1997 I received a postcard from Norman Solomon with on it the rubberstamp "Who Killed Ray Johnson?". Norman wrote that he had a small back injury and that his answer to my last question is delayed. He also wrote; Don't give up! I'm not finished yet. Maybe next week. Until then.)

next answer on 9-7-1997

NS : You ask why I question and I ask what I question and what is a question.

Is a question an event?

Is a question a tool? An instrument? A piano?

Is a question a possibility? A chance? A change? A portent? A portion?

A start? An ending? A way out? A way in? A persuasion? An evasion? A vision?

Is a question any point on the brink of the abyss?

Is a question a thought? An investment? An answer
to itself?

A portal to the universe? A stone in the road? A
cry? A laugh?

A hole in space? A seek before a find?

Is a question an act of love? A green dance of fire?

A burn? A yearn? A turn?

Is a question one side of a triangle?

A ray of darkness in the light?

When is a question not a question?

What is a question not? And when?

Ruud: A question is something that comes up in me, a
need to learn, a way to explore why I do what I do
(or do not). I guess I am curious by nature, and I
like to know more of the world I live in.

You Live in Berkeley now. You Lived a long time in
New York. Why did you move?

reply on 28-7-1997

*(With Normon Solomon's answer he sent a copy of a
photo of Ray Johnson in NY - NY - 1960)*

- NS :
1. New York was a movie I had seen and now it was time to go to the lobby in order to have some delicious treats.
 2. New York was a school, The New York School, from which I had graduated and now it was time to go out into the world in order to seek my fortune.
 3. In October 1966 I went to Sweden to paint stage sets for Ingmar Bergman's opera company. That did not happen. I then went to London and made some paintings which were used as a set decoration for John Cage's talk at the St. James Theatre. I sat with Yoko Ono. Her young daughter, Kyoko, was making a lot of noise. Yoko was on the macrobiotic diet and we talked about the price of brown rice. Later, she invited me to the opening of her small show at the Indica gallery¹⁰ where I read the

¹⁰ The Indica gallery was where she met John Lennon, same time as above. When she was in New York, previous to that, she lived on Christopher Street, a few doors away from Dick Higgins. Ray Johnson and I would visit her there, sometimes. It was on the rooftop of

November ARTFORUM magazine. ARTFORUM had started in San Francisco and then relocated to Los Angeles. The ARTFORUM San Francisco premises were advertised for rent. I bought airplane tickets for California and flew there to have some delicious treats and to seek my fortune.

Ruud: So, when you got to San Francisco, did you find your fortune there?

(After my vacation in Germany I found several pieces of mail from Norman Solomon. One of them was a box, a metal tea-box with on it the word FORTUNE. The tea-box contained also a large collection of 'fortune-cookies')

(In another envelope he writes: "Ruud, let's make the game more interesting. Let's raise it to a higher

that building where she held her first "happenings.". Yoko Ono was undoubtedly on Ray Johnson's mailing list. There is some dispute among the living FLUXUS types as to how much Yoko was actually involved with it at that time. She certainly is included in the nowadays history. But, you know what history is, don't you? (by N.S.)

level. And he sends me "a long list of the kind of questions I should be asking him". This was his reaction to my remark that I might ask in the future some more questions about Ray. John Cage, and other things..... The list is interesting, 4 pages long, and I am tempted to ask him all of these questions.....)

(On September 19th I received another sending of Norman , a copy of 700 small texts which look like fortune-tellings which are printed in some kind of book).

next answer on 19-9-1997

NS : Yes, I found my fortunes, many. Here are 700 of them. Please enjoy the pleasure of the printing. The 700 aphorisms: they are all answers. One thing that you could do with them would be to publish them as a project.

(1) Provide the most appropriate questions to these answers.

(2) Provide the least appropriate question to these answers.

They are sure to make someone happy.

They might even contribute towards enlightenment.

Ruud: What makes you happy?

next answer on 14-10-1997

(Before Norman sent me his written answer, he sent me a postcard with a collage on it about cartoon-figures asking questions, and his text-collage: "is it possible that 3-4 pages of questions is for laughs and is not questions but a statement?")

NS : The sunrises in the mornings and sunny days and cloudy days and rainy days. The moon at night and starry skies and stormy nights at sea.

A good movie, if there is such a thing.

Reading anything about Ray Johnson.

Walking through the downtown area without getting hit by traffic.

My prick. Shiny, gleaming, glistening and inside her hot and juicy cunt, the pulsations of which enable me to experience a sense of participation with the undulation of the Universe and a sharing of the great Cosmic Joke.

Knowing that the means is an end in itself.

Knowing that the world is perfect and that there's a place for everything in it and that everything's in its right place.

Cosmic jokes.

Ruud: Do you laugh a lot lately?

Next answer on 27-10-1997

NS: Yes. yes, I do. In fact, I am laughing now.

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LAUGH

Ruud: Do you also laugh when you get your mail in the morning? Is this a special moment of the day for you?

next answer on 14-11-1997

- NS :
1. Why, should I?
 2. Why should I?
 3. Why, should it be?
 4. Why should it be?

(Below the answer there were three columns of texts in Japanese language, three identical texts. Also Norman Solomon sent with this answer the footnote on the Indica gallery, which I typed into the interview. It also included a newspaper article about "Yoko Ono's Art defaced after -touch- quote" which hit the news last week. He also sent me Yoko Ono's address. It triggered me to invite her for an interview as well).

[illustration with the three identical texts]

Ruud: Well, I just wondered if you think of yourself as a mail artist? You played along in Ray Johnson's games through the mail..... So, I just wondered. Do you?

next answer on 26-11-1997

NS : Well, you know. Life is but a dream, yes?

Ruud: What did you dream today?

next answer on 8-1-1998 (and a copy on 31-1-1998)

(A prompt reply is its own reward. Normal mailed the copy because I was so late to answer the original. He thought it might have got lost in the mails - NS)

NS : It was a dream within a dream.

I met Ray Johnson in the F.W. Woolworth's variety store at 37th Street and 5th Avenue in New York City where I had gone to purchase some factory-made ephemera. This was during the noon hour of March 17th , 1951. Ray had been on his way to the matinee premiere of Puccini's Turandot at the

Metropolitan Opera House and had stopped at the Woolworth's for lunch.

The following year, 1952, Ray and I were both living on Monroe Street in New York's lower East Side, although in separate buildings.

Each of us soon moved to other places, Ray to Dover Street and myself to Greene Street, but by the late 1950's we were both at 176 Suffolk Street, occupying different apartments.

Our similarity of interests had brought us close together quite quickly and we studied and practiced what we loved. What we particularly loved, what we particularly threw ourselves into in the attempt to be proximate to and confluent with, were Chinese poetry, such as Li Po's, the Japanese poetry, Haiku, and the Chinese and Japanese philosophies and religions: Confucianism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism.

We read everything that we could find of these, attended classes of D.T. Suzuki's at Columbia University, and learned, also, what to eat and how to order in New York's Chinese and Japanese restaurants.

We were eating Asia up!

We read that Chuang Tzu dreamed that he was a butterfly and that when he woke up he was Chuang Tzu.

"Last night I dreamed that I was a butterfly," he said. "Was I then Chuang Tzu dreaming that he was a butterfly or am I today a butterfly dreaming that he is Chuang Tzu?"

Ruud: When you would go to a restaurant , Chinese or Japanese , what would you order now?

next answer on 2-3-1998.

NS : In Chinese restaurants: dim sum with Jasmine tea.

In Japanese restaurants: sushi, any style; miso soup; hot or cold sake, for a light and simple meal; green tea.

A complex Japanese meal would be known as *kaiseki ryōri*. Not every place can make this special presentation and they differ from this place to that. I won't attempt to describe *kaiseki*, but it is something which would be a shame to have missed experimenting in one's lifetime, given the opportunity.

(the next question was sent 7 weeks later, on April 22nd 1998, because I took a small break in all the interviews I am doing).

Ruud: My best experience with Japanese food was in Copenhagen (Denmark) , where I and a friend (Made Balbat , a mail artist from Estonia) ate a 7 course meal in a Japanese restaurant where we were the only not-Japanese visitors and we could sit on the only table they had, provided we took off our shoes and followed the rules in this restaurant. I always enjoy to experience other cultures and ways of living, but only by taking part of it , not feeling too much as a tourist. What the name was of the dish we ate in that restaurant I don't know. We ordered a traditional dish that the Japanese waitress recommended. This was about 4 years ago.

Next question for you, Norman , What did you do on the day you received this mail from me?

On Friday 15th September I received an e-mail in which I was informed that on August 1st, --exactly five years after his doctors had given him six months to live – 2000 he died quietly at peace. Mrs. Postcards informed me that Mr. Postcard (Norman Solomon) informed her that he would like the interview – unfinished – to be published posthumously – as it stood.

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