UMBRELLA

1978 1998



5/5

POSTES MRAUR

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THE ANTHOLOGY

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Edited by Judith A. Hoffberg

Umbrella Editions
1999

To Joan Hugo

who gave *Umbrella* its name and told me
to "just do it!" so many years ago.

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FROM THE EDITOR

It is hard to believe that more than twenty years have passed since the first issue of *Umbrella* was issued as a fledgling newsletter catering to the ever-changing vicissitudes of contemporary visual art, especially that of artist books, mail art, video art, rubber-stamps, audio art, and everything else that was considered not very important in the realm of the nearly new "market" which came with the eighties and the boom in contemporary and modern art.

Buoyed by my knowledge of the IBM composer, which had a very short memory but at least a system close to the electric typewriter, this editor and publisher ventured forth in 1978 with the mission of "offering a means of intercommunication for art historians, artists, librarians and anyone else who is interested in what is happening in this most explosive period of art development," feeling that there were enough artists, curators, and librarians around the world who would read the news and information relative to a part of art history that usually never gets discussed in the mainstream art publications. And the "look" of the newsletter would be professional and direct. The mailing lists had already been honed fine, and I sent out the first issue to everyone I knew, hoping that there would be a paying audience out there to be apprised of the news and views four or five times a year. And the rest is history, yours and mine. I have devoted these past twenty-plus years to *Umbrella* and the dissemination of information, mostly about artist books and mail art, an often neglected chapter of art history. To be sure, some years have been lean and mean, but with your support, we have weathered the storms and continued to publish irregularly, but constantly.

My travels have also allowed me to share with you the information and the people I have gathered into my extended family, an amazing array of individuals, characters, personages, and everyone else, leaving me to keep my eyes and ears open to news and gossip and views and vistas. You have been there through thick and thin, and some of the new readers will also share in the excitement and diversity of bookmakers, mail artists, and visual artists who have made a difference in my life. It is a personal history that has been shared with the public to illuminate, educate, and expand the vistas

of those not so involved with French philosophers, but in fact those who have already deconstructed art history and understood through these more than two decades that there is more than painting, sculpture, and graphics.

Many of these articles respond to a conference, symposium, a book art exhibition, all referring to date-sensitive events. But in a strange way, it also marks a trace of a historic moment, one in which there was a vitality and an energy, in which book publishers, resource collectors, multi-faceted artists, and curators did whatever seemed right at the moment. Many of our colleagues are gone, the publishers have quit their business, and the alternative spaces and foundations which nourished their work are no longer extant. So read these chapters as if you were reading "you are there" historic moments, traces of memory, and markers in the history of the alternative in the contemporary art world of the past twenty years. Please note that the interviewer at all times is the editor and publisher of *Umbrella*.

I salute my readers, my supporters, and the artists who made this all possible. Thank you for giving me the energy and the insight into what is really significant in my life, books and umbrellas. Not bad for a slice of life!

—Judith A. Hoffberg

INTRODUCTION

Judy Hoffberg terrified me the first time we met. It was 1968 or 1969. She was the art librarian at the University of California at San Diego. I was an artist and publisher. Judy grilled me with brutal finesse. She was an intellectual Sam Spade. I was just a mug in the lineup, and I was terrified.

Back then, I published the broadsides, brochures, and artifacts of Fluxus West. These were unusual objects. I brought a group of recent objects to offer the university one day. Judy had arrived since my last visit a year or so earlier. For art publishers, Judy Hoffberg was the university. I went to see her.

She wanted to know what these things were. Why did they look the way they looked? Why did I publish them? Why were the prices set at specific levels? Judy peppered me with questions. I was startled, and I didn't answer her questions very well.

From the first, it was obvious that Judy knew her business. She was a connoisseur of books and printed artifacts. Working with George Maciunas and Dick Higgins had taught me a great deal about books and publishing. Nevertheless, I didn't know a fraction of what Judy knew. I was outgunned.

Want to know how the story begins? Step back in time with me, back to the counterculture years of the 1960s.

In 1967 or 1968, the University of California began collecting the newspapers and publications of the Underground Press Syndicate. Fluxus was one of the founders of the Underground Press Syndicate, and Fluxus West was part of UPS.

In January of 1967, representing Fluxus West, I took part in the Stinson Beach meetings that established the UPS. The syndicate had begun to take shape a few months earlier. It was the brainchild of

Walter Bowart, publisher of the *East Village Other*. *EVO* had begun as an irritated offshoot of a then well-established *Village Voice*. According to some, the *Voice* had also become an establishmentarian paper. It was intellectual and articulate, but there was little room for the quirky voices and scruffy ideas of the Beat culture that had once been welcome in its pages.

By the mid-1960s, many of the Beats had moved to the East Village. There, they created an environment for the counterculture of the 1960s. Some of the early glimmerings of the nascent hippie culture took root in the East Village. Much as it had been in the first years of the twentieth century, it was once again a melting pot. This time, however, it was not the tired, poor, downtrodden masses newly immigrated to America who flocked to the area. Now-famous but still-struggling Beat poets and painters such as Allen Ginsberg and Tuli Kupferberg populated the district. Around the parks and tenements one could find clusters of young adults recently graduated from college looking for a taste of life along with college students just dropped out. There were draft dodgers and opponents of the growing war in Viet Nam. There were Zen Buddhists and some of the first Hare Krishnas who had landed on American shores. There were cafes and coffee shops, health-food restaurants and old-fashioned delicatessens. There was also an army of drug dealers back when dealing drugs was a benign protest against squared-off, straight America.

The neighborhood was no longer a melting pot of those seeking entry to American life and a path into the middle class. It was a magnet and a way station for those seeking a way out. It was one of the first great centers of a counterculture that would finally be characterized by the utopian mix of psychedelics and rock music, poetry and politics, multiple religions and individual anarchism.

I met Walter from time to time at his East Village storefront office. He knew about Fluxus, and as an artist and graphic designer himself, he was always interested in the Fluxboxes and projects I brought by. He never quite figured out how to publish them or use them in *EVO*, but we had a nice dialogue. When he began talking about a syndicate of weird underground publishers, I was eager to take part. And so, when the Stinson Beach meeting took place, I was there.

The first headquarters of Fluxus West was in San Diego, and so it was that the University of California at San Diego began purchasing our publications. The order from the University of California led to a series of orders for other products. I sold a large trove of material to them. This included Fluxboxes and underground comics, our archives of UPS papers, documents, manuscripts, and God knows what else. Every now and then I'd shove a stack of papers and artifacts into a box, load them into my VW bus, and drive a few miles down the road to the new university campus. So it went. One year I arrived to find Judy Hoffberg there. As mentioned, our meeting was a terrifying experience. I fled in fear and panic. We didn't meet again for over half a decade. What a decade it was!

But this isn't the place to tell the story of those years. Instead, let's flash forward to 1974 and the Decadance. The Decadance was a marvelous evening of performance, party, and banqueting that

Michael Morris and Mr. Peanut of Vancouver's Image Bank mounted in Los Angeles to celebrate the date that Robert Filliou identified as Art's Birthday.

I attended with my friend and then-fiancée, the late Diane Berendt. Who should be sitting behind us but Judy Hoffberg?

"Aren't you Ken Friedman?" she asked. I was—I still am—and we started a conversation that still goes on today. This time, our conversation was a dream. We were vibrating on the same frequency. We've been talking and sharing thoughts ever since.

Judy Hoffberg's *Umbrella* is an intersection of thought and practice, collaboration and communication between and among nearly everyone who has worked in or intersected with artist books, art publishing, intermedia, Happenings, mail art, and Fluxus. The *Umbrella* chronology reveals two decades of exhibitions, books, festivals, meetings, and projects. These projects connect and weave together every continent and every country where experimental artists work.

Judy started *Umbrella* after an already distinguished career. She was first an art librarian for the Library of Congress and the University of California. She was then founding chair and the first executive director of ARLIS/NA—the Art Libraries Society of North America. She was a co-founder of the Associated Art Publishers and an influential figure in the development of artist publishing. And she is still a critic, curator, and historian of the first order. *Umbrella* has become a nexus and a network of unparalleled dimensions.

The *Umbrella* network began in the days of paper technology. It has grown to encompass the years of the Internet. Through it all, Judy Hoffberg has been a presence, a force, and a voice worth talking with.

Judy Hoffberg's contributions and achievements are history now. She is one of the last great members of that great generation of artists and curators who were present at the beginning of intermedia and concept art, Fluxus and Happenings. She was the first of the curator-scholar documentalists, professional information experts who made it their mission to document, archive, exhibit, and nurture these forms of art. In a time of nationalist and narrow views on art, she was resolutely international in perspective. At a time when curators were detached, remote, and all too often ignorant, she was engaged, active, and always well informed.

Above all else, Judy has been a pioneer in building and shaping networks of information and connecting networks of people. Today's information technology and the knowledge economy to which it gives rise acknowledge the importance of networks. The art world has long spoken about networks. Artists, critics, and curators praise them and enjoy the benefits they make possible. These networks have been built on the planning, strategies, and efforts of a relatively few people. Judy Hoffberg is one of those few.

Millions enjoyed the fruits of the industrial revolution. A relatively limited number of road builders, canal engineers and machine engineers, made the Industrial Revolution possible. A number of visionary scientists and technologists developed the personal computer, Internet, and the World Wide Web. Judy Hoffberg has played a comparable role in the networks of art publishing, art theory, and experimental art. The ideas that she pioneered have grown and taken root. They encompass a large world due to her visionary persistence and the vision of those few who were there at the beginning, when the central issues of today's art were marginal experiments that had not yet grown to become historical art forms.

This has been a tough year for intermedia pioneers. Dick Higgins and Dieter Roth are gone now, along with Wolf Vostell. The grand archivists and documentalists are gone, too, some long ago, like the inimitable Jean Brown, others recently, like the great Hans Sohm. It is a joy to note that Judy is still with us.

I no longer find Judy Hoffberg terrifying. I still find her awesome. She is a force of nature, a force of intellect, and a forceful artistic presence.

Judy Hoffberg is a living national treasure. As *Umbrella* enters its third decade, it is a joy to celebrate the first twenty years of what I hope will be many to come.

—Ken Friedman

UMBRELLA AT TWENTY

I have a clear memory of the moment that *Umbrella* became a reality for me. Although I might have heard of the gestation of the magazine in letters or phone calls, I specifically remember Judy Hoffberg standing up at the back of a large auditorium in New York, in characteristic style, announcing the birth of a new and exciting publication named *Umbrella* in January 1978. And I remember a blur of pale blue, which was either fliers for the magazine or the very first issue of *Umbrella*. As always, it is hard to believe that twenty years have gone by, but of course they have, and *Umbrella* is still with us.

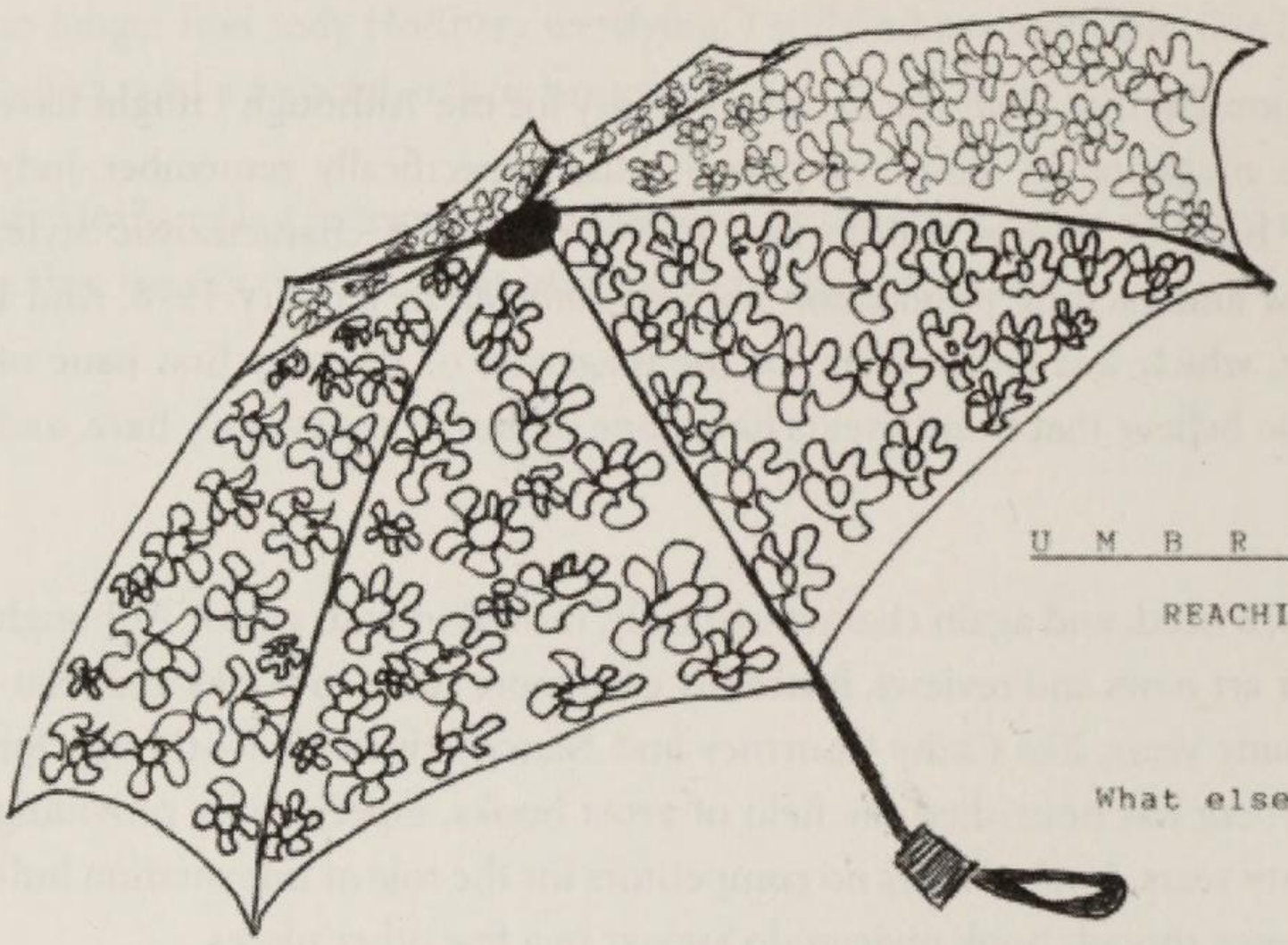
Judy Hoffberg saw a possibility, a need, and again characteristically, moved in with gusto. Although *Umbrella* began as a vehicle for art news and reviews, it steadily gave more space to books and related material by artists. Over many years, like Cathy Courtney and Nancy Princenthal—though for longer than either—Judy Hoffberg has nourished the field of artist books, especially by providing the sun of publicity. After twenty years, *Umbrella* has no competitors for the role of information bulletin to this particular world, even though book reviews do appear in a few other places.

The numbers of publications, exhibitions and catalogs that *Umbrella* has recorded is extraordinary. If one wanted a sense of how busy the field is, and was—other than periodic trips to Printed Matter Bookstore in New York—a back run of *Umbrella* would provide it. *Umbrella* has, indeed, done enough to ensure that there will be a long future for its past, but the future of its future will also be awaited by many with great interest.

—Clive Phillpot

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TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY



TO:

JUDITH HOFFBERG

ON THE

OCCASION

OF

U M B R E L L A ' S

REACHING THIS WONDERFUL MILESTONE!

What else but an umbrella from

ITA ABER

each section has twenty flowers for this special place in history.

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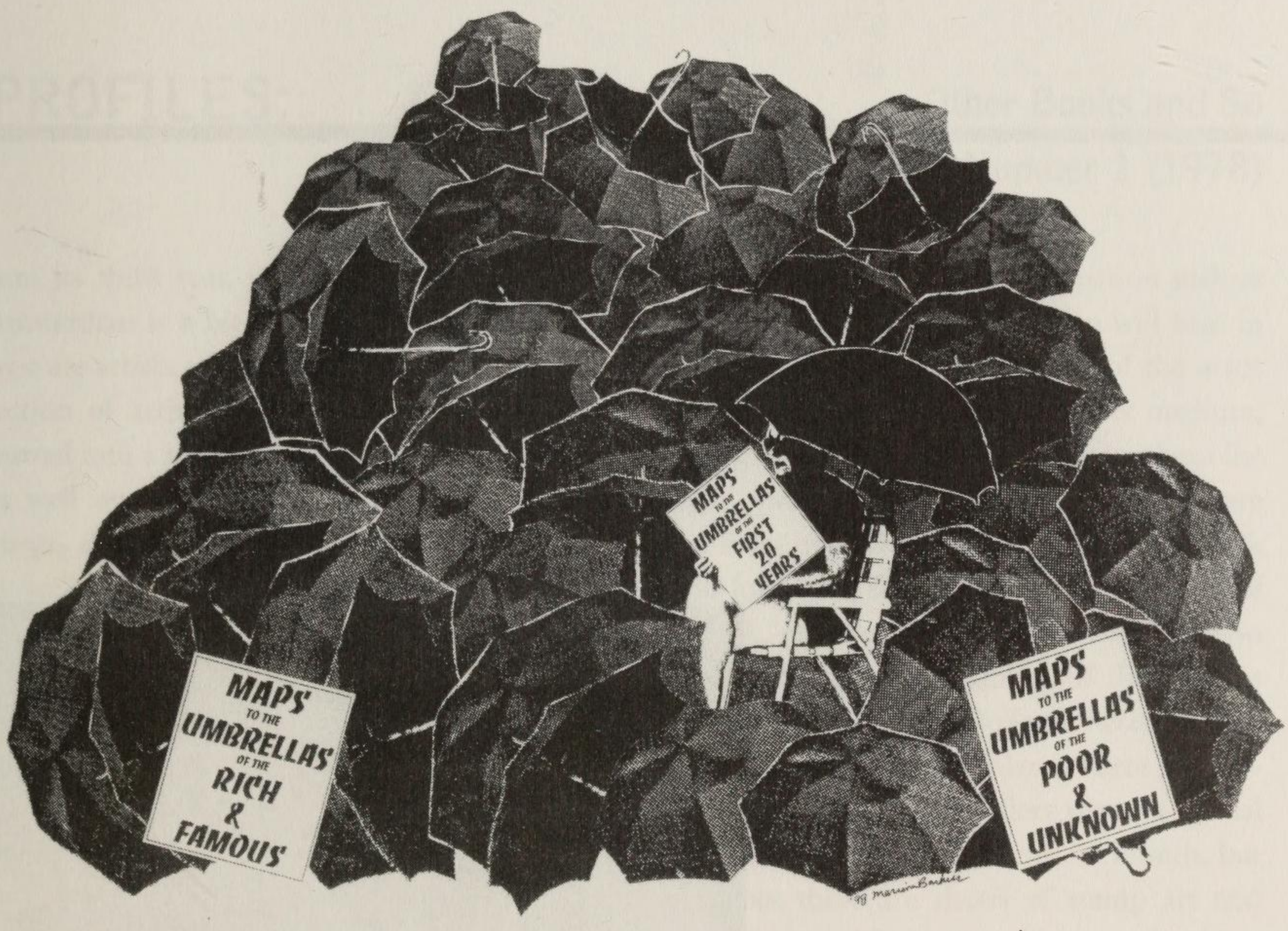
Walter Askin

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Anna Banana



Mariona Barkus


OTHER
BOOKS
AND

PROFILES:

Other Books and So

Volume 1, Number 1 (1978)

Into its third year, this space in the center of Amsterdam is a bit of a salon for bookmakers who are artists, a bit of a gallery, and a great collection of artists' books for sale. Now having moved into a new and larger space which houses well over a thousand items—art and language, artists' books, artists' objects, postcards, as well as a gallery space where the opening exhibit was one of ephemeral announcements of Allan Kaprow's Happenings as well as the glorious graphic books of Tom Ockerse of the Rhode Island School of Design—Other Books and So is guided by Ulises Carrión and Aart van Barneveld. From noon on, you can stop for a cup of tea and delight in the wonders of artists from all parts of the globe.

And what a glorious shop it is, housing linguistic multiples, artists' books, and all those things inbetween that most booksellers wouldn't touch with a long pole. That second generation of bookmakers has the opportunity to come aboveground for distribution. The myriad of books and objects are a delight to the eye as well as to the mind, some lovingly hand-produced, and more and more of them multiples in open editions, using all means of production such as Xerox, color Xerox, and offset. You will hear in *Umbrella* about this phenomenon of the artist who now uses the book as his or her medium, creating an explosion of these books without the proper means of distribution, except in rare cases like Other Books and So. Ulises can talk books for hours, sharing with you the events of the week, month, or year. Other Books and So has started organizing exhibits of these books for various museums in Holland. Recently, they even organized a show in Poland. There is a continuous exhibition in the gallery space of special artists' books, usually two artists a month, but sometimes there are shows of stamp art and postcard art with requests for entries from around the world.

Ulises and Aart have been very instrumental in setting up the Stempelplaats Gallery in Amsterdam—the Rubber Stamp Museum—under the auspices of Posthuma, a rubber-stamp factory of long standing in Holland. They are also launching a magazine of mail art and ephemera as announced under "New Periodicals" in this issue of *Umbrella*.

Ulises is a poet and artist from Mexico who liked Amsterdam and stayed. Aart is a native Dutchman. Together they make Other Books and So an important call in Amsterdam.

Ulises Carrión: An End and a Beginning

Volume 2, Number 5 (1979)

Editor's Note: Ulises Carrión first came to Amsterdam as a student on holiday from Paris. Born in a very small town in southern Mexico in 1941, he had studied literature in Mexico City and then went to Paris on a grant for three years.

I was studying at the Sorbonne in Paris and I came here (to Amsterdam) just to visit the city. I was visiting Europe. And I just fell in love with it. I came several times from Paris to Amsterdam. Then, at a certain moment I really decided, I'm going to live in Amsterdam; that's the place where I wanted to be. I didn't know anybody or anything. It was just a feeling. That was in 1970. I was here four years illegally and it was not a trouble for me. After four years Aart (van Barneveld) and I had the vague idea . . . there must be a place for books . . . there must be a place for exchanging artists' books. It was a totally absurd dream because I was illegal here and we had no money at all. I mean, it was really impossible. But we were going on the bicycle, through the streets, looking for a space. Every time we saw an empty space, we went to ask the cost. But this was totally absurd.

And then things speeded up. I got a permit. We found a place. And everything happened in some months. When we started Other Books, we had zero. We had nothing. But I never thought of it in terms of "Is it really advisable to do such a thing . . . do we have a chance of succeeding?" We just had to do it. There was a space and certain ideas that were very clear. And you had to do it. We decided that. We made a budget that we needed 300 gulden a month. Totally utopic. But anyway, that's what we decided. We needed 300 gulden a month, so let's be sure for six months. That's 1,800 gulden. Let's get this money from friends. We asked everybody who was around us if they could give us 100 gulden. In exchange for that we would give them a diploma, and we would give them discounts. Okay. We were astonished that it was so easy to get those eighteen people. Very quickly. Everyone said, "Yes, fantastic. Here's 100 gulden." We were surprised. Even our closest friends who had no money were ready to give 100 gulden. And when we got to 1,800, we said, "Stop. We don't want any more because we have enough for six months (laugh)." Anyway, when we opened Other Books there was no money anymore because it had all been spent on paper, wood, lamps, everything, of course. But it turned out to be so good. Other Books could pay for itself from the first day. We work by post, that's the thing. Of course, the very first days you still don't work by post, but any city of reasonable size has enough local public to support something for the first weeks. And then, of course, a lot of things have to happen.

When I started Other Books I wasn't writing anymore. I insisted on calling myself a writer. I

was a writer before, in the sense that I was writing, I was using language consciously. I wanted to say things through language. But years before Other Books, I stopped doing this. I kept using language, but not trying to say something, not using it in a way a writer uses language. I was using language as graphics, or as volume, or as color, in the sense that a plastic artist would use language. I never write anymore. In fact, now I don't care anymore. I think that there are two things: I don't call myself a writer because I use language, as I say, from a nonlinguistic point of view, but I consider myself a writer in the sense that I think that my work is important for language. I'm absolutely convinced that my work, and that of many other people, is important for language, as it exists or as it is used, or as it is used in literature. (Now that Other Books and So is changing) I will at least have time again to do my own work. That is important. But the fact is that my own work has taken such strange forms. One of these strange forms is not working with your person as an individual but through an institution. Perhaps the word "institution" is the wrong word. Through a sort of impersonal thing that has a name . . . it could be a shop, a gallery, you can call it an archive, institute, company, group, whatever. But that means you have a sort of screen, you see. Not to cover you. Not to protect you. But to take a distance from the artist as a person. You are someone who is not acting with your own name but with, for instance, Other Books and So. So one thing I have put into practice with Other Books, without knowing it in the beginning, but it became . . . through Other Books and So and other experiences, through talking with people and other friends who are involved in the same problems, it became evident to me that it was very important to make your work of art through a social entity . . . that could be a shop or a gallery or whatever. I would say it this way: you cease being a person, I mean an individual, who is doing a certain work only in his name. You become an institution, a social body that works among other social bodies. You're not an artist, but you are a gallery. Or you are as a gallery. Or you are a bookshop. I think that's very interesting. Or a magazine, for instance. Publishing a magazine can be a work of art. But the magazine, the name of the magazine, the physical existence of the magazine is the shield. Of course, you are behind [it]. But people don't get [the idea]: "This is the work of such and such." No. "This is the magazine such and such." You see, there is a sort of distance, and you are there, behind.

"What I'm going to do now that Other Books and So ceases existing as a shop and as a gallery is the archive. I will start something called Other Books and So Archive. I will keep it (the name) because a very important part of my own work will be part of the archive. And I intend working intensively with it. I will keep it at home. It may also happen that I will have a studio and use it as the public address for the archive. I will keep examples (from Other Books) of everything that I may keep, because the things are not mine. The archive already exists in the sense that I have collected in the last years, through Other Books and So, quite a large amount of publications. So that's already a beginning. And then with the closing of Other Books there is a lot of material that will become part of the archive. And then, of course, the normal exchange of materials and works with friends . . . I think the finances for Other Books came from the selling, and for the archive it will come from my personal work, because the archive is my own personal studio . . . it doesn't mean an extra expense for me.

For Other Books and So we have applied, since

the beginning by the way, for subsidy. This was because they themselves, from the government, advised us to do it. Because they came and said—and this is the nature of the Dutch mentality—everyone thought that Aart and I were crazy for not asking for a subsidy first . . . they said, "But this is good, this is fantastic, you should ask for it." Okay. Well, let's ask for it. But there was the problem that we were a bookshop, and in theory you don't have the right to ask it if you are selling things. You can prove that the sales are so low that it is absolutely impossible to talk of any profit. But anyway, no, this is not possible if you are selling.

Okay. The people that give the subsidies advised us of some ways of turning the law, twisting the law so that we could justify it. We could get subsidies for projects instead of Other Books and So. Well, with all their advice and all their beautiful words and with all the good praise we had, it was never possible. Then we made a second application, and that also didn't work. In the meantime the years went by. And then at a certain moment Aart and I decided to stop with Other Books. We thought it was advisable to go and see these (government) people and tell them, "Thank you very much for your help, but forget about our applications that are still in study because we are going to close. It's finished." And then, to our surprise, we heard, "Oh no. But now it will be very easy to get a subsidy because now you will be an archive. There's no problem anymore with your selling or not selling." And we said, "Oh yes, it is easy?" and they answered, "Oh, very easy. And this time you will not only get funding for projects as you had applied for. No, you will get a salary, insurance, everything. On a permanent basis." Well, fantastic. That would be fantastic. But the months went by and we never got anything.

We decided at the beginning of 1978 that we would close in September. They asked us to wait until December. We told them we'd wait until the first of December and not one day more. The last thing we heard was that we had to wait until April. But we won't wait anymore. It may happen in April that we get this bloody subsidy, when we don't exist anymore. But then we'll be an archive. But who knows, they can invent, whatever. Also, perhaps there will be a little obstacle in that at this point, in April, we won't have any space anymore. Now we have a space. All our applications were based on that space. Of course, it will be easy to get another space if we get this bloody thing. Perhaps we get it. Perhaps it's possible. But really, now I don't care. Very deep in my heart I don't care. I can see the future . . . a rosy future, without this subsidy. It's again like in the beginning of Other Books, you know. It was no question. The question of "will it work?" This question was not applicable. We just had to do it because at that moment it was the right thing to do. So if it is with subsidy or without subsidy, in our house or in a building, it's not important. It will work, I am sure that it will work.

Other Books and So closed on 1 December 1978, and with it the long-term project of Ulises Carrión takes a new dimension. Some of us were fortunate enough to have experienced it. Now an American, Karen Kvernes, has taken it over, changed its name to Art Something, and reopened on 1 February 1979. As she lives in Amsterdam and works in her shop, she writes about her commitment to the cause of artists' books and her growing love for her work. Other Books and So is not a business, it is a process. (Interview with Ulises Carrión excerpted from A.I.R. Holland *by Jan van Raay. Reprinted with kind permission from* Artzien, *no. 3 [January 1979], edited and published by Michael Gibbs in Amsterdam.)*

Born in Zurich, she spent her first childhood years with her parents in Russia and Greece. Later, in Winterthur, she went to high school, and in Zurich she went to the trade school for graphics at the Arts and Crafts School. After studying in Stockholm, Basel, and Paris together with her late husband, Gottfried Honegger, she opened a studio for applied graphics in Zurich. Themes of trademarks, colophons, signs are characteristic of her work. Her first children's book appeared in 1949. For several years, she edited and created a typographic and illustrative monthly children's newspaper and gained through her experiences how the reading of symbol is attained.

From 1958 to 1960, she lived in New York with her family and discovered, while illustrating scientific books and by observations in Chinatown, that a symbol, once introduced, will keep its meaning and is capable of transmitting a message. The contact with American painters gave her the inspiration to break away from her inherited ways of representation and to have in her drawings literary allusions.

Alfred Barr, founder and director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, obtained for the museum her first small softcover book, *William Tell*, and published it as a "special edition." Later, several other books followed that were published by MOMA, including *Little Red Riding Hood.*

Since 1960, Warja Lavater has lived partly in her studio in Zurich and partly in her studio in Paris. Through the publishing house of Basilius Presse Basel, a small book appeared between 1962 and 1968 entitled *Folded Stories*, lithographs on stone illustrated and printed by Emil Mathieu Zurich and partly hand-colored in laminated layers .

Adrien Maeght, editor in Paris and her publisher since 1963, created in collaboration with her a quantity of paperbacks in his print shop, such as *Arte* and *Imageries*, which has been adopted in the teachers' curriculum, and *Animations*, created in the Studio des Enfants at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Other publishers, such as Adolf Hurlimann in Zurich and Lafrance Locarno, have published her books.

The experimental work by Lavater is always original. She paints thoughts which she wants to transmit as stories in a volume, or as in most cases, on long prefolded strips of paper. She expresses herself in picture-writing.

Here is a self-interview, which appeared in a hand out at her exhibition at the Maeght-Zurich Galerie 3 in February/March 1979:

Book.

It stands in the book. Could it also lay?

It stands in the book with letters.

Does it have to be letters?

The letter does not stand alone, many letters build a horizontal line.
Does the line have to stay horizontal?

The letter is a character.
Could the character in its parts be divided?

Letters from our alphabet are known to all.
Aren't monuments also known?

Monuments do not belong in a writing.
Who acknowledges the type of a writing?

Letters in a book are read from left to right, from top to bottom.
Ought not one to read also from the bottom to the top, or roundabout?

It is in the sentence type-face.
Must it be so orderly?

Letters do not belong in a volume.
Why indeed not? Surely their movement is much freer than in a paperback?

After all, nobody pays attention to this depth, one merely jumps over them as one reads.
Well, it is there, doesn't it bring opposition?
But also light and shadow?

Also the turning of the pages are done automatically.
Couldn't one change it?

On the contrary, the flipping through the pages is a psychic pleasure.
Yes, but with psychic touch, the book comes in contact with the hand, it forces the sight, it tears the fantasy.

A book does not live through manipulations, it lives through spiritual contents.
A book is an object, couldn't it add to it from the spiritual?

This object has its traditions.
Every tradition has once been discovered, shouldn't we?

This object has a function, the line length, for instance, counts for the weariness of the eye.
Why not cheer the eyes up instead of making them tired?

Futuristic type-faces are unreadable, they belong in the department of art.
Aren't symbols understandable when the meaning is already known?

To remember symbols with meanings is too tiresome. But, where symbols move about like actors on a stage, doesn't something new appear: the performance strength?

The performance strength does not appear through diagrams but rather through representation.
Isn't the representation in the street also a writing?

The performance strength implied by traffic signs is self-comprehensible.
Such signs are a picture, isn't that readable or not?

A picture is interpretative; letters on the contrary mean security.
Is there security? Or does security exist?

A letter that will be divided in its whole form, a letter symbol that does not belong to the alphabet, a line that does not run horizontal, a double side to the side . . . a choreography to the ornament . . . structures to the picture writing . . . symbols that become a type-face . . . a story without an overall publication . . . a volume that changes into a volume . . . is that still a book?

There is time . . . it has a beginning and it has an end . . . in the volume.

It is a Book.

translated by Deborah Burchett

Paul Zelevansky: A Bookmaker with a Case

Volume 4, Number 5 (1981)

Paul Zelevansky, a New York artist and bookmaker, discovered in his early art career the importance of words. As an object maker or a painter, words always were incorporated in the imagery, including a thirty-foot sentence or a three-dimensional poem. Having reached a point where he had to find another way of expressing himself, he turned to the book.

His first book was *Sweep*. The idea was to take a word with twenty-four definitions of it, and using the definitions the same way he used the lines of a poem, he associated the words magically and literally and did the book. After taking the book around to various publishers, the Something Else Press in 1974 finally published six pages of it in their anthology, and Zelevansky was absolutely thrilled.

That is when Zelevansky met Richard Kostelanetz, who inspired him to do books. Books solved a great many problems for Zelevansky, condensing imagery and words. In addition, it solved the portability problem. Although you learn to warehouse many books in your studio, in most senses, except for the distribution, books circulate; you put them in an envelope, with pleasure, put stamps on that envelope and the returns are continuous through the mail.

In Europe with his wife, Lynn, in 1972, he took the time to catch up on his reading, starting with *Ulysses*, and then *Magic Mountain*, then *Moby Dick*, and finally the Bible. When he got to Jerusalem, while reading the Bible he got the idea for his next book, to be called *Jericho*, the exodus of one person.

The theme seemed to be much more than he could handle at that time. He began with birth, where the first twelve pages contained the *Book of Thats*. The title came from the conversation of his first child, indicating that and that and that, which seemed to be a way of taking in information for children. What seemed to be a chapter, however, became a whole book. He had pages published in a few magazines and anthologies. That led to establishing a corporation, Zartscorp, primarily a financial arrangement to publish books and umbrella other activities and expenses. Then they published *The Book of Takes*, in an edition of 1,000. Thinking it would sell quickly because it was made so beautifully and yet was reasonable in price, Zelevansky learned the hard way that the road was difficult. He had worked hand in hand with the printer and the binder. Certainly, some copies sold at exhibits, and its most recent reincarnation was a review in *American Book Review*. "It was a long process, although it is not a very long book. It is very condensed. The way I worked on it in terms of generating the narrative was to use three columns and three concurrent stories, and I worked in an inventory book, which had six to eight columns. I seem to enjoy a 'found form' with which to work. *Sweep* was the found form of the dictionary; *The Book of Takes* was the inventory. Part of it is the physical layout, and part of it is the 'feel of it.' I wanted it to be a recording, and it felt right to work in that situation. There would be three concurrent stories and three columns; one column had to do with stairs as with both the image and the idea, the other column had to do with chairs, and the central column had to do with Jericho, which was still on my mind as a place."

Central to all Zelevansky's books is a certain relationship to the page, since the page for him is beyond conventional reference as a holder for type. Instead, it has edges (a frame), and because we can make marks on it if we allow ourselves to do so with visual and verbal books, it becomes a geographical space.

CASE FOR THE BURIAL OF ANCESTORS

Having found another section of the Old Testament to work from, the construction of the tabernacle with details, Zelevansky wanted to see if he could write a description of a tabernacle that might in some way be connected to this Jericho book but still maintain the language of construction. He then went to the dictionary, the Random House edition, and started making columns of materials, structures, famous buildings, starting with A and B and working through the alphabet. Going at this via a roundabout route is the way the artist works. When he got to the letter H, there were a great many pertinent words, and he decided to stop at that letter, describing the tabernacle as the H Tabernacle.

Starting to write about this H Tabernacle, Zelevansky described its shape, with four pillars, the harpoon, the hook, the hoe, and the four altars, going to this place and uncovering the lost civilization of Hegemon and thereby uncovering the lost H Tabernacle.

The book is largely a chronicle, the history of a fictional people called the Hegemonians (much like the Hebrews in the Old Testament). The first part of the story is a log (which shows up in the third book) from the standpoint of the explorer. They find this tabernacle, and the next step for Zelevansky was to actually build it. So he went back and stopped working on pages of this book and began building in earnest—four pillars and different hand-held objects. Somewhere it dawned on him that the Hegemonians were interested in portability, so he built this into the story. They were also interested in taking their religion on the road.

At that time, the artist was with a cooperative gallery, West Broadway Gallery, and he had an exhibit called *The History of the H Tabernacle in Exile*. The exhibit was made up of these different artifacts, and there was a mockup of the tabernacle. There was an audiotape ongoing with him reading sections of the history behind the altar. During the course of the show, he gave "tours" or orientational talks, a kind of performance, explaining sources and facts of the tabernacle and artifacts in the language of a "guest speaker," priest, or patriarch.

The Case for the Burial is a real suitcase, which was one of the objects in the original show, with four tombstones in it. When he started doing the performances, he developed a piece called *The Waters of Separation*, which later became that section in the book, referring to water and cleansing. Each time he added statements in the book, he would take something out or put something in the suitcase but never make any reference to the case, until the very end, when he would come back to the podium and pronounce "the Case for the Burial of Ancestors" while holding up the case. He therefore actually walked around with a physical pun, and he was delighted.

In writing the whole story, after the exhibition and after some performances, there is discussion of fathers, sons, generations, and the necessity to make separations—not to get disentangled from the past or from the present, but pass through the wall, go over the wall. The book was a basic

outgrowth of trying to bridge the problems of God the Father (in an orthodox Jewish home) and the actual father, the sense of responsibility to religion and the sense of responsibility to his own father, including the confusion it elicited. In writing the story, Zelevansky built a whole culture, with references to the Old Testament and other places, making fun of the material that seemed ridiculous, analyzing the material that seemed more interesting, and applauding the material that seemed really essential.

In beginning the story, Zelevansky started with *Genesis* (it was supposed to have been five books), using water as a wall of separation, metaphor and pun. In order to write the Creation, he had to have a God, and that role was played by the Puppeteer. A piece in that original Tabernacle show was called the *Puppeteer's Portable Traveling Pack*.

The second book, which contains alot of the performance material, is called *Genealogy*, and the author feels this book is the funniest one. It starts with the people in the sections and ends with four priests going out on the road for forty days in the desert, going through their rites of purification and ending up back where they started, mostly because the people are not that bright. They get the people together, make a giant spear, and throw it up; it lands on the top of the hill. On that spot they make a benchmark, and that is where the tabernacle is to rise. The language is also semi-biblical in tone.

The third book is called *Tabernacle*. In the whole process, Zelevansky was trying to find out who the Puppeteer was. "I was part of the Puppeteer, who was this god, but I never truly found out who he was, except to find out my own sense of myself as watching and participating. The answer to that is in the book I'm working on now, *Shadow Architecture at the Crossroads*."

The book has been a great project, and this is only the first volume of three. It has been beautifully printed at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. It is a book that will be viewed as a personal statement, but also a spiritual and psychological journey, not only for the artist, but also for the reader.

Phil Dadson, New Zealand Musician

Volume 5, Number 4 (1982)

HOW DID FROM SCRATCH EVOLVE?

From Scratch evolved as a result of my own growth. Up to this point I've written all the music for the group, devised it, I should say, since it is intermedia-oriented, as a result of my own growth and my own experiences that developed out of the relationship with the Foundation Group for the Scratch Orchestra in London, which was co-founded by Cornelius Cardew. I went to England: having done the Fine Arts course in Auckland, half-way through I cut out and went to England. I had always had an interest to combine visuals and music, and I needed the experimental music area to get into and find fresh experiences.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN ENGLAND?

Well, I had a job with Editions Alecto. And then I looked for a course and went to Morley College, a workingman's college with a wide

range of music programs, and one course was called Experimental Music, run by someone I didn't know, called Cornelius Cardew. It was a Friday night session which ran for four hours, from 6 to 10 P.M., and over the year the group experimented with pretty amazing material. Looking back at it now, I was fortunate to get involved with this amazing group of people, a mixture of artists, musicians, composers, and enthusiasts. Out of that group developed the London Scratch Orchestra, and I was pretty much part of that and part of the first preparations for performing Cardew's composition *Great Learning*. We made a tour of North England. The Constitution of the Scratch Orchestra was published in the *London Times*. Things were bubbling when I left, and the agreement was that I would form a group of some sort in New Zealand and collaboration would ensue.

HOW DID YOU CONTINUE IN THIS VEIN?

Well, I made a strong move away from objects, for I was not very involved in object-making. In England I had done a number of pieces while I was there. In my career, I happen to have picked up vibrations that are in the air, that are happening simultaneously in other places. So I became interested in nonobjective, post-object ideas and conceptual things to express process, transience, and ephemeral ideas. The Global Communications concept started in England too, when I heard someone in Canada was doing something called a Global X piece, a Global Line—I think it was Bill Vazan.

WELL, LET'S GET BACK TO FROM SCRATCH. WHEN DID IT GET STARTED?

In 1974, we had our first tour, which followed the performance called the Sonic Circus in Wellington. This was the first large-scale national music event coordinated by a young composer, Jack Bodey, who had just come back from Europe and had studied with Stockhausen. He had a lot of energy and took an exciting approach to getting things done. He also had the encouragement of a local woman, and that was our first opportunity for airing our music.

DOES FROM SCRATCH ONLY MAKE MUSIC?

From the early days, a feature of our group has been a combination of music and performance—performance in the sense of physical action as a component of the work we do. We also have equalitarian ideals. There is never a leader as such in the actual playing of the music. Each player in turn is a leader and a follower—a sort of triggering system, implying collective ideals. There's always been a strong visual element, the way the group installs itself in a space. From the very earliest days, we always arranged ourselves in a sort of a circular fashion at the same level as the audience, at floor level, the four players sitting with their clutter, their instruments ranging from glass, wood, stone, metal, and skin. We had some wonderful stuff we had collected, and that clutter would be arranged right around each of us, where we had our array of instruments with the high at your right, medium in front of you, and low on your left.

There was a kind of a conceptual aspect to it, right from the earliest times. I was heavily involved in the concept of opposites, and some of our earliest pieces like *Waxing and Waning Influences,* ranged widely, such as the idea of having a median drumming pattern out of which you could evolve, unpack your pattern, a white set, and all names of rhythm involved in this white set. Or you could devolve it into silence, into its black end. You could do the same

with language, one player could get up and evolve an idea, and the thing was that each player had to influence the others toward their particular category. Just last year, I did a sequence of pieces called *Triads*; the latest is *Triad IV,* which is a piece for three bass drums based on the idea of active, passive, reconciling roles, the Hegelian idea of thesis, synthesis, antithesis, the dialectic. That was a very language-oriented concept which influenced the rhythms.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE MAIL ART NETWORK?

Prior to the formation of the smaller group which in a way forced me to nuclearize my interests slightly, I had always been involved in a lot of intermedia things. I made my first film while I was in school; it was an earthworks film and involved Ken Friedman, which was my entrance into the mail art network, and I was quite involved with that for some time. Through that I met some great people, including Terry Reid, who is now living in Australia and with whom I met up recently when we were on tour in Sydney. Ken Friedman participated in earthworks, and he introduced me into his mail art activities and to his global mail art directory. We have had a connection since then. About that time I also became interested in video and was doing some multicolor video things.

WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU RETURNED TO AUCKLAND?

I came back and got a group going in Auckland. We used some of the material that some of the Foundation Group had gotten together, like *Nature Study Notes*, we did improvisation, and then I started writing material, because for me it was always a beginning from scratch. I had had light classical training as a kid and had gotten into jazz when I got older, but I was more interested in that area of rhythm—the barrelhouse style, boogie, strong rhythms.

HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR COLLABORATION AGREEMENT?

Well, we had the first simultaneous long-distance linkup where a performance was organized between our group in Auckland and the London Scratch Group on tour in North Wales. The performance was synchronized, where the two orchestras played and listened alternately. A flag here was up when they played and down when we played. This was the first Communications piece. Some of my first compositions were like that—alternative pieces of play and rest and action. Our group grew to fifty strong on and off, mainly non-musicians and artists, and the pieces were mixed media. It was quite an exciting time!

DID YOU CONTINUE TO MAKE MUSIC?

After that I got involved in filmmaking as a sound man and sound editor, and while I was on vacation I put together a new proposal for the group, which was called VOM (Verbal Occasion Music), based on an idea to form an evolving set of rhythm pieces which forced the group into a small nucleus, and about four of us got together and started rehearsing these new ideas. We used random pitch percussion, various simple ideas, setting them into sequences using orders. There were high, middle, and low ranges, wide-ranging categories. There was hard, brittle, resonant, and soft, with a wide range of categories which took in all the possible randomly pitched works.

WHEN DID YOUR SOLSTICE EVENTS BEGIN?

In the midst of the early Scratch events, I started annual solstice events in Mt. Eden Crater, which is the only piece I continue to do which is total-

ly random-oriented, where I set up a base each year for things to hang on, and people come and bring what they will to it, and that's a dawn-to-dusk drumming event, basically drumming. It happens each year, but there is always something else, something different, extending the idea of the earth breathing or trying to tap into something, into the intelligence of the earth, and relating to it in some way. It is always quite a remarkable event, for it is wonderful to be in that space as far as we know an extinct volcano, a beautiful parabolic dish, a still audio space. In that crater you cannot hear the city, but you hear a very, very fine hum. The predominant atmosphere is that space. It is a very unique sound space, because from one side to the other you have a wonderful dislocation of sound. It is nice to try to coordinate pulses, physical movement, and follow the shadow line from one side to the other through the course of the day, communicating with bass drums.

One time I set up twelve stations around the interior of the crater with a bull roar at each one, or a version of a bull roar devised for our group, sort of a drone instrument. We have had radio operators up there and VHF people broadcasting their reception into the crater. It's been an interesting sequence of annual events ranging from quite busy to very quiet. [like last year] when we experimented with three bass drums and megaphones and language to influence drum patterns, it was a very nice way to spend a day. This last event, the solstice event, started at 5 A.M. I had just returned from Australia the day before, and I had done most of the arranging before I left. I had a friend here who got the event organized by doing most of the linking with the people in the post office. He had set up the power and amp lines at 4 that morning. For the first time ever, it rained solidly up there. It was clear from 5 to 7:30, and then the rain started through until midday. It came down in torrents, but we were sheltered in the tent, still trying to keep our drums dry in the safety of the tent. Suddenly, at noon the sun came out, and we had this incredible afternoon, me half-asleep on my feet but drumming, drying out, until dusk, about 5. I went home and crashed, for it was certainly an endurance test.

TELL A LITTLE ABOUT WHERE YOUR IDEAS ARE COMING FROM.

The ideas I developed occurred without any knowledge of similar trends. I'd done some drumming in London as part of the Scratch Orchestra. In Cardew's *Great Learning* there is some wonderful simultaneous drumming and singing, sort of random drumming. Everyone has his own list of patterns, and you just work through them at your own speed and at your own tempo. I'd always had a strong feeling for rhythm and for natural cycles, of connecting in with this idea that the earth has an intelligence, that all cycles have a purpose, and that everything works in circles. Part of my proposition, then, to the Scratch Orchestra (the testing ground—an idea that Cardew formulated that any member should make propositions to the Scratch Orchestra) was my idea of rhythm manuals as a new basis to the group found upon rhythm. I was really investigating natural phenomena and translating it into structures and compositions for pieces, so it was directly related to the ebb-and-flow patterns.

After our group had done its tour, Lucy Lippard came here from New York. She was actually staying with one of the members of our group, Bruce Barber, who at that stage was a junior lecturer at the art school here. She heard firsthand what we were doing, and I think she heard a tape

done for our hour radio program, and she said we should contact Steve Reich, whom I had never heard of at that time [1975]. Perhaps it had slipped by me, or had not reached the magazines yet. In this area, it's easy to be oblivious to trends in the northern hemisphere. I'd kept a lively connection with Michael Parsons in London, a member of the Scratch Orchestra, and about the time I was getting this together, they were actually putting together an anthology in London. He and I exchanged works, so there was connection there. It was exciting to learn the level of development that Reich, Glass, and others had reached.

At first, I felt a little daunted: Was it worth proceeding? It had grown from such a different angle and had evolved within such a different context, a Pacific context. You see, the Pacific is an area that has always informed me; the cultures of the Pacific have a wonderful affect upon the city environment here in Auckland, and in a way I'd connected in our material with the communal aspect of some of the island communities. They come out of rhythm-based cultures, it seems to me. Surely, Western influence is pervasive right through there, but there's still a solid root of rhythm in their culture, and by rhythm, I mean integration. The art in this culture, in Maori and in most Pacific cultures, is an integrative force in the community. It embodies the history of the people. It's intermedia in the sense that it's visual, it's oral, it's movement, it's their history, it's their social life. That's an aspect I've always wanted to integrate into our material.

That projection of an integrated social life has informed a lot of people in the New Music area too. It's something in the air, and you sort of tap into it if you're receptive to it at that time. Steve Reich sent me some records, a nice letter, and his book. I tried not to listen too much to them at first because I had just devised a structure for a piece that was so similar to some of the ideas in *Drumming* (not as sophisticated or refined, but similar), called *Drum Wheel*, and it also related to another piece I had done, the *Odd-In* piece that had previously been called *Passage*. And if anyone hears it, they say, well, it's Steve Reich's influence, but it really grew out of something very different, completely oblivious to that. And if we come to the States, we want to be seen for what we are and have the things judged on their own merits. It acted positively as a reinforcement. All of our instruments are acoustic, and half of them are homemade, which is one aspect that differs greatly from what's happening in the New Music area.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR IDEAS ABOUT YOUR SOUNDS?

I devise the structures, and we refine them as a group. I work best this way in terms of a composition process. I like to hear what's going on and make changes here and there, if necessary. I like to hear it out. It helps the ideas flow. I'm really interested in new sounds. I like the idea of extending the tonal vocabulary that's available. The percussion way is accessible, so one of the main instruments in our group are PVC pipe racks. Now we have three stations of pipe racks with fourteen tubes apiece—these are PVC drainpipes. They are cut to length. They have tuning sleeves, so the whole thing is finely tuned, and they match up with a pitched set of chimes and pitched rototums at each station. The pipes have been influenced by a Pacific source.

In 1976, Geoff Chapple and I went to the South Pacific Arts Festival. There were some wonderful groups there at only the second festival of its

kind—of Pacific nations performing their music and dance—and there were some groups that had never been out of their island context before. The group from the Solomons was particularly impressive, with some marvelous panpipe bands. I built these racks in a way to look like huge panpipes. There was another group there who played bundles of bamboo pipes in a boogie bass arrangement, and they accompanied songs. It was an acculturated style of music with singing and guitar accompaniment, like Western harmonies, but a boogie bass that never changed key. The sound of these instruments was quite beautiful; the bamboo sound was very strong.

I never go out looking for different cultural groups or ethnic music to see what I can grab. It's not like that at all. In fact, in this instance I made a decision to completely avoid any reference to bamboo or anything that was obviously Pacific. I built these things to look industrial. They are Western industrial–looking, and they sound twentieth century. They have an electronic-type tone to them. They sound like large bass guitars. We have a number of ways of modifying the tone on them. There are different adaptions we can put on them to change the tonality, so these PVC pipes match up with dulcet chimes, rototum drums, and there is a whole range of homemade drones, basically physical action–type things—things that you can spin. They're acoustic; they produce continuous vibration-like sounds, pitched in various ways.

Just recently I moved to something a little bit different: a consistent interest of mine has been keyboards (I'm a piano player, and over a period of years I've written a few pieces for piano.) My first piece, *Triad 1*, was a piece for piano drone. It's a performance piece, a music performance piece, and has a visual layout aspect. This is a various slow-performance process, so the visual aspect is as much a feature as the music. I wrote another piece later for two pianos, called *Crossings*. It was for piano and closed-circuit television and two typewriters, which typed up simultaneous texts while the music was going on closed-circuit monitors. This latest piece, called *3-D Music*, is really the result of the group going into a temporary lull when one of our members left, and so I moved off into piano works again just to explore some of the ideas we've been working with in percussion rhythms into piano, which has so much more pitch range and so much more potential for harmonic movement. That's one of the pieces we took to Australia with us—piece for piano and occasional voices. The pianists sing quite a bit through it, too, simultaneous with the playing. A good piece which we have refined a lot, since we have performed it a great deal. It needs a great deal of performing. But it's working, and it's working back now on the new music I'm writing—richer and more complex now.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO IN PARIS?

The two pieces we're taking to Paris are *Gung Ho 1,2,3D*, which is a one-hour percussion work dedicated to Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who in the 1930s established a workers' cooperative movement in China. (During the war years in China, Alley's cooperatives were designed to replicate easily until they formed small industrial units in every Chinese village. The working spirit of the co-operatives, with equal shareholding and responsibility, matched the ideas of From Scratch.) In fact, *Gung Ho* means "work together." We plan to bring this piece to the States too. The second work is *Pan Pacific Peace Pipes*, which is a piece for trombone tubes, voices, percussion, and drones.

We think this piece carries a great deal of political meaning with it. First of all, there is a great deal of nuclear testing in French Polynesia. The new music has a great deal of action involved, but it is not too blatant. The message will be tucked in, and it will be evident to those who can see.

Editor's Note: I had the great pleasure of meeting Phil Dadson while I was in New Zealand. He is a most unassuming artist, a musician of acute talent, a performer with keen humanity. During the summer solstice, he and From Scratch participated in an international event choreographed by Charlie Morrow of the New Wilderness Foundation in New York City. From a telephone line to the top of the crater, the group played work in a direct line to New York with a wide-band-data link line. A tape was made of the whole event by Morrow. Members of From Scratch: Philip Dadson, Geoff Chapple, Wayne Laird, and Don McGlashan.

Rod Summers, Sound Artist in Holland

Volume 6, Number 3 (1983)

Editor's Note: This interview was held with Rod Summers at his home in Maastricht, in the south of Holland. Summers is known throughout the world as an audio artist, but this interview reveals more about the diverse interests of Rod Summers of V. E. C.

SINCE YOU'VE BEEN IN HOLLAND, HAVE YOU ASKED THE GOVERNMENT FOR ANY GRANTS? HAVE YOU JOINED THE ARTISTS' UNION?

Yes, I joined the artists' union in 1974. I came here in 1973, and I joined in 1974–75.1 have asked for money from the government mainly to support one journey, outside of the normal range, Germany, France, this one to Poland, Rejkavik. If the trip is that far out, I cannot afford the fare myself, so therefore I ask the government for assistance. And usually they say yes. They give me money when I get and provide documentation. So it really doesn't help. But as an artist, I can go to the bank and get credit, and they say they will give me up to $300 if I provide them with proper documentation when I return to show I've been away. Apart from that, I have had money to help go to Israel. Otherwise, I have had no subsidies.

IS THIS UNUSUAL IN MAASTRICHT?

I think so. But it's really not necessary for me to apply for extra money. The costs to run V.E.C. are about $2,000 a year, and most of my own activities, most of my own media, material—well, the most expensive is tape and photographic material—so I can earn that money here. I don't really need more than that—I sell things occasionally teaching. Living with the possibilities here should give you enough strength in itself.

THEN WHY ARE ALL THESE ARTISTS APPLYING FOR HOUSING, FOR STUDIOS,

FOR MATERIALS, FOR AN EXHIBITION, FOR EVENTUAL PURCHASE, AND STILL FINDING THEMSELVES FRUSTRATED AT NOT HAVING THE POTENTIAL SITUATION?

Because I think the system teaches them to be like that. I came out of a different background, independent, but completely dependent upon government backing. Now I'm totally independent, but dependent upon my wife to pay the rent. If not, we would get Social Security which would pay the rent. V.E.C. would just have to pull back a little bit, but it would come back. Even if there were no money, the activity will carry on, because the activity is my activity, and the mailing is part of it.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THIS SOUND ART?

I bought a tape recorder in 1961 in the town of Hereford. There's a military base there to train young boys to become soldiers. I did about three to four months there and found out I have been in entirely the wrong trade. I went there as a storesman. I decided I didn't want to do that, and I decided to remuster and become a medic. And there were no courses for medics there at that time, so I had to go to courses in another town in the north, and I bought a tape recorder on the way. I had a lot of fun with it until I eventually sold it in Ireland.

I did play my first sound piece in 1972 with Raoul Marroquin, Ward, and two other artists. I had already been making pieces by that time. I had built my own tone generator while I had managed to short-circuit the transistor to make it. I still have tapes from it. I was recording from two tape recorders and a mixer. I had made this piece, the sound work which represented two very close friends climbing a mountain, getting to the top, and what they see; on the way back down again, one slips and falls, and then the major part of the piece is the sensations and feelings of the other person as he has to climb down. He tells the people at the bottom of the hill what happened to his friend. Raoul heard this piece, the basic tape, and he said, "well, bring it along and we'll play it at the same time we've having the exhibition." Why not? And so I brought in a tape recorder, without any permission, and we played it, and a couple of people came up, and one person in particular said that he thought it was very strange thing to be having this noise in the museum, and he said, why don't you have a symphony orchestra in here, instead. And then I said, if we had a symphony orchestra in here, we wouldn't be able to listen to ourselves talking. He was very upset. And that was the first piece that I had made, which I had already been making before 1973.

BEFORE THAT, WHAT KIND OF ARTIST WERE YOU?

I was a poet. I had been writing forever. I won my first National Poetry Prize when I was six years old from the World Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—a poem and an essay about bird protection in the winter, and my guardian probably had more control over that piece than I did, because she was a very strong influence when I was very small. She used to read me *Hiawatha*, and her husband used to play Bach music on the piano, and these were the two things that kept me quiet when I was a baby. And I have a terrible passion for Bach music. I can tell you that. And I am very much in love with traditional linear types of poetry, especially that of Dylan Thomas.

I wrote, but nobody is a poet. It's not a profession or a trade, especially if you come from a

farming community. I really wrote continuously until I went to India. That's when I started to write much more seriously because there was a great deal more to talk about which naturally came out in the form of poetry—not necessarily in rhyme, but trying hard. I started taking photographs to try to see and visualize the poetry. Then I met Raoul Marroquin who is an artist, and Raoul was doing things which showed me a whole new way of doing things, and then I was introduced, I think, by Michael Gibbs, to V.E.C. poetry (visual and experimental concrete poetry—that's what V.E.C. stands for), and I thought there's where the poet's foundation is, and then you could go from poetry straight through to art, and then I became a poet almost without knowing it. I hope tomorrow to become an artist. I moved from soldier, to poet, to photographer, and then an audio artist—and yet the audio art is really poetry. V.E.C. is nonlinear forms of poetry, and 70 percent of the audio I make is sound poetry. It has very little to do with music; the other 30 percent is probably *musique concrète*.

YOU'VE BEEN RECOGNIZED THROUGH VARIOUS NETWORKS (BOTH MAIL AND PERSONAL VISITS BY ARTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, SOME OF WHOM HAVE NEVER MET YOU EXCEPT VIA THE INTERNATIONAL POSTAL SYSTEM) SO IN A STRANGE WAY YOUR NETWORK IS A SOUND NETWORK THAT USES AN ESTABLISHED DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE INTERNATIONAL POSTAL SYSTEM GOES ELECTRONIC?

Vittore Baroni and I are in conversation via letter about this issue. "It looks like the only way to go is via the computer"—that's one of his statements in his last letter. I don't really know about that. It would mean an end to this. It means another way, and I don't know how to transmit the information. I will wait until the new system becomes more readily acceptable, and then I'm going to try to see how to translate poetry into this, that's all.

WHAT I MEAN IS SOMETHING MORE TRAUMATIC. NOW THAT YOUR RECOGNITION HAS BEEN MADE WIDER BY FRIENDS, WORD OF MOUTH, THE NETWORK, AND THOSE WHO RECOGNIZE QUALITY IN A SMALL COMMUNITY, EVEN THOUGH IT IS INTERNATIONAL. NOW THAT EVERYONE IS WIRED FOR SOUND, THANKS TO THE NEW TRANSISTORIZED SYSTEMS, DO YOU FEEL IN SOME WAY A PIONEER, A CATALYST, OR JUST A MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH ARTISTS DIVULGE SOME OF THEIR TALENTS?

In 1978, 1 went to make a project. I was working with sound a lot, making a lot of recordings, and then sound became a very important part of my art—while I was exhibiting the photographs, slides, installations, sound was very important too. Then I was invited to Poland, and Poland was my first public performance using sound in the Remont Gallery, and I was totally flabbergasted at how people reacted. Everyone really went wild, they thought it was cheese and bread. It was totally unexpected. I came back and had six or seven tapes from my mail art friends. John Bennett, Leonhard Duch, and I had some pieces which I had made with Anna Banana and Bill Gaglione when they came to visit, and I had these pieces which I had made for the Polish performance, called *Polish Environmental Reaction*, and some I had made with the audience which was there, so this was a fair amount of material. I was then interested in finding out what other people were doing, so I made this postcard and mailed it out, and very very fast I

got a lot of cassettes back—fifteen to be exact—so I made a program from these tapes. It wasn't supposed to go on, but it just grew and grew until now I could make a program every month, but there are no possibilities because of the cost. And I just don't have that sort of time. But it really is creeping into all of my time. Out of an edition of 150, I offer twenty-five for sale, which barely covers the cost of the edition. With twenty-five for sale, it's going to be very difficult for distribution, and I can't afford to have five or six sitting around because I can only keep it down to that twenty-five. I cannot afford to pay that 33 1/3 percent commission, which is expected. I only made that twenty-five available for those who didn't want to participate but really wanted the information. So there are 125, which are made one at a time, and with the speed those cassettes come in, I can usually barely afford to buy these tapes, copy the cassettes, and send them out. It just keeps going over at the same rate. They are starting to sell a bit. Radio Sweden just bought a complete set, and somebody here in Holland bought a set. And somebody in Germany, and people are actually writing theses and papers about sound poetry and sound art. It's wonderful for them, because they get immediate coverage of the last three years of one group of artists.

Distribution has always been a problem. I then decided, after I had begun, that it would be a bit more costly than I expected to generate more money, so I made a decision to do editions. twelve audio-exchange programs and ten audio editions, and these editions are usually one artist on a cassette. One hour of John Bennett reading his poems, there's one of me reading short stories, there's a Polish Futurist cassette with one side done by Piotr Rypson, who came here especially to record (some poems never before published), and on the other side, Italian Futurist poetry that's never been published before. There's an audio biography and a couple of pieces I've created myself. The idea about doing this is that I would sell these, I would make it for the artist, he or she would have 5 copies for free, and then the edition would be 125, and then I would sell them. But I've never had the time or the inclination to advertise. That's been the problem. There's never been any advertising for them; if someone could handle that side of things, and let me do this side, but it's very hard to find somebody.

I have this concept of art as a cosmological stream, constantly over the whole of the universe, and we take from the stream. We don't take from the water of the stream or the substance of the stream, but we take from the substance of what floats in the stream, the flotsam and the jetsam, and we take it and leave it to dry. And if it dries and it holds, it's still there in 200 years. If it doesn't hold, it's of no substance, then it dissolves. So we need someone to help pick up this material and distribute it. There just isn't enough time to do all of it. This all runs on a shoestring, stumbling from one month to the next.

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THE FUTURE FOR YOURSELF?

I see recognition through audio exchange; people have begun to notice my own audio work, and I'm starting to get invitations, where Rod Summers will eventually be able to achieve his aim, to make enough money from his own work to allow V.E.C. to continue exactly as it is—advertising a bit more, the exchange of this material.

IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ENJOY THE ANONYMITY BEHIND V.E.C.

"Anonymity." No, because it creates a lot of problems. Especially letters from Americans who worry about this "faceless" organization. I don't answer things that seem to come from nameless companies. I'm very worried when I get things from just "Art Foot" because I don't know what that is. I'd like to know that there is a person behind that name. V.E.C. would sound terrible as "Rod Summers Organization."

NO, BUT YOU COULD PUT YOUR NAME IN THE SECOND LINE SO THAT THERE IS A CONNECTION.

I don't necessarily appear on all programs. There are cassettes where I don't have anything on them. I find it charming that V.E.C. doesn't communicate "Rod Summers." I don't blame people who write and say, "Who's this?" and then they get an answer saying, "It's me."

AS FAR AS EQUIPMENT IN EUROPE, HAVE YOU FOUND ALL THE EQUIPMENT YOU NEED, WITHIN THE PRICE RANGE?

In a performance situation, you take what you find, because you never find the equipment you need. The tapes are copied one-to-one, so I have a tape recorder (we have two) and one cassette copier. The equipment that I need is all here. The problem is finding the money to pay for it. Now having a new second cassette recorder, whereas the old one was on its last legs, V.E.C. Audio Exchange technically can continue for a while. Although at the moment, I am using four-track to play the master tapes because the half-track is running slow and has to be replaced, worn out after hundreds of copies, and I'm wearing out my composition machine which should not be used for playing back master tapes. It is a machine which should be used for composing Rod Summers audio works, and it needs new heads, and that costs about $500. But we can't worry about it, we just press on.

ARE YOU GOING TO BE DOING A PERFORMANCE INSTALLATION IN ICELAND?

It's called *Iceland Environmental Reaction*, the piece that I have so far is the bottom line. I'm going camping on a glacier, for the first four days, and then I'm going to photograph a cliff face which is filled with puffins, and I'm going to photograph it with normal lenses, just to get the movements of black-and-white puffins against the rock face, and I'm also going to record puffin sounds—stereo recordings of the puffins, very close up and using a parabolic reflector. I really want to get their conversations with each other, because they speak like people do with sounds. Then I'm going to record the wind through the glacier, and I hope the weather holds. I'm also going to record the sound of the sea, just directly, the sound of the wind on one track, and then the sound of the sea on the other, left and right monitors, and then the birds' songs will be on stereo. These two tapes will last a half hour each. In the installation, the background of the hall is made of wood, very high, and the floor is made of concrete, typical Icelandic construction, and at the back of the space, two tape recorders will be placed, one will be playing the bird song, and in front of it will be made a sand representation of the burrow of the puffin with one puffin egg inside. On the other side will be the sound of the sea and the sound of the wind.

For the performance, I start the tapes simultaneously, and then I'm going to tape two boards and am going to push the pebbles along the parallel lines, so that they don't fall out of the parallel lines, into as high piles as I can, which will

probably be the size of the space. I will end up with four piles of stones with spaces in between, and then in these spaces in between I'm going to do a polyp on the floor with the colors of paint birds make—seagulls on Iceland, because they nest so close together when their egg is laid, it has red and red-brown pigments in it, which are still soft after the egg is laid, and then the mother bird makes a mark with this pigment, and every bird recognizes his own egg. I've been studying these egg designs. And in between these piles of stones I'm going to put a teaspoon of polyp-size designs. And the installation will be this pile of paintings, etc.

BIRDS ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU, AREN'T THEY?

Yes, I find birds very fascinating creatures, the construction of the birds, their wings, all very marvelous.

DO YOU KNOW JOYCE CUTLER SHAW?

Yes, I have one of her pieces on one of the audio exchanges. She's very into the artist as messenger and the bird as messenger. In our bedroom we have two of her pieces hanging together. Her work is very beautiful. Her work arrived at a very rare time, and now mail art has changed. And now what's left over from mail art has become very crisp art—much too valuable to put postage stamps on it. I think it's filtered itself out this way. I've sent marijuana leaves to mail art shows in California, and the American postal system obviously allows it to go through.

My first performance was in the museum here. There was no name on the museum here in Maastricht when it first opened, so in my performance, I thought I'd put a name above the door just saying "Museum." I then went to the Museum and photographed the oldest dictionary in the museum, and on the page where it says "museum," I made six prints and cut them out in the shape of Latin letter forms and put them on a board, and I did the performance. It stayed up about six weeks, meaning the sign outside. It was done during my student days.

DO YOU TEACH AT THE ACADEMY HERE?

You have to be very careful about teaching here. Twice a year I get invited to the Jan van Eyck Academy, where I talk about audio art. Now I think that audio is very difficult to teach. I don't know where you start teaching audio art, because when you start, you can begin with the philosophy of creation, or exercise for endless hours the people's ability to hear. So when I go there I talk about recording techniques, what cassettes to use, how to demagnetize, how to keep your recorders clean, what tapes to use, examples of what other people do, and make loops and things like that. And it works very well. I make it a three-day gig.

Rod Summers has published many books of poetry, short stories, mail art projects and of course, the V.E.C. Audio Exchange Programmes.

Maurizio Nannucci and Zona, Florence, Italy

Volume 6, Number 5 (1983)

Editor's Note: The editor of Umbrella *had the privilege of interviewing Maurizio Nannucci of Florence, Italy, in May in Toronto during the conference on International Exposure for Canadian Artists.* Umbrella *has visited not only Zona, the artists' space in Florence, but also the archive, the phenomenal collection of books, magazines, and ephemera in his home and studio in Florence, Italy. The interview was done in Italian and translated by* Umbrella.

WHEN DID YOUR ARCHIVE BEGIN?

In the 1960s, I was doing typewriter poetry, and then someone told me that it was concrete poetry, and I didn't even know it. I was published in Emmett Williams' *Anthology,* published by Something Else Press, and at that moment a lot of material was being distributed by a large network, mail art, where we sent out work and it never returned but was given as a gift or exchanged. I realized that all this material and documentation linked to concrete and visual poetry and to Fluxus and music was not being regarded with due recognition. People created it, received it, and recognized it, and then abandoned it. At that moment, I realized there was a possibility of gathering it all together. And it was easily found until the end of the sixties in Europe. In a couple of years, however, it became rare, these small editions. Thus was born the desire to collect this material that other persons had not collected. The others who had collected the avant-garde, including Dadaism, Futurism, etc., all had to spend a great deal of money.

WAS THERE A NETWORK IN ITALY AT THIS TIME FOR COLLECTING THESE THINGS?

Yes. A few people, e.g., Mario Diacono, understood this. But other artists and art workers had participated in the debate about this situation but had no intention of retaining these documents for posterity: Spatola, for example, collected his own correspondence for his own works and purposes but had not enlarged it into a general archive.

HOW DID YOU GATHER IN THIS COLLECTION? DID YOU PAY FOR IT, DID YOU EXCHANGE?

At the beginning of concrete poetry, it arrived as an exchange. Afterwards, much later, I started looking at the lacunae in my collection, e.g., the Solt *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, so I contacted Mary Ellen Solt to get one, or Dick Higgins or Robert Filliou, a network that really did not have a precise definition. Then it was called concrete poetry, fluxus, and intermedia. From the middle of the 1960s, I had connections with Ben Vautier, Jackson Mac Low, Ray Johnson, James Lee Byars, a very wide network which didn't have a defined direction which came forth afterwards as far as a grouping.

I SEE THAT IT WAS NOT JUST A PRIVATE ARCHIVE.

When I was a boy, I was so happy to say I never made a stamp collection, and when I grew up, I became very involved in stamps, but stamps made by artists. I just don't like the spirit of collecting for collecting's sake. I looked at all the things I had and realized how valuable they are

in one place instead of being dispersed to preserve them, which is a value of recognition of phenomena which are living works of art of today, continuing into artists' books and sound media, for the same motives. In Italy at the end of the sixties there was critical recognition for these materials such as that of Germano Celant, and Daniele Palazzoli, who tried to find critical and historical places for this material. Then they became disinterested because perhaps their strategy was very reductive with respect to their ambitions. With Celant, who has a magnificent archive, his interests can be exchanged for others due to information.

WHEN DID ZONA BEGIN?

Zona, as an idea, was easy to conceive, because in Italy there did not exist any alternative spaces except those which were publicly financed. Many artists in the sixties who found new ways of expressing themselves through new media vs. traditional means with different sensibilities, different ambitions, found it difficult, because audiences were very limited due to indifference. Zona was born with these presuppositions by a group of artists residing in Florence where one can live well, but it is a city which is not very generous for contemporary art, although the city produces many interesting things in radical motives of visual arts, music (Fluxus, computer music). Artists such as Paolo Masi, Giuseppe Chiari, Albert Mayr, Luciano Bartolini, Massimo Nannucci, Gianni Pettena, and I founded Zona to be a place where these new movements could be seen and heard, in a city which had largely ignored them for years.

We chose a small place, $2,000-a-year budget, with 250 various events which we have put on. It has been discreet, and as a final destination, all activity centers around the collection of material, which I have mediated for certain reasons. One of the first and most stimulating events which centered on the accumulation of material was the *Small Press Scene*, one of the first exhibitions, with 300 titles of magazines from 1960 produced and distributed by artists, with self-distribution by the producers, the artists, small bookshops, and a few collectors. This occurred in 1975. We continued to collect material after the exhibition. Now we have thousands of titles of magazines and yet not all the runs are complete. We exchange material for other materials, but sometimes because of economic reasons, we haven't been able to do everything. We have agreements with public institutions to start an archive, but because of legal and political reasons, interest has changed. It is easy to use our own efforts, will, and energy to do this archive ourselves!

DO YOU HAVE RELATIONS WITH OTHER CENTERS?

In Italy, there are similar places, but mostly to forward the cause of artists who participate in the effort, while at Zona we have a centripetal instrument which attracts external efforts and presents them in Florence. All of us are independent artists who give of ourselves to produce the space and the archive at Zona. From time to time we call ourselves the group of work, an agile structure.

In the 1970s, I always tried to involve Zona with other activities of mine, even though they were at my personal initiative, in order to give more energy to Zona, to make it better known. The invitation to do a book show was directed to me, but since I was part of Zona, I tried to involve them too by using part of the Zona archive.

WHO USES THE ARCHIVE?

The Archive has practical problems. The material is a collection. For example, the small press is in alphabetical order, and there is a catalog. The bookworks do not have a complete catalog, but there is a way of finding books dealing with the long production of some artists. Audio works are all cataloged: 200 disks, 200 cassettes, along with the first records of Art by Telephone, the first records of Giant by Andy Warhol, then there sound poetry and artists' audio works.

IF ANYONE READS THIS INTERVIEW AND WANTS TO SEND YOU ANYTHING, WHAT CAN THEY DO?

Well, for sound works, for artists' books, for magazines, the space is there for your new titles, but we cannot send you anything in return. The material will be secure and will not be dispersed, and there is hope that we can have a public space that is more available, which is our intention. Zona is open three times a week, yet some months we are closed, because we are traveling with new work, research, etc. If Zona is created by active artists, then one must understand this.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION WHICH WE ARE UNDERGOING, WHICH WILL PERHAPS ERASE THE PRINT MEDIA?

Personally, I must always be open to this situation, which will probably be improved. However, for artists there are always problematic situations with this new technology. The computer doesn't have such a great product. Perhaps it will improve, like new video, which was documentation of performance but really was not video art. We need more time to enlarge our vistas with the new technology. I think that soon we will have proposals by artists with "technological art" with different trends from painting, which is now undergoing a transitional period. There will be ties with people who have maintained an analytical thrust via these changes, who have maintained a historical perspective.

ZONA IS OPEN FOR FLORENTINES ONLY, OR FOR FOREIGN ARTISTS TOO?

We have a very flexible program. We have never fixed our plans. If someone comes and lets us know a week ahead of time that he or she is coming, then we will find a space for them to realize their work or art or discussion. To differentiate Zona from the galleries, an idea in which there is synthesis, symbiotic relation, to communicate, we began to do works which involved the neighborhood: who we are, what we do, paying homage to the neighborhood. Then it was all dedicated to what was happening outside of Florence, since Florentine artists wanted to know people from other places, but not to do an "international" geography. For us, "international" means "provincial."

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR ZONA?

We had planned to stay open only two years, and now after eight years we are the only alternative space in Florence. We think we will continue, and now more young artists want to join and create a situation for these younger artists. We want to do this as long as we have this energy. If this energy changes at all, then Zona can end, but right now we have the desire and the energy to continue as an archive, which is the final goal.

WHAT ARE YOUR RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARCHIVES?

Years ago, we asked the National Library of Florence to take over the archive, keeping it intact with a catalog, and they said no, since there are problems with classification, since we consider a piece of paper which is the only

documentation of an event as important as a 250-page catalog. To them, this was incomprehensible; it is weight that is important, not quality.

With *Umbrella*, Hans Sohm, Jean Brown, and the Sackners, we have very good relations, but also with little collectors, those who do not have the madness of collecting but who do it quietly, who have graphic collections, small works by artists. For example, there are book collectors in Italy of antiquarian books, but there are also collectors of contemporary artists' books who are very few, but they collect modest artists and modest works of art.

Zona began in 1974 in a working-class neighborhood of San Nicolo in Florence as a nonprofit art space and organization run by a group of local artists. The purpose was to give information and to exhibit, and serve as an international meeting point within the world of the nonprofit space. With more than 250 shows, performances, installations, lectures, and concerts in the past eight years, Zona has opened up new levels of discussions and activity. Not only the Small Press Scene *in 1975, but also* Zona Suono e Ambiente, *held in 1977 and curated by Albert Mayr, based on information collected from all over the world related to experiences dealing with sound and space, including concerts and musical performances given by Richard Heyman, Alvin Lucier, Giancarlo Cardini, Cornelius Cardew, etc.*

Parola e Suono *(1979–1980), an exhibition specifically dedicated to presenting works of sound poetry and artists audioworks, is, like many other works-in-progress events at Zona, still open to future contributions. Participants have been Sten Hanson, Henri Chopin, Maurizio Nannucci, Robert Lax, Bernard Heidsieck, Ulises Carrión, Adriano Spatola, and Dick Higgins.*

Zona Radio belongs within this same field of investigation. In cooperation with the Florentine radio station Controradio, a series of radio transmissions were broadcast over a three-month period with tapes and audio materials by Joseph Beuys, Robert Lax, Vito Acconci, John Giorno, Keith Sonnier, Dieter Roth, Lawrence Weiner, Jackson Mac Low, Robert Filliou, Albert Mayr, Ben Vautier, Jack Goldstein, and Maurizio Nannucci. Rather than simply transmitting these audio works, an attempt was made to explore a method of editing which, without falsifying the sense of the work, would indicate a certain compositional approach that had been especially

adapted to the medium of the radio. Zona Radio also participated in 1982 at the festival, Ars Electronica, in Linz, Austria.

International themes have included an exhibition on Iceland in 1977 with films, books, documents and work by twenty-five artists. There is also a kind of "hotline" between Zona and Canada with connections with General Idea, Glenn Lewis, Ian Murray, Bill Vazan, Vincent Trasov through documents and magazines, and information between artists' spaces such as Art Metropole, Western Front, A Space, and many others.

Zona Geneve *(1982) recognized the activity of a group of young artists from Geneva who participated in the journal Furor. Included were contacts with Ecart, Gaetan, and the Center of Contemporary Art.* Australia *was an exhibition of work by artists in Australia, and there was a show of video productions made in Berlin. Zona's archives have been recognized throughout the world as a rich collection of publications from the small press; artists' books (over 2,500 examples), audio art including records and cassettes; sound poetry with over 1,000 listening hours; and the collection of concrete and visual poetry made in collaboration with the Exempla archives.*

Coach House Press, Toronto

Volume 7, Number 1 (1984)

Editor's Note: During a visit to Toronto, I had the great pleasure to visit with Stan Bevington, the guiding light of Coach House Press, and with Victor Coleman who was associated with Coach House in the early days. We began talking, and some of the innovations, trials, and errors of small presses can be appreciated in this conversation. Coach House is a landmark press in North America, and with this interview we wish to salute Stan Bevington and his staff, with great admiration and respect.

HOW DID IT REALLY BEGIN?

Victor Coleman: A modest little operation, undercapitalized—no grants available. Stan and some friends wanted to go into publishing, so one summer, that of 1965, there was a very famous parliamentary debate called the Flag Debate, when the government at the time had a competition for the new Canadian flag, and Stan had put together a lot of different designs, silkscreening a lot of different flags which he sold on the street in what was then a hippie community, Northville, and Stan turned over 3,000 to 4,000 dollars, with six to eight people selling them, all before the flag was officially adopted. The most popular one was the flag that showed the nine beavers pissing on the frog. Although it doesn't seem like a lot of money now, Stan was able to buy a small letterpress type with the intention of making letterpress books. Soon after that, Stan bought a linotype machine, because he had trained as a linotype operator for a newspaper.

There was a confluence of people. Wayne Clifford, poet, who was very interested in publishing poetry, a friend of Stan's, did ephemera. We approached six writers to come in and submit manuscripts. Those six books, plus a couple

of others, began sporadically over a year and a half. They were crudely produced, although they don't look particularly crude. Some were offset, letterpress, silkscreened, and handbound. We were doing things by hand to live by hand. We did make a move for some kind of design sensibility, which Stan dominated. Along with the writers who were attracted, a number of artists also came in. Coming from the mimeograph revolution, many artists decided this was interesting to do bookworks, and they became intimately involved. Coach House was not a literary press, strictly speaking.

Stan Bevington: We tried to get away from the private press doing exquisite volumes for dead authors.

VC: Computer artists, sculptors, electronic artists all saw something in the printed page, something which they could use such as the experimental in printing.

SB: We did silkscreen on anything—we printed on balloons, on flags, on anything. Michael Hayden (now resident in Los Angeles) came along and wanted things silkscreened in plastic which were Day-Glo and would also glow in the dark. He also did those catalogs for artists' books, some of the first Coach House had anything to do with. No real theme went through our products except for the normal things that occurred in the sixties, but there was a sense of good humor and camaraderie that was extremely important and held it all together.

VC: Stan taught me to be a linotype operator (I earned my living by setting type), and I had to learn pretty fast. I never learned how to set type properly. I did it some other way—fairly fast, fairly accurate.

SB: I was pretty sympathetic, because I learned from a newspaper operator who insisted that you should never use your thumb on a keyboard.

AS YOU MADE THE BOOKS, HOW DID YOU DISTRIBUTE THEM?

We walked around and did direct visits to local bookshops; we were really amazed how the community in Toronto picked up on it. Two or three days later, writers were coming to say "do my book." There was no problem of selection or editorial process.

But the process of distribution was quite strange, peculiar to Canada. We had a local market, the only one we had access to, but we did have contacts outside of Toronto, so we started sending books to people, and they were amazed. So we got recognition from New York, the Bay Area (San Francisco), France, all over the place, and the word was out fairly quickly. It was only a matter of time before there was a real catalog of books.

DID YOU RECOGNIZE THAT THERE WERE SMALL PRESSES ELSEWHERE LIKE SOMETHING ELSE PRESS, LIKE BEAU GESTE PRESS?

SB: One of the interesting characteristics of our books, which was a carry-over from photo-silkscreen, was that the photo and the visual aspect were there immediately—color reproduction on the cover right away. Whereas others were worried about how they could pay for color separations, we just did it!

THERE'S A LONG TRADITION HERE OF COLOR SEPARATION BEING HERE LONG BEFORE COLOR SEPARATION— ALL MECHANICAL SEPARATIONS TOO, AND NOTHING SOPHISTICATED ABOUT IT AT ALL.

VC: *Light Burst* was a book of snapshots. Stan printed them on the A. B. Dick, and the first run we scrapped. That was painful, but the second run we did on a laid paper, and something happened to the photographs so that we were getting reviewers saying that these photographs were "art" and I was embarrassed about it. We let it go, however. It was that kind of leaping into illustration, and this is how it can be done, and let's do it that way.

SB: We couldn't afford a process camera or anything. Our camera was a wood and brass thing with lightbulbs and some tinfoil up there for lighting, and we did our separations right off, and that attitude has carried on. It was beyond "experimental"; it was alchemical, a sense of magic that permeated the activity and caught on with whomever was here. People were attracted to it. Anybody with the least bit of graphic sensibility and some kind of mechanical talent and some vision could pull something off. Trick Simon came (I didn't know what kind of training he had, not like David Hlynsky).

SB: No, I don't think he had any kind of graphic-art training. There was a wave of draft dodgers. My first job was to print up their letterhead with a job application! I was just reminded of making these letterheads for farmers, plumbers, all of these different things, of giving out job applications, strange printing. . . .

WHAT WAS AN AVERAGE EDITION?

500 was the average. If we thought there was a bigger market for it, we did 1,000, hardly ever more than 1,000. I am sure we did some books in an edition of 500 of which there are still copies.

HOW WAS THE BUSINESS END OF IT?

We tried to keep it pretty low-key. We were a cooperative. We didn't have funds to pay someone to keep the business going until the fourth year of operation, the 1970s. We did our first catalog in 1968–69, mailed it out, and kept a customer list.

WERE YOU ALL DOING SOMETHING ELSE TO KEEP GOING?

No, this was a full-time operation. We started in 1967 with six to eight people, and always had a staff like that. We printed everything in sight, besides books. Posters, other jobs, so that counts for the artists doing brochures for galleries, posters for artists' events, always happening at the same time that books were being done. There was always a stable of artists who were always available, so that Coach House's reputation was clear that we would be approached by other publishers, galleries, etc., to attach an artist-designer to a job.

DID YOU EVER APPLY FOR GRANTS?

Sure. There was a program from the Canada Council, and we were turned down, so I did a campaign. I took the correspondence and reduced it all down to one sheet and sent it out to a lot of people and got a letter-writing campaign going. I called people, bugged them on the phone, met them in person. Eventually they gave us a pittance in 1967. Three thousand dollars for six books, and we had to be specific about the titles and the budget for each book. The Canada Council did not have any program in place for

such a project. It was under "Projects." Artists were given grants, but no programs for publishers. The problem with the way Canada Council is set up is that it is split up into media, and any interdisciplinary activity that is set up gets short shrift. It is better now because it has a media section by which artists' books could be funded.

FROM THAT EARLY EQUIPMENT, YOU OBVIOUSLY IMPROVED YOUR EQUIPMENT AS YOU WENT ALONG?

Yes, we occasionally handset type and pull proofs, since phototype is a bit messy, but for display lettering, it's still hard to beat! And then there's the computer downstairs. We just applied what we learned in offset books in the sixties to computerized books now!

ARE YOU STILL DOING ARTISTS' BOOKS? WHAT PERCENTAGE IS LITERATURE, WHAT PERCENTAGE ART?

We have increased the amount of words in the books. So have artists. Coach House hasn't had a bookworks program. It did in an ad hoc way ten years ago. That was largely self-generated. If an artist wanted to do something, we accommodated him. Quite often the artist would end up funding the whole thing, or a portion of the costs. Time, paper—I always remember Robert Fong's book, *Antimorphis*, but it really is an artists' book full of writing. We also do duotone reproduction books, but we don't feel we want to use duotone illustration that wants to get on with the message in words. We are aware now, when at an earlier time we did not have the ability of making that choice, so we printed it in color!

COACH HOUSE RECOGNIZES THE QUALITY OF THE BOOK FROM PROCESS TO PRODUCT AS A PIECE, WHEREAS MANUFACTURERS SEE IT AS A PRODUCT ALONE. YOU SEE THE AESTHETIC OF THE BOOK.

SB: Well, computers are stuck on quality, which we could never have done by hand.

VC: David Hlynsky is the prime example of someone who was grounded in visual imagery who became a writer through his association with Coach House. So this book is similar to *Incognito* in that the text is not illustrated per se. There is a parallel thing that is happening here, and that is an aesthetic thread at Coach House which is very strong. It is not unlike the Beau Geste aesthetics too.

SB: Coach House has spawned a great deal of activity. For instance, A. A. Bronson worked here one summer and designed a few books, getting his hands dirty. People from all over Canada did put in their time here; also some have come from across the border. The Rochester connection has been very important. I go down there and pick up a few ideas, come back here and polish them up. It is an incubator for new ideas and new processes, and old processes used in a new way.

UP TO NOW, YOUR SOLVENCY HAS COME FROM WITHIN, OR DOES CANADA COUNCIL HELP?

Last year we got grants from Canada Council that equalled what we paid the federal government in income tax and unemployment insurance, so we zeroed out!

DO YOU EVER HAVE ASPIRATIONS OF TAKING A BREAK, OR CHANGING SHE DIRECTION, OR DOES SHE DIRECTION CHANGE BY THE PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH YOU?

A new person may come in and they are expected to produce things of similar quality, which puts quite a bit of pressure on the press at times. The pressure is on a new pressman. There is also the necessity of scheduling things to match the capabilities of the people here. A project may be set aside for a year until we get a person who can do it well. The frustration is that we are a teaching resource for people to come in and learn, and when they have learned, they go. It does germinate projects, but it doesn't give us a long-term basis for doing adult books. So our books will continue looking experimental, since a lot of our people are learning while they are doing.

IS DISTRIBUTION BEST IN CANADA?

Yes, in Canada, because we have narrowed in on our audiences, to target our audiences effectively. There is a full-time person here who concentrates on marketing research, to increase the press run, or whatever, making events in bookstores. The books, therefore, are made more directly for a specific audience.

DO YOU ADVERTISE?

We cannot get trapped into that regular advertising schedule, so we create catalyst situations, a symbiosis between product and the audience. We had a remainder guy come look at our books, but he turned us down, and it was so embarrassing! Selling small press remainders should be an interesting market. We have a couple of good plans. With the computer, we have kept track for the past five years of who bought what book, and we have supplied that list to a couple of other small presses, so that we can snowball through the audience who that author is, and that audience becomes part of what the author presents with the manuscript. That's an important consideration for us in Canada, particularly because the authors publish here and with other small publishers. The other one is that we encourage people to phone us for orders, and everyone here is reasonably informed to chat up other books and to tell them where their local bookstore is, and if they've called from Montreal collect, tell them that their bookshop has that book in stock, order from us by phone and we ship them to their local bookstore, tell them where their bookstore is, and get them to go there. So we get a response from the bookstore, encourage the customer to go to the bookstore, rather than the book-club attitude that means you cut the bookstore out as the middle man. We have tried to encourage this. We put slips into all the books that say "write in and order a catalog," and when the catalog goes out, we say, "phone in," so we've tried to encourage that loopback. It has been an amazing long-term battle to get shelf space, display space. We have seventy-five bookstores in Canada; we know exactly who they are! I tour around to the bookstores, and since there are only seventy-five, it is manageable. They are responsive if you come in with seven or eight books. They buy! It has never been depersonalized! And I have made postcards of each of these stores! There is a real visibility, and we have efficient shipping. We give people a schedule from a small press publisher!

DO YOU SHIP IMMEDIATELY TO BOOKSTORES?

Yes, we have a good number of standing orders and seventy-five good bookstores, not the chains!

THEN YOUR BOOKSTORES ARE YOUR PARTNERS!

Yes, it's handwork for seventy-five bookstores. We do a flashy display. We reached an important point to say it really isn't open-ended. And by definition, we are doing good marketing and good sales for this quality book! We've tried to keep our quantities down, and we overprint the covers and the guts and make up more copies than we can since we have begun to do our own binding. We began that three years ago. We would never have survived, unequivocally, if we hadn't done this. There is no way we could have survived. I should have done it years ago! It was largely a space problem before. Either warehouse copies, or have a bindery! You get trapped into having to do a long run in order to get them cheap. The bindery is the exact opposite. You do handwork, you can make up a couple of hundred copies and get them out, and then when you have time, you can bind up a few more! We did that with little books, producing them in ten days, binding by hand, in order to have them ready during a reading by a poet, Robert Creeley.

HAVE THOSE EIGHT PEOPLE BEEN CONSTANT?

There have been a few changes.

WILL ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING CHANGE YOUR LOOK?

It already has. The typographic quality has improved dramatically. All the typographic refinements are definitely built in. Ten years ago, type design was lead type, rigid type, and the new technology has clearly made a difference There are manuscript editions, better forms of electronic publishing. You don't need a monitor, just printouts. They are done on demand! We never have any in stock, since 1979.

HOW DO PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THIS?

From our catalog. They're banged together with staples or perfect-bound and deliberately made to look like computer printouts, the ugliest, works in progress quite often. This is by-product of typesetting. We insist on keying things and passing it through filters that humanize the printout. It is the *humanized printout* as part of the manuscript editions. We have a computer file that passes through a filter that goes through the typesetting machine and comes out typeset. So in a way, the manuscript editions are a bit of a media joke. They could have just as well been nicely typeset, but they go through the computer to come out typeset but have to look as if they come out of the computer. We send our annual catalog out to a mailing list.

HAVE YOU EVER DONE A SURVEY TO SEE PERCENTAGE OF SALES FROM THE CATALOG?

We did a specialized catalog, books written by women, and although we had no intention of a publishing program to target such an audience, it just turned out that it was possible. We sold back volumes by theme for the first time. We are now working on a catalog of fiction, of presses known as poetry publishers, the style in post-modern tradition of writing. No beginning nor end. Books by David Young, for instance. The short story and experimental is definitely the most difficult to market. Not much fiction is being written.

THE LOOK OF YOUR BOOKS IS DISTINCTIVE AND VERY MUCH "COACH HOUSE." IS THAT DUE TO YOU AND TO YOUR AESTHETIC?

I have a tremendous amount of respect for Michael Hayden, who came in and coached us on how to be more of what we really were. If you

can do it on a rectangle, let's try a triangle; if you can do it in black, let's do it in color. He kept that awareness of any new media that came along. If we can do it on the computer, then let the computer do it in color. If we're going to do a book, then let's make that book become a member of a class of books so that it comments on bookishness!

It's pushing beyond the prescribed limitations, so making postcards was a great exercise. We had great racks at art galleries, we encouraged the audience to consider the artists' postcards the same way they thought about the artists' book. I feel really responsible for that kind of development so that the XOX postcard shop is full of our stock. I believe in pushing every kind of new form so that it becomes something in itself. I got interested in postage stamps years ago. Michael Hayden was doing Zero stamps years ago, and Rick did all kinds of stamps. In the printing world postcards were considered ephemeral, but now there are postcards everywhere in Europe and in America. Anyone who is publishing knows that the postcard is a work of art.

We've spent quite a bit of effort in our word-processing relationship to writers taking a stab at the Teledon graphics, computer graphics in which I am interested.

The aspect that makes us independent of location is electronic publishing. We have a proposal in for doing a magazine called *Swift Current*, and it's starting out with writers using Apple Computers. They're all online now. The advantage of an Apple is that you've got your Volkswagen and you're waiting for the highway. You're all lined up beside the highway, and the highway is there for the big corporations. The goal in the next few months is to get the Arts Council saying okay. The highway has got to be made available for the Volkswagens too. So we're lobbying for electronic book rate. Forget about the post office rate problems. Our goal at Coach House is to distribute and manufacture, keep the stuff electronic and if you need a hard copy, make it locally. Our goal is an integration there of guts and cover. The guts get manufactured locally, and the four-color cover can be shipped around if you have to, so we're trying to keep an inventory of four-color covers, and we are getting used to putting guts in on demand. We did our Manuscripts Editions, which were crummy looking, on demand, and now we're trying to gear up for this situation of quality. Thus, the material made on demand will be indistinguishable. In publishing this is a very important direction. A book comes to life, has very slow sales, and then peaks out. It justifies going on the press, and it fades out, but it should be kept in print forever on demand, because it's a book.

THERE WILL BE NOTHING OUT OF PRINT, AND THE SECONDHAND BOOK DEALERS WILL GO CRAZY!

There won't exist the problem of diversity of editions, and that does point very critically to that old tradition of form and content, each putting a value on the other that isn't necessarily there: "This must be good writing because it's in a printed book," and that's going to fade away a little bit.

AND YOU WON'T HAVE TO WAREHOUSE ANYMORE.

There are other positive features as well. A designer can establish a look for a series and feature that look in a variety of different manuscripts. So if I choose to read my books in Herman Zapf's newest typeface, okay. Quite a

different approach, and exactly the opposite of everything the same, robot computers. What are your choices?

So we've established a procedure that we shared with George Quasha of standard input on all of our texts. We type all the books the same way no matter what. We apply a design to them which goes through the design filter and it comes out looking like a Baskerville book or a Bembo book. The filters have the typographic refinements for Baskerville, and we go through the punctuation carefully. The texts of the books are relatively portable and can be form-independent, and when display screens come along to allow you to see without going to hard copy, we are continually trying to develop that archive of portable texts. This has been a dramatic reversal for the arts, where before it has always been a question of is it going to be in stone, or on cloth, or what is the quality of the leather. I'm so upset by seeing big book manufacturers saying that they've really done something by buying all-white clothlike material and printing a stripe on it to simulate a three-piece binding. That form, of using materials to gain an economy, and that economy should be in terms of variety and using materials more interestingly, is really frustrating.

YOU MAY DEVELOP A NEW AUDIENCE BECAUSE OF REFINEMENT, AND YOU CAN ADAPT A KIND OF WRITING TO A DIFFERENT AUDIENCE BY SEDUCTIVE MEANS AND ALSO UPGRADE A CERTAIN SENSITIVITY.

I hope that the manufacturing on demand scattered around the country may revive a return to hand-bookbinding, with people to put their own bindings on themselves and make objects of them that are special, where the information that you need as information is not wasting paper but it's on the screen, and when you're doing the book object, you will be doing an object because you like the object. It might not be a letterpress book, but it might have a typographic style where black is blacker and it is on more interesting paper. I have an ongoing joke with the push-it-in-paper letterpress people: make the black ink better, they always say, and here we have a xerox which meets the requirements of letterpress people better, where black is really black.

That range of machines that Canon and Xerox have are really printing machines. And the 9700 typesetting machines go so fast that they become a printing press. It is the perfect thing for a small publisher, and we tend to operate more viably than any publisher who has to dump pipelines to fill. If our audience knows and wants a book, we can make it, although when the economies are set up on a large scale . . . It's amazing that the transition from letterpress to offset has happened within ten years, and we're in the next transition, and it's a bit easier and smoother. And it is a much shorter period!

My colleague Frank has his Apple at home, and he puts a mimeo master in it and cranks out purple copies on his duplicator. He's made the spirit masters from his word processor. You cannot xerox those purple copies, and they fade! A perfect way to protect copyright, a perfect way to publish.

In the graphic arts, we've had digital computers for separations and forming dots, and that's very specialized and recognized. We're looking at color scanning machines that can form dots so nicely that they form type and put the two, type

and pictures, together. When that becomes smooth, there is no reason for us to put effort in intermediary devices. We're better off to use that awareness on traditional technology and make really nice pictures. We cannot afford it. We'll stay with our clickety-clack photomechanical typesetter until a class of digital mechanisms is created. We bang things out with our Linotype and enlarge it in Helvetica to look like photo-typesetting.

The future will definitely improve things. My fantasy about working at home is becoming so clear. The cottage industry will really be a cottage industry!

As far as our darkroom, we force our computer to do pasteups for us, and we don't even bother using a camera. No pasteup, no dark and light, it all comes out in pages, and we have a contact print! We publish 120 to 130 books a year for many other people. We skip the pasteup, since we got our computers. We buy time on machines that are quite a distance away, transporting the data over the phone lines, and we are putting all that we have done for the last five years on computers.

The Coach House Press is truly a coach house and Stan Bevington showed me the door for letting straw in. That is the place where the line printer types promotional letters automatically. Bevington also publishes a union catalog for all the literary presses of Canada, supported by the Canadian government, in an edition of 12,000 catalogs sent to all places in Canada and abroad. All the files for the literary presses are at Coach House, and Coach House publishes the catalog for the government. The paper comes from a mill in Quehec, which fills the large order of the Coach House Press inexpensively, because Coach House orders by the ton, and it's laid paper. The folding machine is set up to make the Coach House kind of book. The fresh sheets of paper are folded into sixteenths, and it can fold a few of this book and a few of that, chop it up in different sizes, and away they go. The books they have done are stored in flats, as are the negatives in case there is a request. Cover stock is printed on "good American paper," but coated in Canada. They make color paper by printing the color directly onto off-white paper. It all was a dream, but one created out of hard work, imagination, and that alchemy that Bevington says is so much a part of Toronto's Coach House Press.

Coracle Press, London

Volume 7, Number 1 (1984)

Simon Cutts, who founded Coracle Press and also Coracle Gallery, has been publishing since 1964. In the beginning, it was small press poetry and a magazine which he ran from Nottingham called *Tarask*. He worked along with a colleague, Stewart Mills, and they bought a press in 1968 which gave them their own means of production. It became more and more physically possible to make visual books, which seemed to become more pronounced in the late 1960s, when illustration was used more in publications, and even during the last days of concrete poetry. For instance, when they started working with Ian Hamilton Finlay, they finally saw a

book as a completely separate entity and themselves not just as a press producing poetry or a magazine. The sense of the book was isolate.

By 1972, Mills became more involved in continuing a magazine, while Simon Cutts continued in the same vein, founding Coracle Press in 1975. By then, it was so visually oriented that there were already exhibitions in the wings besides group exhibitions in which artists made parts of books or illustrated books alongside writers. By 1976, the idea of a gallery developed and became endemic. The look of Coracle Press books is very specific, idiosyncratic, and Cutts explains that there is a fluent collaboration between him and his designer, where a sense of the independence of books is manifest, moving attached or unattached to exhibitions. Coracle Press is always open to ideas and extremely sympathetic to the needs of an artist, where there is a cohesive idea, "a fusion of where we are with an idea of someone fitting into our situation."

Although Coracle used to make very small books, which was a very special Coracle look, now there is a genuine diversification, which is a way to support the press and the gallery. "We can make books for ourselves, but we can make books for other people too. . . . When we started, I didn't know we could make books this well. I think that now we have lots of new ideas about books coming through. Diversity has been a catalyst for new ideas and an ongoing device for publication."

With the technological revolution, things have changed, but the feeling for letterpress printing, according to Cutts, will never be lost in England, because of that tactility of type on the page which is irrefutable, even flying in the face of technology.

As far as distribution is concerned, it is as difficult as ever. Distribution isn't any different, according to Cutts, only the quality of the materials is different. Xerox has run right into the hands of quality and book reproduction. Then there a group of specific collectors who know about artworks and boxworks and bookworks, but alas, there are precious few. In a funny way, in England, the concept of a gallery with a bookshop is not generally accepted. The two are seen in separate ways: there is Coracle Press which has a gallery, and Nigel Greenwood, who also has a book distribution service and a gallery, but they really remain two separate entities.

At one time Coracle had a subscription to the books, say fifty pounds a year for one year's production, which included invitation cards and ephemera. But that does not work as well now that the gallery takes up so much time. Yet the ephemera of Coracle Press are phenomenal, so that every exhibition announcement is truly a work of art, of printing and design art, and it goes hand-in-hand with either the catalog or the book that comes out of the exhibition. A collection of these can be found in most known archives of bookworks around the world.

Cutts also publishes, from time to time, complete catalogs of their book production. The latest catalog was that of the work up to 1981–82. What with the gallery program, Cutts making books for other people, as well as his own production of exhibition catalogs for other institutions, it is hard to keep up-to-date with an annual catalog, but Coracle Press does keep up with itself by issuing these catalogs of retrospective publishing. The collection of exhibition announcements, as I stated above, is of immense interest not only for quality of production, but for ingenuity and innovation. They can range

from shovels to boxes and everything in between. Oftentimes even the exhibition catalogs they do are more than catalogs; they become bookworks because of the participation of the artist and the design concept, which become more than the exhibition and make the catalog a bookwork.

Volume 20, Number 3/4 (1997)

Editor's Note: During the Eyerhymes International Conference in June in Edmonton, Canada, I had the great pleasure to visit with Klaus Groh, renowned in the mail art, visual poetry and book art world. It was the first time I had seen him since 1975, when he was in San Francisco for the Banana Fest.

Kurt spoke about how he performed the *Ursonate* of Kurt Schwitters (only six or seven minutes of it) in the Square at the Embarcadero. He was in the U.S. at that time (1975) because he had written his thesis on the New Dada on the West Coast—the new Dadaism on the American West Coast—which he prepared for his Ph.D. in Art Education at the University of Oldenburg.

He had also written a book on concept art, *If I Had a Mind*, published by Dumont in Cologne. It was well received and in a short time it was out of print. Some years later, they asked him to do a book on concept art/land art in the Eastern European countries, since the first book by Jiri Valoch and Geza Perneczky about the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, published by Dumont, had also been well received. But a book on art in Eastern Germany by Thomas could only be published if Groh's book was suppressed, so although the book was published in 5,000 copies, it was available for only 1 1/2 months, then it was cancelled. He discovered that the roots of conceptualism and land art are as different in the East as in America or Europe. Published material is "samizdat" or home-made, and the largest collection of Samizdat is in the University of Bremen today. In the meantime, Groh was transforming all his personal research into his education as teacher.

Over the years, he has organized lots of exhibitions of mail art, which was called correspondence art in his time, whereas Ray Johnson and the New York School changed it to mail art. Groh carried the theme of mail art to Europe, with Wolf Vostell and Robert Rehfeldt being the dominant figures at the time, to transport artistic ideas through the mail. "Mail art is not an -ism, but a channel to distribute art. For artists in Eastern European countries and in Latin America, mail art was a possibility to cross boundaries without traveling, without visas, passports, and controls." The biggest mail art collection in Europe is the Polish-controlled system in Warsaw. Every piece of mail which had a red triangle stamp with a number in it was copied because it was considered a mail art activity and therefore subversive.

In the DDR (East Germany), there was the same problem with mail art. A lot of mail artists had problems with the government, but actually many "mail artists" were members of the Secret

Service (the Stasi) and were serving as spies for the government. They spread mail art invitations around for exhibitions, and they wanted to know who from the West working with this "terrible group." They collected all this information about dubious personalities in a center, a so-called Gaust Archive, an archive in which they kept big files on people such as Klaus Groh. He found his file held more than 200 pages, and because of the new Freedom of Information Act, he now has a copy of all his files from the Berlin Archive. All the postcards Groh received in English from other countries were translated into German and he knows this because you can see the translations made in pencil, which make no sense at all most times. because of some of the outrageous messages on mail art. The real importance of mail art was stopped, according to Groh, when the Wall came down. The political and social reasons for doing mail art were rendered mute at that time. As Robert Rehfeldt used to say: *Say something about anything or anybody will say something about you*. Or *Mail Artists of the World, Unite!* At that time, Robert was sending many messages out to the world, with a secret message between the lines.

After 1989, mail artists changed. What could they do now? Some of them just want a collection, others just do stupid things. But I think that those who do mail art now should do something like poetry—where the word and letters are the main thing, emphasizing the word. Mail art in one way has words that have meaning, while other aspects should be concrete poetry and visual experiences. And there are special pattern poems, using letters as mystical elements in the German culture. If an illiterate sees something written, there is something mystical about it, since he reads what someone who is not present is thinking. You can read what anybody thinks about something in that moment, but the person who created it is many miles away. In the whole history of human existence, there are technical means to transport any kind of information and emotions, which is a mystical expe-rience, because you don't see the person who wrote it, but you know exactly what it means.

According to Groh, e-mail or fax-art is not truly mail art, because mail art is material. And mail art can be humorous. As Schiller wrote, he explained, a human being is only a human being if he plays. To play high-quality games is interesting.

In 1977 he was invited to Calgary to do a book and concept art exhibition by Brion Gysin, Paul Woodrow, and Clive Robertson. In 1988 he was invited by Philippo Menessis in São Paulo to exhibit and lecture. He used to teach at the University of Oldenburg as lecturer, and some of his students (about seven or eight) have continued to do mail art in the network. In 1990 he was invited by a club of journalists in Havana, Cuba, to do a book exhibition at the University of Havana, and then he attended the Mexican Conference of Visual and Performance Poetry in Mexico City in 1996.

He and his wife now have a small salon/theater/exhibition gallery in their home in Oldenburg. They have had exhibitions of the books of Mirella Bentivoglio from Rome, Milan Knizak, Ken Friedman, John and Astrid Furnival, Henning Mittendorf, Andrej Dudek Durer, and many more. I reminded him about his great *Buchobjekte* exhibition at the University of Oldenburg in 1986 with an amazing exhibition catalog of 400 pages and an extraordinary binding.

In addition to the exhibitions, they do have theater performances (rather classical), such as work from Brecht, Kafka, Beckett as well as concerts and political cabaret. Because he and his wife Renate live on the "backside of the moon in the countryside," they have become the cultural center in that area, so government and banks are interested in sponsoring their programs. It is good public relations for them, and excellent for the artists, for the patrons, and for the audiences. The house can hold fifty-five people, and performers have come from Switzerland, Australia, Holland, Italy, and mostly from Germany. They will be celebrated their tenth anniversary in 1998 with a big festival. Klaus Groh, has been there, done that, and is still doing mail art, book art, and is a catalyst for the alternative.

CONGRATULATIONS
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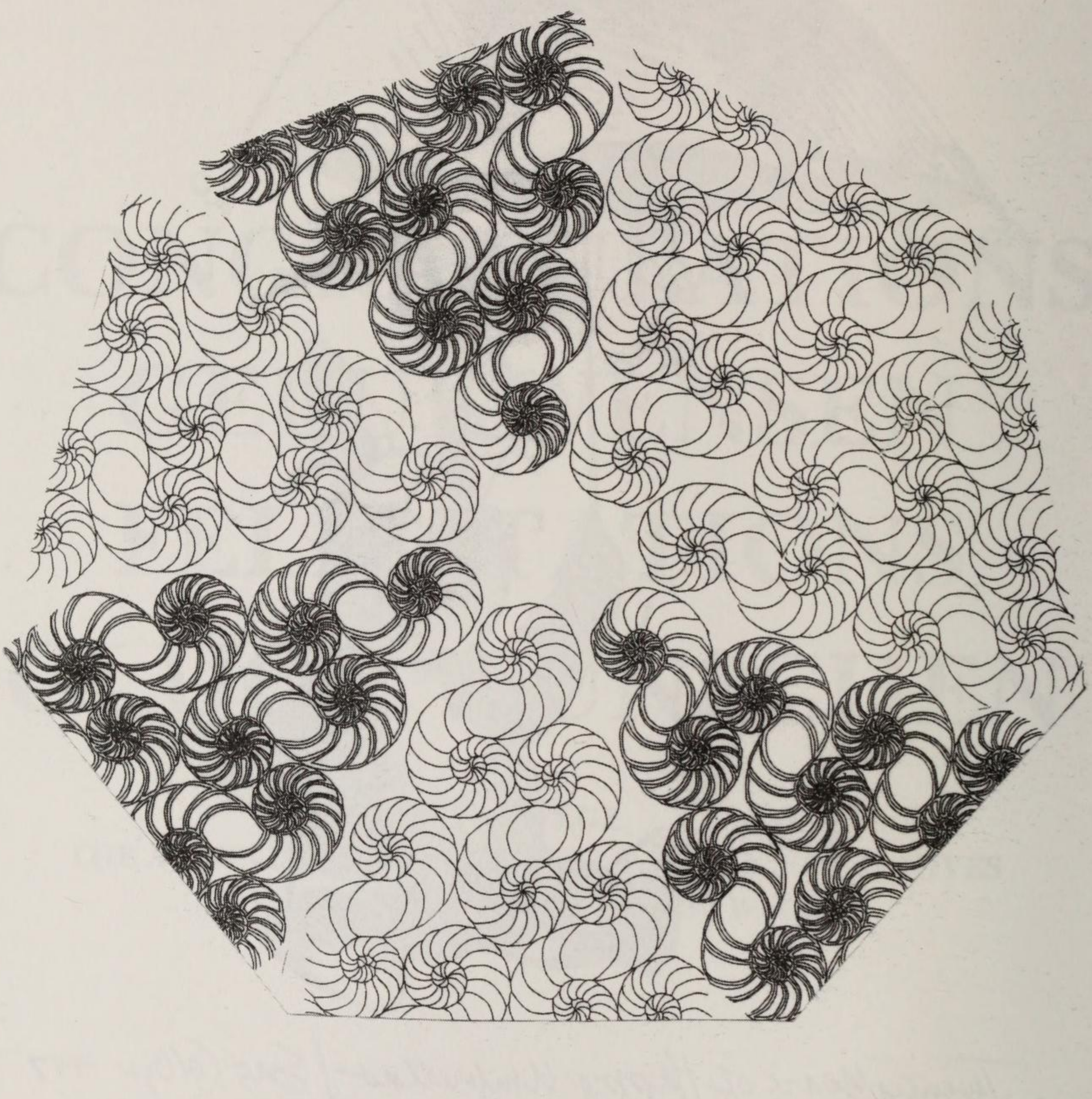
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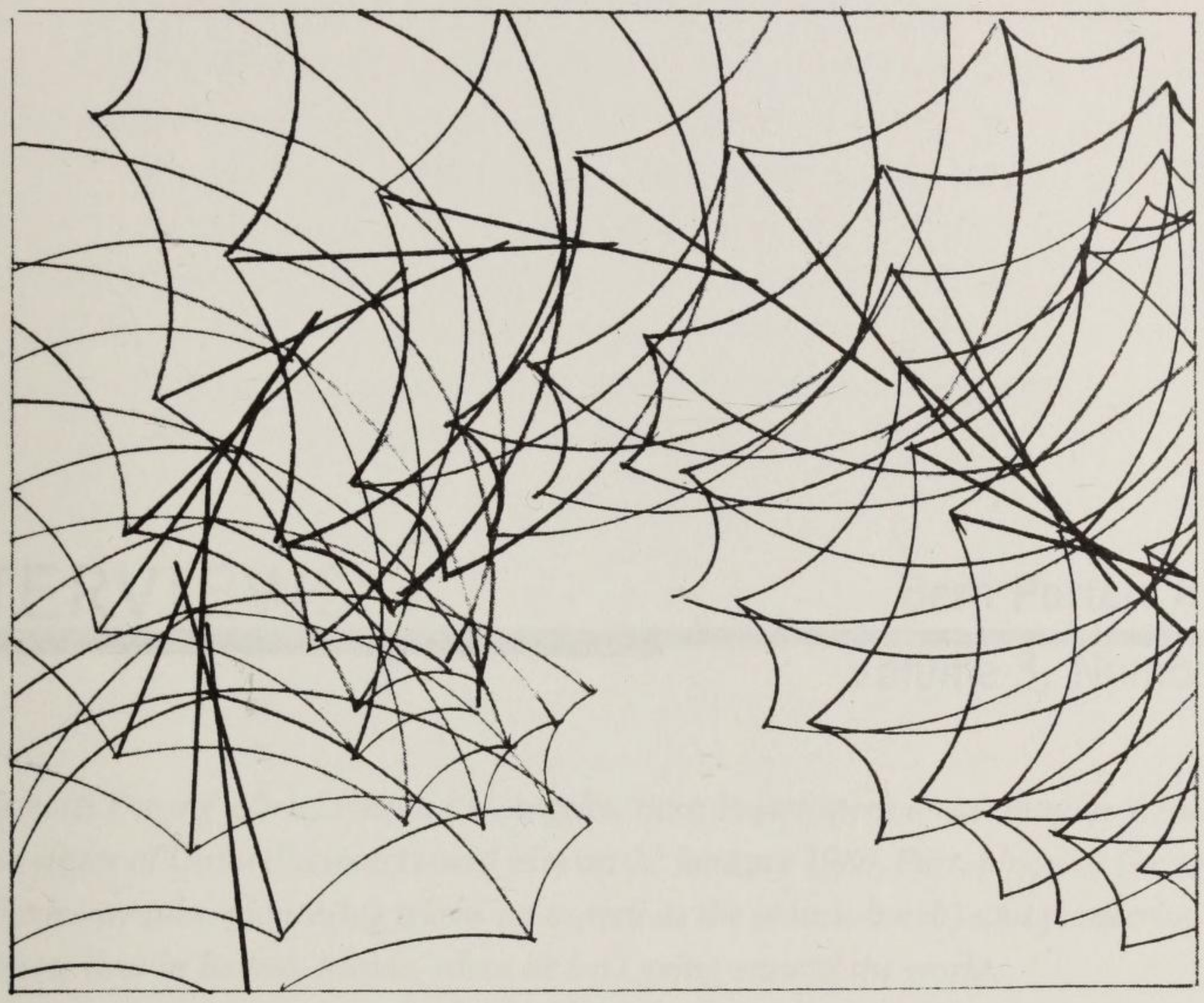


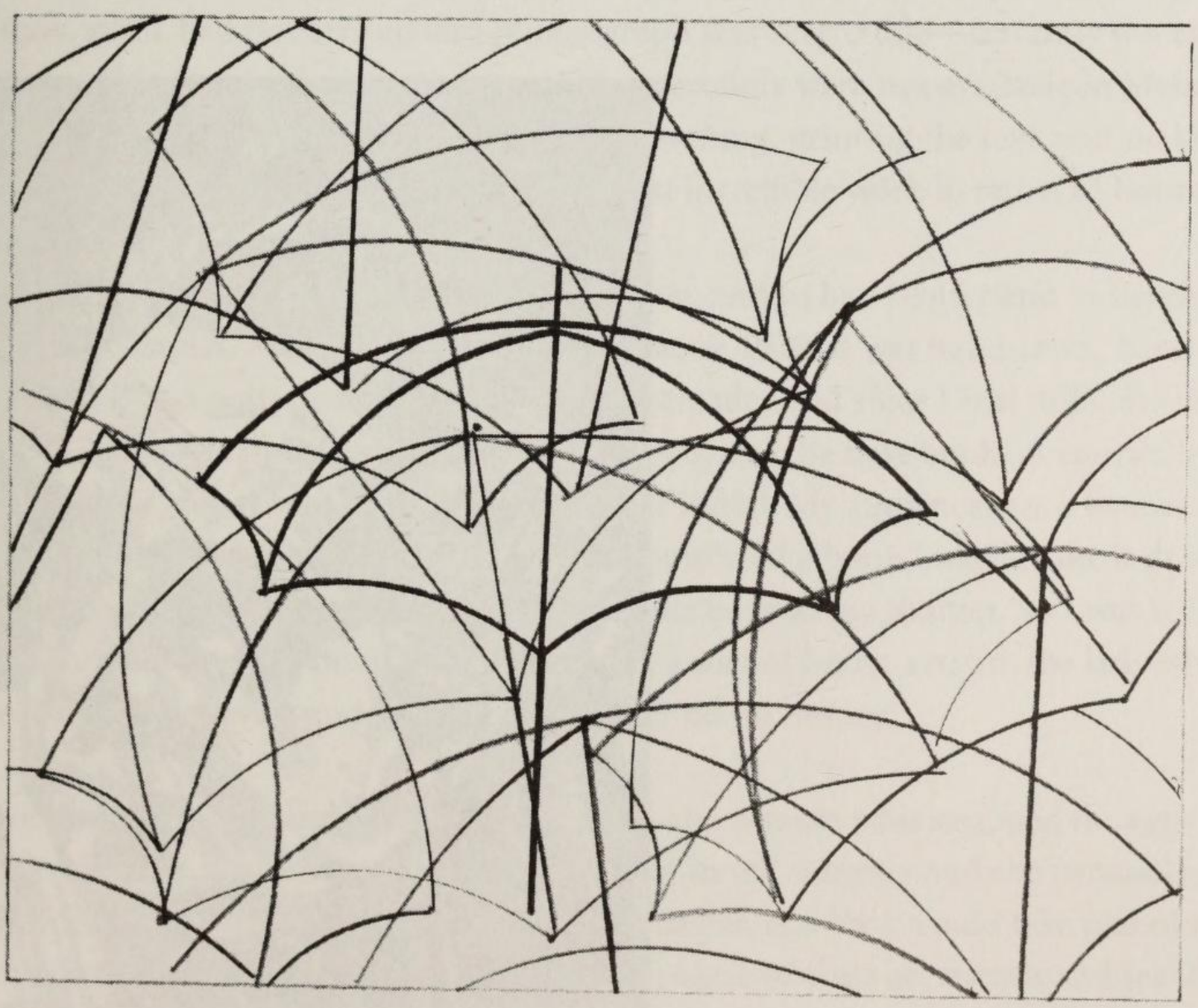
Twenty Years of Happy Umbrellas / Sas Colby 1997

Sas Colby



Patricia Collins





Jules Engel



INTERVIEWS:

Bern Porter: An Interview

Volume 3, Number 5 (1980)

Editor's note: During a brief visit to Los Angeles, Bern Porter spent an evening in Venice during which time the editor of Umbrella *interviewed him on 22 January 1980. Poet, physicist (he helped develop the cathode-ray tube, pioneering television as well as the atomic bomb) and pioneering bookmaker, Bern Porter lives in Belfast, Maine, when he isn't going around the world.*

In 1920 I started making books. Up in Maine my problem was the simple act of reproduction. In those days, xerox had not arrived and mimeograph was very crude—certainly too expensive for me—and rubber stamps had not yet come in or certainly were not available in Maine, so my problem was to draw them by hand. This meant writing, printing the text, and making the illustrations, and it meant an edition of five copies, an incredible work in terms of hours and of effort.

The trick was then to condense, to redigest, to state, and to hand-letter and to hand-illustrate an edition of five copies. My first such book was done in 1920. It was hand-sewn, hand-drawn, hand-lettered, and it had a slipcase which was also handmade. And since I had difficulty with titles in those days, I simply called them numbers, like 179B, and the next book, of course, was CD21. Thus, every title had at least one number and one initial. My audience was a woman who lived down the street about four blocks, and when I completed a book I would take it down to her, and she would give me a dozen eggs which I would take back to my mother. So I was making artists' books in those days—one book for a dozen eggs, a sort of barter system, the lady who received, my mother who received, and I who made it received no money.

I continued with this edition of five, and as far as the woman who swapped the eggs for the book, some friends from Boston would come to visit her in the summer and she persuaded them that they should give me the magnificent sum of one dollar, and they would take one of my books and take it back to Boston and take it into a gallery to some of their art friends and see if there were anyone in Boston who would like to swap hand-made books. My first out-of-Maine client, I've

forgotten his name, was also making a kind of art book (I don't think they were as sophisticated as mine), but he was playing with words and putting them on numbers. Those were very rich years, 1920–21, in Maine, with swapping and bartering and the man in Boston who sent the books to some folks in Philadelphia, who bought some books, and the next thing you know they were tied up as far as New Mexico after about a year and a half of production. At no point were the editions more than five copies. I've been told that one of these editions that I produced in those days now sells for $750 at auction, somewhat different from a dozen eggs, which in those days sold for about thirty cents. I personally have no more of those, but the master collection at the UCLA campus in Westwood does have the magazine which I hand-lettered, which runs to about three pages, so I began at the age of nine.

MAIL

I also did what has later become mail art about that time, and was receiving postcards through the mail and would take a razor blade and cut them up into three sections and then repaste them together, so that we had a sort of a montage, in fact, of a distorted image. Later I encountered in Copenhagen a man named Dieter Roth from Iceland, and he and I swapped cards which we had cut and we called those simply "cut cards," to make it easy. So mail art was beginning in those days, and I later found that Marcel Duchamp was doing it about the same time, and I later learned Kurt Schwitters in Switzerland (they were independent of each other, but 1918–1922 was a very rich time for the beginning of artists' books, mail art, and what we later called posters). It was always shattering to me to sit in Maine thinking that someone else was also doing the same thing, and we got to know one another, becoming friends instead of rivals. The first artists' books went through the mail and were swapped very much as we do mail art now.

As for artists' books, five copies of thirty pages was really a Herculean task! The network was basically word-of-mouth, and the mail service was considerably different in those days than it is now, probably just as unreliable, but we were quite adaptive in those days.

Suddenly, the church that my parents attended acquired a mimeograph machine. This was a marvel of the first order because it came all the way from New York City to the North of Maine, and I happened to have a job as a janitor in the church, and every week when no one was looking, I used to turn the crank and produce some pages on this marvelous machine! I was able, therefore, to run an edition up to ten copies. This was a very advanced technological development. Mimeographing had arrived in Northern Maine!

WERE YOU AS PLEASED WITH THE PRODUCT?

No, and neither were my recipients. They felt that the ink impression that I made with an ordinary quill pen and a bottle of India ink was far superior to the sort of muddy gray that this marvelous machine produced.

I still feel that the machine stands in the way between me and the product. Today we are involved with computers, space satellites, and communication devices, and the artist is particularly very much in the background.

We have discovered recently that we are unable to talk with one another, and the reason is that everyone has a different definition for one and the same word. So it is necessary now to examine the word. And some of us are making desperate attempts to do this. The word is in a bad way in our culture. This is a universal problem, but few people understand one another because this difference of word meaning to each person exists, and I feel it is time for the individual word to be examined.

I find this is a product of our time, when we have nothing but words coming out of the woodwork, and all of them are generally instilling fear, doubt, uncertainty, untruth. It is almost impossible to find the truth in this great tremendous morass of words which now surrounds us.

HOW DID YOUR MASTER COLLECTION GET STARTED?

My master collection has been forming at UCLA since 1942, started by Lawrence Clark Powell. I was working as a physicist in Berkeley on the atomic bomb, and he was interested in having California people preserved there. And in this category, I am reminded that Henry Miller's wife, June, used to go from bar to bar selling one single sheet of paper about six inches square on which Henry had written some words. I was able to give some of those sheets to my collection at UCLA. I look upon those as a very important form, the prerunners to the handbills, the free handbills—with the exception that she sold them—and she was doing this around 1924 or so.

I personally add to the collection at UCLA every six months or so, with the result that by now it is very considerable in volume. I have a secondary collection at Colby College in Maine, where I graduated, and in the case that I have a certain kind of split personality, I also have a split collection, a master collection on the West Coast and a secondary collection on the East Coast.

In my isolation in Maine, it seems to me that I just plowed ahead in a great number of forms and sort of called them my own and sent them out on waves, so to speak, and if other people were independently doing the same thing or later imitated me or followed me in any way, I was very pleased and surprised. But in general I worked alone all these years.

EUROPE, THEN THE STATES

It has been interesting to me that the things I have created have first appeared in either Germany or England or France, and later they somehow were brought to the United States. So I found that making such things as photographs without a camera, trying to interpret the quality of early jazz, Louis Armstrong, the old funeral bands from the streets of New Orleans, I was able to interpret themes of 1930, and I found a music magazine in France which would produce it, and to my knowledge I was not able to get one produced in the United States.

I find every European curious to know what is going on in America. It's as simple as that. So they write to me, and if I don't have something of my own, I send some examples of other work. They look at America as the birthplace of many innovations. It is true that once they absorb them, they seem to imitate them very successfully and advance them and improve upon them in a sophisticated way. But in general they are highly excited about what goes on in America. And in my case most of my things appeared in Europe. There is a greater interest in my work than there ever was. I still think it is America which is leading in such things as outer-space exploration, computers, and what not. They look to us in the arts, as they do in science.

I was in the West at a very fortunate time, 1942–52, when the soldiers were rushing off to the wars in the Pacific and then were rushing back to G.I. loans and stopping in San Francisco and Berkeley to study. There was a tremendous fervent at that time in just about anything you can mention-music, poetry, painting, playwriting. Historically, they refer to it now as the San Francisco Renaissance. Those of us who lived through it, I'm sure we were starving to death, but were nevertheless excited about what we were doing, and we never thought we were "renaissancing" anything.

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION OF INTERMEDIA?

We are indebted to Dick Higgins for having brought the word to our attention; even now I believe it has lost its meaning, because there are so many things happening simultaneously. However, it was a very valuable contribution, and we operated without the use of that word for many, many years. I suppose that *The Wastemaker* is as close as I'll ever get to an unusual composition. I've done experiments since, but I've left the appendix that was first published as *Physics for Tomorrow*, which contains, as far as I'm concerned, a system of consequence for the next twenty years. It actually is my greatest contribution of consequence.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF YOUR RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION?

My retrospective is very flattering to me. Here I am seventy years old, and I could easily ask the question: "Why does it take so long?" It's fair that I ask myself that question. In this case, it was a matter of throwing into a box some sixty-eight items I had lying all around and shipping them off to New York. That's sixty-eight items that I could spare for the duration of six months. But it is very flattering to have this recognition at this time. I'm certainly grateful to all who took part and will be taking part. In my silence I ask how I could be functioning for these sixty years and only now come to the surface?

I always have been aware of the fact that I can produce a great deal more if I had more outlets, so in a sense I am like Emily Dickinson, who wrote her poems and tucked them under the rug, and I produced things and sent them off to UCLA. *The Wastemaker* sat there for eleven years, and some things have sat longer than that. They have one copy only, and one of these days I'll go there and take it out and revive it, I'm sure.

I earned my living as a physicist all these years, and the income from that has gone into all of these artistic efforts. And the art forms have evolved from physics' domination and physics have enmeshed themselves into many of my productions. I'm very concerned about the human eye; I'm also concerned about our five senses. Along with taste, people don't feel anything. Some people can still smell, but their hearing is limited; I'm highly concerned about our seeing. I think there are few people who know how to see, and I'm particularly disturbed about the printed lines. The human eye does not need all the letters in the alphabet. The lines are not typed and set and adjusted to the eye reading; the other eye should be indented—the other eye jumps in a very crude fashion. Take these days when we are moving while looking at something, either in a car, a bus, or we are looking at something such as television, or in the third case, where the object seen is stationary, then we have a clear visual difficulty; then I am very concerned about our five senses being mutilated, and even slowly disappearing, which is an incredible phenomenon, in process now. And this, of course, is traced to bad air, bad food, bad water, just the bad environment that we have created for ourselves.

As for the new media such as microfilm, microfiche, lasers, and holography, they are an indication of our running out of space, of an artificial eye, for the light that we have is not adequate, of the total degradation of the culture. The disappearance of the act of seeing will create the acceptance of artificial eyes, artificial seeing devices, to take the place of nature, characteristic of technology at the moment.

Editor's note: This is the transcript from the videotape made by artist Jeff Perkins while Wolf Vostell was in Los Angeles for his exhibition at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. Many thanks to Vostell and Perkins for permission to print this. Vostell was on the grounds of California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, when he made this tape. When he is not in Valencia or Los Angeles, he is usually in Berlin or in Barcelona.

WHAT IS FLUXUS?

Yes, look at this highway. The highway for me is a Fluxus stream, a Fluxus concept, and all this multiple activity from the people driving their cars, hearing the noise, seeing the light, being aware of the accidents which can happen, covering miles—all this is a contemporary piece, the light, the noise, and time and spac. It is a real Fluxus piece you're looking at.

WHAT IS THIS WORD ACCIDENT? HOW DOES IT PERTAIN?

"Accident" came from my philosophy of the de-collage events—events in modern life which involve situation—changing forms. The car is driving, and if there is an accident, the car is the

opposite of a car—it is no longer car, it is a wreck. So the wreck makes a lot of psychological and economical troubles. So the objects of today, a car and an airplane and a television set, you have implicated the positive and negative ways of behavior, a constructive and a destructive. You cannot do anything today without the destructive moment behind the event.

SO DID YOU THINK ABOUT THIS EVENT IN 1959–60?

No, when I was in Paris in 1954, when I was walking as a young artist through the streets, the street life and its complexity were more interesting to me than any other painting at that time. I knew a little about Dadaism, but for us in Europe, in Germany, especially in West Germany, there was a date which was very important: it was the first Dada retrospective show in Düsseldorf in 1958. There we really saw for the first time the originals. Before we only saw the things in books. Schwitters, Duchamp, Max Ernst—everybody, a complete retrospective! Nam June Paik told me he was very shocked and influenced by this exhibition! I mean, my concept has come from the fascination of the material involved in daily life. And the fascination of the life of objects. That means when I began to see that a turned-down poster is more interesting than a new poster, then immediately I also liked a distorted television program more than a real program. At the same time, it was also a comment on abstract art and at the same time something very new, to get to a secondary reality. It means that all the meaning which the objects like car, airplane, and television sets have after they are normal news, where they are prepared for—so the artist, myself, has given them a second reality, a second news, which is an anti-news, something which gives a final destination to the objects. And man, dealing with those objects, in time—when we began to use time—with the object, the action-music, the event, the performance, and the Happening was born. To me, the Happening was some years before Fluxus. Fluxus is a second union of American and Western European artists who were interested in the phenomenon of acoustic produced through the body and through objects.

WHAT IS THAT WORD "ACOUSTIC?"

Acoustical production—noise production, music done by the human body and music produced by objects. So there we have the same thinking, the same base, and everybody did it differently. You see, *Danger Music,* produced by Dick Higgins, produced and shown and performed in Wiesbaden in 1962, was just putting his hand in 20 kilograms. of butter and moving the butter as a material—nothing else than moving butter for ten minutes. So this is a very new concept, as was La Monte Young's idea of feeding a piano with hay—the same thing by Paik, putting water over himself during his painting of the floor with his necktie. For example, I called my Fluxus piece *Kleenex.* It was in front of the audience, erasing with a liquid, tetrachloride, a double page of *Life* magazine, and the audience could see how the image was erased by my hand. And in my hand I had a microphone, so when I was erasing, the sound of making the image disappear was augmented to the audience. Then suddenly, I jumped up and threw a hundred lightbulbs against a huge glass which was held in front of the faces of the audience. It was a dialectic, a tautology of two disappearing elements, the disappearing of the image was again shown as the disappearing of the lightbulb, because when a lightbulb gives noise, it is no longer a lightbulb, but a lightbulb when it

doesn't give noise gives light. So you can decide whether it should give light or noise. This is typical of a de-collage music and a de-collage event: when an object changes its form, becoming something else and *doing* something during the transformation. At the same time as the process of the disappearing image in *Life* magazine, the audience could see the explosion of the noise of the lightbulb and hear the noise at the same time as the explosion.

YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE FIRST FLUXUS CONCERT IN WIESBADEN IN 1962.
Yes, September 1962.

AND DURING THE CONCERT, GEORGE MACIUNAS WAS THERE?
Maciunas came in 1962 to Cologne—in April or May—to see Paik first, and then we met. Ben Patterson was living in Cologne, and then there was a young assistant of Paik's, Tomas Schmitt, who also lived in Cologne. So Maciunas met four people upon whom he could count to organize the concert. Emmett Williams was living in Darmstadt, Daniel Spoerri came from Paris, and Addie Koepke from Denmark. Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles came from New York. And we all gave a performance not only of our pieces, but of the others' pieces. Phil Corner came too, for the piano activity. You see, Paik organized, in the middle of the year, in Düsseldorf, a concert which was called "Neo-Dada in Music," in a theater, and there Maciunas also did pieces of his own. Then, simultaneously we all did our pieces.

This was three months before the real Fluxus concert in Wiesbaden, which was poorly organized by Maciunas. So the press was confused because the concert in Düsseldorf was called "Neo-Dada in Music," so they thought the concert in Wiesbaden was the same thing. It was the same thing, but Paik intended that the concert in Dusseldorf be called "Neo-Dada in Music," but in Wiesbaden the struggle went on. The whole German press called us the "neo-Dadaists." That Dadaist aspect did not disappear for a long time—it hurt and created confusion, because Fluxus, of course, was a completely new idea of music, of behavior, instead of the music then going on, electronic music. You must know that Cologne's radio station was very important with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mauricio Kagel doing electronic music festivals. You see, we were on the opposite side of the coin. For the public, it was absolutely the most opposite form you could get at that time—I mean, music produced by computers and by machines. On the other hand, young artists not even trained as composers were making music with their bodies and with objects. So you could imagine the kind of discussions that were going on. Many of the journalists at this time could say, "Oh, they're only making music, even not being composers, so maybe this will be for a few years and then go away." They were absolutely not interested in seeing that each of us had already a history of performance of our own, even before Fluxus, and exhibitions too. They were absolutely not used to artists who did objects, multiples, silkscreens, and music, performance, and environments. You, from another generation, may feel that in 1980 the Fluxus aesthetic is not explained very well, because it is so complex to understand.

I THINK IT WORKS FOR INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS IN A PERSONAL WAY WHO ARE DOING THINGS NOW—VERY FLUXUS-LIKE THINGS. THE ACTIVITIES OF PERFORMANCE ARTISTS TODAY ARE VERY AKIN TO WHAT FLUXUS ARTISTS DID THEN.

For me, Fluxus and Happenings cannot make a school, because it is too radical, it depends upon the personal engagement of the artist, so there are very few artists who can have this aesthetic radicality. It leads to performance, which is again something like a theater form; a performance is slightly easier organized and executed. A Happening, for example, is a very strong thing to organize; it depends upon the whole life of the artist.

YOU'RE A VISUAL ARTIST, BUT YOU ARE STILL CONTINUING AS A PERFORMANCE ARTIST DOING ENVIRONMENTS—MORE THAN A CONVENTIONAL ARTIST.

I came to the conclusion that the most radical thing I can imagine will happen in the future. There will be entirely new art forms: for example, when the scientist can put a television camera, a television screen, directly onto your memory, into your brain. Now the media are manipulated by many individual persons or artists or journalists. So it's a classical form. But a very new form would be if you can register what an artist or even a normal man can think about, this mental, this psychoaesthetic production. I think someone can misuse this, but I believe in the future that this direct form of thinking and seeing the thinking visualized on the screen will happen. This is a very new art form. The thinking of an artist has to be visualized. It has become visualized by hand until now. But the future is that everything a man does will be shown in an electronic way. And I also believe that to humanize life through art philosophy, a man himself can become a unique artwork himself—the quality of an artwork. Then if he gets an artwork or if he feels like an artwork, he still has the capacity of making art. Let's say to become an artist shall be fantastic, but I think the most important thing after Picasso, during the second half of the twentieth century, is to have shown to the public that art is discovering yourself, talking with yourself, and making yourself a piece of art.

Back and Forth, Open and Close: An Interview With Kevin Osborn

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Editor's Note: This interview was held in Arlington, Virginia, on 18 March 1983, postponed but not deferred after the great snowstorm of 1983. Kevin Osborn's books have significantly contributed to the discourse on bookworks in the media, and we thought it was opportune to converse with him about his way of making books and his theory about books made by artists in general.

WHEN DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN MAKING BOOKS?

I started making books in 1972. I was an exchange student in France at L'Ecole Nationale des Arts Decoratifs in Nice. I had been making films and slide shows for the French government: I was nineteen. One of my professors, François Cali, was an art historian who wrote and designed books about architecture. (*Real Lush* is dedicated to him.) We got to talking, got interested in each other,

and I visited him at his place up in the mountains. I still remember that day very clearly. We talked about books: paper and ink; pictures and text; and the complex relationships between those things and your imagination. When I left it was as if my head had been turned around, literally turned around . . . I suddenly realized you could layer many realities onto one surface. It wasn't a one-shot deal, but a continual density. It was always there . . . I could see books moving, pages turning. We talked about sequencing, about doing little tiny images in a book like a pocket romance. (*Real Lush* is very much part of that). Little sequences of stories, historical romances, meaningful connections. My doing books comes out of that initial experience of talking with him. He was a mentor.

I left at the end of the year, and I would send him book mock-ups. He would write back how certain movements worked. Usually his refrain was, "Your sequences are *les petites miettes d'images* (little crumbs of images)." He was a tough critic.

WHEN YOU GOT BACK TO THE STATES, WHERE WERE YOU IN RELATION TO YOUR STUDIES?

I was a student at the University of Vermont. There was nothing there in book arts. I had heard about Visual Studies Workshop and was very excited about the program. When I was at the University I drew up an individually designed major in visual communication. I started and taught a photography program in the Experimental Program of the University. We produced four offset books which we distributed, one of which was called *Mashed Potato Mystery*, a Möbius strip. There are very, very few copies existing.

SO YOUR EXCITEMENT ABOUT VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP WAS VERY MUCH IN KEEPING WITH YOUR INTERESTS?

Well, yes, I went there for a semester and dropped out. What interested me about the Workshop was offset, but I had the feeling I had to get some support system behind me and also I wanted to learn how they printed books commercially. So I went back to Vermont and I worked in an old-line printing firm for two years. I did pasteup and camera work and eventually a little press work, but not very much. Essentially I got the discipline of printing beat into me. The way to do it. The correct way to do it. Occasionally they would take me off the offset and put me on letterpress, "real printing," as they called it. I worked on old Heidelburgs and Linotypes, etc. I got to experience that overlap of technologies, that replacing of technologies when offset drove out letterpress. It's happening again now with the exchange of paper and ink for plastic and electricity, offset being replaced by computers.

WERE YOU SURPRISED THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHY INTEREST LED YOU TO THE PRINTING PROCESS?

Well, I had never been interested in photography per se. The idea of putting prints on the wall didn't hit any bells with me, didn't make any sense to me. I didn't feel comfortable with it. I really

wanted to experience "open and close" in my work. I really wanted the images to move and be stationary, layers.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM? WAS IT THE CATALYST IN FRANCE THAT TRIGGERED IT?
Well, yes, it comes from a certain logic, a dialectic tension of presence and absence; revealing and concealing; inside and outside; and so on.

SO YOU FINALLY FOUND A METIER?
I found a medium. I didn't know what to say. Cali said it would take me at least five years to do my first book, and I said, "Come on, I'll be here next week and I'll have a couple of books," and I did return with a couple of books the next week but nothing of importance. He was just about right.

SO WHO DID YOU STUDY WITH AT VSW?
Nathan Lyons. I worked with Joan Lyons in the print shop. She was very supportive. Keith Smith (I would go over to his house and look at his books). And two people who came during the summer I was there: Todd Walker and Stan Bevington, from whom I learned an enormous amount in a very short period of time.

WITH ALL THAT, WHERE DID YOUR INTEREST IN BOOKS COME FROM?
Doing books is like writing a long letter. I come out of a very large family, forty-five people in my extended family within nine miles of each other in Amesbury, Massachusetts. All one side of the family is French-Canadian, and the other side is Irish, and very, very close-knit, extremely close-knit. So growing up was an incredibly vocal experience, voluminous, much the same as *Real Lush* paraphrases that experience, and I think for me to get into doing books was a way of solidifying that experience, writing a letter back.

Also, my grandfather Riopel owned a grocery store catering to a large French-Canadian community in the town. I would wander in the store looking at packages and labels. Was the outside inside? A very direct impact of image and reality! And paper and ink! Aunts and uncles, customers talking back and forth. A very complex environment—overwhelming after a certain point.

IT REMINDS ME A LOT OF *REAL LUSH* WITH THE OVERLAY OF VERBAL AND VISUAL IMAGES. SO IT'S AN EVOCATION OF YOUR PAST WHICH IS A CATALYST FOR YOUR PRESENT?
I think your past is very important, especially when you find yourself with forty relatives—that's a past, that's an enormous density of memory. What interests me about books is the possibility of recording a past to go back to. It was a very loving, strong, close environment with all the advantages and disadvantages that come with it. Incredible claustrophobia! But also supportive—if you got sick or had a birthday, you'd have twenty relatives coming by.

AND ALSO BECAUSE YOU COME FROM A FRENCH-CANADIAN FAMILY WITH ITS TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS UPON WHICH YOU HAD TO BUILD.
Yes, I was in the last class in grammar school that began in French. Speaking in two languages gives one a different perspective.

WHEN YOU GOT OUT OF VSW, YOU DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHERE YOU WERE GOING. WAS IT EASY TO DO WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO AFTER THAT?
It was entirely fortuitous, a stroke of luck. During the VSW Summer Workshop of 1976,1 met an artist who had a studio at Glen Echo Park, Maryland, just outside of Washington. This was an amusement park abandoned in the middle sixties, taken over by the National Park Service, and then opened up as a space for artists. The Writer's Center had started up in 1976 at the Park. They had just gotten a Compugraphic IV phototypesetter, and they decided they wanted to print books. (That's always the way people get started, "I want to do a book," which is completely blind to all the things that are going to happen, but the discoveries as you go are the joy.) Alan Lefcowitz, chairman of the board of the Center, had heard of me from this artist, and he called me up. I came down two days after I passed my thesis. I thought I was going to play softball all summer. Instead, Alan and I started putting together the printing facility. We went to printers who were going out of business. We got our copy camera for $600, a platemaker for $300, and a press for $2,000. We did a lot of scrounging and dug up all these old pieces of equipment. It was great fun.

DID THE WRITER'S CENTER JUST START UP?
A group of writers started it as a place to do readings, to have a bookstore, to be able to typeset their own books, much in the spirit of autonomy. And one of their goals was to get the printing started. What still interests me about the Center is people learning to speak in their own vernacular instead of the "Latin" of TV, newspapers, magazines, which serve an important function in society but which express a public, not a personal tongue. It's very important to provide an environment for individuals to be able to express themselves through workshops, readings, and open access. You get a range of activity happening. Some of the books are extremely interesting, others are not. But it is the process of beginning to define, describe your own language. It takes time.

SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT THE STRUCTURE OF THE WRITER'S CENTER IS SO LOOSE THAT IT ALLOWS FOR THE FREEDOM OF EACH PARTICIPANT TO COMMUNICATE IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY WITHIN THE CONSTRUCTS OF THE TECHNOLOGY THAT IS AVAILABLE AT THAT TIME?
Yes, it's a very loose environment. There isn't an "-ism" behind it. We offer open access on equipment. You rent it from us as a member ($15 a year). You come in and use the typesetter for $6 an hour. If you know how to type you can produce a lot of your book at a very reasonable price. My role at the Center is to do consulting and design work with artists and writers on their books. For example, Doug Messerli of Sun & Moon Books was working on *Smoke* by Djuna Barnes last year. He came in and we talked about the project a little, but he typeset and pasted up the book himself.

And now he's in his third printing. Some books we will design from scratch; others we will assist the publisher in choosing options.

YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PROTOTYPES TO EMULATE—SOUNDS LIKE A UNIQUE SITUATION.

The access is unique, but if you take this back, it's really Stan Bevington at Coach House Press in Toronto who started experimental offset in the sixties. And not by going to a commercial printer, but by getting some equipment and seeing what happens. I can still go into bookstores and reach for a book and then realize it's one of Bevingon's books—just like that! There's the ink, there's the paper, there's that lushness of attention to the material. Print isn't TV. It's really alive, it's a real substance in your hands.

ALTHOUGH IT IS CALLED WRITER'S CENTER, IS IT AVAILABLE FOR VISUAL ARTISTS WHO WANT TO DO A BOOK?

Yes, we have a small grant from the National Endowment right now that assists artists in doing artists' books. We've done seven and have another five coming. The artists are mostly local, with some from New York. What happens is they will come in with the idea of doing a book, and we will do some book engineering: kind of paper, type of binding, ink selection, experimental processes, etc, all geared to helping the artist find a range of options in offset to select from.

Also, we use a process called "positive plate" quite frequently which loosens up the artist and the printing. Positive plate is an offset printing plate that gives you a positive image when you put down a positive. In other words, when you draw a line on a piece of matte mylar, contact it to the plate, and burn it in the platemaker, you will get the line and not the reverse. (With negative plate, which is the standard printing plate, you will contact a film negative and get the opposite of the negative, which would be a positive image.) The positive plate is light-softening, the negative light-hardening. The important point is that you will get on the plate exactly what you put down on the mylar. You can do overlays and see the whole job before you get on the press. It is extremely fast. All the regular stone litho materials and techniques are applicable: tuche, Conté crayon, wash, etc. And the best thing is that there is no darkroom!

If you are an artist who has been trying to do a book, you know the frustration of trying to do experimental work at a commercial printer. Commercial shops have other commitments. They're into volume. They have to make money to pay for the large scale of machinery and people who are working for them. We work small scale and loosely. The artist has direct access to the press, which means they can mix the inks themselves, monitor the effect on the press, and decide when an experimental approach is successful or not. The artist will frequently modify the inks so that they do more than just thin on the sheet. They can be mixed with metallic silver to glow, or mixed with opaques to sit up. The ink is the magic in printing. And of course, since the artist is mixing the inks, he or she will have a lot of options with the color. The printing itself is a slow, deliberate process. The artist will work with our printer. The artist sees a sheet come off the press, they

approve it or change it, work it back and forth. It's a working process. It's not xerox. It takes time. Mistakes are made, corrected . . . definitely the real world. Pain and suffering at times, but when you get some gorgeous press runs, it is an incredible elixir.

ABOUT HOW MANY BOOKS HAVE COME OUT OF THE WRITER'S CENTER SINCE YOU BEGAN?

We've printed over 100 easily—that includes poetry as well as visual books. There has been an incredible range, from *Smoke* by Djuna Barnes, published by Sun & Moon Books, to Helen Brunner's *Primer*, to someone doing their very first book. We sell all books in our bookstore at the Center.

AND YOU OPEN DURING THE SUMMER?

Yes.

SO PEOPLE CAN CONTRACT WITH YOU TO DO A BOOK DURING THE SUMMER, ESPECIALLY FROM OUT OF TOWN?

Yes, we've had a number of people do books with us from out of town, and it's worked out very well. The process of leaving your familiar environment and going somewhere to do just the book really focuses you. For example, I did *Parallel/* down at Nexus in Atlanta with Michael Goodman, and it was great! No one was on the phone. What usually takes six months, I did in a few weeks!

YOU MENTIONED NEXUS. OBVIOUSLY, THOUGH YOU ARE IN MARYLAND, YOU KNOW OF OTHER CENTERS WHICH DO SIMILAR WORK TO YOURS.

Yes, Open Studio in Rhinebeck, New York; Chicago Books in New York City; Women's Graphic Center in Los Angeles; Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester; and Coach House Press in Toronto. I recommend all of them highly.

DON'T YOU FIND THE ARTISTS EXTREMELY NERVOUS, SCARED OUT OF THEIR MINDS?

Yes, you're nervous, you're on the line, you're right there. It's happening, you've thought about it, and now it's running on the press. You've planned it, and there it is. The ink hits the paper. Is it what you wanted? Less or more? Can you work with it? What will come next? You can do printing so right that there's no risk. I want to see my press runs either soar up or go down in flames, right on the edge of what the equipment can do.

And again, the option of the Center is that if you don't like what you see, you can pull the plate and go back. In fact, when I did *Real Lush*, I had a piece of grid paper ten feet long with the signatures numbered on the top and each press run numbered down the side just to keep track of the changes I was making during the actual press work. I would run some different signatures with one plate, divide them up, and then run another collection with a different plate. I would pencil in on the grid as I went. And I had to close off certain signatures with a broad "X," because my over-

riding response was to saturate everything with ink.

SO IN A STRANGE WAY YOU WERE CREATING AND RE-CREATING NEW IMAGES WHEN YOU WANTED, AS LONG AS YOU HAD INDICATED WHAT YOU HAD DONE? AND DISSATISFACTION OR SATISFACTION CREATED A NEW IMAGE AT TIMES?
Exactly. Like painting with the press.

THE PRESS BECOMES A NEW MEDIUM. ARE THERE PEOPLE WHO GET HOOKED?
Yes, but I don't think all artists are going to do artists' books. It takes a certain mentality to go through that type of delayed gratification, that type of complexity in order to arrive at a multiple—not a unique object, but a multiple to be distributed to many people. The number of copies expands the audience, but because of the production it can compress.

COMING INTO THE PRINT MEDIUM MUST BE EXTRAORDINARY FOR SOME PEOPLE. THERE'S NO SCHOOL (TECHNICAL OR POLYTECHNICAL) THAT PREPARES THIS KIND OF EDUCATION, IS THERE?
Well, schools like Visual Studies Workshop, Art Institute of Chicago, and Tyler offer programs. Most print centers have an educational dimension. You learn by doing. The environment to experiment is critical. At the Center we try to streamline the process for the so-called nontechnical person. Rulers create all kinds of problems. We try and create a situation where there are no rulers existing in printing. We try to clear out as much of the tight printing attitude as possible. Basically, by structuring the book first and then filling, it is based on the frame of the page, not the singular image or word.

Most artists who work with us come down for a day, print some stuff, and then go away for four months. They may come back and take a few workshops: hands-on offset, phototypeset, artists' books, etc. Then they are ready to schedule, and boom! the book is done in two weeks! Or they will print a few plates and then come back a month later and overlay some more. That takes longer but is richer.

I'VE NOTICED MORE BOOKS BEING PRODUCED WHICH REQUIRE PARTICIPATION ON THE PART OF THE VIEWER, WITH A PLAY BETWEEN THE CONSTRUCT AND THE PAPER, DIFFERENT FROM THE STRAIGHT-ON BOOK FORMAT.
Yes, that's exciting. The book in the West is out of the codex tradition for various material, manufacturing, and then cultural reasons. My wife, Anne-Catherine Fallen, has done a number of studies of book structures from early Coptic formats to palm-leaf books from Southeast Asia and India. They are all different from our own traditions but are still containers of information. They are very active, and it is very exciting to explore with them.

THEN THAT EXPERIMENTATION WITH BOOK FORMATS WHICH IS ACCESSIBLE AT THE

WRITER'S CENTER IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE EXPERIENCE AT ANY ORDINARY PRINTSHOP WHICH UNDERSTANDS ONLY THE CODEX TRADITION?

Yes, it's different manufacturing and a different audience. What I tell artists who come to the Center is that anything is possible. Whatever you want to do, you can do, and we can produce it with you. The other thing I tell them is that we charge extra for black ink. I hate printing with black ink.

HOW DO YOU FIND TIME TO DO YOUR OWN BOOKS?

I have a schedule set up so that certain days I'm not at the Center. I work then. You have to be disciplined. And when you are in the midst of a new book, as I am right now, everything else stops and you go flat out till you finish.

I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT YOUR BOOKS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO SYMMETRY. YOU LIKE ANGLES. I JUST WONDER WHERE THAT INTEREST CAME FROM, SINCE YOU DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A CRICK IN YOUR NECK. YOU HAVE A DEFINITE LOOK ABOUT YOUR BOOKS.

Up to 1977 most of my printed books were codex. I wanted to make my books more dimensional, alert the viewer that there might be a different experience awaiting him, make it real clear at the beginning. Pique their curiosity: "Why is this? where is this going?" With *Real Lush*, for example, the angle binding was intentional, both to help flip open the book, but also to hide a good percentage of the book in the spine. Open and close. Some people press the book, attempting to make it square. Others will respond immediately and let the pages fly back and forth.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT MAKING A BOOK?

I usually come up with a structure first, so that the frame of the experience is the frame of the book. And then I work in from there. With *Repro Memento* I came up with the structure about two years before I actually printed the book. With *Parallel* the structure was right there and then I worked it out in a very short time. It's a process of seeing something on the street or perhaps a combination of papers that sparks my attention, a jog to my memory. Then I start working with the papers and seeing if the spark, the pull, the job will structure out. I gradually dig deeper and deeper and then I have to dig out, which is the hard part. But making the structure at the initial stage is when I feel closest to the viewer.

SO YOU'RE GOING THROUGH THAT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VIEWER AND YOUR PRODUCT ALMOST BEFORE YOU'RE GOING TO PRODUCE IT. ISN'T THAT UNUSUAL?

Well, the process of coming up with the structure is like establishing a bridge with the viewer. This is what we're going to talk with, this is the frame, this is the context to explore. It's also what I talk with. I work back and forth from content to form, frequently changing the structure, looking for openings. *Real Lush* did not start out as an angle book. The angle did not come in for about three months, but that step opened up a dialogue with the form and then the imagined viewer. That

was vital. The feelings and ideas are there, and they surface in the structure.

TALKING ABOUT DIALOGUE, YOUR *REPRO MEMTO*, FOR INSTANCE ALLOWS THE PARTICIPANT WITH THE BOOK TO DISCOVER, ALMOST UNCOVER, YOUR INTENTIONS, BY THE TRANSPARENCY OF THE PAPER, BY THE STRUCTURE, WHICH BECAME A PIECE OF SCULPTURE AT TIMES, SO THAT UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF THE BOOK WAS AS MUCH PART OF THE THE ACTIVITY AS IN FACT REALLY KNOWING WHAT THE BOOK WAS ALL ABOUT—A MEMORY TRACT, A MOMENT EXTRACTED FROM THE PRINTING. YOUR BOOKS OFTEN UNLOCK THOSE SECRETS SLOWLY, ALMOST AS MUCH AS THE PAIN AND SUFFERING OF MAKING THOSE BOOKS.

Cover and uncover then the element of surprise, You recognize something in the book over time. The book hits you over time.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?

The new book, *Vectors* (working title) which will be coming out this spring, is composed of drawing and words on twelve different colors of paper in fifteen colors of ink. It's book active. A very narrow format two by nineteen inches. It spins off a common axis and fans into arcs and circles. Closed, it's tied up with ribbon. Open, it rainbows. There's slow process of revealing and concealing.

DO YOU HAVE ANY DEFINITION OF ARTISTS' BOOKS?

Only that it is bound. Once you've tied together something: paper, oranges, concrete, whatever, it implies coherence. Implies that you've thought about it. Implies that you've done something which is basically human: combine two or more things together to create a relationship. A book has that automatic manifold implication because of its binding. The viewer anticipates he will have to work the binding to discover the contents—even in a codex. By the way you bring together the pages, you shape the circumstances.

THE BINDING THEN IS THE COMMITMENT?

Yes, that is a good way to put it. You see the binding first in a book, as it lies closed on a shelf. Compressed almost waiting to explode. The book triggers a feeling in you. You are attracted to this book. You reach for it. The commitment. You open the book and you open yourself. You begin a dialogue with the movement of the pages. You are aware of remembering. You cover, uncover bound shapes. You reveal and conceal.

AND THAT'S AN INTIMATE EXPERIENCE, A ONE-TO-ONE EXPERIENCE WITH MAGIC?

Yes, the intimate magic of bringing forth memory.

Today's Artist in Portugal: An Interview With Juliao Sarmento

Volume 7, Number 1 (1983)

One of the surprises at the Art Ink '83 fair was the presence of the Instituto Portugues Do Livro from the Ministry of Culture in Lisbon, and who should be manning the booth but someone who wanted to see my identification badge. As I approached, he told me that he knew me, and indeed he did, for he was Juliao Sarmento, who was producing postcards in 1978 and entered the book show I helped curate, and who was represented in Documenta last year. I was so fascinated by his presence at Art Ink that I decided to interview him and found out about art in Portugal.

The Portuguese Book Institute is part of the Ministry of Culture, but independent in budget and mainly concerned with the promotion of Portuguese literature, nothing else. This is the first time that the Institute explored another area, namely art. We are not publishers, we just promote. We contacted several Portuguese publishers and asked them to give us samples of their production to bring it to London to exhibit, this being the first attempt to promote art. Only time will tell if this will be an ongoing responsibility. There is one art magazine in Portugal, published by the Gulbekian Foundation. There is no specialized art publisher in Portugal, but there are about six publishers who publish, among other titles, some art books as well. The only exclusive art books are published by the Gulbekian Foundation, plus catalogs of the shows they put on, and also exhibition catalogs from several exhibitions either published by the galleries or the institutions where the exhibitions are held, or by the artists themselves, or the groups of artists who form an exhibition. There are not even specialized bookshops for art, so you have to go everywhere to see the panorama.

There is a new Museum of Modern Art in Portugal privately owned by the Gulbekian Museum Center of Modern Art. The Foundation supports contemporary art through very ample grants which are available to artists who make proposals to them. Because they are the sole support of grants to artists in Portugal, the Gulbekian Foundation is immune from any criticism, since it is private. The Ministry of Culture also gives some specialized grants, as well as the Institute for Portuguese Culture. There was an attempt at alternative magazines, initiated by artists, but they have failed after one or two issues because there was no financial support and people were just not interested in the small art scene which exists. It is a very small country in a very difficult economic crisis, where survival is of the utmost importance. Artists are the only people interested in the art scene. First you need money, then you must find an audience. But there is a lot of energy and vitality in the art community, an art community which works for itself.

HOW DO ARTISTS GET INFORMATION?

There is a problem. There is only one art magazine, and all international art magazines are not distributed in Portugal. The only way to get them is through subscriptions. You must know the art magazines to subscribe, and they are so expensive that no one has the money with which to sub-

scribe— it's rare to find those who subscribe. There are no art publications, so people lose interest. And there really isn't an audience for publications in art.

DO PORTUGUESE ARTISTS TRAVEL?

No, they don't travel much. We are just allowed to take a small amount of money out of the country for a year, only 40,000 escudos which is equal to $280 a year! So artists really cannot travel with such a small amount of money. They stay, and being an artist doesn't pay, so very few people go to the two art schools, and those who go to the art schools usually don't end up being artists, but teachers. Graphic artists, fashion designers all go to art school for one year and usually become independent artists. Yes, there are several good artists who are teachers in Portugal. Artists usually do menial labor or become public servants like me to help pay their way in life, to do what they really want to do, namely, be artists.

IS THERE SPACE FOR STUDIOS?

There are very few studios in Lisbon built by municipalities, but if they are, they are taken right away. Only one to two percent of artists can have those studios because there are so few of them. I have my studio in my home.

ARE THERE ANY ARTISTS' UNIONS?

In Lisbon, there are at least the National Society of Fine Arts, the Artists' Cooperative, the Specialized Etching Cooperative, the Circle of Fine Arts, but these are organizations, not really unions. Artists and institutions get grants only if they ask for them, and not every artist gets a grant, but if they do, they usually help pay for basic needs.

HOW ARE THE EXHIBITION SPACES FOR ARTWORK?

Artists exhibit either in their own artists' organizations spaces, those which belong to the unions which are not commercial, or else they show in private galleries, but there are not many of them. The market is now starting again, but there are not really collectors, just those who make one purchase.

SO WHAT DRIVES AN ARTIST TO BE AN ARTIST IN PORTUGAL?

Because we have to. You feel compelled to do it. When I was in Documenta, it was the first time a Portuguese artist had ever been in Documenta, because I have galleries in Switzerland and in Germany and I became known to Documenta curators through that. I was not in Documenta because I was a Portuguese artist. No, it was because I am Juliao Sarmento, and they liked what I did in Switzerland and in Germany.

For the Venice Biennale, however, we have commissioners, one who is a Portuguese art critic and every year he selects an artist to represent Portugal at the Biennale, and he's absolutely straight. There are very few reviews in the newspapers, since there are very few critics who write about art. Each critic has a certain group of artists, and not all the artists are under a certain critic. So some

artists are not represented in the literature. Only artists probably read those columns in the newspapers. Libraries also do not have those art magazines. Exhibition catalogs are purchased by those people who go to the exhibitions—collectors and artists themselves. One thousand is the normal edition, but sometimes there are only 500 in an edition: they sell about 200 and keep the others in a warehouse.

WHAT KIND OF ART IS PREVALENT IN PORTUGAL NOW?
There is a lot of printmaking, and graphics in general. Artists have an etching union called Gravura, and another deals with silkscreen. Lithography isn't very well known. Artists use mostly etching and silkscreen.

Other artists use video and performance. Not many artists are using photography, but there are many of them who use it as documentation. Copy art never really took off in Portugal, but audio art is frequently used. Mail art is also another network for Portuguese artists.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SPANISH ARTISTS?
None at all. The two countries in the Iberian Peninsula have no cultural exchange. People don't know what's happening in Spain, not through the movies, literature, or fine arts, and vice versa. It's probably because of the old hatred between the two countries, and there is hope that things are going to change. Cultural contact does not exist. We have more to do with France and Italy, e.g., Maurizio Nannucci is going to have a show in Florence. To be sure, there is a language problem, and there really isn't any communication device.

This is the first attempt of the Institute to do this, to go to another country and show more than literature. The Institute deals mainly in Portuguese literature, but it's so great that they are opening their doors and providing a window to Portugal.

Paula Claire, Visual Poet Extraordinaire

Volume 18, Number 1/2 (1995)

This interview was held in Oxford, England, with Paula Claire, a visual poet and owner of the International Concrete Poetry Archive, 1961–1991, which she has documented in a volume that celebrates thirty years of her performing and collecting. This volume is entitled Declarations: Poems 1961–1991. *I have been corresponding with Paula Claire and reading about her for years.*

HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN CONCRETE AND VISUAL POETRY?
I read English at London University, and I was very interested in the sound of words. And in our college, there was a very strong language emphasis, so we had to study the Old English texts and Old Norse texts, and things like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. And I found in that four-beat

alliterative verse terrific power, and the only modern equivalent I could find was Gerard Manley Hopkins, and so my roots are really very traditional, because I have gone in the sound quality of words, I have gone back to that great tradition of four-beat, not five-beat lines and alliteration, which gives a terrific energy to words. I suppose my interest as a poet started from those texts and Hopkins, and then in 1964 I went to Greece for four years, and I was off the beaten track, so to speak. I began writing in 1961, continued it when I was in Greece, and I was rather glad I was isolated, because I think I developed my own style without other influences. When I came back from Greece in 1968 and I went to Zwemmer's Book Shop and found the Something Else Press *Concrete Poetry Anthology* (ed. by Emmett Williams), I felt that I had already established for myself what I call my "mobile style," a non-linear style—clusters of words, complex images which I could improvise with, but I think my inspiration came from those ancient texts. And Hopkins's very core of his inspiration was the ancient Welsh poetry, which also had the alliterative quality. So I feel pleased that I didn't suddenly come across the concrete poetry of the 1960s in that anthology and get wiped out by that. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to develop a style, then having seen that anthology and seen British names in it, such as Bob Cobbing . . . I met Bob Cobbing in 1969. We went to a conference at York University on contemporary poetry, and he then slotted me into a lot of international exponents. I worked on and off with him, performing his texts and my texts ever since.

WHO ELSE DID YOU MEET BESIDES BOB COBBING?

The other person with whom I have worked quite closely is Bill Griffiths, and he also has a great interest in the ancient texts and the sound values that come from those. Then Bob formed our group, Concrete Canticle, which originally had a chap called Michael Charles, but Bill Griffiths joined us quite soon afterwards, and we three have experimented with each other's texts. I find that a great discipline, because some of Bob's work I don't necessarily like, but I admire. It's like an actress playing parts, characters, which she maybe finds very formidable, but it stretches you. Bob is far more Dada than I am.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE EACH OTHER? HE GIVES YOU DADA, WHAT DO YOU GIVE HIM?

I suppose that I take like a duck to water with improvisation. To me it is quite natural. I do not have a good mind for memorizing. I cannot memorize a poem very well, but if someone gives me something to improvise, I don't know why, but I can improvise. And Bob really has given me a very frightening but marvelous training. He doesn't believe in rehearsals. He did slightly to begin with, but as the years have gone by, he will actually give me the experimental texts we are going to work on when we are on stage. I don't even see it two minutes beforehand. But I have to work, and he creates the instant response. I think you are tapping into really primal energies when you're challenged that way. And I have Bob to thank for that.

WHAT ENCOUNTERS HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PERFORMANCES WITH OTHER SOUND POETS?

We have strong links with the Canadian poets. The first time we went to Canada, I was invited by bp nichol, and that is a huge gap for us that he died in 1988, because he was a marvelous performer and a very generous human being. He loved sound poetry, and he would encourage anybody. A lot of the major events in Canada were inspired by him, because he was so thrilled that we were all together and working together. There was no sense of "Oh, I want to be center stage." He wanted everybody to develop, so we have from 1978 onwards a strong connection with the Canadian sound poets, and I have worked with barry nichol and another extraordinary character, Bill Bissett, who is another extraordinary performance artist as well as a painter/collage maker.

DO YOU EXCHANGE TEXTS? IS THERE A MAIL ASPECT TO THIS?

Yes, absolutely, this is how my archive has gradually cohered since I started going internationally. My first event was with Bob at the Stedelijk Museum in 1970 in the "Question Mark" concrete poetry exhibition. Since then, because my name was in the catalog, that's how Mirella Bentivoglio found me. And that is how I got to know a whole international set of people. Sometimes we meet at festivals, sometimes we know each other (just as we do) just through the mail. What I love about this particular scene is that we all believe in poetry as currency, and we produce our little publications not really for the public—I think it is something to barter with. If someone sends you a book that you love, you want to give them something in exchange. My archive isn't particularly big, but it is, I feel, important, because it is unique, because I am a working poet, and it's all been gathered together by this swapping. We believe in the currency of each other's work, and that is how all the books have come together. I have bought very little indeed, but it has all been by fair exchange. I am in touch with people all over the world—in Australia, in South America, in Japan, Europe, the States, Canada—it's a full-time job just doing that, and I am very hit and miss. Some people may think I am a marvelous correspondent, because something comes in and I will immediately answer them, send something off. Another time, when there is something particular going on here, some problems or whatever, then I do not respond to people for ages, and then I feel dreadful.

TELL ME IF YOU HAVE FELT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 1970S AND 1980S. AM I WRONG IN FEELING THE DECADE DIFFERENCE, OR IS IT LESS OR MORE TIME TO CITE DIFFERENCES?

I think the 1970s and 1980s were both productive, peaking around the mid-1980s, and since then, unfortunately, because of a loss of grants for visiting lecturers and performers, my international activities have gradually ebbed away, but that is the same for a lot of people in the field. Because of the lack of finances, we are not getting around as much as we used to.

ARE YOU MORE RECOGNIZED IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD, BECAUSE THEY ARE THE PEOPLE WHO FUND EVENTS LIKE THIS, OR THE ALTERNATIVE ART WORLD, OR WHAT?

I suppose the alternative art world. To a certain extent, the universities. For instance, I call myself a poet, but I am never sponsored by English departments. It is either the visual arts departments, because they are interested in what I am doing with language and how it appears on the page and

poem objects or poems in the environment, or the music departments, because I improvise with musicians; I am very interested in electronics and live electronics, and I sing. I don't recognize the difference between speaking and singing. To me, singing is just like when you walk and then you dance. Where is that point when walking becomes dancing? Where is that point when you are speaking and then singing? So I like to flow backwards and forwards from the speaking and the singing. So it is the music departments that are more interested. But the literature departments know because they feel that experimental poets are tampering with the language, and if they tamper with it, they are spoiling it, they are making it degenerate. For me, language demands, requires, deserves an intense focus. Concrete poetry is the most intense focus you can put on language, because you are saying that less is more. I often think that language suffers from inflation, like money. Sometimes the more words we use, the less we say. And I think that the concrete poetry movement is making us realize that a few words say so much, that we ought to understand that each word and each part of each word interreacts, how it has evolved, and how it affects us.

BEING AN ENGLISH CONCRETE POET AND THE LANGUAGE IS ENGLISH, IS IT UNIVERSALIZED? IS THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE A STOPGAP FOR UNDERSTANDING?

I think the universal is important. I am ashamed to say that so many people whose mother tongue is not English understand English, and it makes us who speak English very lazy. The only other language I know is Greek, which I learned while living there for four years, and a bit of French and a bit of Italian, but I do not know more foreign languages fluently. People come to English because there are so many millions of people speaking English.

SUPPOSE AN ITALIAN CONCRETE POET COMES TO ENGLAND, AND THEY DON'T KNOW ENGLISH. HOW IS THEIR PERFORMANCE RECEIVED?

I think it is the sound of the language that is important. I think what is beautiful about sound poetry is why it is strong in the twentieth century. We are conscious of being part of the entire globe. Sounds in themselves have their own wonderful values, and it is wonderful to listen to another language and experience so much. In fact, it is more often very helpful not understanding the semantics, because sometimes semantics get in the way. We are so busy concentrating on the meaning that the profound effects of language are lost on us. And that is what sound poetry has to offer us—that it is a kind of Esperanto.

DO AUDIOTAPES GO INTO YOUR ARCHIVES HERE? DO YOU CAPTURE PERFORMANCE ON AUDIOTAPE, VIDEOTAPE, FILM?

Obviously, I would love it to be videotape and film as well, but I have done very little with that. I did a bit with Texas Tech in their music department. Real Art Ways (Hartford, Connecticut), did a video of my performance for their archive, but mostly my work is on tape. I would very much welcome the chance to have it in both dimensions. My archive contains quite a number of tapes, visuals, and books. I don't like to separate the two—the visual shapes on whatever a book is, and that interpretation in some kind of performance, some kind of sound enhanced with musical

instruments possibly, and with movement.

ARE THERE OTHER COLLECTORS BESIDES ARTISTS WHO EXCHANGE THIS MATERIAL?
Well, yes, there are these mythical collectors. I am not really in on that scene in Britain, but Mirella tells me that there is in Italy a considerable market. She sells her work to collectors, but it needs a lot more education for people to get to know about it. It ought to evolve from colleges disseminating this kind of work. We are so often ghettoized, and this I object to. If I can get through to people, whoever they are—I often draw concrete poems on the train, which I take a lot—people will be a bit nosy, even in England, and the times I have given lectures and performances in trains on the way to London is lovely. People just get out of that particular barrier, and if you tell them you are writing a concrete poem, what a turn-on. If they are intrigued, well, it is called visual or concrete poetry—they are intrigued first. Many people get an enormous joy out of language, but it is intimidating if it is presented to them as an eclectic occupation. And of course children, teach us that it shouldn't be eclectic. I do a lot of work with children six to seven years old. We did a portion of my Space Poem, and they spread the letters of the word "space" all over their pages and all over their walls, and they were just natural sound and visual poets, even at that age. I was a little nervous to start that young. Usually I teach eight-year-olds upwards, but this class of six and seven-year-olds was a perfect joy. They showed that we should play with language, as dolphins play in the sea, without set ideas that we develop as we get older. Kids love to wriggle around on the page, they love to respond to language signals and the joy of sounds.

YOU KNOW THAT THE FLUXUS MOVEMENT IS CELEBRATING ITS THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY, AND I JUST WONDER HOW YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES RELATE TO THE FLUXUS ARTISTS?
The only person I know quite well in that movement is Dick Higgins, and he has always appeared in our concrete poetry events. We met in Canada several times, and of course, in New York in 1980, and I feel there are a lot of links between us. I hate this idea of movements. I don't like pigeonholing people in movements. These are all creative people who have goodwill, who are not so keen in categorizing what they do. It's useful to understand things, but I do not like categorizing.

IS THERE A FRUSTRATION IN THE WAY ART MOVEMENTS TAKE OVER, AND THERE IS LESS OPPORTUNITY TO PERFORM CONCRETE AND SOUND POETRY WHEN OTHER ART FORMS DOMINATE?
I don't think things have changed a great deal. In England, the scene is centered on Bob Cobbing in London. It is small groups of great enthusiasts that keep the thing going. That is no different from the Dada artists in the first decades of this century. It is the enthusiasm of these small groups of people that is inspiring. It is the quality of enthusiasm, when you have these particular gatherings. Bob has pretty regular gatherings in London, at the Victoria Pub in Wallington Crescent, upstairs. The things that have happened in that room have been terrific—twenty to thirty people come drifting in. He has the whole afternoon there, and people come in and out—there is the

usual hardcore of regulars. London is such a meeting place for international visitors that you never know whom you will meet or who is influenced by these things. Anna Hatherly happily met Bob in the 1970s and was inspired by him and set out on her own course. And there have been a lot of people from Australia, the States, and it's this particular quality of experience, specialist and gorgeous experience on these occasions. If you have not experienced them, you might go to the other side of the world, but this will stay with you, because it has been so "peculiar."

IS IT TIME TO HAVE ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL GATHERING SOMEWHERE?
Absolutely, it would wonderful to all get together again. Of course, bp nichol used to be such a great generator of this kind of experience. But since he died, there hasn't been a major meeting in Canada. But it would be wonderful if we could.

ARE YOU ALL CONNECTED VIA SOME MEANS LIKE A MAILING LIST, JUST IN CASE A LARGE INTERNATIONAL MEETING WOULD BE CALLED?
Yes, we all network, in a very irregular way. You might not hear from somebody for one to two years, and suddenly they erupt again. The art world likes to say, "Oh, concrete poetry was that movement in the sixties," and of course it's all going on still. It doesn't stop, it is a continuous web. Art critics are out to make their own reputations, they like to be kingmakers, and they like to say, "This is finished, and if I say it's finished, therefore it is." And yet, all the creative people still continue with all the work. That is why I think the Sackner Archive (Miami Beach, Florida) is doing such marvelous work. Marvin and Ruth collected a phenomenal amount of material, right from early in this century with the Futurists and Surrealists and everybody since. It is incredible how they have searched out all the people who are still working. That archive, which the Sackners have said they will secure intact for the future, will show exactly what is going on. It cannot be ignored, it is huge. The art critics will look very silly indeed when someone will write a definitive book on the material in that archive.

WHAT ABOUT MARY SOLT'S ANTHOLOGY AND EMMETT WILLIAMS' ANTHOLOGY THAT YOU DISCOVERED IN THE SIXTIES, PUBLISHED BY SOMETHING ELSE PRESS? COULD WE USE A NEW ANTHOLOGY NOW, NOT ON PAPER BUT USING SOME OTHER MEANS?
I think a composite video to get people to know about this group. Of course, that would be quite an undertaking, and you have to have an establishment that is willing to get everybody together to fund it.

I THINK IT WOULD BE WONDERFUL IF A CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM WOULD UNDERTAKE IT BY HAVING A FESTIVAL, GETTING EVERYONE TOGETHER, AND GUARANTEEING DOCUMENTATION. HOW ABOUT A GERMAN MUSEUM?
There are a lot of German exponents, but I am not so knowledgeable about the Germans. Jeremy Adler, who is a reader in London University, has been a visual and performance poet since the 1970s. He's the person to ask about the German scene. There is so much to know about the vari-

ous national scenes. I have a pretty good handle on the Italian group because of my contacts. There is quite a lot going on in France.

YES, ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO THERE WAS A BIG EVENT IN MARSEILLES IN WHICH JULIEN BLANE HAD A GREAT PART.

Yes, I met him in 1979. He had an exhibition in Paris, and we all had to send postcards, and I did one with the gargoyles from Oxford greeting the gargoyles of Notre Dame in a medieval fighting match, hurling insults at one another. The Centre Pompidou, in connection with their Electronic Music Studio, has held some sound poetry events from time to time there. Bernard Heidsieck had a lot to do with that.

ARE THERE JAPANESE POETS INVOLVED WITH YOUR GROUP?

I know of a Japanese visual poets—Shoji Yoshizawa—who did a very interesting visual poetry magazine for about twelve years, which he has now disbanded, of Japanese visual poets, and at the back he would have a little résumé of what is going on internationally. In Japanese, one could see in Japanese calligraphy: "Karl Kempton." The Japanese are very sensitive to the wonderful visual qualities of language. Through their calligraphic traditions, they will look at language with the same intentions as we would only give to painting; we are not so used to looking at language for the sheer beauty of the form that is natural in the Japanese culture. That is why the Japanese have produced very fine visual poetry.

I love to think that when I work at night that I can be quite sure that there are quite a few people that I know beavering away.

IF THERE WOULD BE AN IDEAL SITUATION FOR YOUR ARCHIVE, COULD YOU INDICATE WHAT YOU WOULD LOVE IT TO SERVE FOR YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES?

These archives become a great burden and responsibility as they increase in volume and as we get older. Suddenly, I'm not going to be here permanently, I am not a fixture, and so I will divest myself gradually of things. Bob did have a very remarkable collection of stuff when I first met him in the 1970s. He has gradually dispersed a considerable amount of it. I would like my own archive to be accessible to people. I just cannot cope with people coming to study here. They usually want access to the material for several days or weeks, and I cannot just give that time to people. Some kind of an institution might one day take it. I would like it to be a living archive and have a whole group of people use the material and create themselves. An archive should not be something enclosed, but it should be in the public domain and very active and an inspiration to people.

YOU TAUGHT WITH YOUR ARCHIVE. I WONDER HOW YOUR YOUNG STUDENTS REACTED TO USING THE MATERIALS EVOLVED UNDER YOUR GUIDANCE? DID THEY LOVE IT, DID THEY FIND IT STRANGE?

At Oxford Polytechnic, I have been working for the past two years with Michael Corris in the Introduction to Graphics Module, and I used to take the second part of the module. I would bring

a lot of archive books along, we would browse and we would discuss, and then the students would have their own project in which they would create either a poem object or an overlay poem involving an overlay of xerox on acetate, and we were really delighted with the response we had. Somehow, there is something in people that loves to play with words and to free words from their linear straitjacket that printing has put on them. Printing was a wonderful thing that freed knowledge from the jurisdiction of the Church and disseminated information. When we look at a very strict text (left to right on a grid), it does things with our mind. The value of the experiments of visual poetry in this century is that it frees language from the left-to-right, top-to-bottom grid (the straitjacket, which controls our ideas), and the computer today makes children do very sophisticated things that were not possible at all before the technological revolution—so when you have the words flowing and dancing on a surface, then it actually liberates the thinking processes. That is why it is very important that it gets people making things in this visual poetry style, and the students really made for us an unending source of creativity. Robin Crozier at University of Sunderland, an exceptional visual poet who is tremendously fertile and keeps connections with people all over the world with his work, probably teaches a certain amount in England.

DO YOU FIND THAT THE MAIL ARTISTS SOMETIMES CHANGE THEIR STYLE OF COMMUNICATIONS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN INVADED BY SOME UNUSUAL CONCRETE POETRY OR VISUAL POETRY THAT CHANGES THEIR FORM OF COMMUNICATION?

Well, I feel on the periphery of mail art. I do get invitations to participate, but if I am working on my own projects, it is very difficult because there is always a deadline. Often I am too involved in what I am doing, and then when I remember, the deadline has gone. I feel you have to have more time.

WELL, IN THE MAIL ART WORLD, THOSE VISUAL POETS WHO PARTICIPATE USUALLY CREATE WORKS OF ART THAT HAVE RESONANCE. SINCE THEY ARE APPEALING TO A VERBAL THEME, THEIR VISUAL POEM USUALLY STANDS OUT AS AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION—OFTENTIMES MAGICAL. IN THE 1980S, THERE WAS REALLY AN ITALIAN WAVE OF VISUAL POETS WHO SENT MAIL ART AROUND THE WORLD.

Well, in my archive, the largest number of work from any country is from Italy. There is a very large number of visual poets in Italy who also perform as well, the sound poets as well. Some people really draw the line between the two, but it is a very lively tradition, probably because there is such an expertise in the small printers in small towns in Italy. The beautiful quality of work that you find in these limited-edition small books that are sent to me is not uncommon. You can get beautiful work done by your local printer in Italy. There is facility and a tradition of the printed book.

SO YOU SAY THERE IS A FINE LINE BETWEEN VISUAL POETS AND SOUND POETS?

Yes, there are some poets who do object to the idea that their work can be performed. We think that there Is a lack of purity in their visual poetry. If you try to perform it, you are in some way

interfering with it or spoiling it.

WELL, DO YOU FEEL THAT PERFORMING POETS MUST BE LIVE, OR CAN AN AUDIO-TAPE SUFFICE?

Sometimes when I hear recordings of improvised work, there is a mystery throwing something into the ether, there is a wonderful spontaneity, but it does have ragged edges, whereas when you are at the actual performance, if there is a real dynamic in the room, you're so thrilled by the immediacy of it that you're not looking for the faults. You're only experiencing that extraordinary thrill of the improviser. For me, improvising is my form of surfing. You ride that wave, but you're going to fall off. It's going to knock you about, but you're going to fall off at the end. But you don't care about falling off, because you have that supreme thrill of riding the wave, of people enjoying your doing it, and then falling off and making a mess of it—it's all part of the experience. Maybe if it is done on tape you're too aware of failures, but when you're actually experiencing it, you don't care. Falling off is part of the experience.

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT A LIVE PERFORMANCE OF SOUND POETS THAT IS ELECTRIC.

Yes, I would agree about that. The utterance is such a marvelous and logical thing. Just the human voice—but what an extraordinary thing the human voice is. When it is flowing, when it is expressing . . . my work is not only improvised but also participational, and I think that the interchange that you have in such a situation is wonderfully joyous and therapeutic. And it is essentially quite simple, not costing a great deal, with no complicated setups. It relates to when people used to sing and change and speak to one another in a tribal situation, and perhaps when it was getting dark and a fire was there, and you need this feeling of the tribe, of all being together, and the voice actually establishes who you are and your place in the universe.

YOU ARE AWARE OF THE OTHER GROUPS CALLED "PERFORMANCE POETS" ARE NOT NECESSARILY SOUND POETS, NOR ARE THEY VISUAL POETS, BUT THEY PERFORM THEIR OWN POEMS AS A TROUPE, AND SOMETIMES TOGETHER, AND THAT IS THEIR FORM OF EXPRESSION?

I know groups of performance poets, mostly from the Caribbean, where you have a great oral sense and rhythmic quality of language. This is the scene that I know for the most part. In Canada, bp nichol and his colleagues formed the Four Horsemen, and you have a younger group called Owen Sound, and they have done a lot of pioneering work in the idea that voices are a quartet. I always love working with other people, and I always welcome that. There is something beautiful not only about speaking, but it is the listening that is so important. When I am guiding students in their own work, the mistake they usually make that spoils things is that they are so busy trying to project their own voices that they don't really listen to the others. You have to listen as hard as actually performing, because the listening makes the group performance a true coherence and a true interchange. That is the whole fascination of working with groups. You have got to really pay a great deal of attention. If you're just performing yourself, that dimension is gone. For me, group

work is very fulfilling indeed. It's difficult to keep groups together. People go their separate ways.

THEN THERE ARE SOLO PERFORMERS WHO REALLY ONLY DO IT ALONE, RIGHT?
Oh, yes, like Bernard Heidsieck, who works with his own voice, using his own tapes, and that is very fascinating. It just shows the many ways of working. It's a pity that we cannot get together on a regular basis and develop a whole school of sound poetry. We do suffer from being separate. If we knew that we're going to have an annual festival at some university, sponsored and relied upon, developing a whole tradition of work, whereas we as yet have not had such an opportunity . . .

WELL, PERHAPS IF YOU HAVE A EUROPEAN UNION NOW, PERHAPS YOU COULD HAVE A ROVING FESTIVAL, NEVER TO BE IN THE SAME COUNTRY MORE THAN ONCE UNTIL IT COMPLETES THE CYCLE, AND THEN START AGAIN WITH THE ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER.
It would be a reliable working situation and interchange, colloquia, performances. People even in Europe, however, don't phone each other. So how can we talk about an annual event? We need a paperback anthology for students today, but there is nothing right now. Bob and I approached Penguin, but the typesetting seemed to be too much of a challenge.

I always wanted to set up a T-shirt business if someone could back me. Cards, posters, T-shirts—a lot of visual poems would go down very beautifully without in any way cheapening them or spoiling them. I think they would be very popular indeed.

DO YOU ALL EXCHANGE WORK WITH EACH OTHER IN LATIN AMERICA?
Avellino de Rojas has sent me work since the 1980s. And the students find his work very, very powerful. It has this intense sense of injustice and care for the downtrodden. These concerns are expressed in such condensed imagery, they are very powerful with the students. There is one that he did (all on postcards), the *Apartheid Sonnet*, which is just fourteen lines of barbed wire—each line barbed wire.

HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED VISUAL POETRY IN A LANGUAGE YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND?
There is a gentleman in India called Joshi, and his visual poetry is in fourteen different Indian languages. He is into computers, and he is trying to create a synthesis of languages just for the purpose of advertising easily, but that is his actual commercial work. His great interest is the different language forms, and he works in fourteen of them. It is very fascinating to receive work from him.

WHAT IS THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AND MEN VISUAL POETS?
Maybe 25 to 33 percent women on a continuous basis. Mirella has been doing exhibitions of visual poetry since 1971. When I was invited to participate in 1978 in the Venice Biennale with eighty-eight international women exponents, I was a bit worried about what kind of work I would see. Yet I was very impressed, and the standard was magnificent. The imagination and the execution

was impressive. She has continued to collect examples of women's visual poetry.

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE EVOLUTION OF VISUAL POETRY FROM XEROGRAPHY TO COMPUTER?

I have some examples, and I wish I had more. The computer provides very interesting possibilities. To use technology well, it is very difficult for an individual to keep up with the developments. If you happen to be associated with a college that has all the latest technology and is constantly upgrading it, maintaining it, then you can work in it in confidence. For individual users, often they buy their own equipment which quickly becomes obsolete, and they must spend more money to update. To exploit that equipment fully, you must take courses, because the training manuals are atrocious. The people who design and make computers cannot imagine what it is like not to understand it—so they are in the worst position to write manuals. They forget to tell you very elementary things—and especially in the wrong sequence.

Computer graphics is the biggest hope for visual poetry, because with these systems you can do extraordinary things with language and quite easily get a printout. This is more and more accessible to people—including children in schools. It is far less than an arcane thing to do—explore fonts, mix fonts, reverse them, invert them, and fill them with patterns—and it seems to me that if people have access to this kind of equipment and start playing with exploring language, they're very close to visual poetry. Maybe the computer is going to be quite a help, a revival through the use of computers.

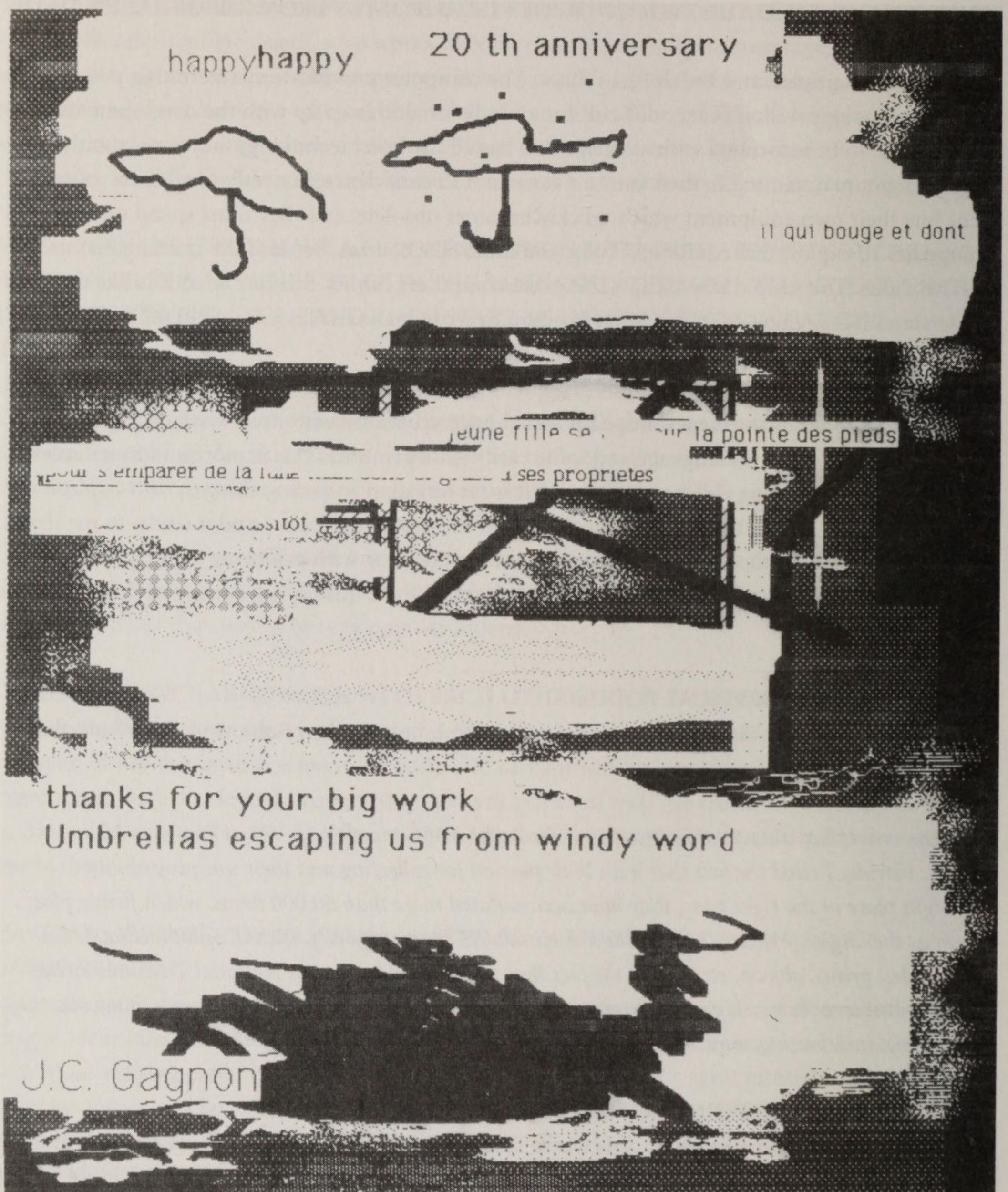
HOW ABOUT GREEK VISUAL POETS?

There are many Greek visual poets who have come to London, taken Bob's workshops, and then gone back to Greece.

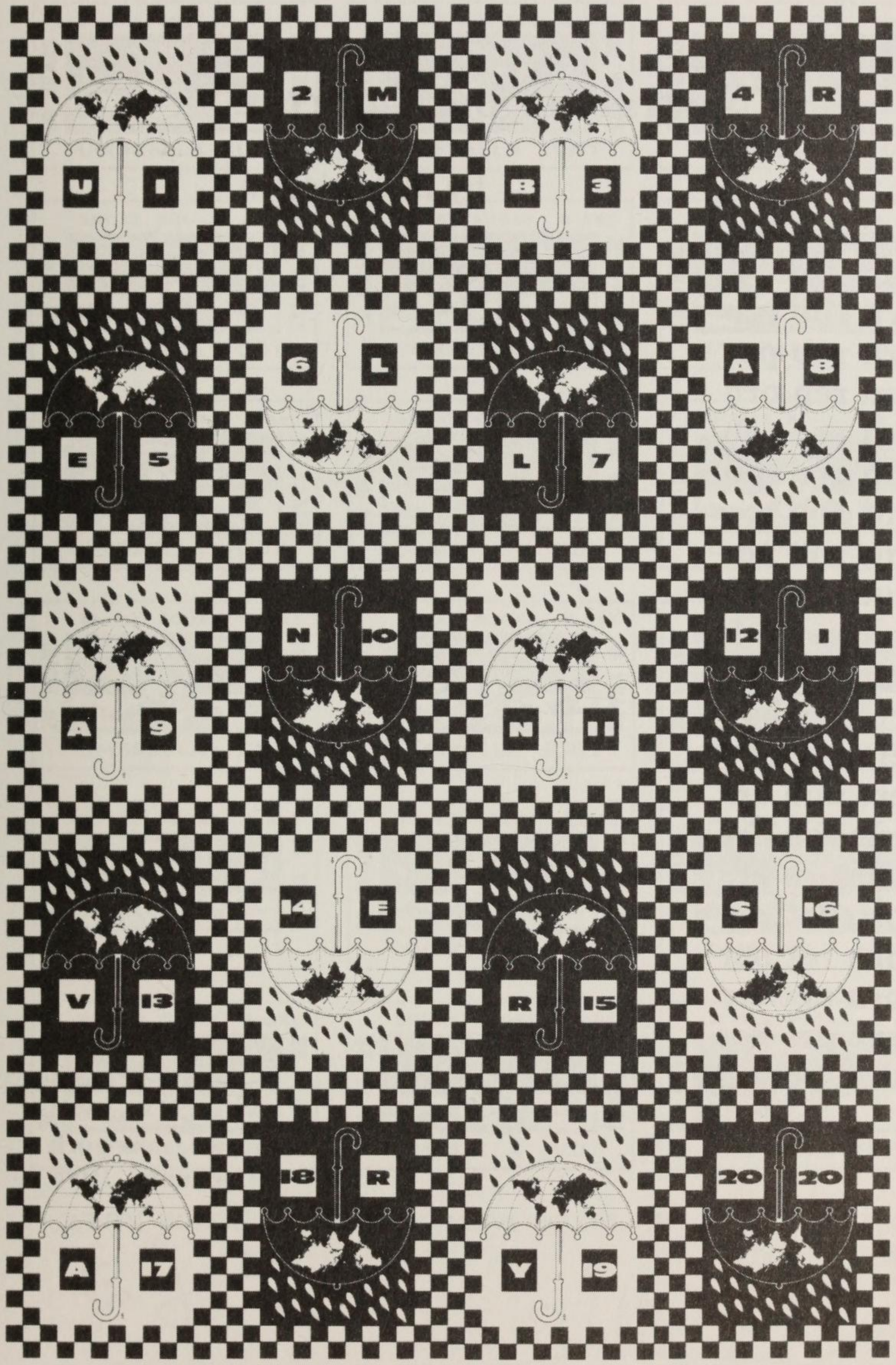
And then we talked about the Sackners and the Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Miami Beach, Florida. I cited the fact that with their passion for collecting and their uncanny ability to be at the right place at the right time, they have accumulated more than 60,000 items, which firmly places them as the largest privately held archive of visual and concrete poetry, including all media, books, broadsides, prints, objects, etc. I cited the fact that they should be named National Treasures by the U.S. government for marking an unsung chapter of cultural history with the accumulation, collecting, cataloging, interpreting, curating, and exhibiting.

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SACKNERS' COLLECTION?

I feel that because of the Sackners, this whole field can never be ignored. That collection is at their house, they own it, but inevitably it will become part of a public institution, and a lot more people will know about it and it will give all the visual poets more prominence, because it cannot possibly be ignored.


happyhappy
20 th anniversary
il qui bouge et dont
la pointe des pieds
ses proprietes
thanks for your big work
Umbrellas escaping us from windy word
J.C. Gagnon

J. C. Gagnon



William Harroff

portrait of bern porter

by dick higgins

tern rob rep
tern rob per
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rent rob rep
rent rob per
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pert born re
pert nob err
pent rob err
pent orb err
born ret rep
born ret per
born pet err
bent pro err
bern porter

barrytown, new york
29. january, 1995

Dick Higgins



JUDITH HOFFBERG COMMEMMORATIVE BOOKPLATE

E. F. HIGGINS III
DOO DA POST
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E. F. Higgins III


MAIL ART AND
THE BIG MONSTER

MAIL ART: U.S. Post Office Stratifies the Postcard

Volume 2, Number 4 (1979)

As of the 15th of July, the minimum standard for postcard sizes has been set as 3 1/2 inches high and 5 inches long. All sizes smaller than that of 1/4 inch thick or less will be non-mailable. Obviously this is to accommodate mail-processing equipment, namely machines, rather than people. If items are thicker or thinner, they will crumple, tear, and jam the machinery. If items larger than 11 1/2 inches long or 6 1/8 inches high or 1/4 inch thick are sent, they will be subject to a surcharge in addition to the applicable postage and fees. Although it is not spelled out in the circular, it amounts to 7 cents extra. Anything smaller than 3 1/2 x 5 inches will be returned and not be accepted. Exceptions are hotel keys, identification cards, and tags.

We have to give the Postal Service some credit, since the proposal was passed in June 1976 and the new size standards were not adopted until suppliers of current stock and manufacturers of greeting cards and postcards, stationery suppliers, etc., would have adapted to the new regulations. Thus, it was long in coming, but it has arrived.

Some of the mail artists in the United States had a "ball" sending undersize and oversize items through the mail before the fifteenth of July. Now it cannot be, and so once again Big Brother has dictated to us, and 1984 is not so far away. We have also been informed from various sources that the Supreme Court has let stand a lower-court decision upholding the use of warrantless "mail covers," under which the Postal Service gives law-enforcement agents information from the outside of letters.

In addition, it was brought out by Anthony Sampson in the *New York Times* that the xerox machine and the cassette-tape recording have become revolutionary instruments in world politics, too. In Iran, the revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini was the first cassette revolution, according to Sampson. It was the arrival of thousands of cassettes containing the Ayatollah's speeches that first propagated his revolutionary ideas, with cassette players in mosques, easily hidden from the ears of the secret police.

At the same time, the xerox machine "was performing its own seditious role. When revolutionary night letters and pamphlets arrived mysteriously at offices in Tehran, sympathetic secretaries quickly produced piles of copies and the powerful propaganda suddenly began circulating."

Electronic mail is also slated for use within three years. The Postal Service is testing to see if its concept of electronic mail will work: in other words, should the Postal Service compete with several commercial carriers which are already offering and developing such services in the United States. The Postal Service is working through COMSAT, providing overnight service linking the U.S. with London, Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Buenos Aires.

With regard to "mail covers," Buster Cleveland recently received a letter from the Inspector in Charge of the Postal Service in San Francisco referring to his envelopes which "were covered with numerous rubber stamp annotations and numerous perforated stickers, which resemble postage stamps. As an artist I suppose you are interested in the design of postage stamps. However, with such stickers affixed all over the envelope, it is difficult for such mail to be properly handled at a post office, and it becomes questionable in view of a postal law which pertains to the counterfeiting of postage stamps."

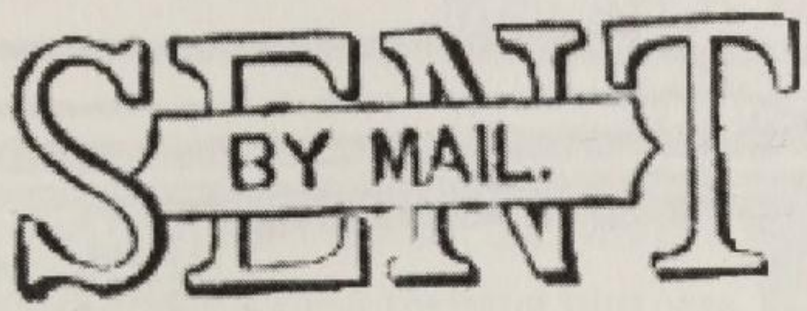
The Inspector thus sent Buster Cleveland a reproduction of the recommended arrangement of addressee information on envelopes, with proper postage affixed to the-upper-right hand corner of the envelope. "If you do not wish your mail to be delayed and questioned, I suggest you use this arrangement on your envelopes. You should leave the face of the envelope free of other matter in order to insure speedy processing of your letters." Big Brother is surely upon us. So, mail artists, beware of your local postal inspector, and hug a mailman today!

Stamp Until You Feel Guilty

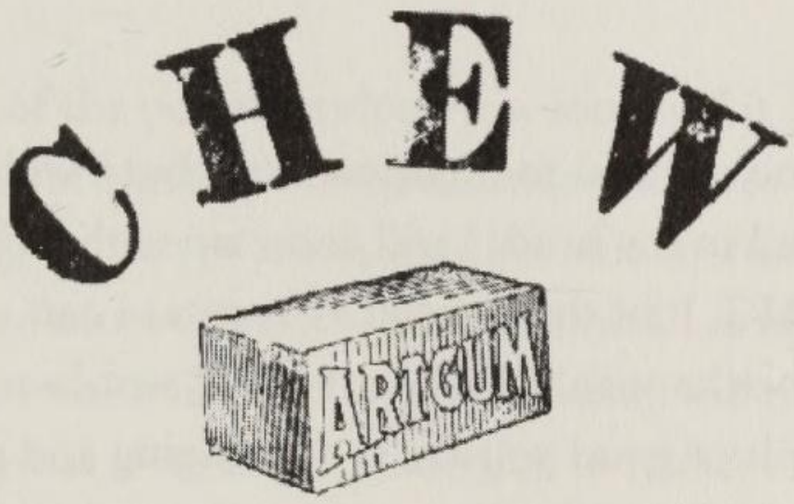
Volume 4, Number 3 (1981)

I got turned on to rubber stamping about a year ago, and I have lots to learn, but I wanted to share some things I found out with anyone who wants it.

If you want to make stamps from clip art or your own drawings, write to a stamp company or talk to a local one in person. Find out the size of stamp material they use so you can determine how to lay it out for photocopying. You can cram images next to each other any way they will fit, leaving just enough room to cut them out. You can mount them on blocks of wood yourself, or have the company do it for you.



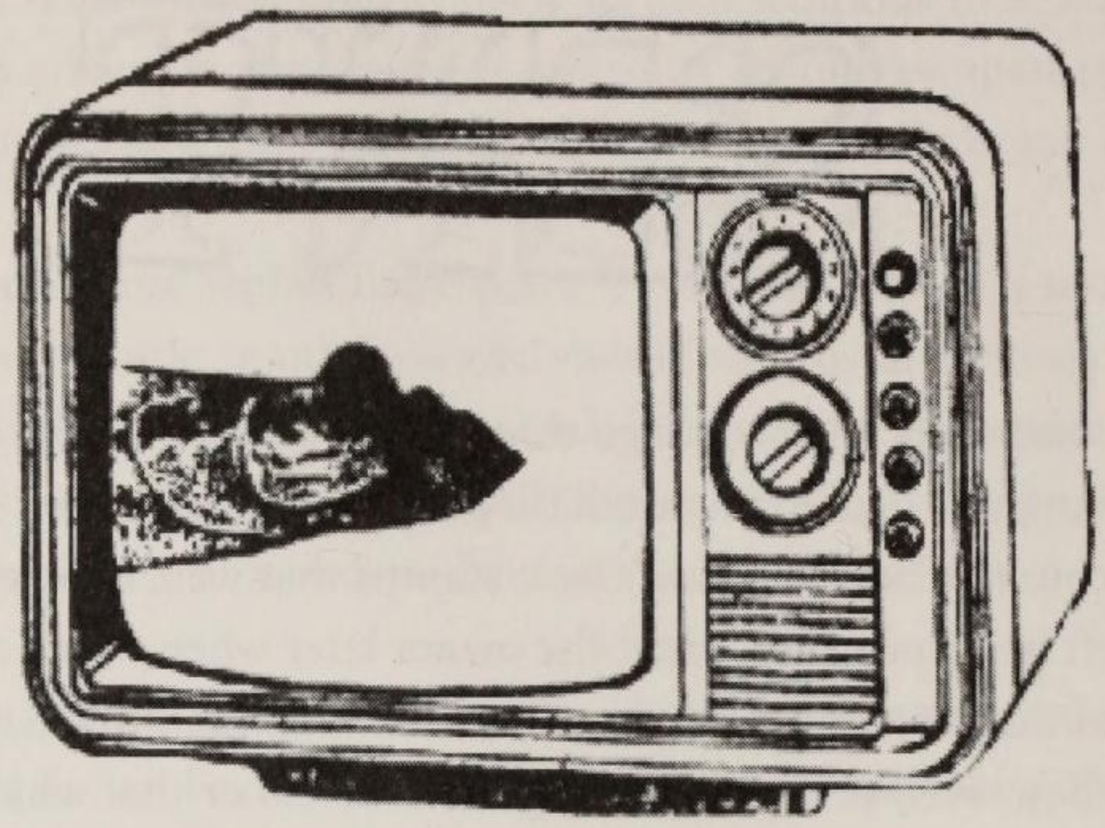
I like to go to stamp companies and beg to go through the boxes of scrap stamps. Don't be put off by an underling (nothing personal to any underlings who may read this): I once was told by the nice lady behind the counter that they didn't save stamps that were obsolete or mistakes. Turns out she had hardly ever left her typewriter. I met the owner later when doing a rubber stamp–collage show. He took me into the shop and turned me loose. It took me three days to go through the scrap boxes, because they saved everything they goofed up on or that which customers did not pick up. I got some of my best stamps that way. If you aren't afraid of a little sifting, it's great. I have since found it best to take samples of my work straight to the owner in order to get permission.



Another stamping activity I like is to combine words (which is 98 percent of what you will find in scrap barrels) and combine them with pictures (98 percent of what is in rubber-stamp catalogs). It's terrific for me to play a sort of verbal head-collage game. For instance, I had this cowboy stamp from Rubber Brothers that I liked because I could animate the art by repeated stampings of the arm portion (placing a piece of scrap paper over the rest). Then I took a simple NO WAIVER stamp from my scrap findings and combined the two.

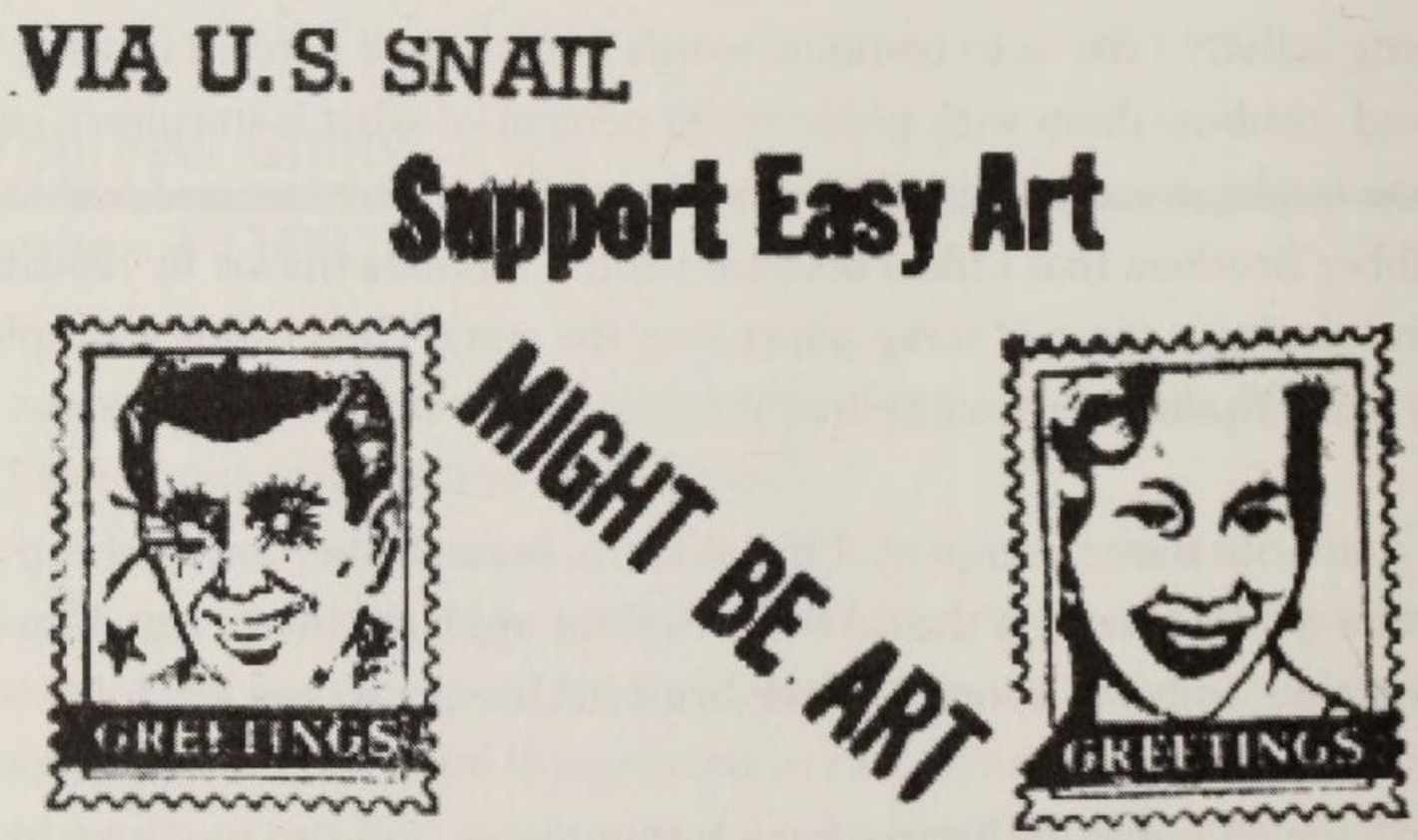
Everybody has a favorite stamp company. I like Bizarro, because they are so cheap and friendly. The ink in a bottle with a brush on the lid is the best for applying ink to a pad (as opposed to roll-ons or glug-glugging it in heavy spots, plus the brush technique wastes less ink).

Some stamps like the TV set from Bizarro have empty places. You can use these by stamping once, then take a pair of fingernail-size scissors and cut out the empty space. This is, in effect, your template. Now stamp the image on your good paper. Finally, align your template over the first image. Stamping into the TV screen (in this case) can be done with you selecting exactly what goes into the empty space.



I am one of the few stampers in Indiana. If you have ideas you want to share, please address them to me. I give stamping workshops in Indiana and will show your innovative samples to college students.

Oh, yes, and this may be too obvious to mention at all, but I will anyway. Many times in conversation or mulling around in my head, I will come up with a phrase or expression I like, such as SUPPORT EASY ART. I jot these down as soon as I can, and when I get a check in the mail from an art sale (it does happen!), I take my list of words or phrases to a stamp company for an order. No matter how good you are at scrounging and picking goodies from catalogs, there is a special delight in turning your personal pet phrase into stampings.



That's all I can think of right now. Bye. Stamp till you feel guilty!

—Bill Whorrall

Mail Art Is *Not* Correspondence Art

Volume 6, Number 4 (1983)

What is the subject of "mail art"? The subject matter, the content, if you will, apart from the image is the letter, the rubber-stamped imprint (now a thriving business, like offset printers), collaged paraphernalia, xeroxed or IBM'd pages, and pages and leaflets from St. Louis, from Oberlin, dirt from Milano, from Genoa, posters from Brescia, punk tabloids from Montana, from Wichita, from Wichita Falls, postcards from Australia, more leaflets from Warsaw. All and more are now considered under the aegis mail art! Mail art is not correspondence art, although they may be distant cousins. The distinction, I think, is a worthy one, worthy of some discourse. Hopefully, you will not be left with mere categories of distinction between these two viable forms of inexpensive art production, but you will be left instead with a sense of receivership, that is, how to receive gently, graciously, how to read things in terms of either their blatant publicity or the cherished notion of true sendership, of true sharing, of giving and receiving, the art of exchange, certainly not beneath even the most debauched artists of recent history. To take the problem too lightly is not the solution, to take it too seriously is even further from the truth of the matter.

Once again, consider the role of the postal service. How long will it prevail? Is it becoming an anachronism, perhaps, within our time? We must humble ourselves to the extent that the transition phase of our art may be going out of work, may become dysfunctional in a few more years, as telex systems become more and more efficient and economical, as other computerized information-access systems become common fare. Extremes in theory will not suffice at this juncture, only a respectable attitude toward what it means to construct, to make, to select, and to send: in short, the art of exchange, how we exchange, what it all means, this economy of art as thought and feeling. This treatise is a call for a more knowledgeable sense of primitive receivership and giving, a sense of what the economy can do for you, what the postal mails are really about, that subtle level of transition.

The term "correspondence art" was employed by Ray Johnson in his New York Correspondence School some years ago, supposedly over three decades ago (the exact date being difficult to verify given the ambiguous nature of the content). Anyway, the idea—the *raison d'être*—as I understand it, was to make contact with various artists through the mails using whatever imaginative means possible; in short, to establish a circuit or a system for exchanging art, a direct line of information, spunky-style messages—a "hotline" of art among artists that bypassed the normal channels, the commercial channels, or the "go-to-the-gallery-and-hang-it-up" syndrome (hang what up?). In other words, this essentially Fluxus-related medium (specifically endowed to the larger system of the international mails) could easily bypass the accepted and acceptable market of sacred art.

The label "mail art" won favor among artists in the sixties; but it wasn't until the seventies that the real "mail art" heyday began, aided and abetted by conceptual theories here and abroad. Suddenly, it was all right to do just about anything and call it "Art." McLuhanism had a lot to do with this re-

volutionary insight in terms of recycling information from one medium to another (hence, the term "intermedia," for which, I believe, Dick Higgins has been credited). However, this whole notion of recontextualizing information, when applied to art world jargon and protocol, was ultimately an update of what Duchamp had discovered many years earlier: art *could* be anything. Are not most paintings dependent upon "ready-made' materials, i.e., tubes of paint, gesso, canvas, wood, etc.? Art *could* be anything, as stated in *Apropos of Readymades*, some years ago. The catch here, of course, is the *could*.

For example, one might inquire: Is photography art? Well, photography *could* be art. That is, the medium of photography might express a profound thought or feeling beyond its mere technical capabilities. Since Duchamp, who indeed revolutionized aesthetics in the early twentieth century perhaps more than revolutionizing art, a work of art no longer had to be dependent upon its medium or its technical facility. If anything ***could*** be "art"—better said: if anything or any material or any idea *could* be used or manipulated as art—then why not consider the mails, the postal service, as an extension of meaning in a work of art. Duchamp's "art coefficient" has two stages: 1) The artist completes the work through a process which may or may not converge upon his or her original intention, and 2) the receivership—the person or public audience viewing the work of art–completes the work by giving it meanings which may be outside the scope of realization given to the artist. Thus, by mailing a work of art, a work considered and fabricated for this purpose, the "art coefficient" is automatically assumed on the second level. The receiver of the mail art will have another take, another thesis of meaning, that completes the work.

Mail art can use anything and become art, contingent upon the faith of the exchange. The community of mail artists apparently accepted this faith of exchange from the ground up. Art had suddenly shifted its focus: it became a matter of *use*. In becoming a matter of use, mail artists made use of the postal system. They plugged into it, as it were. The implications were international; art could be sent most anywhere, except where laws of extreme censorship prohibited it. But usually mail art has maintained an innocent-appearing flare. Just as art has been relegated to after-the-fact decorative impulses—something to go with the couch and green drapes—the censorship of most art that passes through the mails is negligible. Furthermore, good mail art tends to speak in metaphors, devising ingenious schemes of transmission of codes, of signs, of ideas that artists and intellectuals might share and use to nourish this sense of a world art community.

Mail art generally addresses itself to a public context, an open-ended visual/conceptual concern; that is, mail art can be made as editions—postcards, posters, books, folios—and sent to 150 or 200 people. Other times the mailings are less limited and less discriminatory, and literally hundreds or even thousands of receivers get hold of the word through these expansive editions. The context of working in small editions is one way of insuring that the receivership understands the rarity of the object in the same sense that a photograph or print might be considered "rare." But it is not rarity in itself that gives quality to a piece of mail art: it is the substance of its intended use, the nature of ideas, the force of the message in relation to the *time* it is sent; therefore, mail art has an immedi-

ate topical inference. Somehow the metaphor must connect with social or political issues which are within the grasp of its intended receivership.

Regardless of how limited or unlimited the mail art edition may be, the issue of correspondence art in the true sense of what it *means* to correspond is a more private action, something less relegated to the public sector. Correspondence art implies that the message is more intimate, that the sharing is a one-to-one exchange, something that is particularly intended with the receiver in mind, a direct channel of communication on intimate terms. The history of literature is filled with significant correspondences of this type, though in recent years—since television, telephone, and cassette tapes—this kind of written communication or even drawn image/text is less apparent. Correspondence has become less a part of everyday life. Like physical exercise, it is not something that someone else will insist upon in order for action to be performed. To correspond requires a choice a decision, that two or more people make in consort with one another that they shall, in fact, *correspond*; they shall communicate directly and significantly to one another on less than public terms (although correspondences may eventually wind up in public hands, having a public use at some later time).

Here is an analogy of what I mean. To do a portrait of someone is not simply a matter of taking that person's picture and some posed or indeterminate moment and passing it off as art. There are certain art historians, however, who will insist that Andy Warhol is upholding a revered tradition in Western art with his *Portraits of the 70s* or his *Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*. In fact, Warhol is *not* doing portraits. He is simply delegating a cosmetic decorativeness to the ortho-image of a public figure or a socialite in order to enhance visual appeal. This is not portraiture because nothing of the person is told to us. There is no presence, only a decorative visage without emotion and without character. This may be contrasted with Picabia's famous portrait of Alfred Stieglitz where the face of Stieglitz is not intended as the portrait but the presence of the photographer is understood through Picabia's anthropomorphic depiction of a camera. Whereas Warhol is unprepossessingly pretentious in decorating his faces, Picabia's portrait is prepossessingly disarming and utterly truthful.

If I can take this comparison one step further and relate it to the present issue of mail art and correspondence art, I would be most satisfied, for it would seem that correspondence art, in the sense of which I remarked a moment ago, is something more than any object or collage or photo-image or leaflet that one might choose to reproduce and to send through the mails. On the other hand, mail art is essentially an idea—a democratic idea—that anyone can give and receive art. To send mail art is a performance gesture, usually emphasizing the effect of the visual idea or image inherent upon the page or envelope in reference to a topical situation, aesthetic or otherwise. To correspond, however, is a literary action. The content is less abstract and more directed toward the intimacy of the receiver. Whereas Warhol's "portraits" are outwardly directed toward topical circumstances, as in the images of Elvis, Mao, or Golda Meir, Picabia's portrait is an inwardly conceived expression directed specifically to his friend Stieglitz and the followers of the 291 Gallery who

would enjoy the wit and the insight embedded in the image/text drawing. Thus the content is different in either case, as is the intention. To correspond is an intimate action; to send mail art is a public one, perhaps, less arcane in its meaning.

The action of correspondence, however, reaches beyond the scope of literature in any positivistic sense. The image/text is a term often applied to ideograms: that is, word-pictures which express abstract ideas, mudras on the page, pictographic processes that evolve into communication, into a shared experience, the idea of exchange. Correspondence, therefore, suggests the more personal aura of a community, even if that community be two people, a dyad, the smallest sociological group. This is to say that social, political, economic, religious, and aesthetic concerns may and do enter into correspondence by both word and image or by word-image or by writing, literature in the traditional manner of recording inner speech.

In 1966, while living in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, Kenneth Kramer, a graduate theology student, and I made a decision to correspond. In other words, we agreed upon a medium by which we could exchange ideas. We agreed to send our ideas—our exegeses, as it were—through the mails, from Newton Centre to Philadelphia. The reasons—the exact rationale—for doing so were not entirely known, realized, or understood at the time. Kramer and I simply recognized the need to communicate, and therefore, to correspond, to keep in touch with ideas. We avoided chit-chat. We avoided overconscious narration. The concern was to express inner thoughts openly, wildly, fervently—just the opposite of the academic writing we had both engaged in and would continue to do. Academic scholarship rarely permits what Barthes called "bliss" in terms of receivership.

As the correspondence progressed, we changed residences several times. The late Sixties were incredible: socially, politically, the escalation of a war in Indochina that we hated. There were difficulties with each of our marriages, financial problems, struggles to be creative and free from the restrictions that our society imposed upon us. Hence, the content of the letters and cards and paraphernalia became intensely penetrating at times, really searching and exploring deep (as well as some frivolous) ontological/psychological/aesthetic/cultural phenomena. The letters were defensive at times, silly, insightful, even sardonic. Interestingly enough, the Kramer/Morgan correspondence has been going steadily onward for seventeen years with only a couple of three-month lapses, one in 1968 and one in 1976, both on the heels of divorces. The exchanges normally occur on a weekly basis, if not semiweekly.

Comparing this action with mail art I have sent, often anonymously to other artists or shows, I sense a considerable distinction. The literary or image/text means employed in a correspondence—not necessarily to discuss "personal" matters, but simply to *write*, to express subconscious ideas and metaphors through highly charged, banal, and hybrid forms of language: in short, to react to life as it hits us square in the eye—this is more than purely visual; it is a level of conceptual performance.

The fact is that Kramer and I decided to correspond, made a decision, free of intentionality, for the most part, on any conscious level; the correspondence did not begin as an art piece or art action or mail art, but it has by now evolved into something profoundly intense and interesting. (We each have notebooks and binders filled with the originals plus one copy of each letter. These will eventually be edited sequentially into a manuscript, artists' book, or whatever.)

The kind of language that distinguishes these letters became apparent to me while corresponding from Denmark, where I lived and painted for five months in 1970–71—that the language presented through correspondence had the potential of art without pretending to be it. It could evolve directly from the raw material of everyday life on many levels of consciousness. It could evolve as a simultemporal thought process, rather than progressing as an imposed linearity working only as a narrative form on one conscious level. The event of writing a letter was close to a diaristic approach except with the "other" lurking in the mind as recipient of the word/image action. All of a sudden, after a warm-up period of four years, the letters started to feel like "art." At one point, I sent Kramer a single boxing glove found in front of my house in Oakland in 1970—a simple action, an event, communicated through the mails, asking for receivership, asking from completion of meaning, yet without a word or label attached other than the address of the receiver.

Mail art? Perhaps, but not anonymous. Mail art can be anonymous, can be editioned, can be political, can communicate art-world messages, but correspondence art is more personal, more experimental, more inward. Correspondence may become self-consciously poetic as well as inadvertently funky, reflective, and abstract. But the potential of correspondence, as in any art, is not one of classical rules, or necessarily, systems of exchange; the emphasis is not formal but substantial, an inward set of meanings expressed or told outwardly, given light, as meaningful exchange.

—Robert C. Morgan

Editor's Note: This and many other of Robert C. Morgan's essays on mail art, book art and the media are included in a volume entitled Commentaries on The New Media Arts *(Pasadena: Umbrella Editions, 1992).*

Stamp Art Is Not (Necessarily) Mail Art

Volume 7, Number 1 (1984)

In browsing through Saul Steinberg's book, *The Inspector* (Penguin, 1973), it occurred to me that not all "stamp art" is necessarily destined to be sent through the mails. Some of it stays pretty well on the page. Stamps function well within the context of artists' books or even on fine paper, in drawings or collages, behind spruce frames. (In the latter case, I refer directly to an exhibition of stamped collage works by Steinberg at the Pace Gallery in New York. It was an excellent and subtle exhibition.)

I think it is a misleading and mistaken assumption to equate the function of "stampography" with mail art. At this juncture—and I strongly disagree with Carlo Pittore in this respect—mail art is simply too raw and too ill-defined (perhaps its glory) to have its own generalized category, regardless of how expedient the publicity might appear.

To refer to my recent essay in this journal ("*Mail Art Is not Correspondence Art*"), let me reiterate: Correspondence has nothing intrinsically to do with mail art. Neither does "stampography" have anything intrinsically to do with mail art. Mail art can be anything sent through the mail by an artist, if I understand Carlo once again. On this point, I think we can wholeheartedly agree. To correspond, however, is a different matter—much more personalized, more concerned with the interrelationship of personalized signs, ideas, objects, and images.

In Steinberg's *The Inspector*, we find the use of appropriated rubber stamps as well as commercially fabricated stamps used pictorially for reasons of visual texture, nuance, style, and most of all, meaning. Steinberg's works are essentially those of a satirist who has appropriated the legal insignias used by bureaucrats, the codifications of our society. He draws cartoonlike images, illustrations of neoclassic buildings such as those designed by McKim, Mead, and White in the early twentieth century, then fills in, so to speak, his linear compositions with rubber-stamped insignias. In doing so, Steinberg reveals a certain absurdity in the meaning of stamps, the conflict inherent in various signs of authority, and how these signs of officialdom create more chaos than definition. In other words, he plays with the assigned meaning behind the rubber stamp. For Steinberg, the rubber stamp is not merely a formalized vehicle associated with the process of sending mail; rather, it is a means toward content—a means of political satire. The rubber stamp implies much more than we may encounter at the outset.

In addition to the legal insignias associated with rubber stamps, Steinberg also makes use of the banal insignias. For example, in one drawing he includes the repetitive use of a rubber-stamped Indian warrior on horseback. (Funny how I assumed it to be a "warrior." The image is really quite small.) This is juxtaposed with rubber-stamped foot soldiers, the same image repeated over and over, and finally, rubber-stamped runners. Above the horizon line which the artist has drawn across the picture plane, one sees the repetitive image of an American eagle. (Anyway, it *looks* like

an American eagle I have seen sometimes on currency.) Meaning builds upon former meanings; signs (stamps) are quickly recontextualized and given new meanings, new functions of seeing and believing. . . .

If the *National Stampagraphic* is going to devote attention to "stampography" as a specialized genre, a new category of art-making, let me suggest that more emphasis be given to the *content* of stamps. We pretty much understand their function as potential art material. But once the function is accepted and realized by enough people, it's time to turn to specifics; that is, what stamps mean in the various contexts they are used. In the case of Steinberg, stamps can alter their meaning in a drawing or a book, perhaps better than as mail art.

—Robert C. Morgan

Editor's Note: This article was written specifically for National Stampagraphic, *in which Carlo Pittore defends rubber stamp art, but* Umbrella *thought it was important to print it as well. The article is copyrighted by Robert C. Morgan.*

It Ain't (Necessarily) So, Mr. Morgan A Mail Art Rebuttal

Volume 7, Number 2–5 (1984)

Robert C. Morgan's recent essays in *Umbrella* and *National Stampagraphic* make careful distinction between what is and isn't mail art. I'm somewhat amused by his unyielding belief that mail art lacks content expressing nuance, style, intimacy, and most of all, meaning.

As an active mail artist, I've worked with many forms of expression, including electrostatics, stampographics, book art, artistamps, and efforts to conceptually unite mail art and hand-papermaking. I'm looking forward to future essays by Morgan featuring "what is not (necessarily) mail art' about all of the above media.

There is probably value in these exercises of semantics which will inevitably help shape a mail art definition. My belief, however, is that longstanding mail artists/philosophers are best able to make accurate definitions. Efforts are being made now through projects and essays by Guy Bleus, Vittore Baroni, Ulises Carrión, David Zack, and most recently, a *Mail Art Handbook* produced and published for the uninitiated by Henryk Gajewski. "Injury by Jury," a year-long documentation of mail artists about mail art, addresses many current issues in the medium. In lieu of many notable dissertations by Mail Artists of varied backgrounds, I'm amazed at how the art establishment continues to ignore and incorrectly ascertain what mail art has been and is becoming.

Part of the problem is aptly described by Guy Bleus, a Belgian mail artist who recently published *The Mail Art Atlas*: "Whether a work can be classified under the heading mail art does not only depend on its esthetic qualities, but also, or especially, on the informative, communicative and cultural intentions included in the mailing of the work itself."

Morgan does take issue with considerations of communication using an equally dubious heading of what constitutes "personalization by media." Morgan believes correspondence and stampography are "much more personalized, more concerned with the interrelationship of personalized signs, ideas, objects, and images." Conversely, mail artists will say that their content, regardless of technique or media, does all that Morgan qualifies. I would contend, therefore, that Robert Morgan's essays are, if I may use his own words, "simply too raw and too ill-defined, regardless of how expedient the publicity might appear."

Mail artist, Guy Bleus voiced strikingly similar rhetoric a few years ago when he paraphrased a delineation between "gallery, mail artifacts" and mail art by practice; "Posted art is undoubtedly "mailed art" but not necessarily "mail art!" He goes on to say, "When freedom is a basic principle, it is not easy to indicate any limits. Therefore, it is no use to give strict standards to judge whether something might be false or real." And what about this further comment by Bleus? "The mail art structure is "chiefly" based on the international postal service, but mail art does not necessarily depend on the postal service." Bleus is on target with these insights, but is bound to drive any high-art critic stark-raving *mad*.

—Cracker Jack Kid

The Question of Mail Art

Volume 14, Number 1 (1991)

I received the following letters from Guy Bleus and Carol Stetser on the same day (March 29, 1991), and they seemed to encapsulate a dichotomy that is prevalent in mail art; namely, the contradictory positions that the phenomenon should, or should not, become historified, preserved, and unhinged as a free and unencumbered creative act very much in the tradition and spirit of Dada.

As I have frequently written about mail art, I take criticism such as Carol Stetser puts forth to heart. Besides writing, I have lectured on the subject and amassed a substantial reference archive. I have acted as if I want mail art incorporated into art history, and I do. It's important to me and a lot of other folks on the planet that have labored long and hard under its yoke. We see mail art as having opened new avenues in a global approach to thinking about art and life and in breaking down the boundaries between artists and non-artists (and exploring what the definitions and/or

differences are). By acknowledging its rightful place in the progression of twentieth-century avant-garde tradition, more people will be exposed to the medium and become aware that the thrust of progressive contemporary art is not towards the commodification of the art object, but towards the elimination of boundaries between people of different cultures and an understanding that we possess a great many more similarities than differences. This is true not only in the practice of international mail art networking, but of its practitioners as well.

But above all, this is art that is fun, pure, and simple. Mail artists enjoy looking forward to the postal encounter every day, and we all want to keep it that way. The question boils down to: Will all this self-examination ruin the joy of mail art?

I say no. Mail artists have been their own curators, critics, and archivists. We have set ourselves up as an alternative to the mainstream and have progressed on a parallel course. No one tells the mail art story better than mail artists. We are being ignored by the establishment that profits from artistic gain. They perceive us as weak and ineffectual, posing no threat to the status quo of art as commodity and investment.

Mail artists say that boundaries are made to be crossed. Just as the lines between artist and non-artist are blurred, so is the notion of a quality art object. Who dares set himself up as judge? In mail art all contributors participate on an equal footing, their progress only measured by the energy they devote to posting letters and communicating within the Eternal Network. The power of mail art is the energy one receives in return from the energy expended.

The essays by Stetser and Bleus represent a fortuitous convergence that encapsulate two divergent viewpoints. I believe in the "correspondences" which occur in the mailbox.

—John Held Jr.

WHERE A MAIL ARTIST DELIVERS THE MAIL

I've written about my travels all around the world, but I've never written anything about my experiences in mail art. I guess it's because I'm still doing it. As Colette wrote somewhere, "You can't write about love when you're making love." But I can tell you the hows, and why I got started.
In July 1978 *Umbrella* reviewed one of my self-published photography books. The periodical contained lots of interesting information, so I subscribed. I had no idea what the frequent references to mail art meant.

By January 1979, I still didn't know what it meant, but I took a leap nonetheless. I can still recall my excitement when I mailed a postcard of a Martian umbrella into Judith Hoffberg's *Umbrella* mail art show. And when I received the catalog full of so many wonderful images and such playful exuberance—I was hooked. I knew what mail art was, but I couldn't explain it.

At that time I lived in a rebuilt tin shack that was once a miner's cabin in the small town of Oatman, Arizona, in the Mojave desert. Wild burros still roamed the hills, and the coyote trail passed in front of our house. Summers we had rattlesnakes on the front porch and scorpions in the bathroom. The water pipes froze in the winter and the asphalt roads melted in the summer heat. The human population numbered 200 and consisted primarily of retired people and bums. I had no telephone and no TV. The closest gas station was fifteen miles away, the supermarket was twenty-five miles. But in this "authentic Western ghost town" of Oatman was a post office where I worked for several years. And in my mailbox was mail from all over the world.

In a small town you spend a lot of time discussing the weather, the potholes in the road, who is sleeping with whom, and who got drunk last night. The gossip bonds a community together and helps pass the time, but it does have its limits. My correspondence had no limits. Mail art opened the world to me. It brought me information and stimulation and friendship from all over the globe. It gave me hope and kept me from becoming as crazy as my neighbors.

Mail art also taught me the relevance of my own life. The artwork I received fed my brain, but the personal notes fed my heart. I loved receiving pictures of my mail art friends, their families, their studios, their homes. I liked to hear about their vacations, their jobs, their moods, their likes and dislikes. And I finally realized that my correspondents liked hearing about my life, too, that I was as interesting to them as my artwork. Mail art radically changed my perceptions of myself as well as this world we all share. As the world became smaller, it became more open and more free at the same time. Mail art is truly communication among friends. That's why I continue to participate in the Eternal Network.

—Carol Stetser, 12 February 1991

At Leavenworth Jackson's suggestion, I wrote the above article about my experience doing mail art and mailed a copy to Chuck Welch for his book. But the more I think about it, the more I wonder about the motives behind this sudden urge among mail artists to become historians. Those of us participating in the network know why we're doing it. We don't need to read a definition of mail art—we know what it is. We don't need to hear a lecture on its aesthetics, on the origin of its terminology, on its future direction. As practitioners we are already engaged in its present and its future. So why this need for exposition? Who are these books about mail art for? It looks to me like mail art is being packaged for consumption by the art market. Mail art is being turned into a commodity. And turning art into a commodity is what we're all fighting against in the first place.

I'm also concerned about the need for chapters dealing with mail art and feminism. Participation in the network is limited only by your ability to pay for postage. Mail art by nature is color-blind and sex-blind. Are we now going to need chapters on mail art and homosexuals, bisexuals, Latinos, blacks, Tongans, and Filipinos? Is mail art being codified as His Story the way mainstream "art history" has been? Will we hear white mail/mail art stars ask "Why are there no femail artists?"

There are as many stories about mail art as there are participants. The pathways of communication are infinite. How can anyone presume to write a "history" of this network?

—Carol Stetser, 27 March 1991

THE ADMINISTRATION CENTRE–42,292

1. Archives are cemeteries of memories, activities, and curiosities. They file the present for posterity. The Administration Centre–42,292 is a living archive of "comunicationism," of the postal rituals and communicative gestures of the mail art network. It is based on the democratic principle that "every" piece of mail (envelopes, postcards, letters) is meaningful in the sociocultural context of the mail art circuit, so every artist or non-artist is treated with the same care. The idealistic purpose was and is to store up the entire narration of what happened by classifying "all" the received results of mail activities from the Eternal Network. But every archive will tell the true story of its own web.

2. 1991, the whole collection comprises original works and/or information of (plus or minus) 2,000 networkers from over 50 countries. The classification is in alphabetical order and per country. Every artist has one or more files and/or archive boxes (if a lot of works are present). Individual numbers refer to an accurate index system so that everything can be found easily.

3. The Administrative Archive is divided into separate units: artistamps, artists' books, artpaper, assemblings, audioart, catalogs, computer art, copy art, fax art, graffiti, magazines, mail art, performances, postcards, posters, rubberstamp art, small-press publications, video art, visual poetry, etc.

4. Over the years a lot of mail artists and those interested came to Wellen for a visit to the Administration Centre. From abroad there were artists such as Banana, Baroni, Bloch, Dudek-Durer, Formentini, Graf Haufen, Held, Janssen, Olbrich, Perneczky, Ruch, Skooter, Stake, Kustermann, Lorenzi, Van de Hoef, Van Dijk, etc. Several students used documents of the Archive for research.

5. Since the foundation of the Administration Centre in 1978, a lot of exhibitions with works for the Archive have been realized at different place, e.g. *Mail-Art Party*, Gemeentehui, Leopoldsburg, 1979; Gallery Ruimte z, Antwerp, 1980 (with emphasis on indirect correspondence and mail art by children); I.C.C., Antwerp, 1980; VUB, Brussels, 1981; CIAP, Hasselt, 1982; De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam, 1983; Stedelijk, Museum, Tiene, 1984; Cultural Centre, Valkenswaard, 1985; Gallery II Venturo, Hasselt, 1986/1988; Cultural Centre Gent, 1989. In 1991–92 a selection of artists' books will be shown in several libraries during a traveling exhibition in Belgium and Holland.

6. Attention: Don't throw it away.

—Guy Bleus

WHAT IS THE QUESTION? THERE ARE CERTAINLY NO ANSWERS

The problem is this: Will the examination of mail art rob it of its power? The beauty of mail art is the mystery it can evoke. Every visit to the mailbox is an adventure in a brave new world. There is an unseen friend around a corner we didn't know existed. Peeking around those unknown corners (of the planet, or of the mind) is what holds us to our chosen medium. If we delve too much into the reasons of the mystery, we run the risk of watching the dissolution of its power.

But I find that the deeper I investigate the medium, the more wonder I find. This is not shallow ground. Thirty years after the formation of the New York Correspondence School of Art by Ray Johnson, mail art has attracted a vast array of people who have given generously of their time and talents. Each has a story to tell, and together they point to directions towards which the progress of artistic, cultural, and social history is moving. I find it a fascinating parade. By ignoring it, we miss a rare opportunity to examine not only the beat to which we collectively march, but our own reaction to it.

—John Held Jr.

Interview with Angela Pahler and Peter Kustermann

Volume 16, Number 1 (1992)

THE NET MAIL TOUR

HOW AND WHEN WAS YOUR PROJECT BORN?

The idea began in summer 1991, when Angela's mother forwarded a letter to us from conceptual artist H. R. Fricker, in Switzerland, announcing 1992 as a year of worldwide Decentralized Networking Congresses. Fricker's invitation reached us in Japan, where—as a part of our World Art Tour–we were participating in Tajima Performance Festival through Masami Akita. We had been on this world tour since 1990 and wanted to continue as long as our savings would last.

Since we would not be able to organize a Congress in Minden ourselves in 1992, we decided to travel a bit faster in postmen's uniforms, carrying mail art from one Congress to another, all around the world. We appreciated the congress idea very much, since Peter had organized one in 1986 at home in Minden.

The combination of travel and Congress reminded us of Creative Thing's public marathon run in Los Angeles, where he transported mail art from and to his local networking friends posted along the route. So we decided we would do the same thing on a bigger scale: to repeat over one whole year what he did in one day, over 100,000 kilometers instead of 42 kilometers, with several hun-

dred participants instead of a dozen. Maybe you remember Creative Thing's commemorative arti-stamp sheet about his action? We started producing similar sheets this year, a very rewarding activity.

So back up in the mountains in Japan in 1992, Angela got so enthusiastic that she immediately carved our NET MAIL Personal Delivery logo image as a linocut, and then we started printing our invitations during the night of that Japanese festival to mail them out into the network as far as we could, to keep the project from the beginning as democratic and open as any mail art and networking activity should be, especially with regard to the Decentralized Networking Congresses (now cited as DNC).

WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU START, HOW MANY FRIENDS DID YOU MEET IN 1992, AND HOW MANY COUNTRIES DID YOU VISIT?

We started in Trogen, Switzerland, as an homage to H. R. Fricker, as one of the fathers of the Congress idea. At the first second of 1992, we collected the first piece of NET MAIL from him: an artist's envelope, which we delivered half a year later to Shozo Shimamoto in Japan. Eventually we carried more than 200 kilos of Net Mail, which would have cost over 20,000 dollars in normal postage. In our big registration book, we registered almost 4,000 single pieces. On 31 December, we ended our project in the same place and in the same way we started, i.e., with Fricker, and the great Congress coordinator Kaufmann, in Trogen, Switzerland, looking back upon about 170 Congress meetings in 35 countries during which we met roughly 350 networkers to bring to and also to carry their mail to other places. During these meetings, we wrote several dozen Congress Reports on current network topics from "The Role of Fe-Mail Artists" to "Coimputers in the Network" and "The Network and the War." Also, we portrayed a series of networkers for Fagagaga's "Face" booklets. But many more people got involved in our NET MAIL project: visitors to our congress meetings, performances, exhibitions (e.g., in Split, Croatia, and Oberlin, Ohio), slide shows (e.g., in Lebanon, New Hampshire, in Novi Sad, Serbia, and in Brisbane, Australia), class lectures such as in Hannover, Germany, and in Naples, Italy. Even train conductors got interested just by seeing us work (e.g., between Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Minnepolis, on an Amtrak train) and travel agents (e.g., in Kowloon, Hong Kong) and museum and library directors (e.g., the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Central Artists House in Moscow, and the Tate Gallery in London). This fully met our intentions to keep the network open to all sides according to Joseph Beuys's definition of art and the artist. So, all in all, the total number may well be double the 350 networkers we cited. If you consider the countless media reports on our tour, we probably "infected" even more: newspapers spread the message in many languages as well as radio stations, and TV reporters from Australia to Ukraine loved the very visual aspects of our tour: the uniforms and all those colorful pieces of mail. Many a postal carrier contributed an official badge, pin, or sticker to our evergrowing fantasy outfits.

DID YOU HAVE SOME SPECIAL EXPERIENCES DURING YOUR WHOLE YEAR'S TRAVEL?

Yes, certainly. Let us just mention a few of the surprises in the mail that we were carrying:

1) the kangaroo bone from Tani in Australia to his Native American friend, Rosy Gordon, in Dallas, Texas: Rosy hung the bone with his other bones in his traditional open-air collection on the veranda outside his house;

2) the umbrella covered with images of Mickey Mouse from Minden to Daniel Daligand in Paris, the leading MickeyMousologist in the network, a specialist for his "Mickey" collection;

3) the art beer bottle from Marcel Stussi in Basel, Switzerland, to the Congress meeting in Milan, Italy, where it was shared by Fernanda Fedi, Gino Gini, and Paolo Barrile. We transported this bottle across an international border within only seven hours (including a train delay), and thus beat once more the official, slow, dreaded, expensive, monopolized state postal GPO services. And above all, our transport was free of charge!

4) the heavyweight, tightly glued and wrapped photo album with all the photos of a whole love story of Mike Dyar, San Francisco, now sealed closed so that it can never be opened again to watch the lovers. We carried this voluminous book object to José Oliveira for his art-book collection in Portugal, and it occupied half a backpack.

5) our official German passports with many a colorful artist's rubberstamp in them and the visa from Tui Tui (Dogfish in Seattle) which caused a customs officer to refuse us entry into Quebec at first. We could hardly prevent her from confiscating our unique IDs. At last, she accepted their very mail-art contents as beautiful.

And here are a few exotic ways of transport:
1) swimming with the mailbag through an icy blue lake in Finland under the midnight sun to deliver NET MAIL to Reima Makinen in Kaugasala;

2) arriving by coach and horses at the daily afternoon shootout in the central square of Jackson, Wyoming, in America's Wild West, to meet Gary Connors;

3) sliding down a snowy Swiss mountain path on a sled to collect the first piece of NET MAIL from Fricker in his home village of Trogen, and again to deliver the very last one to him.

HOW DID OUR NETWORKING FRIENDS REACT TO THE SITUATION IN THE EX-YUGOSLAVIAN COUNTRIES?
They gave us their NET MAIL to carry, often very special notes of support and solidarity, and at the same time, they warned us not to go to countries at war. It is very difficult abroad to realize where the limits of this war are and to judge the actual situation in the different new countries.

Canadian GPO refused to transport our preparatory itinerary letters to Serbia if we wrote "Yugoslavia" on them, though our Serbian friends claim that they still officially live in Yugoslavia.

Croatian GPO did not accept any letters to Serbia at all; we had to carry them ourselves, together with those from our friends. They and *their* friends even used us as a surrogate postal service to Serbia—an unexpected new function of our project.

Several networkers showed initiative of their own as well as civil courage by organizing supportive actions against the war and against the blockade, e.g., Lon Spiegelman and his Los Angeles ZTZU friends with their appeal to write to one's congressman.

Andrej Tisma's defense of mail art in the face of war has stirred many emotions and reactions in the network, like the foundation of his institute of love, as well as Rorica's and Dobrica's *Open World* netzine.

The readiness for artistic and intellectual support from the network for all ex-Yugoslavian friends is quite notable, provided they do not fall into hatred and nationalism. But nobody from abroad dared to go there this year, not even those who had registered for the excellently prepared, sponsored, and well-covered DNC congress at Karlovci, a bitter experience for the organizers, who felt unduly stigmatized.

WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF YUGOSLAVIA AND SERBIA AFTER YOUR VISIT?
It is dangerous to rely only on mass-media reports. Personal visits were definitely better, though we still feel that we did not get full objective information. Every day, life was grotesquely normal, even full of hectic consumerism such as in Split and Beograd, Novi Sad, and Odzaci. The actual war area is rather limited in former Yugoslavia. Still, the war is a horrible genocide, unimaginable in the twentieth century, in the middle of Europe, explainable only from historic roots, though there is no excuse. Our networking friends make great efforts to stay cosmopolitan and pacifist within very narrow horizons. Their biggest heroic deed seems to occur in their hearts, attitudes, and consciousness.

We wanted to integrate *all* of our Yugoslavian networking friends into our NET MAIL delivery, of course. Beograd, for example, is a train stop on the way from Athens to Budapest. So why not go and meet your old acquaintances there? We found ourselves, however, in the unexpected role of celebrated cultural-blockade breakers. We were honored and pleased; it is nice to be the center of attention, where you can speak out and be heard, but it was also a burden. We would have liked to talk much more about other networking issues than just about war and antiwar activities, but we had to realize that this was *the most important* networking issue then and there, that in this extreme situation every aspect of life becomes automatically related to the terrible war situation, including art, mail art, networking, of course. As Nenad Bogdanovic put it: "If the network really functions, we measure our friends in it by their readiness to share our grief and trouble."

We experienced a rich variety of witty contemporary networking performances by Bogdanovic, Supek, Kamperelic, Tisma, Jovanovic—always against the background of the war. Artists of such

different ethnic origins like theirs (Hungarian, Serbian, Slovenian) who congress together like that will certainly also be able to practice international solidarity, provided we all give them a chance to do so.

At the Congress discussion in Odzaci, it became very clear that it is the artist's duty just now to speak up against the war and the blockade loudly and ever again (there are better international means to force an uncontrolled militia into peace talks). Not only do the Serbian mail artists need the network, but we also need them: the continuous artistic, positive, creative impact of ex-Yugoslavian countries on the network becomes evident in the mail art magazines from Beograd by the Kamperelics and from Split by Sojetlana Mimica. Valuable documentary work is done on the analytical level by art critics Andrej Tisma and Balint Szombathy.

We would like to come back "after the war at 5 P.M.," as the brave soldier Schwejk used to make appointments, to enjoy the genuine hospitality of our networking friends in a normal, relaxed, and open situation without the imminent urge to thank each other for more than just that. We would really like to network with our Serbian and other ex-Yugoslavian friends on more subjects than just this horrible war.

DID YOU HAVE CREATIVE ART MEETINGS APART FROM JUST VISITING (UN)KNOWN MAIL ART FRIENDS AND HANDING THEM MAIL ART GIFTS?

Yes, we participated in a series of bigger DNC sessions with many participants (though by definition, every meeting with a networker was already a congress):

1) at Ed Varney's Museo Internacional de Neu Art in Vancouver;

2) at Tui Tui independent territory, organized by Dogfish and Dragonfly;

3) at Lon Spiegelman's Bugress meeting in Los Angeles;

4) at Part II of the Serbian Congress in Odzaci in Nenad Bogdanovic's courtyard in Serbia;

5) at Bill Gaglione's Rubberstamp Museum in San Francisco;

6) at the opening of Vladimir Sutjagui's first mail srt exhibition in White Russia's capital, Minsk, entitled *Apokalypsis*;

7) at Klaus Groh's Literaturium in Edewecht, Germany;

8) at Atomic Arts' Congress in Woollouggabba, Australia;

9) at the Rubberstamp Carving Workshop at Henderson State University, Arkansas;

10) at the opening of Steve Perkins' zine show in Iowa City, Iowa;

11) at the Multicultural Festival in Trondheim, Norway through Roger Aasegg;

12) at Mike Dyar's Spiritual Seance with Joseph Beuys' spirit in San Francisco;

13) at the Congress in London's Tate Gallery with librarian Meg Duff;

14) at the Mail Art Museum in Koshiengudii, Japan, through Shozo Shimamoto;

15) at the New York Hilton Hotel Congress upon invitation of Clive Phillpot, librarian at the Museum of Modern Art;

16) at the Court Session with Michael Duquette's union in Toronto against the closing of postal stations;

17) at our Public Arts Postal Station with Dawn Redwood in Oxford-Cowley, England;

18) at Anna Boschi's country-estate performance session celebrating thirty years of mail art as an homage to Ray Johnson in Bologna, Italy;

19) at the Museum Book Fair in Split, Croatia, through Svenciliste Evening School . . . and not to forget all those slide shows we held about the history of mail art and networking, all those class lectures, all those performances, all those rubberstamp workshops which we held this year in our postmen's uniforms—plus all those radio, television, and newspaper interviews, just like this one.

The creative effects of our meetings are our own contributions to the running mail art projects of the friends we visited, e.g. Dyar's homage to Beuys, Mittendorf's "Who eats whom and why," Yaroslav's de-blockade project. We, ourselves, produced above all color artistamp sheets about our congresses with participants' portraits. This was made possible through the helpful knowledge and technology of our North American friends and their patience during long nightly hours of manual work over perforators and in copy shops. A very creative experience was the physical involvement that personal encounters in the network offer to everyone who is ready to expose him/herself to them:

1) Mayumi Handa shaved the postman's head completely (a highly recommended rite of initiation to the network) so that he could transport art messages for peace on his bald skull from Japan to Canada. Giving up your hair is a sacred act in Japan. Peter experienced with his body a cultural encounter;

2) Angela and Henning Mittendorf transformed us with white foam into ugly post-nuclear war monsters, a warning against the ever-imminent atomic threats;

3) Jerry Reid welcomed the postman in his Vancouver bathroom: he had taken Ruud Janssen's "Congress in the Bathtub" literally, so Peter was sitting together with him in his bathtub delivering his NET MAIL. This all happened during a Congress meeting. The participants found it especially hilarious that the bathtub was not filled with normal water, but with around 100 liters of green jelly pudding: networking sticks!;

4) Angela painted an homage to Shozo Shimamoto on Jim Simm's head with natural ochre-colored earth from the local ground in the Congo in a 5,000-year-old technique from the aboriginal Australians;

5) On the whole, our visit to neighboring countries in a uniform was a peace-practicing exercise, while coming as a German in a uniform has a disastrous tradition: our fathers and our grandfathers came as occupant soldiers, whereas we came as pARTners for joint art activities, wearing the "postman's" uniform as a game in order to change a historical pattern through an art action by personal creative involvement. We understand this travel not only as a chance, but also as an obligation.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON YOUR "GREAT PROJECT" AS IT ENDS?

This year has been a series of intense good vibrations; it has broadened, concretized, and deepened our understanding of the abstract network idea. On the whole, this project was an extreme physical experience, which was only possible in mutual support and constructive criticism between the two of us:

1) carrying all those bags and backpacks full of mail and a few personal belongings, with depots in Hong Kong, Minden, and Moscow;

2) getting used to different climates quickly: from -45 degrees C in Siberia to + 45 degrees C in the central Australian desert;

3) experiencing the microclimates of every participant's and host's personal environment, not only on a physical level, but also very intensely on an emotional level, and, of course, also mentally: behind every single postcard we found a whole creative personality, attractive, adventurous, inviting, worth our undivided attention;

4) sleeping in trains, youth hostels, woods, airports, tents, or being the welcome guests of our hospitable networking friends, most of whom even restricted their smoking habits for us and geared their kitchen to us as vegetarians;

5) lots of energy went, of course, into the mere organizing of such quick hit-and-run traveling. We

would have liked to stay longer with quite a few networkers and carry home a series of appointments and invitations to visit each other, also for bigger mutual projects;

6) constantly writing our documentary diary with photos and text, which at the same time serves as exhibition material and will go as free documentation in several hundred copies to all the participants.

This project has also revived an historic art form in us: storytelling. We found ourselves again in a wonderful old oral tradition and experienced that repersonalization of an evergrowing network, which originated as a reaction against anonymous mass-art circuits and is more than ever subject to deterioration into meaningless photocopy mail trash today. We need time now to relax and work on the documentation. We do recommend to all networkers to play art postal carriers themselves for a while: there is no copyright on our idea, and the experience is definitely worth the effort. NET MAIL HAS CHANGED OUR LIVES.

Postscript: In the Congress Year 1992, we carried more than 220 kilos of mail art over 100,000 kilometers across 50 borders to and from over 300 networkers. Our Free Personal Deluxe NET MAIL Delivery Service is over now; we have enjoyed being your guests and postal carriers. We are working on the handmade documentary book now to let each participant have a free copy.

Guy Bleus married us as postmen, the Pope blessed us as Angela and Peter Netmail, and our traditional German family names with umlauts and double consonants got constantly misspelled. *So we will use this new artists' pseudo-name from now on in the network.*

Mail Art Verses E-mail: A Personal Inquiry

Volume 19, Number 2 (1996)

Recently I picked up Chuck Welch's *Networking Currents* again, an excellent book that draws a vivid picture of mail art in the mid-eighties by presenting a number of questions and issues. But, I realized, answers to these questions were never found, great expectations left unredeemed. In fact, an awful lot of people who were actively involved with mail art at that time have left the Net, some of them (whom I befriended through nontraditional mail art channels) rather disillusioned. The Net is a living, breathing entity. It changes all the time. People come and go, the fucking Tao at work. But what way are we heading? Change is going fast. For example, four years ago when I went slack, it was all Congress-talk. Now that I'm back I hardly recognize the picture. These observations (that Netland mutates—that great artists who promoted mail art as the New Cultural Strategy left the scene disappointed) brought the idea that everything moves on, and communication, not only the means but ultimately the essence of it, changes as well. Whether we like it or not, we have to go along.

Communication has always been the goal of mail art. Postcards and stamps were a means to, not the aim itself. Why the mails? The universal postal network was the most interesting. Post is everywhere, relatively inexpensive, and provides easy access to everybody interested in participating. See your personal mail art history book. However, the (post)cards are shifted with the recent E-mail evolution. having dealt with the initial (and considerable) investment of hardware, the networker can reach a mass of people (practically) anywhere on the globe. Costs are lower and it goes at lightning speed, which cannot be said of the traditional mail system. Is there a future for mail art as we know (knew) it? Question 1. Question 2. I am not online. This is no matter of being anti-this or pro-that. I even don't have a phone. It's a matter of priorities. The money I save this way I can spend on something else. But does that doom me to function in a second-rate network where a new generation of mail artists stamps and mails cards without realizing what these were used for? I'm not saying mail art today is second-rate compared to the hot hype of Internet. But these are my questions: What future is there for mail art, apart from the prominent nostalgia factor, and how can e-mail absorb the democratic and social aspects of mail art? My friend Guy Bleus wrote that the more the communication media evolve, the smaller the distance between communicators becomes. In theory, he writes, this means that this distance will end on one point that is located between Somewhere and Nowhere. Am I Nowhere, together with the unwilling, the unable, and the Third World?

These are old mail art issues. But the situation is changing rapidly. Two years ago everybody in the States was online while we in Europe didn't even know what was going to happen. Besides, there is a need for a critical attitude toward e-mail. Everyday information about/from Cyberia is blasted our way. The media are uniform in their hype and lack of criticism about the phenomenon, and if even the rulers (both economic and political) present the mirror of Freedom to the masses, there must be a catch somewhere. Has mail art considered this aspect of the new Commedia?

These are some thoughts/inquiries. We all want to break those chains and rattle those cages, get in touch with people, share information and learn. Communication is our concern. There are promising things about the future (the past euphoria of "it will be better" is replaced with more sober "It can be better, but only if we work on it and make it worthwhile"), and all too often mail art is too much of an insider's joke anyway. What are your experiences/thoughts/feelings about all the above or related subjects? Is there hope for a New Cultural Strategy or should there be? This is not a traditional mail art project but your reaction will be appreciated and documented in some way.

—Kristof Debris



Leavenworth Jackson

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

BOOK ART

The principal difference between the book hack and the book artist is that the former succumbs to the conventions of the medium, while the latter envisions what else "the book" might become. Whereas the hack writes prose that "reads easily" or designs pages that resemble each other and do not call attention to themselves, the book artist transcends those conventions.

The book hack is a housepainter, filling the available walls in a familiar uniform fashion; the other is an artist, imagining unprecedented possibilities for housepainting material. The first aspires to coverage and acceptability; the second to invention and quality.

Common books look familiar; uncommon books do not. Book art is not synonymous with book design or literary art; it is something else.

Three innate characteristics of the book appear to be the cover, which both protects the contents and gives certain clues to its nature; the page, which is the discrete unit; and a structure of sequence; but perhaps neither cover nor pages nor sequence is a genuine prerequisite.

The process indigenous to book-reading is the human act of shifting attention from one "page" to another, but perhaps this is not essential either.

The attractions of the book are that it can be individually cheap to make and distribute, that it is customarily portable and easily stored, that its contents are conveniently accessible, that it can be experienced by oneself at one's own speed without a playback machine (unlike theater, video or movies), and that it is more spatially economical (measured by extrinsic experience over intrinsic volume) than other non-electronic media. A book also allows its reader random access, in contrast audiotape and videotape, whose programmed sequences permit only linear access; with a book, you can go from one page to another, both forwards and backwards, as quickly as you can go from one page to the next.

Because the text of a book is infinitely replicable, the number of copies that can be printed is theoretically limitless. By contrast, a traditional art object is unique and a multiple or print appears in an edition whose number is intentionally limited at the point of production. It is possible to make a unique book, such as a handwritten journal, or to make an edition of books limited by number and autograph; but as a communications vehicle, the first is really a book-as-art-object, which becomes known only through public display, while the second is, so to speak, a book-as-print (that is destined less for exhibition than for specialized collections).

The economic difference between a standard book-object and an art-object is that the latter needs to be purchased by only one person, while the former needs many buyers to be financially feasible. Therefore, the art dealer is a retailer, in personal contact with his potential customers, while the book publisher is a wholesaler, distributing largely to retailers, rather than to the ultimate customers.

The practical predicament of commercial publishers in the seventies is that they will not publish an "adult trade" book unless their salesmen can securely predict at least several thousand hardback purchasers or twice as many paperback purchasers within a few months. Since any proposed book unconventional in format could never be approved by editorial-industrial salesmen, commercial publishers are interested only in book hacks (and in "artists" posing as book hacks, such as Andy Warhol).

What is most necessary now, simply for the development of the book as an imaginative form, are publishers who can survive economically with less numerous editions at reasonable prices.

There is a crucial difference between presenting an artist's work in book form — a retrospective collection of reproductions — and an artist making a book. "Book art" is my term for books that are works of art, as well as books.

The book artist usually controls not just what will fill the pages but how they will be produced and then bound and covered, and the book artist often becomes its publisher and distributor as well, eliminating middlemen all along the line and perhaps creatively reconsidering their functions as well.

One practice common to both books and paintings is that the ultimate repository of anything valuable is the archive — the art museum for the painting, and the research library for the rare book.

One trouble with the term "artists' books" is that it defines an art work by the initial profession (or education) of its author, rather than by qualities of the work itself. Since genuine critical categories are meant to define art of a particular kind, it is a false term. The art at hand is *books*, no matter who did them; and it is differences among them, rather than in their authorship, that should comprise the stuff of critical discourse.

Indeed, the term "artists' books" incorporates the suggestion that such work should be set aside in a space separate from writers' books — that, by implication, constitute a minor league apart from the big leagues of real books. One thing I wish for my own books is that they not be considered minor league.

The squarest thing "an artist" can do nowadays is necessarily compress an imaginative idea into a rectangular format bound along its longest side. Some sequential ideas work best that way; others do not.

In theory, there are no limits upon the kinds of materials that can be put between two covers, or how those materials can be arranged.

The essential distinction separates imaginative books from conventional books. In the latter, syntactically familiar sentences are set in rectangular blocks of uniform type (resembling soldiers on a battlefield), and these are then "designed" into pages that look like each other (and like pages we have previously seen). An imaginative book, by definition, attempts to realize something else with syntax, with format, with pages, with covers, with size, with shape, with sequence, with structure, with binding — with any or all of these elements, ideally reflecting the needs and suggestions of the particular book.

Most books are primarily about something outside themselves; most book-art books are primarily about themselves. Most books are read for information, either expository or dramatized; book-art books are made to communicate imaginative phenomena and thus create a different kind of "reading" experience.

An innovative book is likely to strike the common reviewer as a "non-book" or "anti-book." The appearance of such terms in a review is, in practice, a sure measure of its originality. The novelist Flannery O'Connor once declared, "If it looks funny on the page, I won't read it." No, a "funny" appearance is really initial evidence of serious book-artistry.

Imaginative books usually depend as much on visual literacy as on verbal literacy; many "readers" literate in the second respect are illiterate in the first.

One purpose for the present is to see what alternative forms and materials "the book" can take? Can it be a pack of shuffable cards? Can it be a long folded strip? Can it have two front covers and be "read" in both directions? Can it be a single chart? An audiotape? A videotape? A film?

Is it "a book" if a book-artist says it is?

With these possibilities in mind, we can recognize and make a future for the book.

Richard Kostelanetz



Elaine Langerman

Arrival was earlier than anyone's, largely because I wanted to help the Visual Studies Workshop in some way, also because I wanted the luster of Manhattan to sink in with a less active day in Rochester.

31 Prince Street looked mighty good to me, with its two stone buildings and its inviting feeling. The vibes were wonderful, and I thereupon ordered lots of artists' books for my shop from the Book Bus, with Joe Flaherty at the helm. The Book Bus itself is now for sale, and only rolls on the wheels of UPS, I believe. The shop itself is packed full of wonderful books, and it was heavily visited during the course of the week. It was an inviting place to look over the products of the VSW and those of other artists too.

Slowly old friends and new friends arrived, and with name tags we recognized each other and embraced. Old correspondents became acquainted, new self-publishers introduced each other, and the feeling of camaraderie, like a United Nations of art publishers, came to be felt throughout the week.

NEW NEA GUIDELINES FOR 1981

Going out to lunch with Nathan Lyons on Monday allowed me to be apprised of some very good news before the opening of the conference. Due to Nathan Lyons's persuasiveness on the Advisory Committee of the NEA these past two years, the National Endowment for the Arts will make ARTISTS' BOOKS a funding category! That means, that 1) With the 1981 Guidelines, individuals and collaborative projects can request project support for artists' books, and 2) Artists' books will come under Prints & Drawings under the Artists' Fellowship Program. It is hard to imagine a more important announcement at the outset of a conference on alternative art publishing, but Nathan did make this announcement, seemingly to deaf ears. We just think that the import of this announcement did not sink in until later in the week, but we know that this began one of the most comprehensive and significant conferences in alternative art publishing ever launched.

RICHARD MINSKY AND SHEILA DE BRETTEVILLE

The first day heard Richard Minsky, recently out of London and founder of the Center for Book Arts, talking about the history of the book from stone tablets until new formats of today, with an emphasis, of course, on innovative binding. Sheila De Bretteville of the Women's Graphic Center in the Woman's Building in Los Angeles spoke on the development of the Center with courses, pressses, production, and projects including exhibitions and motivations of the women she has trained and inspired.

Lunches, by the way, if purchased at the Workshop, were catered by a remarkable chef who made hummus sandwiches or fine roast beef, with cannoli for dessert or homemade sour-cream brownies, and the price was quite right as well. Since the weather in Rochester left a little to be desired but certainly wasn't as bad as anticipated (just a little rain), no one was unhappy to find a good lunch available at reasonable terms at noon.

ULISES CARRION

Among the honored guests during the conference, Ulises Carrión, founder of the first artists' book shop in the world in Amsterdam, gave a theoretical talk about books and their logical verbal-visual import. The talk was illustrated on a blackboard with diagrams showing how the book has developed on a verbal basis just like a newspaper, which represents the spoken language and a space-time structure. So too have film and video developed (the visual) into mail art and likewise spoken language is countered by photography and eventually performance.

Ulises illustrated his talk with an array of slides taken from his favorite books, books which he likes which illustrate the variety, accessibility, strange formats, and verbal/visual books which have come out of Europe. He emphasized "bookworks' rather than artists' books as the phrase he prefers. Ulises went through a short history of the 1960s, discussing Something Else Press, Ed Ruscha, and Dieter Roth, and then showed how European books describe, analyze, and embody the process, both with a three-dimensional reality and the reading process.

TOM OCKERSE

Head of the Graphic Design department at the Rhode Island School of Design, Tom Ockerse has long been interested not only in the making of books as time-space objects of visible language, but in the theoretical studies implicit in such work. His slides were an aesthetic experience in themselves, showing the work and projects of his students, showing word and image equations, meaningful use of form, materials, and productions. Many of his own books and those of his students were on exhibit in the Research Center Gallery. His philosophy of design and his emphasis on visual legibility were profound impressions made on the audience.

DAVID BUCHAN

Canadian periodicals and books were discussed by David Buchan, director of Art Metropole in Toronto, which is Canada's largest distributor of artists' books, periodicals and videotapes. A wide range of periodicals, past and present were shown by slides.

To begin the whole conference, a book fair and exhibition opened on Tuesday, 6 November, with books from all over the world in the Composite Exposition, with booths representing publishers from all over the U.S. and Canada showing new and older titles with a vast array of

older books offered by Backworks in New York. Sales did very well during the course of the week, since the book fair was open all the time, organized by the students of the Visual Studies Workshop with Adam Weinberg at the helm, and sales taken care of by the students, allowing the publishers to participate in the conference unencumbered. This was an innovation to be emulated by many other conferences. Of course, not all facilities have students who are assigned to such a task, but it could be a solution to the difficulties in exhibitions/workshops.

DICK HIGGINS

Wednesday evening presented the audience with a legend in our times, for Dick Higgins spoke vividly about the growth and development of the Something Else Press, showing slides throughout the talk, citing facts and anecdotes to tell a whole new audience about this innovative collaborative press which produced some of the best-made books in the sixties, resilient books, books that made a difference.

From the demise of the Something Else Press arose from the ashes Unpublished Editions, and then a collaborative with Cage, Corner, Mac Low, Knowles, Oliveros, and Higgins was formed as Printed Editions, which now has a catalog of several titles. Higgins emphasized the importance of a collaborative, its benefits, and its products.

He then entertained the audience with a series of readings from many of the Something Else Press books, which delighted the new listeners for quite a while, making the evening a sterling one indeed.

CLIVE PHILLPOT AND STEPHEN FOSTER

Phillpot, librarian at the Museum of Modern Art, spoke on Dada and Constructivist magazines from 1913 to 1927, while Foster, professor at the University of Iowa, spoke mainly on the Berlin Dadaists and especially on Bader and his desire to publish to exhibit works, polemiciz, and promote themselves.

MARTHA WILSON

Wilson, founder and director of the Franklin Furnace, spoke on the "Last Ten Years of Artists' Publishing" with emphasis on the exhibition she and Weston Naef produced for the Grolier Club in New York City from the archive of Franklin Furnace, which demonstrated the variety, ingenuity, and creativity of the artists who make books, especially those who have done so in the past ten years.

BETSY DAVIDS AND JIM PETRILLO

These two, who form Rebis Press in the Bay Area of California, presented a remarkable survey of printing in California from the turn of the century until now, from the fine letterpress tradition to the artists' book which is being made throughout California. The zest and vitality of artists' publishing in California produced much interest in the audience. Exploration of formats was analyzed as well.

HERBERT HOSMER

Hosmer, a collector of nineteenth Century illustrated children's books, brought several contemporary pop-up books to sell at his booth during the book fair, but his major interest is the work of the German artist Lothar Meggendorfer, who was the chief exponent of mechanical and pop-up books. He demonstrated in his delightful and entertaining slide lecture the masterpieces of design and production these books were, representing a significant extension of graphic illustration and engineering.

FELIPE EHRENBERG

A surprise on the program, Ehrenberg came from Mexico City to talk about the founding of the Beau Geste Press in Devon as well as the infamous *Schmuck* magazine. To talk about "art really is an excuse" in Latin American publishing today, this charismatic publisher told of the exile of many South Americans because of political reasons and their continued interest in disseminating ideas by publishing. He spoke sincerely of his own story and that of many others who find that art is directly linked with politics and must be at this time in South and Central Americaand Mexico. The devious means to publish and get governmental backing for these publications made fascinating listening for the audience, who realized the importance of having Third World publishers represented this conference.

JACKI APPLE

Apple, curator of exhibitions at Franklin Furnace and a performance artist herself, spoke vividly about one-of-a-kind books which have been exhibited at Franklin Furnace, books which are unique and are being made throughout the world. Sculptural bookworks were also amply explored.

CHUCK HAGEN

Hagen, publisher of *Afterimage*, the monthly tabloid of photographic news, reviews, and commentary which Visual Studies Workshop produces, discussed the use of the book by photographers from 1930 until the present. His slides were taken from the books in the Research Center, which houses a fine basic collection of photographic books throughout the decades.

NUTS AND BOLTS ISSUES

ARTISTS' BOOKS AND PUBLISHING STRUCTURES

Joan Lyons, coordinator of the Visual Studies Workshop Press and Printshop, and Muriel Cooper, editor at MIT Press, discussed the differences between small and midsized publishing. In addition, Felipe Ehrenberg spoke about the Latin American experience of publishing structures, as well as his experience with the Beau Geste Press. Several other participants from the audience, such as Kevin Osborn of the Writer's Center in Maryland, and George Quasha of the Open Studio in Barrytown, New York, also spoke of their experiences in publishing, as did Jim Snitzer of Chicago Books. Problems of production and distribution were also voiced.

PROBLEMS IN ART MAGAZINE PUBLISHING

Edit DeAk of *Art-Rite*, Eldon Garnet of *Impulse*, Chuck Hagen of *Afterimage* each spoke of their motivations in publishing a magazine, and their problems and experiences, mostly in distribution and in production. An interchange with the audience helped to clarify some of the issues brought forth by the panelists.

ART NETWORKS AND COOPERATIVE BASES

The editor of *Umbrella*, Judith A. Hoffberg, spoke of the nuts and bolts of some of the problems encountered in the field of artists' publications, such as exhibiting at art-oriented and library-oriented conferences, buying mailing lists of art libraries, proper packaging of books and publications, and the need for copyright statements, let alone the name of the artist-author of the book.

A sense of marketing and consumerism should be inculcated in the artist, not after classes, but as a necessary part of their education, since they are indeed creating products which are marketable and in fact are being purchased in outlets each day.

She pleaded for a continuation of the community spirit that was generated during this conference, an ongoing cooperative linkage that could generate problem-solving and a professional stance among artist-publishers.

CRITICISM

Panelists Peter Frank, Ken Friedman, Barbara Tannenbaum, and Jorg Zutter of Amsterdam urged more critical vehicles for reviewing artists' books and publications, cited *Umbrella* as an excellent vehicle right now, and announced a forthcoming premiere issue of *Collation*, edited by Peter Frank.

EXHIBITIONS

Throughout the conference, there was an exhibition of book objects by ten bookmakers of significance in the Workshop Gallery. In addition, there were selections from the VSW Press archive; book productions from educational print centers, the speakers' exhibition, with original examples of works discussed in the conference presentations; as well as a remarkable exhibition *The Evolution of an Artist's Book: Pleasure Beach by Syl Labrot*, and in the Print Loft Gallery as the Collective Exposition, a combined book fair of items sent in by artists from all over the world.

ROCHESTER

Oh, it was a good surprise had by all, for the VSW kept us all very busy, busier than anticipated, and the listings of bookstores, galleries, museums, and restaurants abounded. The VSW was big enough for a week, because there was so much to see and so many people to meet. The book fair was handled in a most professional manner, and the exhibitions allowed all conferees to visit all parts of the operation of the VSW. The physical plant was just right for a conference of art publishing, because we saw everything from production to consumption—and everything in between. As far as food goes, some of us found a delightful inexpensive place near VSW which became our watering hole, called the Wellington Water Works, which in fact must have once been the water works. We found a rather incredible item on the menu and have since decided that in Rochester they only grow potato skins, and not potatoes. They serve potato skins deep-fried, served with a wonderful mustard-sauce, and we ate them for days!

In addition, Rochester seems to be a luxurious walking town. The formerly rich home owners on East Avenue had a variety of architects, spacious gardens, and all the land you could imagine. Today, there are many Victorian homes empty, Victorian buildings empty, and loft space to be had for a song. If artists could withstand the winters of Rochester, Mecca is here. We have already subdivided P.S. 2—or what we have named the public school which seems abandoned and ready for recycling into a marvelous artists' space. After a final bash on Friday night, tired but so very glad we came, most of us wended home except for those who attended the electroworks exhibition at Eastman House and the subsequent symposium.

AAPN: PUBLICATION BUT NO FUTURE

A majority of board members of the Associated Art Publishers Network met in Rochester during the Art Publishing Conference and voted to

dissolve the organization for lack of interest and energy. Notwithstanding the publication of the first issue of *Artists' Publications in Print, 1979–80*, which was given to each registrant at the conference and handed out free-of-charge to all those who passed by the *Umbrella* booth, the board members debated the issue of the existence of an organization that did not have enough support from its own board members to exist. So, with the agreement of all members of the Board extant, the publication, *APIP*, will be distributed widely to all libraries, bookstores, museums, and galleries before the first of the year, and the present Executive Director will be entrusted with dissolving the organization and contacting all members.

Avant-Garde Festival of New York: A Review

Volume 3, Number 5 (1980)

Many said it couldn't be done, and some even said it shouldn't, but to the delight of its long-time fans and its first-time visitors, the Avant-Garde Festival of New York staged its fifteenth annual blowout for twelve hours in mid-summer, in unlikely but physically and spiritually appropriate surroundings. The choice of locale, public and slightly offbeat as always, was especially fortuitous: the northernmost of the three piers in Manhattan's midtown Passenger Ship Terminal on the Hudson River, operated by the Port Authority. The Terminal piers are cavernous and spanking-new areas for activity, whether it be the bustle of those who go, the milling about of those who stay, or the antics of those who make art. At least as importantly, the Piers are air-conditioned: the Festival took place on July 20, the hottest day (103 degrees) of the East Coast's heat wave, and the cooling of the space provided comfort to busy artist and curious spectator alike. There were a few activities staged on the open lot on the Terminal roof; this correspondent refused to venture above until nearly sundown, by which time everything but a makeshift New Wave band or two had been dismantled (or melted). Fortunately, there was more than enough to keep one preoccupied below and within.

The Festival's organizer and den mother, Charlotte Moorman, was scurrying about even more than usual, helping every participant with the last little detail. Charlotte's particularly high profile this year was made possible by extra time—time which resulted from her inability to convince the powers that be to let her perform one of her Festival-climaxing spectacles (this time, playing her cello suspended from a helicopter). As a result, the Festival did not climax, it just wound down. In the heat, however, this was all for the better, and it was encouraging, indeed downright inspiring, to see Miss Moorman everywhere, brimming with her customary energy. Only last year she had to cancel Festival plans because of serious illness and major surgery—the second time in the Festival's history that the vagaries of the body and the advice of doctors have squelched the otherwise perennial celebration of new art.

Of course, there were the usual grousers, casual visitors and press commentators alike, who

challenged various contributions to the Festival—"you call this art?" "That's silly" "Where's the sex n' violence?'—or the concept of the Festival itself—"You call this avant garde?," "That's childish," "Where's the true contribution to the aesthetic debate?" But everyone should know by now that the Annual Avant-Garde Festival is more devoted to the idea of "Festival"—and, when possible, "Annual'—than to the idea of "Avant-Garde." The term was adopted in 1963 after the first presentation of six evenings of new music, when a woman in the audience sued Moorman for what she called "irreparable hearing damage" resulting from a John Cage piece. On legal advice, Moorman (who won the case, but hates lawsuits) added the term "Avant-Garde" to the series' name, thus clarifying the nature of the thing.

After the third annual series repeatedly spilled out of its usual home (Judson Hall, across 57th Street from Carnegie Hall) in an Allan Kaprow Happening presented every evening for a week, Charlotte brought the rest of the Festival outside. With the cooperation of a then-superhip Parks Department, the Festival was mounted in Central Park in September 1966, from dawn to midnight. Since then the Festival has occupied the Staten Island Ferry, Grand Central Station, Shea Stadium, the 69th Regiment Armory (where the 1913 Armory Show was held), Central Park West (in the form of a parade), and other highly public locales. Each time the Festival has become less concertlike and more simultaneous, chaotic, and carnivalesque.

The Futurists would love it—not least because there is so much technology involved. From the first, the video, laser, holograph, biofeedback, computer, and electronic music people from academic and independent studios round the world participated eagerly in the Festival; it was one of their main bastions during the lull in interest in technological art during the 1970s. The 15th Annual Festival was no less switched-on than before, but in its arrangement—which kept the video, film, holography, and other technological forms segregated—a new, slightly less jumbled and confusing presentation emerged.

Partly because of especially good planning and partly because of the Terminal's capaciousness, the Festival seemed less crowded and more broadly cohesive this year than previously; the poets and dancers and private-event-makers and object-displayers no longer seemed to impinge upon one another's work or be engulfed by blinking lights, whooshing sounds, and whole forests of vinelike cables and monstrous machines. Such space and clarity gave the less technologically ambitious participants greater prominence—a mixed blessing: as usual, the fatuous and the crass leaped and tromped and yelled and waved their flea-market figurines (homemade or no) in the face of visitors, often obscuring far more substantial work. The Festival's democratic policy of accepting all those who apply to participate has its drawbacks. If such neo-hippie pseudo-artists threatened on occasion to pester the Festival into mindlessness, however, their genuine counterparts—including longtime Festival regulars and devoted friends of Charlotte whose membership dues in the working avant-garde are fully paid up—provided constant spiritual and aesthetic stimulus.

The poetry readings, situated smack in the middle of things for once, were especially lively, featuring George Quasha, Charles Stein, and Bruce Andrews. Baltimore Co-Accidentists Kirby Malone and Marshall Reese formed a webbed-

together pair of well-dressed mummies. Many others participated, such as Alison Knowles, Pauline Oliveros, Linda Montano, and the Russian emigres Rimma and Valery Gerlovin, who installed Fluxus-like phrase boxes and hidden object chains.

Where will the Festival happen next year? When will it happen? Will it happen at all? Only time, the whim of the various New York City bureaucracies, and Charlotte Moorman's own health and stamina will tell. But this year's Festival, despite notices in the press even less sympathetic than usual, was a success in the eyes of this correspondent. A landmark in the history of art it wasn't, but an entertaining and sometimes enlightening use of skills and insights of artists in various modes and attitudes it was.

—Peter Frank

Russian Samizdat Art: 1960–1982

Volume 5, Number 2 (1982)

Franklin Furnace in New York City is giving the public a rare opportunity to view Russian samizdat art, curated by Rimma and Valery Gerlovin. The chance to see and experience handmade books and artworks made by Russian artists since the 1960s, who used these as the only outlet to express their aesthetic and political ideals, is unique. These *samizdat* or (self-published) bookworks were a phenomenon begun in the 1960s, illegally printed and chain-distributed in the Soviet Union as well as works by those Russian artists who continue "samizdat" in the West by various means. The exhibition includes work by twenty-eight artists, reflecting a rich period of self-publishing in the Soviet Union. These works are collected by people throughout the world as another aspect of bookmaking, not in the avant-garde book tradition, but as a way of getting an aesthetic and political work out to a larger audience than in the repressed society of Russia and the Eastern European countries.

The curators, emigrés to America themselves, feel that the cultural artifact which is the samizdat book is completely independent of any outside influence, involving no censorship whatsoever, since each work consists of typed or handwritten carbons in an edition of two to twelve-copies. Printing equipment of any kind, including copying machines, is illegal in the repressed Russian society, so that each copy is passed from hand to hand accompanied by discussion and recommendation. Distribution is always dangerous, especially of handmade books if they are ever seen in public places. With that repressive social situation, there is a binding force in the artistic and poetry community, so that the challenge that this represents creates a stimulus for creativity.

The exhibition, which opened on 24 February and remains available through 17 April, is unique also because there is no way of showing handmade book objects in Russia. It is against the law. Among the artists are Henry Khudyakov (b. 1930) who did his first bookwork in 1963, typed on onionskin paper on the typewriter (ten copies), with a manifesto from his own "publishing company" and handwritten com-

mentary. Visual poems are his medium, and his fame has spread. He now lives in New York, where he emigrated in 1974, and makes nonverbal symbolic objects, such as suits.

Vagrich Bakhchanyan (b. 1938) is a performance in himself, using books and mail art as his documentation. He was the first who deliberately started the wave of book objects and developed his medium of general production, doing a book of tobacco with real tobacco for pages, or a toilet-paper book with pages of that medium. On his mail art he puts the label "Vagrich Bakhchanyan, President Reagan's Advisor on mail art." His work is based on paradox, writing menus, obituaries, dreams, and orders.

Other artists in the exhibition show collaboration—artists with poets, photographers, and musicians, as reflected in the collaboration of the curators of the show in book media. Rimma's "box-housed" poems done from cardboard, covered with colored fabric, with text inside and outside, allow the viewer to participate and change the meaning of the message by manipulating the cubes, turning them over, creating a new sense. *A Man*, a six-foot structure, consists of soft-covered boxes with bells inside bearing inscriptions on every side from positive to negative, and the viewer/participant is supposed to create his own ideal person.

The Gerlovins tell us that now in Moscow there are popular book performances, such as those of the Moscow "Collective Action Group," a group of three artists who in 1979 laid on the snow about twenty handmade colored books, which participants and spectators decomposed further, as these books consisted of different-colored square-shaped loose pages with a concrete poetry text. Other groups and collaborators use books in their works, such as political artists Komar and Melamid.

The Gerlovins on the night of the opening did a performance/action in which they both threw out to the group of spectators and guests tickets, visas to Franklin Furnace, small handmade cardboard books entitled *Russian Yellow Pages 1982*, as well as a sheet of paper which Valery threw down to the spectators, entitled "Compressed Russian spirit concentrated in a suitable for transplantation."

UNDERGROUND MAGAZINES

In addition to bookworks, at the end of the 1960s many new underground art magazines began to appear in the art community, at first in single editions, and then handmade art periodicals like the magazine *Aeronautic* in 1973, where artists were asked to do a page dedicated to the theme of aeronautics, and Valery Gerlovin did the cover with a kinetic title.

A new magazine, *Kolkhoz* (Collective Farm, 1981, ed. 150), is based on the contribution of Russian artists living in Moscow and in New York. Many pages are designed by hand, and the cover of the first issue has a red hanging label ,"Keep in Front" with a gold star that makes it look like an epaulet. This first issue is a stunning document of interpretations of Russian artists now living in New York and pages contributed by Russian artists living in the Soviet Union. This is a true samizdat publication, but this time it is available for $25 in an edition of 150. Future editions will be international.

The announcement for this exhibition, the third in a series of four presented in the 1981–82 season by Franklin Furnace devoted to bookworks from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, is

also a work of art, a montage of photographs from the exhibition folded in such a way to make a self-mailer, stunningly printed in red and black, with a gold star above the return address. An exhibition catalog or checklist is also available from Franklin Furnace.

The exhibition is inspiring, showing the undaunting spirit of artists who must get their ideas across in bookworks which become vital and resourceful for all artists and people everywhere. A detailed article by the curators describing this movement in the USSR was published in *Flue* 11, no. 2.

Making Books in Philadelphia: Bookworks:82

Volume 5, Number 5 (1982)

After eighteen months of preparation, *Bookworks:82*, the international conference on books and publications made by artists, opened on 1 October in Philadelphia at the Moore College of Art. Hosted by the Foundation for Today's Art and coordinated ably by Michael Kostiuk, *Bookworks:82* proved to be a continuation of that spirit which was generated in Rochester two years ago at the Visual Studies Workshop; that spirit of cooperation, communication, and continuity.

You couldn't have asked for a better place for a conference, a city that really put out the red carpet for books and bookmakers, not only with Indian summer weather, but with no less than twenty-seven exhibitions of bookworks throughout the city, from Alison Knowles's *The Book of Bean*, a walk-in book whose pages were eight feet tall, to Suzanne Horvitz's *Thou Hast Ravished My Heart* and *For Sick of Love Am I*, a miniature dual volume of xeroxed color images. There were exhibitions of William Morris's books at the Rosenbach Foundation, Bruce Schnabel's handsomely bound books at the Helen Drutt Gallery, a remarkable exhibition of one-of-a-kind books at Jeffrey Fuller's Gallery, including some mysterious "closet" book artists, and so much more. Alas, the conference was so rich and full that many participants could not see all the exhibitions that were available, except within walking distance at lunch hours. But those who came early and those who stayed after the Sunday closing of the conference did get to see many books, more than anyone could absorb in one "sitting."

The more than 250 conferees enjoyed a full program from morning to night, including a significant session on "Books and Freedom," chaired by Martha Rosler and with the participation of Felipe Ehrenberg telling about setting up more than fifty presses funded by the Mexican government in the rural areas of Mexico, where villagers learned how to put together a newspaper or a magazine to communicate among themselves with a press, many examples of which were on display on the thirteenth floor of the Philadelphia College of Art over the weekend. This was a testimonial to a democratic system of freedom of the press, taught by one who should know about that, the founder of the Beau Geste Press. In contrast, the Gerlovins, Valery and Rimma, spoke about the problems of being artists in Russia and the necessity of printing underground books. It was a powerful begin-

ning to a wealth of information for the next three days.

Shelly Rice analyzed the structure of a few of her favorite books, such as Kevin Osborn's *Real Lush* and Paul Zelevansky's *Case for the Burial of Ancestors.* There was also an interesting dialogue of artists and writers who produce vinyl disks and audiotapes as an extension of their visual or written works, with Peter Frank as moderator and Jacki Apple, Jeff Gordon, and Charlie Morrow on the panel.

The offset printers presented a fascinating explanation of their methodology and techniques on Saturday morning with Kevin Osborn as moderator and Conrad Gleber, Michael Goodman, Philip Zimmermann, and Janet Zweig participating.

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION

The international nature of the conference showed representation not only from Mexico and Canada, but also from Holland, Finland, and Poland (via Amsterdam). The Dutch representatives were the owners of Void Distributors, including bookmaker Hettie Huisman and her partner, as well as Outi Heiskanen from Helsinki and Henryk Gajewski, a Polish artist who found temporary haven in Amsterdam. He gave a presentation on *Other Child Book*, the exhibition of one-of-a-kind artists' books which artists from all over the world sent to a show which opened in 1979 in Warsaw and has been seen in Mexico City, Australia, and now in Philadelphia. His presentation not only gave his philosophy of teaching contemporary art to children via bookworks, but he also exhibited a film which he had made about the books and the interaction by children with them.

Art librarians were also given a chance to voice some of their opinions about the importance of the acquisition and preservation of these bookworks in a panel chaired by the editor of *Umbrella*. The major interest of all these art librarians was to keep the lines of communication open to their students and their clientele to these works of art. Besides sessions on collections and archives, innovative approaches to bookmaking, and publishing management, there was a fine exhibition of Philadelphia book artists at the Moore College of Art gallery, as well as an adjunct book exhibition of more than 400 bookworks sent in by artists from all over the world, all to be savored by the conferees. There was also a performance-lecture by Betsy Davids and James Petrillo on William Blake's art and aesthetic.

Distribution, however, was on the minds of all those who attended, and although a session on Sunday morning was devoted to the problem, it was mentioned time and again throughout the conference. Paul Zelevansky, in a panel discussion, "Making Book," put it well by urging artists to do more to push their books beyond the realm of the art world. "It's not enough to make pretty things; we must infiltrate with the right words and images. As big publishing drifts further into corporate style, we may still have amateur status, but the balls in our court." This was amplified in the Sunday morning session, where several of the panelists cited the problems of limited audience, lack of outlets, the reluctance even on the part of museum shops to take the bookworks on. In fact, Leta Stathacos, coordinator of marketing services for the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, gave the artists hell for using noncommercial tactics in trying to further the dissemination of their products. She felt that indifference to sales was the earmark of some of

the artists at the conference and would not lead to success at all, especially since the energy going into the creation of the books far exceeded the search for a broader audience.

Openings of book shows, receptions, and encounters with "old friends" allowed this conference to open up new lines of communication for many of the conferees. Due to a newspaper strike in Philadelphia, attendance at a public book fair held in conjunction with the conference did not bring in the large audiences anticipated, but those who came enjoyed the books and publications of more than sixty exhibitors, and it was well organized and produced some interesting sales.

Artists' Books: Japan

Volume 8, Number 1 (1985)

Kipling's proclamations notwithstanding, occasionally East and West do meet. They did so in the Franklin Furnace's recent Artists' Books: Japan exhibition from March 15 through April 20, and the encounter was memorable.

Featuring around 100 bookworks produced in the post–World War II period, the show was curated by Tokyo-based artist, teacher, and critic Yoshjaki Tono. In the international capital of the art world, it provided a rare opportunity to examine up close some of the influences modern Japanese and American art have had on each other as well as continuing cross-currents in the two countries' popular cultures.

Usually more sculptural than literary, more playful than serious, whatever the artists packed between two covers in this show—when, in fact, their books had any covers at all—was probably not intended to be read as much as it was to be touched, caressed, or merely contemplated by viewers. In many cases, physically, the starting point in making or appreciating these artists' books was more than the idea of the book as a six-sided sculptural object than as a bound stack of paper (Katsuhiro Yamaguchi's mirror-covered tome *Liber Liber*, for example).

On the other hand, as Tono points out in his introductory notes, "Reading is not all that people do with books." Some artists represented here took the function of the book as their point of departure. Coming from a culture with a long and rich tradition in printing and the graphic arts, they cooked up a wild batch of work which challenged ordinary concepts of what books can or should be while tossing up some interesting design concepts of their own at the same time.

Tono divided these works into several categories of book-as-art inventions. Along with other catalog type volumes, "The Book as Documentation or Memory-holder" was represented by leading graphic artist Tadanori Yokoo's *Shoot Diary*, a collection of personal photographs, and by several of his own original sketchbooks. Gempei Akasegawa's *Pictorial Cherry BIossoms, 1250 Agitated Days*, a thick, illustration-filled volume reminiscent of *manga* (Japanese comics), also appeared in this group.

A paperback by Ryuichi Sakamoto, the popular leader of the rock group Yellow Magic Orchestra

and soundtrack composer for Nagisa Oshima's film, *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, was included in the "Book as Skin" category. An illustrated compendium of imaginary titles, it contained his "Whole Catalog of Unpublished Works from Honhondo," a proposed collection of outlandish book jackets which would never turn up in any bookstore. Some were actually constructed for this show. Genki Numata's *Metaphysics of No Smoking by Gyojin Karatani*, for example, an oversized, upside-down cardboard egg container, looked at first like a prop from a science-fiction movie. On one cover side of this book, centered in a field of Japanese *kanji* (written characters), a little plastic monkey sits Buddha-style in a tidy nest of wire; more than a dozen speedometer dials, intricately laced-up with string, decorate the other side. *Marcel Duchamp, or the Castle of Purity by Octavio Paz* consists mostly of green, rubber-coated copper wire stuffed into a soft-drink bottle. The wire "flows" out of the bottle's open mouth. At the wire's end, which extends out from a surrounding plastic funnel, some braided copper threads, slightly frayed, are exposed. Overall, this book by Jiro Takamatsu is a good exercise in the Duchampian nails-in-the-bottom-of-a-hand-iron mode.

Items such as Susumu Wakabayashi and Gozo Yoshimasu's locked-in-an-iron-box poetry anthology "Object-Book" (pictured in the exhibition catalog) are not even meant to be opened in the first place. And "The Book as Performance" completely subverts our normal book-to-reader relationship. The white nylon mesh pages of Sakumi Hagiwara's *Wind* book probably "read" best hanging from a clothesline, blowing in a gentle breeze. His *Fade Out* as originally conceived, cannot really be read at all: the words written on its light-sensitive pages would vanish if the book were ever opened. (A more manageable, printed facsimile was also shown.) A rare copy of the original 1964 limited edition of Yoko Ono's Fluxus performance manual *Grapefruit* was included here too. Its haiku-brief entries are instructions for various kinds of events and meditations. Other categories in Tono's taxonomy included "The Book as Concept" and "The Book as Picture Show" (illustration and photography-filled volumes).

These Japanese books were right at home at Franklin Furnace, which houses a repository of artists' books, mail art, performance art documentation and other "ephemera," which it has collected for the past nine years. Overall, the items included in this Artists' Books: Japan exhibition reflected the spirit of the international exchange of ideas between artists that blossomed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when nationalistic boundaries in art were breaking down. Influenced by new technology and the communications potential of popular media such as film, magazines, and television, artists, like politicians, began to think globally. Just as Japanese artists, well-grounded in their own burgeoning consumer culture, could relate to pop art's colorful canvases celebrating the everyday world of soup cans, comic-book heroes, and movie stars, their American counterparts were inspired by Japanese "art actions," which viewed art as a process in time as well as in space and greatly influenced the development of Happenings. This art-as-event flavor could still be detected in the "Book as Performance" works included here.

Finally, even as the whimsy of pop gave way to the 1970s seriousness of conceptualism, when typewritten descriptions of ideas for artworks replaced actual paintings on gallery walls,

Japanese artists continued to fuse the new aesthetics with their own traditional approaches. "They combine seriousness and humor more than we do, and there's a certain lighthandedness about what they do," Martha Wilson, director of the Furnace notes. "There is a lot of quiet humor in this show." This included, in its imaginative New York installation, Tadashi Kawamata's custom-designed book-reading booths: an upright row of giant book spines, each of which contained a stool, light, and built-in table.

"Despite the onrush of television and other media," Tono concludes in his exhibition notes, "we continue to reserve a special affection for the book, never letting it stray far from the grasp of our hand." In fact, these books often demanded to be held, and recognizing this, the show's designers thoughtfully provided a supply of book-protecting gloves for page-turning browsers.

A certain quality of thoroughness in the artists' craftsmanship was evident in a number of these works, the kind of clever and thoughtful planning one finds, for example, in Japanese kitchen equipment (they love gadgets) and industrial design. In essence, the conception and execution of these bookworks seem to share the same ideals, the result of which, as this collection displayed, was often an outpouring of remarkably creative energy.

—Edward M. Gomez

London/Honcon 1980 by Ohtake Shinro

Volume 10, Number 1 (1987)

London/Honcon 1980 *by Ohtake Shinro.*
Published by Yobisha (Tokyo, 1986).
ISBN 4-946419-39-X (Japan).

Unlike their counterparts in the United States, many of Japan's contemporary artists are as involved in commercial graphic projects as they are in the creation of their own painting, sculpture, or other works of a so-called fine-arts nature intended for presentation and consumption in a gallery/museum/art market context. Younger artists often seem especially keen on keeping their hands in several creative pies at one time.

Book design, posters, pamphlets, magazine covers, retail displays, tableware, and more—virtually no negative stigma is associated with a fine artist also dabbling in commercial assignments. Likewise, a number of artists also make bookworks, using the form or idea of the book as a vehicle for artistic expression, complementing their activities in other media or, in some cases, taking it further.

One rising star of the younger generation is Ohtake Shinro, thirty-one, a scissors-wielding collagist who lives and works in Tokyo. He is also a painter, a printmaker, and musician. Ironically, although he shuns the kind of commercial work pursued by many of his peers, Ohtake turned out a handsome little graphic-design project of his own around the end of last year. Neatly packaged in a cardboard slipcase

and beautifully produced in full color, his *London/Honcon* drawing-collage collection is a small testament to the fine printing and dependable attention to detail that, in recent years, have attracted more and more American art book and museum catalog publishers to this country with a long and rich history in the graphic arts. At the same time, it also reflects something of the crowded Japanese urban environment. Curious, dazzling, ugly, and intriguing, this world never fails to fill an artist's eye.

"Japan today, and Tokyo especially—it's an image supermarket!" says Ohtake of the constant stream of home-grown and imported visual information that pours into the capital each day. In a way, his book may be seen as a document showing how one young Tokyoite tries to sort it out. At the same time, it is a record of a field of vision. As such, Ohtake's *London/Honcon* presents itself tidily with a cool, somewhat studied charm. It feels both very personal and peculiarly anonymous. To leaf through the 200-odd pages is to imagine the sensation of coming across the misplaced, private notebook of an imaginatively doodling schoolboy.

To create his collages, Ohtake collects advertisements, train tickets, old postcards, girlie magazines, his own pencil drawings, and frames or re-worked sections of *manga*, the telephone book–thick, popular Japanese comics that sell daily by the millions to readers of all ages. Grabbed, dissected, and glued down into dozens of overstuffed scrapbooks, this stockpile of odds and ends provides the raw material for his catchall, cut-and-paste exercises. What he assembles between two covers can be oddly amusing—a section of a vintage photo of nudists jumping, painted—over bathing beauties or a faceless pair of violently red lips—and sometimes very personal as well, page after page of jerky, quirky little human figures that never seem to add up to anything especially meaningful.

To put together *London/Honcon*, Ohtake selected drawing-collages from more than half a dozen notebooks and sketchbooks produced during trips made several years ago. He is currently preparing two more limited-edition artist's books for publication, one a scrap-collage volume of the kind described above (no travel-related theme), the other an homage to Marcel Duchamp which, as currently envisioned, will include many Ohtake-assembled images from here and there reworked to present them as the young Japanese artist imagines the great modern master might have seen them had he stumbled upon them himself. Both books will also issued by Yobisha.

—Edward M. Gomez
On assignment in Tokyo

Books Do Furnish a Room: Lawrence Weiner on Artists' Books

Volume 13, Number 1 (1980)

Editor's Note: Lawrence Weiner presented his own thoughts about artists' books in 1989 at a symposium on Artists' Books sponsored by the Dia Foundation and Printed Matter in New York.

"My reasons for turning to books, the essential reason for any person turning to books, is content in search of context. The thing that differentiates artists from other people is not their insight, not their central poetics, or not their inbred pathos; it really is essential that artists are unemployed. They must be. And one of the definitions of an artist is a person who does something useful for society, who does have something to present to society but must at all costs remain unemployed.

Reading is a leisure-time activity in the United States. Growing up in New York, one is confronted by the fact that there is a leisure-time activity that can be done only by people who are successful enough to have leisure time or are unemployed. Your audience is certainly not the people who are filling out grant forms, who have people to see and things to do and places to be; it's the person who does his job, has time to sit down and read, and is willing to look at what somebody else has to say, or the person who just happens to have a lot of time.

I had opportunities to show in the 1960s, happily, and the universities fund things, and the only reason you make something is that it is "political." Now I don't understand what the word "political" means. You make something because, we hope if you are an artist, it doesn't exist before. It doesn't have a place. You're not happy with the way you see the world. You, as an artist, as a human being, as an activist, wake up and find that perhaps you have something to say that can bring about an inherent change. That doesn't make it "subversive." To have a special category of books that are called "Artists' Books, Political, Feminist Artists' Books, Decent Thoughts Artists' Books" makes no sense whatsoever in the context of artists' books.

If it is content in search of context, with a book you have the possibility of building a stage set, a platform, that in your eyes contains enough dignity to stand for what the content of your book is. If the content of your book is the exclusion of certain cultures that help build the United States or help build the world as we know it, then the dignity of that content is carried over by the book that you make. If you are a professional artist, you have certain kinds of basic knowledge of how to present things—the theatrics. Books are just a theatrical performance that you can take to the toilet with you. There's no particular place that you cannot read a book. That's what attracted me when I started to try to make books.

The first book that I did make was called *Statements* (I mean the first book that ever got anyplace). It was "what you see is what you get." A statement was what you got at the end of the line; if you ran up a bill any place, you got a statement. It was badly bound, to the point now that if anyone wants to look at it, they really have to destroy it to look at it, which was sort of funny. It was badly bound, and it was really badly printed. But it got out there. Other artists

have gotten books out there. Yet this context has developed into something that in order to control must be subsidized.

In the United States, books are very cheap. Anyone who wants to make a book should better be advised to spend their time figuring out what they have to say in it, how they want to present it, and not bothering to fill out a grant form. The whole purpose of subsidizing books, the entire reason for this enormous industry that we have now in the United States called "How Wonderful the Artists' Book Is" is that by the time you finish filling out the form, by the time somebody who makes his living reading the form gets that form, the content that you're trying to get out on the street has already lost any significance it can conceivably have. It is a built-in time lag.

The artists' book was a means to allow artists to get out at that moment what they had to say in relation to the art context, in relation to the brutality of our society, or in relation to the ecology of our society. But what has come about in the last fifteen years is this plethora of crap, its contexts desperately advertising looking for content. It's changed around the whole thing of artists' book. It has taken away one of the great pleasure principles of an artist to be able to say: "Okay, to say what I have to say might not be popular, it might be wrong and it might not be useful, but with a minimum amount of intrusion into society, I will make a finished package that is made by means of professional printers, professional people who know how to buy books, and get that package out into the world in the great hopes that like any kid in this audience who grew up in any place in the world where their parents were not avid readers or could not read at all, found a book one day, read it, and walked away. It changes a life" And that's what books are all about.

And what constitutes an artists' book really doesn't matter. To use Joe McCarthy's line again, "if it walks like a duck and it talks like a duck, it's a duck." If you can pick it up and if you can read it, it doesn't matter if it's on newsprint, it doesn't matter if it has spikes coming through it, or anything else. I'd like to see a resurgence of a need for artists' books. Maybe we've outlived the need of what an artist's book is. Now we have just books published by artists, or on artists, or for artists, and the only purpose it has is keeping this industry of artists' books going.

I'm happy that someone can walk into Printed Matter and buy a book of mine. I'm delighted that Franklin Furnace has put together an incredibly beautiful archive of books. I believe in the history of the accomplishments of human beings. And books constitute one of the histories of the accomplishments of human beings. But at the same time, I'm looking at it from the point of view of being an artist: an artist is not involved in history, an artist is involved in dealing with society at that particular moment and figuring out one way to present things without having to impose them. A book is something we in the West can publish anytime we want. It just means eating eggs and beans for a couple of months to pay for your own book. That's all I have to say."

—Lawrence Weiner

Volume 15, Number 2/3 (1992)

It may be time for the arena of books, marginalia, and ephemera to assert itself as a prime means, no longer to be found in our Museums of Applied Art, but as suitably reticent and unflamboyant replacements for the so-called fine arts. It is a moment to seize the generality of the book, to use it, and to assert its primacy in a theoretical and practical field.

For too long it has been buried by division. From the illustrated book, the *livre d'artiste*, to the artists' book, the last distraction, all these have distorted its real potential. Some of the monoliths of these genres have always seemed far too eccentric: the Shakespeare text that is illustrated by a Sidney Nolan, and even worse, any old bookstock that is embossed and encrusted by some master binder. These all lead to the unsavory lectures I came to hear of, given by Rigby Graham in Leicester in the seventies, "Binding with Human Skin," which I did not attend. I also wrote my own ode to the Society of Designer-Bookbinders: hide-bound.

Or the banal notion of sculptures built with books as physical units; this might pass in the climate of Late Punk in the early eighties, but to make such edifices in these necessarily more critical times is thoughtless. All these are so far from the transparence required of the book that they are mere private sculptures to adorn their collectors. The real issues are those of editing and publishing, of warehousing, of making available.

At Coracle in 1986 we looked at this field of activity under the title of *The Artist Publisher*, and the subsequent survey was published as a series of headings which still seem valuable. The overtly polemical was stated in the first instance as "Self-Publishing as a Critical Alternative." This was followed by sections about Manifestos, Little Magazines, Artists' Presses, Gallery Presses, Fluxus, Mail Art, the New Ephemera, and finally, Published Musical Scores. This still seems a way of discussing these activities, but more importantly, it also aimed at a conception about the process of the book well beyond the overplayful divisions of text and image. Before we can move further, before we can settle into hypertext, we have to get beyond the simple linearity of text and image and the fascination that words and pictures have some unquestioned significance.

An historical model for this search for a conceptual whole for the book is represented by concrete poetry, as opposed to the indefinite visual poetry. Noticeably absent from the uncredited samples of textual form handed out by Robert Darnton the other evening was perhaps a late work of Lewis Carroll. Not a "pattern-poem" as Dick Higgins referred to them, a poem in a recognizable overall shape, but a single simple transformation of a "river" to "shore." Here the syntax of the work changes by its presentation on the page, and we have an entirely new arrival, where the written text is no longer a representation of the voice-directed syntax of speech at all. The entire linear field of illustration is denied, and we have the emergence, historically, of concrete poetry. It is this transformation that may have a parallel now for the book I am seeking.

Within the economy of means available to us in this critical moment in time, the book and publication present the most adaptive positions possible. A new austerity might arise, beyond a stylistic adoption, one which places the superfluousness of design outside the process of production, as unrequired as in the heyday of letterpress printing. Working with students of fine art now, they sometimes know of this integrity, this potentiality. In a time when the gallery has abandoned any developmental dialogue on its format and has become a mere shop in the most available of mall culture, the book has its place.

It is a moment when the absurd physicality of many media and processes is evident; the massiveness of sculpture has no place, nor the manneristic game of painting. The failure of installation as space has left the book in a clear position to develop a genre of representation and reference for it. The concern with space overall may be reducible.

It is this adaptability rather than the insistence on a given form or medium that now seems so important. Talking with John Goodwin in Printed Matter the other day, he said that if artists now started to work with film scripts, for example, then that is what would be evident in his store. And this seems to me the case. There is no issue about artists' books left to discuss: they are just books. There is no issue about book artists: they are just artists, what and whoever they are.

—Simon Cutts

Editor's note: This manifesto was presented by Simon Cutts, poet, publisher, and gallery director in England, who has been a major proponent of the book for more than two decades. He presented this before a Conference on Reading at the Getty Center in Santa Monica, California.

Artists' Books: Twin 4-Barrel Aspirated or Electronic Fuel-Injected?

Volume 17, Number 1 (1994)

Let's get one thing straight from the outset: I love books, all sizes and varieties, especially those made by artists, and would hate to be considered anything less than their undying advocate. Having said this much I must go on to qualify my statement by reminding you that there are books and there are books-falsely-so-called, and many people are reluctant to draw a distinction.

When a writer or a speaker uses the word "book," I do not automatically think of an apple, a good deed, or even a carburetor. I normally envision an object, often but not exclusively made from printed and bound paper, which is discreet, intimate, and available to more than one reader or owner. In the Western tradition, the two-millennia development of the codex-format book encompasses a number of innovations. Some of these, like saddle stitching or phonetically based movable type, are significant enough to have played important roles in the rise of universal literacy.

As with so many aspects of our postmodern lives, the criteria for what comprises a book are changing. All kinds of ideas make it into book form these days, some more successfully than others. In my time I have seen illegible books, which are regrettable, and unopenable books, which are coy. Whereas referring to a hypercard stack as an "electronic book" merely taxes the language to the limit of what it can comprehensibly support, referring to a sculptural object as a book, even a "unique book," dissolves both meaning and tradition in a wash of confusion.

All of this must sound annoyingly commonplace, obvious, and downright tendentious to those with any knowledge of books. But when a distinguished panel of librarians, curators, and publication directors at the 1993 College Art Association symposium on artists' books showed dozens of slides of second-rate sculpture masquerading as books, its large, supposedly well-informed audience did not so much as rustle a program.

It's not that I begrudge printmakers, papermakers, and other bibliophiles their share of the artist book market, either. Even though artist publications and the avant-garde movements which spawned them (such as Fluxus and Dada) have nothing to do with archival preciosity, I'll give the printer's devils their due and admit that deluxe editions are an oblique precedent, part of an illustrious fine press tradition. But when image upon image of "unique" objects are shown to me as exemplary artists' books, I begin to fear I am adrift in a metaphoric Sargasso, my poor Mother Tongue unequal to the task of semantic navigation.

That a seminar purporting to be about "Artists' Books in the 1990s" should seem to hit wide off the mark is not too surprising. After all, things have been sliding in this direction for a number of years. The enthusiasm among printmakers for monoprints merely whetted our appetite for logical absurdity. Their success at valorizing one-of-a-kind graphics at a much higher fiscal threshold than was ever possible with multiples virtually guaranteed that book artists would follow suit. Yet the late-twentieth-century re-medievalization of the book arts by a self-serving fine-craft movement is such a distortion of reality that, in Seattle at least, the artists' book colloquium felt like a Saturday afternoon session of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

The view I propound will no doubt offend many decent, right-thinking, god-fearing book artists. It is narrow, blasphemous, and slightly vain. I understand completely the dangers of the assumptions inherent in it. Elitism is not only futile, it is also hopelessly unpopular. In my headlong rush to avoid being compared with Hilton Kramer, I will again mention the accomplishments of the fine-press movement. William Morris and Eric Gill, among many others, made valuable donations to the graphic arts, albeit in an elite sort of way. The predictable return to handicraft in an age of mechanical reproduction is not difficult to accept. As Benjamin, McLuhan, and Postman have all pointed out, new technologies make war upon those they supplant, and commercially obsolete techniques are usually relegated to the Academy for preservation. What boggles my mind is that the handmade tradition would be hellbent to append itself to the very avant-garde which is its antithesis.

Objets d'art described as books are even more problematic. The Duchampian proclamation that art is whatever an artist declares it to be is

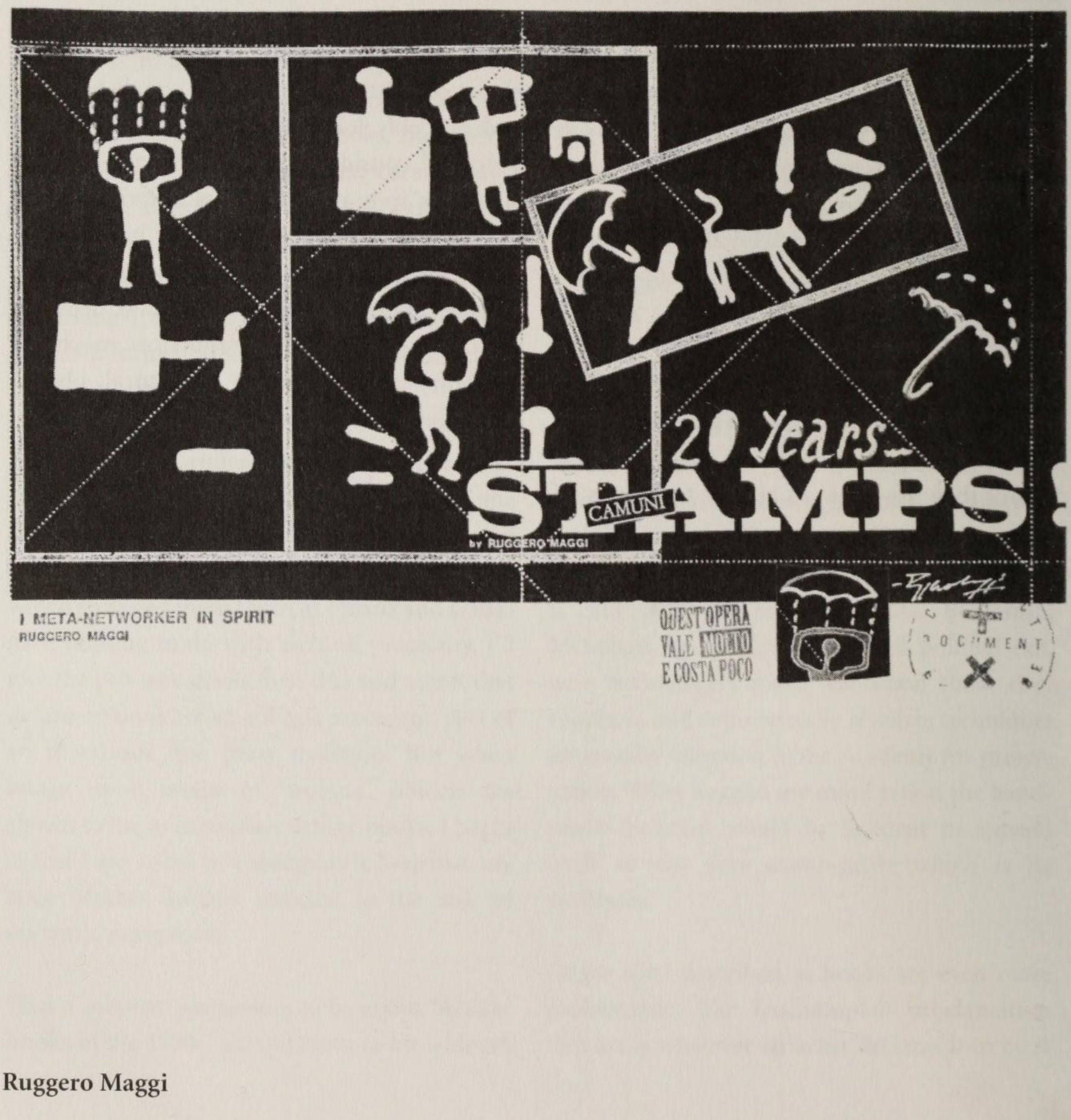
here exaggerated with a vengeance. Everything from specimen jars to meat cleavers now serve as "books designate," with accompanying gallery-sized price tags. This opportunistic rationale, which admits any object in sequential form to the library, so far transcends reason that it won't be long before the World Series is mistaken for a book.

Taxonomy is the single most pressing problem facing a sound historical appraisal of the artists' book phenomenon. To lump letterpress poetry, xeroxed fanzines, and three-dimensional objects together is not just bad cataloging, it is poor critical hygiene. Personally, I've always been more taken by the elegance of an idea than with the opulence of its execution. Archival quality is a consideration in any design, but fine materials do not a book of a sow's idea make. Conversely, parsimonious production values do not demean or "ephemeralize" a splendid idea.

The irony of all this is that, no matter how hard we try to gyp the worms, books are ephemeral by nature, expensive ones as well as cheap. Unless they are keen to return to an era of palimpsests and incunables, artists and critics ought to realize that process counts for only so much. Combinations of adroit technique cannot mask oafish conceptualization. The responsible practice of art requires a better balance. In fact, the world's present condition demands that serious artists think and act with their minds and hearts, abandoning their appetites for luxury at Versailles, where they should have been left two centuries ago.

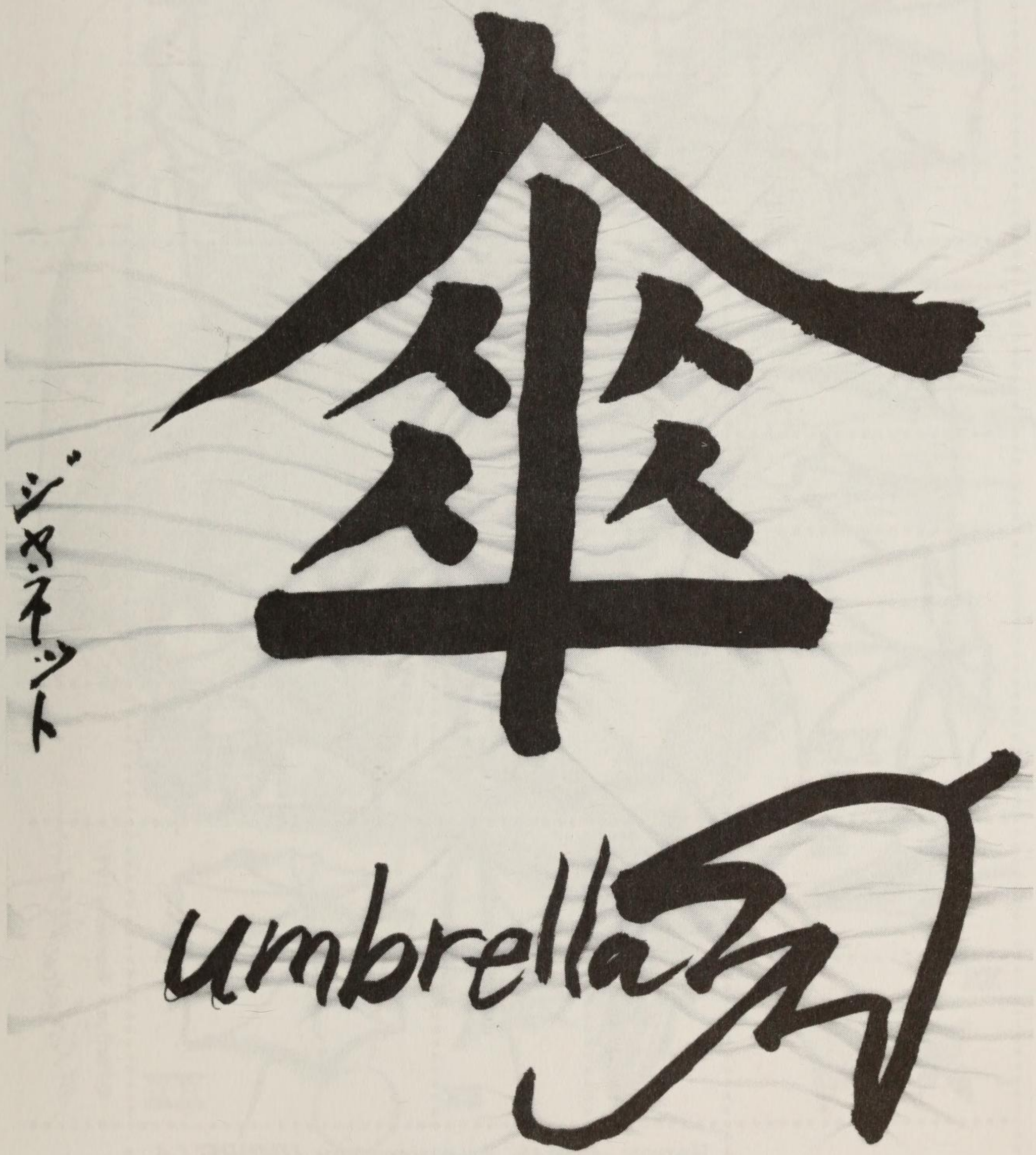
I began this essay by stating that, come what may, I am a friend to books and those who make them, especially artists. Along the way I've blown off a little steam, sworn a couple of oaths, and probably lost a few true believers in the process. I consider that a fair price to pay for clarity. In spite of all the new criteria, when a person speaks or writes the word "book," especially "artists' book," I still do not envision an illegible apple, an unopenable good deed, or even a hypercard stack of carburetors, much less a library-quality unique sculptural object. Henceforth, maybe you won't either.

—David Stairs

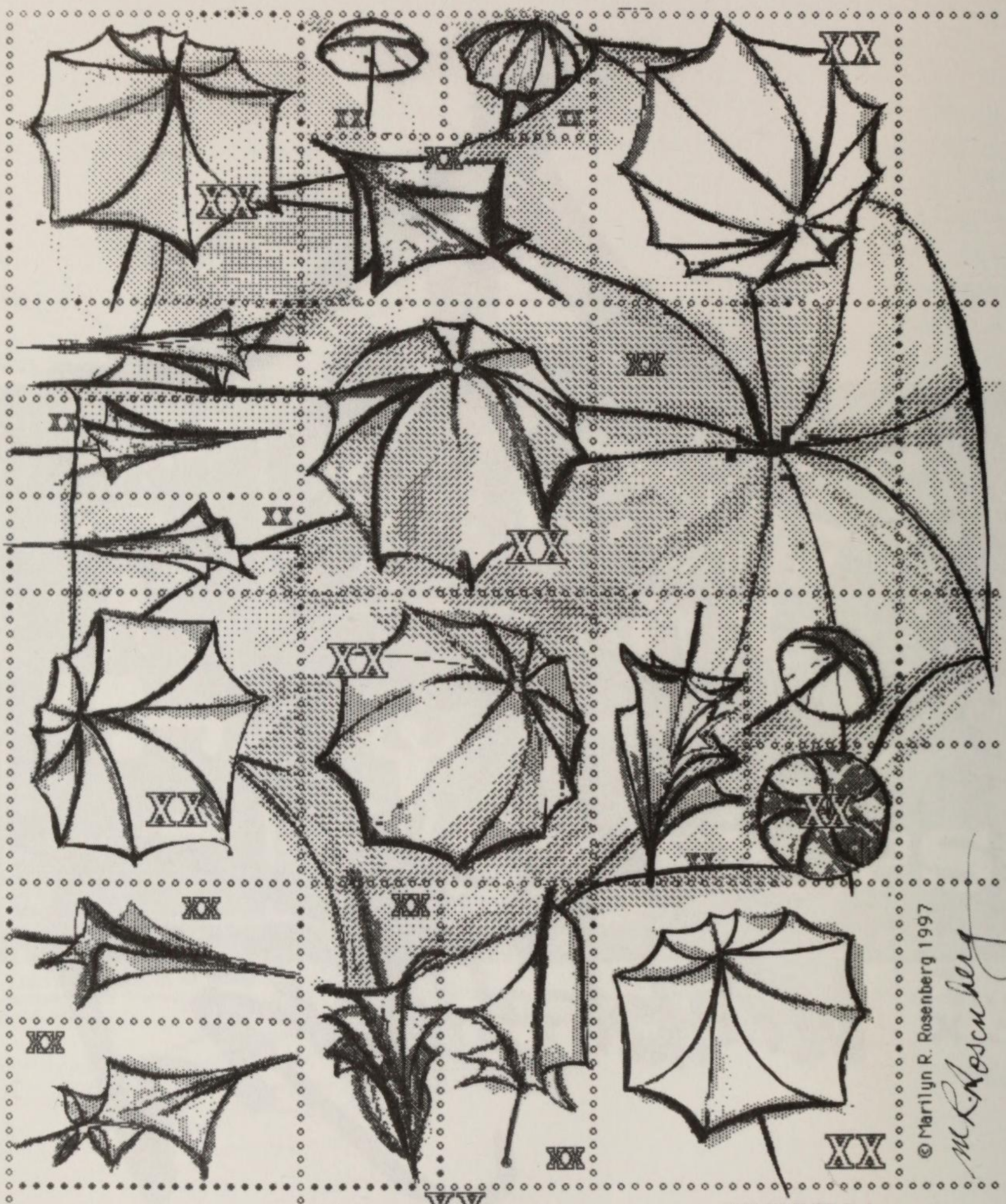


I META-NETWORKER IN SPIRIT
RUGGERO MAGGI

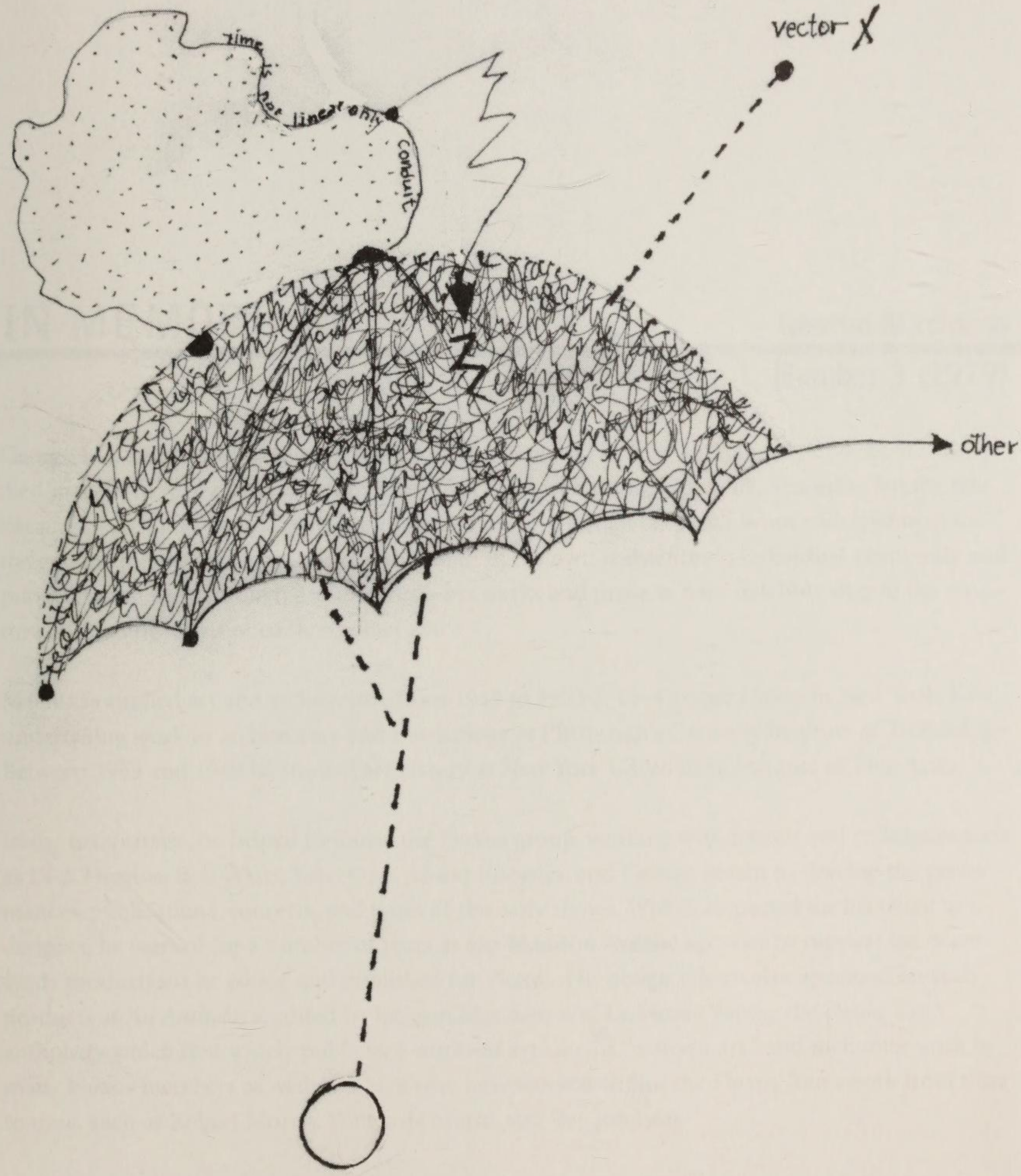
Ruggero Maggi



Janet Pyle



Marilyn Rosenberg


vector X
time-like
non-linear only
conduit
other

IN MEMORIAM: George Maciunas

Volume 1, Number 3 (1979)

George Maciunas, long-time organizer of Fluxus activities in New York and around the world, died in early May of cancer. Born in November 1931 in Kaunas, Lithuania, Maciunas has for two decades been an influential presence in the art world. Though his name is not widely known to the general public—to a great degree the result of his own insistence on individual anonymity and public presentation through group effort—his works and projects have indelibly shaped the structure and visible forms of contemporary art.

Maciunas studied art and architecture from 1949 to 1953 at the Cooper Union in New York, later undertaking work in architecture and musicology at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology. Between 1955 and 1959 he studied art history at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

In the early sixties, he helped to found the Fluxus group, working with friends and colleagues such as Dick Higgins, Bob Watts, Yoko Ono, Alison Knowles, and George Brecht to develop the performances, publications, concerts, and tours of the early sixties. Widely respected for his talent as a designer, he worked for a number of years at top Madison Avenue agencies to support the avant-garde productions he edited and published for Fluxus. His design talents also appeared on such products as *An Anthology*, edited by Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young, the classic 1963 anthology which first widely publicized works of art labeled "concept art," and including work by many Fluxus members as well as others who have worked within the Fluxus framework from time to time, such as Robert Morris, Walter de Maria, and Ray Johnson.

During the early years of the Fluxus movement, roughly 1961-66, Maciunas presided over the Fluxus activities as an editor and coordinator. The first major push he organized was that of a series of magazines, modular and revolutionary, using ideas later adopted by many new art publishers from *Aspen* magazine to *Lightworks*. The second effort was a series of concerts and tours through Europe, by the end of which many of the most significant members of Fluxus, including

Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik, Ben Vautier, and Wolf Vostell, had come to join Higgins, Knowles, Brecht, and the others in one of the first genuinely international movements since Dada. The third important process was the program of publishing of objects, multiples, games, and other materials which Maciunas almost singlehandedly organized at his New York center. These modular, well-designed artifacts range from Brecht's *Water Yam* and Watts's *Events* to the museum-in-a-box versions of the Fluxkit and the many exquisite Fluxus chess games. These activities altogether helped to herald in a number of the transformations in art which swept in the sixties, ranging from the development of multiples as art objects to the dematerialization of art and finally the introduction of intermedia in an art where content—rather than the presence or absence of form—is the crucial issue. Maciunas's fourth great project began in 1966, the development of artists' cooperative housing in what is now called SoHo New York, an area in which Maciunas had been one of the first permanent residents. It has been said that as a visionary architect and urban housing activist, George Maciunas was more responsible than any other man for the development of the area including SoHo, NoHo, and now TriBeCa as a center for art energy and activity.

By 1967, Maciunas had become interested in even more progressive housing-living schemes, including a Fluxus Island, which never materialized, and a Fluxus Farm, which finally did. He spent the last few years of his life on the farm in western Massachusetts, where he has been carrying out his work and his activities together with friends and colleagues.

INFLUENCE AND REPUTATION

It is impossible to gloss more than a few of the major activities of the extraordinary Maciunas in less than a book. In fact, there exist books in several languages filling hundreds of pages with nothing more than indexical notes to other sources of full description. During the twenty years he affected the art world, George Maciunas was productive, active, and continually experimental, developing and playing out new themes in an energetic and forceful way. He has been an influence on art and the world through object-making, filmmaking, publishing, design, urban design, architecture, editorial planning, politics, music, performance art, and art-historical research.

An individual of uncompromising integrity, Maciunas was widely known as a difficult man to work with. He was legend among his friends for his explosive temper and his occasional "purges" of the Fluxus group, when for one ideological reason or another he ultimately "purged" Fluxus of all but four members whom he considered the "core." Nevertheless, for all his capacity for wrath, he was a loyal, good friend, and none of his ideological expulsions were taken very seriously by anyone, including George himself. Where integrity really mattered, Maciunas took firm and often dangerous stands. During the last few years in New York, this resulted in numerous legal battles with the Attorney General and in a physical attack against him by a mobster, which cost him the sight in one eye.

His reputation began to grow during the seventies. It seemed at one point that almost everyone had a Maciunas story or two to tell. He was always controversial, but it must be said that of the

many people who hated him or thought they hated him, almost none knew him directly. A complex, quizzical person, a person who had the capacity to irritate others as much as he himself was irritable, Maciunas was nevertheless appreciated and respected by those who really knew and worked with him. All of his many friends have unfinished business with him—and bones yet to pick. It is characteristic of the loyalty he earned that the unsettled matters and little problems he left behind him remain treasured by his friends as gifts, just as they had previously been treasured as anecdotes.

When one Fluxist received word of Maciunas's fatal illness, she found words appropriate to the feelings many hold toward him. She said, simply, "Whenever we get to wherever we're going, George will have the program organized for us." Maciunas, a lifelong bachelor, was married to Billie Maciunas only a few months before his death in a Fluxus ceremony. It is customary in a tribute or obituary to state that he is survived by his wife. In the case of George Maciunas, he is survived by his wife, by many devoted friends, by thousands of "children" and "grandchildren" in the generations of young artists who have grown to maturity under the influence of his often-anonymous but far-reaching work, and by an art world which he left much different than it was when he and his colleagues first came to it.

—Ken Friedman

Jean Brown, 1911–1994

Volume 17, Number 3/4 (1994)

Jean Brown has been variously described as "the Archivist of the Avant-Garde" and "the Den Mother of Fluxus." One tends to want to capture her essence in a well-turned phrase, because this was a lady who was obviously a unique personality. She was known as one of the world's foremost collectors of challenging art, but for those who knew and loved her, sharing was her greatest asset.

In the fifties, a time when collectors of Dada went begging, Jean and her husband Leonard, a Massachusetts insurance agent, began acquiring the printed ephemera of the movement. Having attended Columbia University, Jean was a public librarian in Springfield, Massachusetts. Not particularly wealthy, the couple focused not on the more expensive original artwork, but on the publications, manifestos, letters, and other poignant mementos of a movement which exposed the underbelly of its meaning.

Having amassed one of the most comprehensive study collections on Dada and Surrealism, the Browns turned their attention to the contemporary scene in the mid-sixties and became early supporters of Fluxus. After gaining the confidence of George Maciunas, the Brown's archive became in essence the depository library of the movement and the repository for many of Maciunas's private papers.

After Maciunas was attacked in New York City in the process of developing affordable housing in the Soho area for a community of artists, he moved to Great Barrington, some thirty miles from Jean's home in Tyringham. Having made her home in a former Shaker seedhouse, she had Maciunas fashion an archive in the spirit of the religious sect. Stark in design yet warm in character, the archive became an international meeting place for those interested in experimental art.

After Leonard's death in 1971, the collection was expanded to include art books and periodicals, concrete/visual/sound poetry, Happenings and performance art, and mail art. It was an anomaly of amazing proportions. Nestled in the placid Berkshire mountains, housed in a structure devoid of pretension, this archive of the improbable flourished and provided inspiration for a generation of adventuresome artists.

When John Lennon and Yoko Ono came to look over this treasure-house of contemporary currents, their visit caused headlines in the local paper. The great European art critic Pierre Restany wrote about her in the pages of *Domus*. But more often than not, it was the unknown but vitally interested who came to visit Jean Brown. I was one of those.

As a young man fresh out of library school, I was treated by Jean with the same courtesy shown the most celebrated of artists. Her ability to focus on the needs of those in her presence was extra-

ordinary to behold. Jean made you believe that you mattered. It was the same consideration she bestowed upon the artists she sheltered from an otherwise unreceptive public. It mattered to her.

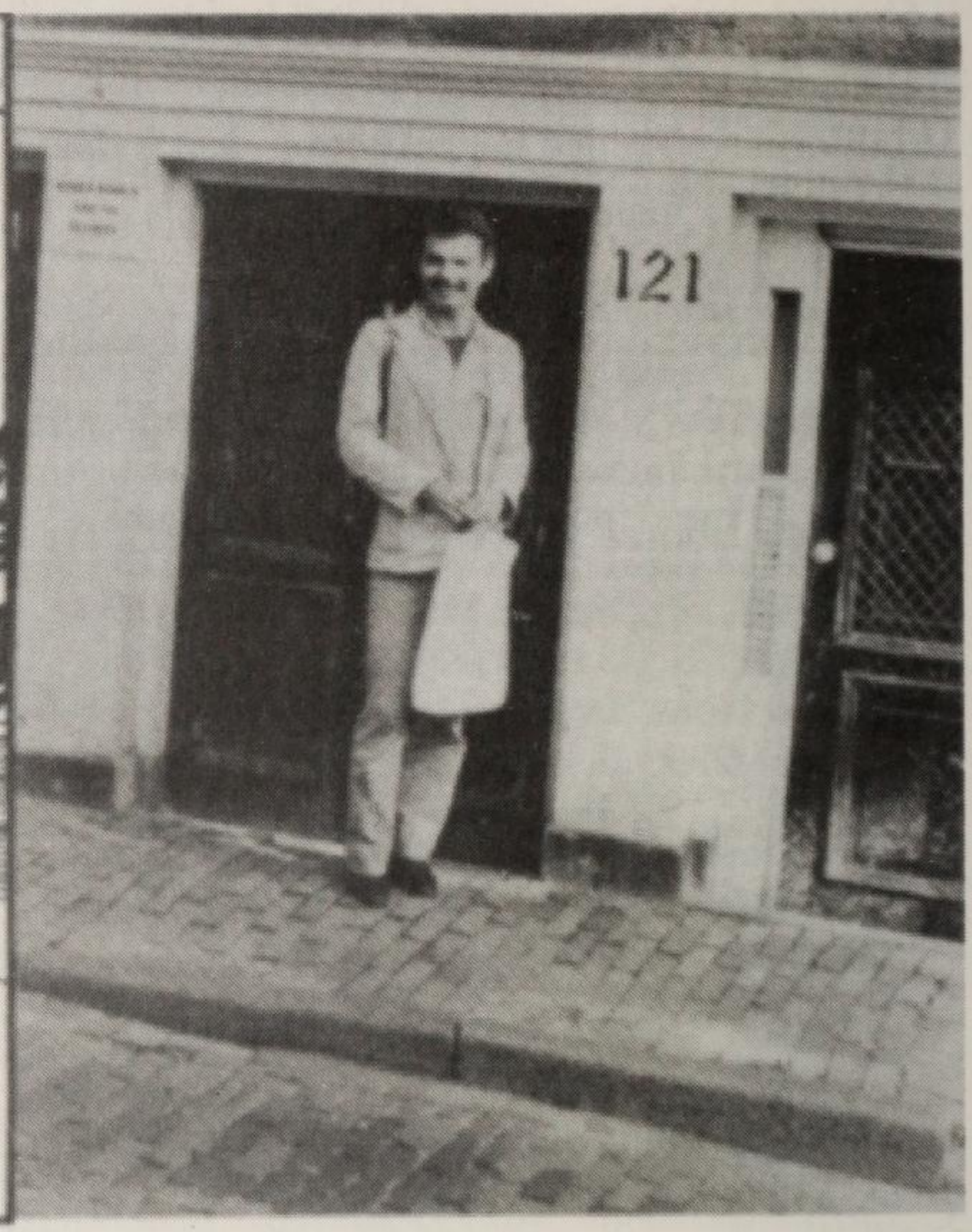
On 1 May 1994, Jean Brown died at the Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. She was eighty-two years old and had been in ill health for several years before her death. In 1985, the J. Paul Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in Santa Monica, California, obtained her collection. It was one of the first times the Center had acquired twentieth-century material.

Jean is survived by two sons, both active in the art world. Jonathan is an historian at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York City and a noted writer. Robert is a partner in the Reinhold Brown Gallery, also in New York City. She leaves behind a multitude of friends and admirers. For many years she labored to document unheralded art. She leaves behind a legacy yet to be fully examined.

—John Held Jr.

Volume 12, Number 2 (1989)





Dick Higgins, 1938–1998

Volume 21, Number 3/4 (1998)

Dick Higgins was a great human being. He was great in talent and achievements; great in the rigor and depth of his experimental art; great in the influence he exerted on the world. Born in 1938 in Jesus Pieces, England, Dick Higgins died in 1998 at the age of sixty. In the last four decades of those sixty years, he became a major figure in twentieth-century culture.

History will eventually shape a clear critical, conceptual, and artistic picture of Dick Higgins. A human history will accompany it, but Dick's human qualities will inevitably be abstracted from the ambiguous and intricate weave of human nature. The man who history will honor cannot incarnate the feeling and tone of the man whose death affects so many, the human qualities of character and mind that gave substance to the public figure.

The public person is the Dick Higgins whose biography is better known with every passing year. This is an historical Dick Higgins, one of the inventors of Happenings, a co-founder of Fluxus, the founder of Something Else Press, the critical theorist who named and clarified the concept of intermedia. Behind these was a deeper and even more complex figure than even these facts suggest. He was cut of the same cloth as the great humanists who gave voice to the intellectual and spiritual upheaval bridging medieval times and the early modern era.

More than once in recent years, I have heard thoughtful scholars rank Dick Higgins's role as an influential presence in the arts of the century with that of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage. The comparisons are appropriate and informative, in similarity as well as difference. As Duchamp did, Higgins abstracted and then concretized the profound artistic and intellectual ferment of an era. He was a bold experimental artist. He was also a quiet, tireless contributor to the world of ideas. Through the exhibitions, projects, and publications he helped to shape, he became a pivotal figure in the network of idea-based artists whom he attracted and with whom he interacted. For many, Higgins personified and exemplified these issues from the 1960s through the last days of the century.

Higgins's art explored and—in European terms—problematized the issues that attracted his attention. His works functioned as the specific demonstration of larger theories, and his theories shaped the crucial framework within which much of the artistic thinking of our era emerged. While the art world is driven by intellectual fashion, it is historically and intellectually illiterate. Many of the artists and composers whom Dick Higgins influenced have little or no knowledge of Higgins as a source of their ideas and work. This gap in the knowledge of a media—driven art world will be remedied when Higgins's work is given proper historical study.

Higgins's program was astonishing in scope and scale, encyclopedic in perspective. His work ranged across painting, performance, and poetry; Happenings, intermedia, and film; typography, book art, and publishing. Beyond this, he shaped a theory of the arts for our times, and he explained his theory in an extraordinary series of books and essays. His explanations opened a world of artistic territory for those around him. At different times, Higgins described these worlds under the various rubrics of "experimental art" and the "arts of the new mentality." The most expressive term, and the one that Higgins most durably gave to the English language, was the word "intermedia."

Higgins coined the term "intermedia" in the mid-sixties to describe the tendency of the most interesting and best in the new art to cross the boundaries of recognized media or even to fuse the boundaries of art with media that had not previously been considered art forms. With characteristic modesty, he often noted that Samuel Taylor Coleridge had first used the term.

Higgins was too modest. Coleridge used the term "intermedium" once (and apparently once only) in referring to a specific issue in the work of Edmund Spenser. Those who have read Coleridge's *Lecture Three: "On Spenser"* see a distant kinship to Higgins's construction of the term but note that Coleridge's use was different and distinct in meaning and form. Coleridge referred to a specific point lodged between two kinds of meaning in the use of an art medium. Coleridge's "intermedium" was a singular term, used almost as an adjectival noun. Higgins's "intermedia" referred to a tendency in the arts that became both a range of art forms and a way of approaching the arts. Higgins said on more than one occasion that he may have read the Coleridge essay at some point in his years as a student at Yale or Columbia, and thus subconsciously taken it in. This may be so, but Dick Higgins coined a new word in the current form and contemporary meaning of the term "intermedia." He went on to elaborate the issues and ideas involved in this term in a program of artistic research and writing that spanned three decades.

Higgins was an artist as well as a theorist. He approached experimental art in a genuinely experimental spirit. In essence, he constructed an extensive research program of ideas and issues ripe for exploration. He then posited the cases and examples that would explore them. These cases and examples formed the body of his work. One must compare Higgins's studio program to a scientific research program to comprehend his radical and experimental nature. Even though he was interested in the operation of chance, he did not rely on chance effects. Quite the contrary: one of his famous one-sentence manifestos read, "If you haven't done it twice, you haven't done it." Higgins placed great emphasis on learning and mastering the specific artistic skills needed to undertake his experiments. In some cases, he only put these skills to use once or twice, but he felt the mastery of skills essential if artworks were to fulfill the experimental goals for which he shaped them.

He was equally rigorous in documenting his results. He accepted and critically analyzed the problematic results of his experiments as well as the successes. Rather than bury his failures, as most artists do, he published or exhibited them when he felt it appropriate to a larger program of ideas. More important, he challenged the scope of an art world that insisted on artists who confined themselves to the limits of a single discipline or medium. While intellectuals and critics with no stake in the art market admired Higgins's extraordinary experimental spirit and his rigorous integrity, these virtues hardly suited him to an art world interested in the repetitious production of recognizable and salable physical artifacts. Like soap or automobiles, artworks are most marketed under brand names, and salable works are expected to embody brand values. It is an irony of the art world that many of the critics and curators who view themselves as opponents of market mechanisms and corporate branding expect art to be packaged in readily identifiable formats and brand-value packages. This is understandable given the management of artwork by a complex of forces as powerful in the art world as the military-industrial complex is in the larger world. Even so, it is sad that those who represent scholarship and critical distance accede to and reinforce this aspect of the system. Critics and curators should—more than most—have been excited by Higgins's work and the range of meanings he helped to shape. [Endnote 55 on page 227 of Higgins's last book, *Modernism Since Postmodernism*, offers one of the reasons why Fluxus artists are systematically excluded from the art market at the very moment they have become increasingly famous. One imagines that independent thinking by critics and curators who understand the intellectual foundations of experimental art might have made a difference. But then, it poses the corollary question: Do many of today's critics and curators understand the intellectual foundations of experimental art?]

Higgins was concerned with far more than his own work, however. He was engaged in the work and ideas of the colleagues he respected, an important reason for his work as a publisher and public thinker. This role, in fact, was a key reason for Higgins's great influence, and he helped to shape an international community of learning through two major forums for intellectual dialogue and artistic interaction. These were Fluxus and Something Else Press. Higgins played an important personal role in shaping the laboratory of ideas that swirled around Fluxus and Something Else Press. These became a meeting point and breeding ground for some of the best and most innovative experimental art of our era, in music and performance, in visual art and intermedia.

Thus it is that comparing Higgins with Cage and Duchamp has become common for a knowledgeable few, and so it is that Higgins holds his own in this comparison. But if he holds his own, it is because there are important differences between his career and theirs. As an artist, far fewer of Higgins's works are known than Duchamp's. His work as an artist was incomplete, and it will remain incomplete. He will never complete the program of works he planned to undertake. As a result, his final stature as an artist will never be known. There are as yet no works in Higgins's body of work that rank with Duchamp's acknowledged masterpieces. This is partly so because Higgins was not given to the memorable single gesture. This is also the case because times have changed, and times have changed in great part because of Duchamp's influence and Cage's, not to

mention the influence that Higgins himself exerted. Of course, Higgins's standing as an artist is subject to reconsideration. I still recall the time a friend of mine was offered a Duchamp for $300. Duchamp's reputation wasn't always what it is now. But then, Joseph Beuys was just an eccentric art teacher in those days, and you could still buy a copy of George Brecht's *Water Yam* for $5.

If it is not yet possible to evaluate Higgins's work as a visual artist, few dispute the power of his ideas. In intellectual rigor and depth, he was one of the few artists since Duchamp who had the capacity to plan and complete a comprehensive program of idea-based art. And unlike Duchamp, whose program is expressed in enigmatic notes and elliptical comments, Higgins was a skilled theorist who presented his ideas and concerns in an expansive, thorough body of sophisticated, articulate publications.

Unlike Cage, Higgins was not old enough to have been forgotten and rediscovered. (Cage, like Higgins, lived in genteel poverty until he was quite old.) Despite the differences that might eventually have been rectified by time and a longer life, however, those who had a deep knowledge of the two legendary figures with whom he forms a triumvirate hold Higgins in high esteem. The reason rests on qualities that make Dick Higgins unique among the artists of the twentieth century.

To understand these qualities, one must look back in history, not to the composers of the Romantic era or to the artists of the Renaissance, but to the humanists who transformed the Middle Ages into the modern world. To find Dick Higgins's proper comparison, one must look to Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Like Erasmus, Higgins's work attracted many of the best minds of his era. His thinking and his work ranged wide and deep over several fields. He exchanged letters and correspondence with a wide circle of colleagues. And, in notable similarity to Erasmus, Higgins harnessed the power of the printing press in the service of his theories. Time and context gave Higgins's works different meaning. He certainly never achieved the popular success of Erasmus, whose works alone comprised nearly one-third of all books sold by one Oxford bookseller in 1520 and whose *Encomium Moriae* was still in wide use a century later when Milton was at Cambridge. But like the great Erasmus, he viewed life and learning in the broadest perspective. Higgins read widely, aided by a near-photographic memory, and he could have said, as Erasmus did, "My home is where I have my library." Even more significantly, principles held prime place in Higgins's life, and principles informed his art, his intellectual activities, and the way he conducted his life. Simply put, he was the kind of human being whose greatness rests on the natural dignity of moral grandeur, a dignity that combined with talent to make him admirable in the deepest sense of the word.

Like Erasmus, Higgins was committed to a knowledge that bridged past and present moments, classical and modern concerns, prehistoric and postmodern phenomena. His books outline the broad range of his interests. Among them, we find the first major historical study of pattern poetry. So, too, there are essays and monographs on a sixteenth-century Italian philosopher, a seventeenth-century English theologian-poet, a pair of eighteenth-century German historian-critics, and several major modern composers and poets. And, more recently, there is a massive study on an influential twentieth-century book designer. As publisher of Something Else Press, Higgins was also responsible for a major revival of interest in the work of Gertrude Stein with the publication of a wide range of her books, including the first complete edition of her enormous masterpiece, *The Making of Americans*. There is more, and the next few years will certainly see a decent collection of his writings, eventually to be followed by a complete collection of annotated works, a major retrospective exhibition with a full and proper catalogue, and finally the intellectual and artistic biography he deserves.

As important and useful as these will be, no catalog of facts will contain Dick Higgins. The rhythm of a text, a word, a silent note, a sign can be reflectively imagined, though, and each imagining of the man will be a new horizon. As the horizon of ideas and expectations meet the man, his work and his words will take on new meaning.

It is November now. Here in the Swedish countryside, the gray weather and turning leaves are interrupted by an occasional moment of piercing sunshine. The last time I saw Dick, we went walking here, down the same road where I went walking today. It was spring then, going on summer. As on so many days before, we talked about a hundred things. It was one of those rambling conversations that crosses years of multiple connections. The topics were in some ways the same as the last time we met and talked. There was a little change, though, and the changes in each conversation charted the change people make through life and time. We strolled around the village church, an austere and beautiful structure that is now eight centuries old. Then we went to the forest, the Priest's Woods, a tract of land that belongs to the Diocese of Lund. The forest was given to Lund Cathedral over a thousand years ago, when King Knut the Holy of Denmark established the cathedral here under the guidance of Absalon, the founding bishop of Copenhagen. Dick liked walking in these history-rich woods, and he loved the flow of history.

That afternoon, we spoke of many things. As always, we fished in the river of history. But personal issues were more important. Foremost was his health. Dick had been in a bad automobile accident only a year before, together with Alison Knowles and Jessica Higgins. He was recovering, but he wasn't yet feeling great. This was the first long walk he'd taken in a long time. He was worried about finances.

But we also spoke about happy matters and interesting things: Fluxus, old times at Something Else Press, Dick's next show, my latest project, Hannah Higgins' book, Dick's new book, my new book, getting married (me), being married again (Dick), Dick's day with Bengt af Klintberg the week

before. For me, it was a day like many days since I first met Dick in 1966. We'd see each other after a separation of a few months or a few years. In between, we'd correspond or talk on the phone. The distance in time and space always seemed about the same. We'd catch up and go on.

Dick wrote me just a few days before he died. He was at work on a new book titled *The Theory of the Book*. I was looking forward to the manuscript. When we first knew each other, we sent manuscripts back and forth as typewritten or xeroxed documents. When times changed, we often sent beautifully printed desktop documents or computer diskettes. These days, it was e-mail and attached files. But through all the years, our discourse was the same.

Dick was a model for me, a model of everything one may aspire to be as an intellectual, as a man of dignity. This is not to say I agreed with Dick on everything, or needed to. That's not the role of a model. When two minds meet in difference, they learn and grow as much or more than when they meet in similarity. That's one of the things I loved best about Dick. He cherished the life of the mind. We could debate freely. And we could trade ideas, sources, and suggestions for reading and thoughts for our next debate. Dick played this role in other lives, too, because he cherished the life of the mind and the life of ideas. That is why he seems to me so well compared with Erasmus.

As an intellectual presence, Dick Higgins is still alive for me, towering and grand, an embodiment of ideas and issues, a mind engaged in the virtue and value of ideas without consideration of personal advantage. Some days I find myself thinking he is still here, and in the life of the mind, he is.

But there is another Dick Higgins, and I will not see him again, at least not in this place. That is the Dick Higgins who headed his letters and e-mail messages with a little reminder of what happened on the day in history. That is the Dick Higgins who knew the years of effort and negotiation to realize an exhibition or a book, the Dick Higgins who would send a cordial note of congratulations when someone else was stirring up a maelstrom of discontent over a trifling error that would have been correct if the aggrieved artist had answered a query two years earlier. That was the Dick Higgins whose sensitive and subtle analysis of George Maciunas's typography was grounded as much in his friendship for George as in his sense of type.

That was the Dick Higgins who was known and loved around the world. But if he had friends around the world, so too was he a public figure in many countries. Thus it was that his death occasioned obituaries and notices in many places. One appeared in the *New York Times*. A far more perceptive essay appeared in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, the newspaper of the Skåne region around the cities of Malmö and Lund, where Dick had recently been visiting professor.

"For me," wrote curator and art critic Jean Sellem, "Dick Higgins was a direct contact with modernism, a brilliant, many-sided, and productive poly-artist with a subtle and poetic imagination. He was a visionary, a humble man with high thoughts on the deepest issues in life."

So he was to many of us. He was a friend, a colleague, and an exemplar. He was an explorer of new worlds, a pilgrim.

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

—Ecclesiastes 1:4–7

Thank you, Dick, for everything.

—Ken Friedman
Sweden

The Cream of the Jest

by Dick Higgins

1) Two male readers, one with a high voice and one with a low one, plus a pre-prepared tape lasting two minutes, a tape recorder and some newspapers are needed for this piece. The tape is a collage of groans, gasps, wheezes, sighs and non-verbal expressions of agony.

2) The tape starts playing, and the deeper voiced reader reads off the names from the newspaper of those who have died, following the format: "Elizabeth is dead, Abraham is dead, José is dead, Jean-Pierre is dead..."

3) When the tape stops, the reading stops, and the higher-voiced reader says: "Dying hurts us all."

Berlin, Germany
21 October 1993

Dick Higgins

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About *Umbrella*

The scope and concerns of *Umbrella* editor/"inventor" Judith Hoffberg were global long before "dot-com" made the world just an e-mail away. Codex Land, Mail Art Land, Flux Land: you name the art movement (or figure or work or event)—it's not terra incognito to Hoffberg, who seemingly has been there and done that, and she's chronicled her explorations sensitively and insightfully. Her articles, reviews, and observations are required readings that detail the cultural geography of the past twenty-five years.

— Tom Trusky

It's not true that Judith Hoffberg began her research on artists' publications in the Garden of Eden. However, sometime after that and long before just about anyone else, she launched her personal mission to document, promote, comment on, critique, and encourage artist-generated books and periodicals. Overcoming obstacles and facing down adversity, challenges, and occasional calamities, Judith has managed to turn the beam of public attention to established and emerging book artists and in the process create an unrivaled record of their triumphs and accomplishments. It is difficult to imagine what the book arts community would be like without the efforts of this singular, dedicated individual.

—Ed Hutchins

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