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Networked

ART

Bléments mnémotechniques
pour un conte oral à faire
29 août

Craig J. Saper

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To

Lynn, Sam, and Lucy,

the keys to all my intimate networks

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Contents

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Preface

Still in the midst of a new art's dawn, we can look back at its emergence in the twentieth century's last decades. Unlike all the other arts, including film and literature, this new art, intensified by access to the Internet, is not defined by any medium's form. It is not a thing like a painting, printed poem, or film. It is a situation: networked art. One initial example will highlight the characteristics of this new terrain. Since the late 1980s, J. S. G. Boggs has drawn versions of currencies, including the U.S. dollar bill. His work has drawn the negative attention of government agencies investigating counterfeiting, including cases against him in Australia, Great Britain, and the United States. The controversy surrounding his work has focused on the similitude of his meticulous drawings to the official bills, and critics have discussed his work as a provocation to reconsider the value of art and the value of money (Weschler). For Boggs, the artworks include, and are more concerned with, the transactions involved in trying to use the bills to purchase food and merchandise. His art uses the trappings of a large bureaucratic system to create an intimate community among those involved in the transactions. Typically, the final artwork consists of a framed collection of the receipt for payment, the proper change (which Boggs later sells to the collector), and the drawing used to make the purchase. The collector uses the receipt and other clues to track down the person who knowingly accepted a Boggs bill for the

purchase. Boggs estimates that he has spent well over a million dollars in Boggs bills.

In terms of this book, Boggs's work demonstrates the general phenomena found in a group of artworks concerned with transactions that create intimate relationships using the trappings of bureaucratic systems (stamps, canceling stamps, corporate names, logos, events, instructions, and, in Boggs's case, money). These artworks invent a gift-exchange community involved in a more intimate sense of transactions that we usually consider impersonal. I have coined the term *intimate bureaucracy* to capture this type of experimental art that depends on networks of participants. These works concerned with networking as poetry or art stress the importance of understanding the electronic arts and literature of tomorrow in the context of artistic experimentation, especially during the last half of the twentieth century. At the locus of these new media, the computer and the Internet highlight a new way to appreciate the arts. The computer interface is, from the start-up, a metaphor and a translation (e.g., desktops, windows, files). Previous media produced representations of language via the printing press, vision via film and camera, and sound via tape and recorder. The computer, first and foremost, represents itself and its workings. It does not have a singular mechanical process; rather, it depends on a series of translations from one code to the next in order to work. Likewise, the Internet is a situation-making machine rather than a thing. It depends on an intertwined series of overlapping connections. Whereas the camera and printing press produce representations, and the computer translates its own codes, the Internet simply intensifies a peculiar type of situation: access to networking. Of course, one does not need electronic devices to create these situations. Without using these devices, the experimental art and poetry of the last half of the twentieth century offer a glimpse of the emerging networked culture that electronic devices will make omnipresent. Because the U.S. government has cracked down on Boggs's literal production of bills by seizing his works and all of his art-related belongings, some might look to his literal productions of bills and forget the transactions. Government authorities are apparently more concerned with the literal bills, because they have refused to return these items in spite of the fact that they have never charged Boggs with a crime. These actions have probably been strategic moves by the Secret Service to avoid a jury trial, but they do suggest that the U.S. government considers the real threat the production of the bills rather than the actual transactions.

The people who participate in transactions with Boggs accept the bills as drawings and correctly consider the artworks as more valuable than

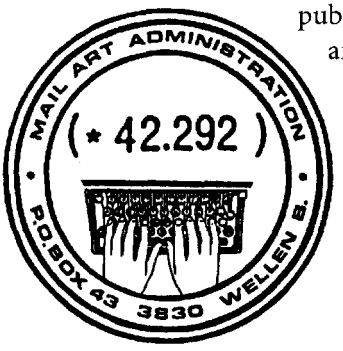
Boggs bill by J. S. G. Boggs. Copyright J. S. G. Boggs.

the face value of a Boggs bill; so the transactions are not exactly counterfeiting, but U.S. law enforcement authorities have considered the bills themselves as counterfeit currency. One can get a sense of the fascinating social connections inherent in using currency at the Where's George? Web site (http://www.wheresgeorge.com). Site participants mark one-dollar bills with the Web site's address and a request to log on. As each subsequent user of a particular bill logs on, he or she explains where the bill is located at that moment and how it got there. One can see amazing journeys and connections among all the seemingly disconnected users of a dollar bill. Two additional anecdotes highlight the importance of these transactions for an intimate bureaucratic artwork. In one instance, Boggs wanted to use one of his drawings of a bill to purchase a meal at a restaurant; the waiter agreed to accept the Boggs bill in lieu of official currency. When the waiter returned with the proper change, he had drawn a picture of the change, to Boggs's great delight. It is not simply Boggs's great skill at drawing original artworks based on government currencies that constitutes the artwork, but the invention of intimate gift exchanges and transactions among the participants. In 1992, Boggs planned a large-scale artwork, *Project: Pittsburgh* (1993), that more completely involved the social situation as a canvas. He wanted all the participants to keep the Boggs bills in circulation for at least five exchanges (and to mark the bills with their thumbprints) (Weschler 128). The government intervened by threatening all of the participants with prosecution. Boggs's goal was to use the trappings of a bureaucratic system to invent a gift-exchange community in which the members would be involved in a more intimate sense with transactions usually considered impersonal. Boggs uses the language of bureaucracy in a poetics of the receivable (which I explicate in the first chapter). In general, the works discussed in this volume exemplify this

surprising conjunction between bureaucracies and artists' efforts to involve their audiences in intimate aesthetic situations.

A slogan for the magazine *Art/Life* summarizes this type of artwork, which is dependent on collective action, by inviting the participant to "become a page in art history in your own time" (Cardella, advertising). These almost opposed values of collective action and self-promotion combine to form an alternative to more hierarchical systems of appraising artworks. To capture this apparent contradiction between *collective* and *conspiratorial* action among the networks of artists involved in these artworks, I use throughout this book the apparently oxymoronic phrase *intimate bureaucracies.* An intimate bureaucracy makes poetic use of the trappings of large bureaucratic systems and procedures (e.g., logos, stamps) to create intimate aesthetic situations, including the pleasures of sharing a special knowledge or a new language among a small network of participants.

On the one hand, the appropriation and parody of the depersonalized aspects of mass bureaucratized life appear to make the purpose of a bureaucracy absurd. On the other, these groups use bureaucratic distribution and production systems. The inside jokes that result from this parody and use of bureaucratic forms make the artists' search for more democratic forms seem insincere, or incomplete, because the artists appear to raise the bar for entrance to include only the already initiated. But within these small groups there is an effort to construct nonhierarchical systems by using neutral bureaucratic distribution systems, such as accepting all works submitted and employing production procedures in which everyone produces one page and a compiler binds or boxes the resulting collective work. These artists seek a democratic form of art in which all contributions have the same space, but the result is secret codes, idiosyncratic works, and hermetic poetry. Their publications allow for collective production and distribution opportunities without homogenizing the outcomes.



Canceling stamp by Guy Bleus.

The temporary institutional structures these artists build (i.e., the networks, publications, and collective works) soon become artworks in their own right (Castleman 204–7). For example, one editor of an assembling introduced a compilation by writing, "Neither the editor nor the publisher

feels this project will make any money, but it might well attract some press attention" (Bowles n.p.). In compiled works of this type we see this spirit everywhere. In an issue of *Libro Internacional,* the influential mail artist Guglielmo Cavellini constructs a poem in which he prints his version of the Ten Commandments on a sticker of the Italian flag. The commandments instruct one in how to *avoid* being part of the history of art and modern art and how *not* to glorify one's art or art movement. The last commandment is "Thou shalt not publish the story of thy past present and future history, nor shalt thou write it in diverse and sundry places such as thy personal clothing, other human bodies, bolts of cloth, columns, and so forth" (n.p.). When aesthetic and poetic decisions embodied in artworks lead to a heightened or changed social situation, one needs to describe these forms as *sociopoetic* rather than as artworks within particular social contexts. The social situation is part of a sociopoetic experiment.

Mainstream political democracies restrict the choices (candidates or products) available and level the types of interpretation (or voting) to the lowest common denominator, especially to a yes-or-no question, in order to reach the largest number of participants. The success of a democracy is judged according to how many people have access to free and open voting, consuming, and choosing among alternatives. The artworks examined in this book seek to create a different political situation by allowing for many more producers or candidates, with heterogeneous products, and leave the interpretation undecided or open in order to reach a small communal group of participants. In mainstream political democracies this would resemble going into the voting booth and being confronted by so many radically different choices, including your own work, that you could only wonder how to decide on just one. Intimate bureaucracies seek to use the social situation as a canvas to construct new languages, new poetries, and new arts.

Scholars struggling to expand or amend close readings that depend on formal or semantic criteria often refer to social interactions. Rather than merely referring to mass culture, the works in assemblings often respond directly to mass culture by using parodies and pastiches of the graphics of advertising, the trappings of corporate or bureaucratic culture, and the look of movies and commercial media. The works appear in mail-art networks or as the processes and procedures of these networks. Although some participants may object, their work suggests a special relationship to corporate networking as well as the supposed alternatives. Guglielmo Cavellini constructed a memorial sticker that resembles a

Stickers by Guglielmo Cavellini.

political or corporate logo sticker. This sticker adds something to the form by also including the future date of the artist's own death: 2014.

The term *sociopoetic* describes artworks that use social situations or social networks as a canvas; intimate bureaucracies are a type of sociopoetic work. The term *sociopoetic* does not define my methodology. Instead, it describes the works discussed here. Using Roland Barthes's category of the receivable, I employ a theoretical approach that involves examining how situations function poetically (or sociopoetically).[1] Although I do present contextual information (the history, the participants, the politics, and the like) as entangled in the work, my focus remains on how the artists and poets have manipulated and scored situations.

John Cage explained that he presented his lectures and writings in a

way that exemplified the message. Likewise, the artists discussed here have produced and distributed periodicals, visual poetry, and networked art in order to exemplify the message. Cage used experimental typography, layout, and poetry to explain and exemplify how music or art might take seriously everything usually discarded as noise. Cage changed the social situation of a concert, using the situation itself as a canvas. His work built on a tradition of artists' using situations and relationships among participants as a canvas. This tradition usually involved a link between *verse* and sub*version*. Like the artists examined here, Cage considered his publications as events in themselves rather than descriptions, justifications, or explanations of his performances. He participated in some of the artists' networks described in this book, and his students helped form Fluxus, which, in turn, had an enormous influence on artists using publishing and networking as canvases for their art. He frequently used visual poetry as a way to change the activity of reading, and, like the other artists discussed here, wanted to highlight the interactions involved in reading these experimental typographies, concrete poems, and untraditionally organized texts. He participated in artists' networks and their publications, seeing these systems and social situations as canvases in their own right, and he eloquently exemplified and explained some of the major issues involved in this hybrid of poetry, performance, and publication. Cage opened ears to what was previously ignored or dismissed as distracting noise outside the bounds of music. Likewise, the works examined in this book usually receive relatively little attention because they fall outside the bounds of contemporary art, poetry, performance, or media. Histories of new media mention Fluxus *intermedia* as a key predecessor to multimedia work, and the authors of these histories appreciate concrete and visual poetry's minimalist aesthetic as another important influence on new media art (see, for example, Rush 24–27). However, few authors of histories of new media have noticed visual poetry's and Fluxus's most important contribution: making networking situations into artworks.

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Part I

Intimate Bureaucracies

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1. Receivable Art and Poetry

The texts examined in this book fit into the category that Roland Barthes calls "receivable" (*RB* 118). He distinguishes the receivable from both the readerly texts of narrative realism and the modernist writerly texts that depend on a reader's responding as if he or she were writing the text (*S/Z* 3).[1] Literary critics and theorists have written extensively on these two other terms, and Barthes himself mentions the third category only in passing (and only once late in his career). He names the works sent to him by his friends or acquaintances *receivable* because he does not know quite what to make of these texts, but he gladly receives them. He explains that this type of "unreaderly text catches hold, the red-hot text, a product continuously outside of any likelihood and whose function—visibly assumed by its *scriptor*—would be to contest the mercantile constraint of what is written" (*RB* 119).

Barthes did not intend this definition to apply to the works examined here that contest the mercantile constraints associated with gallery systems and mainstream publications. Nevertheless, he goes on to describe the receivable in terms of another key attribute of many of these works. He explains that "this text, guided, armed by a notion of the unpublishable, would require the following response: I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I receive it, like a fire, a drug, an enigmatic disorganization" (*RB* 118). Although a literary critic may dismiss the receivable

work as "unreadable," Barthes's term (and his description of how he developed the term) alludes to a more intensely *intimate* relationship with the texts received. It alludes to a network of relationships linked by sending and receiving texts in the mail or as part of a network of participants. Barthes also explicitly notes that these texts have an inherently militant attitude toward mercantile constraints of publication and that the sender expresses this attitude *visibly.* As "receivable," the works examined in this book create intense, intimate situations rather than the polite pleasantness of the "readerly" magazine or the cool detachment of the "writerly" poem. By definition, these works are not for everybody, nor do they make a claim to aesthetic quality. They are produced for, and by, usually small circles of artists, writers, and friends, and the results often arrive in the mail, as mail art. Guy Bleus, in an edition of *Commonpress,* explains that "the main question of mail art-criticism is: 'Is it mail art or not?' This does not imply the act of traditional judging . . . but of recognizing" (Exploring 37). Although one might find fault with this narrow definition, it does sound like Barthes's notion of the receivable in the sense that the critic suspends traditional norms of judgment. The work distributed through compilations such as *Commonpress* and in artists' networks seeks to "catch hold" of the participants. Barthes describes the "fire" these works start in him as producing reveries and "enigmatic disorganization."

In his advertising blurb for *Assembling,* one of the compiled works examined in this book, Richard Kostelanetz describes the contributions as a "series of 'otherwise unpublishable' creative works." What is "unpublishable" does not fit into the category of traditional literature (the readerly) or even into the category of modernist and experimental literatures (the writerly). Building a rhetoric around this third category requires an alternative to formalist close readings that will account for networks, interactions, and compilations. It must account for the intimacy, particularity, and intense impact of these works. As an alternative to any rhetoric built around either the readerly or the writerly, this rhetoric must respond to works outside norms of quality (for the masterpiece) or criticism (of the broadcast popular story). In that sense, the receivable names those narrowcast texts that do *not* provoke general consensus about either enduring aesthetic value or widespread cultural impact.

In spite of the fact that the works examined here were intended for small groups of producer participants, the insights they provoke about how to interpret sociopoetic works have wider implications for literary, art, and media scholars. Political formalism illuminates how particular

formal practices change the possible ways of understanding and seeing an artwork, and in cultural studies, scholars read the materiality of texts to trace the social and political implications and historical contexts of these material details. The cultural studies method seeks to explain the determining *contexts* of particular texts, whereas semiotic studies often limit analysis to the *internal workings* of texts. Neither cultural studies, which examines how contexts determine aesthetic production, nor semiotics, which studies the structures of texts, enables us to focus on a third possibility: social situations that function as part of an artwork or poem (that is, sociopoetic works). In that sense, the works discussed here serve as a particularly powerful pre-text to expand and alter these practices of close readings. The codes of networked art and poetry highlight the sociopoetic codes in all the arts and literature, and the rhetoric of the receivable is particularly useful for interpretation of the morass of correspondences and links in new electronic media. It is not simply that audiences play a role in understanding and appreciating certain formal or semantic patterns; the audience also functions as part of the code, especially when we examine texts that are dependent on networks.

Although Barthes does not explain much about the third alternative to the readerly and writerly texts, he does write about texts that have a similar impact. He describes this impact of something catching hold of him as the *punctum.* Critics usually define the *punctum* as a peripheral detail that has a peculiarly intense impact on a spectator, who cannot get that detail out of his or her mind. In this sense, Barthes opposes the *punctum* to the *studium,* the aesthetic or social meaning usually referenced in discussions of art, photography, or media. Barthes describes the impact that these details produce in him by using the metaphor of a passenger jumping up at the arrival of his particular train (*CL;* see also Gallop; Polan; Lukacher).[2] Similar to Proust's madeleines, they evoke involuntary memories and personal reveries. Barthes uses his discussion of the *punctum* to examine the institutional practices of evaluating photography. In doing so, he does not oppose the *punctum,* the use of the off-center detail, to the *studium,* everything one learns in school, to appreciate the central social or aesthetic meaning. Rather, he describes an interaction between analytic knowledge and something like a rhetoric of the receivable based on those details that grab or provoke a specific spectator (rather than a general audience or an ideal reader).

The nuances of a rhetoric of the receivable become clearer in relation to a traditional writing primer's rhetoric. *The St. Martin's Handbook,* a rhetoric and composition primer, represents the epitome, and one of the

best versions, of a traditional writing textbook (Lunsford and Connors). It describes and applies traditional Aristotelian rhetoric, including modern and contemporary versions from Kenneth Burke, I. A. Richards, Wayne Booth, and Peter Elbow. The literate "rhetorical stance" presumes that rationality is an "essential characteristic" of all people. This rationality depends on a sender-receiver model with a tripartite distinction among writer, audience, and text (or, in Aristotle's version, *ethos, pathos,* and *logos*). The text, or *logos,* is conceived of only in terms of logic. That logic, limited to either inductive or deductive reasoning, necessarily depends on the presumed a priori existence of a "probable reader." Literate rhetoric depends on the presumption of an a priori probable reader and advocates reading strategies, which depend on a statistical norm to indicate the characteristics of a literate person. As Barthes explains, "an ideology of the 'greatest number,' of the majority-as-norm . . . of 'the probable'" is the basis of traditional rhetorical methods. Indeed, traditional rhetoric (along with a particular form of humanism) informs the political formalism mentioned above (*SC* 92–93).

With this schema of the probable reader, *The St. Martin's Handbook* explicitly and implicitly argues that every statement is either true ("what is") or arguable ("what ought to be"). Either it is agreed upon as a truth or open to reasonable argument. There is no other option. For the writer, the *Handbook* emphasizes internal cognition and heuristic rules. It wants to encourage students to "realize individual selves in discourse" (sec. I, 8). Obviously, traditional rhetoric needs a supplement to deal with the type of conceptual visual literature in assemblings that does *not* depend on the legibility of an argument or the literalness of a picture. Reading or interpreting a sociopoetic work requires a different rhetoric not based on the average reader. In suggesting an alternative to the average reader, Constance Perin connects the probable with Aristotle's mean and highlights the relationship between the "stranger" and the "average reader." She explains Aristotle's mean in terms of Greek and Roman society, and argues that the mean is not at all a standard among differences:

> [The Greeks' and Romans'] way of life constituted not a comparative "standard" for it was the only one they knew. . . . [The mean] was simply a system of meanings which were already familiar, known, or believed in relation to which *anything* "too" dissimilar, novel, and discrepant would evoke the distresses translated as "vice" and its variants in denial, negativism, and disapproval. Indeed, Aristotle's "mean" . . . signifies the experiences of fear and anxiety. (147)

The probable does not represent the midpoint among many different possibilities. It represents a way to efface differences by moralizing about under- and overarousal when confronted with strangeness or strangers. The works examined in this book intend to produce intense experiences precisely by appealing to particular participants, not any probable reader. These works depend on receiving the strange and the stranger. In the literate rhetoric, denotation, connotation, and figurative language allow the probable reader to follow the writer's meaning more closely. If one bases a writing method on the situation, variations, or potential readings (versus the probable), then one can reject any ideal that assumes literate people *probably* share a common knowledge.

In the traditional literate rhetoric, all language statements are either true descriptions or open to argument. A rhetoric that makes use of variations, substitutions, and multivalence without deciding on how these choices support a particular truth or argument builds on the fascinations or manias usually discarded by conventional reading practices. It allows for the intensity, patience, and enigmatic disorganization necessary for generating associations. It understands variations of expectation, in Barthes's terms the "unreaderly," as indicators of emergent ideas or even alternative poetic strategies. Extreme particularities and intimacies can suggest an unheard-of symbolic system. This kind of inventiveness does not merely offer a negative criticism of a dominant ideology of reading, writing, or thinking. Out of the failures of empirical reading strategies, it builds a method. The rhetoric of the receivable unites what could "not be apprehended together in the mere flat space of representation" (Barthes, *ES* 8). As Barthes explains, "An aberrant grammar would at least have the advantage of casting suspicion on the very ideology of our speech" (*ES* 8). The built-in "implicit counterfactual sphere," as Douglas Hofstadter explains, refers to things that "never were but that we cannot help seeing anyway . . . the sphere of implications surrounding any given idea" (247). This rhetoric deals with those spheres of implications somewhere between a given truth and an arguable supposition.

The St. Martin's Handbook mentions the extensive mixing of citations only in reference to plagiarism. Denotation and connotation appear only in the context of "appropriate" and "concrete" meaning (395–96), and figurative language appears only in a discussion of "tone," which, the *Handbook* suggests, should not merely ornament an argument, but help the reader to "follow the writer's meaning" (407). Although the preface to the instructor's edition argues "that writing decisions are never merely mechanical, but are always rhetorical as well" (sec. I, 5), most of the

Handbook focuses on mechanical rules of grammatical construction. These rules have no explicit connection in the *Handbook* to rhetoric or thinking through writing. One would assume that grammatical rules do have an impact on what is said and what can be said, but the *Handbook* does not address these issues directly. The implicit connection suggests the importance of the *invisible style.* Grammar succeeds when it functions as a transparent medium for truth or argument. Arguing that mechanical rules can *make* meaning would not only identify the opaque qualities of writing, but also encourage experimental transformations.

The nonlogocentric grammar in the poetry found in assemblings presents a problem situation rather than an expression of a particularly "apt" or "fitting" linguistic solution to describing a scene or situation. Citation, grafting, repetition, and collage challenge a supposedly invisible style or grammar. The rhetoric of the receivable questions "existing modes of representation," and, as Marjorie Perloff explains, in terms of language poetry, "it inevitably undermines the authority of the individual self . . . [and] calls into question . . . 'the conduit theory of communication (me-you), [which] presupposes individuals to exist as separate entities outside language and to be communicated *at* by language" (*Futurist* 75, 76; see also Reddy; Saper, Music). For example, in his introduction to an issue of the artists' periodical *VAST,* Raimondo Cortese explains that it contains visual/audio/semantic texts. The magazine is "dedicated to the fusion of these elements on the page." Cortese goes on to explain that the "first time around, the audio and semantic content (the traditionally dominant concerns for most poetic forms) have clearly taken the plunge with preference going to the (typo)graphic possibilities. What we're left with is a *vastly* altered spatiality instead of the regimented linear progression that underlies nearly all contemporary Western literature as well as this introduction."

Some of the contributions are clearly not readable using logocentric grammar. Cortese concludes his introduction to *VAST* by speculating that the next time the reader comes "across a conventional text the shape of typeface & the gaps in between may take on a new meaning for you." Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol, the influential concrete and sound poets, examine similar poetries that employ a "vastly altered spaciality." In one of their manifestos and research papers, they argue "that texture is in no way (and has never been) truly external to the normal experience of reading" (*Rational* 176). Nichol has explicitly sought to connect this *anormal* reading experience to alternative distribution systems. At first his publications, such as *Ganglia* magazine, were intended to create a

forum for otherwise little-known poets. Later, he saw these alternative distribution systems as enhancing, and becoming part of, poetic experimentation. When he began publishing *grOnk,* he recognized the usually effaced connections among design, publication, distribution, and the poetic process.[3]

In my book *Artificial Mythologies,* I demonstrate how to use Barthes's work on the *punctum* as a model for media and cultural theory. I introduce works that were intended to allow for an alternative to the readerly or the writerly texts: an alternative institutional practice. The institutional organization of academic disciplines is, of course, based on the *studium*—the term describes a type of school (Ferruolo 24–25). The alternative institutional system, connected to the appreciation of the *punctum* as a lapse in our *studium*-based understanding, functions as what I describe later in this chapter as an *intimate bureaucracy.* As Barthes writes: "I want to change systems: no longer unmask, no longer to interpret. . . . Let us imagine that the science of our *lapsi* were to discover, one day, its own *lapsus,* and that this *lapsus* should turn out to be: a new, unheard-of form of consciousness?" (*LD* 60). The works discussed in this book seek this emergent system or form of consciousness, and the texts involved in this alternative institutional structure are described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a *minor literature,* this "deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses" (17). Significantly, the "minor literature" disrupts the usual connection between individual and a social background. The minor institutional structure, based on the receivable and allowing for the impact of the *punctum,* changes the relationship between individuals and their organization of knowledge. The works examined here often use the institutional trappings associated with bureaucratic systems to create, counterintuitively, intimate aesthetic situations. The institution of intimate bureaucracies grew from an alternative art scene that sought more access to audiences.

In his study of modernist visual poetics, Jerome McGann argues that one could write the history of "modernist writing" as a history of the "modernist *book*" (77; emphasis added). In making and persuasively supporting this claim, McGann opens the door to exploring other art and poetic practices as crafted and constructed objects. He explains how two small presses in particular, Kelmscott Press and Bodley Head, influenced modernist poetic practices by emphasizing words as visual design rather than mere "legibility" (77). Their goal was to appeal to, as well as to create, a particularly modern and aesthetically inclined audience. Their interest in the printed page as an object found important practitioners not

only in the later postmodern concrete poetry but also in Louis Zukofsky's interest in considering the composition of poetry as a "musical score" and an "aspiration . . . toward the condition of music" (McGann 83). The modernist precursors point toward the poetic compositions that resemble musical scores in concrete and visual poetry as well as the scores, instructions, and games found in assemblings. Ken Friedman explains that one can perform a Fluxus event score in various styles, including as a "virtuoso" or in "bravura," by "jamming each piece into the minimal time possible," in a "slow, meditative rhythm," with "powerful torque, energized and dramatic," with an "earthly folkloric touch," or with "atmospheric radiance, spiritual and dazzling" (Getting).[4] Significantly, these poetic scores do not depend on the voice but on creating a situation. The shift from a phonocentric poetry to the graphic scores, logos, stamps, and visual poetries found in assemblings referenced the mechanized visual language of bureaucracies rather than the single voice of traditional lyric poetry. Poetry had become a performance score rather than a documentation of a past reverie.

This move toward a participatory poetry begins with an intensification of the reading experience in some modernist poetry. McGann, focusing on American modernist poets, examines the usually overlooked work of Robert Carlton "Bob" Brown's *Readies for Bob Brown's Machine* (see also Rothenberg 9–14). Brown's book includes a photograph of the machine he constructed to aid in reading selected modernist poetry. In that work Brown, also known as a visual poet, wanted to "immerse the reader in the print medium" the way movies immerse the audience in images (McGann 85). His book begins with a photograph of a machine he constructed to intensify the reading of modernist poetry. The machine is contained in a box with binocular-like lenses placed in front of a hand-cranked horizontal cylinder. The specially prepared transcripts of the poems are cranked on the cylinder, thus producing a completely different reading experience. The book of the "readies" is a prepared transcript that one could supposedly use in the reading machine. Sharing the intent to immerse the reader, postmodern poetry attempts to increase the intensity of this modernist poetic strategy. Whereas Brown's machine sought to intensify and defamiliarize the reading process, postmodern poetry, like language poetry, uses a "textual process for revealing the conventions, and the conventionalities, of our common discursive formations" (McGann 107). The suggestion that postmodern poetry emphasizes the social conventions of writing through concrete visual construction also speaks to the further expansion and intensification of the same pro-

cess in assemblings. This writing's "ironic self-representation," according to McGann, "situates poet and poem firmly in the social, institutional, and even the economic heart of things . . . an imagination of writing that knows it inhabits a world ruled by Mammon" (108). Here McGann's work resembles the sociopoetic approach adopted in this book, and his readings or his "reading machine" functions as a useful tool for understanding experimental poetry. The textual surface and ironic metacommentary found in language poetry "flaunts its core idea," in the language poet Charles Bernstein's phrase, "as candy coating" (380). McGann goes on to examine contemporary small presses such as Burning Deck, the Figures, Jargon, and Roof, arguing that these presses' publications imagine writing "as part of a social event of persons" (113).

Bernstein's "Lift Off" demonstrates the way poetic practices might function as a "social event." McGann, in order to describe it, interjects two opposing narrative voices into his book in the style of a script. It is McGann's way of reading, his reading machine, that can yield an insight about how to read and write this type of poetry. In McGann's script, a disgruntled and humorous speaker, a sort of curmudgeon, argues that Bernstein's poem is nothing more than a transcription of everything lifted off a page with a correction tape. The other character in the script, a more earnest narrator, counters the curmudgeon's literal interpretation by arguing that Bernstein's poem "foregrounds the machinery of writing" (McGann 109). The curmudgeon, disgruntled and suspicious of experimental poetry, answers that the poem literally foregrounds the machinery (of using a typewriter and a correction tape). For that reader, the poem is a clever one-line joke. For the more earnest and reflective narrator, the poem figuratively foregrounds the process of producing poetic texts in our text-saturated world.

In sociopoetic works, this inherently social process of constructing texts is expanded to the point that individual pages or poems mean less than the distribution and compilation machinery or social apparatus. The assembling reader finds threads of the social connections as if receiving something that is "illegible." Much like Bernstein's transcription of the correction tape from his typewriter, these works reveal themselves to be visually and poetically allusive and meaningful on more careful examination. Postmodernist aesthetics, in its concern with the social constructions of texts and sign systems, opened the way for working these systems as artwork and grist for spoofing "a world ruled by Mammon" or at least by Mammon's corporate bureaucracy. In addition to providing support for a sociopoetic approach, McGann's work offers a way to consider the

craft involved in assemblings. His emphasis on the conceptual weight of the craft involved in modernist and postmodernist poetics suggests another way that one might appreciate craftwork as a type of conceptual art (rather than necessarily opposed to it).

In his essay "On Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin's discussion of how Baudelaire's poetic genius interacted with market forces and publicity culture helps to focus the conceptual use of craft. Benjamin explains that, through his dealings with editorial offices, Baudelaire "stood in uninterrupted contact with the market. His strategies: defamation and counterfeiting." By working with the market as grist for his poetic sensibility, Baudelaire was "perhaps the first to conceive of an originality appropriate to the market, which was at the time just for that reason more original than any other: to invent a cliché, trivial piece of work" (Benjamin, Central 37). Just as Baudelaire invented an image of originality in, and out of, the world of infinite copies, the assemblings produce original works using the means of multiple copies. The milieu of the mass market, demanding multiple copies, changes the role of artisanal craftspeople. Rather than simply eliminating the artisan's craft, the mass market may paradoxically create a new context for individual expression. Thus the market plays two roles: it is both the force that assemblings initially try to avoid and the system that assemblings emulate in a poetic practice that changes the rules of the game and alters the original context.

Benjamin's insights also illuminate the importance of assemblings as collections rather than individual works. In his work on surrealism, Benjamin explains that "a collection is composed of objects wrenched out of their contexts of origins and reconfigured into the self-contained, self-referential context of the collection itself, and this context destroys the context of origin" (Surrealism 191–92). His description applies equally well to the impact of compiling many contributions in an assembling. It is as if the experimental and avant-garde artists were waiting for precisely this vehicle of assemblings to explore the implications of their work more completely: destroying the context of origin, challenging the notion of a singular fully conscious author, and exploiting the infinite explosion of images available in mass markets and bureaucratic cultures.

In general, the availability of industrial production techniques (photocopiers, low-end printing presses, increasingly affordable film, video, and photographic equipment, and so on) and the urge for democratization of art making have fueled an alternative art scene since the 1950s (especially in the work of groups like Fluxus and in such activities as the publishing of artists' periodicals and establishment of artists' networks). The access

to multiple media released these works from a single medium or traditional forms. The questioning of the proper form for art led to more conceptual work about social systems. Reaching relatively wider audiences, Johanna Drucker explains, the conceptual artists began to find that their work left some "baffled by the esoteric and complex conceptual terms" (80). Thus their artistic vision never quite came to terms with their ideal of liberating the body politic. The conceptual book artists needed to make and find an audience. Various institutions were founded in the attempt to create an audience, including Printed Matter, which sells mass-produced multiples of books and periodicals with more than one hundred copies; Franklin Furnace, originally the archive of record for the artist's book; the Visual Studies Workshop, founded by the important artist's book critic Joan Lyons; NEXUS Press in Atlanta; and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, which has helped publish a number of important conceptual book works. In a discussion of how the democratic spirit and economic context of the artist's book allows for, and encourages, a wider audience of readers and buyers, Robert Morgan mentions that a similar spirit is evident in "magazines, tabloids, and offset catalogs" (186).

In a 1979 issue of *Arte Postale!* Vittore Baroni states that "the only way to get a copy of 'arte-postale' is by sending a mail-art work or publication in exchange." He asks the reader to "send 100 words and get a free subscription to 5 issues of the magazine" (Introduction, n.p.). In an interview, Baroni confesses that he started his assembling because he "needed something readily available to trade with other networkers" (Interview 3). The founders of the very influential assembling *Commonpress* named the periodical so as to suggest the production of work by "common effort." Its coordinator, Pawel Petasz, even invites readers to volunteer to edit special issues. *Commonpress* always has a guest editor; the place of publication shifts with the editor. Petasz has noted that in Poland the censors would stamp each and every proof page of a publication on the back side of the proof. With these kinds of absurd controls, one can imagine why *Commonpress* began investigating these stamps of authentication in a number of issues produced in Poland. (In this regard, see the discussion about the authenticating stamps used by Polish and German mail artists, with Dick Higgins's assistance, described later in this book.)

Guy Benveniste's speculation that "the last quarter of this century will be remembered as the bureaucratic era" (37) may seem unrelated to Johanna Drucker's contention that "artists' books really are *the* quintessential 20th century artform . . . and it is only at the end of the century

that its full scope as an artistic activity is beginning to be recognized" (1). Combining a comment about the historical importance of a particular system of social organization with an argument about art seems strangely contradictory. It also seems that the two comments are mutually exclusive. Certainly this thing called the "artist's book" connotes craftsmanship and independent production, whereas "bureaucracy" usually connotes large, impersonal, corporatized social structures opposed to precisely the kind of independence represented in the production of an artist's book. One can extrapolate another interpretation by *combining* these two provocative quotations with the assembling editor Guy Bleus's hint that the hybrid cross between the artist's book and bureaucratic forms might produce "the largest art movement in the history of the world" (How). Although Bleus probably intends a simpler counter against bureaucratic forms, his work suggests another option. In one of his contributions to the assembling *Commonpress,* he includes a rubber stamping of his head with a huge post office date stamp. The title of the work, "How to Fight the Madness of Bureaucracy at the End of the Twentieth Century," suggests an unlikely overlap between art and bureaucracy. This work, like intimate bureaucracies in general, resembles parodies of bureaucratic processes and procedures. Artists' magazines, networks, and compilations represent that peculiar conjunction between these two quintessential twentieth-century forms. Intimate bureaucracies may be the quintessential artworks of the late twentieth century: they use book artists' craft as well as bureaucratic production and distribution systems.

Robert Filliou, Fluxus participant, coined the phrase "eternal network," often used to describe the mail-art networks, to describe the contemporary situation in which no one person can command all knowledge in any field. The article in which he first used the phrase appeared in 1973 in the assembling *FILE,* and in his explanation of eternal networks he suggests that each assembling covers a mobile and changing network of artists and poets for a transitory moment even as it marks that moment for use by other readers at a later date. Each of these assemblings functions as a kind of relay system. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, assemblings may look like experiments in networked productions in general and serve as a model for electronic media networks.

One issue of the samizdat-inspired *Collective Farm* illustrates how sociopoetic works allude to the works of other artists in a network (Gerlovin and Gerlovina, *CF* no. 3 and *Russian*).[5] The editors constructed the issue from a series of envelopes (eight inches by six inches) with rubber-stamp art on each envelope. In the envelopes are various documents. This issue, specifically dedicated to mail art (hence its basic con-

struction as art on envelopes), offers an example of how some of the work in these networks depends on the audience's recognition of imprints, pseudonyms, inside jokes, and connections among the participants. Unless one recognizes the allusions and inside jokes, the works seem to address some other reader; that is, the letters seem intended for some unknown receiver. Opening these envelopes is like reading someone else's mail. In one envelope, Tehching Hsieh, the performance artist famous for his *tied together for a year* performance with Linda Montana, includes two postcards documenting two of his performances. One piece, titled "punching his time clock on the hour, one year performance, April 11, 1980–April 11, 1981," resembles Bleus's date stamp on his head. On the one hand, it is an apt example and symbol of the routinization of everyday life with a bureaucratic procedure: punching the time clock. On the other, as a performance and a documenting postcard, it ironically implies a wish-you-were-here sentiment, and it seeks a knowing connection with a network of like-minded readers.[6] A contributor identified as NO-GRUPO also captures this mix of fascination and parody in its attitude toward bureaucratic forms. It includes an envelope sealed with red wax and stamped "sealed by order of the editorial board." This work alludes to a censor's activity and makes a joke about art as process rather than easy access. The reader has no access to the work inside the envelope. Instead, the playful interactions this situation sets up become a different kind of artwork using the envelope, and the censor's procedures, as the canvas.

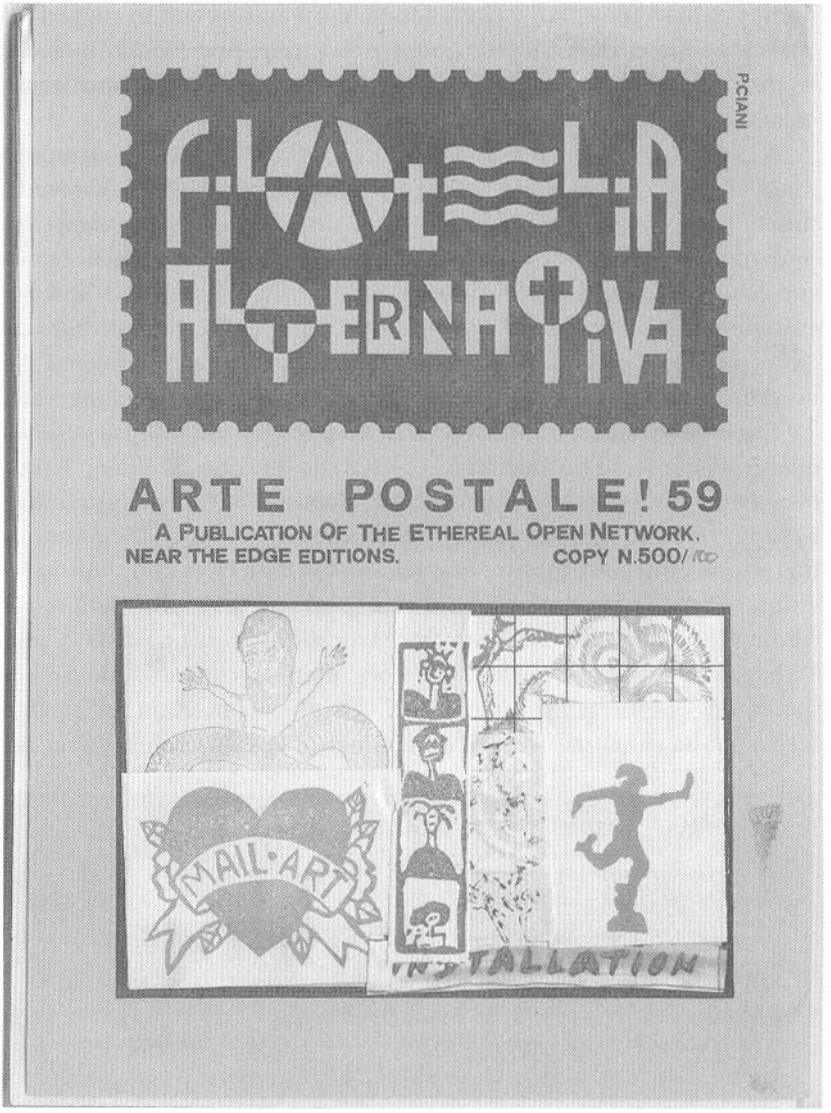
Another example appears in an issue of *Commonpress.* Guy Bleus includes his essay on mail art and a few examples of rubber-stamp imprints or "aerogrammes." On the title page of the issue, Bleus has stamped his own canceling stamp. The outer circle contains the description of the project: "Aerogramme-Mail Art-Project Tienen / CP56 Commonpress-Retrospective B.T.S." Inside the circle is an airplane ascending above a logo that resembles an ink bottle, beneath which is another logo showing an X inside a square. The text under the airplane reads, "Guy Bleus administration" and printed across the first logo is "Museum Het Toreke." The stamp captures the aura of official business.

Canceling stamp by Guy Bleus.

These strategic parodies of bureaucratic discourse do not suggest a complete rejection of bureaucratic values;

rather, these works mirror the performance of a smoothly running network, a well-oiled corporation, in order to suggest an alternative network, an alternative grassroots politics. For example, the Church of the Sub-Genius emerged out of underground comics' parodic attitude toward evangelical religion and corporate culture. That church explicitly combines religion with business into mailings, stencils of a messiah called "Bob," and organizational structures somewhere between parodies of fanatic exclamations and manifestos. Instead of using the rhetoric of being saved, one article contends that followers should "diversify" their "stock" by "investing in the god or gods of your choice" (Stang 144).

Rather than dismissing modern culture in favor of a transcendent escape from the society of spectacles, red-tape tangles, or even mass-marketed religions, the artists involved in intimate bureaucracies have reconfigured quintessential forms of our often bureaucratized lives to provide new interpretations of contemporary and future cultures. The artists' assemblings implicitly claim that the only way *out* is *through;* hence their work resembles parodies of these processes and procedures as well as parodies of mass-media images and combinations. Often, in works like *Blast, Aspen,* and *Commonpress,* the tone is not merely pastiche or parody, but one of fascination with contemporary sociocultural systems. This is the tone of an intimate bureaucracy. Using all the trappings of bureaucracies for poetic ends, these poets and artists shift the use and tone of the bureaucratic images from signaling authority to participation in ironic satire, parody, and inside jokes. The new tone also suggests a more serious endeavor: to create intense dynamic relationships among those who participate in the joke and move beyond the fascination with bureaucratic trappings as objects of ridicule into sociopoetic invention. The networks of distribution common to mail art, assemblings, fanzines, and World Wide Web magazines perform the processes, rituals, and trappings of bureaucracies, but as alternatives to mass-media distribution networks, they appropriate the trappings of the systems now common in big business. As assemblings developed and took on a more conscious awareness of the networks in which they participated, the artists' works began commenting on these systems. The problem with claiming that a large underground periodical culture of experimental forms, fanzines, and even electronic culture was parodying mass media is that such a claim does not account for an ambivalent attitude and undecided tone that includes emulation. The assemblings parodied the influence of media spectacles and bureaucratic culture and at the same time adopted and emulated the practices of the media and bureacracies explicitly as part of their programs.



Front cover of special issue of *Arte Postale!* on "alternative philately," with selected contents.

The rubber-stamp art found in most assemblings, for instance, is often not only self-referential, but alludes to the bureaucratic procedure of authenticating, taxing, canceling, or inspecting via the use of stamps (Baroni, no. 59). The postal worker's or machine's canceling stamp is the identifying mark of that bureaucracy; the authentication of a letter depends on its stamping. Thus assemblings often use similar-looking

stamps both to mock large bureaucratic mechanisms and to suggest alternative sources of authentication. For example, *Arte Postale!* includes on the cover of each issue stamps created by the contributors. Such ornamentation points also to the issue of authorship.

Because *Arte Postale!* makes replica versions of contributors' stamps to use on the cover of each edition, the conventions of authorship and ownership of images no longer hold at the same time the individual stamps receive more attention through reproduction. Examples of personal stamps and canceling stamps appear throughout the mail-art networks, and any example gives a clear idea of how this form captures the intimate bureaucratic sensibility. Even those pieces that are personally delivered are nevertheless stamped and canceled in various bureaucratic-looking ways.

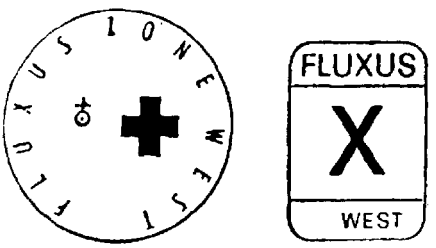
The appropriation of bureaucracy's trappings includes instructions, questionnaires, and form letters. For example, the questionnaire "Complete Form and Submit to Yourself for Evaluation" includes a form number and code and imitates exactly the bureaucratic look to ask questions that mock efforts to capture empirically specific facts about an individual (Raman). It asks for an unusual assortment of information, including "Pseudonym," "Destination," "Avocation," "Size of Shadow," and "What was your number when you stood up to be counted?" It also has spaces for "Corporate Clan, Tribe, Etc.," "Depth of conviction (in feet and inches)," and other parodies of psychological test questions. Other in-

Back cover of *Arte Postale!* issue on "alternative philately."

triguing, if odd, questions suggest something more than parody, hinting at an alternative worldview: "Are games related more closely to art or to life?" "What did you play the last time you played?"

Official tickets also become grist for the mill in, for example, Mark Axelrod's "ticket to ride," a ticket to the Nixon impeachment with "performance canceled" stamped on the ticket. This official-looking ticket appears in *A*, an assembling compiled by Jeremy Adler.[7] A literal version of the motif or preoccupation with infrastructure, the assembling *8×10* includes a work by Robert Cummings analyzing sections of Los Angeles street maps. A fascinating translation of concrete poetry into infrastructural poetry, "poemparades" by G. J. de Rook, which appears in *AH*, consists of two photos of masses of people in a parade formation spelling out words and images in Chinese. Another example of the art of infrastructure is Mary Ellen Solt's *People Mover* (1968), which involved performers holding poster-poems in a mock protest or "demonstration poem," performed two years before she published her landmark anthology on concrete poetry. Solt saw visual poetry in terms of sociopoetic activities.

The tone and attitude of these artists' networks is reminiscent of the British Mods. The Mods would wear the suits common to midlevel managers and bureaucrats; from a distance they looked as if they were on their way to work, and passersby might smile at the "nice young men." But the Mods pushed the tidy, respectable look to an extreme. They would tuck in their blazers or sweaters in an obsessive neatness that bordered on paranoia. Whereas many of the Mods were probably trapped in their parodic performances, the poets who use bureaucratic corporate signs and systems have more critical distance. Similar to the Mods, however, these artists use postal-like stamps, corporate identities, and networking procedures to imitate the trappings of bureaucratic performance to the point of revealing their absurdity. In a reversal of cultural surveillance, the artists' networks implicitly look back at the authorities whose task it is to monitor and sometimes censor them, resulting sometimes in a strong backlash from angry politicians and bureaucrats.[8]



Fluxus West canceling stamps by Ken Friedman.

Joseph Beuys produced rubber stamps and even his own monetary currency. Both have the look of officialdom. In an issue of the assembling *Eins*

Von Hundert (no. 27), a special issue titled "F Is for Fake," Beuys contributed a remarkable full-color "replica" of some unknown country's paper currency. Instead of the standard picture of a king, queen, president, or other leader, the bill features a rabbit. Instead of the signature of a secretary of the treasury, the bill bears Beuys's signature. Beuys's bill resembles Marcel Duchamp's personalized currency as well as Boggs's bills.

Many of those associated with Fluxus used Beuys's corporate-identifying rubber stamp as well as Ken Friedman's similar stamp in order to challenge the notion of individual authorship. The Fluxus kits, yearboxes, publications, flood of organizational titles, archives, and nonexistent galleries led to Beuys's founding his own political party, which went on to become the German Green Party. A list of some of the most influential and best-known corporate aliases circulating in the network include Crackerjack Kid, Mr. Peanut (Vincent Trasoff) and the peanettes, P-Orridge, Mr. Citizen, Dada Daddy, and Anna Freud Banana. Banana was the organizer of the Banana Olympics in 1975, which included a parade celebrating the banana motif; she also published *Banana Rag* (1971) as well as *VILE* (a defiant reaction against the aestheticism advocated in letters appearing in *FILE*, which was a mail-art spoof of *Life* magazine's supposed inclusiveness); *VILE* later influenced the publication of *SMILE* (the neoist work that had multiple versions because it had no single identity who played the role of the pseudonymous editor "Monty Cantsin") (Banana, Web sites). One networker has mentioned that although Anna Banana visited her for more than a week, she has never known the real name of the top Banana of mail art. Mr. Peanut once ran for mayor of Vancouver and wore his costume to the political debates. The networks and assemblings also frequently use corporate-style names, for example: ISCA, or the International Society of Copier Artists; Dadaland; Private World; Blitzinformation; Administration Center; Museums of Museums; Image Nation; Artpool; Creative Thing; Postmaster; Ant Farm; L'Ecole de l'Art Infantile; New York Correspondence School and Buddha University; New York Corres Sponge Dance School (which staged dances in swimming pools in 1970, organized by Glenn Lewis); Something Else Press; Sock of the Month Club (which mailed a discarded sock to each participant); X-art foundation; the Xexoxical Endarchy, Ltd. (founded by Miekal And and Liz Was); N. E. Thing (founded by Iain Baxter); Truthco; and Image Bank. In 1970, Michael Morris and Gary Lee Nova began Image Bank as a "commercial images" request list for mail artists and montage artists. It began using its extensive address list and by 1971 merged many lists, including Fluxus

artist Ken Friedman's huge list of fourteen hundred names, addresses, and phone numbers, which he began compiling in 1966. The list became the artist's directory for the assembling *FILE*. Friedman had moved to Vancouver in 1970, and later Flash Art's *Art Diary* and *Who's Who in American Art* and *Who's Who in America* used versions of his lists. *FILE*'s parody cover of *Life* was produced by the General Idea Group. Distributed free, the lists helped assembling editors to distribute international mail art through networks.

The importance of iconoclastic and personal code systems makes the network, rather than the internal workings of the texts, the *key* reference of these works. The codes refer to the network's structure, machinations, and influence. In some cases, the network consists of the participants and readers. In other assemblings, especially mail-art compilations, the network might refer to the entire historical lineage of mail art and to an elastic group of international potential participants. Performance in this alternative corporate context mixes the intensely personal with the impersonal corporate demeanor. In the first issue of *Collective Farm*, Victor Tupitsyn presents his manifesto for "Kolkhoz":

1. The "Kolkhoz" is the most sublime form of NONCREATIVITY.
2. Collectivization, that is, the formation of Kolkhoz, is the process of forced induction into NONCREATIVITY.

...

6. The prime form of kolkhozian construction is known as "Avant-Garbage." (n.p.)

A long footnote explains the procedure involved in this type of activity: "Avantgarbage is form of utilization of artistic junk, scrap, and trash. . . . Creativity, however, remains the prime 'moving force' behind contempt for civilization. . . . Even if the rebellion against creativity takes (another) creative form, the situation will at least have been extended to the absurd." Also, a series of photocopies labeled "Mr. No. 1's Lab for the creation of a non-creative state" show a diagram of a man diagramming a box using some device and the room itself becoming abstracted. Clearly, these artists recognize the double bind of parodies of bureaucratic systems mixed with attacks on personal creativity. The result is neither flight to some pastoral forum for free creative expression nor working for large corporate entities. The work involved in intimate bureaucracies resembles a Muybridge experiment instead of an unconscious activity. Performance instructions have a didactic structural grammar; they seem to be parodies

of scientific experiments simply because they *reduce theatricality to a set of instructions.*

Guy Benveniste suggests that bureaucracies can represent the *standardization* and *simplification* of modernization as well as the participation involved in *decentralization.* Alluding to E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* as well as William Morris's experiments, Benveniste explains that bureaucratic structures can, in fact, function to encourage self-sufficiency. It is striking that Morris, famous for influencing artists' books, appears here as an example of an alternative organizational structure. Johanna Drucker explains that Morris's Kelmscott Press "took its form and agenda from the larger context of his response to the effects of industrialization upon labor" (27). David Beetham also notes that democratic forms of organization and bureaucracy are not "intrinsically contradictory" (104). In the field of visual poetry, concrete poets introduced the advantages of modernizing poetry by simplification and standardization; this tendency, I explain more fully in later chapters, appears in Fluxus games as well as in the strategies used in other assemblings. The participatory decentralization becomes a mantra of mail-art networks, and the collective endeavors of assemblings become the vehicle to express this decentralized bureaucratic form. These forms of organization as well as aesthetic achievement represent a paradoxical mix of artisanal production, mass-distribution techniques, and a belief in the democratizing potential of electronic and mechanical reproduction techniques. Borrowing from mass-culture image banks, intimate bureaucracies play on forms of publicity common in the society of spectacles and public relations, as in the thematic montages in the artists' compilation *American Living.* These montages combine images with similar motifs drawn from popular culture and textbooks.

The *OED*'s definitions and usage history of the term *network* suggest two contexts: mass-media networks and management terminology. The citations to business all suggest that the term took on its cybernetic connotations around 1957. The copious usage history of the term does not include artists' networks, and neither mail art nor correspondence art appears anywhere in the *OED.* John Held objects to the common use of the term *networking* because it presumes "a yuppie glad-handing scheme to get ahead of the other fellow through new, fast and shallow connections made over cocktails" (17). In his discussion of the "diverse" definitions of artists' networks, Chuck Welch strongly defends his similar description of networking against a corporate use. None of these definitions resembles "the negative, exploitative and competitive business ethic that defines networking as a way for making profitable connections in a

high-tech world" (Introduction xx). Yet it is precisely the coding of the network as related to the corporate and bureaucratic world that may lead to an alternative interpretation of these works.

Joseph Beuys, the influential German conceptual, Fluxus-associated artist, used the phrase "social plastic art" to describe the process of addressing social issues using art strategies. This social art, like the works examined in this volume, paradoxically advocates both an extreme individualism and a collective internationalism, employing both artisanal and mass-production techniques. This paradoxical motivation, production, and distribution form the basis for an intimate bureaucracy, for they create intimate aesthetic situations by using all the trappings of bureaucratic procedures. Often these situations produce networks of insiders who share idiosyncratic code systems. One usually thinks of intimacy as the opposite of objectification, procedural utility, and bureaucratic manipulation. The poetic practices of assemblings inherently offer alternatives to the preconceived opposition between the artisanal village and the mechanized global society (see also Saper, Spinography).

Writing on artists' books that communicate the immediacy and intimacy of particular events, Johanna Drucker discusses works such as Tom Trusky's *Guest Book,* which reproduces a guest book containing reactions to an exhibit on "some 'zines." Drucker argues that Trusky attempts to produce "the process of intimate discovery . . . fundamental to the experience of the book as a form" (357). Presented in private spaces (through direct mail to the reader's home and hands) rather than in public galleries or mass media, the works examined here heighten the experience of intimacy for their readers. Packaged in boxes, folders, and other receptacles, these works invite the reader into an intimate discovery of the small objects and scribbled messages they contain.

A well-known work that captures the intimacy of an event is Daniel Spoerri's *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance.* The work, originally in French, with revised versions later produced in English and German, presents photographs of the remains of a meal (which Spoerri glued to his table) accompanied by anecdotes about each object. The anecdotes appear in footnote form, and the book looks like an ethnographer's notebook on Spoerri's life. In the English-language version, subtitled *re-anecdoted version,* Emmett Williams offers his *own* anecdotes for each of the photographs. He reads the images according to *his* reveries and intimate recollections while staying alone in Spoerri's apartment. All three works are linked to the artists' networks: Spoerri's and Williams's through their connections to Fluxus, and Trusky's via subject matter.

Spoerri was also a member of the Nouveaux Realistes, along with

Arman, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Martial Raysse, Raymond Hains, and François Dufren. The group, much like the Arte Povera group's interest in throwaway materials and Robert Rauschenberg's use of trash from his neighborhood in collage paintings, was interested in an art of real objects and real moments in everyday life. Beginning in the mid-1950s, these artists became interested in systems, especially postal systems. Yves Klein's *Blue Stamp,* a fake blue postage stamp, created a scandal among post office bureaucrats after it was successfully mailed and postmarked. Arman started using early-twentieth-century rubber stamps in his work, and it was with the work of the Nouveaux Realistes that artists began to play with the postal system and other forms of bureaucracy as parts of everyday life. They sought to project intimacy onto otherwise impersonal systems. They also used a graphic sculptural poetry rather than poetry closely connected to the voice, and, by moving away from the voice, they recast intimacy and opened the way for future artists to write poetry using logos, corporate names, mailing lists, and distribution systems.

Intimate bureaucracies monitor the pulse of the society of the spectacle and the corporatized bureaucracies: economics as in Big Business, culture as in Museums and Art Markets, mass media as in Studio Systems and Telecommunication Networks, and politics as in Big Government. Rather than simply mounting a campaign against big conglomerations of business, government, and culture, these artists' networks and their publications use the forms of corporate bureaucracies for intimate ends. Rather than reach the lowest common denominator, they seek to construct what those in the business world would call niche marketing to specific demographics. Ironically, the model these artists developed has now become the new mantra of businesses interested in utilizing the World Wide Web and the Internet, as these technologies allow for very specific niche marketing. It is the very system of the new business model used in Internet marketing that the artists' networks explored, emulated, and resisted.

The apparent oxymoron *intimate bureaucracies* suggests not only a strategy of artists' networks and their published periodic compilations, but the very basis for the new productive mythology surrounding the electronic World Wide Web. Electronic networks combine a bureaucracy with codes, passwords, links, and so on with niche marketing, intimate personal contacts, and the like, creating a hybrid situation or performance. It is not merely business performance masquerading as performance art. It is not only performance art mocking business, but the emergence of an alternative politics.

Artists have often imagined the combination of surrealism and Fordism—the combination, that is, of American efficient know-how, also known as big business, and European avant-garde absurdity. Of course, this combination is always conjured as a Kafkaesque nightmare, in the style of the film *Brazil,* for example. American mythologies like to keep adventurers, eccentric inventors, and outlaw heroes as rebels against large institutional powers rather than as part of a collective bureaucracy. The fascination with the outsider who takes on the bloated bureaucracy still holds the popular imagination. Politicians promise to dismantle the government, cut the budget, and radically change the rules even as they propose huge increases in funding and take no action to dismantle the mechanisms of old-boy lobbying. What is imagined far less frequently is the possibility of a mixture of performance in the business sense and performance in the art sense. Intimate bureaucracies, whose works are better understood in terms of processes, procedures, systems, and situations, stage a possibility—actualized rather than utopian—of combining two apparently opposite tendencies in Western culture. These artists' networks, and their conglomerated periodicals, stress the collective production process, the playing with (rather than the rejection of) the trappings and procedures of large institutional bureaucracies, corporate aliases, and the centralized efficiency and money-saving process of collecting the pieces of the assemblage and then sending it out. It is the Federal Express process in miniature: all the packages are shipped to one central location and then are sent out to their various destinations.

The "finished" product of the periodical as an artwork is not merely a documentation of a closed collective art experiment; it is a provocation for further experimentation. The democratic spirit exists in the infinite potential of distributing these periodicals to future audiences. For example, in the premiere issue of *Running Dog One and Done,* a letter from the editor, Michael Crane, explains, "The attempt of this publication is to present the documents of the experiments and explorations artists are undertaking today on an international level." Crane goes on to justify the publication's unbound pages by explaining that "the readers can recycle the pages within their own information systems" (n.p.). The title of this assembling also contains an ironic allusion to Mao's condemnation of capitalist entrepreneurs as "running dogs." The premiere issue is packaged in a portfolio with a silhouette reproduction of Eadweard Muybridge's *Greyhound running from 1879* on the cover. The introduction and cover art point to a desire among participants to encourage and facilitate sharing by creating a venue in which artists can *experiment* rather

than showcase finished work. These publications have an "in-process" feel, and when art is understood as an experiment rather than the making of a masterpiece, the gallery system loses its competitive edge over faster distribution systems. The works on the artists' networks seek to challenge both the gallery system and the corporatized world in which art is now marketed and distributed.

The experimental tenor of these works resembles social scientific experiments. In that sense, the artworks often seem like actual social psychological experiments. Stanley Milgram, best known for his "shocking" work on obedience, in which volunteer "teachers" followed orders to inflict supposedly fatal shocks to "students," did less invasive work to study "communicative webs" in the late 1960s. He wanted to study how people are connected, and his work closely parallels the work of artists' networks (and the publications that grew from those networks). He began with a randomly generated list of people living in Omaha, Nebraska. Each person on the list received a package containing instructions to write his or her name on a roster and send the package on to someone he or she knew, a friend or acquaintance, who might get the package closer to its final destination (someone who lived in Sharon, Massachusetts, and worked in Boston). Milgram used the mail system, and a chain-letter-like experiment, to investigate social connections.

He found that it took on average only six steps for the package to reach the final destination. The concept of "six degrees of separation" and the implications of our links to large social webs have been explored in the play and film of that name and in the party game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." The works discussed in this book explore the science of social systems and communication networks mixed with the novelty of using these systems as a canvas. Much of this book, therefore, reads like a description of social scientific tests of communication bureaucracies, tests conducted to see if these systems can be used to make the intimate connections between artists and participants conjured in fictional work. Much of the work described here, especially in the section on on-sendings, resembles Milgram's experiment and suggests how one could classify these works as social science fiction.

I have explained in this opening chapter how Roland Barthes's term *receivable* can illuminate these artworks as social situation and experimentation. In the next three chapters, I expand the rhetoric of the receivable in terms of specific examples of intimate bureaucracies. In the rhetoric of the receivable, the audience's participation and interactions are no longer secondary to the production of the artwork. Instead, audience

responses, actions, and interactions become part of these works, and a rhetoric of the receivable helps explain the implications. With so many participants, these works have much in common with outsider art. They might remind you of the fan's importance in publishing fanzines. And they sometimes allude to fans' acting out in disturbing ways the identification with the artist as celebrity. The dystopic fantasies within some of these artworks, as well as the alluring aspects, provoke intense interactions with participants.

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2. A Fan's Paranoid Logic

On-Sendings

The fanzine began as a marketing ploy of the Hollywood studios in the 1920s, serving as part of their publicity machines. In the 1930s, fans began to produce their own fanzines.[1] By the 1940s a new twist to these magazines appeared. The amateur press associations produced collections of works by fans that had an enormous impact on conceptual art, especially since the 1950s. An amateur press association, usually referred to as an "apa," consisted of "a group of people who published fanzines and sent them to an official editor who mailed a copy of each to each member in a regular bundle" (Sanders xi). Although the initial reason members formed these groups was to discuss science fiction, the apas focused increasingly on the lives and interests of fans rather than on science fiction itself. They included "mailing comments" that were reactions not to science fiction but, instead, to each other's contributions. Soon these apa fanzines left sci-fi behind and focused on small audiences of fewer than a hundred. With the number of apas increasing throughout the 1950s, participation in all such groups grew to include thousands (maybe even more than ten thousand).

The apa fanzines included written sounds, visual effects, puns (especially visual puns), irony, humor, nastiness, "fun with language," running

jokes and allusions, and obscure lingo shared by the participants only. There was a highly interactive feel to these works. One critic describes the atmosphere of an apa as a "mail order cocktail party" (Sanders xii). The especially creative apa fanzines contained poetry, drawing, and art. It was only a small step from these to the production of similar periodic publications for art world fans. Not-yet-famous artists needed a forum aside from the absurdly restricted gallery and mass-media systems. In the science fiction apas, slogans like "Fandom Is a Way of Life" and their corresponding acronyms like FIAWOL (or parodic comments on those acronyms, like FIJAGH, which stands for "Fandom Is Just a Goddamned Hobby"), bring to mind the later use of pseudonyms, corporate names, and especially slogans found in artists' networks' compilations and mail-art slogans like "Mail Art Is Tourism." Stephen Duncombe explains how contemporary zines grew from apas, especially the idea of a centralized compiler of the participants' work who distributes the magazine (49–50). These apas mix aloof distance with shared intimacy, blend that reappears in intimate bureaucracies and other conceptual artworks.

The mythic star quality of the artist Ray Johnson (often referred to as Sugar Dada), who founded the New York Correspondence School (NYCS), grew as the artists' networks increased in size.[2] In 1970, Marcia Tucker staged an exhibit on the NYCS at the Whitney Museum. It included work from 106 people, but none of Johnson's own work, because he included only work sent to him. He put himself in the position of a structuring absence, which increased many people's desire to know more about him. Although he announced the death of the New York Correspondence School, in April 1973, by sending a letter to the obituaries department of the *New York Times,* he soon invented Buddha University as a replacement (reminiscent of Nam June Paik's early mail-art series *The University of Avant-Garde Hinduism*). Playing on his tendency to drop people from his list of participants, Johnson created a rubber stamp that read, "Ray Johnson has been dropped." This sort of stamp, and the appearance of rubber stamps of Johnson's head throughout the mail-art networks, further fueled the star frenzy. The mail artist Honoria mentions a project in which she placed images of herself and other mail artists in a picture of a tub; the caption reads, "taking a bath with Ray Johnson" (n.p.). In his efforts to become invisible in the art markets, Johnson became a world-famous icon and name brand. He was so well-known as a "name" rather than as a personality that, in 1973, he was mistakenly included in a biographical dictionary of Afro-American artists. He had finally reached the status of Woody Allen's character Zelig. In

fact, Johnson had done performances at the Fluxus AG Gallery on "Nothing" instead of staging "Happenings." As one perverse twist on his highlighting of a fan's logic, he would often include prints of potato mashers in his work as well, playing on that word's other slang meaning: "a man who annoys women not acquainted with him, by attempting familiarities." Fans are the ultimate mashers.

Johnson initiated a practice called "on-sending" which involved sending an incomplete or unfinished artwork to another artist, critic, or even a stranger, who, in turn, helped to complete the work by making some additions and then sending it on to another participant in the network.[3] These gift exchanges, begun in 1955, evolved into more elaborate networks of hundreds of participants, but at first they included a relatively small circle of participants. Johnson would often involve famous artists, like Andy Warhol, as well as influential literary and art critics in these on-sendings. In a variation on this process, each participant was asked to send the work back to Johnson after adding to the image. Much of Johnson's mail art and on-sendings consisted of small, trivial objects not quite profound enough for art critics to consider them "found objects." These on-sendings were part of the stuff previously excluded from art galleries. Johnson's gift giving resembled the lettrists' earlier use of a type of potlatch (which was the name of one of their journals), Fluxus Yam Festivals, and the work of intimate bureaucracies in general. The gift exchanges soon led Johnson to explore the fan's logic in more depth.

On-sendings challenged the participants to resist participating by refusing to send the artwork on to a famous artist like Andy Warhol. The work points out just how difficult it is for an artist to avoid associating his or her scribbles consciously with a work completed by a celebrity. Many contemporary artists share this interest in playing with the trappings of the art world. A partial list of artists who seek to expose the contexts and social dynamics of the art world scene includes Martha Rosler, Sherrie Levine, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum, and Jenny Holzer. Hal Foster has examined the social and economic contexts and circumstances of aspects of the art world. He notes that, unlike the superstars of the art world, Johnson supposedly sought low visibility in the art world scenes and economies he investigated. That is why his on-sendings played such a crucial role in his absent-artist artworks rather than simply serving as a vehicle for distributing his work. Bruce Connor, the influential and well-known experimental filmmaker, also produces anonymous works that play on the code of the receivable. He sends collages only to a circle of friends, but does not sign

the works or include any indication of who produced them. If a friend calls to thank him for a collage, "he denies that he had anything to do with either producing the work or sending the work" (Wallach 36). To explain this practice without legitimating the actual works in the art marketplace as authentic, Connor has produced a "12-step program for Anonymous Artists." His guide seeks to sober up artists and collectors drunk on the value of an author's name for authenticating a work as a (potential) masterpiece. Without a name, the work is about the friends' relationships, the gift system, and the network as an art process.

The last twist in Johnson's efforts to play through this perverse fan's logic—the logic that fuels the art markets as well as the society of the spectacle—involved his calling or writing to strangers. I think I received one of Johnson's calls after I published an article on the potential use of Fluxus strategies in university education. I do not know how he got my number, but one day my answering machine had a message on it: "Ray Johnson, Ray Johnson, Ray Johnson." I did not recognize the voice, and at first I was flattered. Then, when I could not figure out who had called me, it began bothering me. Who actually called? How did he find me? Why did he call? What does he want? And, if it actually was Johnson, then what should I do with the tape recording? Is this an artwork? Should I save the tape? What does this mean? Johnson (or some surrogate) had electronically mashed me.

About two years later, in 1995, Ray Johnson committed suicide—somehow not very surprising, considering his "suicide" of the New York Correspondence School and his unpublished manuscript *A Book about Death*. Just as he had sent a letter to the obituaries department of the *New York Times* announcing the school's death, with his typical flair, he had apparently turned the sad occasion of his actual death into a morbid joke and event. The *New York Times* ran a follow-up article to his obituary that included details indicating that Johnson had planned the suicide as an artwork or numerical puzzle. Among the evidence was a postcard sent to Johnson's home address that arrived the day after his suicide; it read: "If you are reading this, then Ray Johnson is dead" (Marks 37; see also Vogel). In 1989, a triangular death stamp appeared announcing Johnson's death, and rumors spread throughout the artists' networks that he was dead. Soon participants recognized that this was another ruse Johnson had perpetrated as part of his efforts to become a "living dead legend" and to continue his investigation of the fan-star dynamic. When Johnson actually did commit suicide on January 13, 1995, many friends and fellow mail artists initially greeted the news with skepticism and cu-

riosity rather than shock and sadness. In addition to the postcard sent to his own address, other letters bearing Johnson's return address arrived at his friends' homes. In his handwriting, the letters announced, "I Am Dead."

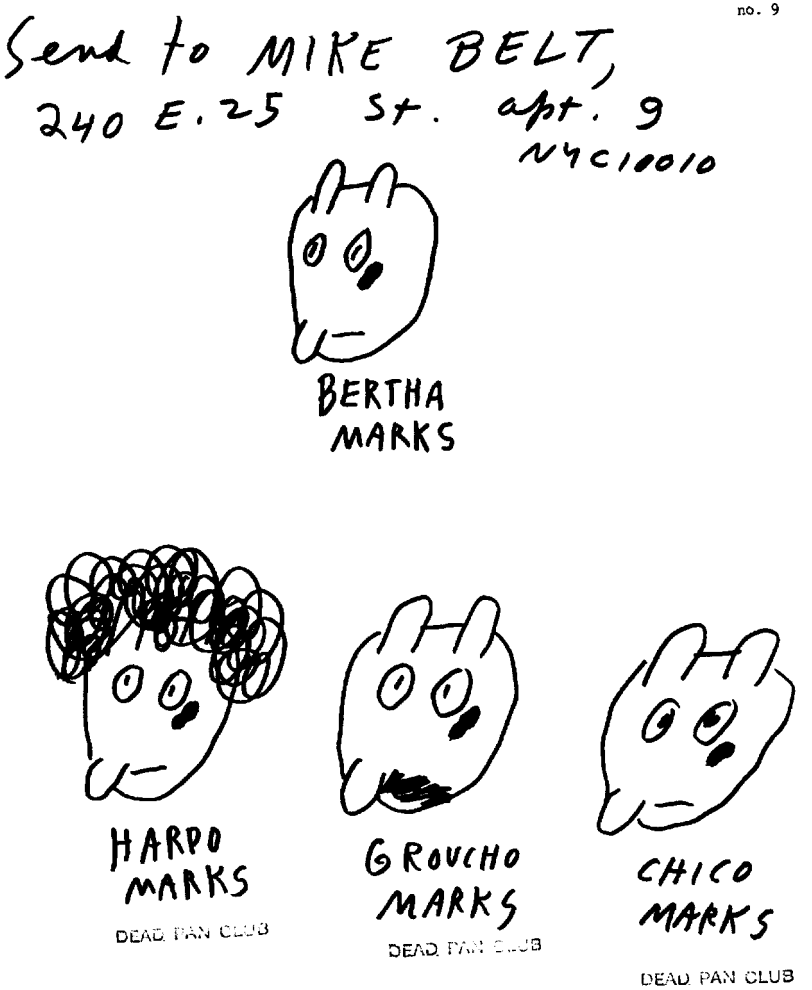
Playing into his friends' and fans' initial reaction to the announcement of his death as if it were another hoaxlike artwork, the details in the follow-up *New York Times* article seemed to confirm that Johnson had staged the event as an artwork. The *Times* reported that there was apparently a series of numerological clues involved in the case. Johnson had committed suicide on January 13. The digits in his age, sixty-seven, add up to thirteen. The night before the suicide he checked into room 247 at the Baron's Cove Inn, and those digits add up to thirteen. The last time he was seen alive was 7:15 P.M., and again, those digits add up to thirteen. Added to these clues, he had parked his car at the local 7-Eleven, a hint about chance and a throw of the dice. His previous artworks add even more support for the theory that he staged his suicide as an artwork. In 1961, he staged a "Nothing" at the Fluxus AG Gallery in reference to "Happenings," and in the 1970s he often said "I'm visiting from the land of silence." The artist had apparently finally found the invisibility and silence he sought in his efforts to avoid the gallery system's artist-as-pop-star marketing strategies (see Hoffberg). Suicide as art had already become a mythology about dada activities, and this mail artist's apparent suicide seemed to fit perfectly with Alvarez's claim that "for the pure Dadaist suicide was inevitable, almost a duty, the ultimate work of art" (228). Alvarez's view is not shared by any of the actual dadaist or neo-dadaist artists, but it summarizes the popular fantasy about that type of work.

The sad twist to this almost comical interpretation of Johnson's suicide is that it turned out to be part of a Ray Johnson–like hoax instead of his own last cavalier act. Apparently inspired by Johnson's spoofs, ruses, aliases, and other hoaxes, which he found documented among Johnson's belongings and artwork, the Sag Harbor police chief investigating the suicide, Joseph J. Ialacci, decided to "gig" the *Times* (Hurt 24). He did not make up the coincidental numbers, but the numbers had no significance to the case, and on closer examination many other numbers appear as part of the case. For example, Johnson probably parked at the 7-Eleven because it had the closest lot to the bridge he leaped from (and seven and eleven clearly don't add up to thirteen). Johnson's artwork had inspired the detective to play with the mechanisms of celebrity. Later, participants in artists' networks associated with Johnson learned that California mail

artist Johnny Tostada had mailed the fake letters as if from Ray Johnson in the true Johnsonian spirit of playful parody and as an homage to Johnson's type of artwork. Instead of simply ignoring the dynamics among fans, reporters, and legends, Johnson sought to play with these mechanisms in his work in intimate bureaucracies. There are many unanswered questions surrounding his death, but the case now seems far less exotic than at first. Still, the events have a Johnsonian cast to them.

No discussion of celebrity would be complete without some mention of John Lennon, who became infamous for comparing his fame and celebrity status to Jesus Christ's. A 1968 issue of *Aspen* includes a facsimile of Lennon's diary for that year. Because of Lennon's status as a star, one rushes to read it carefully for any new information, especially knowing that Yoko Ono has now refused to release his diaries to the public. A parodic use of "everyday life" appears in "The Lennon Diary," in which all the entries read: "Got up, went to work, came home, watched telly, went to bed." The entries are increasingly scrawled, and the diary ends with one last "memorandum" that says, "Remember to buy Diary 1969" (n.p.). In some ways, then, the repetition of the same everyday events plays a joke on the fan's narcissistic identification with a star. One cannot avoid the urge, and the joke depends on that uncomfortable recognition and deflation of the payoff. Another reading of the diary is that it parodies the boredom of everyday life in the form of a situationist send-up of the promise of change in the "society of the spectacle." Like much of the work involved in creating intimate bureaucracies, this is at first just a joke of recognition: you simply get the joke and move on. Its other meanings seep in more slowly.

Lennon's and Johnson's artworks highlight not just the art world's production of celebrities as a marketing device, but also the way this marketing depends on the fantasies of other artists, including those in alternative art groups. Breaking the narcissistic link between the participant and the celebrity may in fact be impossible; Johnson's jokes depend on the link remaining strong. Johnson became famous for his repetition of a bunny-head character. These identical hand-drawn bunny-headed representations of famous people, each with a caption, suggest that one could substitute any head as long as one includes famous or personally significant names. The characteristic look of these bunny heads also suggests that portraiture represents an artist's trademark as much if not more than the subject painted. Johnson's earlier collage works, which included prints of James Dean and Elvis Presley, found him a small place in the history of early pop art, but his later work moved off the canvas and into conceptual work involving participants' own desires.



Bunny heads. Mail art by Ray Johnson.

Because all of Johnson's portraits are identical, his name-dropping stands out, as readers inevitably associate the name under the picture with the identical image. The readers care about the big "names" even as they laugh at the absurdity of that interest considering the endless serial repetition. Johnson's fascination with celebrity also manifests itself in his mail from fan clubs such as the Shelley Duval Fan Club. Other clubs include the Marcel Duchamp Fan Club, the Jean Dubuffet Fan Club, and the Paloma Picasso Fan Club, as well as the Blue Eyes Club (and its Japanese division, Brue Eyes Club) and the Spam Radio Club. Johnson even advertised meetings in newspapers, much to the surprise of "genuine"

fans. The kind of celebrity watching and stalking that Johnson is examining here pokes fun at art world celebrity seeking and highlights the participant's fanlike fascination and identification.

When you look at one of Johnson's serial images of basically identical bunnylike faces captioned with various famous names, or you are asked to function as the middle relay for a work involving Johnson and a celebrity, you laugh only if you recognize your own investment in this game. Otherwise, you simply discard the junk mail, fail to subscribe to the on-sendings, and focus your narcissistic fascinations on other stars. You cannot simply disentangle personal desire from mass culture; there is no utopian outside for Johnson. His work challenges particular forms of celebrity and identity formation. On-sendings are not benign. They insist on a sociopoetic interpretation; the particular conclusion of that type of analysis leads to the conclusion that on-sendings set up a bureaucratic procedure of mass mailings in order to investigate and engender the intimate relationships found among artist, patron, fan, and collaborator.

In the on-sendings, the notion of authorship was not disrupted merely by implicit problems in determining the author's intention, but by the explicit disruption of the category of authorial intention. These works depended on both reproducibility and on-sending. At the least, at the moment of the on-sending, everyone participated in authoring and reading. In the periodic compilations from artists' networks, the individual works often have signatures and sometimes even include numbered prints or multimedia objects. Yet when the works appear together in a compiled package, they refer to each other and to other related assemblings and networks. It is not that authorship falls prey to a reader's solipsism. The author changes into a more fluid notion of production and consumption. The distinction between artists and spectators blurs not because of the open-endedness of interpretation, but because of the effort to build in interactive gamelike structures of discovery and play. Compilers, for example, function both as readers and as writers when they assemble multiple works, package them, and send them back to the participants involved. Receiving the assembled package in the mail makes each participant join in the pleasures involved in discovery and relay. Once participants have joined in a number of assemblings, they often allude to other works in other assemblings.

Écrits Bruts and the Fan's Logic

The networks distributing multimedia works via mail art, fanzines, and assemblings have an aspect of *productive* paranoia involved in their work.

A social scientist would look to paranoia as a psychological state to explain various aesthetic activities. By reading paranoia as a code, I seek in my sociopoetic analysis to examine how it works to produce meaning, allusions, and other artistic and literary effects rather than merely functions as a symptom of a disturbed personality. Paranoia as an aesthetic code alludes to the peculiar social relationships established by the lists, mailings, and systems of collection and distribution as well as the play on cultural fears about art and poetry. Attempting to use social and societal forces as a canvas, these productions involve what scholars usually consider psychological or sociological traits, in this case paranoia, as aesthetic codes.

Instead of studying how these works influence the psychological or sociological state of participants, we will examine how assemblings use the aesthetics of these phenomena as the codes to construct the meanings of this new genre. Allen Weiss makes a similar argument about certain experimental forms of modernism that incorporated "psychopathological symptomology into aesthetic production, broadening the range of aesthetic possibility" (81). Weiss explains, for example, that "glossolalia—which entails the enunciation of the pure signifier, the refusal of meaning, and the reduction of speech to pure voice, of language to the body—manifests that foregrounding of the signifier that now seems to be a central tenet of modernism" (81). Of course, this broadening of aesthetic categories allowed the "productions of the insane to be deemed art," and that in turn "permitted Dubuffet's researches into Art Brut and Écrits Bruts" (81). Intimate bureaucracies and on-sendings may, in fact, form the largest *art brut* and *écrits brut* systems in the world. They not only reference paranoid codes, they also use private symbol systems and neologisms common in schizophrenics' use of language, but art critics and curators include this activity in collections of outsider art.

In popular culture the negative examples of "paranoid criticism" and "underground networks" usually appear under the rubric of "terrorists" or "stalkers." After the FBI linked Timothy McVeigh and the other culprits in the 1995 attack on the Oklahoma City Federal Building to right-wing paramilitary groups, including the Michigan Militia, news reports discussed how paranoia fuels these networks. This negative moral appeal to the audience to avoid the intense influence of networks has a more neutral corollary in the great difficulty individuals have extracting themselves from Listservs, mail-art networks, and participation in assemblings. The negative examples surround us with a moral appeal to avoid paranoid criticism and networks.

One might demonstrate how psychoanalytic explanations of paranoia and its connections to those networks called "language" and "culture" function in ways similar to electronic and mail-art distribution networks. One might also look to Jacques Lacan's work on paranoia as it relates to the emasculating power of these networks. Lacan's insights might illuminate particularities of the situation, but finally psychoanalysis speaks most eloquently and specifically about how networks affect the formation of individual subjectivities rather than the post- or para-aesthetics of the intangible network. One could extrapolate from this research a way to read the Big Other in terms of something like aesthetic codes. That type of reading would most closely resemble the goals of this project, and would perhaps continue to move analysis away from organic or psychological models. Lacan's work on the dynamics of fans and, more important, his personal connection to, and encouragement of, networks of fans and followers are the key starting points for this type of analysis.

For example, in an infamous restaurant rendezvous with Roman Polanski, Lacan examined the relationship between stars and fans, as I discuss more completely in my work on "scandalography" (Saper; see also Schneiderman 124–25; Turkle; Forrester). Rumor has it that Lacan wanted to meet Polanski, and a third party arranged a meeting. Polanski arrived a bit late and sauntered into the dining room with a tall, beautiful woman. As he strutted to the table where Lacan was already seated, he attracted the attention of the other diners; he was a star. Polanski greeted Lacan and then began to sit down. Lacan started to sigh as an admiring groupie would sigh when his star appears, "Ah, ah, oh." He sighed louder and louder, until the entire dining room silently stared at the embarrassed director. Lacan would not stop. If one reads Lacan's actions in terms of prevailing decorum, he resembles a caricature of a lounge lizard. In a similar scenario, one would expect someone to throw a drink in his face after he has made some obnoxious comment to a potential pickup. There is something else going on here as well. Lacan's sighs scandalized the looks of the diners. At first they were gawking at the Hollywood star, but after Lacan's parody of a groupie's sighs, they looked at the star differently.

This is the same situation that Ray Johnson wanted to produce with his uncomfortable requests for participants to send artworks in progress on to celebrity artists. Both the fan and the star become self-consciously implicated in a parody of fandom. This allusion to fandom includes an allusion to the beginnings of assemblings in amateur press associations started by sci-fi fans and focused on the fans rather than on science fic-

tion. Assemblings might be considered as the work of apas because many of the apa fanzines include art, poetry, letters, and literary texts. Assemblings are the fanzines of the art world—focused on the "amateurs" rather than the stars. The term *assembling* is only coincidentally related to the term *assemblage.* The former connotes the assembling of a group of people, whereas the latter connotes a particular type of collage. Of course, Johnson's work can be seen as *disturbing* parody, given that stalkers and obsessive fans have increasingly played a role in terrorizing celebrities.

In his dissertation, Lacan narrates the story of a scandal involving a star and an infatuated fan:

> On 10 April 193 . . . at eight o'clock in the evening, Mme Z., one of the most admired actresses of Paris, arrived at the theater where she was to perform that evening. She was approached, on the threshold of the actors' entrance, by an unknown woman who asked her the following question: "Are you indeed Madame Z.?" The questioner was attired quite appropriately in a coat whose collar and sleeves were fur-lined; she wore gloves and a handbag; nothing in the tone of the question aroused the actress's suspicion. Accustomed to the adulation of a public intent on approaching its idols, she answered in the affirmative. Eager to be done with the matter, she attempted to leave. The unknown woman at that point, according to the actress, changed her expression, quickly removed an open knife from her bag, and with a face glowing with hatred, raised her arm against her. In order to block the blow, Mme Z. seized the blade with her bare hand and cut through two flexor tendons of her fingers. Already two assistants had gained control of the perpetrator of the attack. (Roudinesco 118–19)

This story not only stresses the relationship between stars and fans, it also illustrates Lacan's interest in writing about and through the scandalous. Here again the contemporary post-pop artist shares a similar fascination with playing through the dynamics of fandom. Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and *The King of Comedy* would also fit into this schema. Lacan's narrative exposition uses literary and cinematic devices. For example, the reader has access to the actress's subjective thoughts; we learn that "nothing in the tone of the question aroused the actress's suspicion." Lacan heightens suspense: he waits to tell us why he is telling us the story. He surprises us: we learn about the knife at the same point in the narrative as the actress does. A less surprising narrative would begin by stating that the story chronicles the attempted stabbing of an actress. Lacan includes fashion details: the attacker "was attired quite appropriately in a coat

whose collar and sleeves were fur-lined; she wore gloves and a handbag." He even supplies a close-up of a "face glowing with hatred." Rather than trying to avoid this obviously cinematic and suggestive language and narration, Lacan uses paranoid excesses strategically. Paranoia is no longer merely an object of scholarship; now it helps direct the research.

In intimate bureaucracies, artists recognize the wonderful, annoying, frightful potential of a network's framing of discourse. The types of analysis associated with literary studies seem equally limited when confronted with networks as texts. Studies of great authors make sense when the key component of a text depends on at least an arbitrary choice of an "author's name" to focus the analysis. Studies of socioeconomic or cultural contexts explain the complicated relations between texts and contexts; they might not explain the specific codes of networked media. The aesthetic dimensions of networked media appear as significant factors when the less tangible power of the networks structures the art and literature. The corresponding shift in aesthetic and cultural theories will make the unique approach developed in the humanities particularly valuable for helping us to understand that which will resist not just genre classification, but, more important, classifications according to media such as print, film, video, architecture, art, and photography. Introducing paranoia as a code shifts analysis away from both psychologistic explanations as well as formal text-based readings and cultural contextualizations. Instead, the analysis synthesizes these various approaches to examine the effects of intangible influences. Without falling too far into a paranoid reading of the future, it seems likely that these intangibles will function as the new texts for disciplinary formation in twenty-first-century universities. Although idealist and materialist approaches have together, and in opposition, formed the very basis of modern thought in the arts, humanities, and sciences, the study of implicate and intangible orders has already begun to appear in experiments like on-sendings.

In describing one common paranoid schizophrenic symptom, clinicians use the term *circumstantiality.* This refers to a person's inability to edit out an overwhelming mass of trivial or irrelevant details that stymie any urge to stick to a topic or express a central idea. Read as an aesthetic strategy, circumstantiality appears in the comedy of Gilda Radner in the character of Roseanne Roseannadanna, who begins her meandering stories with the pretext of giving a news report on cultural events. She never quite gets to the point. Beginning a report about returning Christmas gifts, for example, she discusses her surprise at finding Bo Derek right in front of her in line. She noticed that the movie star had a hair sticking out

of her nose. She adds to this that she fantasized about pulling two more hairs out of Derek's nose, making a braid, and putting a bead on it (a reference to Derek's braided hairstyle in the movie *10*). When the anchorman interrupts her absurdly irrelevant discussion, Roseanne quotes her uncle, Dan Roseannadanna, who "always said, 'If it's not one thing, it's another.'" Radner's routine parodies the traditional news essay. Circumstantiality as a joke allows for the realization that we usually edit out the morass of details when we want to "communicate" an idea, story, or what have you.

The masses of details in artists' networks publications, like linguistic fetishes substituting for the loss of any central meaning, do not necessarily cohere around a central idea or theme. Readers cannot attend to everything. Quickly they learn that looking for a central idea is not only frustrating, but not particularly productive as an interpretative method. Using the analogy of circumstantiality to guide an interpretation allows readers of these often daunting works to appreciate the function of effects in terms of a social-aesthetic disruption or change. It will not help readers to appreciate or cure an artist's pathologies. The analogy highlights the significance of what appears explicitly and intentionally as a random compilation of many unrelated artists' and poets' works in these compilations. More important, the apparent inside of the assembling, its apparent content, is always linked to the framing system of exchange—and the implications of that exchange. That is, the inside texts are part of the outside context. This productive confusion between text and context, inside and outside, self and other is what produces the fascination with paranoid codes in respect to the audience for these works.

The fascination with these mail-art networks looks strangely similar to what Victor Tausk describes as an "influencing machine." Tausk studied a group of schizophrenics who reported their fantasy of a *cinematographic* influencing machine directing their behavior. This fantasy machine would project images around the hallucinating schizophrenics. This phantasm of technology as an influencing machine is not limited to these paranoid characters. Many critics and scholars continue to characterize the mass media as an influencing machine. Rather, these paranoid delusions represent an extreme form of a common fantasy of media technologies as having strong influence over our minds. We find this metaphorization of media in most social scientific studies on media effects, as well as in recent condemnations of media violence and sexuality. The artists who form networks and construct assemblings share this kind of fantasy in their own unique way. Their fantasy of the influencing

machine is neither that of rational social scientists nor that of irrational victims of paranoid delusions.

In his exploration of the influencing machine experienced by schizophrenics, Tausk describes something that very closely resembles the cinematic apparatus. His article "On the Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia," written in 1933, has received little attention accept as a historical oddity. The traditional psychoanalytic community has ignored most of Tausk's work because of his unique and tragic relationship with Sigmund Freud. He was Freud's greatest fan and star student, and, following from that intense identification, he tended to work in areas very close to his hero's current research. Freud found Tausk both brilliant and too close for comfort. He finally strongly advised Helene Deutsch to discontinue her training analysis with Tausk. Soon after Tausk learned of Freud's rejection, he committed suicide. These unfortunate circumstances have relegated his writings to an embarrassing blemish on the history of psychoanalysis. The collection of his writings was not translated into English until 1991.[4]

Tausk describes how a group of schizophrenics conceived of a machine that "consists of boxes, cranks, levers, wheels, buttons, wires, batteries, and the like" (186). This detailed technological description illustrates how schizophrenics use science and technology to explain a sense of persecution that, at first, appears beyond scientific explanation. In describing how the mechanism works, patients describe how the machine produces pictures similar to those made by "magic lanterns" or images from a "cinematograph." These pictures are not hallucinations, but rather two-dimensional single-pane images projected onto walls. The image of these influential projections is the image of a multimedia network. Like the paranoid's fantasy, the network promises an ephemeral connection to a huge and elastic world of semianonymous and potentially influential artists and poets. Once you become a member of the network, you feel compelled to respond, contribute, plagiarize, modulate, and project your fantasies and fetishes for the enjoyment of the semianonymous poets, artists, compilers, and fellow travelers.

The strange events surrounding Johnson's death encouraged many to interpret his suicide as an uncanny addition to his work on celebrity and visibility. The lack of visibility of mail art, on-sendings, and assemblings in the mass media is "sometimes indicative of [their] tactics rather than [their] absence" (Plant 176). To include suicide as part of Johnson's lifework is not in bad taste. It is simply part of his taste and the taste of those involved in artists' networks. It does not lessen the tragedy. It does not ex-

cuse or justify the act. It does not assuage the sadness. It simply punctuates a life lived around the odd dynamics of celebrity culture, the constraints of a mercantile art world scene, and a sociopoetics that sought to play with the fan's logic. That logic desires to see and watch everything about a star even when there is nothing to watch. Johnson's work was a disappearing act, and his act taught the participants in networks and assemblings the poetic tactics of reversing, avoiding, and detouring surveillance.

Inter(media) Activities

In the work of Nam June Paik, the Fluxus artist and founder of video art, the direct links between mail art and electronic art represent a widely known example of the importance of networks and networking in contemporary art beyond any particular medium. And the preoccupations and peculiar aesthetic codes of these underground art networks, with their emphasis on an explosion of information, appear as key components in the definition of an electronic cultural milieu of World Wide Web and Internet mail systems.

It is commonplace to explain that Fluxus was not concerned with formal issues of an art medium. For example, the term *intermedia* (Dick Higgins's term for much Fluxus activity) plays off of, but is not synonymous with, *multimedia* precisely because the stress is on works that resist formal categorization as belonging to any (or even many) media. Fluxus members specifically rallied against the notion that art should follow certain (modernist) rules of form (Higgins, Intermedia 12–17; see also Foster and Brader). On his poster titled *Some Poetry Intermedia,* Higgins offers a number of definitions of intermedia: "Intermedia differ from mixed media in that they represent a fusion conceptually of the elements: for instance, opera is a mixed medium since the spectator can readily perceive the separation of the musical from the visual aspects of the work, and these two from the literary aspect." Higgins also explains that it is "pointless to try and describe the work according to its resolvable older media." He coins the term *intermedia* in order to "describe art works being produced which lie conceptually between two or more established media or traditional art disciplines." My definition of intermedia differs from Higgins's slight stress on *formal* innovation: "The intermedia appear whenever a movement involves innovative formal thinking of any kind, and may or may not characterize it." The last part of this sentence seems to suggest the role I give to formal innovation in intermedia: formal innovation is irrelevant to an object's or event's status as intermedia. One Fluxus work by Ken Friedman suggests these intermedia qualities:

"The distance from this page to your eye is my sculpture." Sometimes this sculpture concludes with "in 1971."[5] Not only does the work poke fun at the normal criteria for sculpture, it suggests a particularly important interaction with the spectator. It goes beyond a mere criticism of art to suggest a social network built on playing through or *interacting* among people, activities, and objects. Fluxus scholarship functions not only as a way to organize information, but as a way to organize social networks (e.g., people learning) based on interaction rather than on a sender-receiver communication model (e.g., teachers sending information to students). In an issue of *Edition Et,* Fluxus participant Eric Anderson's contribution consists of three cards, each with instructions on one side on how to mail the card and these instructions on the other side: "don't do anything to this very nice card." Typical of Fluxus work, these instructions put the participant in a humorous double bind and point to the social interaction involved in the work.

In a letter to Tomas Schmit, George Maciunas argued that Fluxus's objective was social, not aesthetic, and that it "could have temporarily the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art" (in Pincus-Witten, Introduction 37). This social project specifically concerns the dissemination of knowledge—the social situation of pedagogy. Simone Forti suggests that in the context of this social (antiaesthetic) project, Fluxus work does not have any intrinsic value; the value of the work resides in the ideas it implies to the reader, spectator, participant, and so on. He goes on to explain that "when the work has passed out of their [the producers'] possession, it is the responsibility of the new owner to restore it or possibly even to remake it. The idea of the work is part of the work here, and the idea has been transferred along with the ownership of the object that embodies it" (45; see also Higgins, Five; Lippard; Henri). Forti explains that the audience performs the piece in the process of transferring the ideas; the work is "interactive" (58). The term *interactive* suggests a shift away from the notion of passing some unadulterated information from an author's or teacher's mind directly into the spectator's eyes and ears. Instead, the participants interact with the ideas, playing through possibilities rather than deciding once and for all on the meaning. A description of Fluxus "art games" by Dick Higgins can function as a coda for the particular type of playfulness employed in the Fluxus pedagogical situation. Higgins writes that in the art games, one "gives the rules without the exact details," and instead offers a "range of possibilities" (Intermedia 20–21). He goes on to list a series of crucial elements in these art games, including social implications, a community of participants

more conscious of other participants than in drama (what we might call "team spirit"), and the element of fascination about when rules will take effect. Again, the authors leave the details of the actual event open, and others have noted that Happenings resemble scientific laboratory experiments rather than finished artworks (Schechner).

In discussions about electronic texts, the term *interaction* has a special prominence. One of the defining features of hypermedia concerns building in the demands for response by the reader or participant. When a reader "clicks" on a highlighted or underlined term in a text, the program replaces the text with another page of text. A reader's refusing to interact with these linked terms will limit a reading to one single page. The links allow the reader to navigate among pages from either one set of producers or throughout the World Wide Web. This ability to make links easily often encourages designers to structure Web sites into lists of lists. In that sense they replicate the earliest written texts of accountants' lists. A number of commentators, including Walter Ong, have noted how written texts allow for the categorization essential to rational systems of logic. Electronic technology allows for a more intense and extreme version of something like Peter Ramus's rational logic based on relational branching lists. The mail-art networks foreshadowed these media technologies' peculiarities.

Electronic technologies not only present these endless lists and lists of lists, they demand that the participant or reader "click" on terms to create new lists. This call for interaction changes the impact of these lists in important ways. No longer do lists necessarily present a rational branching structure; the lists spread out in idiosyncratic routes according to any particular reading. The interactivity of these electronic texts also functions as the key factor in making electronic technology something other than an intensification of hierarchical branchings of organized information. Instead of imitating a singular rational thought, the links mimic the free association found in both brainstorming and psychoanalytic efforts to tap displaced and condensed sources of information.

This type of eccentric reading practice has already found advocates in literary and cultural theories. George Landow and others have persuasively illustrated how literary theory offers a useful model for these hypertextual linkages (see, for example, Landow; Landow and Delany). Although multimedia and literary artworks employ these codes, Web pages and e-mail often highlight, literally and figuratively, calls for response. Although it seems obvious that audiences play this crucial role, most literary and media analysis before the second half of the twentieth century

examined only the construction of the texts or the historical context of the production process. The importance of an audience's response has always had a central role in media theories, at least since the beginnings of media effects research during World War II. In those studies, researchers showed new inductees in the U.S. Army propaganda films such as the *Why We Fight* series directed by Frank Capra. The social psychologists wanted to determine what effects these films would have on the new soldiers. The films sought to convince U.S. soldiers that the war was indeed a "good cause" in spite of enormous opposition to the United States entering the war and significant pro-German sentiment. The researchers concluded that the soldiers did not understand the films and were left bemused. The films contained too much historical contextualization for the audiences to understand, and the researchers argued that the messages needed to be simplified. Before these studies, the role a spectator played in the creation of meaning was considered secondary to the actual message. After these studies, the role and experience of spectators became a major concern of social scientists and many humanities disciplines as well. The audience had a role to play in the creation of meaning, emotional impact, and even basic perception.

Landow has argued persuasively for the importance of poststructuralist theories not merely as analytic tools, but, more important, as models of electronic hyperconstructions. Aside from his own scholarship, in two anthologies he has collected essays by scholars leading the effort to connect the seemingly disparate areas of literary theories and electronic media's possibilities of presentation.

Critics now routinely examine the contexts of reception, the possible aberrant readings, and the emotional impacts of particular texts. A growing number of media critics now describe the watching of television, for example, as something interactive, rather than assuming the passivity often associated with popular images of the impact of mass entertainment. Similarly, scholars regularly read printed texts to highlight the importance of the interpretative interactions involved in reading even the most realistic novels. For example, Roland Barthes's study of Balzac's *Sarrasine* copiously demonstrates how realism depends on the reader's weaving the cultural and narrative codes together to both understand and follow the story and appreciate the diegetic space as natural. Through Barthes's students' own influential work, especially Christian Metz's, this analysis led to the study of how media manipulate viewers by subtly calling them to respond to images and codes. Researchers examined how spectators participate in their subjugation to mass media's ideological

messages. Loosening the image's power, therefore, depends on making audience members more aware of their role in partially creating media messages. In highlighting the ways the media hide the production process and allow for a limited number of responses, the critics hoped to make audiences more likely to look for contradictions in mass-media messages. They also wanted to encourage audiences to become more open to experimental films that demanded more explicit interactions during the interpretative process.

Much of literary and media theory now seeks to highlight the importance of a reader's or spectator's interactions. Because of that emphasis, one might forget that these theories of reading, or more generally of ideological interpolation, depend on a counterintuitive claim against the commonsense appreciation of reading and spectating. That is, when one considers literature or film, for example, one usually speaks of "following a story" rather than making a unique set of potentially infinite links among a potentially infinite set of linked texts. Critics and theorists make these links and associations precisely because these interactions defamiliarize habituated reading practices. The best critics will attempt to find unusual or significant connections beyond the manifest reading. Manifest readings of obvious plots and themes have little place in advanced scholarship seeking not only to open individual texts to other contexts but to expand the definitions of reading. The calls for interaction exist potentially in every text, even in those hiding these possibilities behind an invisible style of natural realism. The interaction exists implicitly in these texts; in networked media the call for response exists explicitly and as a matter of course.

Theorists and critics looked for, and encouraged, more interactive forms of representation that made readers into writers. The networked media, both in the conceptual arts' fascination with participation and in the World Wide Web's stress on interactive forms, attempt to answer these calls for alternative media. The spectator's or reader's role in literature and twentieth-century media such as film and television remains implicit rather than highlighted and coded in the direct address of networked media's hyperconnections. It also suggests that the formal constraints of any individual medium play a less significant role in encouraging interaction than do the connections among producers, texts, and participants. The code of a call for response depends less on whether that call takes the form of print, photography, film, video, or, more likely, a combination than on something far less tangible and far more difficult to describe in any media's formal terms. Networked media did not just

appear in the last ten years of the twentieth century. They have existed at least since the invention of postal systems. The receiving and sending of letters appears almost too obvious to read as a text, especially because of its worldwide reach and regular occurrence. Yet mail art uses precisely this call for response and interaction as an aesthetic code. These works' strategies highlight aspects of interaction. Studying the many peculiar uses of interactivity will lead to a better understanding of the subtleties of networked media.

Surveillance becomes a crucial scholarly concern when electronic technologies gain increasing influence over everyday life. Scholars have also begun examining the formal constraints of hypertextual construction and the implications of particular choices made by designers and programmers. In a similar fashion, Marjorie Perloff has illustrated the links between contemporary poetry and the new electronic situations confronting contemporary culture *(Radical).* Although intimate bureaucracies suggest many of the same kinds of connections found between experimental theories and hypermedia, the differences concern the way the alternative art scene has focused on the methods and implications of *distribution systems.* Experimental theories and poetries have focused more on strategies of creating links (or disjunctions), juxtapositions, and potential experiments in (de)constructing texts. The works examined in this volume teach those interested in hypermedia about types of interactivities, distribution systems, and other paraformal relationships.

3. Strikes, Surveillance, and Dirty Tricks

Art Strikes and Art Tourism

Art strikes offer an example of the social emphasis of artists' networks. In 1974, Gustav Metzger, who had previously worked with Fluxus, called for an art strike from 1977 through 1980, during which time artists would refrain from making art. Although that strike had limited impact, Polish artists had staged a successful strike in 1981 during the Solidarity movement, and in 1985 Stewart Home of the neoist formation (i.e., the mail-art movement set against the individual identity of an artist) called for a strike to last from 1990 through 1993, which he predicted would fail (Home 4; see also Phillpot).[1] The importance of Home's strikes, and other similar strikes, has less to do with their inevitable failure than with the fact that artists had come to think of the systems of distributing art as part of the art-making process. The call for a strike foregrounded the artist's ability to control not just the production of art, but its distribution.

At the same time, true to the spirit of the movement, Home himself had hoped his strike would fail and thus become a caricature of the pompous calls for social change through avant-garde artwork. Concerned on the one hand about "the effect such a strike will have upon my own—and any other's artist's—identity," Home explained that, on the other hand, "such a 'refusal of creativity' [as a strike] ties in with my interest in

plagiarism and multiple names, since all three concepts stand in opposition to contemporary Western notions of identity" (136). He wanted to use the strike as "a means of encouraging critical debate around the concept of art" (137). He wanted to challenge artists to reconsider their creativity and individuality in terms of impersonal bureaucratic formations. He wanted artists to recast their protest of working conditions, not as an abandonment of making art, but as a strike: a collective, bureaucratic action.

News of Home's art strike was disseminated through artists' periodicals, mixing the artisanal production with the posture of a bureaucratic union going out on strike. The news spread and other artists formed strike committees. Stephen Perkins, Scott MacLeod, and Aaron Noble formed the first Art Strike Action Committee (ASAC) in San Francisco, and the Crackerjack Kid (Chuck Welch) produced an "art strike mantra." Other influential mail artists like Guy Bleus participated as well by claiming not to produce any art during the strike. Lloyd Dunn of the "Tape-Beatles," who had suspended publication of *PhotoStatic* (as well as *Retrofuturism,* which appeared within *PhotoStatic*), began producing the assembling *YAWN: Sporadic Critique of Culture* during the art strike.

The art strike was connected to the neoist movement, which sought to challenge the notions that art must be connected to a single artist and that the value of art depends on connecting works to specific artists' names. The neoists invented a name, Monty Cantsin, that any artist could use as a pseudonym. When that name became too closely identified with a few individuals, another name, Karen Elliot, appeared (sometimes as Karen Eliot). David Zack, who in 1973 was one of the first to use the term *mail art* in the popular art press, invented the Cantsin name in 1977 to democratize the star system. Cantsin was an "open pop star." Maris Kundzin, a Latvian punk rock musician, began performing as Cantsin. Stewart Home also used the name, and in 1985 launched the Elliot name. Not only did neoists promote these anonymous names, they insisted that anyone could issue the assembling *SMILE,* initiated by Cantsin in 1984. *SMILE* wanted to continue the debate about artistic merit begun in three other assemblings, *FILE, VILE,* and *BILE,* to challenge authorship itself. The quality of the issue could no longer depend on an artist's *individual* reputation because the artists and editors involved remained anonymous. Many in the network were still able to identify significant players, but no one will ever know how many unidentified editors and contributors were able to participate anonymously. Supposedly, more than fifty different versions of *SMILE* appeared, and other as-

semblings such as Vittore Baroni's *Arte Postale!* (started, in part, as a mixed reaction to the "glossy" look and relatively high production values of *VILE*) included special issues on neoism. Although Baroni always liked *VILE* because it was "the first mail art–related magazine he saw," and his first correspondents included Achille Cavellini, Anna Banana, and Bill Gaglione, who all printed books and magazines with high production values, it was the photocopied zines, such as *Cabaret Voltaire* from the United States and *Karimbada* from South America, that "were much more influential" on his own work, "as a model of cheaply produced homemade magazines." Although *VILE* may have influenced his decision to start a publication, the influence of the magazines in which most of the pages were submitted by the contributors in a "real collective effort" was more profound (Baroni, e-mail). *Cabaret Voltaire* showed Baroni that one "could make a strong original magazine with just a black and white photocopier" (Interview 3). Baroni called his publication simply *Arte Postale!* (Mail Art!) "because that is what it was, art received in the mail, assembled and circulated only in the mail." He included the exclamation mark in his title "because for me the idea of mail art was so exciting if compared to the Museum-Gallery contemporary art I had seen before" (Baroni, e-mail). During the art strike, *YAWN* answered *SMILE,* and later *Slime* and *Limes* continued the lineage with their anagrams of *smile.* Neoism was the largest effort to challenge completely the framing of artworks with a lineage of authenticity and, therefore, market value. Everything was *inherently a fake.*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gunther Ruch again stressed the social issues involved in assemblings by proposing a Decentralized Mail Art Congress. The event would occur from June through September of 1986. It was publicized through various assemblings and direct mailings to artists involved in artists' networks. The congress included any documented event that involved two or more mail artists. Participants sent their documentation and photographs of each event to the congress's headquarters in Geneva, where Ruch and Hans-Rudi Fricker would publish the results in their periodical *Clinch.* Between twenty-five and one hundred artists participated in eighty meetings and thirty major events. Similar "congresses," such as the Decentralized World-Wide Networker Congress held in 1992, followed.

Calling for participation by other mail artists in the 1986 congress, Fricker had rubber-stamped on all his publicity and in issues of *Clinch* the slogan "After Dadaism, Fluxism-Mailism Comes Tourism." His collaborator, Ruch, angered by this slogan's irreverence toward mail art's

countercultural attitude, issued a less playful slogan of his own: "Tourism in Mail Art Remains Tourism and Not Mail Art." Tourism, for Ruch, remained a symptom of a culture industry no matter what spin one put on it, and he finally expelled Fricker from participation in the publication of the congress's results. If mail art became an excuse for tourism, then, Ruch worried, it would become something like children visiting pen pals or correspondents having crash pads in every port. A defiant Fricker published *Tourism Review.* Most of the other participants saw the value in using tourism as a caricature of avant-garde art, and Vittore Baroni suggested a mail-art hotel or a post inn. Some, however, like Guy Bleus, hated traveling and saw tourism as inherently hierarchical because it costs more to travel than to mail. Mark Corroto and Melinda Otto from the former Soviet Union took mail art as tourism seriously enough to travel extensively through Europe. The chronicle of their journey, published as an article titled "Mail Art Tourism," highlights the eccentricities of the mail artists they visited. They mention that "Fricker doesn't take his chosen Tourism path lightly. Mail art 'Tourists' are treated as special 'guests,' served from Mail Art Menus, and lodged in suites named after mail artists who have previously visited" (152). In fact, in an article in *Clinch,* Fricker sought to redefine tourism as the "expression of all the artistic activities and situations which develop when one artist is on the way to another and on the spot where they meet each other. Tourism is the execution of the mail-art concept" (n.p.). Andrej Tisma formed his "Noism" in reaction against Fricker's advocacy of tourism; that is, he said no to tourism and mainstream culture. The significance of the conflict over the tourism rubber stamps was not simply that Ruch could not take a joke. He did not *get* the joke of mail-art networks. The use of tourism as a "vehicle" for mail art and assemblings became a major preoccupation of Fluxus, as I explain in depth in chapter 6. As a widespread, institutionalized version of traveling, tourism is grist for the mail artist's mill, offering an occasion to play on the bureaucratic form of "congresses" and "packaged tours." Re-formed by the mail artists, these bureaucracies celebrate individuality, eccentricity, and the intimate sharing of personal artworks.

Why is the equation of mail art with tourism so controversial? In popular culture, the tourist is often a degraded figure who seeks packaged and sanitized experiences. In Kristin Ross's elegant description, the tourist seeks "virgin territory, uncharted worlds, [but] suddenly notices he has brought his whole world along with him in a tour bus" (95). The tour bus becomes an icon of the mercantile forces behind tourism's drive to homogenize all geographic and cultural differences. This mercantile

homogenization is something that artists, who want to resist prepackaged mercantile systems of exchange, would resist. In this sense, tourism continues Orientalist and romantic discourses about otherness. Tacky tourist sites "overexpress" the underlying structure of earlier Orientalist journies. These "touristic places overexpress their underlying structure and thereby upset certain of their sensitive visitors: restaurants are decorated like ranch kitchens; bellboys assume and use false, foreign first names; hotel rooms are made to appear like peasant cottages; primitive religious ceremonies are staged as public pageants" (MacCannell 103). As Marianna Torgovnick explains, for the primitive "charm" to work, the foreign society must represent a "common past—our past" and at the same time it must remain "eternally present" in a place we can visit. For the origin to remain a common past, the tourist must deny these peoples "pasts" of their own. More important, the foreign society can have no authentic development of its own. It must remain a place for us to "go home" to, "eternally present and accessible" (187).

So on one side of the argument are mail artists who see tourism as a sign of the very forces they seek to resist and avoid. Modern-day tourism is more complicated than that rejection might indicate. In my study of views of tourism, in *Artificial Mythologies,* I explain that popular culture and scholars have both painted the tourist as a dupe of deception and crass manipulation (73–74). In a contemporary version of this mythic deception, one researcher describes how "a Turkish respondent of mine, whose job it is to divert tourists off the main thoroughfares of Istanbul to a back street leather coat factory, described the language he uses in his work as 'Tarzan English, you know, the kind one reads in comic books'" (MacCannell 200). In Puerto Rico, a popular joke tells of a man who in his dreams dies and goes to hell; he finds hell contains dancing girls, gambling, and booze, and he has a wonderful time. Upon awakening, he makes a covenant to live his life in sin and try for hell instead of heaven. When he dies, he goes to hell; Satan gives him a pitchfork and tells him to start shoveling the hot coals. In protesting, he recounts his dream and asks, "Where are the dancing girls, the booze, the gambling, and all the rest?" Satan replies, "Oh that! That's for the tourists."

To its unintended credit, tourism's vulgarized and kitsch versions of seeking authentic difference in a simulation inadvertently disrupt the notion of authenticity and parody romantic visions of the lone traveler discovering the primitive natives. With this version in mind, some artists also see modern-day tourism, and other bureaucratized entertainment institutions, as either ripe for parody or always already a parody of earlier

romantic and Orientalist quests. Roland Barthes's *Empire of Signs,* which I explicate in terms of tourism in *Artificial Mythologies,* represents this parodic appropriation of tourism. I explain that Barthes writes something like a tourist's parody of Orientalism to call into question the search for underlying structures or meanings (70–76). The off-the-beaten-track tourists and the artists opposed to using the term *tourism* to describe their work share a faith in positivism, and that faith creates their prejudice against those pseudotourists or appropriating mail artists who would seek anything less than the absolutely authentic. Fricker's use of tourism and the publications *SMILE, VILE, YAWN,* and the like embrace an artificiality similar to that found in punk zines and punk sensibilities of the late 1970s.

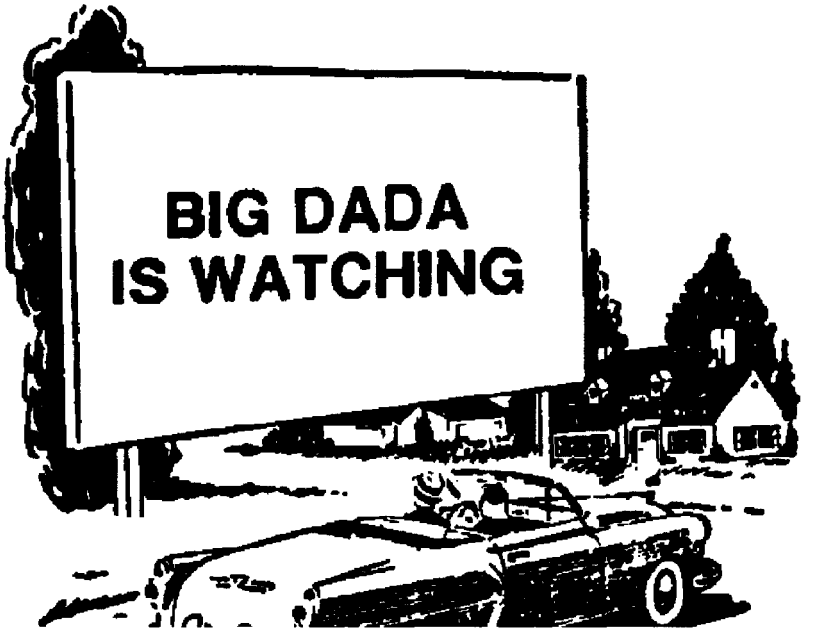
In the late 1970s, punk zines appeared in England as a fanzine variant of assemblings and served to popularize the democratic aspirations of mail art and assemblings. Dick Hebdige notes that "the existence of an alternative punk press demonstrated that it was not only clothes or music that could be immediately and cheaply produced from the limited resources at hand." These cheaply produced periodicals allowed for a "critical space within the subculture itself to counteract the hostile or at least ideologically inflected coverage which punk was receiving in the media" (111). Their attitude toward readers grew from concerns shared by the situationists and the lettrists. Greil Marcus charted the connections between the English punk productions and French situationists' activities. They were published without editorial interference. "Typing errors and grammatical mistakes, misspellings and jumbled paginations were left uncorrected in the final proof. Those corrections and crossings out that were made before publication were left to be deciphered by the reader" (Hebdige 111). A slipshod aesthetic, it produced a sense of urgency and immediacy. Punk zines wanted to make readers into music makers, zine publishers, and protesters rather than passive consumers.

Punk's impact had as much to do with a diagram printed in the fanzine *Sniffin Glue* as it did with any particular concert. *Sniffin Glue,* irreverent in title and attitude, achieved the highest circulation of the punk periodicals. The diagram showed "three finger positions on the neck of a guitar over the caption: 'Here's one chord, here's two more, now form your own band'" (Hebdige 112). The most influential punk group, the Sex Pistols, played few concerts. The band members hated each other and much of their own music, yet their punk pose (i.e., their flaunting of raw, simple music) challenged others to start bands. Like the underground art scene's assemblings, the punk zines captured the "do it yourself" attitude

and allowed for a positive spin on a cultural movement that mainstream media described only as a scourge, a threat, or an oddity. Considering punk music's reemergence as grunge rock in the 1980s and in the 1990s neopunk, it is not surprising that the number of zines has also rapidly increased since the late 1980s. This antiaesthetic, like the equation of mail art with tourism, was not greeted favorably by all participants. Robert Cummings, once associated with mail-art networks, withdrew in 1973 after writing a letter to the editor of *FILE* complaining that "the quick-copy mail art may pass in Vancouver or San Francisco as art, but wherever, it's not worth the paper it's on, nor the ink either; the utmost in idle activity" (quoted in Banana, Mail 252).

Surveillance and Mail-Bombers

In a cartoon by the Canadian mail artist Edwin Varney, a stereotypical modern family drives past a large billboard proclaiming "BIG DADA IS WATCHING." Using the strategy the situationists call *détournement,* redirecting a cartoon's or advertisement's meaning by altering or adding words, Varney has redirected the message of the cartoon by changing the billboard's slogan. *Détournement* is a term coined by the situationists to describe a method of redirecting a cartoon or advertisement. Typically,



Mail-art cartoon by Ed Varney.

the situationists would change the voice bubbles of characters and insert theoretical statements on cultural rebellion. The situationists began from a branch of the lettrist group, which I discuss in greater detail later in this book. At first glance, Varney's cartoon appears to be a mild spoof of an Orwellian dystopia where surveillance keeps families in line. But instead of Big Brother watching over our actions, the antiaesthetic movement of *dada* is watching. This reading leads, instantly, to the contiguous interpretation of the billboard as a spoof of corporate America's intense influence and cultural surveillance against everything from "ring around the collar" to "housatosis." The stereotypical family out for a drive examines *itself* according to the guiding images of advertisements. In this sense, the cartoon looks similar to art that seeks to expose the clichés in stereotypes and banalities of consumer culture in order to produce a critical distance (Foster).

A third reading immediately appears from these two others: perhaps there is a connection between these other omnipotent corporate or state apparatuses and the neodadaist mail-art networks; perhaps, that is, Big Dada is more powerful than we've imagined. Varney's mail-artist pseudonym, Big Dada, and his corporate alias, Canadada, make the cartoon a more pointed spoof on the corporate name as identification. The term *Canadada* appears as the title of a sound poetry album produced by the Four Horsemen poets in 1972 (Griffin House). These poets—bp Nichol, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera—were closely aligned with the Coach House Press, and Edwin Varney was associated with that press in the 1970s. He began making mail art around 1984. Currently, Varney is the director of the Museo Internacional de Nue Art and continues to produce artist's stamps in Vancouver. In 1973, Michael Trasoff also used the term *Canadada* in his work, and in 1995, Christian Gronau produced a "Canadodo" stamp.

With the cartoon's connection to Canadada, the slogan alludes to a possible hint of avant-garde alien invaders just to the north of the United States. In fact, a Canadian book artist, Greg Curnoe, produced a book cover for George Bowering's *At War with the U.S.* that includes a drawing of a Canadian jet shooting down an American jet already in flames, and he has also produced rubber stamps that read, "close the border." This interpretation might easily remind one of Michael Moore's film *Canadian Bacon,* which spoofs the U.S. Cold War mentality by making Canada the new "enemy." This absurd scenario leads to John Candy's character invading Canada; jokes about beer, hockey, Canadian politeness, and bilingual laws follow. With the obvious fact that Canada is an unlikely, even

preposterous, evil empire, the film appeals to the same sense of humor that Varney wants to tap into. Many of Varney's montages, prints, and *détourned* cartoons include his *Canadada* neologism or the root neologism *dada.* Varney's interest in concrete poetry during the late 1960s led him to this instant poetry of recognition, branding, and publicity.

Just as this thought of a powerful Big Dada or Canadada enters the mind and sets off an immediate laugh, the cartoon appears as a spoof of dada's imagined powers to influence and change opinions. It refers, in that sense, to a now-familiar complaint against the historical avant-garde's questioned belief that its comedy is politically transgressive. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White summarize this complaint by explaining how these supposedly transgressive acts function simply as a ruse of the law (33). The cartoon plays on this debunking of the historical avant-garde's pretensions even as it uses the comic strategies found in dada montage. As soon as dada appears as the butt of the cartoon's joke, a number of allusions to psychoanalytic concepts also appear and move the interpretation in a new direction. The most obvious is the pun between *dada* and *da-da,* the child's expression for big *daddy.* The cartoon then spoofs an Oedipal struggle involving not only consumers but also avant-gardists against a hegemonic corporate culture. Ed Varney was certainly familiar with the often-used nickname for Ray Johnson, "Sugar Dada," and that link hints that the cartoon refers to a star-fan dynamic. Later in this chapter, I look at the Sugar Dada's work on this dynamic.

Among these overlapping jokes, Varney includes his assumptions about alternative art networks and media provocateurs. It also suggests a possible connection between these underground art and literary networks and other paranoid networks, such as those made infamous by the Michigan Militia and the Unabomber's mailed bombs. As this chapter illustrates, the mail artists are quite different from these militants, but entertaining potential connections will further illuminate the specificity of assemblings and artists' networks. Even as the cartoon indicates the complicated, and mostly parodic, readings of both avant-garde political pretensions and sanctimonious criticisms of corporate culture, its humor depends on the reader's empathic appreciation of this outsider mentality. Its humor aims at those who recognize their own paranoia about an apparently hegemonic media. Aside from the cartoon's joke about typical billboard advertising, its *distribution* to an underground mail-art network assumes an audience concerned about these cultural and political issues. In this sense, it does begin to look like something that might appeal to those cranky and cynical libertarian terrorist groups and militias.

The events surrounding the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing, the Unabomber's killings, and countless "standoffs" between militia members and the ATF have once again put paranoid networks in the limelight. Fantastic connections and conspiracies loom in the background of these networks' actions. Over and over again, media pundits and voices of reason explain that the perpetrators combine paranoia with righteous moralism to motivate their fatal anarchy and destruction. The aesthetic decisions made by these groups have an uncanny resemblance to much avant-garde art. The Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, a former mathematics professor, for example, apparently chose one particular victim because the target happened to live at the corner of two streets named Aspen and Pinewood. That unfortunate coincidence fit with his overall fascination with wood. Another victim was Percy Wood, then head of United Airlines, who lived in Lake Forest. The last victim was a lumber industry lobbyist. One Associated Press report indicated that the "bomber has used phony return addresses on his mail bombs that have included Ravenswood and Forest Glen Road." Kaczynski chose his victims not by some deductive method. Rather, he used a strategy common to postmodern art: the pun. Literalizing the pun, he built his bombs from wooden parts. In their efforts to describe Kaczynski as either an evil Luddite terrorist or a paranoid schizophrenic loner, media reports have increasingly excluded descriptions of his odd logic. The issue of his sanity has effaced the interest in his bizarre associative reasoning. Reports tell us where he learned about bomb making and where he developed his vicious brand of radical ecoterrorism, but no reports have explained how he developed his system of logic and wordplay.

In a similar fit of paranoid overcoding, the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombers chose April 19 for their activities because the date had special significance. It was the date on which the Minutemen in the eighteenth century battled the British for the first time, it was a date mentioned in a popular novel among paramilitary networks, and it was the anniversary of the tragic end to the Waco siege. Timothy McVeigh's own lawyer pointed to the impact of the events at Waco to explain his client's actions.

The use of coincidence and puns is one of the characteristic aesthetic traits of modernist writers as well as postmodernist experimenters. Every history of experimental media and art in the twentieth century includes a discussion of the avant-garde's deeply seated distrust and suspicion of governments and a fascination with coincidences, puns, and irrational textual links. The historical avant-garde did not shy away from advocat-

ing violence, nor did its members always support progressive political goals. The futurists in Italy, for a particularly apt example, explicitly supported right-wing violence. These superficial connections do tend to force a scholar to wonder whether there is an aesthetic connection between postmodern experiments like mail-art networks and terrorist networks. In an effort to contain the threat of mail bombs, the U.S. Postal Service decided that it would no longer accept any first-class package weighing more than one pound unless the person mailing the package personally delivered it to a post office worker. One wonders if this decision will have an impact on assemblers who regularly mail large packages using first-class mail from remote locations.

Using the "Big Dada Is Watching" cartoon as a guide, it seems clear, *at first,* that underground artists' networks and underground terrorists share a distrust of Big Business, Big Government, and Big Brother. Certainly, the historical avant-garde had a romantic streak and a revolutionary aim. Much of this political spirit and ultraextremism appears later in punk rock (during the mid-1970s), performance art (during the mid-1980s), and experimental media arts such as mail-art networks (from the mid-1960s). Are the militantly libertarian groups merely an extension of alternative art networks? Should the government infiltrate mail-art networks and other artists' groups as threats to national security? Should we fear these art networks as threats to our safety? In the movie *Canadian Bacon,* Canada functions as just such an absurd and unlikely enemy of the United States; perhaps Canadada is watching and waiting.

Once we begin analyzing the aesthetic and literary dimensions of these alternative arts (e.g., the cynical antiestablishment rhetoric, an intense interest in radical political issues, and an openness to experimental forms, including performance and even civil disobedience), then the similarities to the militias seem striking. One could easily see the comic strategies of the situationists appearing in underground magazines like the militant environmental magazine *Monkey-Wrenching* or on the bulletin boards of ultraconservative militia groups. In analyzing the connections among these various groups claiming politically transgressive goals, the actual aesthetic strategies employed in this cartoon, and in much ephemeral underground art, might receive less attention by those condemning or advocating a strong link between these supposedly revolutionary groups, whether right-wing libertarians or left-wing anarchistic communists.

Does a socioaesthetic analysis produce any clues to important *differences* among the romantic avant-garde, underground terrorist networks, mail bombers, assemblings, and mail-art networks? On a strictly formal

level, the differences might seem obvious to those *not* familiar with the radical changes of artists' goals, uses of media, and scope of activities, especially in the past thirty years. Artists regularly cross the supposed boundaries between media and even the line of "appropriateness" for art. Even museum art no longer attempts to encourage catharsis or transcendence, nor does it permit easy classification as painting, sculpture, or theater. This may seem obvious even to someone only vaguely familiar with contemporary art. Yet, in terms of a possible contrast between letter bombers and letter artists, the traditional aesthetic dimension (e.g., to encourage transcendence, using a traditional form and medium such as painting) does not seem to rescue experimental artists from falling under the same classification as paranoid militias. In this sense, a reactionary study of contemporary art may conclude that art poses a serious threat not only by promoting immoral messages, but also by advocating and encouraging dangerous attitudes and strategies. Already this connection between mail art and mail bombs seems both absurd and, with only a slight dose of paranoia, not a completely implausible argument for a politician set on restricting access to dangerous information. That politician's fantasy about the threat of mail artists' networks is a crucial layer of the cartoon's meaning, and, unfortunately, the politician's fantasy often provokes the worst sort of violent reaction.

In a discussion of advertisers' strategies, Roland Barthes explains how national fantasies and mythologies of one country appear in the representation of goods from another country; so, in France, an advertisement may try to elicit "Italianicity" in the specific colors and objects used. This is not the way Italians, or, say, Norwegians, would necessarily try to conjure the Italianness of a scene (Rhetoric). Likewise, the cartoon does not seek to describe the dada scene accurately or to make a comment about any dada national spirit. It attempts to use the phrase *Big Dada* to describe a diffuse fantasy about dada (and Canadada); it equates the absurdity of the fantasy about any threat to the United States from Canada with a similar absurdity of the fantasy that dada art is a threat to national security. In this sense, Big Dada and Canadada function as markers for the U.S. American's fantasies and mythologies. From the allusion to a Canada-icity and dada-icity grows other arguments about the dangerous fantasies of those threatened by art, poetry, and other cultural experiments. Of course, Varney's work also suggests the ways Canadian bureaucracy has sought to use art to define a national identity. Canada as Big Dada Pro Art looks in the cartoon more like Big Brother.

As a metonymic illustration of intimate bureaucracies, this cartoon

about situationist-inspired strategies opens the obvious door. This is a cartoon. It is funny. We laugh at cartoons. Why is it funny? A structuralist would explain that the cartoon places "dada" in the position of Big Business, Big Government, or Big Daddy. Mail-art networks use a shifting tone undecided among metaphoric, ironic, and parodic. The cartoon conjures a series of interpretations that valorize the apparent foes of these networks, big hegemonic forces, even as they cancel the paranoid fear of these forces. Instead of a neat opposition between the big systems and the small forces struggling for liberation, the cartoon illustrates a fascination with the trappings of corporate surveillance and control. Unlike the libertarian forces, the underground artists' networks do not emulate the bureaucracies of armies, army intelligence, or surveillance systems. Instead, the art networks emulate the look and trappings of corporate and bureaucratic culture, adding a specifically shifting tone that includes farce and parody. The cartoon is a parody and a satire of someone else's paranoid fantasies. Simply put, Ted Kaczynski made people into abstractions; mail artists, in contrast, take abstractions from our bureaucratic society and bring them back down to earth with parody in order to make the now-deflated abstractions useful for intimate connections among real people. The use of puns and coincidences, like the importance of terms related to wood, helped Kaczynski abstract the problem away from any network of participants that might include him. Artists' networks use puns and coincidences to defuse power and to include all the participants in productions. Unlike mail bombers, artists' networks react against the one-mailer-reaching-one-recipient system. Kaczynski thought he could limit language play to suit his one-way system. One can only wonder if he would have sent bonbons instead of bombs if he thought any of the recipients could answer his missives the way one pun leads to another endlessly.

Zip Code and the Correct Address

This shifting tone and use of such corporate trappings as logos and canceling stamps appear as *unintended effects of modernist concrete poetry.* One of the best-known concrete poems, *CODIGO,* by Augusto de Campos, looks like a series of concentric circles. Some of the circles are incomplete, some resemble stylized letters of the alphabet—a *C,* a *G,* an *O,* a *D,* an *I*—and the overall pattern makes the individual parts appear, at first glance, as one single image. Because of the moiré effect, that visual vibration created by the concentric circles, it is difficult at first to see which circles are complete and which are not; the whole simply looks like a

CODIGO by Augusto de Campos.

logo. In fact, it is the logo for the journal of the same name, *Codigo,* which during its twelve issues from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s was the main inventive forum for semiotic poetry in Brazil. This logo is more than a logo for the journal. It makes use of *verbivocovisual* relationships. Rhymes, portmanteau words, embedded words, and more appear because of a visual layout that stresses these linguistic relationships. From these poetic tensions, semantic relationships appear as well. For example, we see embedded in this circular logic the word *codigó,* the Portuguese word for *code,* as in zip code, and the English word *God* appears toward the center of this image of logo-centrism. The English word *I* appears at the center of the eye-shaped image, and the word *digó,* "to say" or even "to sign," as in sign language, appears as well.

In its concreteness, this poem seems to mock a literary tradition that privileges a poem of many lines that opens a poignant window onto the world. This poem has an all-at-once development similar to a neon sign or billboard on the highway. The poem resembles a kind of poem as advertisement. "Its strategy is to place the reader, along with the author, in

the position that we are now actually in as we drive the freeways, shop on the mall, push our carts through the supermarket, or watch the evening news" (Perloff, *Radical* 109). It says the God of our modernity is the sign systems and codes we use. The God of the modern, multicultural urban world does not float in the clouds, it sits at the center of the semiotic codes we make. Through its concrete poetics, the logo also functions as a visual poem with a conceptual coding of contemporary culture. As Claus Clüver writes, "It has been argued that the most representative (and perhaps even the most exciting) art form of our age is the advertising logo. Why not create a logo advertising modern poetry, modern art, and the modern view of man as 'homo semioticus,' of man continually encoding and decoding signs, shaping his words by signs and in turn being shaped by them?" (caption; see also Clüver, Languages).

Marjorie Perloff notes that although Clüver presents a worthwhile interpretation of this "especially pleasing and ingenious advertising logo," the conflation of advertising and poetry might present a "dead end" for concrete poetry. Because advertising effaces allusions with the power of recognition, it does not serve the interests of poetry very well. Perloff explains that *CODIGO* functions like an advertisement for a literary magazine "because only that particular object has just this (and no other) emblem" (*Radical* 119). In this sense, it looks like a kitschy personalized license plate, whose puzzle leads to a simple solution of recognition, as in the plate Perloff includes: "JOG 2." The reduction of poetry to anything as easily understood as airport and traffic signs, Perloff asserts, "runs the risk of producing 'poems' which *are* airport and traffic signs" (*Radical* 120). The concrete logo-poem now stands for an ironic mistake in the history of visual poetry. The experiment went too far; the poem becomes a license-plate joke. The absurdity of the reduced poem has a positive value in the condensed Big Dada cartoon. Its poetry has a series of condensed messages, much like a seductive suggestive advertisement, but it parodies each of these connotations in a deflationary effort to jostle the reader's preconceptions. If, as Perloff writes, "in the billboard culture of the late twentieth century, the 'successful' text is one that combines high-speed communication with maximum information" (*Radical* 93), then the Big Dada cartoon mocks its "success" as a spur to give the reader pause.

The obviousness of claiming that mail-art networks do not take themselves too seriously as a serious aspect of their art and activities makes the preceding dissection of the Varney cartoon sound like a caricature of a social scientific treatise. It sounds like a claim that, for example,

"advertising lies to the consumer and manipulates the truth." The pundits who make these types of claims always appear to ignore the aesthetic and literary dimensions of their objects of analyses. Rather than conclude by summarizing the differences between advertisements and this cartoon or between mail artists and mail bombers, a sociopoetic analysis notices that a shift in *tone* and attitude has important consequences for the use of paranoia in mail-art networks. Both mail bombers and junk mailers, in their efforts to get clear and quick messages across, miss the importance of a shifting tone. The activity of *détournement* appears often in assemblings, and it is defined as the shorter term for "*détournement* of pre-existing aesthetic elements. . . . there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of these means . . . a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres" (Debord et al. 22). The mail bombers and junk mailers seek to increase the importance of their trite messages. The mail artists seek ways to testify to a *loss* of importance, not just in the spheres of high art, but in advertisements and political slogans. They are especially interested in deflating supposedly advanced guard artists', or terrorists', claims to a pure unadulterated worldview even if that means making fun of themselves and their relative obscurity.

If we look again at how the "Big Dada" cartoon replicates mass culture's favorite form, we see that there is something strange about this supposedly "successful" billboard slogan. The words on the billboard are not printed in perspective (Higgins, Eye Rymes). It is obviously printed over the image rather than part of the cartoon's world. Once one notices that the billboard's message is not printed in perspective, this leads to the conclusion that the message is not directed at the passersby, but at the reader, in a flat directive. This visual interpretation of the lack of perspective brings to mind another definition of *détournement* as a "reversal of perspective." Explaining this phrase in terms of situationist work, Sadie Plant notes that *détournement* "is plagiaristic, because its materials are those which already appear within the spectacle, and subversive, since its tactics are those of the 'reversal of perspective'" (86, quoting a phrase from Vaneigem, *Revolution* 137). One can read this phrase figuratively *and* literally, as in the cartoon's literal subversion of the billboard's perspective.

The paranoia code, as illustrated in the "Big Dada" cartoon, alludes to something intangible and, yet, something that structures the discourses much like Jacques Lacan's conception of a structuring absence. If one reads paranoia as a code rather than as a definitive label for someone's identity (as in "She has a paranoid borderline personality"), then one can

appreciate the use of surveillance as an aesthetic code as well. Not surprisingly, artist networkers and situationists, as well as media and art theorists, share this preoccupation with surveillance and visibility, as the discussion of on-sendings in chapter 2 illustrates. The instructive cartoon alludes to these same preoccupations with watching and being watched.

In reference to the evil eye, Johan Huizinga writes, "The terrors of childhood, open-hearted gaiety, mystic fantasy, and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in this strange business of masks and disguises" (13). This play activity, related to a different notion of representation (not as identification, but as re-presentation), functions neither to imitate some existing reality nor to normalize activities by legitimating smiles or dismissive frowns.[2] Instead, this type of masked rite, a dance of the mask-as-evil-eye, as Huizinga explains, "causes the worshippers to participate in the sacred happening itself" (15). The effect on the participant takes the form of a seizure, thrill, enrapture. The evil eye protects the participants from a worse evil; the cartoon's evil eye produces and diffuses a more virulent and threatening paranoia: the fears of oppressive governments and others fearful of conceptual art and poetry.

A key factor in this optics of fascination, and in the powers of the influencing machine, is that "whether one is sorcerer or sorcerized one is always knower and dupe at once. But one chooses to be the dupe . . . a good spectator who can be frightened to death" by something imaginary and virtual (15). The cartoon will not work as an ironic criticism of a culture's paranoid fears about art and poetry unless readers play along and recognize the cartoon's direct address and its dependence on the readers' entertaining their own paranoid fears.

Guy Debord, whose "society of the spectacle" works according to this optics of fascination and who advocated *détournement,* apparently was *frightened to death,* as was Ray Johnson. One news report of Debord's suicide noted that he hated media, and his work theorizes the false images in a society of the spectacle. Thus "the rare photos . . . were the most hazy in the world. . . . Certainly, invisibility was imperative" (Milan)! Debord seemed to follow the situationist slogan, "A single choice: revolution or suicide," whereas Johnson, with uncertain intentions, still effectively helped make his suicide function as a (paranoid) commentary on the cultural contexts of celebrity, art, and mail-art networks rather than a mere personal tragedy (Vaneigem, Basic). The mail *bombers* want visibility, whereas these two experts on the society of the spectacle yearned for invisibility. One cannot help but read their suicides as part of their oeuvres.

Those self-annihilating acts might also add one more inflection to the statement "Big Dada Is Watching."

Dirty Tricks

Examples of the oppression of mail artists are unfortunately and surprisingly numerous. In one case, the Uruguayan dictatorship jailed Clemente Padín, the visual poet and mail artist, for "hurting the morale and reputation of the army." This was not a trivial offense, and the court sentenced him to four years in jail; he served two years and three months of this absurdly harsh sentence. Padín's work in assemblings and among artists' networks often spoke against the brutality of the dictatorship in his country from 1973 until 1985. The government's fantasy, that Padín posed a threat to the national security and morale of the army, reached a high point after Padín staged a "Counter Biennial" in front of the Latin American section of the Tenth Biennial in Paris in 1977. Soon after he staged this event, the police arrested him. Under intense pressure from an international group of mail artists including Dick Higgins and Klaus Groh, the dictatorship released Padín early. There are other examples just from Latin American governments reacting to mail artists as if they posed some serious threat. The Brazilian military closed the "II International Exhibition of Mail Art" organized by Paulo Bruscky and Daniel Santiago in Recife in 1976. Oppressive governments in Latin America have imprisoned, exiled, tortured, and put under house arrest many other mail artists and editors of assemblings (Padín, Latinoamerican 16). Of course, governments' paranoid fantasies about, and corollary oppression of, these poets and artists are not limited to Latin America.

The Gauck Behoide Archive in Berlin now contains the Stasi documents compiled in the former East Germany. Stasi was the name of the East German internal secret police, similar in the scope of its surveillance of that nation's own citizens to the Soviet Union's KGB. The Stasi was particularly worried about mail-art subversion, and this archive now also contains one of the largest collections of mail art in the world. Klaus Groh notes that in his own 250-page file (not even one of the largest Stasi files on mail artists), the archive has blacked out the names of other mail artists; these missing names protect the former Stasi agents. Unfortunately, many East German mail artists cooperated with, and sometimes worked for, the intelligence agency. For artists in the West, the government's concern about something apparently so marginal seems misplaced. The Stasi fantasy about the threat from underground art and

poetry networks became the justification for spying, oppression, and censorship.

The authority's fantasies are often the raw materials for mail artists' sociopoetic performances. For example, Dick Higgins recounts how he participated in an international intervention into an East German bureaucrat's authority. Robert Rehfeldt, a prominent East German artist, had organized a mail-art conference in Poland in 1989. He needed to obtain permission to hold this meeting, and a bureaucrat fearing a big network of artists and poets decided to deny permission for the event. Rehfeldt gave Higgins a copy of the official letter in which permission was denied, including the bureaucrat's authenticating stamp. When he rejected a proposal, that particular bureaucrat stamped the request with this identifying mark of official authority. On instructions from Rehfeldt, when Higgins returned to the United States, he made a rubber stamp based on the stamp print on the bureaucrat's rejection letter. He then sent this stamp to the Polish mail artists. Higgins also obtained the bureaucrat's address and bought subscriptions to a number of gay porn magazines, as well as Trotskyist newspapers, in the bureaucrat's name. He heard nothing for a few months, perhaps because it was difficult to get information from behind the Iron Curtain. Then he received an uncharacteristically typewritten letter from Rehfeldt. The letter said that Higgins had done a bad deed in using the rubber stamp to make it appear that the bureaucrat supported and approved of art events and projects that he did not actually approve or condone. Later, Higgins received an unsigned, handwritten note from Rehfeldt that said, "Keep it up."[3]

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Part II

From Visual Poetry to Networked Art

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4. Processed Bureaucratic Poetry

> The visionaries of Constructivism, de Stijl, and the Bauhaus used technology as a spring-board to a realm unencumbered by accident or artist's touch.
> **—Carter Ratcliff, "*SMS:* Art in Real Time," 1968**

Intimate bureaucracies grew from efforts to expand the terrain of visual poetry and typographic experimentation. Visual poems offered alternatives to horizontal lines of poetry and even alternatives to the use of words. These steps by concrete and lettrist poets, respectively, ultimately, led to the making of poetry off the page.[1] The publications discussed in this book were not merely filled with these types of poems. More important, the publications, and their corresponding intimate bureaucracies, depended on these poets' efforts to find new poetic terrains, including collective compilations and interactive situation-dependent works.

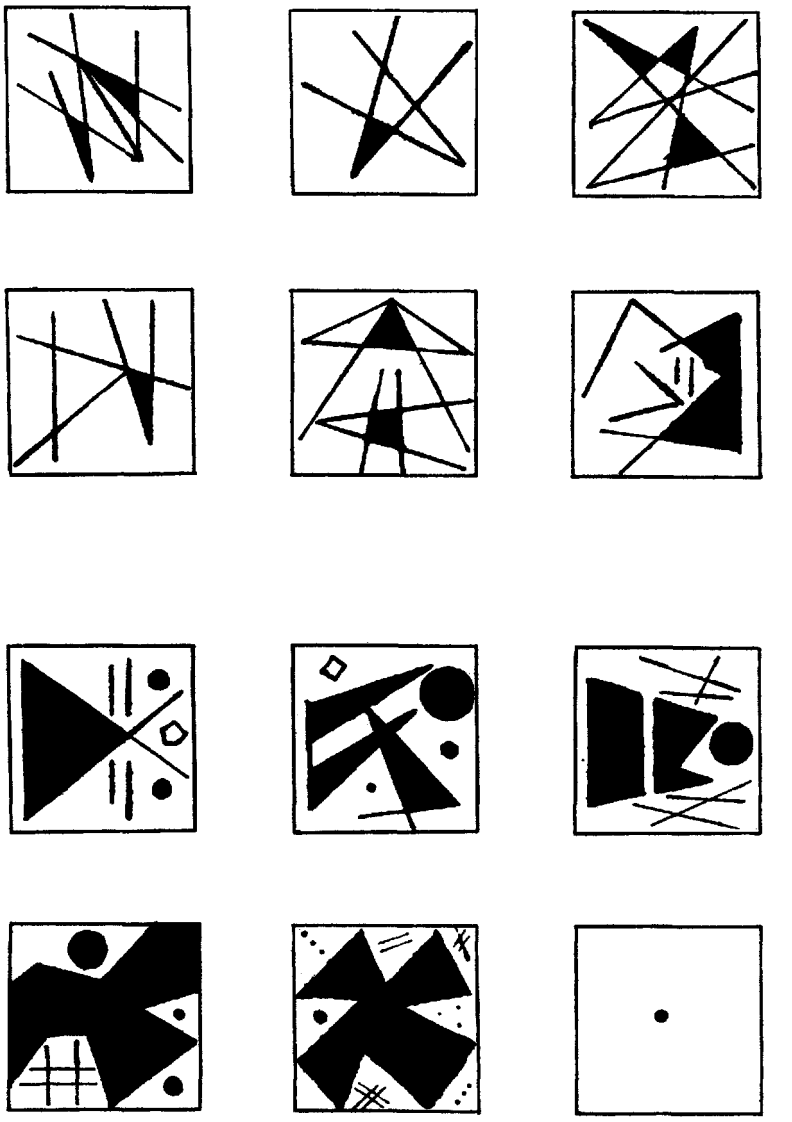
The process and concrete poets' interest in distilling poetry down to the word and basic visual, semantic, and aural poetic structures eventually led to their production of gamelike and interactive poems. Artists later applied this reduction and abstraction to the trappings of bureaucratic culture, including stamps and logos, as poems. The lettrist poets, objecting to the rationalist and functionalist goals of concrete art and poetry, produced calligraphic experiments, playing with serifs, cursive twists, and even voice bubbles to break language down to the letter. Eventually, these poets began producing their cursive pictures off the page in other forms, including film, clothing, and performance, which in turn led to an interest in a poetry built from the situations of everyday life. Intimate bureaucracies borrowed this performative poetics especially in works that

involved constructing intimate aesthetic situations among participants. When one examines this history of the experimental arts and poetry, one finds that the infamous split between a Bauhaus modernism and a situationist postmodernism looks more like a *merger* of these two tendencies. This merger appears in intimate bureaucracies and in the publications, performances, and poetry appearing during the 1960s from artists associated with Fluxus.

There is a direct historical link from Weimar Bauhaus (and its reappearance in the United States and Europe after the Second World War) and constructivist concerns and strategies to the concrete poetry movement and, then, to the concrete and visual poetry that appears in many artists' periodicals. In fact, concrete and visual poetry is a common and perhaps defining characteristic of many of these publications. More important, these poetic tendencies led eventually to the sociopoetic experimentation of intimate bureaucracies and the periodical publications associated with artists' networks.

The importance of concrete poetry within these periodical publications is evident in the periodicals *Ponto* and *Ponto-Ovum 10. Ponto* introduced "process poetry" as a variant of concrete and visual poetry in its premiere issue on "revista de poemas de processo." The editor, Rua Almirante, attacks "discursive poetry" as well as earlier versions of concrete poetry that still used words. He goes on to explain that concrete poetry had now surpassed its original stated goals and strategies. In that sense, he sounds much like the critics of concrete poetry's actual effects versus their intended claims, discussed later in this chapter. Yet process poets still recognized the shift accorded by the concrete poets and vowed to continue the fight against "linear" writing. Wlademir Dias-Pino explains that these purely graphic poems avoid both the structure of linguistics (no words) and the aura of author (nonexpressive of emotion) (Limit 10). Dias-Pino concludes that the "process poem is anti-literature in the sense that true mechanics seeks motion without friction or electricity seeks a perfect isolator" (Limit 10). If that explanation strikes some as stiff and not perfectly clear, then those individuals will probably also see the poems of invented symbols and montages of symbols and images as slick, mechanized, and nonexpressive. To understand how process poetry developed, one needs to look at the much better known concrete poetry movement.

To read concrete poems within the context of intimate bureaucracies' publications, especially those appearing during the 1960s in conjunction with *Edition Et, Punho,* and *Punto* as well as in periodicals like *Invenção* and *Spirale,* the reader must have an appreciation for poetic structures.



Process poem by A. Leandro from *Ponto-Ovum 10*.

The poems themselves encourage the reader to find and play through these structures.

Concrete poets attempt to reverse "the atrophy of language relegated to a merely communicative function" (H. de Campos 178). The use of

typographical designs does *not* function as the necessary and sufficient condition for creating a concrete poem because these poets attempt to change our relation to language, not merely make picturesque poems. The concrete poem must concern "meaning and loss of meaning, legibility and illegibility, not merely the visible (the printed letter as material)" (Bann 11). In this sense, the poets focus on metacommunication and the activity of poesis. The shift away from representing objects corresponds to a heightened interest in the problems of combination. The combination and iteration of words and the structuration of space replace mapping of reality into a symbolic form as the creative activity of poetry. Gomringer describes the constellation as "eine realität an sich und kein gedicht über [a reality in itself and not a poem about]" (Gumpel 41, quoting Gomringer, *Worte* 281). The poet no longer seeks to create a heightened but objective view of reality, nor does the poet attempt to express a subjective message, or emotion, through a narrator's voice. Instead, the poet uses language's visual potential to change the reading, or reception, situation. The semiotician would express the situation as "The intervening visual component disrupts the tight relation between the encoding/decoding of the communicative process. Decoder cannot get back to encoder but remains somewhere suspended in the middle" (Gumpel 64). The structure/receiver model supersedes the sender/receiver model. The "text starts to appear as a set of words rather than a set of things, feelings, atmospheres, and so on" (Bense 788).

This move toward an impersonal, or bureaucratized, poetry also rejected Joyce's complex writing procedure as the work of a virtuoso; instead, the poets favored "an attitude toward language approximating that of *industrial processes*" (Rodgers 255; emphasis added). It was this interest in mechanically processed poetry that would influence the graphic poets like those involved in constructing process poems. Rejecting the grand mastery of the great modernists (Joyce and Pound), the concrete poets followed Max Bill in furthering the Bauhaus ideal of merging the roles of artist and bureaucratized craftsman.

Concrete poets wanted to create the "*artificial poetry* of the future" (Bense 788; emphasis added). These poems speak to a reader inundated by mass media, a person familiar with the communication of "one-word concepts" required by telephones, televisions, and so on. Excited by the mass media, Pignatari later used pictures to make poems and named this poetry "semiotic" to reflect its universal sign system. His serious attempt at a rational universal poetry was ripe for parody.

According to its advocates, concrete poetry explores the fundamental

and most basic effects, structures, and laws of language and reading. It examines and experiments with poetics and literariness. The poets explore the laws of layout, typography, and poetry the way students of the natural sciences study the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology: they run experiments. Before initiating research into the workings of the physical world, students of the sciences examine the basic structures or laws of that world: laws of thermodynamics, gravity, and so on. Likewise, students of poetry and literature study schemata and structures. For the literary theorist, the concrete poem communicates a theory of linguistic structure. For example, employing the same version of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics that Max Bense, the concrete poet and theoretician, uses to examine language and poetic experimentation, a literary theorist such as Lisolette Gumpel explains these poems according to semiotic structure rather than poetic allusions or emotional power.

The official "international movement of concrete poetry" began in 1955 at a coincidental meeting between Eugen Gomringer and Décio Pignatari in Ulm, Switzerland. While living in Europe for two years, Pignatari met Gomringer during a visit to the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, where Gomringer worked for Max Bill, the Bauhaus-trained concrete artist. Bill wanted to form a new Bauhaus, and his disciples invented a poetry closely aligned with modernist concrete art. Many of the analogies used to describe this type of poetry use modernist painting styles (e.g., cubist, op, minimalist) as the vehicle of the comparison.

The spread of these poetries began with the links among Gomringer, Pignatari, and Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, founders of the Brazilian Noigandres group.[2] Before meeting the Brazilians, Gomringer called his poems "constellations" in a collection of the same name published in 1953. He chose the name "constellations" from Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* (Throw of the dice). Walter Benjamin wrote that Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* (1897) "has for the first time wrought the tension of advertisement into a written picture" (Central 34). Mallarmé, in his introduction to the poem, explicitly mentions the influence of newspaper logic in his construction of the poem.

Gomringer's frustrations with traditional forms of poetry led him back to concrete art. In 1947, he wrote a favorable review of a concrete art exhibition in Basel organized by Max Bill. After that exhibit, Gomringer befriended Bill and other concrete artists. Between 1950, when he stopped writing Shakespearean sonnets, and 1952, when he published his first constellations, he wrote no poetry; instead he studied concrete art. He saw in concrete art's reduction of line and color a possible solution to

his frustration with writing traditional sonnets; he struggled to find a link between the visual arts and any potential poetry. With his close friends Diter Rot (sometimes written as Dieter Roth) and Marcel Wyss, both graphic artists, he published the magazine *Spirale*. Roth later became a very influential and innovative printer, book artist, and creator of the Literaturwürste (literature sausages) series that consists of shredded pages of, for example, the twenty volumes of Hegel's philosophy boiled and stuffed into twenty animal intestines and individually labeled. Roth also later collaborated with Daniel Spoerri. Born Karl Dietrich Roth in Germany in 1930, he emigrated physically to Switzerland and Iceland, and aesthetically from the Bauhaus interest in the clean lines of concrete art to a fascination with self-destructing artworks, using everyday refuse and the techniques of smearing and smudging his prints. Those shifts in his interests parallel the shift in European art from constructivist concerns before 1960 toward conceptual art such as that associated with Fluxus, the Vienna Actionists, and pop artists like Richard Hamilton. Roth collaborated with these artists, making the connections literal, and he explains that the aesthetic shift happened after he saw Jean Tinguely's self-destructing machine. But Roth himself was never quite in any particular group, and Dick Higgins, commenting on Roth's unique influence, called him a "one-man movement." For example, Roth founded six different presses, mostly to publish his own work. He founded these presses using the trappings of infrastructure as artworks. Roth's oeuvre highlights the startling shift from the efforts at producing a universal aesthetic language in, for example, the magazine *Spirale* to the process-oriented, transient, and autobiographical works. "It was my task," writes Gomringer, "to find a suitable form of poetry for our magazine, or myself to devise and produce one, [and] when the first issue came out in 1953, [he] wished to put forward programmatically a new type of poetry" (Solt, Charles 9, quoting Gomringer, First 17–18).

Gomringer chose the name *constellation* rather than *concrete poetry* to suggest both Mallarmé's typographic experiments in *Un Coup de dés* and Hans Arp's use of the word in *Worddreams & Black Stars*. Arp, who had a long-standing association with Max Bill, suggests that concrete art causes "stars of peace, love, and poetry to grow in the head and heart" (53). This quote might strike one as oddly sentimental and romantic, with its association of modernist concrete art with love and peace growing in one's head and heart. The inclusion of Arp's choice of "man's most dangerous folly" as "vanity" points more directly to the antirealist and nonperspectival practice of concrete art. Regardless of whether he wrote constella-

tions or concrete poetry, Gomringer's theory and practice are usually understood within the context of European concrete art.

In condensed form, Dom Sylvester Houédard's history of concrete poetry contains both summary and theoretical speculation. Significantly, it reads like news headlines coming off a Teletype machine, with abbreviated words and chopped sentences:

> concrete world already existed waiting eugen gomringer's entry 1953 (cf 1st internat expo concrete art (basel 1944) and concrete art 50 years of development . . . w/ noun poem *avenidas y mujeres* and near entry of augusto de campos w/ his *poetamenos* unpoems)—earlier beginnings— . . . true poesia concreta world only got viably geboren in mental symbiosis at ulm meeting 1955 gomringer plus pignatari (one w/ augusto & haroldo de campos of brazil noigandres) . . . increase borderblurs inter art-art & artist-public & mind-unmind & non-nonnon/ "supercool aesthetic of nothingness"/ concrete spatial 4-D kinetic—these 3 ambiguities as creativity now—not art-poem as creationis imitatio (to copy outside-inside worlds / nature / impressions of nature / soul-psyche-subconscious) but artist-poet as imitator creatoris . . . poems looked *at* not *thru*—not clean window poems to poet mindscape . . . satori let go of freudian *moi*—low temperature serene (no épater-the-bourgeois) ch'an-zen of supercool *je* nothingness—suchly identification & distinction dada/paradada . . . concrete & visual (aesthetic structures doing to language & words as much as / more than / or instead of thru them). (696)

The style of presentation tells more about concrete poetry than the actual description. It uses the devices of mass media in a montage of key words and concepts. It includes condensed meanings like "borderblurs inter art-art & artist-public." It contains only abbreviated sentences and words, like "concrete world already existed waiting eugen gomringer's entry 1953," with no pronouns or definite articles. It has a staccato pace that sounds like a news bulletin. Likewise, concrete poetry eliminates "unnecessary" words, seeks to condense semantic connections, and emulates mass-media forms.

Öyvind Fahlström of Sweden (who spent the first three years of his life in São Paulo) had published the first manifesto for concrete poetry, *manifest for konkret poesi,* three years before Gomringer and the Noigandres group adopted the name concrete poetry (Williams vii). Fahlström anticipated all of the major theories advanced by Gomringer and the Noigandres group in his mimeographed manifesto. He distributed his work through a network of friends and colleagues. Whereas Noigandres and Gomringer published books and journals, Fahlström relied

on a smaller network for production and distribution (Solt, World 9). In terms of similar aesthetic practices, Carlo Belloli, the Italian futurist, exhibited "mural text-poems" as early as 1944, and other futurists working with "typo-poetry" include F. T. Marinetti, Carlo Carrà, Armando Mazza, and Fortunato Depero (Williams vii). Belloli's introduction to the catalog of the 1944 exhibit presents all of the major theories introduced later by Gomringer and Noigandres. Just as these "founders" of concrete poetry had not read Fahlström's manifesto, they did not know, at first, of Belloli's work or theories; Belloli argues for a "verbal architecture" on the street's walls instead of in the libraries, which could function optically in "typographical and structural layout." Brian Fothergill's 1945 series of typed "asemantic" poems "commissioned" for Dom Sylvester Houédard and Peter Fison's 1949 "resistentialist poem" (Houédard 696) were other unrecognized precursors. Following other trends in a postconcrete direction, many poets began producing specific styles and strategies during the 1960s, including Group 70s "visiva poesia," Wlademir Dias-Pino's "semiotic poem," Julien Blaine's "poem to be assembled," Edgardo Antonio Vigo's "poetry to be built," the minimalist conceptual poems of the Art-Language Group, and Alain Arias-Misson's "public poems."

Of course, if we extend the definition of concrete poetry to include these earlier examples, then we also need to include ancient examples as well. The first concrete poems had connections to the "magical and then the mystical impetus to shape texts, poems in the shapes of things. . . . The Greeks named such writing *technopaegnia.* Simas of Rhodes (Third century BC) made poems in shapes of ax, egg, wings" (Bowler 9). The urge to make pictures with words made some Islamic and Hebraic artists ignore the religious injunctions against making images (Bowler 9). The Chinese and Japanese had no injunctions against image making, and they produced some of the earliest examples of pattern poetry. Mimetic pattern poetry differs significantly from concrete poetry. Stephen Bann points out that "concrete poetry is all too often confused with the 'Calligrammes' of Apollinaire, and their modern equivalents, in which lines of texts are ingeniously manipulated in order to imitate natural appearances" (11). The Noigandres group and Gomringer criticize this type of mimetic pattern poetry in general and Apollinaire's "Calligrammes" specifically. Anthologies and histories tend to place concrete poetry in this lineage of pattern poetry; even Dick Higgins encourages this reading in his encyclopedic work *Pattern Poetry.* The alternative interpretation, which moves these poems away from mimetic works and toward conceptual works, depends on an appreciation of the specific strategies involved

in reading this type of visual poetry. Reading these poems in assemblings (rather than in anthologies or surveys) puts them in relation to the other works appearing next to them and to the cultural, artistic, and poetic experimentations taking place around them. These poetries mark a transition from the phonocentric to the visual, and they refer to mechanized bureaucratic visual code systems like logos as well as to an intimate network of artists and poets working on producing an international poetic Esperanto.

The Brazilians found the name for their group, Noigandres, in Pound's "Cantos XX":

> You know for seex mon's of my life
> Effery night when I go to bett, I say to myself:
> "Noigandres, noigandres:
> Now what the DEFFIL can that mean!"

Pound alludes in this canto to the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel's song translated as "The grain of joy and the smell of noigandres." Augusto de Campos later translated the ancient Provençal word *noigandres* as *livre de tédio* (free of boredom), but there is no single denotation to the word. The word became the group's "motto of poetical research and invention poetry." Significantly, the choice of the name connects the concrete poets to the archaic poetic-performance tradition of the troubadour's song. That is, the name suggests the poet's alternative to the romantic conception of lyric poetry by referring to the etymological connection between lyric and lyre, the musical instrument; the group's poetry calls attention to the musical materiality of language rather than subjective personal expression. And, like Gomringer, members of the group wanted to produce a materialist, rather than a romantic-metaphysical, poetry: poetry of mass media and contemporary urban culture. The *Poetemenous* poetry collection offers a good example of this interest in musical materiality over subjective metaphysics.

In 1953, Augusto de Campos's collection *Poetemenos* (Poet-minus) became the "first manifestation of concrete poetry" (de Campos, Concrete 169). According to the poets' descriptions, this collection synthesizes lessons from the *Klangfarbendmelodie* (tone color melodies) of Anton Webern and the ideogramic technique of Ezra Pound's *Cantos.* Borrowing sources from modernist art, the poets reinforced their poetry's art historical position within modernism, but the details of the actual works suggest an alternative reading. de Campos had planned to use "luminous letters which could automatically switch on and off as in

street advertisements," but "there was no money" for that project; instead he used colored lettering (169). The colors in the poem indicate which voices should read with which sections. In 1955, Noigandres presented the *Poetemenos* series at the Teatro de Arena of São Paulo; they projected the poems on a screen and had four voices read parts according to the color coding. Later, in 1956, the poems appeared in the group's journal, *Noigandres.* The letters were to resemble "street advertisements." The poem seems to have more in common with pop art's conceptual irony or twisting of popular culture than with a tone color melody. Its message strikes the contemporary viewer with unintended allusions to the popular American television game show *Wheel of Fortune,* with lighted letters turning. In fact, one can easily imagine a concrete poet using the hangman format to construct a poem.

With the poets' close ties to the modernist art of the Bauhaus, and with the poets' manifestos advocating a structuralist brand of modernism, most critics have interpreted concrete poetry as an example of a tightly constrained structural poetry with a singular meaning and definite effects. Concrete poets do attempt to organize the most fundamental structures and rules of poetics, using layout, design, typography, and time. They use this method not only to comment on poetic structure, but to create conceptual thought-games. In their concern with pure form, the concrete poets resemble other modernist artists. Although these central goals of a structural and formalist poetics have only a limited impact, the concrete poets' challenge to expressive poetries and their gamelike structures continue to influence experimental poetry.

When Pignatari returned to Brazil in 1956, he and Gomringer planned an international anthology, and the Noigandres group suggested *Concrete Poetry* as the title of the publication. Gomringer agreed to that title, mentioning that he had previously considered the phrase *concrete poetry* to describe his own work, and he also titled his introductory essay-manifesto "Concrete Poetry" (Solt, World 12). The anthology was never published, but Gomringer and the Noigandres group began to function as ambassadors for concrete poetry throughout the world. In December 1956, "the movement of concrete poetry was officially launched" as part of the National Exposition of Concrete Art at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo. The exhibition combined concrete poster-poems and concrete art (pictures, drawings, and sculptures) (Pignatari 791). The concrete art stayed within the bounds of the modernist project by examining formal issues rather than expressing narrative content. The poems also attempted to focus on structural issues, but because of the inherent linguistic component, they inevitably expressed other contextual issues.

While still a student in Berne, Gomringer, growing dissatisfied with his own efforts at writing Shakespearean sonnets, began studying Mallarmé and Arno Holz, an east Prussian poet (1863–1929). Holz "tried to find a natural rhythm divorced from traditional meters," and Gomringer became fascinated with Holz's concern with "every minute detail both in visual arrangement of script and in the organization of sound" (Solt, World 8, quoting from Gomringer, First; see also Kriwet; Saper, Music). In reference to the poetry as a move to musical scores, Ferdinand Kriwet explains that a poet like

> Holz, as Mallarmé before him, conceptualized this arrangement as a score, or sound-images. For if any form up to now has made demands, it is this form which demands live performance in order to exercise its full effect. And however often typography fails to suffice, a better medium for such purposes is unfortunately not yet available to us. I know that what I can give in this way are, comparatively, mere notes. Music from them must be made alone by whoever knows how to read such hieroglyphs. (n.p.)

In the context of reading concrete poetry as musical scores, Augusto de Campos's *pentahexagram for Cage* uses musical notation as a vehicle for a poem. Four musical notes appear on an I Ching hexagram that resembles a musical staff except that it includes one more line than a standard scale of musical notation, and one line of the five horizontal lines in the I Ching is split in two parts. If we read the notes as music on a treble staff, a standard musical notation, they spell C, A, G, E. The poem alludes to John Cage's method of writing and performing music by using the chance permutations produced by "throwing" the I Ching sticks. First the user throws the sticks, and then the user consults an annotated list of images, like the one used in the poem, to learn what to do next. In some ways, it is like throwing dice to determine what to do next in life or in composing music. Even if we turn the poem upside down and read the notes as if they appeared on a bass staff, they read C, A, G, E. And the two hexagrams (right-side up and upside down) stand for Revolution and upside-down Cauldron, respectively. Cage uses the I Ching's chance permutations to compose music. This poem uses the I Ching to set up the visual parameters, and, by chance, not only does the design resemble a musical scale, the notes spell out the same name right-side up and upside down. De Campos looks for Cage's name in the same way that Cage finds Joyce's name in passages from *Finnegans Wake*. Both Cage and de Campos find the letters of the names in vertical or multilinear relationships instead of in single horizontal lines. De Campos's poem shows the

"cidade city cité" by Augusto de Campos.

extension of a technique synonymous with Cage's name: using chance to compose with and finding names hidden vertically in texts. Cage's name becomes a common noun, a kind of trademark, and a way to think through the poem. With Cage as a trademark, the poem suggests an intimate bureaucracy by both allowing for an intimate link between Cage's methods and the poet's work and by suggesting a generalized system of working beyond the virtuosity of Cage or de Campos. The poem for Cage uses the musical sense of "signature," the set of signs at the beginning of a staff indicating the key (and/or time) of the piece. That is, the signature is an institutionalized guide to playing the notes. In this case the letters of Cage's signature (CAGE) become guides as well. A proper name and a common noun merge, and an intimate way of composing music merges with an institutionalized system of reading music not to give us deep hidden meanings about Cage or music, but to suggest a kind of musical vibration among the signifiers.

As this poem for Cage demonstrates, even the problems of translation fall into the category of structural relations because concrete poems depend on the words' relationships rather than the words' reference to something outside poetics. So translating a poem literally will not suffice to capture the experiment in structure. Gomringer considers translation as more than a verbal rendering. He explains that "transcreation" functions as an interpretation of all aspects of the text (Brasil vii). The problems of translation also function as structural elements in the "transcreation" of concrete poetry. An obvious example of the problems in translating concrete poems according to reference rather than structure occurs in Augusto de Campos's "cidade city cité," a polyglot poem that makes translation absurd. The poem represents the mix of languages found in any modern city. To translate it into one language would misunderstand the reference of this multilingual structure. It is not a poem about *what* people say in a city. The linguistic structure represents *how* a pedestrian or a passerby in a car or bus hears and sees the languages of a cosmopolitan city. It attempts to put the reader in an intimate structural relationship with the institution of a modern city. The poem's

long horizontal and continuous line structure suggests the fast blur of lines in a metropolis: trains, speeding cars and buses, queues, straight avenues, and passersby. It looks at first like babble. It sounds like something you might hear if you walked or drove down a crowded city street.

The shape of the poem does not illustrate a long city street, but in performing the reading both visually and verbally, the reader performs the rapid linear blur in the moving and crowded city streets. Still, what later conceptual poets borrow from this type of poetry is not its formalist translations of an experience; rather, they borrow the poetry as concept that this type of poem introduces.

Sergei Eisenstein, an influence on the Noigandres group, demonstrated and theorized how to fuse visual images into ideograms. To create a concept in "intellectual montage," the filmmaker reduces the image to its most laconic form and neutralizes any diegetic connections with the image. The filmmaker then combines a series of these reduced statement-images to create a concept. But, significantly, these filmic analogies hold only when we remember that the overlapping of visual and aural modes guides these practices. In terms of writing this type of notation, the concrete *poems* offer three guidelines. First, reduce elements down to the laconic forms in a kind of schematic graph of language. Second, foreground the tension between the familiar reading and the puzzling sense of words, sounds, and images. This dislocation of expectation depends on the recombination and permutation of the visiosemantic elements. The reduction abstracts, while the dislocation adds allusive complexity. Third, create ideogrammatic concepts in order for the concrete poem to function as a prototype: anonymous and capable of infinite reproduction. Working with the prototype, the reader realizes language-thought patterns and possibilities by actively participating in filling in or extending the poem's structure. According to Eugen Gomringer, his constellations offer intellectual puzzles that find their concrete solution in the thought of the reader. These puzzles do not "represent" the (illusory) "reality of experience," but make something realizable (Gumpel 62, citing Siegfried Schmidt).

At first, one might believe that the criticism of concrete poetry as metapoetry can also apply to constellations as thought catalysts. Formalist art attempts to critique representation of "reality" in favor of representation as realization, and the emphasis on formal structures disrupts the *supposedly* unobstructed view of a slice of life. In realist art and poetry, readers believe that the content exists without any formal manipulation. They incorrectly believe that their "view of reality" transcends the artwork's semiotic structures. The reduction of a medium's language

to its essential concrete form or structure supposedly forces the viewer to abandon the belief in a transcendent view of life. Instead of floating through life-as-it-is, the spectator of formalist art recognizes the potential possibilities of pursuing permutations of the barest concrete structures. As Heissenbüttel suggests, concrete poetry offers "not just a new diction but a new way of orienting oneself in the world" (Gumpel 62). And Siegfried Schmidt notes that "vision has intervened and the communicative process no longer draws the reader right into a sphere of illusion. . . . Thematic coherence, which normally arises from (syntactic) augmentation of a lyrical ego, has been relinquished. . . . The reader engages in intellectual exercitum; instead of being a passive recipient, he participates actively" (Gumpel 62–63). The allure of a pure perception of viewing and cognition led formalist filmmakers and painters toward rational and objective systems of production. They made the spectator consciously aware of the formal parameters of media. In her critique of formalist films, Constance Penley explains that the "transcendental subject" returns, at a higher level, because formalist cinema appeals to the ultimate vanity of pure objective perception; in the cinema, formalism increases the identification with the camera and projector, whereas in painting it privileges the iconic representation of pure form.

Counter to these criticisms, the concrete poets actually increase the nonsemiotic elements of poetry. Their project differs from that of their precursors because, as Wendy Steiner notes, they do not privilege pure perception, contrary to their rhetoric, but focus on the tension between a sign's meaning and its visible or phonetic character. They, perhaps unwittingly, solve many of the problems created by formalist artwork. Moreover, by increasing the tension between sense and intelligibility, a few of their poems change the structural path of *thinking* without prescribing the direction or content of *thought.* By the middle of the 1960s, one can find similar work on "open systems" based on structuralist theories. The best indicator of these concerns in an artists' periodical is an issue of *Aspen* (vol. 1, nos. 5–6, 1966–67) that summarizes and demonstrates the impact of structuralism on artists, filmmakers, writers, composers, playwrights, and so on using parameters as part of their work. This issue of *Aspen* (which I call the structuralist box) includes essays and artworks that demonstrate and explain structuralism's impact on the arts. The editors have packaged the contents in a white box without any text or images on the outside. The list of contributions reads like a compendium of foundational essays and examples of structuralist poetics.[3] One analogy for concrete poetry is this kind of structuralism, with its open parameters.

Concrete poems state their message-structure instantly, or in quick cinematographic sequence, blurring the distinction between visual art and poetry and making the poems function as structural scores.

In a context of discovery, rather than a context of justification and codification of a type of poetry, one can read concrete poetry as a conceptual art poetry. Anthologies, and the secondary literature, in their efforts to present one type of poetry, miss the factor of experimental poetry as changing and evolving. Those changes make the initial concrete poems look very different when viewed in the historical context of work that appeared in the same periodical publications. For example, the assembling *AH* had strong ties to European concrete poetry, and the works in its nine issues in the late 1960s through the early 1970s chronicle the shift from implicit conceptual work in concrete poetry to more explicitly conceptual work. The premiere double issue of *AH* in 1966 includes concrete poems, and, as late as issue 5, Timm Ulrichs contributes concrete and visual poems (Damen, nos. 1–2, 5). Herman Darmen includes his "love during the dessert" for Ian Hamilton Finlay: a tomato turning into a heart shape printed in red on a white napkin.[4] Here the shift from concrete to visual poem suggests a shift toward conceptual, rather than semiotic or formalist, poetics. *AH*'s issue 9 includes a record, titled "AHAHAHA 8—review for verbal plasticism," that suggests a continuing link to the concerns of concrete poetry, but the rest of the issue focuses on kinetic poetry that moves the visual semantic concerns of concrete poetry off the page to examine the poetics of movement. For example, there are plans for building various "poetry machines."[5] The issue also includes "poemparades," discussed earlier in relation to sociopoetic infrastructuralism.

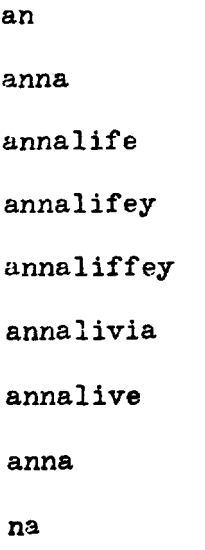
An issue of the assembling *Geiger* includes a work by J.-F. Bory, who published an important anthology on concrete poetry (Spatola, no. 3; see also Spatola and Vangelisti), that demonstrates a more explicit shift from concrete to conceptual work. It consists of a line drawing of a faceless group of people organized as if they were about to have a group photograph taken. On the empty faces appear words—*eux* (they), *lui* (him), *elle* (she), *toi* (you), and more—and next to this picture is a photo of a young woman sitting and looking at the camera. Here the structural parameters of a situation (the stereotype of the group pose) functions like the parameters in a concrete poem, except now the emphasis is on conceptual relationships among words, images, and situations rather than between visual and linguistic rhymes and relationships. Other contributors to this issue of *Geiger* are a number of European concrete poets, including Kriwet.

Exit News cover.

The influence of a *rhetoric of concrete poetry* continued in assemblings during the late 1960s even as the contributors' work shifted in emphasis. A double issue of *Exit News* (nos. 5–6) promised to "continue to attempt a meaningful verbal/visual balance of content and format," insinuating a strong connection to the visual and concrete tendencies (Hall n.p.). The issue includes an anthology of British visual poetry. The assembling is

packaged in a large plastic bag, with the title and contributors listed on a folded paper sealing the top of the bag. In the specific choice of works in this issue, the move toward event scores and more conceptual work is clear. Tom Phillips, famous for his *Humument* and *Heart of the Humument* books, contributes an event score (or instructions for a performance). He explains that "the piece itself may last any length of time and can include any kind of event suggested by its visual incidents." He claims that the piece can benefit from "very precise interpretation" or "allow for open ended situations." He also notes that these pieces were actually played. The directions, score, a "rough spare copy of the solo part," and "optional material" hint at some kind of musical event titled "harmonia praestabilita * for musicians," but they do not contain a translation key for musicians used in traditional scores. This work, which resembles visual art more than didactic directions, is part of the works produced in the middle and late 1960s that mark the shift in emphasis from the supposedly closed structural poetics of concrete poetry to open structural parameters.

In the same issue of *Exit News,* Ian Breakwell's "dance of operations" consists of outlines of shoe prints with typed letters inside the shapes and a three-part drawing in the middle of the page. The three drawings show a hand holding a toy duck (which looks more like a kangaroo) that grows legs in the second version and skis in the third. Breakwell's work mixes seriality and cartoon with a hint at instructions with specific if open performance parameters. In that same issue, Dom Sylvester Houédard's visual typewriter poem of a repeating geometric pattern is much more closely linked to concrete poetry. He describes his "kinkon" poems, titled "three gridshift poems for exit," as "unlike moires that depend on quite minimal variations in register." These poems "depend on precise right-angled turns & make use of the very slight variations of distance built into this Olivetti between traveling one-up and one-along—the distance between the platen and carriage ratchets." Again, this sort of precise mechanization of the production process encouraged artists to consider the aesthetic potential of the bureaucratic distribution process. However, the skill,



"anhalfmoon for james joyce" by John Sharkey.

"Get In It" by Edwin Morgan.

craft, and structure involved in these poems did not fade away. In this same assembling, John Sharkey, an influence on Laurie Anderson, includes "anhalfmoon for james joyce," a linear poem mesostic. Edwin Morgan includes "advice to a corkscrew" (1966), which reads, "Get in it." These two poems look much like concrete poems because they tend to have a deceptively simple mimetic relationship to their subject matter, but they, in fact, depend on structural patterns or rules of composition.

As soon as artists examine the "rules" of concrete poetic composition, they also comment on the cultural constraints motivating and constraining the artworks' presentation. In their concern with pure form, the concrete poets resemble other modernist artists. Art historically, concrete poetry usually fits within the context of modernist art. In actual practice, the poems' allusiveness makes them conceptual art as well as structuralist puzzles. For example, Clemente Padín's contribution to an issue of the assembling *A* includes a series of line-drawn pictures. The titles for each series of pictures describe simply what the result of a particular procedure looks like. For example, the section titled "Acting" shows a pair of scissors in a line-drawn illustration above a printed passage with a section cut out. Another picture in this series shows an eraser above a section where the printing is erased. A picture of a pencil appears above a passage of print scribbled over. All of the passages in this section have different messages, but each passage discusses playacting. Here the play between words and images shifts from a poetic tension to a conceptual game.

In the same issue of *A*, Paul Dutton, famous for his involvement with bp Nichol and the Four Horsemen sound poetry group, includes a sonnet in which he uses the letters of the word *sonnet* to construct a series of sonnets, including one in Spanish. A number of these sonnets make little sense, but the last in the series seems to comment on the difficulty of following the particular constraint. This rule-governed (or bureaucratic) system for writing poetry has a formal element—it's a sonnet, but the constraints also allow for a conceptual piece on bilingualism and on making sense from nonsense. In an issue of *Aspen* (vol. 1, no. 9, 1970), Brian O'Doherty's structural play includes an event script (or instructions for a performance) with parameters and grids to explain the action

and development of the play. O'Doherty uses geometric shapes to describe the actors' parameters of possible movements (in relation to the other actors). This script looks like a visual or process poem spread over a series of five pages. Once again, this work represents the shift from visual poems concerned with production parameters to interest in consumption parameters. At first glance, this script seems quite similar to a graphic poem. Using it as a score highlights the performative potential of concrete and visual poetries. This score helps illustrate how visual poetry became the locus for sociopoetic practices through a subtle shift in visual poetry from poems about poetics to poems as scores (for future or potential performances).

The problems critics found in these poems (that they were actually not able to capture experience concretely or mimetically) also hint at how these poems made sense as conceptual games. As conceptual games, the poems would go on to influence Fluxus and much of the work in assemblings since the 1960s. This interpretative transformation begins with concrete poetry's dead end. Eugen Gomringer's "silencio" demonstrates, for Wendy Steiner, that "dead end" of some concrete poems. Roland Grass's interpretation of "silencio" is precisely the reading that Steiner critiques. Grass writes: "Eugen Gomringer, when he wishes to concretize an aural phenomenon like silence, relies on a spatial analogy" (137). Silence is a lack of sound, and the repeated word *silencio* surrounds an open space lacking words. If the poem offers a picture of silence, then it merely maps the concept of silence onto the words and the blank space. The poem does not engage our structures of language/thought. The poem offers only a reified picture of silence. The poem might suggest that our concept of silence (as blank space) arises only from the surround of words. Silence is born after writing. This interpretation does require our engagement with the design of the poem. The poem no longer mimetically illustrates a simple and banal idea (i.e., silence equals blank space), but sets up a tension between design and idea. From this tension spring a number of other possible readings: language, even the word *silence,* is structured around a lack, and words never fill that space; the blank space may represent not silence but an open space, the open space of imagination, surrounded by silence; or the poem invites the reader to fill in the blank space given the surrounding silence. Finally, the poem might refer to the (lack) of silence that John Cage examined in his work. Cage's scores often left a space for the performer(s) to remain silent and listen. The Fluxus attitude toward silence was an openness. As this example demonstrates, the readings of concrete poetry

include more than semiotic and formalist solutions, and the analogies to modernist painting need not direct positive or negative readings. The concrete poets' use of words makes the poetry often unwittingly open to alternative readings.

A square box painted in a color that contrasts with that of the background will inevitably create the expected visual effect in op art. Words, as the above example demonstrates, can too easily escape the rigid references required for formalist lessons. These poems do not privilege pure perception, but focus on the tension between meaning and visible arrangement. They represent concepts rather than things in the world. Reading concrete poems as conceptual games or scores links these poems to similar experiments in the last half of the twentieth century in Fluxus, for example, and, later, throughout the vast expanse of artists' networks.

The concrete poets *claimed* their poems had a direct access to the sensual world, but, as Steiner and others point out, far from escaping from realist illusionism, the poems themselves merely move the illusionism to a higher level. Although they fail to make words into things, they succeed in breaking reading (literally and figuratively) from its linear patterns. Words and parts of words resonate with others, the way notes play off each other and the various elements join in a choral movement. The concrete poems' immediate message also suggests a politics of interpretation that makes the critic as intermediary "merely superfluous" (Bowler 14). Concrete poets attempted to make their poems immediately accessible to a mass audience.[6] From these constraints inherent in concrete poetry sprung conceptual poetries, including the sociopoetics of intimate bureaucracies.

5. Intimate Poetry

> The letter would be ready to form a new alphabet and a new language, a language that could say what had never been said, in tones that had never been heard.
>
> **—Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 1989**

> Writing cannot be reduced to a pure function of communication. . . . for writing to be manifest in its truth (and not in its instrumentality), it must be illegible. . . . writing's truth is in the hand which presses down and traces a line, i.e., in the body which throbs (which takes pleasure).
>
> **—Roland Barthes, "Masson's Semiography," 1999**

In the early 1950s, a disagreement between two artists, best known for their sculptures and paintings, about the goals and strategies of concrete art epitomized the differences between the two major tendencies of visual poetry (concrete semiotic poetry and often parodic lettrist calligraphic poetry). The development of these two tendencies grew literally from Asger Jorn's and Max Bill's influence on their collaborators and followers. The split between Jorn, who was among the founders of COBRA, and Bill, who theorized "konkretionen" or concrete art, marked the divergence of the international concrete poetry movement from the lettrists' montage and free calligraphic poetry. On the one hand, the group of poets influenced by Max Bill built poems that attempted to follow the high modernist standards of works constrained by rhyme structure and semiotic sign systems. On the other, the group of visual poets who opposed this structuralist tendency used parody and montage techniques to investigate new conceptual poetries not tied to recognizable words or sign systems, never mind rhyme. In this regard, they borrowed both the Italian futurists' experiments in *parola in libertá* (liberated words) and the Russian cubo-futurists' notion of "transrational language" (Ferrua).

The disagreement between Bill, who advocated a rational art based on the structure of form, and Jorn, who advocated an irrational and irreverent exuberance in making art, marks the divergence of the two tendencies.

Their differences also set the stage for the merger of these tendencies in Fluxus during the 1960s and later in assemblings.[1] Adherents of both tendencies in experimental poetry found themselves in need of a new distribution system that could accommodate their combinations of verbal, visual, and conceptual rhymes. Artists' periodical publications met the need. Moreover, the works contained in these publications combined concrete poetry's efforts at abstraction, simple reductions, and repetitions with the lettrists' conceptual and performative attitude and emphasis on graphic rather than phonocentric poetry. The results were the visual plays on mass-media forms and bureaucratic trappings (official rubber stamps, forms, questionnaires, icons, corporate logos and slogans, and so on)—a poetic recovery of the mechanized bureaucratic languages of authority—that both chronicled and produced the intimate bureaucracies found in the periodical publications of artists' networks.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the reaction against the strict structural constraints of concrete poetry produced a closely parallel poetic practice that sometimes explicitly parodied the concrete poets' strategies. In answer to Décio Pignatari's "semiotic poetry," discussed in chapter 4, Ian Hamilton Finlay produced "semi-idiotic" poetry. As poets looked for more corrosive versions of pop art appropriations of popular culture's images, lettrist and situationist strategies appeared in their work. Some works are more concerned with montages of found scraps, *détournement* of images or advertisements, and an anarchistic politics. Others, especially in the artists' periodical publications appearing during the 1960s, seem more concerned with an instantaneous poetic meaning, exposing the structure of a conceptual game in a linguistic construction, and an abstraction of political issues. In later chapters I examine why the merger of the two trends happened so smoothly and invisibly; I also explain the importance of that merger for the history of poetry, art, and future discussions of media. The "process poem" offers one example of how the merger of the two opposed tendencies began with surprisingly little conflict (Padín, Semiotic; Dias-Pino, *Processo*; Padín, Latin-American; Padín, Ruptures). "Process poetry" functions as a logical extension of concrete and visual poetry as well as an opening for more conceptual and nonlinguistic work. Like the critics of concrete poetries (e.g., Asger Jorn and the lettrists), the process poets abandoned the use of existing languages by inventing poems without words. Unlike the somewhat romantic lettrists, they also challenged the aura of authorship by experimenting with nonemotional poetry. Process poetry builds on the advances of concrete poetry and moves that tendency toward visual conceptual games,

scores, and activities. Although these poems are not yet scores, they do suggest a secret code system waiting for a reader to interpret or play. The "process" can refer to the process of interpretation; the reader as writer-performer has to try out these strange code systems.

During the 1960s, the two trends began to merge into hybrid forms, and those forms demanded a new distribution system suitable for both sociopoetic activities and concrete poetic play and analysis. As an indication of that merger, Fluxus artists, who shared many of the strategies and goals of the situationists, adopted the term *concrete* to describe their work. They also explicitly included the concrete poetry of the earlier poets in their publications. The apparent inheritors of concrete poetry, at least among Fluxus artists, moved in directions that had as much in common with Asger Jorn's vision as with Max Bill's. Fluxus artists used the term *concrete* to describe the strategies for working with three-dimensional productions and concrete situational artworks rather than two-dimensional printed poems. Although anthologies usually position concrete poetry in a lineage with high modernist art and other pattern or visual poems, in the publications of the time the two tendencies appear together. For example, the premiere issue of *Edition Et* (Berlin, 1967) contained work by the founders of the international concrete poetry movement as well as Fluxus artists. It demonstrates in literal fashion the early connections between these two groups.[2] The appearance of works by these contributors in the same issue obviously changes the contiguous context surrounding these works. By the 1990s, the distinction between what Jorn considered modernist concrete strategies and situationist-inflected postmodernism had blurred.

On November 8, 1948, Asger Jorn coined the name COBRA, at Café Notre-Dame, because this group of painters came to Paris from *Co*penhagen, *Br*ussels, and *A*msterdam. These painters reacted against the abstract expressionists as well as the superrational concrete art (what they called "objective formalism") as they sought to produce an irreverent, playful art based on a splinter group of the international surrealist movement. Strongly influenced by Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* they sought to combine a childlike artistic style, automatism, and an interest in magic and outsider art with Scandinavian libertarianist and socialist activism. Jorn (originally known as Asger Oluf Jørgensen), the poet Christian Dotremont, and Constant (Anton Nieuwenhuys) were the theoretical core of the group. Other artists included Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, Karel Appel, Corneille (Guillaume van Beverloo), Jacques Doucet, Anders Østerlin, Jean Raine, Carl Henning Pedersen, Shinkichi Tajiri, Jean Michel

Atlan, Joseph Noiret, Pol Bury, Karl Otto Götz, and Pierre Alechinsky. Their works often resembled children's drawings covering other paintings, and, significantly, they considered their paintings experiments rather than finished artworks. As a visual pun on the group's name, their works also usually incorporated cobras or other snakelike creatures. The group lasted only from 1948 until 1951, but it was responsible for one of the most important art movements in the last half of the twentieth century. Jorn and these other artists were already active in the Revolutionary Surrealist Group, which sought a more politicized version of surrealism than André Breton's group.

Jorn placed his materialist art on the side of festival and play rather than in line with what he saw as the boredom involved in the seriousness of naturalism and realism. In 1953, after the dissolution of COBRA, Jorn formed the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus from among some of the COBRA artists, and a year later he engaged Max Bill in a public debate during the 1954 Triennale of Industrial Design in Milan. Bill, and the new post–World War II Bauhaus, sought to produce an art for the masses to appreciate by using simple shapes, colors, and forms. Peter Wollen explains that "Jorn argued that the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier had been revolutionary in their day, but they had been wrong in subordinating aesthetics to technology and function, which had inevitably led towards standardization, automation, and a more regulated society" (*Raiding* 14, citing Bandini). Although in industrial and urban design as well as architecture and poetry, Jorn's position was not widely adopted during the 1950s or 1960s, his statement now appears in keeping with a postmodernist interest in variability, ornamentation, and a less regulated approach to design. The collective and antiproductivist attitude of Jorn's Imaginist Bauhaus still appears in contemporary artists' networks. Like Bill and the concrete poets, Jorn wanted to bring together artists in collective projects, but he vehemently disagreed with Bill's other functionalist goals. In his attempt to make art education more attuned to the formal attributes of art, Bill restructured Bauhaus so that students received technical skills and formalist appreciation through the process of production. Most art schools today follow this formalist skills-based curriculum. Students leave with sets of skills specific to their disciplines or media of expression. In his "Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus," Jorn explains that Weimar Bauhaus (and the variants that followed after the Second World War) sought to supply an education for artists to find their "place in the machine age," whereas his movement sought "experimental activity" rather than a rational pedagogical se-

quence (23). He describes his experimental activity as "constructed situations," and later the situationists, with whom the lettrists merged, would use this phrase to describe their activities and name their group. When the situationists claimed to dispense with art making in favor of making "situations," Jorn split off from them because he believed in the usefulness of artistic practice. Although Jorn's faction of the lettrists left, they still shared many of the situationists' methods and goals, and the two groups remained aligned if no longer merged.

Jorn and the situationists define *concrete* in terms of "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events" (Debord et al. 22), whereas for Max Bill's disciples, *concrete* refers to visual, verbal, and semantic poetic effects. The situationist phrase *concrete situations* resembles the term *performance* or *Fluxus events.* Although the Noigandres poets claimed the term as their own, the French "concrete poets," led by Pierre and Ilse Garnier, followed the lettrist movement rather than Gomringer or Noigandres and drafted their own manifesto of concrete poetry, *Spatialisme,* in 1963. In terms of the definition, the word *concrete* also appears in theories of experimental music; for example, Schaeffer, Henri, and Boulez have all worked with *musique concrète* as a method of composition. Usually this method includes working with found materials and has links to "ready-mades" and later variants of concrete poetry such as "semiotic poetry" and "pop-crete." In terms of the word's use in music, it is important to note that Max Bill and many of the concrete poets saw John Cage (closely associated with Fluxus) and Marcel Duchamp (associated with an antifunctionalist dada aesthetic) as influences and inspiration (see Bill). Bill asserts that Duchamp's artwork is "one of the most positive contributions to the intellectual history of the 20th century" (26; see also Zurbrugg; Cohen). East German poets such as Michael Franz used the term *concrete,* but they drew its meaning from Georg Lukács, who favored an explicitly realist art based on "a highly concrete position on concrete issues and tendencies in life" (Gumpel 23, quoting Lukács).[3]

The COBRA group initiated two magazines to publicize its members' work, *Cobra* and *La Petit Cobra.* These publications drew their inspiration from two other Danish magazines affiliated with many of the same artists, *Helhesten* and *Reflex.* In fact, *Reflex* published Dotremont's manifesto for COBRA. *Cobra* usually appeared in conjunction with exhibitions, and over three years, eight issues were published. A final, double issue was planned and prepared, but never appeared because of a lack of funds. Each issue had a different guest editor, and Dotremont oversaw

production. *Le Petit Cobra* had four issues. In these magazines and in his exhibited artwork, Dotremont introduced *peinture-mots* (painted-words) that led to the type of painted writing found in lettrist work. In 1956, Jorn joined in the formation of the Lettrist International, which led to the Situationist International and to the production of another type of concrete poetry.

Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître, then only twenty-four years old, began the lettrist movement in 1950 after Isou published his *Journaux des Dieux.* Earlier, Isou had written "The Manifesto of Lettrist Poetry" in the early 1940s, but only in the 1950s did the group grow beyond Isou's imagination. Responding to James Joyce's numerous literary innovations, Isou believed that only two general directions remained for fertile exploration.[4] He rejected plagiarism as an option (one later adopted as a solution by the neoists and some mail artists) in favor of a total re-creation of language and literature. The poet would create a new language. This odd deification of the poet seems to represent an approach opposite to that of the concrete poets influenced by Max Bill, who constructed poems "minus the poet." Similar to the concrete artists, Isou wanted to "plasticize" literature, emphasizing the page and writing as a type of painting neither figurative nor nonfigurative. In addition, Isou and the lettrists avoided the first-person pronoun *I* because of its romantic suggestions.[5] Isou wanted to make works from the position of a god, but he wanted to avoid producing works from the seat of the ego. In this regard, the works do appear as if "channeled" from some unknown deity, as if the artists were speaking (or writing) in tongues. The poems neither mimetically depict reality nor function only as visual images, and their use of letters hints at some unknown figurative language. Although the lettrists proposed reducing all art down to the letter or graphic sign, or fragments of letters, Maurice Lemaître also produced hieroglyphic work that employed literal objects in his poems; he would glue a small object to the page as part of a rebuslike puzzle. His approach demanded that he find alternative language systems rather than focus only on the use of cursive letters. His picture-novel *Canailles,* first published in *Ur,* the lettrist periodical begun in 1950 by Lemaître, uses Braille, sign language, cartoons, a map, a photograph of the Arc du Triomphe, calendar pages, and more. Later, he used bottles, rocks, sand, matchsticks, and other scraps from his everyday life in his poems. In looking for canvases for poetry other than the page, he led others to use the cursive look of writing to design books, ceramics, tapestry, and jewelry, and to print on clothing, furniture, and even eyeglasses.

Lemaître's hieroglyphic contribution to one issue of *Jerimadeth*

(founded in the early 1970s) highlights this object-oriented approach to language, and his use of a thing-code system overlaps with Fluxus boxes and kits that contained objects as clues. Lemaître's "L'Aide-Mémoire: Eléments mnémotechniques pour un conte oral à faire" (The memory aid: mnemonic techniques for the telling of a story) begins with a mailing label, on a separate page, with the title of the work as the destination and the author's name as the sender (see Goldschmidt and Studeny n.p.). The hieroglyphic poem is on another page. It includes photos, photocopies, pieces of printed pages and bank checks, and objects such as a piece of twine and three matchsticks. In the upper left-hand corner are two coins, a two-franc piece and a one-franc piece; in the upper center of the page is a fragment of a page describing horror films cut into a shape resembling the Hebrew letter aleph, or maybe the Greek symbol for pi. The upper right-hand corner includes a mug shot–like photo of the author, who appears to be holding his breath. His pursed, pouting lips are a sign in France for skepticism, boredom, and rejection. The literary and media theorist Greg Ulmer builds his logic of invention (what he calls heuretics), relevant to my examination of lettrist innovations, around the gesture and body language of pouting. Ulmer quotes a guide to French body language to explain the pouting sign: there is "a long list of gestures indicating a rejection of responsibility, the belittling of one's errors, the affectation of indifference. One says *Je m'en fous* with the whole body. A person or a problem or a responsibility is symbolically expelled. . . . Above all it is ejected as a stream of air from the lungs; the shoulders shrug and compress the lungs, while the lips pout as the air is expelled making the sound 'bof!' " (*Heuretics* 240–41; see also Wylie and Stafford 22–23). Lemaître is skeptical of phonetic language. He waits, with his pouting sign of skepticism, to exhale and expel the problem of linguistic language. He waits with his pout to expel the poet's supposed responsibility to use that common language. One wonders what sounds or noise will come out of his mouth, and if out of those sounds, and body language, one might hear the pale sounds or song of a new language, a dreamlike body language and gestural writing.

Just below the author's photo is a wrapped capsule of Sonpal, a drug with a name that combines *son,* sound or noise, and *pal,* pale, and that leads to a *songe,* dream or dreaming. The center of the page includes a painted circle, the three matches, the knotted twine, and half of the author's ID card, which includes his address. The bottom third of the page is filled with a "voided" bank check; it is a "blank check" signed by the author for one million francs.

"L'Aide-Mémoire" by Maurice Lemaître, from *Jerimadeth.*

What story, or sound poem, is this rebus trying to bring to light in the reader's imagination? The images do not make a linear argument as in phonetic writing systems, but the images do hint at some kind of signification, some kind of story. The relatively few elements involved encourage the reader to ponder the problem. The analogies among these systems of exchange or counting systems (coins, checks, knotted twine, and matchsticks) hint at some story about keeping track or exchanging. This hieroglyph tells the story of lettrisme, told in its most appropriate and un-

Label for "L'Aide-Mémoire" by Maurice Lemaître.

forgettable style, about a new language built from the sounds and noise hidden in everyday objects, a symbolic exchange system built from the remnants of other exchange systems: a potlach. Peter Wollen notes that the Lettrist International named one of its journals *Potlatch* (the group's other publications included *Jerimadeth, Lettrisme, La Revue Lettriste et Hypergraphique, Ur, PSI,* and *Le Mouvement Lettriste*) to allude to the "great feasts of the northwest coast indigenous tribes of Canada and Alaska, the Kwakiutl and the Haida, in which the entire wealth of a chief was given away or even 'wastefully' destroyed" (Wollen, Introduction 144). For Jorn and the lettrists, potlatch expressed a festive alternative to the market economy.

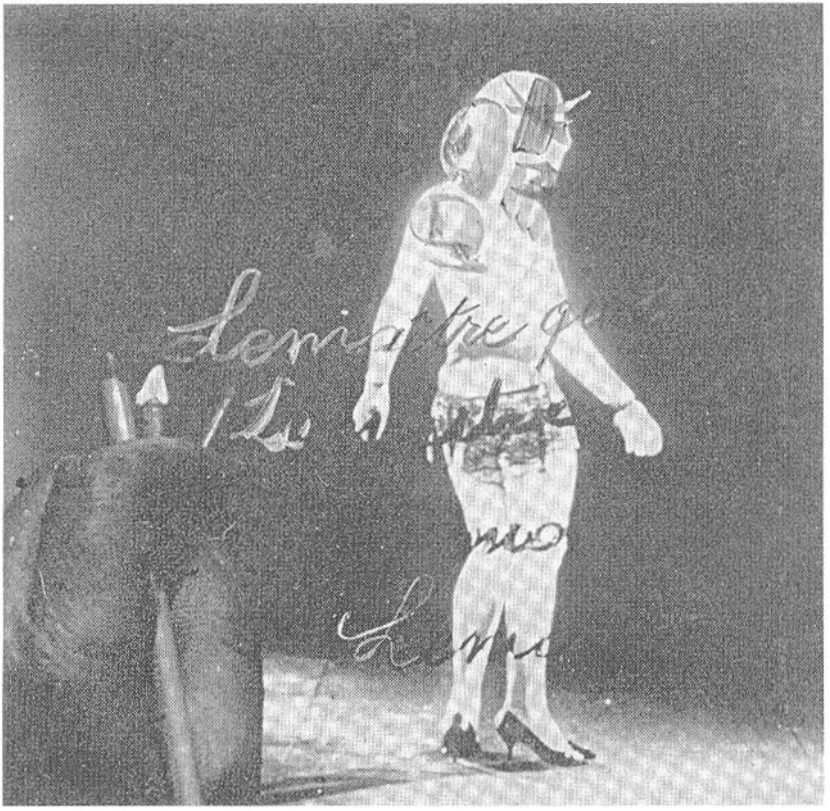
Although a complete discussion of these festivals is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that objects in a potlatch economy circulated as *gifts* rather than as *commodities.* This gift-exchange approach to poetry fueled the emergence of artists' networks as a way to avoid the market economy of the art world. Even the peculiar method of compiling assemblings, of accepting any contribution received, shares a connection to this sense of potlatch. The publications depend on excess, waste, and communal use rather than the efficient editorial decisions that usually determine whether contributions are distributed or not. Fluxus Yam Festivals also drew explicit symbols and inspiration from gift-giving rituals. The Lemaître poem examines the idea of a poem as a

system of gift exchange. The notion of a specific kind of gift giving as a viable alternative to market systems later played an important role in Ray Johnson's correspondence art and remains an important theoretical concern in Continental philosophy. Most notably, Jacques Derrida has published a study of how philosophers and anthropologists approach the problem of potlatch and gift exchange; he also subtly alludes to how these terms circulate in discourses about alternative artistic practices. The lettrists' manifestos advocate the destruction of all art world systems and even language itself, down to the letter (a kind of joke on traditional rhetoric—breaking down language into its parts). Lettrists' artwork uses carefully constructed printed materials best described in the tradition of beauty and aesthetics rather than the antiaesthetics, or neodada, sensibility that they explicitly advocate. Likewise, their publications reject an "anything goes" attitude and introduce the concept of an (alternative) aesthetic beauty born from the serifs-as-excess and the wasting of writing's ability to communicate speech—a potlatch set on destroying worn-out forms of communication.

Maurice Lemaître's hieroglyphic work on memory highlights the object-oriented approach to language the lettrists advocated. His use of a thing-code system overlaps with the Fluxus boxes and kits that used objects as gamelike pieces and symbols in an unknown language system. In this similarity with Fluxus, Lemaître's work identifies one of the elements that had found its way into the conceptual concrete poetries. Willard Bohn argues that because the broken apart "letters function exclusively as pictorial signs . . . their significance derives according to the rules governing abstract art" (177). In terms of this stress on the pictorial quality of writing, David Seaman argues that the lettrist work had two trends: poetic and painterly (French 205–7). We see the same interest in the painterly in Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School's allusion to the New York school of abstract painters. Johnson's work, and Fluxus work in general, had the hard lines of a type of pop art rather than the cursive eccentricities of the lettrist painterly style, but as Bohn notes, because the rules governing the lettrist type of poetry present a permissive alternative to the relatively restrictive parameters of concrete poetry, there are "as many visual styles as there are members of the movement" (180).

The mechanized style and attitude of concrete poetry and Fluxus kits and boxes appear, at first, to have met their opposite in this anarchic expressivity. Although in general this expressivity does define much of the lettrist work, the use of comic-strip styles and found images and objects is an important aspect of lettrist work. For example, Alain Satie made extensive use of a pop style reminiscent of Roy Lichtenstein's use of comics.

Satie liked to mix the comic-strip look with thought and speech balloons filled with lettrist cursive writing. Seaman identifies this type of work with Lemaître's "postécriture." This form of lettrisme removed poetry from "the sphere of phonetic and literary texts because there was no vocal correspondent to many of the signs" (Seaman, French 207). The puzzlelike pieces influenced other work in assemblings more directly than the more-difficult-to-reproduce extravagant cursive works. The script works may have influenced other printers who wanted to use stylized scrawl as well, but the lettrists' particular skill makes these works visually unique. Maurice Lemaître coined the term *hypergraphics* to describe the puzzlelike works, including his "Memory Aid," discussed above. These works drew on comics and a pop art tradition in their effort to produce a new language system. They mark the emergence of a tradition of producing a language from visual signs without phonetic equivalent. The poems that used rubber stamps, logos, and the trappings of bureaucracies were only a short step away from Lemaître's dingbat poetry.



Improvisation lettriste with female form from *Ur* 4.

Instead of directing the reader's eye, the lettrists thought of their work as establishing parameters for interactions. In one of their many manifestos, Lemaître explained his work (in the third person); He "invited the amateur spectator to enter into Lemaître's framework in order to create his own personal work. The amateur spectator can also imagine and realize his own super-temporal framework into which Lemaître will take pleasure to come to, to work at, and to be a spectator for the new framework" (Lemaître, Model n.p.; my translation). This sounds like a description of Fluxus events a decade or more later. The lettrists sought a poetic form that could dispense with words entirely to free visual extravagances of writing from linguistic communication because words suffer from mechanization and rigidity.

The lettrists believed that words choke inspiration. The only solution was to give free improvisational reign to the twists and turns of the serifs and curves usually suppressed when writing serves linguistic ends. They often used *détourned* pictures of nude women with script covering parts of the image in order to prove that given the opportunity of *improvisation lettriste,* cursive writing is more attractive than the nude female body; the eye supposedly follows the writing rather than the female form! As hilariously absurd as this claim seems, and it was no doubt meant to be provocative rather than merely descriptive, the lettrists' calligraphic play is often startlingly beautiful and does serve to remind the viewer of the potential aesthetic pleasures locked up in linguistically and phonetically confined language systems.

In practice, the lettrists focused on both the materiality of writing and the objects and materials that might make a new alternative language system. New alphabets and symbols appear frequently in their work, as do objects and photographs used as part of some unknown hieroglyphic system. They constructed many new alphabets from the dingbats used by printers as ornamentation. Around 1952, they began calling their technique *hypergraphy,* which promised to use all sign systems as the raw material for artistic expression. They later felt this technique did not go far enough in resituating creative activities toward innovation, so they introduced "imaginary" films and paintings, then "infinitesimal," then "supertemporal," and "antisupertemporal." This endless and absurd array of methods, specialized terms, and jargon resembles the parodic use of official languages and code systems in intimate bureaucracies. The lettrists flirted with using their systems as a way to produce a new Esperanto. In this way, their efforts resemble the semiotic and process poets' attempts to find a universal language, but the lettrists' intermittent interest did *not*

cause them to reduce their poems to the traffic sign–like clarity of some semiotic poetry.

Like the poets involved in Noigandres and the international concrete poetry movement, the lettrists were also interested in film and film theory, and used cinematic performances to inform their poetry. Isou and Lemaître both produced films that sought to break down film language to light and sound rather than just the usual forms of editing, cinematography, and so on. Lemaître founded a screen lettrist school and initiated new types of filmmaking, such as "syncinéma." For example, he produced "imaginary" films that used neither projectors nor any illumination; spectators were asked to imagine these films. In reaction, Isou proposed the "infinitesimal" film, which exceeded the imaginary. The audience would arrive at the cinema, and Isou would explain that, although one can imagine any number, no matter how large, one can only hope to imagine the infinitesimal ratios between numbers. For his infinitesimal film *Art of the Street,* spectators were asked to stay in their seats and imagine living with Isou as he watched other films. Spectators were asked to imagine the infinitesimal possibilities of Isou's life unfolding between the images projected of other films. Lemaître's answer to Isou was the "supertemporal" film, which was never finished. The audience arrived and was given the "unfinished" film. They were asked to cut it up and scratch it in order to create the film continually. In these experiments at the Ubu Gallery, around 1965, Lemaître explained that the filmmaker was also never finished, and, therefore, became an immortal deity without mortal ego. Other lettrists answered this strategy with the "antitemporal," in which the filmmaker denies all intervention by the audience by wearing earplugs and a blindfold at the screenings. Around 1968, Lemaître answered this antitemporal strategy with his proposal for an anti-antitemporal, or supertemporal, film, for which audience members were led, one by one, into the theater, blindfolded, and tied down to chairs so that they could not intercede or change the film in any way whatsoever. In 1980, Lemaître produced a printed film that expanded the language of film to include touch and smell. Again, the audience was blindfolded to experience the film *Western,* which consisted of a leather cloth printed with the title of the film. Participation in devising new strategies and unforeseen innovations is crucial to the appreciation of these films, and, like assemblings, which made publication into a hybrid form that included performance, these films forced participants to consider the cinematic *performance* with an audience as part of the experience. Lemaître's *Has the Film Already Started?* has few images and consists of found footage and blank

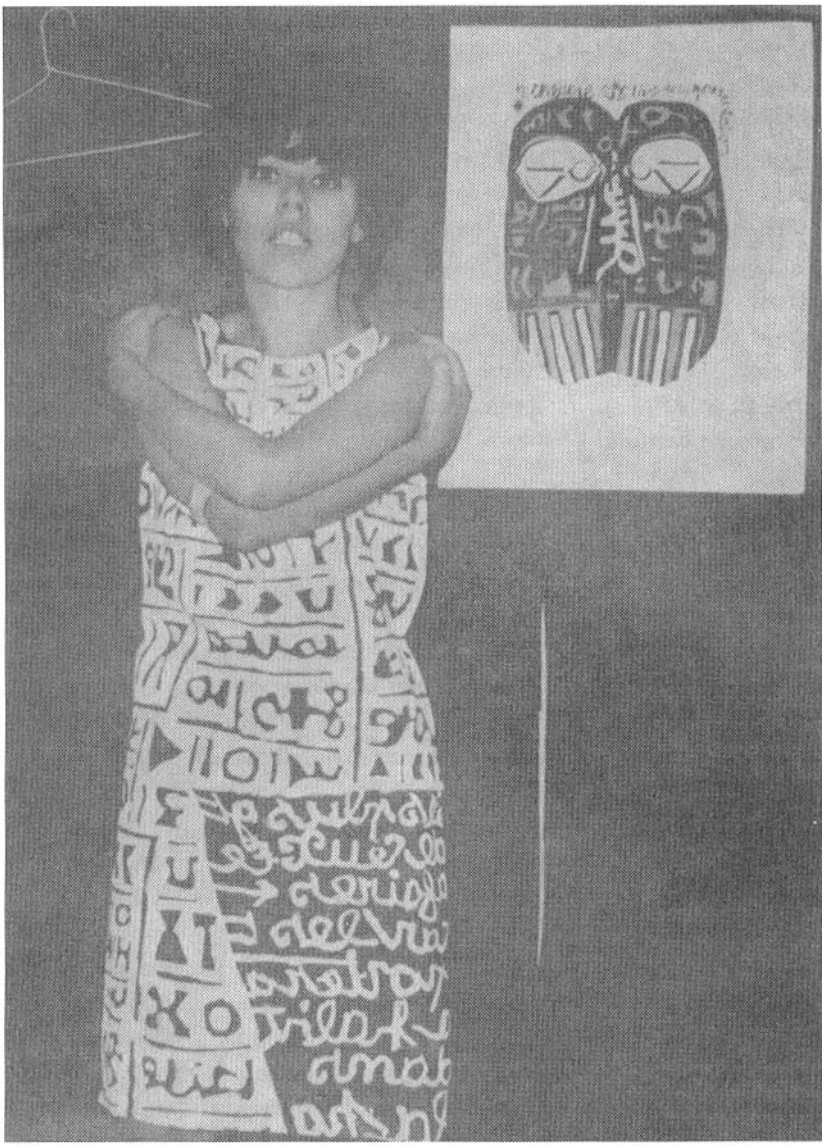
"Soirée Odéon '64" from *Ur* 4.

film stock with some letters written on it. It is a cinema without images. The lettrists, like Jorn before them, sought to "destroy formalism from within" (through parodies of breaking poetry, cinema, and performance down to their essential, pure form) in order to disengage creativity, imagination, and play from any specific techniques or aesthetic skills (Debord and Wolman).

The lettrist assembling *Ur,* edited by Lemaître with Roberto Altmann and Jacques Spacagna, presents the most comprehensive collection of lettrist work. Issue 3 includes contributions by Lemaître, Roland Sabatier, Micheline Hachette, Frédéric Studeny, Peter Foldés, Altmann, and Spacagna. Lemaître's "El Momo et l'action rapprochée" tells another cryptic story, this time using a photomontage. Some of the glyphic symbols appear in a cartoonlike speech balloon, and the cryptic language system mentions Tristan Tzara. There is a picture of a performance, with microphones surrounding the performer; the center of the montage is a profile of a man with glyphic symbols on his hand and cursive flourishes all over the photos. This issue also includes several of the nudes with cursive script covering much of their bodies and heads discussed above. In issue 4 of *Ur,* Lemaître includes a humorous "Letter of Petition to King Assurbinipal" written in some unknown language, but with the look of a cross between Sanskrit and French. This issue also includes the spectacular clothing designs of Roland Sabatier modeled by Micheline Hachette and Alain Satier. Printing letters on clothing as design elements entered the popular lexicon during the go-go years of the 1960s; the body became a lettrist-like canvas for expression as the cursive and glyphic symbols mixed with a pop sensibility in poetic expression on bodies and clothes.

In the mid-1960s, the assembling *PSI* began publishing under the direction of Roland Sabatier. Contributors include Micheline Hachette and Lemaître. In issue 2 of *PSI* (1965), Hachette includes a geometric print resembling three mazelike connected pieces, introducing a mazelike geometricity to lettrist work. Lettrist work also appeared in the assembling *Revue Ou,* founded by Henri Chopin and dedicated to "audio-poetry." Issues included records, and contributors included a wide array of sound poets and other lyric poets and visual poets not usually associated with audio-poetry, such as Brion Gysin, the beat poet. In one issue, a reader might find works by Tom Philips, John Furnival, and the typewriter artist Bob Cobbing as well as Isidore Isou.

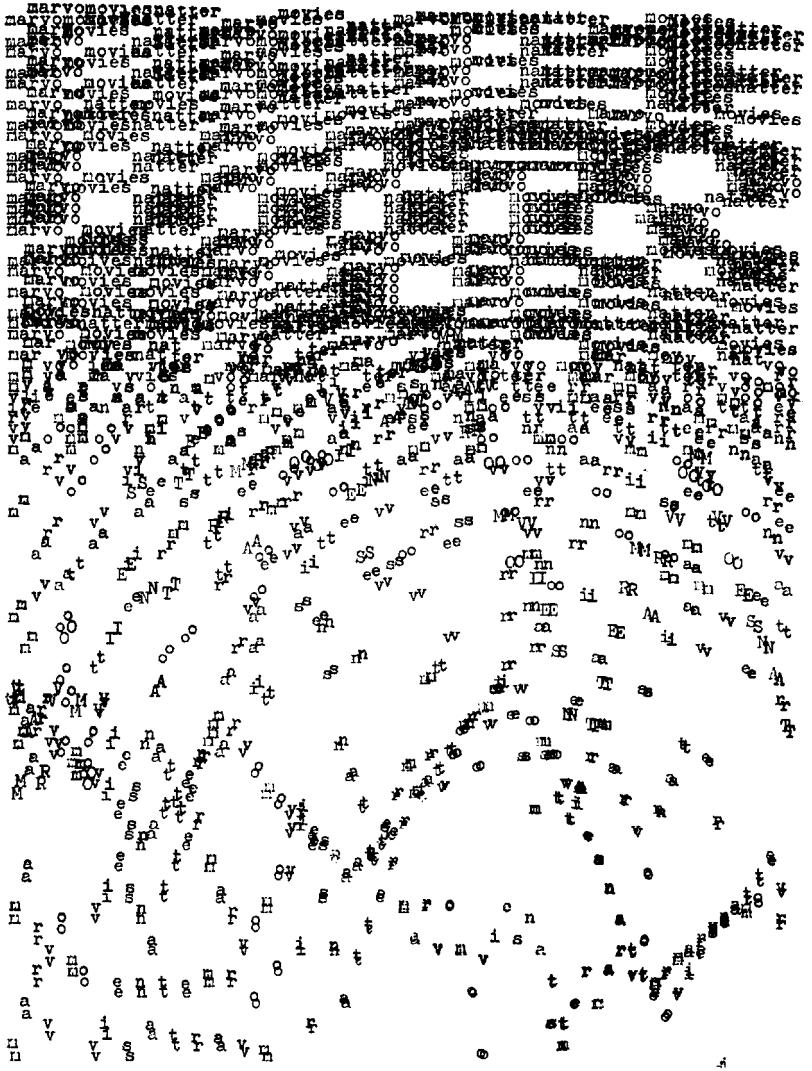
One might read these works as scores for sound poetry, especially with their allusions to sound and noise, as in the Lemaître poem



Lettrist dress by Roland Sabatier.

discussed above. When Bob Cobbing reads his typewriter poems, they function as scores for sound poetry that resist any suggestion of words. Sound poetry is the corollary of the visual poets' seeking to break down language to the letters or serifs: the poets sacrifice linguistic signification

for a cubistlike reading that frees sound from logocentric and linguistic constraints. Furnival's inclusion seems strange because his work is usually anthologized with visual or concrete poetry, but in this context, his poems break with signification and might function as scores for some as yet unknown language(s). One poem in issue 3 of *Revue Ou* that plays through the word *Ou* in an abstract explosion of lines is dedicated to



Typewriter poem by Bob Cobbing (version of *Marvo Movies Natter;* originally done as sound track for Jeff Keen's film *Marvo Movies*).

Henri Chopin and includes the following explanation: "dessin pseudo-cryptique; crypto-cybernetique; quasi-semaphotique." Although discussion of the continuing importance of sound poetry for experimental poetry circles is beyond the scope of this volume, assemblings like *Revue Ou* suggest that these works can function as scores rather than texts alone. As scores, they appear as if one were receiving some strange form of semaphore, and the sound poems sound like someone attempting to sound out the message *before* translating it into some known language (see Chopin, Web site). In the periodical *Le Mouvement Lettriste,* the lettrist cursive writing was used extensively for portraiture and other figurative work (Dupont). These poets used the script form of writing to produce portraits.

At around the same time this later lettrist work appeared, mail-art-oriented magazines like *American Living* and *Data File* also began publishing. The work in those two journals marks the gulf between two tendencies in assemblings. On the one hand, the lettrist work represents craftsmanship and expressivity; that connection may strike some as counterintuitive because lettrist manifestos advocate destroying language. In practice, as this chapter illustrates, the lettrists' work returns writing to its visual beauty. A lettrist assembling does not reproduce well because it depends on the quality of the printing and the delicacy of the graphics. Lettrist works represent, in many different forms, the erotics of writing or a fetishization of the pieces and parts of individual letters. On the other hand, the mail-art and stamp-art assemblings flourishing during the 1970s and 1980s wallow in the mass-produced look and make great use of photocopying to construct humorous montages (see photocopy magazines Web sites). These works depend on mechanical reproduction beyond concrete poetry's move toward rational solutions. The assemblings cherished slipshod work as they explicitly attempted to destroy the uniqueness of the artist and the artwork. Other conceptual issues, like jokes about distribution systems, which became more popular motifs in assemblings, and other groups, like Fluxus, had superseded lettrisme as the supposed precursor to work in assemblings.

In the 1960s, many assemblings cited lettrisme as an influence and precursor; by the 1990s, assemblings tipped their hats to neoism, Fluxus, and other more conceptual tendencies. On the one hand, the situationists (who merged with, and sprung from, the lettrist group), whose ideas influenced the French students involved in the Paris rebellion of 1968, especially at the University of Paris, Nanterre, and the British punk culture of the 1970s, began to fade in the late 1960s after their ideas entered main-

Mona Lisa by Albert Dupont.

stream discussions and debates about politics. The lettrists, on the other hand, continued to produce collective publications containing calligraphic improvisation into the early 1970s, and Lemaître continued to produce some of his best work in the 1990s, in part because their language

Mona Lisa by Maurice Lemaître.

systems were much more difficult to recuperate into mainstream writing or politics. In that sense, situationist antics have come and gone, whereas lettrist languages remain for future generations to use. Although the letterist-inspired situationist strategies began appearing in England around the time of the punk scene, lettrisme itself is now usually considered a footnote in the history of art rather than an important tendency in literature, art, and modern thought.

Some assemblings embrace elements of both concrete art and the alternatives. They do not contain much, if any, traditional linear poetry or prose. To those less familiar with the emergence of an alternative symbolic system, the poetry, montages, and other activities in assemblings simply look and sound *different* from mainstream poetry. Because experimental and alternative poetries now have at least a fifty-year history (never mind the thousands of years of pattern poems), the distinctions within the alternatives to linear "expressive" poetries become clearer. What might still appear to some as simply "unreadable" and "irrational" appears to many of the participants as an emergent symbolic system. The types of works in, and *of*, assemblings may have specific variants, differences, and nuances.

Although the debate between Asger Jorn and Max Bill, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, produced the lettrists', and later the situationists', interest in experimental cultural interventions, Bill's artistic and poetic lineage ultimately led to experiments quite similar to the situationists' projects. And even within these two major tendencies (modernist semiotic poetry and postmodernist intimate poetry) there were important differences in approach. Jorn did not completely accept Isou's narrower notion of lettrist work, which focused on calligraphic play rather than larger philosophical issues, and he sought to emphasize lettrist strategies to transform everyday life. This emphasis on a socioaesthetic practice had a profound impact on artists looking to make artworking into transformative collective networks like intimate bureaucracies. The publications of these groups became both the chronicles of these changes and the vehicles. Sadie Plant mentions the continuation of this legacy in a samizdat tradition in the concluding chapter of her book on the legacy of the situationist international in a postmodern age. She notes that this tradition "continues to produce music, magazines, performance, and political interventions in the spirit of ironic violence perfected by Dada; plagiarism, détournement, and provocation remain the hallmarks of a thriving and sophisticated world of agitation" (176).

In 1952, the Lettrist International (and the group's journal of the

same name) split from those lettrists whose work addressed literary and aesthetic concerns rather than direct cultural provocations. It was a Lettrist International group that had begun from a faction called the Ultra-lettrists that led to the formation of the Situationist International. Neither group saw itself as a new literary school or a vanguard of modernism. Both saw themselves as reinventing everyday life. The Situationist International sought to change life by rejecting all forms of poetic and aesthetic production that the society of the spectacle would inevitably recuperate, whereas the more poetic lettrists sought to reinvent the language of imagination and imagine the invention of a gift-exchange basis for poetry and art. Instead of applying formal internal criteria in assessing aesthetic value, the lettrists based aesthetic appreciation on the ability to create intimate poetic situations. Reading a lettrist poem encourages one to wander toward a specific appreciation of a serif or a handwritten letter. Even after they splintered into opposing factions, the lettrists imagined a sociopoetic language that led visual poetry into networked art.

6. Fluxus: Instructions for an Intimate Bureaucracy

During the early 1960s, the artists' networks and publications of multimedia texts expanded as artists, filmmakers, and writers joined together in groups first simply to promote their work outside the entrenched gallery system and later to experiment with collective and performative art, media, and poetry. Improvisation, spontaneity, and the immediate presence of participants played important roles in this work. But participation also occurred via mailings and through subscription to assemblings. The counterculture of Fluxus events, Allan Kaprow's Happenings, dances by Yvonne Rainier and Simone Forti, Andy Warhol's Factory, and screenings by Jonas Mekas still have an aura of immediacy so intense that these practices usually are explained, or apologized for, by reference to the immediate historical context (i.e., "the sixties"). These groups' and artists' assemblings, mailings of flyers, newspapers, and multimedia art have received less attention. The importance of the *media*tion and dissemination of this counterculture has also been discounted in favor of discussions of the immediate "experience" of those present, in part because the bulk of printed works does not fit easily into the categories of visual art or literature; also, these works are not well-known outside the groups of former participants and current collectors. This chapter reveals the lesser-known publications of Fluxus and other groups active in the 1960s.

The term *happening* conjures an image of an event that surprises and engages the participants present to witness it. And although critics have noted the important differences between Fluxus "events" and "Happenings," both terms are often used to describe presentations that sought an unmediated encounter with an audience (see also Henri 156–57). The participants' descriptions of and allusions to these events did not merely attempt to recapture their immediacy and spontaneity. Instead, in a significant twist, the participants considered the publications themselves as events and performances, not merely chronicles of performances. In fact, the name Fluxus was intended for a magazine publication, and the group involved sought to use media, mediation, and mass production as guides, or muses, for creative productions.[1] In fact, the term *Fluxus* might refer to a series of publications rather than membership in a group, because there was never a membership, and most of the artists involved never signed any of the various manifestos. In this sense, Fluxus *is* a series of publications and kits, and as the founder or *assembler* of Fluxus, George Maciunas, has explained, Fluxus "was going to be like a book, with a title, that's all" (Miller n.p.; see also Anderson, Fluxus 42). The Fluxus festivals grew from the Yam Festivals organized by Robert Wątts and George Brecht in late 1961. Watts had first borrowed the yam image as a reference to gift-giving festivals in New Guinea for his *Yam* collage constructed in 1960–61. Significantly, the first Yam Festivals were not planned as actual gatherings. Instead, they first consisted of mailings with instructions for participation. The results were later compiled as an "event" by Brecht and Watts. It is precisely this networking as event that suggests an alternative to the impression of the experimental arts in the 1960s as a "be here now" experience.

Alice Hutchins, in an interview, notes that Paul-Armand Gette, associated with *Revue Ou,* "started to make up small inexpensive editions of bound paper, works that he circulated in non-traditional ways, he asked different ones of us to contribute a page" (Milman, Circles 205).[2] The interviewer, Estera Milman, adds that "this was a distribution mechanism for new works in the same way that *An Anthology* was a kind of strategy for distributing the work and also a strategy for connecting the people" (206). *An Anthology,* originally planned as a periodical publication, with each contributor sending original artwork to be packaged with the works of others in a box or envelope, became the model for later assemblings. In the late 1950s, Robert Whitman and Lucas Samaras started a literary magazine, *Anthologist,* at Rutgers University that quickly became associated with Fluxus artists, including George Brecht, Robert Watts, and

Geoffrey Hendricks. Allan Kaprow, Roy Lichtenstein, and George Segal were also part of this group of artists who worked together for a few years from the late 1950s through the early 1960s. Significantly, Hutchins agrees that these publications were "like an alternative gallery," an alternative gallery event in itself (Milman, Circles 205).

Rather than secondary publicity, these publications used networking and publicity as canvases. Assemblings, networks, and media not only documented and publicized events, they also defined the goals of those alternative arts. As a precursor to the poststructuralist interrogation of the privileging of speech over writing in Western philosophy, the alternative art scene *challenged* the notion that dissemination and media are secondary to the artist's expression. The most obvious and well-known case of this interest in the mechanization of cultural invention is Warhol's desire "to become a machine" and to transform the studio into a "Factory." Still, histories of the Factory want to capture or describe what it was like to "be there" at that time, and galleries and museums have usually focused on paintings, prints, and sculptural works rather than the periodic publications and mailings associated with the Factory and other groups. In retrospectives of artists such as Nam June Paik, an influential founder of video art and a Fluxus artist, exhibits might include only a mention of the importance of mail art for their work. In spite of obvious explicit allusions to the connections between mail art and networks in Paik's artworks, scholars have not argued explicitly that Paik, and his Fluxus compatriots, produced networked art. Those works represent an indication that the alternative art scenes during the 1960s had a peculiar and intense fascination with networks' codes rather than any individual breaking through all codes with some supposedly outrageous performance. Since the emergence of the alternative art scene around Fluxus, participants have used the look of mass-produced media as a muse rather than as a distraction from self-expression, and the publications and mailings mark that peculiar trail. Paik's career trajectory (from mail-art networks and Fluxus events through video art to experiments in digital installations) has been similar to those of many artists interested in relationship technologies. Like the work of Dana Atchley, an early pioneer in the publication of assemblings, Paik's work epitomizes, and makes most sense in the context of, networked art.

Joseph Beuys, an influential performance and installation artist associated with Fluxus, sought solutions to social problems using the logic of art. His "social sculptures" depended on his presupposition that "everyone will be called an artist."[3] Beuys did not simply propose art as problem

solving in order to propose "beautifying theories" that would explain how to make the world more beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. He argued that "nothing else is able to change the social conditions or relations than the extended concept of art."[4] This necessary change would lead to evaluating labor conditions in order to encourage creativity; in this sense, he proposed an alternative to "the politics of today," including Marxist analyses of labor as well as capitalist organizations, because these are based on "conspiracy theories." With his slogan "Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler" (Everyone is an artist), he proposed organizations that would allow for the "possibility of decentralized self-administration"; organizations formed around this consideration of labor conditions in terms of encouraging creativity included the Green Party and FIU (Free International University).

Others associated with Fluxus shared Beuys's interest in infrastructure and spread those ideas through the decentralized networks. Through the Green Party, this problem-solving strategy also spread to broader political formations. Considering the experimental arts since the 1960s as what Beuys calls "social sculpture" shifts the interpretation of events, Happenings, and assemblings toward recognizing them as laboratories and figurative petri dishes for experimental cultures. In terms of art as a social experiment, the Fluxus use of the boxed kit form alludes not just to box games, travel kits, and jigsaw puzzles, but to elaborate IQ tests (for some as yet unknown intelligence). Given Beuys's work on social sculpture, this type of IQ test involves using the logic of art and game playing as sociopoetic strategy.

Although not a periodical, the *Prepared Box for John Cage* suggests how Cage's disciples and students, whether associated with Fluxus or not, considered the assembling-like boxed form central to their concerns, especially as it related to Cage's influence (Solway and Solway). A letter from Allan Kaprow asks for contributions for the issue. Jackson Mac Low's visual poem of densely written words in an oval shape on much closer examination spells out the words "Happy Birthday, John." Most of the contributions are letters about Cage. The work in this assembling reminds readers that Cage is the link between the concrete poets (see de Campos's poem dedicated to Cage discussed in chapter 4) and Fluxus. The Cageian link is the musical score as a vehicle for experimental culture. It allows for open structural parameters as well as a visual or concrete poetry geared toward a sociopoetic practice (i.e., it provokes the participant to play the visual score). In this regard, it is appropriate that Dick Higgins, who was trained in music by Henry Cowell and John Cage,

and helped to initiate publications around Fluxus, would write the entry on concrete poetry in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.*

George Maciunas himself planned for the organization of a school as well. In a prospectus for the New Marlborough Centre for the Arts, he described a think tank that would devote itself to "(1) study, research, experimentation, and development of various advanced ideas and forms in art, history of art, design and documentation; (2) teaching small groups of apprentices in subjects not found in colleges; (3) production and marketing of various products, objects and events developed at the centre; and, (4) organization of events and performances by residents and visitors of the centre" (Prospectus n.p.). In Fluxus participants' efforts to purge the art world of authors and creative genius, the works became models for alternative forms of social organization. Indeed, as Estera Milman explains, "Fluxus work (objects, paperworks, publications, festivals, and performances) and the movement's social structures became congruent and interchangeable" (*Fluxus* 7; see also Musgrave). Maciunas's manifesto for Fluxus explains this sociopoetic practice:

> FLUX ART: non art—amusement forgoes distinction between art and non-art forgoes artist's indispensability, exclusiveness, individuality, ambition, forgoes all pretension towards a significance, variety, inspiration, skill, complexity, profundity, greatness, institutional and commodity value. It strives for nonstructural, non-theatrical, nonbaroque, impersonal qualities of a simple, natural event, an object, a game, a puzzle, or a gag. It is a fusion of Spike Jones, gags, games, Vaudeville, Cage and Duchamp. (Milman, *Fluxus* 5, citing Maciunas, Fluxus Manifesto)[5]

Fluxus artists were combining a (parodic) emulation of the Bauhaus model, characterized by the production of "impersonal" conceptual games and puzzles (concrete poetry), with a situationist-like art as situations leading to an experimental culture and a rejection of art's commodity value. These concerns, and the mixing of these tendencies, appeared in a number of Fluxus publications. This mixing of poets and artists associated with supposedly opposed tendencies occurred literally in the inclusion of particular contributors associated with concrete poetry, situational Happenings, and anti-art.

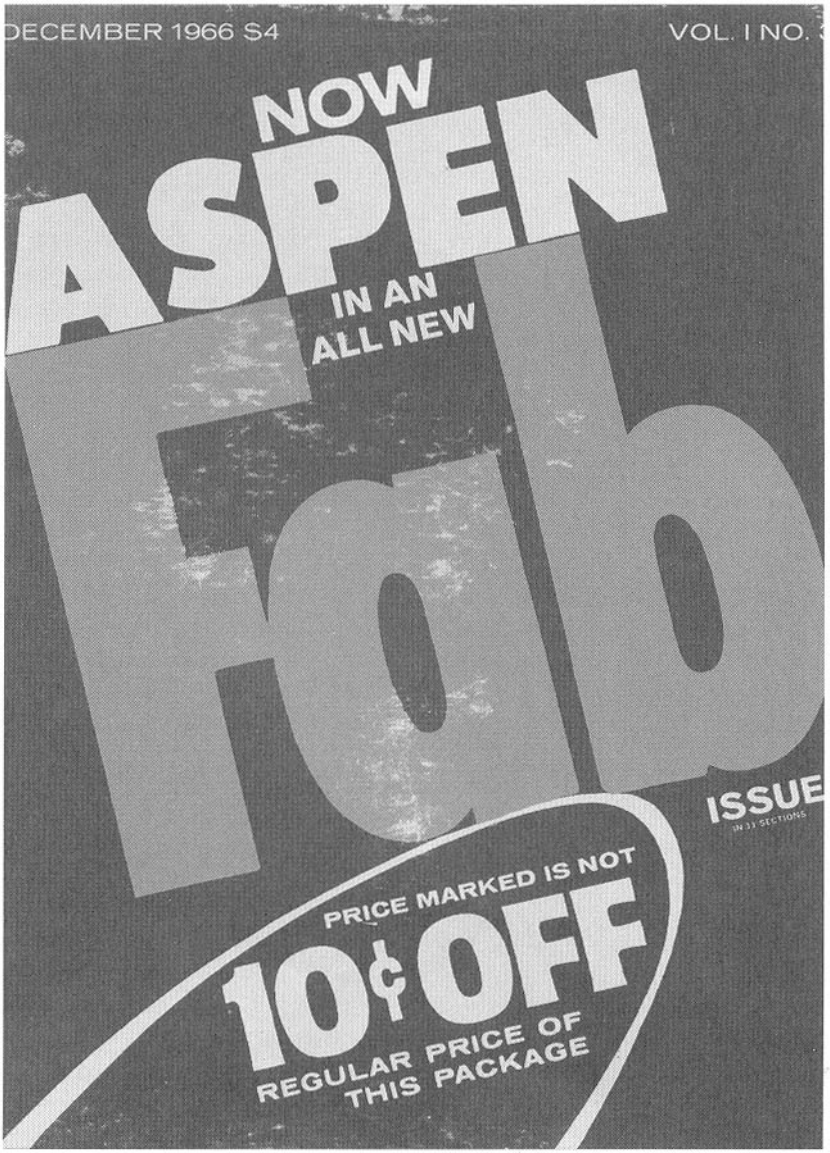
Maciunas designed an issue of *Aspen* (vol. 1, no. 8, 1968) that illustrates explicitly his interest in new forms of systems theory. The subtitle of the issue is "Art information and science information share the same world and language." Robert Morris's "Los Angeles project" suggests the

shared fascination with art, technology, and information systems, especially in these networks of cultural work looking for new maps for contemporary experience. He proposes an ecological experiment in which he will bury air conditioners and heaters and measure the effects. Presumably you could visit the site as a national park. Morris explains that what "miniature golf did for the game, this park will do for the national park system." Edward Ruscha's "parking lot" includes an aerial photo of thirty-four parking slots in a lot, and, similarly, for "lead shot," Richard Serra ran an experiment in which he dropped lead shot from an airplane and measured the size of the resulting holes. Another work about landscapes from above is the documentation of Dennis Oppenheim's well-known "ecologic projects," which includes photos of canceled crop and other crop art. Robert Smithson, well-known for his earth and landscape artworks, has a work in the assembling about landscape structures titled "strata." These absurdist projects function as conceptual scores as well as highlight the interest in experimental procedures to change the way people understand the urban and posturban contemporary landscape, just as the situationists wanted to change psychogeography. Although Maciunas edited the special issue of *Aspen* described above, it was not a Fluxus boxed periodical. In the first issue of *Aspen,* Phyllis Johnson explains in her editor's letter that she wanted to produce a "magazine in a Box . . . harking back to the original meaning of the word *[magazine]* as a storehouse, a cache, a ship laden with stores" (n.p.). Each issue represented the concerns of an experimental art group; included were Warhol's pop art, McLuhan's global village, Fluxus, and the use of structuralism. Influential theorists associated with the art scene during those years, such as McLuhan, Cage, Barthes, and Sontag, produced important work for these *Aspen* publications as well as guest edited or designed individual issues. Before it embraced these contemporary art and cultural issues, *Aspen* resembled a printer's periodical concerned with ornamentation rather than *ideas* of packaging.

In the spring of 1966, *Aspen* initiated its new agenda with an issue designed by Quentin Fiore. Fiore had collaborated with McLuhan on *The Medium Is the Massage,* and the Fiore-designed issue includes a poster for the book. It also includes John Cage's essay "How to Improve the World" as a poster. The format of *Aspen* was the ideal vehicle for McLuhan's effort to advocate a technology of connections and interactions; television had not yet caught up with this boxed magazine as medium, and no one had yet imagined the nonsequential contours of the World Wide Web. In this assembling, McLuhan had found a perfect "vehicle" for his observation that the "medium is the massage" and his hope that artists would

respond to this potential rather than simply assume that the distribution medium is secondary to the content. Those now interested in webs and multimedia might look at this boxed periodical as a particularly apt model for work that responds to the Internet's potential as a distribution medium as massage, rather than the Internet's power to deliver content.

Andy Warhol designed the December 1966 issue of *Aspen*. Warhol's



Cover of *Aspen*, Andy Warhol (December 1966).

Selected contents of *Aspen* (December 1966).

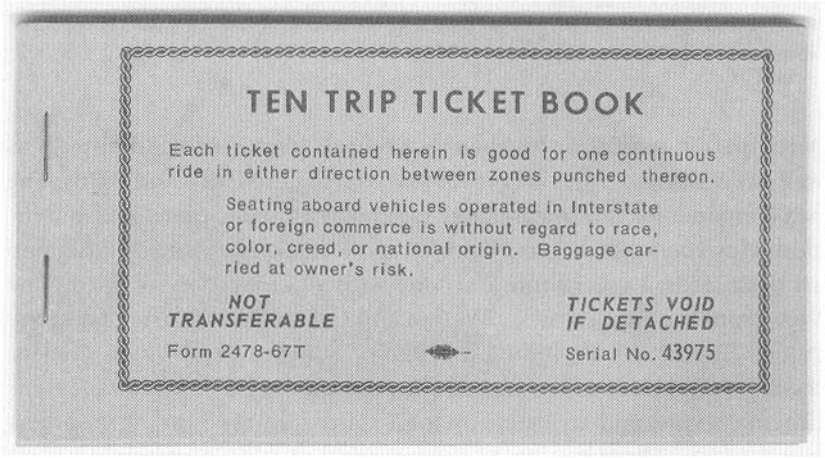
Newspaper from *Aspen* (December 1966).

participation indicates that these periodicals played a role in pop art as well as Fluxus and other art movements during the 1960s and 1970s. The box container for the Warhol issue resembles a Fab detergent box and includes instructions for doing laundry on the back. The issue includes pop art flash cards; a special music section with a Lou Reed essay titled "The View from the Bandstand"; a Warhol and Gerard Malanga–edited newspaper, "The Plastic Exploding Inevitable," with reviews by Jonas Mekas, the key exhibitor of experimental films during the 1960s and 1970s at his Cinematheque; and an article by John Wilcox on the "underground establishment." There is a flip book by Warhol of a kiss that, while not effective at reproducing the animated motion of a kiss, uses the serial images to stress the still seriality of a pop sensibility. There is a book of tickets to a Berkeley conference on LSD, with short articles printed on each ticket stub by Richard Alpert, Timothy Leary, and others. This "ten trip ticket book" borrows the authentic look of official tickets to present an extended examination of the pun on "trip." Taken alone, any one of these texts or objects might have an important place in the history of pop art. Few critics outside the circle of participants know of these collected pop art works. These works use official tickets, daily newspapers, and flash cards not simply as ways to package reports from the underground

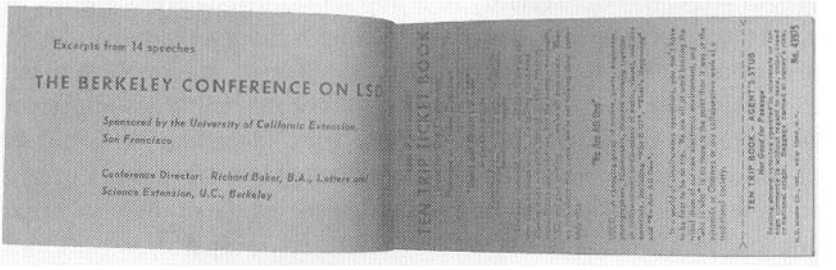
ironically in mainstream or popular media, but also to suggest an alternative bureaucracy, built in the Factory, dedicated to intimate aesthetic situations.

Daily Bul, a periodical begun in 1957–58 by Pol Bury, influenced the Fluxus periodicals and focused on works outside mainstream art of the time. The issue of *Daily Bul* titled "Who Are You? Qui êtes-vous?" includes a series of works by artists who were asked the question "Qui êtes-vous?" John Cage's contribution is a copy of the letter requesting work for this issue of *Daily Bul,* and Christo's contribution is a picture of his wrapped storefront.[6] Much like other poems that borrow a bureaucratic look, Nam June Paik's contribution is his business card with a quote attributed to Sartre written on it: "I am always what I am and I am not always what I am." The card reads: "Nam June Paik vertreter der Tokyo Taisho co."[7]

The Fluxus assembling *Dé-coll/age,* subtitled *bulletin der fluxus*



"Ten trip ticket book" from *Aspen* (December 1966).



"Ten trip tickets book" from *Aspen* (December 1966).

und happening avantgarde, compiled by Wolf Vostell, began publishing in the early 1960s. The July 1967 issue of *Dé-coll/age,* bound in a cover of the *Figaro* newspaper printed on card stock, includes contributions from the concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard; the composer and editor of the assembling *Revue Ou,* Henry Chopin; Ben Vautier; Daniel Spoerri; and Diter Rot (a.k.a. Dieter Roth). There is a police department letter to Vostell explaining the arrest of Charlotte Moorman for undressing during a performance.[8] The issue includes a series of works by Gustav Metzger, who later initiated the 1974 "Art Strike," on the "Destruction in Art Symposium" in London. Metzger's leaflet announces the symposium and explains the phrase "auto-destructive art." A series of letters, all signed by Metzger, follow this leaflet about the planning for events in Germany and London. And a series of photos document the major action from the symposium, staged by the Wiener Aktionismus (Viennese Actionism) group, in which people sat inside or under the eviscerated bloody bodies of large animals. The members of this group—Hermann Nitsch, Günther Brus, Otto Mühl, and, later, Valie Export—sought ways to involve the audience as participants in intense situations (O'Dell 6). Metzger also includes a negative review of the symposium from the *Guardian* of September 9, 1966, that reads in part: "The destroyers-in-art include writers who obliterate words, burn books, and cut odd words out of dictionaries and paste them up haywire. They tear books apart and shuffle the pages so the narrative now reads surprisingly (which is art). Words are displaced and lines transposed in a new and meaningful way. Some newspapers, it seems, especially in their hurried first editions, have long possessed a natural aptitude for the new and the meaningful. That's art. Or is it? More often it is error. Just as destruction-in-art is mainly perverse, ugly, and anti-social." This symposium, on the dialetic between destruction and creation, included its own negative and dismissive review as if to include an autodestructive element in the mix.

Vostell photocopied a series of programs by Ad Reinhardt written vertically over the newspaper's negative review of the symposium. They give instructions about program painting. In addition to these works, the issue includes documentation of the papers presented at the symposium on autodestructive art, including George Maciunas's paper about Fluxus, Jean Tinguely's statement, and papers by Dom Sylvester Houédard, Milan Knizak, Yoko Ono, and Vostell. At the symposium, Yoko Ono also wanted to figuratively cut the line separating audience and participant in her performance, *Cut Piece,* performed a few times between 1964 and 1966, as well as comment tongue in cheek about the possibility of cutting

this particular piece from the exhibition. Spectators were offered a pair of scissors to cut the clothes from her body. The actual effect of this performance was not always pleasurable for the audience, who did not want to participate in this voyeuristic assault (O'Dell 7; see also Stiles 278).

Fluxus did not occur in a vacuum. The inclusion of such a varied group of contributors in this symposium (concrete poets, Fluxus participants, sound poets, and more), and even the self-destructive negative review, illustrates how these usually disparate tendencies mixed and merged. Not surprisingly, the mainstream press bundled it all together in order to shrug off everything from visual and sound poetries to the Wiener Aktionismus event as "perverse, ugly, and anti-social." To understand the tendencies does not necessitate only interpreting these tendencies as separate. This publication, and many others since the 1960s, includes complicated relationships among the contributors. The issue also includes a description by Alison Knowles of her *big book* (with photos), and she explains in precise detail how "the big book is not a product, but a process."[9] *The big book* (1967), which had pages that were eight feet high and four feet wide, contained a grass tunnel, a fan, a hot plate, a mattress, lights, cookies, and silk-screen prints. Knowles also planned for "a real waterfall on page 2, and an elevator running up the edge of another page." It suggests how one could literally live in an ever-changing learning book-machine, and how, by interacting with the contents of the book, the resident learns to read. She explains that those "who read the big book, who take this journey through metaphors, will be on a different quest and will arrive at different goals." But "while they are in the big book they will be as mobile kinetic audio visual energetic" as the book itself (in Vostell n.p.).

Among the other Fluxus publications, *The New York Weekly Breeder* had the strongest connections to correspondence art, and its mailing lists later served as the beginnings of the mail-art networks. Ken Friedman explains that the point when "the Fluxus publishing ethos came directly into the realm of contemporary mail art was in *Amazing Facts Magazine* . . . a crudely assembled publication created at Fluxus West [Friedman's base of operations] in 1968. We gathered our mail, put it into a folio with a cover, and sent it out. The idea lasted one issue, but established a notion of gathering as the editorial principle of a magazine" (Interview 15; see also Friedman, Early). Friedman notes that the Breeder was "both a joke and way to establish regular, weekly contact with other artists."

In a special issue of *aV TRE* dedicated, posthumously, to the Fluxus founder (Paik, *aV TRE*), Larry Miller interviewed Maciunas. Maciunas explains that Fluxus is "more like a way of doing things." He goes on to elaborate what this entails by repeating that "Fluxus is gag-like . . . a good

inventive gag. That's what we're doing." In order for the gaglike element to work, objects and events must have a very simple "monomorphic" structure. In fact, when one examines the issue of *aV TRE* and the earlier issues of *ccV TRE,* one finds that they share a simple and immediate visual joke on newspapers—not only the headlines and the news stories, but the organization of the editorial board and the (dis)connection between the captions and the photographic illustrations. Fluxus offers a way to reduce concepts and ideas to simple gaglike events or objects. When taken up by the audience (that is, when a reader "gets" the gag or joke), these deceptively small *gifts* can lead to more profound interpretations. The reduction to a monomorphic structure resembles concrete poetry's reduction of language to a structural conceptual game, and the potlatchlike festivity with gag-gift giving that Fluxus produces resembles the spirit of the lettrists and situationists (see S. Anderson 52). In a number of the event announcements and manifestos, Fluxus claims to include "concretism" and "lettrisme."[10] Even though the two variants of visual poetry disagreed, the merger passed with little critical comment. Assemblings mixed and merged without regard to the previous contexts. In participating in these assemblings, the contributors invented a hybrid tendency.

John Lennon demonstrates this tendency in a work discussed in chapter 2: the supposed facsimile of Lennon's diary for 1968. The conceptual work depends on reading the same line over and over again throughout the entire diary. Because of Lennon's celebrity status, the reader feels compelled to read the diary carefully for any new information about an important cultural figure. Lennon spoofs the celebrity tell-all diary form by repeating the same daily sequence on every page: "Got up, went to work, came home, watched telly, went to bed." Written in pencil, the entries are increasingly scrawled toward the end of the year, and the diary ends with one last "memorandum": "Remember to buy Diary 1969."

As discussed earlier, the gag depends on a fan's narcissistic identification with a celebrity, and the joke cheats the fan's expectations. The diary also suggests, in parodic form, that a celebrity's life is, in fact, incredibly boring and uneventful. Whereas celebrities supposedly offer the new and exciting, and their personal lives offer the potential for scandalous spectacle, Lennon's "Diary" pokes fun at the desire to live life vicariously through the exploits of celebrities. Like much of the work in assemblings, the gag appears simply as a joke of recognition. Once the reader "gets" the clever joke, there is nothing left to understand.

This funny work, similar to much of the work in the publications discussed here, includes a deceptively simple joke that can function as a poem. First, it is just a joke of recognition: you simply get the joke and

move on. Second, as the joke stays with you, it teaches how humor, in this case the joke of repetition and recognition, can serve as a memory device. You remember the joke as it corrosively changes the situations we encounter everyday. It writes graffiti on habituated conceptions. It functions as a joke time bomb.

In his book on intermedia, Dick Higgins describes the postcognitive alternative to the cognitive model of education. He explains that Fluxus work fits into the postcognitive model. First, he defines cognition as the "process of becoming known by perception, reasoning or intuition," and it also concerns "the expressionistic, self-revealing, and uncovering of reality (transcend personal view) in order to interpret the world in a new way" (Intermedia 20–21). The cognitive model attempts to interpret and describe reality and, at least in its current incarnation, attempts to postulate the abstract rules of supposedly pure, unadulterated thought. Conceiving of social interaction in terms of an algorithmic thought-code machine, cognitive explanations describe supposed origins of "moves" in a thought-game rather than generating novel situations. The postcognitive works set out to *play* the game rather than determine who, or what, made the rules. In short, the postcognitive creates novel realities. Henry Flynt, who coined the phrase *concept art* in 1959, began using the term *postcognitive* to describe the impact of conceptual artwork.

In fact, if we attempt to find a logic in Fluxus activities, we see that they resemble Zen koans (the thought puzzles that Buddhist monks meditate on as they strive for spiritual enlightenment) more than reflections or descriptions of social or artistic realities. These activities/koans have a peculiar structure that allows for both a simplicity and an alchemical disruption or "breaking" of the frame of reference. Greg Ulmer describes this structure and gives as an example a quote from Joseph Beuys:

> Another decisive Fluxus element was the "lightness and mobility of the material." The Fluxus artists were fascinated by the opening up of the simplest materials to the total contents of the world. . . . [Beuys]: "Everything from the simplest tearing of a piece of a paper to the total change-over of human society could be illustrated." (*Applied* 240)

Robert Pincus-Witten goes on to explain how this simplicity works on the audience. He writes that "Fluxus makes ideas reachable through gags. You can get it quickly" (Introduction 25). He also suggests one obvious outcome of the effort to make the ideas quickly accessible and available: "By designation, a Fluxus work must be cheap, and mass-producible" (25). What is amazing about these works, and their importance for the FluxAcademy, is how they function to make the most particular (even

autobiographical) elements into widely disseminated ideas. Beuys's transformation of his autobiographical art into first a Fluxus program and then a grassroots participational political movement, and finally into the Green Party, offers the most obvious example of this transformation. Fluxus gaglike events, when taken up by the audience, can lead to many transformations, like bits and pieces of Beuys's autobiography later provoking the foundation of the Green Party.

Perhaps one of the most important Fluxus kits is the *Flux Post Kit,* which embodies many of the strategies and techniques of the intimate bureaucracies found in later mail-art networks. The kit includes a post office mail box, canceling stamps, a number of postcard artworks including Ben Vautier's "postman's choice," and other post office–oriented works. "Postman's choice" consists of a postcard stamped and addressed on both sides with two different addresses. The postman must choose which address to use. This kit, then, contains in miniature form all the elements found later in mail-art networks and other intimate bureaucracies. It uses the trappings and structures of a bureaucratic system—postage stamps, rubber stamps, postal systems of distribution, and even a post office box—to produce a sociopoetic experiment. The kit compels

Fluxus Collective, *Flux Post Kit* 7 (1968), including work by Ken Friedman, James Riddle, Ben Vautier, and Robert Watts. Fluxus edition assembled by George Maciunas. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit. Photograph by Scott Hyde.

the participant to become a mail artist, which includes much more than simply mailing art. It includes the dynamics involved in using the bureaucratic postal system for intimate aesthetic ends.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the experimental arts continued to attract attention for the immediacy of performance art even as the circles of mail-art and multimedia networks exploded to include almost cultlike followings. On the one hand, only recently have galleries, critics, and museums begun recognizing publications as artworks in and of themselves.[11] On the other hand, zines have now begun receiving more attention in the popular press, on-line, and even in gallery exhibits. This trend will no doubt continue as niche distribution systems supersede mass marketing strategies. A social sculpture does not merely comment on the production of art, but also on the production of specific types of social networks. As a forum for this extension, one can consider the Fluxus publications as the transition into, and kitlike instructions for, the quintessential art and literature of the twenty-first century: networked art and intimate bureaucracies.

7. Assemblings as Intimate Bureaucracies

At least since the 1950s, some artists and poets have sought innovative ways to reach their audiences and collaborators. These artists have sought to circumvent the gallery system by means of direct mailings and alternative distribution networks. During the 1950s, such networks became the driving force of a new art world scene that encouraged the production of works difficult to classify or hang on a wall. By the late 1960s, one of the most important features of the new distribution network was the periodic mailing of very small editions (fifty to five hundred) containing prints and poems, pamphlets, and small art objects, collected in folios, bound volumes, or boxes. Such collections typically consisted of one page or object from each contributor. The assembling system generally required that each contributor send the entire run of the contribution to the compiler, who in turn distributed the collection to subscribers, or sometimes simply to all the participants.

Participants and critics have referred to these periodical issues as *assemblings,* alluding to the editorial policy of compiling original artworks without editorial exclusions, as well as to Richard Kostelanetz's influential periodical compilation called *Assembling.* Sometimes the compilers make no changes at all to the material, and sometimes the participants give editors free rein to reformat and package the works into an entirely new periodical-as-artwork. Because assemblings may include a wide variety of

materials—visual and concrete poems; rubber-stamp art; xerography; small, three-dimensional found art; fine-press printing; recycled or *détourned* cartoons and advertisements; mock examples of mass-produced printed objects; hand-drawn scribbles and pictures—blurring the boundaries between craftwork and artwork, it is difficult to describe them as one would a single medium like painting or film. Their contents may also reflect the artists' participatory and interactive networks by including recipes, scores, instructions, questionnaires, forms, and manifestos. For example, in one issue of Kostelanetz's *Assembling,* the editors asked more than eighty participants (everyone who received the previous issue of *Assembling*) to respond to the question, "If you could apply for a grant of $500,000, what precisely would you propose to do?" (Kostelanetz and Cole). At least for the time it takes the reader to daydream about the possibilities of spending half a million dollars to make art, the reader is asked to become an artist unbound by economic constraints.

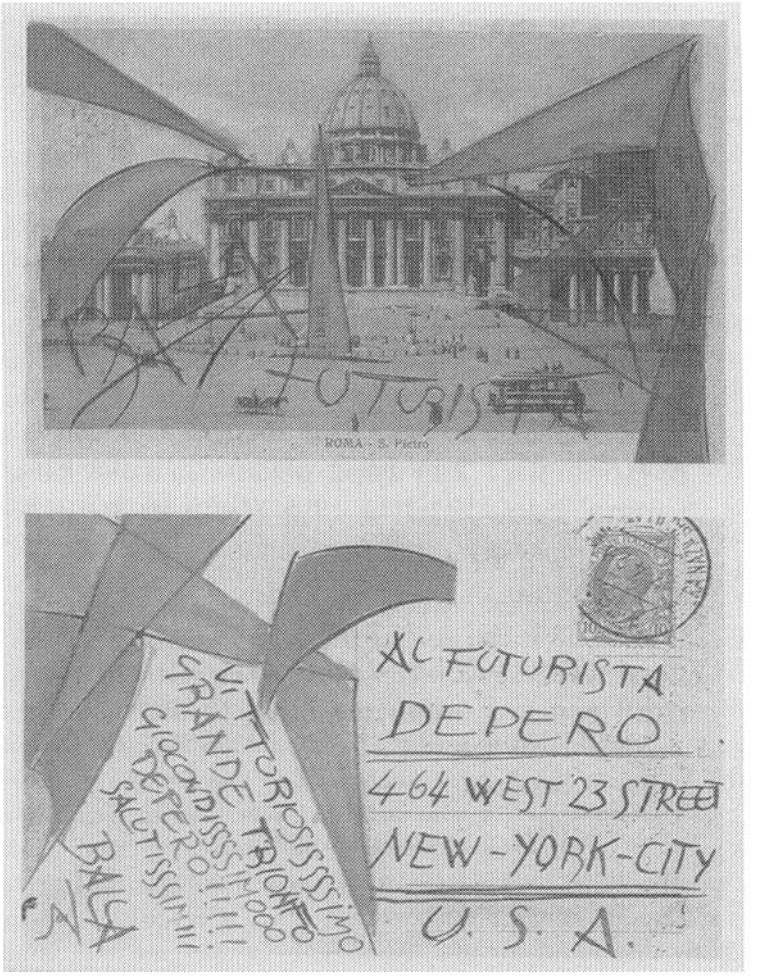
With a few exceptions, assemblings emerged from, or were influenced by, the underground art scene of the 1960s. The exceptions are significant and constitute a historical context for the idea of the collaborative publication as an artwork in itself. Marcel Duchamp's dada publication *The Blind Man,* published in 1917, proclaimed on its front cover, "The second number of *The Blind Man* will appear as soon as *you* have sent sufficient material for it."[1] The editors, Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood, did not turn the magazines into artworks in themselves, unlike assemblings, but instead used the publications as more traditional art news forums. One bibliographer of alternative periodicals, John Held, argues that the first assembling was the "cooperative periodical *Spawn,* initiated in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1917." Held explains that "in the third issue, the editorial stated that, '*Spawn* is the embodiment of an idea and is co-operative in the strictest sense of the word. Each man pays for his page and is absolutely responsible for what goes on it. *Spawn* is a magazine in name only. . . . It has no ax to grind or propaganda to propound'" (17). Although not assemblings, a group of periodicals published in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., *The View, Camera Work, Rogue, Others,* the *Little Review,* and *Contact*) played a crucial role in disseminating and encouraging experimental writing and visual poetry (Rothenberg).[2] These magazines combined their interest in modernist experimental forms with a focus on expanding the poetic domain to become more public and political; in that sense, they would inspire the production of magazines as artworks later in the century. In 1929, *Feuillets Inutiles* began as an actual assembling (it was published until 1975)

(Maret). Each issue consisted of original artworks on single sheets contained in a school chapbook cover. With its unique montages on refunctioned chapbooks, *Feuillets Inutiles* was much more self-consciously an artwork than either *Spawn* or *The Blind Man.*

Modernist and avant-garde art in the first half of the twentieth century is famous for many of the attributes that appear more widely in assemblings at the end of the century. As early as 1918, Kurt Schwitters had used rubber stamps in his work, as had the Russian futurists. Marcel Duchamp made one work in the form of a postcard. But these earlier practitioners thought of their work as mailed art rather than mail art. In his poetry, the futurist Marinetti wanted to stress the phonetic suggestions of particular type sizes, layout, and coloring. He was interested in capturing the scream, the growl, and the shout of the voice. The Italian futurists did include some mail art as ornamentation on their postcards, but they did not seek to examine the postal system or any distribution *system* as an artwork. The work in assemblings wanted to produce visual allusions and rhymes rather than refer to a phonetic equivalent.

Constructivist publications in the 1920s combined the interest in publishing as crucial to artistic production and the shift of the artist's and poet's role to that of engineer. This call for a bureaucratic art worker is similar to that heard from the later publishers of assemblings. The constructivist magazines included *Lef, G, Disk,* and *Blok.* Many of the leaders of the European avant-garde, such as Theo Van Doesburg and Hans Richter, contributed work. One issue of *Lef* includes an article by Osip Brik in which he praises Rodchenko for his "organizing talent," which is reminiscent of the talent of later artists known for organizing huge tasks, such as Christo's *Running Fence* or his wrapping of entire islands or, more modestly, the production of assemblings by nonjudgmental compilers.

Futurist postcard.



Futurist postcards.

After World War II, in the 1950s, visual poetry again expanded the poetic domain to a sociopoetic practice. In that decade, the hunger for more forms and especially for new venues for expanded notions of poetic practice led to an explosion of interest in experimental art through magazines such as *VVV* and the *Experimental Review* that returned to many of the artistic and poetic concerns of the 1920s and 1930s. With the emergence of a neodada sensibility in the 1950s and 1960s, art groups again turned to the collaborative periodical as a way of distributing their poems and art.[3]

General histories of underground, experimental, and neo-avant-

garde activities during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s include only peripheral discussions of these crucial distribution systems.[4] The art scene of that period is usually characterized in terms of the immediacy and presence of performances and events to which the audience is witness, but, as I have argued in chapter 6, it was actually more dependent for its success on documentation and dissemination along with packaging and the rituals of distribution. Artists were frustrated by infrastructural problems in making and reaching an audience and at the same time desired to democratize the making of art. The mainstream art galleries were exhibiting well-known artists and, for the most part, still focusing on paintings rather than more experimental forms. So the artists turned to new distribution systems, like assemblings, that came to resemble a new form of art in itself: networked art. The most influential group of artists associated with the move toward alternative exhibition and distribution systems was Fluxus. The video artist Nam June Paik expresses Fluxus's concern with democratizing networks—playing on Karl Marx's world-changing phrase "Seize the means of production"—by exclaiming "Marx: Seize the production-medium. Fluxus: Seize the distribution-medium!"[5] With slogans like these guiding them, artists and poets realized that periodical production and distribution could become the canvas for a new sociopoetic art.

The attitude of "everyone an artist" that often appeared in the conceptual work of Fluxus helped to motivate the emergence of mail-art networks and assemblings. The editor of *Art/Life,* Joe Cardella, for example, worked with Alison Knowles and Yohima Wada at the Fluxus-influenced performance space "The Kitchen" before he began his assembling. Not only did the "flux kits," a collection of small art objects packaged in a box as a kitlike puzzle, serve as models for boxed assemblings, but Fluxus's invention of fictitious organizations and official codes and stamps greatly influenced the attitude of some of these assemblings.

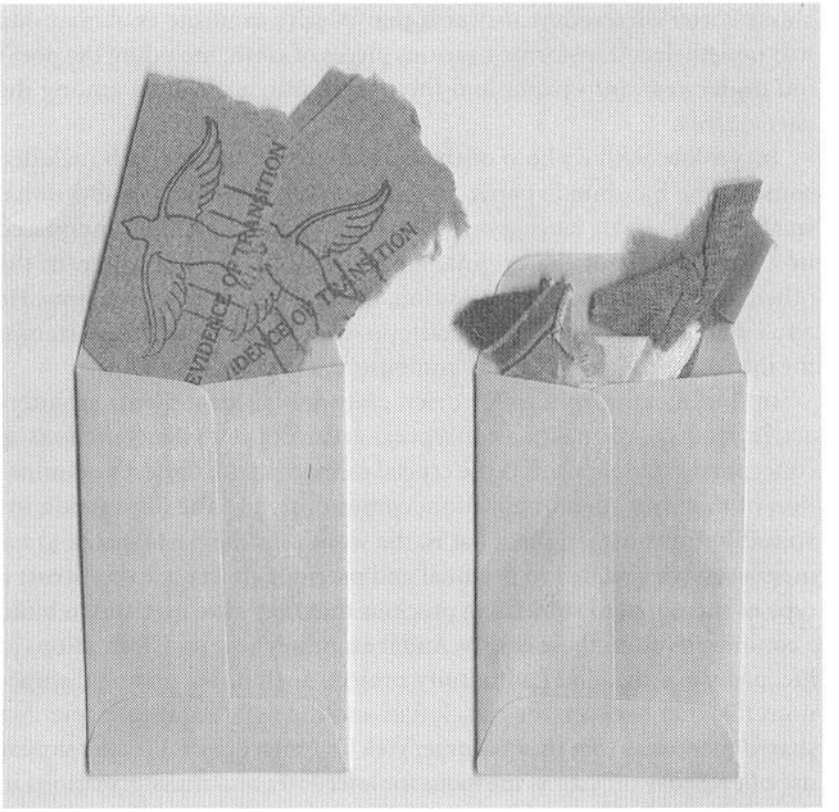
Johanna Drucker points to the sociopolitical dimension of publication and distribution practices when she uses the phrase "democratic multiples" to describe a particular type of artist's book (69). This type of book appeared in the second half of the twentieth century as widely and inexpensively available photographic and printing technologies, and a growing interest in forms that avoided the gallery system, allowed for a forum for communalist libertarian impulses, especially in works associated with Fluxus. Brian Wallis makes a similar point about artists' books embracing alternatives to received ideas about art making. The changes in reproduction technologies, the availability of alternative exhibition

spaces, and the interest in conceptual art allowed artists to make books that took advantage of works that used "the copy not the original; the cheap and ubiquitous, not the precious; the laconic, not the expressive; the analytic, not the emotive; the provisional, not the eternal" (94). The interest in democratic multiples was also a driving force in the production and distribution of assemblings.

The unresolved conflict between collective action and individualistic artisanal production also appears in the role of craft in assemblings and intimate bureaucracies. Assemblings combine insistence on artisanal craft and, paradoxically, global coverage through mechanized reproduction. In this sense, these publications occupy a special place in twentieth-century art because they chart the emergence of craft in the age of mass production. The contributors and editors make fetishes of print techniques, paper making, and book and box binding at the same time they are fascinated with huge bureaucratic systems of production and distribution. The artists involved in producing assemblings both cherish the careful construction of individualized visual poems and insist that readers appropriate, recycle, plagiarize, and forever alter their codes and messages. Because assemblings are an explicit rejection of traditional aesthetic categories and institutional structures, an artists' periodical will often surprise the reader with its contributors' and compilers' careful craft.

The most successful intimate bureaucracy involving craft as conceptual art involved the Crackerjack Kid, a.k.a. Chuck Welch, who took his alias from the "surprise in every package" slogan. Welch edited a special issue of *Commonpress* (no. 47, 1983) on "material metamorphosis." The project involved one hundred artists from sixteen countries, including Vittore Baroni, Buster Cleveland, Robin Crozier, and Ray Johnson. Welch asked each artist to send a *favorite* old piece of cotton clothing. He also wanted the participants to recall stories related to these personal and precious items of clothing. Because he was asking them to give up their favorite pieces of clothing, the project's results would function as a type of memorial for the precious items. Welch shredded and pulverized the material he received into cotton rag pulp, processed the pulp into purple watermarked paper and envelopes, and stamped the paper with a bird-shaped cancel mark with the words "material metamorphosis" in the invented cancel circle. He then sent the paper and envelopes to the participants and asked them to use the stationery to discuss the project in terms of the concept of self-identity.

Writing from his home at the time in Omaha, Nebraska, Welch explained that "this issue of *Commonpress* is a documentation of material



Selected contents from "Material Metamorphosis" in a volume of *Commonpress*.

metamorphosis, a one year project combining paper making and mail art. Having been a paper maker and active mail artist for several years, I improvised a way to combine both art forms in the format of an international mail art exchange and exhibition" (*Commonpress*, n.p.). One participant, Vagrich Bakhchanyan, included a "Russian newspaper article with a picture of Lenin" instead of a story or explanation. Bern Porter, the experimental poet (sometimes associated with Fluxus) and self-proclaimed "Director of Institute of Advanced Thinking," told Welch that "the webbed material I sent you is part of underwear. I cut with scissors the front and back of the underwear. The webbed material is two sides of the underwear. I wore that underwear for years and the older it got, the more droopy it became. It stretched and stretched, and has or had no sentimental value. The day you telephoned that underwear was in the kitchen garbage bag at the bottom of the bag." What is remarkable

about Porter's irreverent answer is that Welch's exquisite craftsmanship had nonetheless transformed various pieces of cloth, including the poet's old underwear, into paper and then again into a dialogue among the participants.

In a folder with a photo of the project on the cover, Welch included some of the handmade paper and envelopes as well as two additional small envelopes. He labeled one of these "material evidence" and placed in it small pieces of the original cloth used to make the paper. In the other, labeled "evidence of transition," he included paper fragments. He also included two other larger envelopes with bird-shaped cancel stamps for the reader to use for further response and dissemination.

In the "metamorphosis" project, craft neither ornaments an interactive process nor makes a conceptual artwork pretty, but functions as conceptual art itself. Craft is the crucial element in the project's examination of memory, memorialization, community, and the disjunction involved in transformations. That is, the work asks the participants to remember stories related to personal and precious clothing, to construct a type of memorial to something precious that they have lost, and to build a community from these efforts. And it examines how transformations in life, papermaking, and community projects include surprising disjunctions like that between the old clothes and the new, beautiful paper and shared memories that they become. Welch's project resembles the similar use of everyday objects as the locus for anecdotes and transformations in the earlier work of Daniel Spoerri and Emmett Williams.

The artists who contributed to assemblings often worked outside traditional art world contexts and market forces. The works they produced sometimes resemble fine paper and printing craft, as in the *Commonpress* issue discussed above, and sometimes resemble more modest handicrafts. The assembling *Busta Sorpresa,* which began appearing in the 1990s in small editions of fifty, includes delicately hand-produced folders with several different ties or closures (see, for example, issue 9). The second issue has a red cardboard piece threaded through two holes to keep the folder sealed. Issues include pictures produced with colored inks, handwriting, collage techniques, rubber stamps, and sewing, each carefully mounted in a unique fashion. Issue 20, for example, comes in a little plastic box, 9½ by 6½ inches. *Busta Sorpresa* encourages a kind of fetishism of packaging and unwrapping.

One contribution to issue 20 of *Busta Sorpresa* consists of a piece of brown paper towel with a string through it and smaller pieces of tissue paper mounted on the towel. The tactility of the piece establishes an in-

timacy with the producer that could not happen with a flat picture, yet it is made with a common, mass-produced, disposable object. Even the most banal objects acquire a preciousness that is not about the *cutesyness* of kitsch but about an intimacy that does not photocopy or mass-produce. Rather than advocating low-tech mass production, this assembling sends the unique as a way to celebrate intimate connections between artists and readers. The meanings of these works are secondary to their craftwork as conceptual art.

Because artists contributing to assemblings depend on the postal system rather than the gallery system, they might live in rural communities far from art markets. One assembler who lives and works in a rural mountainous area of Pennsylvania told me that although he has difficulty traveling far from his home during the winter months, the network of collaborators of which he is a part extends around the globe. In this way, assemblings literally represent life on the fringe, suggesting how isolated geographic locations can come to be decentralized nodes in the formation of a fringe culture. The isolated assembler is not simply an isolated craftsperson. His or her craftwork depends on networks of other artists. Because the works themselves reference networking as conceptual artwork, assemblings have more in common with contemporary conceptual art rather than with ornamental crafts. At the same time, assemblings rescue crafts from the disdain of some art critics who dismiss crafts as the result of rote skill rather than conceptual aesthetic innovation. Analyzing the specific influence of these artists' networks and collaborations helps highlight the conceptual aspect involved in their handcraft. This art at the fringe becomes connected to electronic telecommuting to urban cyberspaces. Networked art no longer requires geographic proximity.

Craft no longer merely ornaments an object's message, nor does it simply represent a naive presentation of skill as opposed to artistic or theoretical insights. Here craft represents an array of conceptual issues, including (1) the use of visual craftwork to call attention to conventions, conventionalities, and the personal connections among artists; (2) the use of a personal imprint in something like pop art's handmade readymades (i.e., the mass-produced object adorned with dripping paint or other signs of artisanal production); (3) the use of craft to heighten the intimacy of the reading process, as part of a process of immersion in the printed multimedia field, to unsettle habituated reading practices and to add delight and entertainment; and (4) the use of obvious and naive craft to highlight the idea of "everyone an artist."

In *The Magazine Network,* Géza Perneczky examines assemblings in

terms of trends in alternative art. From her historical perspective, one can see how the issues and concerns of the assemblings arose from the conjunction of Fluxus, situationism, concrete poetry, chance strategies from John Cage's music, pop appropriations of popular culture, punk music, and underground or countercultural political movements. Stephen Perkins offers the most systematic examination of assemblings and mail-art networks from a social and art historical perspective. Like Welch and Perneczky, he argues for the necessity of a social analysis of the artists' networks. In his efforts to trace their origins, he discovers "that at some point this technique [assembling] crossed over from the science fiction community to the art community (further research in this area is needed)" (Introduction 8). Although the science fiction fanzines do not share similar conceptual or aesthetic concerns with any of the assemblings, they do present a model of distribution. Through "amateur press associations," the members of sci-fi fan clubs distribute collectively produced fanzines. One member simply collects all the submissions, staples them together, and mails the finished product to all the members. In attempting to chart the specific lineage of assemblings, Perkins argues that Dana Atchley, from Victoria, British Columbia, compiled the "first assembling magazine made up of multiple submissions from contributors" in his *Notebook One,* compiled in late 1969 and early 1970. Countering Perkins's claim, Ken Friedman contends that *Omnibus News* was "the first truly gathered or accumulated magazine in multiple editions [that] preceded [Atchley's] better known *Ace Space Company*" (Friedman quoted in Perkins, Introduction; see also Nigel).[6] Both of these assemblings began appearing in 1968—the former in the late summer and the latter in the fall of that year.

Whether or not Atchley produced the first assembling, I am interested in how his ideas and procedures developed into the formation of intimate bureaucracies and other sociopoetic experiments. Atchley explains that in the assembling "nothing is for sale, no rights are reserved, nothing is rejected" (*Notebook* n.p.). In his *Notebook One* and earlier projects, he worked to "develop structures capable of creating gestalt communities whose members reflect technically and conceptually diverse points of view." To develop these communities, he would travel around and put "artists' stuff in a trunk and take it to the next trunk stop for a show." Atchley (a.k.a. Ace, the Colorado Spaceman) spent most of the 1970s driving around the United States in a van until a Hollywood studio, Lorimar Productions, bought the rights to Ace and his story. This literal art-tourism-vaudeville marked the beginning of mail art and, produced

in conjunction with Atchley's "Fat City School of Finds Art," inspired artists associated with Fluxus to issue a "Master's of Finds Art." Such parodies of institutional practices—but institutional practices nonetheless—formed the basis for assemblings. The use and parody of these practices and the interest in reaching a wider group of participants mark two major innovations in the development of assemblings and artists' networks. Atchley began his career as a visual poet and printer after studying with Dieter Roth at Yale in the early 1960s. He now runs a digital storytelling conference and festival, and he also produces digital stories for major corporations. His career has followed the trajectory described previously in this book: from visual poetry to assemblings and artists' networks to digital networked art. Another major innovation in assemblings was the changing of the editor or compiler with each issue. Pawel Petasz initiated *Commonpress* in 1979 and subsequently each issue had a different compiler. In one issue, Guy Bleus discusses his collection of mail-art assemblings, noting that the mail-art works use "communication media as art media" (Exploring).[7] *Commonpress*, founded in Poland with an English title, highlights the international character of assemblings.

Since the early 1990s, both the popular press and the underground press have focused considerable attention on artists' magazines and such distribution systems as on-line zines, encouraging the growth of these works and networks. In the early 1990s, Chuck Welch estimated the number of regular mail-art participants at around six thousand, a number that does not include the many more who access the electronic versions. Because the artists' networks have provided a forum for self-reflexive discussions, most of the secondary literature on assemblings takes place within and remains within the community of artists involved (Welch, Introduction xviii–xxi).[8] For example, in issue 55 of *Arte Postale!* Vittore Baroni presented one of the more complete histories of mail art, spawning even more ambitious summaries, analyses, and definitions among current participants. Clemente Padín, active in many assemblings and a key figure in mail-art networks, wrote a self-published pamphlet on the history and development of mail art with a focus on Latin America (Latinoamerican). Writing histories of artists' networks with an interest in publicizing and promoting one's own work has led to the emergence of self-published zines that narrowcast to small audiences interested in particular topics. A zine might describe the editor's peculiar fascinations or a work situation (for example, one focuses exclusively on dish washing) that might not get much attention in the mainstream press. An anthology dedicated to zines includes a *détourned* photograph of the editor of one

magazine, *Mystery Date,* with a cartoonlike voice balloon exclaiming, "SURRENDER TO THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE URGE . . . TO CREATE YOUR OWN ZINE" (Vale cover; see also Gunderloy). This anthology, produced by the editor of the popular *RE/Search* magazine, as well as Mike Gunderloy's earlier anthology, marks the increasing interest in low-budget self-produced magazines as well as the crossover of the coverage of these works from within zines, networks, and assemblings to a wider audience.

One important tradition among these periodicals, building on the lettrist and concrete poetry traditions, is the promulgation of neologisms, linguistic inventiveness, and pseudonyms. As discussed earlier, this interest in reinventing language supports efforts to create an experimental culture and alternative social organizations that combine intimacy with bureaucracy.

One particularly inventive magazine, Geof Huth's *dbqp,* includes a huge compilation of portmanteau words, neologisms, and embedding as a strategy. Huth, a librarian and collector, creates a series of puzzles for catalogers by inventing a number of other magazines within *dbqp.* In a Chinese box structure, one opens an issue of *dbqp* to find an issue of the *Subtle Journal of Raw Coinage* or *Objecta* or *Alabama Dogshoe Moustache* as well as regular sections such as "Socks, Dregs, & Rocking Chairs." Aside from giddy playfulness, these journals embedded one inside the other produce the effect of an entire Borgesian universe. Confronted with the invented words and intertwined journals, the reader not only pieces together a puzzle of what journal precisely she or he is actually reading, but also begins to construct an alternative library of sources for an invented language. Huth's work eloquently illuminates the relationship between linguistic inventiveness and sociopoetic art. Huth's interest in reinventing culture through inventing new words is shared by Miekal And and Liz Was, whose Xexoxical Endarchy publishes *The International Dictionary of Neologisms,* with ongoing (and now on-line) publication since 1985. The words are collected by their Avant-Garde Museum of Contemporary Art. In 1991, out of their interest in artists' networks and invented language, And and Was founded Dreamtime Village, a commune near Lima, Wisconsin, that is dedicated to experimental art and media (And and Was).

In Huth's works, condensation replaces simplicity as the most efficient rhetorical strategy. Although complexity in efficiency makes little sense in the realm of traditional logic, scientists and social scientists are increasingly realizing the advantages of the eloquently complex structures found in turbulence, chaotic structures, and fuzzy sets. Huth's works ask us to consider a complex and efficient language system and organization of information (e.g., in the complicated connections among his various journals).

In another twist, Huth gave the publisher of *dbqp* the same name as the magazine, and then later constructed a visual mirror anagram from these same letters and named his small press pdqb (pdqb presumably produced other works not included in *dbqp*). Of course, this visually poetic pun creates confusion in distinguishing one entity from another, but Huth's work seeks to use this type of poetry to reinvent the organization of knowledge. The traditional systems of cataloging and categorizing do not seem up to the task.

Publishing since the 1980s, Geof Huth has produced 175 issues of "the magazine of unadorned neologisms." He constructs the issues from printed texts on unusually bound pages or on objects, loose and in archival envelopes, in editions of twenty-five to one hundred. Issues 0–24 consist of a stack of objects and papers. Huth explains that he wanted to publish a project called "the woords." After thinking about forums for "conceptual and visual writing," he could not think of an appropriate publisher. He decided to publish the work himself and in 1989 started pdqb ("pretty damn quick books"), a press devoted to self-publishing, where "form informs and enlightens content" (Socks n.p.). Huth wanted the press to be a "kaleidoscope of information," but his very specific editorial concerns meant that he rejected most of the work submitted. In that sense, his work might not fit into some stricter definitions of assemblings. All issues from this micropress vary in the form of presentation. An issue usually arrives in an envelope, a box, or a series of envelopes, but the contents are printed on everything from stickers to tickets to actual leaves. Because these objects are part of the wordplay, Huth demonstrates a visual-object-oriented conceptual writing much like the lettrists' hieroglyphs. And, like other similar publications, each edition is very small and each issue has a very inexpensive cover price (sometimes only twenty cents—in the late 1980s).

Huth, trained as a librarian and holding graduate degrees in English and history, often engages in deliberate attempts to frustrate archivists and librarians with his issue numbers and magazine titles. His retroactive changes in issue numbers, overlapping magazine titles, and multiple publishers for each contribution create an inside joke for catalogers, a puzzle for library science, and a dizzying reading experience similar to that associated with the reading of portmanteau words. Huth seems to challenge us to speculate on a system of knowledge organized by (visual) poets. For example, when he started including works published by pdqb in his periodic mailings, he titled a montaged comic book "the FAB first issue, and starring: ace face, race trace." The publication is actually an issue of pdqb (as a periodic publisher), but was initially distributed to

subscribers to *dbqp*. In another example of poetic license, Huth retroactively numbered the first issue of "Socks, Dregs, & Rocking Chairs" zero only after he had included that section in a series of *dbqp* issues. In a typical overlapping of two magazine issues, Huth begins one issue with the title of issue 2 of the *Subtle Journal of Raw Coinage* and ends that same issue with a card describing that particular periodical as issue 9 of *dbqp*. That issue 2 of *SJRC* is printed on a series of small cards in the fashion of a photocopy store's choices of paper or a printer's choice of colors: individual cards bound together with a single metal ring in a large stack. Some, but not all, of the cards have text printed on them. A card toward the end of the stack explains that "SJRC number 2 features words from james joyce's finnegans wake" with "edby G(of qp Huth)" typed over the caption. The next card reads, "DBQP number 9—ed. of 50," which means that issue 2 of *SJRC* is actually part of issue 9 of *dbqp*. This assembling alludes to rhyming dictionaries as well as to a choice of examples for a poet-printer to choose from, the way a printer chooses print colors from a selection. The issues within issues and the self-contained world of these multiple journals produces the sense of a Borgesian bureaucracy, discussed above, to which the reader, after figuring out the puzzlelike interconnections, has special intimate access.

Huth's huge compilation of neologisms includes a series of words from *Finnegans Wake:* "RDWORDWO," with a dedication, "Ad homagem to James Joyce"; "cropse"; "everintermutuomergent"; "sylble"; "hierarchitectitiptitoploftical"; "parcequeue"; "whorse"; "pftjschute"; and "phoenish." A proofreader's nightmare, issue 2 of *dbqp* (which is also issue 1 of *Objecta,* 1987) includes a clear-plastic petri dish with a lid. Inside are pieces of wood with a word painted on each piece. On the lid a sticker describes the issue as "the woords." The contents include "oaque" (on bark), a little twirler seedpod from a tree, pine needles, three pine cones, "cherrish" (in a scroll of cherry wood), "langwish" (bark), "hymnlachwoold" (bark), "boock" (bark), "mno o nce" (white birch bark), and "dogword" (on a piece of dogwood?). Later, in issue 133 of *dbqp* and issue 9 of *Objecta* (1991), the contributions appear on shells with words on them. Huth wants to explore the literal objects as part of a figurative play. In doing so, this work resembles other conceptual art, including Koepke's "Original." Another example of this literal-as-figurative play includes issue 50 of *SJRC,* which consists of a work coproduced with Mark Rose. The title of the issue, "flossary," appears on a dental floss container. The container is wrapped with a red-printed band bearing dental neologisms. When one breaks the band and opens the container, one finds in-

side other neologisms written on toothpicks and on pieces of floss. Issue 114 of *dbqp* (and *Objecta* 7, 1991) includes leaves mixed with leaves of pages with words like "levt" on them. The rhetoric of and for assemblings differs from the rhetoric found in most handbooks. Huth's journals offer an alternative handbook for learning to move from a rhetoric that finds the right word for the task to a generative rhetoric that makes words work.

After one reads through a hundred or so issues of *dbpq,* an image appears of all those neologisms, portmanteau words, and linguistic inventions arriving at some huge clearinghouse operated by the editor, Geof Huth, who, in turn, dutifully sends out progress reports. The idea of a singular denotation looks increasingly suspicious. These issues include many items related to printing and publishing. Huth printed one issue of *dbqp* on the punched paper-feed border used in image-writer printers. He printed another using a label maker and printed another on Popsicle sticks. One issue appears on an envelope with little prints, and one series of issues consists of little square cards with individual issues on them. In issue 19 of *dbqp,* the contributions are printed on eight movie tickets; the contributors' names appear on the obverse sides of the tickets.

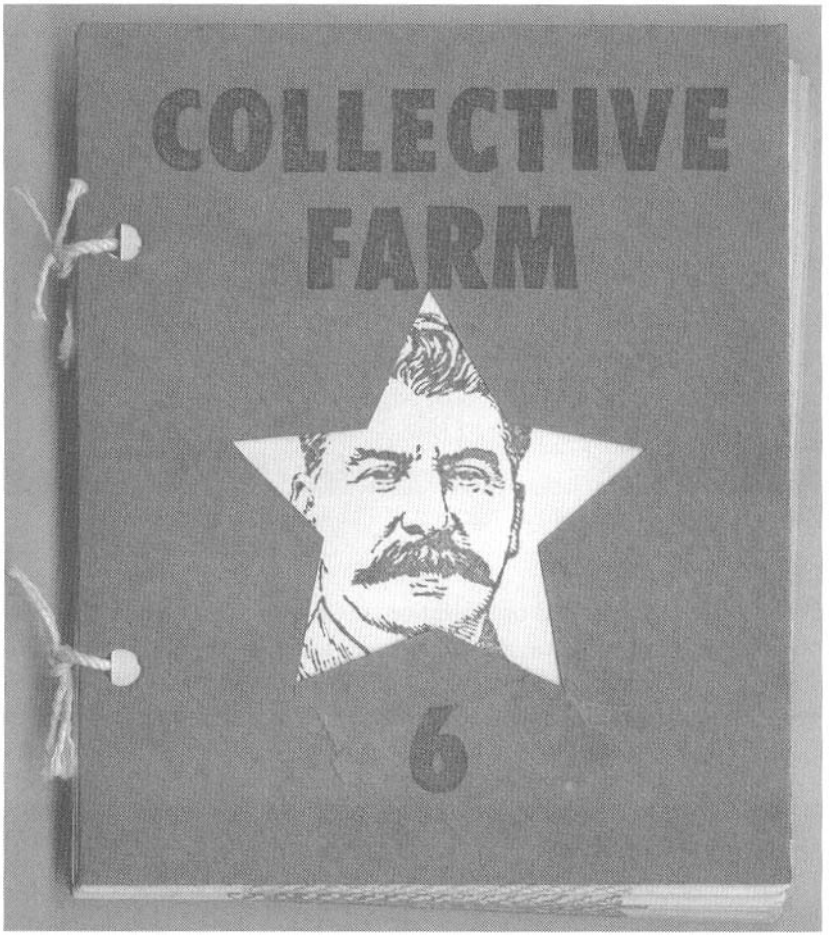
These coinages tempt me to appropriate them to describe the poetry of the receivable: aesthcipient, involvee, involvant, receptant, receivant, inceptor, aestheriencer, lookster, intaker, deKafkanated, populuxe, exissential, and paragraft (Huth, *SJRC* nos. 12, 14, 16, 26). *Paragraft* describes a crucial strategy used in this alternative rhetoric, and *Kafkanated* might define a whole subgenre of literature and prose; this type of literature is not Kafkaesque, but it captures the frenetic intensity associated with Kafka's stories. Already, these neologisms suggest how a poetry of the receivable has no place in a traditional rhetoric concerned only with finding the "fitting" words for an idea rather than using "raw coinages" to generate ideas or at least mydeas, udeas, weedeas, ydeas, and dumdedumdeas.

Alabama Dogshoe Moustache, yet another periodical within a periodical, appears in a number of issues of *dbqp.* The ad for that journal, which has appeared in several issues, reads: "Something like a poetry magazine, *ADM* changes its format with every issue. Printing mostly language and visual poetry, each issue is a single manifestation of wordery." Another advertisement for the *Subtle Journal of Raw Coinage* that has appeared in various issues of *dbqp* explains that "*SJRC,* the monthly aglossary of the becoming tongue, a selection of words invented by people, and therefore somehow unnatural, demonstrates that we can formulate our language out of whatever air we have. Each issue is constructed to be an inscrutable poem, each word of which requires a glossary that isn't provided."

This sort of secret parallel world, with intertwined journals and magazines (besides *SJRC, dbqp,* and *ADM,* these issues regularly include *Objecta* and another journal titled *A Voice without Sides*), epitomizes the effort of intimate bureaucracies to create and encourage a relatively unknown, or underground, distribution network producing its own "becoming tongue." In issue 93 of *dbqp,* Huth explains that "the *Subtle Journal of Raw Coinage* is a monthly periodical presenting collections of undefined neologisms for the amusement of the few" (n.p.). In terms of an alternative rhetoric, or, perhaps, in keeping with *dbqp*'s inventiveness, *retoonric,* Huth's publications do not provide any guides for determining any, or all, of the denotative meaning(s) of particular coinages. Meaning is always potential and dependent not on finding the "fitting" word for the message, but on further transmutations.

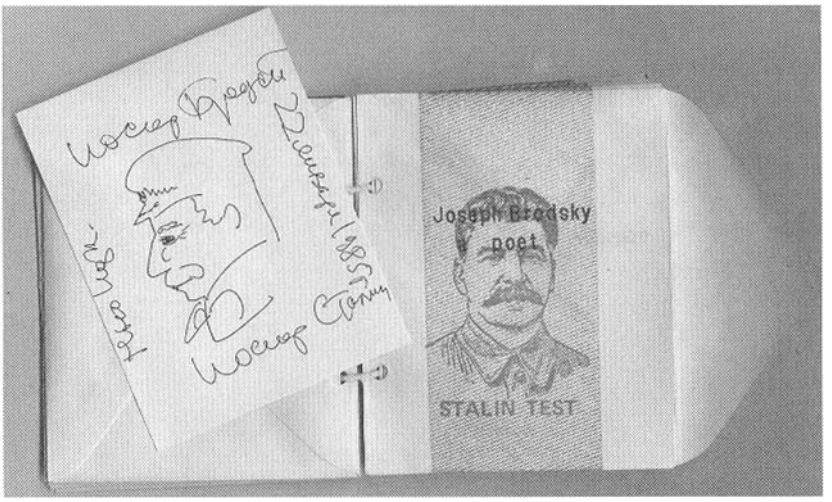
In issue 4 of the artists' periodical *Collective Farm,* the editors include "famous art works influenced by children's art" that in this issue are "completed by children of contemporary artists" (Gerlovin and Gerlovina). So, for example, Augustin Dupuy, 4½ years old, completes a work by Joan Miró; Damian Kostiuk, 8 years old, completes a work by Jackson Pollack; Gregoire Halbert, 7, finishes a work by Henri Matisse; Ben Truck, 5½, completes a work by Pablo Picasso; and Eleonore Hendricks, 1½, completes a work by Cy Twombly. This assembling examines many conceptual issues: the relationship between children's art and modernist art, standards of legitimation, influences and adaptations, playfulness in art, and emulation and invention. It alludes to the often-heard complaint against modern art, "Even a child could do that." Instead of dismissing these modernist artworks as if from the perspective of the stereotypical weekend art critic, the playful "completion" process uses allusion, grafting, citation, plagiarism, and mixing. One might settle for reading these works as "children learning to copy" or "children spoofing modern art" and discourage both strategies as parasitic; this reading has no interest in and little patience for the use of imperfect copying as a purposeful strategy.

In issue 6 of *Collective Farm,* the editors perform the "Stalin Test." They asked "Russian people of different professions to take a visual Stalin test" (Gerlovin and Gerlovina). On the front of each envelope, the editors have stamped an image of Stalin in red with a red patterned background; over this stamp they have stamped a person's name and that person's profession. Inside the envelope is the person's attempt to draw Stalin. Among the participants are the artists Komar and Melamid, but most of the contribu-



"Stalin Test" issue of *Collective Farm* (1986).

tors are unknown in art and literary circles. The actual drawings or texts describing "Stalin" are unremarkable. The entire project, however, presents a fascinating examination of representation. Instead of presenting the most compelling, historically accurate, stereotypical, positive, or negative images of Stalin, this publication examines how specific individuals in various occupations choose to represent Stalin. Again, traditional rhetoric can find a place for only one Stalin, not serial Stalins. The actual responses have less impact on the meaning than the concept of the variations and "imperfection" of all the representations.



Selected contents from "Stalin Test" issue of *Collective Farm* (1986).

With its sophisticated organization, obsessive care, and somber tone, the issue of the periodical artists' compilation *Blast* on "Remaking Civilization," packaged in a metal valise, hints at an emergent sociopoetic system, but not quite the one the users might recognize as their own likely future (Crandall, *Remaking*). This is a social science fiction kit for remak-

Image of *Blast*, edited by Jordan Crandall.

ing civilization. Neither pessimistic nor optimistic about this potential organization, the valise contains all the lavish care, nostalgic yearnings, scientific neutrality, personal obsessions, and odd impersonality of an intimate bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is open only to someone who receives the valise and ruffles through it looking for clues to this other world.

This issue of the assembling *Blast* emulates the *Fluxkit* (1964) in its packaging of the contents in a valise and in the issues collective production by artists, writers, and other participants. The *Fluxkit* combines a playful attitude with conceptual insights. Its professionally produced look encourages the person opening the kit to take the games and jokes seriously, and the mass-produced (versus handmade) look adds to the kit- or testlike quality. It appears like an IQ test kit for some strange and as yet unknown type of intelligence. The *Blast* valise has some of that kitlike quality as well. Both of these valises call for someone to use these works as instructions. The *Blast* issue's kitlike construction resembles other conceptual art and poetry aside from the Fluxus yearboxes and the *Fluxkit*. As a conceptual artwork, it has an overarching theme or story connecting all of the texts and objects: art can function as a tool for understanding and remaking civilization. There are no obvious or simple didactic answers to this ambitious task. The issue implicitly advocates taking advantage of complexity. The playful, gamelike, visually varied, 3-D-in-a-box approach functions as something more than ornamentation and frivolity. It uses the conceptual art strategy of reducing complicated ideas and actions to objects that function as ambiguous, or receivable, mnemonic devices.

The compilation does not evoke a romantic, "anything goes," attitude; here constraints, systems, and structures allow the work to exceed its presentation. It seeks to remap memory and sociocultural systems, especially in light of electronic media's impact. Art functions as a problem-solving tool rather than as a representation of a solution. There is no codified training manual or course curriculum. The volume, not directly related to the Vorticists' periodical *Blast* or to the assembling *Arte Postale!* (produced by TRAX or X-Art group), does seem to push against the modernist notions of pure form, separate and distinct essential attributes for each medium, and appropriately separate realms for each art. In this volume, those distinctions blur.

The entire project in a valise resembles a hybrid of a gallery or museum of conceptual art (another issue of *Blast* functioned as an exhibit catalog as well as an assembling; see Trippi); a library of position papers;

a portfolio of prints, drawings, and other artworks; and a cryptic instruction manual that one might find as a clue to a future or potential civilization. The overwhelming compilation of materials (19 unbound translucent pages; 155 bound pages; 15 leaflets; 2 soft-cover books; a label; 10 cards; 6 drawings using paint, ink, and frottage; a computer disk, a jar, a vial, a glass, 3 boxes, and 25 other objects; 3 scrolls; and a cassette tape; see Sackner and Sackner) depends on a path through a nearly forty-year history of conceptual art, concrete and visual poetry, punk zines, mail art, book art, and international artists' periodicals. Unpacking that history, and the corollary ideas involved, constantly reminds one of the compiler's job in constructing an assembling, as well as a reader's potential pleasure in struggling with allusions, jokes, puzzles, and poetic constructions.

Conclusion: Networked Futures

> We need a new language to describe the new medium of interface, but that doesn't mean we can't borrow some of our terminology from the forms that have come before it. . . . most of it will borrow extensively from preexisting traditions: art and architecture, the cinema and the novel. . . . it will depend on the interfaces designed to represent communities of people rather than private workspaces.
>
> —**Steven Johnson, *Interface Culture*, 1997**

Intimate bureaucracies have an important place in the future of artistic experimentation and the extension of the concept of art to include social sculpture. These works do not comment merely on the production of art, but on the production of specific types of social networks. As a forum in which this extension can take place, the sociopoetic works examined in this book offer a transition into, and kitlike instructions for, the quintessential art and literature of the twenty-first century: networked art. The transition to understanding artworks in terms of sociopoetics requires that previous impasses now become opportunities for interpretation.

The resistance of assemblings to the leveling power of mechanical and electronic reproduction, even as they make use of these mechanisms, resembles the modernist poets' championing of a singular transcendent creative genius while yielding completely to the initiative of (popular) languages. Network artists attempt more modestly to stave off homogenization, although they nonetheless wallow in the systems and mechanisms of mass distribution. Assemblings tend to share one trait: they challenge any participant to figure out how to begin to read and write what Roland Barthes calls a receivable text. In a historical context, the assemblings do seem to share a combination of lineages. From that history, a participant can begin to find appropriate reading and writing practices, if not definitive meanings. Understanding how to make "unreadability"

readable requires a summary of the poetics involved. These poetic tendencies include the following: concrete poetry as a break with "mainstream" expressive poetries, visual poetry as an effort to expand language systems, and conceptual art strategies as an intervention in everyday life. Through all of these tendencies, the problem of identifying the tone of these works makes the interpretation more complicated. Often these works' meanings depend on one specific reader, or small groups of reader-participants, to recognize parodies, inside jokes, and masquerades using the trappings of mass-distribution systems (for example, the post office or the corporation) that refer to the workings of specific artists' networks.

The artists' networks and intimate bureaucracies examined here do not fit neatly into an art historical context in part because the individual works in any given assembling often, and often intentionally, lack aesthetic sophistication. Even an advocate of antiaesthetic sensibilities might argue that many of the individual texts have little value to anyone other than the sender and possibly the receiver. These works appear in the context of hundreds and thousands of individual texts, images, objects, and textual-image objects all found in assemblings, collections of mail art, visual and conceptual poetries, and potentially mass-produced multiples. Few, if any, of the individual works found in assemblings will achieve, nor would the artists want them to achieve, the universally accepted status of masterpiece. The works are about process, contingencies, and group interactions, not lasting truth or eternal beauty. Some of the works flirt with a poetry of simple recognition, a sort of "license-plate joke" poetry that merely demands one glance for appreciation (Perloff, *Radical* 118–19). In assemblings, this recognition only starts the process of discovering as inherently tied to the interconnectedness of these works, connected to a reader's tastes and openness to the receivable gift.

So much mail in the box, and so little of it addressed to you. The bill collector just wants payment, with "no note or written response"—anyone can write the check. The junk mailer is looking for the "occupant" or any potential consumer. The flyers and catalogs make you wonder where they got *your* name, not how apt it is that you received their messages today. Periodicals arrive always in the same format, and sometimes addressed to some fictional character as a prank. You immediately think, "Cancel."

Opening the mailbox reminds you of the massive anonymous bureaucratic postal system that, nevertheless, seems quaint and antiquated in these days of electronic commerce. You wonder: What if culture used

these endless bureaucracies for other ends? What if you received something that asked for a different, more individualized, response—a periodical that was never the same, with a collection of participants including you, a periodical made specifically for you and your small circle? Is this the dream of every high-tech "niche" marketer? The new attempt to use computers to customize purchases? Yes, these desires to "segment" are already here in contemporary culture, but what if they were channeled into something more than selling you a "customized" but "compatible" computer system that almost "everyone" uses? What if networking were a type of poetry and art? If this type of art already exists as an unintended consequence of bureaucratic information distribution systems, as a leak in the system, then the works examined in this book may explain how to continue to "milk the system" beyond the imaginations of the artists and poets discussed here.

Each issue of an assembling announces: This is the story at this moment, make of it what you will. Putting concrete, Fluxus, visual, and lettrist poems not just in a progression but in the same publications alongside each other may suggest that the history of intimate bureaucracies does not necessarily follow an evolutionary route; it may more likely swim around the same set of issues about contemporary culture, media, and language. The reading of an issue of an assembling like *Blast* might improve with more variability, not less—not one singular denotation, but a thousand allusions to other systems and other practices. My bet is that all the allusions to a portmanteau rhetoric, Fluxus kits, situationist appropriations, and even concrete poems' conceptual games may prove more valuable for understanding networked art than any traditional reading practice that seeks to limit contexts and associations and to dismiss paradoxes.

From their efforts to circumvent the gallery system and to find forums for conceptual art and visual poetry, artists soon realized they had stumbled onto an entirely different form of expression. This sociopoetic practice was the production, distribution, and use of periodicals *as* artworks and poetry. These artworks used visual poetry and typographic experiments as instructions and scores for performances and poetic situations. Of course, all art and literature intends to move its audience, but in intimate bureaucracies, the work is about the interactions among distribution systems, a community of participants, and the poetic artisanal works. When the social situation became a canvas for art and poetic practices, the trappings of bureaucratic systems looked ripe for appropriation. Reading these works requires an approach that is different

from contextual analysis or textual close readings, because now the poetic work itself (in, for example, a work that examines postal systems) is about the context and the frame of reference. Other works, especially in the conceptual art of the twentieth century, have much in common with this sociopoetic approach, but intimate bureaucracies more forcefully stress this particular type of social construction.

The historical lineage of these sociopoetic works emerges out of avant-garde art and visual poetry. Specifically, the effort to find new language systems and new forms of expression led to the development of alternative periodicals, and then to periodical distribution as poetic artworks. For example, the lettrists in the 1950s attempted to form new language systems from nonphonetic sign systems such as dingbats (i.e., a printer's ornamental type), the comic book's codes aside from the words (e.g., the use of speech bubbles and frames), and pieces of letters. This nonphonetic writing system resembled abstract and pop art, but it also suggested a poetic practice based on the visual signs everywhere in contemporary culture. Although they are famous for their anarchic expressivity, the lettrists also opened the door to a poetry based on bureaucratic sign systems. The concrete poets offer the most obvious opposite to the lettrist visual poetry, but the concrete poets led to the process poems, which also used nonphonetic signs to construct new language systems. Together these two sometimes bitterly opposed tendencies began to merge in the 1960s, especially in the work associated with Fluxus. That work combined elements from a number of visual poetries and, like other artists and poets at the time, used these new language systems as the basis for sociopoetic and performative work. All these groups began disseminating their work using assemblings and other periodicals. Soon the production and distribution systems became visual poems themselves. One could not "read" these sociopoetic works the way one reads a phonetic poem, but one could read these works as poetry about our current cultural situations.

When one begins examining the importance of assemblings in the countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s, the reputation of these scenes as preoccupied with "being there" and "hanging out" seems less certain. The assemblings offer the first clue that the alternative traditions in the arts have as much to do with publicity and distribution machines used for poetic ends as with an advocacy of presence, immediacy, and spontaneity. The growth of these networks of participants also began to conceive of the global village as a place to share ideas rather than showcase products or propaganda. Since the 1980s, networked art has emerged as a

new genre, especially because of improvements in media technologies. Networks can now accommodate webs of participants; they no longer need to rely on single broadcasters reaching many spectators.

Intimate bureaucracies may exist elsewhere. One might investigate outsider art, new types of electronic arts, social performance art, and unthought-of constructions that use the trappings of bureaucracies to produce art and poetry that seeks to create intimate communities among participants. The literature of the twenty-first century will stress the sociopoetic practices that assemblings were experimenting with during the past century. The question that is already emerging on the electronic webs is, What will popular culture look like as it becomes a series of intimate bureaucracies rather than the single broadcast system now in place? If we follow the lead of these assemblings, then the forms of our bureaucratic era might function as the material for tomorrow's poetry and cultural inventions.

The discussion in this volume opens up these possibilities for further research, and I have attempted to suggest new paths for art and poetry. I have examined here a poetics not simply socially or politically committed, but inherently connected to innovative social situations. If I were to end this discussion with a list of attributes of this new type of work, it would include the following: the use of the trappings and systems of bureaucracies to encourage intimate connections among participants; a nonphonetic poetry that emerges from among the successes *and* failures of lettrist, concrete, and process poems; a combination of artisanal craft with the signs of mechanized production, packaging, and distribution; and contents that refer self-reflexively to the poetic use of the trappings of impersonal systems. These contents often resemble kits, scores, instructions, puzzles, and jokes as well as art and poetry. Much of the work depends on the situation of its distribution and production; hence the production often involves the use of found objects, texts, and images, and the distribution depends on participants' setting up various chain-letter-like links. In that sense, the work will resemble neither the "readerly" classic texts nor the "writerly" modernist texts. Instead, the interpretation of these works depends on reference to a network of participants. The use of pseudonyms in this context functions as a crucial component in sociopoetic work on authorship, collective action, and creativity.

Many of the works have little value for someone eavesdropping on the network of participants because these works favor narrowcasting over broadcasting. One reader's junk is another participant's talismanic gift. More important, the work often involves a process, and a participatory

situation, rather than a finished product. When they subscribe to an assembling, participants do not get a finished product in the mail. Instead, these periodicals function to share ongoing interactive experiments efficiently. These periodicals suggest that the event has already happened at the same time that they hint at a continuation of these events in the act of distribution and emulation. They not only implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) disseminate information about performative work, they function as media performances. From the impasses and problems with intimate bureaucracies and networked art will grow new (tele-ephemeral-electronic?) delivery systems as canvases for as yet unthought practices. In that sense, this book represents a history of the past from the perspective of our emerging future.

Notes

Preface

1. Barthes's discussion of the receivable takes place in a section of the 1975/1977 collection *Roland Barthes* titled "Lisible, scriptable et au-delà [Readerly, writerly, and beyond]."

1. Receivable Art and Poetry

1. Barthes *(S/Z)* distinguishes between the readerly and the writerly as well as finds the latter buried within the former.

2. Although the topic exceeds the scope of this chapter, I would argue that the *punctum* is similar to Jacques Lacan's conception of the *objet à* (Saper, Nervous).

3. Graham Sharpe summarizes and analyzes bp Nichol's magazine publications and interest in distribution systems.

4. The entire quote reads: "You can perform a Fluxus event in virtuoso or bravura style, and you can perform it jamming each piece into the minimal time possible as Ben Vautier does; or, go for a slow, meditative rhythm as Alison Knowles does; or, strike a balance as you'll see in the concerts organized by Dick Higgins or Larry Miller. Pieces can have a powerful torque, energized and dramatic, as in the work of Milan Knizak, the earthly folkloric touch seen in Bengt af Klintberg's pieces; or, the atmospheric radiance, spiritual and dazzling, that is seen in Beuys's work."

5. This issue of *Collective Farm* includes contributions by many important

Fluxus and mail artists, including Lon Spiegelman's photocopied photo of the "third New York Correspondance [with an *a*] School Dinner" with Anna Banana, Ken Friedman, John Evans, Valery Oistenu, Valery Gerlovin, and others all holding a banner reading "homage to our polish mail art friends." The photocopy documents a meeting of well-known mail artists, and as an artwork offers a model for future meetings as Happening-like events. In another envelope, there is a call for "doo da's" (the mail artist E. F. Higgins) mail-art show and photomontages by "Cleveland dada is hot shit" (another mail artist pseudonym) with a picture of a Roy Lichtensteinesque woman in a tub with two signs reading "blood" and "water" below the tub. Geoff Hendricks, associated with Fluxus, contributes a postcard stamped "Poland" on the back of a picture of a blue sky. The works, lackluster as art, have a particular appeal as ways to connect to Polish mail artists, who in the mid-1980s were experiencing increased pressure from censors, more political turmoil, and the possibility of much more cultural and political freedom.

6. L. B. Clark has done similar performances on the repetitions involved in work. Participants in one of her large-scale performances worked for eight-hour stretches in a *Hollywood Squares*–like structure at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Museum of Art. Clark also uses postcards to document and advertise her studies of work.

7. Adler explains that the assembling accepted everything, but all the pages came from people who attended the Visual Poetry Workshop at the National Poetry Center in London. Most of the contributions use type or calligraphy as a graphic medium, similar to lettrist work, typewriter art, or micrographia (writing that can be somewhat deciphered only using magnification). For example, G. Norwicha's piece creates the image of folding shapes from a micrographic description of landscapes. Such works appear together with works concerned with official forms of communication. Peter Myer includes in the premiere issue of *A* his *Boredom of the Motorist,* with graphic street signs inside comic-strip thought balloons.

8. Robert Morgan explains how a similar dynamic against the mechanisms of the society of the spectacle operates in performance art. He describes the artists' "desire to reveal the language of the subtext that has been concealed, thus breaking down the normative code of advertising and the spectacle as a division of ideology" (199). Other visual artists, such as Hans Haake, have sought to make these surveillance systems public (Foster).

2. A Fan's Paranoid Logic

1. The term *fan* reemerges in common usage in the twentieth century, but the word derives from the Latin *fanum,* a temple for prophets, and refers to the priests who flagellated themselves into a frenzy of inspiration. It appears in isolated instances during the seventeenth century, and becomes a more important term in the late eighteenth century to describe a threat to enlightenment. One

study of fanaticism argues that the pejorative sense of the term appears only in the context of tolerance and tolerant societies. One is only a fanatic when society no longer considers certain intense behaviors appropriate (Haynal et al. 20–33).

2. Later, other artists invented variations—for instance, Glen Lewis's Corres Sponge Dance School, started around 1970. Ed Plunkett, who actually coined the name, explains that "it was a reference to the 'New York School,' the leading group of mostly abstract painters that flourished" in the early 1960s (quoted in Held 17). Johnson's work always had a (parodic) connection to the vanguards of abstract painting because, as May Wilson (another participant in the NYCS) explains, "Correspondence is spelled correspon*dance*... the truth for Ray Johnson is not correspondence to actuality (verisimilitude), but is correspondence of part to part (pregnant similarities that dance)" (quoted in Held 19; see also Wilson).

3. After Johnson's death, a number of the people involved in his network wrote short essays on Johnson and his on-sendings (Bourdon; Pincus-Witten, Brother; Paik, Something; Johnston).

4. Catherine Liu, whose research analyzes automatons in the eighteenth century, is one of the few contemporary scholars who uses Tausk's work.

5. The scores of the Fluxus participants have copyrights under the Fluxus name; they appear in various places with minor changes in each version. Friedman also promoted the FUGS band, suggesting a connection between an American underground music scene and Fluxus.

3. Strikes, Surveillance, and Dirty Tricks

1. Home noted two other important art strikes: the Paris revolt of 1968 and the "New York Art Strike against War, Repression and Racism" in the early seventies, during the Vietnam War. The annual "Day without Art," established to encourage AIDS awareness and to mourn the loss of artists who have died from AIDS-related diseases, borrowed the "no art making" tactic from these earlier strikes. Such limited actions have found much more mainstream success than Home's call for a four-year-long strike.

2. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* initially published in Haarlem, North Holland, in 1938, strongly influenced Asger Jorn and the formation of the Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus.

3. The network had used the trappings of bureaucratic authority to reverse the authorities' surveillance system and set in motion a disruption of the normal process. This reversal of perspective is a key element in intimate bureaucracies as well as in situationist strategies (Higgins, EyeRhymes).

4. Processed Bureaucratic Poetry

1. Much of this type of poetry and cultural production, especially process and lettrist work, has received little sustained critical analysis, and many of these works now exist only in archives and collections. Although the groups involved often appear in descriptions of art in the last half of the twentieth century and in

works on contemporary cultural studies, the actual artworks are not well-known outside of the participants, and few descriptions exist.

2. Eugen Gomringer (b. Cachuela Esperanza, Bolivia, 1925) published four collections of "constellations" in the 1950s and 1960s. While still working for Max Bill in the late 1950s, he founded Eugen Gomringer Press in Frauenfeld to publish concrete works. During the 1960s and 1970s he lived in Frauenfeld, Switzerland, and worked as the managing director of the Swiss Werkbund (Association of Art and Industry). He later taught poetics in Düsseldorf, West Germany. Décio Pignatari (b. São Paulo, Brazil, 1927), a graphic and "language designer," cofounded the Brazilian Noigandres group with Haroldo and Augusto de Campos in 1952; from the late 1950s through the 1960s, he ran a very successful advertising agency. He received his Ph.D. in literary theory in 1973 and taught information theory at Brasilia University and at the School of Industrial Design in Rio de Janeiro. He coedited *Noigandres* with the de Campos brothers from 1952 until 1962, edited *Invenção* from 1962 until 1967, and coedited *Através,* which began in 1977. Augusto de Campos (b. São Paulo, 1931) translated, alone and with Haroldo de Campos, poems by e. e. cummings, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* and Pound's *Cantos* into Portuguese. Augusto works as a lawyer and first introduced the phrase "poesia concreta" in *Forum,* the journal of the São Paulo Law School. Haroldo de Campos (b. São Paulo, 1929), the theoretical leader of Noigandres, taught literary theory at the Catholic Pontifical University in the 1960s and 1970s. He has translated the works of Dante, Pound, Joyce, Mallarmé, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, Donne, and others into Portuguese. He has also translated texts from Japanese and Chinese into Portuguese. He worked on a series of holographic concrete poems when he retired from teaching.

Haroldo de Campos's travels and extensive correspondence network played a key role in the growth of the international movement of concrete poetry. He remained in "close contact with avant-garde artists" throughout the world, including Agam, Vasarely, Gerstner, Boulez, Stockhausen, Ponge, Heissenbüttel, Gomringer, Döhl, and Belloli (Pignatari 791). He traveled abroad in 1959 and made more international contacts. In 1964, professor, critic, and concrete poet Max Bense invited him to lecture at the Technische Hochschule, Stuttgart; while visiting Europe that year, he attended a conference on concrete poetry in Prague, where he met the leading Czech concrete poets, Josef Hirsal, Bohumila Grögerová, Ladislav Novák, and Jirí Kolár. These poets founded the "new poetry" in Czechoslovakia (Solt, World 23). "It was chiefly through exchanging letters and books with Augusto de Campos—who sent them the 'pilot plan'—that Ian Hamilton Finlay, Scotland, and Dom Sylvester Houédard" also began experimenting with concrete poetry (Pignatari 791). In 1956, Gomringer met with the Austrians Rühm ("noise symphony") and Achleitner from Vienna (Rühm's poetry appeared in *Edition Et*). The Austrians concentrated on phonetics and made connections between experimental music and the new poetry.

3. Here is a partial list of the contents: essays such as Roland Barthes's

"Death of the Author" and Susan Sontag's "Aesthetics of Silence"; excerpts from Robbe Grillett's *Jealousy* translated by Richard Howard; a play by Samuel Beckett; films by Hans Richter, Moholy-Nagy, and Stan Van Der Beek; a work titled "maze" by the sculptor Tony Smith that allows you to build your own sculpture from cardboard cutouts, including a scaled-down version of Smith's version; an interview with Merce Cunningham; a score by Morton Feldman for percussion; works by Duchamp and Hulsenback; "Structural play #3" by Brian O'Doherty (a graphic guide for a performance with a series of boxes charting an actor's movements in relation to the other actors' movements); Sol Lewitt's "Serial Project," which graphically performs variations on a cube shape; John Cage's "Fontana Mix," an abstract score for a potential performance; Max Neuhaus's "Feed"; Michel Butor's poem "Repair"; and Dan Graham's schema for poem production. The issue also includes an advertisement for Dick Higgins's Something Else Press (often a forum for Fluxus and European avant-garde work), hinting at a potential link between Fluxus conceptual games and the structuralist games in this issue. There are also advertisements for Cage's *Silence, Artforum,* and Bolex movie cameras—the cameras that opened up filmmaking to independent filmmakers because they are relatively inexpensive and portable.

4. The Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Miami Beach, Florida, houses the entire collection of Ian Hamilton Finlay's letters.

5. The instructions for how to build a poetry machine include folding paper into a box titled "zabala, un mediador de lo incompatible" by José Alfaro. Herman Damen's "Pouit Eating His Pouim" includes a short film of a poet eating alphabet soup (8 mm, five-minute film, 1967). Damen then uses the images from this film in two different projects. One project, labeled "kinetische kunst derived from 'filmkunst,'" mentions Alexander Calder's mobiles and also includes the eccentric spelling of *pouitry* instead of *poetry* to add to the difference of a "new dimensional pouitry." The work "insert," by Henry W. Targowski, includes a photo of a man inserting the word *insert* into a display called "insert." The display repeats the word *insert* many times, with only one blank left where the man is now inserting the "insert."

6. Pignatari met Boulez in 1953 and wrote admiringly about Boulez's music and thought. In Brazil, Pignatari dedicated an entire section of *Invenção* no. 3 to music (Pignatari 791). Many Brazilian musicians have recorded poems by Noigandres (e.g., in 1956–57 the vocal group Ars Viva performed several poems by Augusto de Campos; in 1961, Rogério Duprat used Décio Pignatari's "organismo" (organism); and in 1963, Gilberto Mendes's compositions used Pignatari's "movimento" (movement) and Haroldo de Campos's "nascemorre" (birthdeath) (Perrone 64–65, 69). Augusto de Campos's "Viva Vaia" (Hooray for the hisses) (1972) was "dedicated to Caetano Veloso and inspired, to a great degree," by Veloso's response to the boos and hisses of the audience at the Third International Song Festival in São Paulo (1968) when the young songwriter presented the song "É proibido Proibir" (Prohibiting prohibited) (Perrone 68).

5. Intimate Poetry

1. Although some critics argue that "postconcrete" superseded "concrete" poetry during the crucial years of 1968–70, my perspective places a number of competing poetries next to each other in the context of artists' periodic publications of the time. Artists and poets then chose elements from among many supposedly competing tendencies. The split between Jorn and Bill is symptomatic of the distinction between the two major opposing trends that existed during the same post–World War II period. These two supposedly opposed trends found types of convergence and synthesis in works that borrowed from both tendencies. Nicholas Zurbrugg, counter to my position, presents an argument about the "birth of postconcrete poetry" that replaced the earlier concrete poetry (245).

2. The list of names is indicative of the odd combination of tendencies under one title. Contributors to the first issue of *Edition Et* include Eric Anderson, Max Bense, George Brecht, Emmett Williams, and Robert Filliou. Important concrete poems include Augusto de Campos's "sem um numero," Haroldo de Campos's "branco" (discussed in detail later in this chapter) and "weiss," Eugen Gomringer's "vom rand zur mitte," Tomas Schmit's "lesetext," Gerhard Rühm's "bleiben" and "du," Décio Pignatari's "terra," Ferdinand Kriwet's "interpretation einer Rundscheibe," Ronaldo Azeredo's "velocidade" and "ruasoland," and Robert Indiana's pop-crete poem "five." Among the works by Fluxus artists, such as Wolf Vostel's "New Yorker Happening manifest" and Ben Vautier's "oeuvre d'art ben," are concrete poems and other work. The particular list of contributors to this issue is symptomatic of the seamless mingling of key works of the international concrete poetry movement and Fluxus works. It contains important poems often reprinted in anthologies.

3. The West German concrete poetry group published the journal *Material* and, in 1957, published the first international anthology of concrete poetry. Kriwet, Bremer, Bense, Heissenbüttel (see especially *Textbook* series, 1970), Franz Mon, Diter Rot, Timm Ulrichs, and a few others led the West German movement, and most of the poets became editors of and contributors to assemblings, especially *Edition Et.*

The debate between the exemplarists and the experimentalists continues, and many theorists trace it back to the debate between Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukács. Like Benjamin, the concrete poets favor Mallarméan experimentation. Carole Taylor's work is an example of the "exemplarist" criticism of concrete poetry. Taylor argues that the concretists attempt to "reduce language" to the presentational (the act of making) rather than the representational (what is made). Similarly, Bollobás argues that we can best understand the concrete poem in terms of J. L. Austin's speech-act theory. Taylor argues that most concrete poems merely "rely on trivial or insignificant word-play, or simply invoke no referent beyond the page's imaged words." She condemns their supposedly superficial playfulness because of its political irresponsibility. She writes: "Even when concrete poets address the real, social world, they do so with a wit whose very mode disallows deep seriousness or challenge, precisely because the momentary,

perceptual apprehension of meaning pleases rather than pleases and disturbs. Such poetry cannot give birth to a sustained, focused criticism of personal and social malaise, cannot make fine and particularized enough distinctions to shake us out of apathy or—however delightful, however pleasurable—to open our eyes to the connections between our own patness and the sufferings of others" (243). Taylor's work represents the exemplarists' criticism of much experimental work.

4. There is an assembling titled *Leopold Bloom* published since the mid-1990s in Hungary. The title alludes to James Joyce's central character in *Ulysses,* who, according to the book, was a citizen of the Hungarian city of Szombathely. It also suggests Joyce's continued influence on these sorts of conceptual work. The assembling appears yearly on Bloomsday in the city of Szombathely.

5. Isou's re-creation of himself began when he emigrated from Romania and changed his name from Goldstein; he understood the demands of starting from scratch.

6. Fluxus

1. The Fluxus members who made up the group's core community of artists were extremely active and influential in assemblings. Although there is no agreement among observers about how active a role each of these particular artists played in Fluxus activities, a number of lists include these artists: Eric Anderson, Ay-O, Joseph Beuys, Phillip Corner, Jean Dupuy, Robert Filliou, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Al Hansen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Addi Koepke, Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeko Kubota, George Maciunas, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Yoshimasa Wada, Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, Bengt af Klintberg, La Monte Young, Jackson Mac Low, and Henry Flint. The last three on this list either withdrew from Fluxus or denounced it. One of the two most important figures associated with Fluxus, George Brecht, also will have nothing to do with retrospective exhibitions now. Dick Higgins prefers not to be associated with Fluxus because accounts of the history of the group and the inclusion of "fringe" members (like Ono and Beuys) in lists of participants are inaccurate. *The Fluxus Reader* (Friedman) seeks to correct the historical record. Owen Smith's *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* is the most complete and detailed scholarly study of the Fluxus attitude to date.

2. Hutchins is most likely referring to the assembling *Eter,* which Paul-Armand Gette edited, and which I discuss later in this chapter. *Eter* started publication in Paris in 1966 and moved soon after to Sweden. Hutchins makes her comments about Gette when the interviewer, Estera Milman, asks about the relationship between Paris-based artists and the May 1968 student rebellion.

3. Beuys made this statement in a discussion with Peter Mönnig in 1981.

4. Beuys's discussion with Mönnig appears in a special issue of the periodical *Daily Edition* that documents a series of presentations and exhibitions on the

problems facing the city of Ruhr-Gebiet. The organizers explain that "all the proposals [were] developed within the logic of art" (n.p.).

5. Although vaudeville, Cage, and Duchamp have secured prominent places in scholarship on art and mass culture, Spike Jones still remains a somewhat marginal figure. However, his "Musical Depreciation Revue" offers a whole array of useful jokes, gags, puns, spoonerisms, and so on.

6. Philip Corner's page consists of the letter *I* and his signature, with a Chinese logo of his name. P. A. Gette sent a diagram of a cross section of a cockroach. John Giorno wrote, "Mr. Wild wore a dark, multi-zippered jump suit, a white-helmet with goggles and small red and green lamps on top. The main parachute was harnessed to his back; the reserve chute against his stomach was a platform for an illuminated altimeter. The instrument would tell when he was 2,500 feet from the ground, the point to pull the ripcord" (n.p.).

7. George Brecht's contribution to the issue points to the transformation of the visual poetry from the stricter concrete poetry to more allusive conceptual poetry. Brecht titles his piece "5 Bilingual Answers/ A La Question/ To The Question." Scattered around the page, but basically from top to bottom, are handwritten numerals from 1 to 5. After or below each numeral is a line of text or an image. Between 2 and 3, Brecht has inserted a filled-in crossword puzzle. The numbered "answers" individually consist of jokes, puzzles, and clues. For example, one answer reads, "SALE Footprints Marked Down!" Taken alone it is a simple pun on "marked down." Another answer reads, "A swimmer rowing. (Un aimant parallèle.)" Together these answers suggest a conceptual hieroglyph similar to the type of lettrist work in Lemaître's "Memory Aid." It is that hieroglyphic structure that assembling artists tend to favor over the more linguistic structural patterns of concrete poetry.

8. The issue includes a number of documentations of happenings by Allan Kaprow and Al Hansen. Essays include "intermedia" (1966) by Dick Higgins and a reprinted essay on the all-at-once world by Marshall McLuhan.

9. Knowles explains that "the big book is not a product, but a process, and the person using the book must accept himself as part of the process, discarding enough reserve to bend over and enter the book-flexing flowing, discarding stances. the big book cannot be known without being entered, and it cannot be entered without being modified—so that getting to know it alters it, even as it alters us, and there can be no one interpretation. So down on hands and knees then, and through the cover, on through a hole burned in a vinyl page, and down onto belly to crawl through a tunnel in a wall of artificial grass and water, a realm of pleasingly overt artifice. After wiggling through the tunnel, one enters the apartment, an illusionless reality, a world without artifice, the unpretentious Manhattan living-loft of the 1950s and 60s. This underworld, such as an epic hero usually enters, presents the processes of life nonchalantly, without varnish, for acceptance. The acceptance leads (led me) through the window of the apartment and up a short ladder, which I read to mean that when the apartment felt to be sufficient, it ceased to be an underworld and became a means toward eleva-

tion. Others who read the big book, who take this journey through metaphors, will be on a different quest and will arrive at different goals, but necessarily while they are in the big book they will be as mobile kinetic audio visual energetic and beautiful as it is" (in Vostell n.p.).

10. Bertrand Clavez mentions one event where the lettrists worked directly with Fluxus-associated artists. In an e-mail sent to me on January 31, 2000, Clavez writes about "very early contacts between the Fluxus bunch and the Letterists and situationists that happened at the Festum Fluxorum at the American Center of Paris in Dec. 1962. François Dufréane, at that time in the Nouveau Réalistes group, interpreted his 'Tombeau de Pierre Larousse,' his masterwork of letterist concrete poetry. He was the first in France to use a tape recorder to make his poetry, and developed the Megapneume concept with Wolman. He was one of the very first participants in Letterism with Isidore Isou, when he was still at school (at the age of about 16, the manifesto of letterism he signed was printed in 1947). He later distanced himself from the movement in the early 50s, and went on to help build the Internationale lettriste with Guy Debord, which was to become the Internationale Situationniste a bit later. He participated in the Festum Fluxorum, with Daniel Spoerri."

11. A number of assemblings began appearing in selected bookstores during the late 1980s. *Art Works* led the way into this larger market. The contributions to that assembling focused on the nonstandardized possibilities of the 8½-by-11-inch format. Much of the work consists of photocopied montages. In one issue (vol. 3, no. 3, July 1986), an unsigned contribution consists of a piece of the American flag, including some blue background and a couple of stars, mounted on three quarters of a single page. Attached to the rest of the page is a flyer for "liberty weekend" stamped "canceled." There are postagelike stamps with bombs falling. There is also a litter piece in the same issue, with pieces of paper to be littered. The facile messages of the *détournement* and instructions do not compare well to situationist or Fluxus work, or to the alternative politics proposed in an assembling like *Blast,* produced in the 1990s. Among the other assemblings appearing in the 1990s, *Words and Pictures* continues in the Fluxus lineage by combining conceptual work with neat pop packaging. The neoist work discussed in chapter 3 continued as more issues of *SMILE* appeared into the 1990s and as on-line anonymity produced more works about the (lack of) an author's identity.

7. Assemblings as Intimate Bureaucracies

1. Perkins uses a slightly different version of this quote as part of his justification for claiming that *The Blind Man* was the first assembling (Introduction).

2. This anthology with Rothenberg's commentary was out of print until recently. It includes visual poems by Marcel Duchamp as well as a discussion of the importance of periodicals to the dissemination of visual poetry in the early part of the twentieth century.

3. There is no consensus about whether the sensibility of Fluxus, for

example, that emerged during the second half of the twentieth century was neodada. Many involved in Fluxus would object to this claim, and others do not seem troubled by the connection. Claiming that neodada is an *inappropriate* label, Dick Higgins explains that "early Happenings and Fluxus (like the works of Rauschenberg and Johns) were often dismissed as neo-Dada. This was, of course, extremely annoying and embarrassing to those of us who knew what Dada was or had been. For example, I knew several of the old Dadaists, had been raised on their work, and there was no doubt in my mind that what we Happenings and Fluxus people were doing had rather little to do with Dada" (Fluxus n.p.). Ben Vautier, also a Fluxus participant, offers the opposite interpretation of Fluxus as falling within the dada lineage. In an essay constructed in all-capitalized type and using poetic layout and images, Vautier writes, "DADA IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF HOW DADA WAS PERCEIVED BY THE YOUNG GENERATION. WITHOUT DADA THERE WOULD NOT BE CAGE/FLUXUS/POP ART/NEW REALISM/LAND ART/POOR ART/BODY ART/NARRATIVE ART/ETC/A POST DADA SITUATION IS TO TRY TO DO SOMETHING NEW AFTER KNOWING THAT BECAUSE OF DADA NOTHING IS NEW/BECAUSE OF DADA EVERYTHING, ANYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ANYWHERE, IS ART/BEFORE DADA, ART WAS IN FORM, AFTER DADA, ART IS IN ATTITUDE" (250–52). Wolf Vostell, another Fluxus participant, also sees his work as within the dada lineage, especially the work of Huelsenbeck (Kleinschmidt 173).

4. When future scholars examine the sensibility appearing during those years, the work on texts that fall somewhere in the gaps between visual art, literary text, and performance will prove essential. Between the late 1950s and early 1970s, the works of George Brecht, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Filliou, Allan Kaprow, Yves Klein, Sol LeWitt, George Maciunas, and Ben Vautier are especially important in this regard.

5. Paik's video art often refunctions old television sets with magnets, for example, to distort the broadcast signal.

6. According to Peter Frank, the periodical *Avalanche* shared the high production values favored by Maciunas.

7. Bleus often uses his corporate alias, Administration Center, in his artworks.

8. Welch, a critic and a participant under the pseudonym Crackerjack Kid, wants to place mail art in a larger sociopolitical and historical context. His critical work, especially in his anthology of critical works by participants in mail-art networks, *Eternal Network,* focuses on specific works and also places these works in the historical context of, for example, Fluxus conceptual works. The title of Welch's anthology alludes to the mail-art networks' interest in an "eternal network" as an alternative to other systems of community and communication. Welch does not distinguish between mail-art zines and assemblings; in fact, he suggests that assemblings grew out of the networks of mail artists and Fluxus correspondence art. Stephen Perkins draws more distinctions and names more categories that Welch may, if pressed, accept explicitly, but Welch's anthology's citations and its organization create more fluid boundaries between categories.

He explains that "mail artists often associate censorship with editing" (Introduction xi); hence the assembling would naturally grow out of mail artists' inclination to accept everything sent. In that sense, the assembling chronicles the artist as networker rather than the particular artwork. Welch claims that the "lack of interest in technique was common to experimental artists" during the 1950s and 1960s, including George Maciunas and Joseph Beuys; I would argue that technique played a crucial role in the work of these two figures and others during the 1950s and 1960s. My focus is on the relationships among specific techniques, strategies, and conceptual work and the larger social implications; hence I use the term *sociopoetic*. Welch focuses on those artists' zines that began in defiant reaction *against* other mail artists' complaints about "low-quality" work.

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Unpublished (Printed) Editions was a collective of artists, writers, and composers who independently produced their works, alone or with others, and then linked them with the works of others with similar sensibilities—such as Cage, Oliveros, Corner, Mac Low, Higgins, and Knowles—under the common heading so that distribution would be easier.

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Index

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