

The MAIL-INTERVIEW project
by Ruud Janssen – Netherlands

A 4th compilation of some mail-interviews

After the first three volumes (Mail-Interviews Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3) and the publication of Interview Mail-Artists did with me, this is the fifth publication with 21 more mail-interviews and a reprint of the last newsletter.

Some Interviews ended because there never came a reply to a last question. The broken interviews are included in this publication

© 2008 TAM-Publications

This 4th set of mail-interviews was also done in the years 1994-2004 by Ruud Janssen. This publication contains a small collection out of the 80+ interviews that he did in these years.

Contact-address:

TAM-Publications

P.O.Box 1055

4801 BB Breda

the NETHERLANDS

e-mail : r.janssen@iuoma.org

URL : www.iuoma.org

CONTENT

CONTENT.....	5
INTRODUCTION	8
H.R. FRICKER	11
JULIA TANT	25
RAPHAEL NADOLNY	36
JOHN EVANS	45
BERN PORTER.....	54
BIRGER JESH.....	57
PATRICIA COLLINS	68
DANIEL PLUNKETT	85
PATRICIA TAVENNER.....	90
JUDITH A. HOFFBERG.....	107
PETER KÜSTERMANN.....	128
ROBERT ROCOLA.....	137
ROD SUMMERS	141
MARIE STILLKIND	162

ROY ARENELLA.....	172
RUDI RUBBEROID	199
STEPHEN PERKINS.....	216
KLAUS GROH	230
RUGGERO MAGGI.....	241
VITTORE BARONI.....	253
SVJETLANA MIMICA.....	301
The MAIL INTERVIEW newsletter	316
APPENDIX-1	331
APPENDIX-2.....	334
INDEX.....	336

INTRODUCTION

After the first publication with 16, 12 and 10 mail-interviews here is a fourth collection. They have been published before. Mostly on the Internet, and sometimes in small booklet form with cover and illustrations after an interview was finished. Small circulations always, and sent to the subscribers at that time and some archives like e.g. the MoMa, in New York,

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

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

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

Enjoy reading this collection,

Ruud Janssen

Breda, April 2008.

H.R. FRICKER

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH H.R. FRICKER
(SWITZERLAND)

Started on: 17-11-1994

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

Reply on: 26-11-1994

Hans-Ruedi Fricker : July 16th 1981 I received the magazine "Sphinx No. 12/13 1981" from Thierry Tillier, Charleroi, Belgium. I found Thierry's address (very small printed and the term "mail-art" above it) in the magazine "Gepein" from west-Berlin, which Felix Kälin, a librarian from St. Gallen, gave to me when I asked him for books on the term mail-art.

From the magazine Sphinx I took the addresses from Vittore Baroni (Italy), Lon Spiegelman (USA), Ben Vautier (France), Wulle Konsumkunst (Germany), Pawel Petasz (Poland), Günther Ruch (Switzerland), Jürgen Olbrich (Germany) and some others and sent to them a postcard with one question only on it: "What is mail-art today?" I

received many different answers, letters, manifestos, invitations and postcards. This was the beginning of my international mail art involvement.

But, ten years before I began to use the mail for artistic purposes, in the late seventies I was a member of a regional network. Contacts and activities by mail, telephone and through magazines, shows, performance activities. These activities became more and more "group-activities" and this was rather difficult in a regional area around the city of St. Gallen. This network was not open and I was glad to find the channels to the worldwide network with the help of Thierry Tillier in the summer of 1981.

RJ : In 1986 there were the MA-congresses and mail-artists from all over the world started to meet. How did this idea of the congresses start and what has it brought to the network?

Reply on : 24-1-1995

(Because of the language-problem we decided that Hans-Ruedi will answer in German language and I will translate his answer into English. Because I read & write both languages it is no problem. The questions to Hans-Ruedi are sent in English language too, because reading English is no problem for him, he only feels more comfortable in expressing his thoughts in German language)

HR : "International Mail Art is the most important and most significant art movement in the world today" was an often quoted stamp-slogan from Carlo Pittore in New York, beginning in the 80-ies.

Doubt! Were those hundreds of mail art shows, compared to normal art shows just small size, really so important? Was the "NO FEE, NO JURY, NO RETURN" as a rule really the answer to the one-way mass-media. Could these exhibitions show the artists the way out of isolation? I doubt it.

Who were the artists that participated so actively in the network? Is Carlo Pittore a typical Mail artists? He came from Maine to New York to be discovered as talented artists, painted, looked for Galleries and in his free time was a mail artist. He was a good networker, participated in shows, edited a magazine (self-propaganda?) in which he published lists of mail art shows. Carlo had hundreds of personal contacts through the post where he encouraged many people to undertake their own activities. Carlo was a generous host in his New York apartment at the 10th street.

In February 1984 I lived for 14 days in his apartment, and I couldn't believe what I saw. Every morning there came this young Latin boxer in Carlo's atelier, put on the boxer-shirt, boxing gloves and matching shoes and froze into a fighting-position so Carlo could paint his portrait in oil-paint. While the boxer tried to keep his position Carlo complained that the galleries didn't accept his

paintings, that suddenly they all were interested in Keith Haring and that his own painting was great too....

The right mood to make me crazy. The apartment and atelier of Carlo Pittore/Charles Stanley covered with dozens of boxer paintings - in fighting position or knocked-out lying on the floor. Where Carlo dreamt his American Dream - famous and rich - but frustrated, frustrated.....

I was at the meeting-place of the "dead artists society" ; the mail art network was merely used to recreate the misconception of the genius and most important artist.

Outside, in the real world, Art and information had, for long-time already, become products in a booming market. The artist as a "moralistic institution" was only a commercial slogan of the art-market. Moralistic attitudes were better of at Greenpeace; Creativity had its place at silicon valley.

Then, with the experiences in the atelier of Carlo Pittore, I started with the Tourism Campaign..... I wanted the mail artists to move away from the tables filled with rubber stamps. With firm directions - PLEASE VISIT: - I wanted to let them travel around the real world, where they would never meet anybody, because the travelling was the goal.

Who were these "artists" that were involved in the network? Was Carlo typical? Are there people who wanted to transform "artists" into "humans" again?

Günther Ruch from Genf - 400 km from my city - did write often about the desire to organize a congress to discuss this theme. He believed in a democratic congress where there are resolutions to confirm a common goal. We decided together to explore the adventure called "congress". I was very skeptical. The Congress as "Institution", where only few could participate and influence the outcome? The rich Switzerland as meeting place? The people from the East isolated and not able to travel, the people from overseas, who could pay that? But the idea to discuss the mail art strategies for the 80-ies was very interesting. The mail artists of the 70-ies had, by the book "Correspondence Art" from Stofflet and Crane, their own historic document. A congress could clarify the new positions. Günther and I talked for long about the idea, but only could agree on the concept 'lets pretend'. In the summer of 1985 we sent, to the active mail-artists we knew, a congress-invitation and asked for a reaction about their views about this idea. It became clear: as a central happening the congress could only take place in a fictive way.

Strange enough the idea of a congress was accepted quite well, and only few protested against the proposed centralization. Because of the

overwhelming response from the network, Günther wanted to proceed with the congress-idea. No fictive congress, but a real one in Switzerland.

For me the idea still felt uncomfortable. The international mail art network was no "group" like the Futurists, the Surrealists, the 'Situationistisch Internationalists' (SI), or other gatherings of artists with a goal to break through, which wanted to explain the boundaries of who was a mail-artist or not. It was obvious that the "artist" as a concept no longer was valid so why go back to the conventional means of gathering as a group?

How to solve this problem? To meet people personally, one believed to know very well through the post, was an excellent idea. Tourism - to use the space between the people - perfect.

In spring 1985 I started a project in St. Gallen (East-Switzerland) called "Scene intimate/Decentralized Exhibition of the year". I made a proposition to fellow-artists from the local regional Art-scene, to make an exhibition or installation not at a central place, but everywhere there where the artist lived. The visitors of the "Annual exhibition" could not see the complete exhibition at one place in e.g. 5 minutes but they had to travel through St. Gallen to visit several places. Also the artists had to visit each other. A map of the city locating the artists with their art was should become the invitation. But eventually the majority of the artist decided for an

exhibition at a central place. A defeat for me? No. Because the principle - decentralization - brought me the idea: think Local, act global.

That was the solution for the mail art congress! Not at one place, but at many places. Not one organizer, but many..... No program but offer an open principle:

decentralized world-wide mail-art congress where two or more people meet there a congress will take place.

Günther was surprised when I agreed with a real congress, and I could convince him, that the "decentralized form" was perfect for the congress.

We made from the material we gathered through the first (fictive) invitation a selection and Günther made from that a Clinch Magazine. With Clinch 8 we made propaganda for the decentralized congress-idea. Between June and October 1986 everybody could organize a congress, following his/her own possibilities and needs, or, where two or more mail artists meet, a congress takes place.

With this it became possible, that in South-America, Australia, in East-Europe, in small or large cities, in houses, halls or at the beach, congresses could take place. The length of the period (between June and October) should make it possible that there would

be congresses at different moments, so an artist with a love for travel could visit many congresses. The idea was accepted very well and about 80 sessions in over 20 countries took place.

Günther and I didn't organize the congress, but the single organizers of the sessions did. We were only the initiators of an idea based on networking, which we only had to put into words.

The congress should not raise borders; it should be the basis for personal, open and real meetings. I met many interesting people who didn't belong to the "dead artists society", they were networkers.

RJ : In 1992 there was a new series of congresses, the worldwide "Decentralized Networker Congress" where you organized together with Peter W. Kaufmann. This year, in 1995, Chuck Welch is doing the Telenetlink congress, where he wants to explore the possibilities of Internet for mail artists. In what direction is this all going? Could you give your views and explain them to me?

Reply on 11-2-1996

HR : Already in 1992, during the worldwide Decentralized Networker congresses, Crackerjack Kid had many e-mail contacts with networkers who used the internet. Thanks to him, a bridge was established, from the mail art movement to the new networker generation.

For some years there are artists, who were not connected to the mail art network, one could say depending on their system, tried out new networking-strategies. Many of them were brought up with the computer, at the University they had access to computers, and on-line connections could be made for free.

Excited by this new communication-tool, and aware of the cultural changes that are ahead as well as guided by theoreticals as Baudrillard, Flusser and others, many artists started to work in areas that were already been covered by lots of mail artists.

For the older generation mail artists it is often surprising to see, how these new networkers and media-artists try out network strategies and show their works in Galleries and Museums as modern art, while these things have all been done before in the mail art context.

Well, this shouldn't surprise us too much. First, these network strategies sometimes look alike, but the roots and goals are different as they were done in mail art. Second, in the mail art network it was the wish to stay outside the official art world.

Because I believe, that many active mail art networkers have a wealthy experience in worldwide exchange and also in connection to direct communication and the cooperation they can

share their stories, they should participate immediately in the current discussions, wherever they take place. In particular during the 80's the mail art movement has developed its own field for world culture and discussion.

In many aspects the mail art network was a preparation of Internet.

Plenty of energy was needed to build our communication system; lots of mail art shows, magazines and meetings, which make the door open for "mail on-line" exchange systems. The participating in the mail network was often not really satisfying, because in spite of the goal, "the networking with all people" this couldn't be done. Probably a clever mail artist invented the Internet.

In today's Internet there are, also online, several possibilities to contact others directly: who wants to be in contact with artists just has to look for the right forum. Who only wants to look for "contacts" probably will end up in the Chat boxes. Who wants to presents his artworks without jury, can do so on the Internet.

I will start to participate in the Internet as soon as have more control over my new computer. The modem is ready; I only need to get the access to a provider. To work together building a virtual world, what prospects!

But, then there are the experiences and knowledge of the mail art network, the transport- and communications-era has brought us different surroundings, different ways to look at the things that are around us.

In this new reality, e.g. the "conquered transition to smaller distances and endless spaces", I must find my place, I want to explore my creative goals. But these goals won't be merely the sending of mail art products or the communication in Internet.

RJ : The specific aspects of the Internet that are different to the traditional network via the postal system aren't always that positive. In some large parts of our world there are people who have a mailbox, but not a computer, let alone access to the Internet. Also the digital form of the Internet doesn't allow all kinds of artworks to be shown, sent or received. I am not all that optimistic for the use of the Internet in the future (I published some texts about this which I will send you). Am I being too pessimistic?

Reply on 16-3-1996 (this time the answer came in English language)

HR : It seems we have different views on what Internet is. For my interests as an artist the Internet is not a transport system it is a context. This context is a communication system and a space system. The cyber space... As an artist I prefer to act in spaces. That means I have to change strategies and

instruments all the time. Each artistic act is an intervention that changes the system and I know that I am a part of the system too.

RJ : Well, I think that different views are very healthy. In fact I think that if one is open, and doesn't always think that he/she is right but is open for new things, the hearing of different views is very attractive. It shapes the thought of every single person. For me the mail art network, the network, the Internet, it is just a learning system in which I am learning all the time. The results of my learning process I try to express in which form is necessary. So it is also some kind of act. But is it art? What is art nowadays for you?

Reply on 18-4-1996

HR : A word, a context, a communication-strategy (using art-techniques).

RJ : What communication-strategy do you use? Could you explain your thoughts on that?

next answer on 15-4-1997

(Hans Ruedi's answer came after a long silence. This time he answered in German language again, which I translated into English).

HR : When I told before, Art itself is also a communication-strategy, I didn't limit it on the topics "networking" or Mail Art.

Networking has enlarged the art system by making direct, autonomic communication and exchange between artists possible. I realize that also the means - the media - are essential and important. A painting or any other traditional art form, as shown in most Museums and galleries, are also communication-forms from individuals.

Not only paper

(Because of time & other things that happened in both our lives this interview was broken off. On November 25th 2001 I decided to put all unfinished interviews online as well).

This Interview is like mail-art: it is never finished.....

JULIA TANT

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JULIA TANT (UK)

Started on 11-10-1997

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

Reply on 27-10-1997

Julia Tant : I first got involved about 1990. My friend Stefan Szelkun sent me a letter (we were not friends at this point) which had various rubber stamps on it. I really liked this way of communicating and when I wrote back to him about the contents of his letter, I asked him where did he get the rubber stamp from.

He didn't really tell me the answer, I think I recall he said something like, "You get them around" which I didn't know what that meant. He did also say something about how you could make them yourself, but he didn't elaborate on that.

Later though he introduced me to a friend of his called Don Jarvis / Dawn Redwood, and Don invited me to a bookfare in Victoria. At the fare

there was the Mail Art Crowd and Heigndesign-Stempelspass. I immediately looked for any rubber stamps that appealed to me and since I was doing art work about Marilyn Monrou at that time, I was instantly drawn to a rubber stamp they had of Marilyn. Naturally I bought it and I haven't looked back since.

I think it was through Dawn sending me invites from people in other countries that I then began branching out doing other aspects of mail art, such as contributing to specific projects. For a while I did one after another but then I had to resume concentrating on my other art work so I couldn't engage in so many projects but I have continued always to use my rubber stamps and to add bits and pieces to all my mail.

I can't see myself ever giving up now and I am about to join in the project of the Renegade Library in Canada who are doing a project about Mail Art Books. I've got a little second hand photo frames book that I am going to turn into my own creative book contribution to Canada.

I hope this sufficiently answers your question. I will lastly say that I became sufficiently interested in mail art very quickly so that I attended at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London, a lecture by John Held Jr. , that was to tell us about the history of Mail Art. I was such a new comer to mail art that I was feeling very keen and interested and

wanting to learn about it a lot. I felt very quickly disappointed though at this lecture because John Held Jr. gave the impression that most mail artists were men, and I didn't want to feel a lone woman doing mail art with mostly all men.

I challenged him about it to find out if it was mere prejudice on his part or if it really was nearly all men that did mail art, as I just didn't feel that that would be the case.

The answer he gave was so chauvinistic that I figured it had to be his prejudice so I set about trying to make contact with other women mail artists too.

I now have a good cross section of people I communicate with and hopefully these years later John Held Jr. has overcome his prejudice and communicates with women mail artists too, so that we can now be included in his history of mail art it / when he does any other lectures about it. We woman mail artists as you know Ruud, are definitely out there!

RJ : Yes I know Julia, lucky enough there are a lot of interesting woman mail artists out there. Somehow though you aren't the only woman who writes about the fact that sometimes this part of the mail art network is not fully presented in lectures , documentations and even publications. When I count the number of male and female, it always

seems that there are less female artists named. Also in my own mail-interview project I noticed this. What are reasons for the fact that there seem to be more male mail-artists than female? Or isn't this the case at all?

next answer on 8-11-1997

JT: Dear Ruud, I will do my best to answer your latest question about why there seem to be more male artists than female artists.

This question needs to be approached in quite a number of different ways.

First, I don't actually know whether there are as many or less or even more women mail artists than men because I don't actually approach the situation in that way, and besides I've not done a world head count on that. What I feel is that it is irrelevant as to the actual numbers of each unless you are doing some specific survey about that. What is important though is that however many women are involved in mail art, they should be acknowledged made visible. In fact the fewer there are the more important it is not to leave them out, not to exclude them because that makes them a rare breed, and rare breeds are usually taken special care of.

I don't believe though that we are that rare, I do think we are made to seem as if we are, or certainly have been.

Then there is the situation that if you give the impression that an organization or group activity is mainly made up of men, many women have no interest in it, or don't join in because they feel excluded even before they would get to the stage of wanting to join. So, in other words, if you convey a group is mostly males then you perpetuate women excluding themselves, but not for the reason of not really wanting to be involved.

A week ago, I wrote to a TV Channel about the fact that a vote being taken as to who should be the new Mayor for London did not have any women that we could vote for. Later I got a phone call from the Producer. He said I had been the only person (woman) to write in about it and had noted that no one in the audience raised that question.

I then explained to him that that didn't surprise me but it had nothing to do with women "being their own worst enemies" by not questioning that situation. Women are so used to being in situations where there are no women, that they've grown up with it from birth.

The previous week one program, the only program I've ever seen , had only women on it but it wasn't a program about specifically women, when of course if the program is all women that is expected. This was just a regular program. After the program many men wrote in and complained! Now they did

this because they are totally unused to a program that does not include any men.

Ironically when you consider all the millions of programs that leave out women and do not expect any women to consider that out of order , the one time when all women were on a program the men found that too much.

So you can see from this that there is a lot of prejudice going on and a lot of accepting the status quo. In some ways of course women do have more equality but in other ways, since the seventies and due to the 18 year reign here of the Tory Party led by sadly a woman who did not like other women, (that's not unusual either) many younger women are being so exploited nowadays and they don't even know it. They certainly aren't into direct action about it as we were in the seventies and I still am in the 90s.

So, I was not at all surprised that I was the only women raising the fact that here we are going into the millennium with the same old values as we've had for so long.

As far as I'm concerned the involvement of women in mail art is not about how many of us there are, but that we are seen to be involved and that there should be interest on the part of men and other women as to what our contribution is.

Women generally do live different lives from men, even in the world of greater equality, and that will one way and another be reflected in our contribution to the world of mail art. The world of mail art should value and appreciate that and be thankful to have it.

I hope this answers your question fully, if not do let me know Ruud and I'll take it up.

RJ : Yes, it is clear, and maybe some other mail artists (male or female) should write about this subject as well. But let's focus also on the work you do in mail art. Besides taking part in mail art projects you also arranged some yourself. What was your last project about?

next answer on 27-11-1997

(because of a break I took the retyping and next question only were done on April 22nd 1998 , a 5 month break)

JT : Dear Ruud, Thank you for your latest interesting question but before I answer it I would like to say a bit more in answer to your last question of the less visibility of female mail artists, because I feel I should also have said that another couple of relevant aspects for women , is that in general, in a big general way in fact, it is women who take mayor responsibility domestically in relationships and that takes up a big part of women's lives,

especially when there are children involved. Women also have less money and mail art can become costly, especially when you get into the field of computer mail art , and writing books about mail art.

Now onto your latest question.....

My latest mail art project has culminated into a show, which was exhibited at our local library in Blixton originally and then transferred to another library , and in the new year will transfer to a third library. It is also on the internet, under Pink ink, Newart. The mail art show was put together, under the name of Cooltan Arts, which is a group of artists I am involved with.

Cooltan does not currently have a base (any premises) so creating a mail art show seemed like a good idea because we could bring it together at home. Another artist Joanna Spitinan , was the main source of the collaboration, and I don't believe I could have put the show together without her , because she has computer skills, which I don't.

We wrote to about 500 people worldwide and received about 250 responses. I was particularly pleased to have involved children in this project, and am surprised that the mail art network doesn't seem to have much reference to children in it. The children's work was so successful that I have since done two more mail art projects with children. One

was from Italy, and was a direct request to children to make fantastic animals - and the children did!

The latest is a small project by Martha Althison, of Beckenham , London. The children's work for this was outstanding and in terms of creativity , is , in my view , superior quality to the work done by the adult for this show, so we adults can learn a lot from them!

When I gave the mail art workshops for children, I accompanied the practical art practice, with a session giving the children the chance to tell me all their thoughts about art and artists. One group ranged from age 2 years to 11 years , and the variety of ages improved the quality of the group, since the very young ones , looked to the older children for inspiration. So the Cooltan international mail art show is an art show of children and adults work together, which is very unusual.

I hope this answers your question adequately. I am writing this freehand as I am facilitating at Cooltran latest show, which is in a big space provided to us by Texo Stores. It is a space as large as a supermarket at the Elephant and Castle , London , and is called the PAYROLL SHOW. Some mail artists sent in some work, so this hangs in the show with all the other art.

One Japanese artist has made a kind of swirly snake from 1,500 match boxes, and the snakes tail is made all spiky with burnt matches.

Later I will send you a photograph of the show , when my film is developed.

So for now , I send you best wishes, Julia

RJ : Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. You seem to be always that active in the art world. What gives you the energy to keep on doing that work?

(Never received a reply, so the interview was ended)

RAPHAEL NADOLNY

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RAPHAEL NADOLNY (POLAND)

Started on: 3-1-1995

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

Reply on: 2-2-1995

Raphael Nadolny : It was in March or April 1988. I went to the Post Office to send a letter to my friend and saw there a mail art exhibition. I don't remember the title now. It was very interesting for me. I saw information it was organized by "Mój wiat" - a teenage magazine. Then I bought this magazine and found a special part about mail art in it. Finally I started to send mail in this Network.

RJ : What were your first experiences with the mail-art network?

Reply on : 1-3-1995

RN : I started to send my works to many projects and persons. It was important for me to receive first answers, first documentations. It was very exciting. At this moment I had no deep thoughts about Mail Art Network, about communication, about role and position of mail art in culture. Just participating in many projects and exhibitions. It was important to have consciousness that everyone has the same possibility to participation. One of my first contacts was participation in Ryosuke Cohen s' project "Brain Cell" (no 126). My list of addresses was still growing. But in this time, end of the 80's I had many contacts with mail-artists in Poland, most of them at my age. Some contacts became personal correspondents and I even met a few of them personally. Next was my first project "In memory of Salvador Dali."

RJ : Tell me more about your first project. How did you think of it, how did it go, what did it teach you?

Reply on : 22-4-1995

RN : It was a few months after the death of Salvador Dali (23th Jan. 1989). I was thinking about my first project and wanted to find an interesting subject. It was probably some kind of irrational impulse and result of my interest in surrealistic art in this time. So, the choice was very personal. Now I'm not so sure about it, because of commercial activities of Dali in the art world. On the other hand the theme was only the pretext to see how it'd be going.

Deadline was January 1st 1990. I received works from 21 participants. Works were very different. Some with relations to Dali's' works, some surrealist and some not very connected with the theme. All was exhibited during The Art ZINE Gallery show in Zielona Góra , 2-4 October 1992.

This project taught me that participants are not always interested in the subject of the Mail Art Show. They send just one Xerox copy of one work to many projects and important to them is to receive documentation. It made me sure that personal contacts and correspondence are a better way to exchange thoughts, ideas and works. But on the other hand Mail Art is a network and Mail Artists should participate in projects to have the consciousness that they are a group of people making something together. Networking is the essence of Mail Art.

RJ : Do you answer all the mail art you get?

(On November 2nd I received the magazine Irons, no. 9 , February 1995, sent out end of October 1995. I sent the question again to Raphael Nadolny and also a sample of a finished interview with Anna Banana and some texts I wrote in the last months because he asks for texts about mail art for his publications)

Reply on 12-11-1995

RN : Dear Ruud, After receiving your question I sent you my answer, but now I see that my letter didn't reach you. So it disappeared in the post office entrails. But now I cannot find my answer to your question in my archive, so I wrote a new one:

No, of course not. It depends on many reasons. Things which I receive must show something impressive and important for me at this moment. Sometimes I receive a piece of mail, leave it down without my feelings about it. When I take it again (one week later for example), find in this work something interesting and impressive. The act of answering depends on my personal feelings on that day, what I am thinking it then. Maybe about bad weather and rain?

At my beginnings in mail art, I wanted to get many contacts. So I sent answers to all persons. But after a few months I realized that this activity is not so important to me as before. I always wanted to make handmade works, so when there came more and more Xerox copies I was disappointed (that's the reason why I never answer chain letters; I hate them). Works of art means to me something very personal, to be with a very close touch with a person - artist behind it. But not a problem of a copy was important. The mail cannot be anonymous for me. When a Xerox copy has substance, it moves me to answer. We may say the same about a mail art project.

RJ : How large is the network you have discovered so far? Do you have any clue to how many mail artist / networkers there are all over the world?

Reply on 30-12-1995

RN : My mail art network is not so big at this moment. I've got permanent contacts with about 25-30 persons. This is my most important part of the network and mail art activity. Communication with these networkers is more personal, not only by sending art works and nothing else. We exchange thoughts, ideas, sometimes personal problems, so this is like pen-pal correspondence.

They've become my friends (even if I didn't meet them personally), but mail art is the base of this contacts. The number of networkers is changing and is not so important. Some people are silent for a long time and then I've got a new contact which becomes more personal. But of course I send works to many mail art projects, to some people and contacts with them are only this one time.

I think this is very difficult to find the division line between networking and personal contacts. This two spaces are diffused, because our artistic creativity is personal. The need of break our own lonely is one of the basis of mail art networking. This subject is not so often touched upon; important are others from social to artistic. But this problem,

so psychological, to break our exceptionalism between people around us, to find persons who are different like us, is one of the most important problems.

In the 70's it was very exciting to break isolation between artists who wanted to break with the official way of thinking about art and situation of the artist in the art-world. In countries under communist regime it was so important. Artists could break official art system, with censorship, with galleries controlled by government. In Poland mail art started in the early 70's and it was connected with conceptual activity. It was a chance to receive fresh ideas from all over the world. Mail art was a substitute for the freedom.

There are two different accents: on the West against commercial activities in art world; in communist countries to avoid official art system controlled by the government. Not everyone remembers this. But this is a historical problem, for art historians, Mail art networks are now quite different. It is a big black hole which absorbs everything: not only mail art, fax art, computer art, e-mail. You can find everything, anarchist ideas, erotic, boycotts, gender actions, music, video art, and more and more. I think that Global Mail can show how different and big the network is now. And I cannot say the number of participants; it's changing every day, but during our contacts, we create our own, small networks. Everyone is different.

RJ : The many sides of "mail art", that one can encounter while networking, is of course its strength. In your answer you mentioned some different aspects. Which ones are interesting for you as an artist?

Reply on 20-2-1996

RN : The most important aspect in mail art networking is the possibility to show my works and ideas to other persons, but not ordinary people passing by on the street. They are artists too, with their own, mostly very different views on art. Sometimes it is like a confrontation. I'd like to see their reactions, when they receive my works. Making art works means for me to show my inner feelings, to express my thoughts, my ideas, my views on different things, to show when I'm very sad (like today) or I'm happy etc.

But aesthetic, pictorial aspect, is very important too, because I express it in plastic forms, using different techniques. And I'd like to share it with other Networkers. This is very personal, a level in mail art interesting for me.

But I know that mail art is a social, or a common activity. We can express our views about communities, governments, to make actions to support people in hard situations (for example in Balkan Countries). There are many possibilities, but

I think that we are afraid to use them all. Maybe I know a so small part of the network, but I think that we lost sometimes the idea of dada and Fluxus (of course now it is a quite different time, but the world in general is the same). Needs the world a next Utopia? Mail art network gives many possibilities and maybe we are not aware of subversive character of this movement. Following the ideas of Avram Naom Chomsky, mail art network could avoid "manufacture of consent" in democratic communities (not popular views are soften, awkward facts are hidden even without any official prohibition). Radical views are excluded (for example in mass media) by free market activities, great financial companies who posses TV, Radio, Press, etc. And in culture and art it looks the same.

That is the reason why I like all projects concerning social or political activities. You can show your views without any censorship and during the exhibition many people can see it. You can - in this way - confirm the state of your individuality, remembering that thousands of people are making their same art at this moment.

RJ : Are there also negative sides to the mail art network?

(there never came a reply, so the interview was ended)

JOHN EVANS

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JOHN EVANS (USA)

Started on 11-6-1996

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

Reply on 16-1-1997

(John Evans answer was written on a paper filled with color-tests with ink he made before).

John Evans : Dear Ruud Janssen. Thanks for inviting me to be interviewed for your project. Sorry that I have been slow in responding. The pile of mail on my desk simply seems to keep growing. I need a secretary - ah wouldn't that be great.

Happy 1997. When is your birthday? As to your question - When did I get involved in Mail/Male Art?

Well it was in 1964 - 33 years ago. WOW! I remember it vividly - I was @ a party on West 10th Street in "the " Village @ HarveySpevaks. It was a

hot summer afternoon, and there were these 2 men there - Ray Johnson + Albert Fine who were fascinated by this rather crude tattoo of a knife on my left arm (I got it while in High school in Redondo Beach, California). I had no idea who they were, but Ray went off somewhere, and then reappeared on the roof where the party had moved, with a drawing of a knife, which could be a penis - it said "knife" and was signed Ray Johnson. It hangs above this desk. After that I began getting correspondance of the "please add to and send to" variety from both him + Albert. Have really met so many people through this encounter that I lose track - it changed my life, and I am eternally grateful to all concerned. Since Ray died I have been a bit slow in getting to my correspondancing, on + I do try. Do hope this is what you want. Best of love, luck + laughs, @

ps. What ever happened to Sonja van der Burg of Afzet? She always spoke highly of you.

RJ : Dear John Evans, In connection to your questions to me: My birthday is July 29th. What happened to Sonja? She moved to a new address and sent nobody this new address. A way to stop with mail art, and as far as I know she moved to other ways to express herself. I did get her new address from Mark Bloch one year ago, but the letter I sent to her was never replied.

But in this interview I would like to focus on what you have done and experienced in these 33 years. A long time indeed. Are you still in contact with most of the mail artists from the 60's and 70's you encountered then?

(Together with my answer I sent John some info's of my latest activities)

next answer on 3-3-1997

JE : Thanks for the package postmarked 22 January. Like the strange creature that you painted on the envelope. Also the account of your trip to San Francisco was a joy to read. It is a great city. Next trip you must come to Daciddy - Nieuw Amsterdam, which is an even greater city. There are a number of mail artists here, but we are not very organized.

As to your question about being in contact with the mail artists from the 60's & the 70's , many of them have died, or dropped out of the circuit. Those who have died that I know of being Cavellini, Ray Johnson, May Wilson, Pauline Smith, Harvey Spevak, Albert Fine, Mike Belt, Rob Cobugio, Brian Buogac and perhaps Falves Silva of Brasil. There are many who I am still in touch with from that time - Ed Plunkett, Buster Cleveland, Ed Higgins, Mark Bloch, Bill Gaglione, Tim Mancusi, Pat Tavenner, Anna Banana, Les Barbot, Carlo Pittore, Walt Evans, Michael Leigh, Art Naphro, Bill Dobbs,

Les Oisteame, Geff Hendricks, Sur Rodney Sur, Wally Darnell, Philip van Aver, Jim Klein. There must be others who I am forgetting, but @ my advanced age it is to be expected. Actually as I wrote the above three of my favorites come to mind - Richard C. + Blaster (Al Ackerman) + Wilson.

It is getting late and I must get to bed as I get up @ 5 AM so that I can go to my part time job as a "horticultural technician". This helps pay the rent, and is only 3 days a week so it is bearable. It entails watering + caring for plants in these Manhattan Towers - a strange, but wonderful garden.

Hope all is well for you. Love, Luck + Laughts @ *

(* this is a lowercase E with a dot, not a symbol for at (@) - my signature)

RJ : The problem is that the computer has problems with "lowercase E with a dot", but then again, it is a machine and not human. This interview seems to get more of a letter-exchange than a set of questions and answers, but I don't mind. Yes, I know that New York is an interesting place to visit. It is on my list of wishes, so who knows what happens.

You mention a lot of mail artists of the beginning period. Are there also newcomers to the mail art network that write to you?

next answer on 28-8-1997

(with his answer John Evans sent me two Xeroxes. One Xerox was about his upcoming exhibition Invitational '97 - September 10 - October 4. The other copy of a page in the New York Times, about America Off-line; the effects of the e-mail and the explanation that there still is MAIL. His interview-answer was written on a cut-open envelope from Magret A kane with color stains of paint on it).

JE : Thanks for your last missive of which there is no date that I find legible. Your letter actually accompanied me to Redondo Beach, California, where I thought I might have a bit of time to do some Mail art. Had to go attend my mother's funeral, but did not have any time to do much but deal with family matters. My mother, Alice Sauers Evans , lived to be 91 and had been sick, so her death was expected, but it is always hard to lose one so close. Things went smoothly though.

As I look over the copy of my letter to you I see some blatant omissions from my list. Guy Bleus, who I simple love, being the most outstandingly missed.

Your question, regarding newcomers - there do not seem to be any with the exception of yourself who has been around for awhile, that I am now correspondancing with. C'est la vie.

RJ : You like to work a lot with paper, ink and water-colors, all those things done by hand. What do you think of the things that are produced by computers?

(In March 1998 I heard from Roy Arenella that he met with John Evans at the opening of his new exhibition - Collages & Paintings , 1968-98. I decided to send the last question to John Evans again just in case he lost it. Quite soon after that I got the next answer and als a photo/card in it that Roy sent to John with a portrait photo he made of him).

reply on 11-04-1998

JE : What do I think about computer art? Well I find it to be a valid form of Art. More so than so called "performance" or "Video". Guess I do not like things that make one vegetate. I barely watch videos or TV @ home. Why should I have to go to a gallery or a museum. Some performance art has been really quite wonderful, but I prefer "the" theatre. Computers are like cameras in a way and I love photographs preferably old ones from the 19th century. Can one believe the time? WOW. End of 20th. Strange weather we have been having. Very warm. Have been getting collages from a couple of college students in Brazil. Interesting!

RJ : What makes a collage interesting to you?

(there was a long pause between the sending of the question and the receiving of the answer. Just before the

summer, which I spent in Germany and Greece, I sent John Evans a copy of the last question)

next answer on 19-11-1998

(with John Evans's answer he sent two cards of invitations to exhibitions. One of Collages by Vince Grimaldi - "Man and his world" , and the other one "And I Quote" (dedicated to Buster Cleveland 1943-1998) with also work by John Evans in it. "A very good show!" , John writes on this last card. Something I knew since another person I interview (Roy Arenella) sent a very wonderful review about John's part in the exhibition)

JE : Dear Ruud, Cannot believe that I am finally getting around to answer your question and the pack of things which you last sent. Do hope that you got to Germany + to Greece.

My daughter India is now in Perugia - Italia. She seems to be loving it. Who wouldn't @ 20, and studying art. In the next term she will be in Firenze. Lucky.

As to your new question - on the verso. "What makes a collage interesting to me?" - I really love to look @ all different kinds of collage and all art in general. It is always fascinating how a person handles the different elements which go into the making of a work. As Gertrude Stein said:

"Everything is the same on It different" and vive la difference. Love, Luck Laughts @

RJ : You seem to like French language a lot. Any specific reason for that?

BERN PORTER

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH BERN PORTER (USA)

Started on: 29-8-1995

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

Reply on 12-9-1995

Bern Porter : I invented mail art, November 11. 1913

RJ : Why November 11th 1913? What happened on that day that you decided to start to send out mail art?

Reply on 19-10-1995

BP : Sitting together on the floor of his 8x8 foot apartment east side New York I asked Ray: "What are you doing?" He answered: "Being myself."

(the next question to Bern Porter I wrote with pencil on a two-color blue silk-screen printing of Ray Johnson)

RJ : Ray answered "Being myself". So, who was Ray? I would like to know.

Reply on 20-3-1996

BP : I asked Ray: "What are you doing?" He answered: "Being myself, average weight, average height, non drinking, non smoking, daily on the uproad to survival."

I maintain at a library here "The Bern Porter Collection of Contemporary Letters" and wish to have the complete set of everything you have ever done. Advise cost delivered to me U.S.A. B.P U.S. Dollars in bank check form.

RJ : "Everything I ever have done?" That is difficult. Because all the mail art I sent out isn't mine anymore. All I produce is sent out into the network and I only have spare issues of magazines and copies of some pieces of mail. Everything I received and kept so far, that is something I have. Are all the letters you get (like e.g. this one) going to be part of "The Bern Porter Collection of Contemporary Letters", or is it just a "part of your life" that forms this collection? Just curious, what is in the collection?

(interview stopped here. Bern Porter died a few years later)

BIRGER JESH

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH BIRGER JESH (Germany)

Started on: 6-3-95

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

Reply on: 20-3-1995

Birger Jesh : In the end of 1979 I began with mail art exchange. I did projects like "TARGET GUN PROJECT" with exhibition in February in Dresden and several other places. "PLEASE STAMP FOR ME" (on going project) with exhibition in 1982 in Dresden together with the "COLLECTIVE COLLAGES". Further more: "IST ALLES NOCH BEIM ALTEN?", with exhibition in Dresden (1983), "LIVE WITHOUT FORCE" (Homage to Wilhelm Reich) exhibition Summer 1983 in Dresden, "THE DARKSIDE OF YOUR MOONFACES" with exhibition in 1989 in Saßnitz, and "YOUR FAVORITE PORNOGRAPHY" (Commonpress 100) with exhibition in 1990 in Weimar and Halle.

For the East-German autonomous peace movement I gave mail art of my archive for several exhibitions in church's (1981-1986). My address has changed (Dresden-Volkmannsdorf-Blankenhain). Abroad tourism to several other mail-artists and I had meetings at DNC 1986 (Praha and East-Berlin) and DNC 1992 (ZOO Antwerpen and Berlin). I was co-author on the book "MAIL ART SZENNE DDR 1975-1990" (Berlin 1994).

RJ : Has your mail-art changed a lot since the breaking down of the wall?

Reply on : 26-5-1995

(Because of language-problems Birger Jesh answers in the German language to my English questions, and I translate the answers into English language).

BJ : Since the vanishing of the DDR (East-Germany) into the structure of the 'Bundesrepublik Deutschland' (Germany) also the conditions for mail art have changed. There are economical forces like the raising of the rates of a postcard inside Europe from 10 Pfennig to 80 Pfennig, and outside Europe from 0,25 to 2,00 Mark (not counting the extra for airmail!) That makes it obvious that only well paid teachers from Germany are active in mail art. It is the reason why the once very active DDR - Mail art net almost broke down completely. The ones who remain must be real addicts!

The for DDR mail artists once typical political photo-words / collages as protest are not necessary anymore and are now done by Political parties which publish their views openly. Also there are now suddenly all technical possibilities like the copier and even the computer.

I probably won't try to keep up with the possibilities of the E-mail network. The principle of the collage in the art since seven decades, will become more stereotype and standard. I wish to maintain in my mail a bit of my "handwriting". In all mediums and art forms I see plenty of space to work in with the traditional forms.

RJ : You probably are a real mail art addict, because you started a new mail art project called 'Gazetta'. Could you tell a bit more about it?

Reply on 24-6-1995

BJ : I was already thinking about "Gazetta" for many years. In the DDR, to which people from the western foreign countries couldn't send their newspapers, it would have been impossible.. I remember that once for such a project (for the German-speaking countries) , in the year 1987 or 1988 I sent to Henning Mittendorf in Frankfurt/M an invitation with the copies for a newspaper project with the request to copy and pass on. He never received this package!

So finally I can realize my project and I am very curious how creative the participants will work on their newspaper. The exhibition during the 96' Folk-Festival in the picturesque small city Rudolfstadt, near the Saale, is also very exciting. First, because the thousands of visitors of the festival suddenly will be confronted with mail art. And also, because since the end of the DDR, the only small 'Kulturbundgalerie' in the city had to shut down and there are very little possibilities to exhibit.

The project will also be shown in the well-known Museum "Schwerin" , together with a larger exhibition about mail art (archive-material). The four initiators of the book "Mail Art Scene DDR" , Wohlrab, Eigendorf, Winnes and Jesch, will make the concept for this exhibition. And so we hope, that a deserved retrospective will be shown there.

RJ : Can you give me some more examples of censorship in the old DDR?

Reply on 9-9-1995

(After East-Germany was integrated with West-Germany and became one country, the documents of the Stasi, the State-security of East-Germany, were made available for research to the people it concerned. Birger Jesh therefore can tell about the things he found out).

BJ : I have now copies of the papers from the Ministry of Statesecurity (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit) and can read which mail art activities were observed in particular. It is very clear that in the 80-ies the normal artistic exchange wasn't controlled. L'art pour l'art wasn't interesting for the censors, when it didn't attract to much attention openly. It were the themes of the alternative movement in Europe that were the aim of the officials.

Especially with the political themes like "Target-gun-project" and "live without force" (a homage to W. Reich) there were officials following the project. Also sympathy with "Solidarnosz" was looked at as a Stalinistic enemyview.

The ex-DDR Galarist and mail artist Jürgen Scheinebraden got for his project "Solidarity for Solidarnosz", that he did after his move to West-Germany (BRD), also two contributions from the DDR - from Jürgen Gottschalk and me. This I can read from the official papers - also that the documentation consisted of a cassette I know now. The local chief of the SED, Modrow, got a copy about this event.

My first postcard-action was the sending of ca. 150 postcards (Photo prints of destroyed Dresden with a warning against the neutron-bomb). The Stasi recorded on 13-2-1980 precisely 73 postcards. All is documented in writing.

On 7-8-1982 till August 1983 I was on the "Postfahndungsliste", so in this period every piece of post addressed to me was investigated by the State-security office (Stasi).

In October 1982 I was interrogated and the Stasi showed me confiscated postal pieces addressed to me. I was asked to give explanations and they told me: "Mail art is forbidden," and I had to pay a fine of 500 Mark. In the same way they treated the Dresdener mail artist Steffen Giersch, and he became a fine of over 300 Mark. The plan of the Officials was, through different fines, to make the Dresdener mail artists mistrust each other. In the official documents I also found three postcards I sent out but that never got to the addressee. Another thing I found was a postcard I mailed in the year 1983, which I passed on again (after 11 year) to Ryosuke Cohen in Japan.

RJ : You have been active in mail art now for many years. Have you maintained in contact with the same mail artists as you started with? (I especially mean the ones from abroad).

Reply on 11-10-1995

(Besides his answer -in German Language- Birger Jesch also sent me the newsletter about his latest project GAZETTE, where he tells about the number of participants and mentions the first exhibition that will be held in July 1996).

BJ : This is a delicate subject! As you know, I have problems with other languages. At school we didn't learn English but Russian language in the former East-Germany. Therefore I had the most intense contacts with German-speaking mail artists like: Volker Hamann, Aloy Ohlmann, Henning Mittendorf, Julia Barczyk (D), Martin Krist (A), H.R. Fricker (CH), Arthur Berkoff (Ne) and Gudrun Albasser (F). With these, in certain periods real intense correspondences, there were also personal exchanges which go further than the art-exchange. I regret it very much that I don't have the energy to take an English language-course, so I can communicate with other interesting people in a more intense way.

After 10 years of work in the Network in 1990 I looked through my archive for the mail artists I came in contact with in the beginning. They were Lon Spiegelman, Pawel Petasz, Hendryk Bzdok, Robert Rehfeld, Robbert Filliou and Damaso Ogaz. With these last three names it becomes clear. The first generation of mail artists is saying goodbye. There are also others who I was in contact with, Mike Bidner, Joseph Beuys, Ulises Carrion, Achim Weigelt (Wermòve), Karsten Matthes, Slavko Matkovic and Michael Scott. The great historical figures G.A. Cavellini and Ray Johnson never answered my mail. Also there was the news of the death of loved ones. Lon Spiegelman mourned a long time for his dear wife Linda. In this year the

mothers of José Oliveira and Dawn Redwood died. These messages show the need for trust and human compassion. Now Guillermo Deisler is diagnosed with the illness cancer, and I can't find the right words to comfort him

That is how life goes. When I look outside the window when I write, I look at the cemetery across the street. My contacts I usually intensify with a project. I always invite the current contacts I have for the project and also try to participate in their projects. That gives a constant exchange with Vittore Baroni, Guy Bleus, Pawel Petasz, Ruud Janssen, Keith Bates, Guttorm Nordø, Ryosuke Cohen and G. Galantai. But always I tried to find new names to find new ways of expression for my projects. For the project "GAZETTA" I mailed invitations to 657 addresses, and 190 replies came back. This moderate feedback is maybe also the result of the expanding communication-possibilities - in the quarterly published magazine & "GLOBAL MAIL" alone there are hundreds of informations about projects.

In the passing of the years the M.A. scene had several national highpoints. In the beginning of the 80-ies there was in the ex-DDR the most strength. From Italy there are from time to time unimportant Xeroxes. Belgium has grown. In Denmark the names of the participants have changed and in Holland I miss some participants who were once quite active.

Many friends aren't active in the mail art network - much energy was being used and one has to be a real addict to maintain active for many years. I have the catalogue "International Fool" (1980) from the group "Le point d'Ironie" (Jaques Juin, Horus, T. Tillier) lying in front of me, and count the names of European participants. From the 89 mail artists only 22 are still active.

RJ : In the last years the use of computers in mail art has grown. What do you think of this development?

Reply on 12-11-95

BJ : First I have to tell you, that between our latest correspondence, in the middle of October, Guillermo Deisler died. The unvoluntary departing in the network. In the beginning of the 80-ies he wrote me from Plovdiv (Bulgary) "Ich fühle mich hier fremd - ein Indianer im Paprikaland." (I feel strange here - like an Indian in the land of Paprika's"

But now to your question. Because of the generation I grew up with, I have difficulties with the world of keys, commands and pixels on a screen. I do however have respect for the possibilities they bring. For instance, today it is not necessary to make the layout of texts by hand when you have the text processor. A lot of expensive

equipment is needed though to get a good result, and a constant need for energy (electricity).

Should I make fun of the possibilities that the "Techno-Freaks" tell us about? When comes the question how I think of the possibilities to do performances in space with the use of Spaceships? The futurists had their world-war!!

Human beings have - without technical means - a specific set of tools for observation. Different when compared to sharks, ants or even bats. I feel sometimes a bit alienated by the inflation of images and signals the technical means offer us.

A funny example of the expanding possibilities to express oneself is the Computer generated meditative 3D images. And so, also this medium will get its place in art history. But it will get the same place as the sculptor and the photographer.

Ruud, Maybe it is interesting to know how the culture of making assembling zines has developed in the ex-DDR?

RJ : Yes, it would be interesting. Tell me about it.....

(The interview was done in two languages. Because of time and translation-problems the interview was broken)

PATRICIA COLLINS

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA COLLINS (UK)

Started on: 28-8-1995

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

Reply on 11-9-1995

Patricia Collins : I first became involved in mail art in summer 1993. I had taken out the U.K. listings magazine, "Artist's Newsletter" and saw the ads in the mail art section. I had not heard of mail art + could find nothing about it. To satisfy my curiosity, I wrote to the magazine and I received a splendid letter from Robin Crozier in Sunderland, U.K. telling a little about his notions of mail art and inviting me to take part in his ongoing Memo/Memory project. Intrigued by his letter, I sent work to all the mail art ads in the magazine and to memo/memory. Some of those first contacts

have become regular correspondents. Others are yet to reply - Such is mail art.

RJ : So, your first contact was with a mail artist in England too. How many people have you contacted till now, and what does the response tell you?

Reply on 20-9-1995

PC : I can't tell you how many people I have contacted because I do not keep such a record. The responses have told me a little of the variety of mail art work + mail artists. I have found great generosity in exchanging work and nearly every post brings me a reminder of human ingenuity + creativity. I have a sense of artists having fun, spending copious time + energy + telling of what concerns them in the mail art network.

RJ : You speak of the variety of mail art works. What is interesting for you in the responses you got from the network, or are all new things interesting to you? (including chain letters, add-on papers, projects, long letters....)

Reply on 5-10-1995

PC : I especially enjoy receiving project documentations; I like to see the different ways that people collate + re-present the body of work that they have

collected. I particularly admire work in which the final means of representation reflects the project topic. I also get great pleasure from mail art compilations, I enjoy seeing different interpretations of work.

Then there is the pleasure of finding on my doorstep the familiar writing of favorite correspondents.

RJ : Although you are only recently working with mail art, you already did some mail art projects too didn't you? Could you tell a bit more about how you started your first projects?

Reply on 16-10-1995

PC : My first project was "Greenhouses". I had been working as an organic gardener managing a 6 acre garden. In it was a suite of Victorian glasshouses, badly in need of repair. Each summer the garden was open to the public and I had put up an exhibition of artwork in the vine house for each open season. I set up the greenhouse mail art project with a view to exhibiting it in the vine house gallery in the summer of 1994. The exhibition did draw many visitors to the garden and many gave donations of money to the fund to restore the greenhouses. In accordance with the artists' wishes,

none of the artwork was sold but at the end of the year it was boxed up in panels of window frames from the old greenhouse and presented to the National Art Library where it can be seen today.

RJ : You are also doing other projects aren't you? Can you tell a bit about those?

Reply on 21-10-95

PC : I have two on-going projects 'National Geographic' + 'Damaged in Transit'. As a child, I loved National Geographic magazine, an American publication with exquisite photographs. It has been a great influence on my life + art. I have an open invitation to any artist to send me a piece of their work which is inspired by the magazine + I will send them a similarly inspired work of my own. I have compiled the photos, collages, poems that I have received into an illustrated lecture which I present with the aid of an ancient epidiascope.

'Damaged in Transit' is my newest work. I am sending out messages in plastic bags asking artists to send me back the bag with any words, image or objects about damage. This piece came about when the G.P.O sent me a piece of work from Julian Beere in a plastic bag with a profuse apology for the damage that had been done to the work in the mail.

I opened the bag to find Julian's work in pristine condition! I hope the Damage works will stand as an image for all the wear + tear we each experience in life.

Perhaps I should list here the projects I have organized:

GREENHOUSES : Exhibited Summer 94 Vine house Gallery, now at V+A National Art Library.

ARTISTS' KITES: London Kite Festival June 95. Now part of British Artistic Kite Group Touring Show.

PHARMACY: A collection of cures + remedies re-presented in a limited edition Artist Book. A copy of this book is in the Tate Gallery Library. The cabinet housing the work will be shown in Cardiff in Spring 96.

NATIONAL GEO: Ongoing project creating illustrated epidiascope lecture. First presentation to

an invited audience Spring
95.

DAMAGED IN TRANSIT: Ongoing project
aiming to
create a catalogue of
disasters.

CRUSOE'S DOG: A tin full of work
about the dog kept by
Robinson Crusoe on his
island. First shown at Field
Study Show Chiltern Street,
London W1 July 95. To be
shown in Devon Winter
95/96

What draws me to doing this work is not only the
variety of response I get from mail artists but my
own sense of enjoyment in the task of curating.

Answering this question has given me the idea of
making an overview of the projects I am involved
in + I can feel a buzz of excitement as the ideas
flood in. So I must stop writing + get to work.

RJ : It seems like most projects start with a spontaneous
thought that comes up in your mind. Is this also

how you make your art or do you sometimes plan things quite well in advance?

Reply on 28-10-95

PC : I do value spontaneity in life + art. I loathe routine + ritual, but I'm not sure that it is the best description of how my work comes about. I have a number of longstanding themes and concern + constantly seek ways of representing these. Out of the many ideas that arise, I do act in a quite immediate + intuitive way on those that feel right.

Three years ago I was seriously ill and that experience has intensified my sense of immediacy + intuition.

RJ : Most envelopes I get from you are recycled ones. Why do you like to recycle these envelopes so much? Are there also things you like to keep?

Reply on 8-11-1995

PC : Yes, I recycle as much as I can. I think this relates back to working as a gardener + the cycles of growth and decay, compost and harvest. I also learned from my mother a pre-green thrift + economy + like her, I hate waste.

I have made several pieces of work that relate to these values of "make do + mend" that are nearly lost today. But I do save even hoard work in boxes + files. I also collect far too many things that might one day be useful for new pieces. Found objects + documents are a particular love. In using these in my new works I am again involved in re-cycling, re-presenting.

I also take a practical joker's delight in sending envelopes that are not what they seem, bill envelopes to the bank for example.

(Patricia Collins's answer came in a recycled envelope, and the text of her answer was written on a Xerox and illustrated with clippings from mail she received from others).

RJ : Did you ever meet another mail artist in person?

Reply on 21-11-1995

PC : Yes.

RJ : When was this and what was it like?

reply on 30-11-1995

PC : I invited a mail artist to my weekly 'open studio'.
We survived well enough to work on a group-

show, well enough to meet regularly but we still maintain a lively mail art exchange.

RJ : You talk about a 'lively mail art exchange'. I know that some mail artists, who are active in mail art for a longer time, are facing the problem that they aren't able to even answer all the mail they get in. This is mostly the result of doing some projects and works that draw attention, and then others start to write to you too. Have you reached this point yet?

Reply on 7-12-1995

PC : I'm interested in the idea of such a well charted career in mail art. I still answer everything + never find it too much.

RJ : Well, then you must be lucky. I am only able to answer 50% or less of the mail that I get in, and to be honest, it is NO "well charted career in mail art", as you call it. But lets go to another aspects. Why do you think that some people stay active in mail art for such a long time?

Reply on 22-12-1995

PC : I'm sure they have good reasons. I wonder how people stop, as having one's name on a list or two seems to generate a lot of mail. This mail can keep coming for years. Do retired mail artists still

secretly hope to receive their missing documentation?

RJ : How important is documentation for you?

Reply on 14-1-1996

(Besides Patricia's answer I also received several other pieces of mail from her. Some were 3D objects that were part of her installations, and also there was a catalog, handmade, with several color-photo's of Patricia's work & projects)

PC : I love receiving good documentation. I feel that my contribution to a MA project is a personal interpretation of the project's theme. I like to see the interpretations of other participants in documentations. It gives me great pleasure to see the many ways in which a theme can be interpreted. I also appreciate thoughtful presentations of MA projects + documentations that reflect the theme. I have particularly enjoyed David Dellafiora's tape-slide presentation of his Kenneth Anger project, Michael Leigh's "postage" tape and the Body documentation by Sal Wood. This was simple but effective using bubble wrap, plaster + a hospital name bracelet.

I do get tired of poor quality photocopies + address lists.

RJ : While doing this interview, and also before we started with this interview, I received several 3D objects that you used in your installations, or that are connected to your projects. My favorite piece I received from you is the hand carved letterset made out of pencils with eraser-ends (now in TAM Rubberstamp Archive). Do you also receive a lot of 3D pieces in return from the network?

Reply on 30-1-1996

PC : I get some 3D sculptural pieces especially from Jaime Weitzman in America + Anne-Miek Bibbe in Holland and a lot of books. I have just started to create work on a computer with a view to sending e-mail art. Work in this new medium has made me realize how much I like the objectness of books. They have tactile qualities and weight, their pages rustle and hold smells, they can be viewed at different distances on a lap or lectern for example. I enjoy work that appeals to all the senses.

RJ : I must say I agree with you that the computer normally only appeals to a few senses of the human body. But artists are known for using the new

mediums in quite specific ways. What do you think is interesting to use a computer for?

Reply on 8-2-1996

PC : I am interested in three different areas of work:

- (1) Administrative tasks - C.V's , letters of application, address database - the daily paperwork of being an artist.
- (2) In the creation of work, e.g. the manipulation of images by software such as Photoshop.
- (3) The distribution of works e.g. via the internet or in the sense of entering work onto a CD ROM which can then be sent out.

In 1995 I made a New Year's resolution to get myself computer-literate. My resolve took me through my first category. In 1996 I hope to develop the creation & distribution of my work.

RJ : Any more plans for the future, in connection to mail art?

Reply on 20-2-1996

PC : Doing the above seems a pretty big plan! I have some ongoing projects + I hope that my work as an artist will flourish.

I guess my mail art dream is that one day the GPO will have to send me a special delivery. A separate postman/post woman with a complete sack of mail. No junk mail, no bills, just mail art.

RJ : Yes, something like that sounds tempting. I always enjoy getting a lot of mail, but the answering of it all sometimes is a problem. Another subject I would like to discuss with you. Whenever I look at lists of participants I notice that there are always more male mail artists than female mail artists. What do you think is the reason for that?

Reply on 8-3-1996

PC : I would like to know the reason. I would have thought that there would be less under-representation of women in mail art than in other art forms. I had thought of mail art as one of the most accessible forms that could be practiced within the constraints that many women experience. For example it can be a domestic practice + does not require a studio, it can be done in moments of free time, it does not depend on the long hours of concentration necessary for some

other forms, it can be executed in found materials + for the price of a stamp, it can be a supportive network for isolated artists. But it seems that these factors have not brought more women into mail art than into other practices. I have to assume that the under representation of women in mail art is for the same reason as in other art forms.

However I would say that I do not believe that numbers are always important; quality counts too. I am sure many mail artists would agree that a single good postcard can outweigh a heavy tome of grungy photocopy.

RJ : I sure agree with that! Maybe that is one of the reasons that male mail artists sometimes dominate the lists of participants to a mail art project. Just because they want to participate in all (quantity) rather than send in more interesting stuff to a selected project (quality). Just my thought. Actually that deals with one of the things some art-critics have to mail art, that it lacks quality. When I look at the mail I got in the last years I must say that I sometimes wonder what some Xeroxes are all about. Some things aren't interesting at all anymore, and I then just don't reply. Do you still reply to all the mail you get in?

Reply on 21-3-1996

PC : I do. I even have a technique 'the Bates Method' (after Keith Bates) for dealing with chain letters. I send something to everyone on the chain list - usually just a post card + thereby bring one branch to a halt.

RJ : Well, maybe it is time to bring a halt to this interview. Or is it that I forgot to ask you something?

Reply on 1-4-1996

PC : Perhaps, but do check your e-mail + I would like to see a draft copy of the whole interview to know if this is the final.

RJ : Well, I always send a draft copy to every mail artist I interview, so that is no problem. I just wondered about your comment on e-mail. I check my e-mail almost every day, and if you DID send me something it hasn't arrived yet. So, now I am not sure if this interview is ended or not. Anyway, I would like to thank you very much for your time & the answers, and I hope you'll stay in touch.

(Just after sending Patricia the draft-text I received her first e-mail message, which I replied to).

Reply on 10-4-1996

PC : My e-mail address is Pat@E1Studio.demon.co.uk.
I'd be happy to hear from any mail artist, but as yet
I cannot guarantee that I can reply.

RJ : Well, you entered the cyber world too now, so a
good moment to close this interview. Thanks again!

DANIEL PLUNKETT

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL PLUNKETT (USA)

Started on: 19-05-1995

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

Reply on 7-10-1995 (internet)

Daniel Plunkett : Ruud - I thought I had sent this off already, but looks like I didn't. Anyway - I started becoming involved in mail art via cassette trading during the late 70's. After the punk explosion there were lots of people trading tape letters, compilations, music, sounds etc. on tape. And from this network I started to receive news about mail art shows etc. So one day I just sort of started into it all, not knowing what I was getting in for! Each week would bring in new mail, artwork, and contacts which has continued today. I was already a big letter writer and wrote to several "pen pals" already, and to me mail art was great as I could now write people that were interested in some of the same things as I was, plus it was always

exciting to see what arrived in the mail. Ok, well that is a brief answer anyway!

RJ : Most people know you from you magazine N D. When did you start that and what is the magazine about?

Reply on 10-10-1995 (internet)

DP : The first issue of N D appeared in 1982. At first it was planned that artists, musicians, etc would each send in a page of artwork or information. The first issue was mostly that; different pages of artwork from various networkers. Then beginning with N D 2, I did a couple of interviews (one with filmmaker Kurt Kren) and included those, along with a few reviews of magazines and audio releases. The magazine started out as a contact resource for mail art shows, audio projects and addresses.

Each issue has been the same kind of format with interviews, and then as much information and reviews as possible. So basically it started out as a networker tool, and still is, but probably now there is more focus on the interviews and trying to provide a history behind some of the artists.

I started the magazine with a lot of the ethics and rules that have been on-going within the mail art world, by that I mean I would mention every thing that was sent in, everyone would receive a copy etc. But now, that has proved impossible, otherwise

each issue of N D would be 2500 pages! We still cover a large majority of what we get in the mail (cassettes, shows, etc) but we simply don't have the time or room to mention it all.

Plus there are other excellent resources such as Global Mail and Factsheet Five that are exhaustive in what they cover.

RJ : Is almost all the mail art you do connected to your magazine N D, or did you organize some other projects too?

Reply on 17-10-1995 (internet)

DP : Well, more and more over the years the mail art I do is connected with N D. Either by mailing the magazine to shows, or using the magazine to cover interviews and articles on mail art. The lines get pretty blurred anyway, it all becomes one on-going project. We did organize a show a few years back called "Undercurrents" which was a month long exhibition at a local museum. This was an exhibit of over 1000 cassette tapes from around the world, and we organized it in many ways like a mail art show. We tried to present a rough history of the cassette network since the 70's and we also had guest speakers (John Held Jr, and Robin James) and artists who performed during the event. So although we focused on the cassette medium - we tried to connect it to the larger networker activity going on too. Other projects we have done have

been a couple of exhibitions of visual artists, performance art exhibition and events, and several concerts of touring musicians and groups.

RJ : Why and when did you start to use the e-mail for your communication?

Reply on 15-7-96 (e-mail)

DP : I started using email a little over 2 years ago now. I had been introduced to it before, but always sort of avoided it - just what I needed was more mail! But actually it has worked out well. More and more people that I know have email accounts and it is a quick and cheap way to stay in touch. Also it has been interesting to see people discover all of this kind of underground activity via the net. People that would never really come across this world unless they wrote letters, found a magazine at a shop, etc.

So anyway, I just started using email once I finally felt "oh well, what the hell" and have slowly jumped into it. Of course, Michael Northam should be given credit for giving me the push to get the nd.org site set up and also he is the one who has designed the N D WebPages.

RJ : You new N D #20 is about to come out. How does the process go of finishing one issue? Is there a fixed concept or is every new magazine a completely different undertaking?

(no reply came, so the interview was ended)

PATRICIA TAVENNER

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA TAVENNER (USA)

Started on: 3-7-1995

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

Reply on 12-10-1995

Patricia Tavenner : A little preface to the answer. I've been always been a letter writer and I answered for the family as soon as I could write. I have a scrap book with post cards and letters from my pen pals from the 7th and 8th grade. This was encouraged in school. One of them I visited in Holland when I grew up. It was quite a trip to see letters and my handwriting from age 12 & 13. Enclosed is a photo.

Before there was a network or mail art. About 1970 I began putting out stuff and I began putting out stuff and I began a newspaper called "Mail Order Art" published in 1971 - 1972 with 4 issues. I had this great idea one night as I was washing the kitchen floor it was like a big flash. Yes, Patricia, do

a newspaper in the format of the Berkeley Barb (a once famous local and international newspaper from radical Berkeley, California, of the 60's). Originally it was meant to be thrown on people's porches, just like they throw away advertisement newspapers that arrive every week on my front porch. Sometimes the credit for this is given to my x-husband but that isn't true and this often happens when both husband and wife are artists. It is assumed that the ideas come from the man and the woman simply copies and follows. I happen to be a pioneer and love forging new ideas.

But I had been searching for new ways to do art, put art out into the world, and ways to take the same images and put them into different media. I also wanted more artistic exchange and exchange beyond my immediate environment of California. I love living here but anywhere can become stale. What came from the "Mail Order Art" newspaper was lots of feedback and all kinds of new friends. Tons of mail everyday which I adore. I finally put it all in a room and locked the door as I didn't know what to do with it. A great deal of it became part of a piece called "Living Letters" which is a book and a sculpture installation and another piece called the "Book of Tongues."

I think a number of us did newsletters, magazines, catalogues, and newspapers about this same time with no knowledge that others were pursuing a similar arena. That we all had this need to reach

out. And to reach out to totally new ways. Artists are not known for their social ability and here were a bunch of us yelling to the skies "talk with me."

RJ : Are you still reaching out for more (new) contacts?

Reply on 30-12-1995

PT : Yes, but to limited degrees as I just don't have the time. I always mark requests that sound interesting when I read the show listings and when I have the time to read the show listings. New thoughts, new ideas, and new people excite me and I feel that it is important to respond to and to encourage new artists and non artists into the network. Time is my main limitation. I do list that I will always trade stamps in The Global News and I did instigate the First California Artists Stamp Show which brought lots of fresh contributions. I do write letters to a fair amount of mail people but not as I have to make choices as to how to spend my energy and my time. And it seems like the pile to answer is always there. I do cover it up or put it away occasionally. Sometimes it just flows onto the table and takes over. That happened recently to my favorite Mail Art table where I could watch the birds bath out of the window. So I moved to another table as it happened to be free. This weekend I needed that space for a workshop that I was teaching in my studio so I got some boxes and loaded them up to be clear soon. A good winter project - sorting and filing. Actually a good project for my new assistant.

One more thing. I like the creative spark that comes from doing some of the requests. I usually keep them in a separate pile and use them like quick sketches in a drawing class or singing scales as a means of warming up my juices. Often I also get a nice feeling of quick creative completion. That little high of endomorphism that the act of creativity sometimes gives.

RJ : How did you get your name "The Mail Queen"?
What is the story behind this name?

Reply on 2-2-1996

PT : In 1972 I was teaching one of the first classes in the Bay Area on the History of Women Artists. I was scouring the libraries looking for books with visuals, reading lots of history and books on famous women and the English queens were part of that education. So I decided that I wanted to become a queen also, so I simply had a rubber stamp made with the Mail Queen on it. I still use the same stamp today. But I must say it is getting a bit ragged and perhaps it is time to get a new one made. I've had a lot of fun with this nom de plume. There is a Mail Queen post card with me in costume and this same photo is also available in artistamp form. I think that these date from 1972 or 1973

At that time Irene Dogmatic was my neighbor and we used to have lots of dress up sessions and play with costumes and masks. Of course we photographed all of these and a few were made into post cards. But the first of all of these for me was the Mail Queen.

RJ : It seems that publishing is a big part of your life. You sent with your answer an artist speaks (Vol 3, #1). What else is happening at the "Eternal Press"?

Reply on 5-3-1996

PT : The 3 latest projects An Artist Speaks (which is in its 6th year), the regular and the deluxe catalogue from the First California Artists Stamp Show, and A Family Line which documents a video installation about my family, are all printed and in the process of being mailed out and distributed. Most of the first two are out of the studio, but the last - which is larger and hand bound - still needs attention. I am hoping by my birthday on March 22 to have these 3 complete. By that I mean out into the world and the piles gone from the office and studio of rough drafts etc.

Because waiting in the wings are new projects. The work is here and the format is designed for a small commemorative book from friends of Ray to Ray Johnson. It is mostly by people who had mail and regular contact with him. Mostly from the early

days without the hero worshipping. It is to be intimate.

I just wrote up the letter to do an all woman's assembling called I think this is important to do. Focusing the female energy and to draw attention to the contributions of women artists. It is the usual format, send a number of copies and in this instant 75, and \$5,00 to cover the cost of binding, mailing and indexing. At the moment I am this years editor and next year someone else can do it. And it will go on as long as the women support it. But I will keep track in case some prodding and organization is needed at various times.

I am also writing a brief history of Artistamps by women for Bill Gaglione at the Stamp Art Gallery in San Francisco. They produced a beautiful package with rubber stamps, artistamps, and catalogue but with no mention of women contributing to the history. So I complained and Bill asked me to write it. There are enough catalogues from shows with names of women contributors but I do want to get input so I have a card to send out but there is not much time as this is due for June and it is already mid February. I am not planning anything elaborate. Succinct is the word that I want. A beginning to be continued.

I am also writing a short pieces for other sources. It seems that I am writing a history of my life as an artist, Around 1970 a friend suggested that I have a

name for all my early publishing's. It is as though I just reached up on one of the shelves and found one. When the name Eternal Press came to mind I had no idea how significant the name would be for me. I just sort of giggle a bit when people ask me about it.

RJ : After so many years of mail art, you probably have tried to explain mail art lots of times to others. What do you normally tell them?

Reply on 29-4-1996

PT : I want to quote some definitions that I have already published as that will get me going. Then add to what I have written and experienced and how I perceive differently today.

The following is from my publication *An Artist Speaks*, Volume 1, #1, 1993 :

"In the Mail Art world I am known as the Mail Queen. Correspondence Art (another name for Mail Art) as a genre in many ways defies definition. On the most basic level it is something (anything) that comes through the mail. Although Art Historians have chosen a few "important artists", the basic premise of mail art is that everyone is an artist. It is a medium that by passes the official art structure in the same

way the Dadaist did. It is about counter culture, it is about true freedom of expression.

...As a movement, Mail Art began in the late 60's. Today it has evolved to include fax, zine publishing, and computer sent e-mail. While Mail Art is a democratic medium, in that anyone can make it, send it, own it, exhibit it, most mail art has some degree of aesthetic. Mail art is most commonly letters, envelopes, artistamps, postcards, and at one time anything you could get into the mail box. But automation has done away with the ceramic postcards, wooden envelopes, torn books, tongue depressors."

Recently a great deal has been written about mail art coming out of the Fluxus movement and its roots. Two points I wish to make here are: one, that I knew nothing about Fluxus. I tried to find out but it was such a closed circle of artists that I eventually turned my back on it. I just continued what I had always done with my mail - decorated it and continued writing letters and cards to various artists friends of mine who lived elsewhere, I've got mail art that goes back to the 5th grade. Then for 25 cents I could get the name and address of a pen pal in a foreign country. I still have some of their pictures and post cards. It is inheriant in some of

us. Then I wanted a greater scope so I started a newspaper. It sure brought in a flood of inspiration and connection on an international scale. Now a number of artists were doing the same thing and that is how we met - through our publications and through the mail. As an Astrologer I know what we were all responding to but as yet Art News and other publications don't make these connections.

I think the essence of mail art / the network is creative dialogue, transported to and through people. The process is the creativity. Mail art is pure creativity. It is not a question of bypassing museums but of giving to each other what we need: creativity. In addition to an audience and lots of feedback.

RJ : In fact, the museums are now beginning to show some interest in mail art. First there were the postal museums, but now there is also a museum in Germany that wants to do an exhibition about mail art in Eastern Europe. Does mail art fit in a museum? Is it o.k. to just select some pieces of mail art for an exhibition?

Reply on 11-6-1996

PT : I believe the Whitney Museum in New York City had a Mail Art Exhibition in 1969 or 1970. So the question is not new or recent.

There are going to be all kinds of exhibitions in museums of Mail Art. It has been around over 20 years and then people begin to take notice. Fluxus has had lots of attention in the past 3 years and mail art is just behind. Why do you think the dealers have been calling everyone directly or through their scouts. At least here in the U.S.A. that is the case and I imagine the same is happening in Europe. One local dealer in mail art I know has an office in Paris. Mostly I find it quite humorous.

Locally, there have been two exhibitions here recently involving the mail but they were not Mail Art Exhibitions. Much was made of the mail part but the curators did not have the knowledge or the sensibility to see there is a larger picture here. Their focus was fine arts. Two painters sending painting back and forth to work on and the accompanying journals and the other was drawings. I believe that mail art sometimes transcends its own boundaries and is both fine art and mail art. But the spirit of two I find quite different.

So, I accept museum shows of mail art. Also I believe people can learn so much from what we give to each other and this kind of public exposure is part of that process.

The second part of your question: Yes it's O.K. As it will happen anyway and it is happening now. So I figure why buck the tide. Although I think the dialogue between artists is so interesting and has

lot of excitement. There is a richness here that is missing if only a few pieces are shown and out of context. I believe this element of mail art is one of it's most important and most precious. Doing this kind of show ignores this essential part of mail art.

RJ : After doing mail art for so many years you probably have received lots of mail in return. Do you have an "archive" as most mail artists like to call their collection?

reply on 18-10-1996

(This answer arrived just before I leave for a two week trip to San Francisco, where currently there is an exhibition about the TAM Rubberstamp Archive).

PT : Yes. And it is fairly organized. I have worked on it and I have also hired people to help with it. They usually love to do it, and the only problem is that these new comers get so enthralled they are apt to spend too much time reading it.

At present it is divided according to decades. And I would like whatever student borrowed a lot of my stamp collection from the 70's to send it back to me. This happened by chance. I had the first year organized by nom de plume, then the mail became overwhelming so I just put it into a room and closed the door. Two years later I was asked to exhibit some of my collection. The big question was

how to open that door and what to do with it once I did. I had the titles of the projects already and the major issue was the form. Living Letters became 6 green waste baskets with cushions so that any viewer could become a voyeur for the duration of the show. Other pieces from the Book of Tongues were duplicated and put into large clear Plexiglas mail boxes. Other pieces were displayed on the walls and sometimes ceilings. Whatever came to mind.

At present I have the 90's all together. The classifications are artistamps, mail art, oversize, catalogues and books, and magazines. I am a bit behind in filing at the moment but then also seems to be perpetual.

Lets continue and finish this interview when you are here. We could also pick out some visuals and print them on the Kodak 1575 as it is cheaper here. I look forward to meeting you and to spending some time together. Welcome to California.

(In October I visited Patricia Tavenner for a few days. I was in San Francisco for the exhibition of the TAM Rubberstamp Archive, where I gave a lecture about the archive. A few days after this lecture I drove by BART from San Francisco to Oakland where Patricia lives. During my stay there I also visited Berkeley and followed one of Patricia's silkscreen classes. Also she did a video-interview

with me. On the last day I wrote the next question on a piece of paper and gave this to Patricia).

RJ : Well, Patricia, thanks for all the visuals you gave me, and the chance to see the place you live and work. The artistamps seems to be an important art form for you. How did this start?

reply on 11-12-1996

PT : I got started making artists stamps before they were called that and quite by accident or one could say quite by intuition. It was a time of searching for me. One search was for new media. The back of certain magazines is a treasure chest of ideas and potential media for artists. I found an address in Philadelphia that would take any image and make a page of photo stamps that would be gummed and perforated. So I did a few small collages of rubberstamp images and sent them off. What came back was a bit of revelation for me. Originally I thought I would decorate my envelopes with these images. But when the whole sheets arrived a whole new media came with it. The full page was very powerful and I was astounded. They were just wonderful to me. I did make one post card that had some of these images upon them but mainly I have worked with full sheets of artistamps. Individual stamps just aren't that exciting to me. I like the big picture.

In 1970 I did 6 sheets of artistamps. These were collages of rubber stamped images and found papers. Then in 1972 I did my first photo stamp and that was of my belly button and I call it The Moon. I just love this one. Then what followed over a year or 2 were the Nom de Plume series.

RJ : What is the "big picture" for artistamps nowadays? It seems it has developed into an art form of its own now.....?

next answer on 27-9-1997

PT : Yes, it is an art form of its own now. And the dominant contribution of Mail Art to the main stream of fine arts in terms of a media. In the beginning we all did everything. Rubber stamps, audio tapes, video tapes, stamps , letters , poems , etc. But as the movement has expanded and we (in this case me) it has become impossible to do all of it. You will find in the history of most mail artists that this is true. Then choices become necessary but mainly, the choices just take care of themselves. It is a conscious choice and very natural without a lot of vacillation. Evolution is what I am looking for. I would venture that most artists joining the movement today begin in a specific area and perhaps branch out from there as opposed to the reverse which I think was more prevalent in the early 70's

Stamps easily venture out of the mail art network as they have such a universal appeal. They are also

recognizable and already a part of everyone's life. So change the image to a personal one instead of the government and you have artistamps. There is a great seduction in this media which pulls people into it so easily.

Within the network we all trade our stamps like we were a bunch of kids with baseball cards. On the West Coast there have been several festivals and exhibitions of stamps. At these events the stamp artists have been selling their wares. Then afterwards we all go to dinner together and hug and kiss. There is a great community here. Just after the 89 earthquake the Davidson Gallery in Seattle began a biennial exhibition of artistamps. There were 3 of these shows. The Mars Expo was held twice, and the Alternative Festival was held twice. Here in San Francisco I curated a large show of just artistamps and Harley showed some of his mail art Show shortly after mine in Santa Rosa, California. Then last year was the Pacific Rim Show and in January of 1997 was the Artistamp by women which I curated, both in San Francisco. So for now the biggest activity is the West Coast of the U.S. and Canada.

The future is unlimited. And at the same time artistamps may become extinct or perhaps could be considered an endangered species at present. Technology is changing and people don't like to lick those things much anymore. A self adhesive stamp is easier and less messy. The internet may

make the Post Office obsolete. As I am sitting here typing on my computer and perhaps writing myself into oblivion.

RJ : You mention the Artistamp by women show. What is the reason for showing only the female artists? Is there a male dominance in the mail art network?

(never got a reply to this answer so the interview was never finished).

JUDITH A. HOFFBERG

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH A. HOFFBERG (USA)

Started on: 29-8-1995

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

Reply on 4-10-1995

Judith A. Hoffberg : It is hard to remember exactly when I did get involved in the mail-art network. I remember visiting with Ulises Carrion & Aart in Amsterdam, working with them on a Stamp Art Catalog -- and talking for hours about everything for days. At that time, I heard about mail art and sending art through the mail, and asked how to get involved. I think that is how it all happened -- in fact, Ephemera was named after a conversation with me -- dedicated to me for that whole year.

I met Cavellini at the ArteFiera in Bologna, and other people involved with Cavellini -- and perhaps with that opening when Cavellini sent me everything he had published, his roundtrips (of

which I have many), postcards, stickers, stamps, etc. , and since I speak Italian, it was an easy friendship. From then on, I heard about Anna Banana, Dadaland, and much more.

But Ken Friedman had also told me about the Network in the early 1970's and I guess I was involved with that early on-as part of the Fluxus movement. So it is really hard to pinpoint when I got involved. As someone who loved to write long letters on the typewriter, and one who loves postcards, it was an easy transition to become an "artist" without having any real creative skills in that regard.

So, first with Friedman and Frank, then with Ulises and Aart, and then with Cavelinni and the whole network by 1977, when I met Gaglione and Banana, and the whole world changed for me. Then there was my large exhibition, Artwords & Bookworks, including many postcards made by artists from around the world. As a result, I opened a shop which featured those postcards, and I also had a mail art show of Umbrella Art in 1979. So the 1970's was my opening, and Umbrella became my window to the world.

RJ: How did you become interested in Umbrellas?

Reply on 28-10-95

JH : Well, since the name of my business became Umbrella Associates in 1978, thanks to a suggestion from Joan Hugo, as we were sitting in an airport in San Jose waiting for our late plane to Los Angeles after the First Artists' Publication Fair in San Jose in 1977. I had just resigned from the position of Executive Secretary of the Art Libraries Society of North America, which I had founded, and as we were sitting, Joan, a noted librarian and my co-curator in the Artwords & Bookworks exhibition, asked what I would be doing next; I hadn't the faintest idea at the time, but she had been thinking about it, and told me she had done some research. She had discovered that there was once a periodical called Parasol edited by Ricky de Marco, but it was not extant. Then she had looked through the entire list of periodicals and could not find any other periodical called "Umbrella", and so she thought I should start a business as a consultant, called Umbrella Associates, and publish a newsletter called Umbrella, and so I did.

A strong interest in umbrellas had never occurred to me -- except for one print which I had bought in 1966 in Washington, DC which I have in my office. But since my interest in mail art had been growing at the same time I founded my business, I decided that the symbol of umbrella had potential as a logo, an indentifying icon, and perhaps a way for me to send mail art around the world with that image. After learning that my friend Kurt de Gooyer had become curator of a Museum of Photography on

the University of California, Riverside campus, he was involved in a group called Art Spies, and he thought it would be a good thing to have a mail art show in his museum, and so I announced to the world that the theme of the show was "Umbrellas" and having contacted just about everyone I knew from the mail art world, I started receiving lots of mail art, actual found umbrellas, etc. With over 400 entries, I began to see the potential for a collection. As an archivist, it was easy to organize this material in notebooks, and so it began. Now I have over 60 volumes of paper ephemera about umbrellas, including handmade postcards and broadsides, advertisements, articles about umbrellas, newspaper photos, photographs both black and white and color, antique postcards and advertising ephemera, and much more.

The collection has grown largely due to my many trips around the world including Australia and New Zealand, and continental Europe. I buy postcards of Umbrellas wherever I go and some summers I came back with 250 postcards of umbrella images. Then, too, I take pictures of Umbrellas wherever I see them, including inside shots and outside shots. So if I cannot buy an item, I take a picture of it. Many artists send me things, including jewelry, clothing, paper items, postcards, etc. As a result, I have learned to live with some of the material but until this year, I have had to store the collection, except for 1984, when I showed the collection as Umbrelliana in the Bumbereshoot

Festival in Seattle, Washington, which is held every year on the first weekend of September. I filled 4000 square feet of space, and there still was much material at home. Now the collection has increased a great deal more, but now I live with most of it, having decorated my new apartment with umbrellas everywhere -- in the kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, office, and everywhere else. It is a universal well known item, whether it be protection against the sun (parasol) or protection against the rain (umbrella), and so I even have taken that name on the internet.

RJ : About the internet I would like to discuss a bit later, but first this magazine 'umbrella'. In lots of publications about mail art it is mentioned. What is so special about your magazine, and how was it to publish this magazine in the beginning of the 80-ies?

Reply on 8-11-1995 (internet)

JH : In the beginning, I intend Umbrella to be a newsletter that would cover the world--about artists' books and artists' publications, about mail art, and about art books, especially those of interest to artists and those who make books, including photography. There would be interviews, profiles of alternative spaces, and the phenomena from 1978 on of an incredible period when anything could happen and usually did.

In retrospect, the 70s were wonderful because it was a period of incredible energy without a market-driven economy. This means that artists were making art because they had to create, not because they had collectors, buyers and sales every day, month or year. As a result, many experimental works were being created by innovative, ingenious and courageous artists.

Since I had published a newsletter for the Art Libraries Society of North America, I had the skills pre-computer to create a decent looking newsletter on the IBM composer. As a result, I started out doing a profile of Other Books & So in Amsterdam which I had visited several times; I interviewed Ulises; I talked to Wolf Vostell when he was in Los Angeles; I wrote about Fluxus, Artist Books, and Mail Art. Lon Spiegelman helped me gather all the announcements of shows throughout the world; Ken Friedman helped me with other contacts, and we had four or five issues a year. My newsletter filled a gap, since there were very few English-language periodicals which listed mail art shows, talked about alternative spaces, discussed alternative media such as books, new periodicals by artists, videotapes and audiotapes, and interviewed fascinating people throughout the world about what they were creating, whether it be books, an alternative space, performances, or whatever. At the same time I was curating a massive bookshow which also had postcards by artists, called Artwords & Bookworks, which clearly showed the

alternative, having 1500 items by 616 artists. As a result, I opened up a bookshop with two partners, called Artworks. It opened in June 1979. I had been publishing Umbrella for 18 months by then and subscriptions had quickly increased.

Since I am a librarian, many of my colleagues subscribed through their institutions, and libraries even until today seem to support Umbrella and keep it going. In those years I had tremendous energy and loved all the information that was flowing through my mailbox. Even my post office loved the material that was coming in especially the mail art. It was wonderful to travel through Europe and stay with mail artists wherever I went. I had a new community of friends throughout the world, and I even came to visit with them, taking pictures of their archives, interviewing them for an issue of Umbrella, and sharing that information with my readers.

Of course, it was a great deal of work with a IBM composer with only 8000 bites of memory, it meant that there was a great deal of duplication and retyping, but it was worth it! Having built up a subscription list of almost 1000, I felt I was reaching out and making new contacts all the time. And as a librarian and archivist, I felt it was necessary to share the information coming through my mailbox. Now it is almost impossible to keep up well, I thought it was almost impossible to keep up with the mail that was coming snail mail to me. But I

tried to synthesize it and get it out. A whole generation of artists became mail artists because of Umbrella and the sharing of information made it a nexus for a great deal of alternative activity.

In 1984, I was invited to Australia and New Zealand for two months to lecture, and so I left the publishing of an issue of Umbrella to Lon Spiegelman, who used my publication as a vehicle for protesting Ronny Cohen's diatribe against the mail art network in New York City. As a result, he sent out the newsletter not only to my subscribers but to his list as well. When I returned to the United States, I found that the issue did not reflect either my policies or my philosophy, and since I only had two issues for my archive, the issue was never available to anyone who claimed it after that time. I suppressed that issue as part of Umbrella's production. And because of failing finances, I had to suppress publication altogether for six months. As a result, I lost many subscribers, who never came back when I resumed publication in 1985. I have really never been able to recoup those subscribers and it has really been a struggle to keep on publishing.

As it has become more expensive to publish because of paper and postage, I had decided to publish less frequently, even sometimes only twice a year. Now I seem to be publishing four times a year, but I still like to keep it irregular, meaning it gets published when I can get it all together. This

year, international rates went up, so that snail mail really costs a great deal of money, even here in the United States. Of course, it is nothing like other countries, but it still takes a big bite out of the budget because of airmail rates. And I feel my readers should get the news as soon as it is published. That is my philosophy. Of course, I may turn to the Net for publishing but I cannot do all that work and do it for free. I have published for 18 years and really want to continue, but giving it away is out of the question for that much work that I must do. Perhaps I can find a way soon, but right now, we are still printing the publication, *Umbrella*, three or four times a year. There have been changes in *Umbrella*--since I do not publish regularly, I cannot always make the deadlines of some of the Mail Art exhibitions, but between TAM and Guy Bleus and others who seem to be more connected and distribute that information through other means than a formal publication, the news gets out. Right now, I do not get notices regularly from everyone and must search for Mail Art shows more and more. Perhaps it is an indication of what is happening with fax, electronic mail, etc. I haven't had time to analyze it. But *Umbrella* is still around, perhaps not as vitally important as in the days when there was no e-mail or the Internet, but it still is being read by librarians, artists, curators, book dealers, etc.

RJ: Some say that with the death of Ray Johnson, the mail art period is coming to an end. Some others

say that mail art is more alive than ever because of the enormous amounts of projects and exhibitions that there are all around the world (see e.g. the magazine Global Mail). Is mail art still what it used to be?

Reply on 14-2-1996 (internet)

JH : Even four years ago, I was concerned with the change in what was happening with Mail Art. With the growth and development of so much innovative technology, I knew that the Post Office was going to be the choice of last resort for communication, even before I had email or could get on the Internet. I just used common logic that change is part of the end of the 20th century, and a whole generation grew up not knowing who Ray Johnson is, has been, or will be. But Mail Art never depended upon Ray Johnson; it has always depended upon those curious, innovative, experimental, or adventurous. Getting something in the mail that has been stamped a number of times by the "system" as well as the creator is exciting. Even the postal clerks where I have lived have been excited by what has appeared in my postbox, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. There is less time to look at mail now as a clerk in the postal system, since the emphasis is "how many pieces" in "how much time", so one hardly sees what whizzes by, since there are optical scanners and fiber optics which govern the distribution of the mail (or at least the sorting of it).

Then there is a younger generation that is sometimes stimulated by a librarian or a teacher who has been doing "mail art" or "networking" for a while and wants to embrace a whole new group of people in doing it. Not once, but as a habit. And that's why the rubberstamp industry in the United States has burgeoned into a big business. Teachers especially have taken it up, but there must be something in being "independent" and perhaps not being an "artist" that allows one to use a rubberstamp and use it aesthetically to create imagery that is innovative and ingenious. That is why some people think that Mail Art can be used as a project in the public schools. Perhaps that is also why listings for Mail Art appear in journals more diverse than any of the alternative zines and publications by artists which were the norm in the 1970s and 1980s. Mail Art still hasn't grasped the imagination of most people, but it certainly is nourished by ancillary industries which distribute the correspondence in an aesthetic way.

There may be more shows announced, etc., but I have seen a great deal less documentation than ever before. I love how people cite the rules--no jury, no returns, any medium, any size, documentation to all--and what happens but you wait years and you may never see a list of participants, let alone remember what show it was and when, when suddenly to your surprise comes an envelope with a list of people who participated in a show two

years before. The "community" has not grown that much, but many of my friends have been disenchanted by the novelty of mail art. Not because of Ray's death, but in spite of it. Between the faxes, the email, and all the other forms of communication that rush through the system like magazines, periodicals, books, artist books, newsletters, and generous forms of communication called letters, well, it is almost too much to respond to whether in just the reading of it, or the answering of the mass of it all.

I believe in email for short messages, but email messages are ephemeral, and even if they are enhanced by good graphics, or the Internet creates sites which are graphically dynamic, good solid information is not part of the tool called email. Quick and neat, but not deep. And I really do not think that email and fax art should be considered Mail Art. Mail Art has to go through the international postal system and have been stamped and delivered by the system in order to come under the category of Mail Art. The other means such as email and the Internet as well as fax art comes under the larger umbrella of "Networking" which is not necessarily Mail Art.

Those of us who met during the Age of Cavellini certainly became a community, a group of friends who could visit each other through the mail, and sometimes even in person. I met many people who had archives already well established in the 1970s

such as Anna Banana, Bill Gaglione, and many Europeans. I admired the system of order which most of my friends in Belgium and Holland had in order to archive their Mail Art. Ulises Carrion opened a space just to exhibit his archive and make it available to any person who was serious. And how often messages were waiting for you as you arrived, since it was a conduit of networking as well. Those days are gone--we have lost the touch of being part of a community. Of course, Peter and Angel Network are certainly exceptions to the rule. That dynamic duo has made it a life's work to be human networkers and the epitome of what Mail Art can and should be. But who am I to say what "should" be! Other than defining Mail Art as what goes through the international postal system, I believe that networking is totally something else. Certainly Leonardo and Michelangelo had their differences, but their form of writing letters was to take the back of drawings and write to each other or other artists--and keep notes and make notes when an idea popped into their heads. Frederic Remington used to send the most wonderful illustrated letters to his friends! And there are so many people who communicate with each other without feeling or knowing they are a part of a "movement". They just communicate visually and verbally with their correspondents.

So if there is a difference it is because we are bombarded with too much information--and too much labor to make the same amount of money. I

remember being told that this was going to be a life of leisure what with the labor saving devices of computers, etc. But instead, I think we are all working harder for allot less. At least, I speak of the United States...and some of my friends in Europe.

RJ : Time seems to an essential thing in life and art and also mail art. The more one wants to do, the less time one has for every single piece of work. I have noticed in the last years this bothers me more and more (I probably get older too....) and that I hardly react anymore to Xeroxes, stupid invitations, and also the hasty written e-mails without any content. How do you deal with all the mail that you get in?

(Because of the incident that Judith's computer & diskettes were stolen from her place, it took some time for her to get things started again. This explains the short break in the sending of the answer and the getting of the reply)

Reply on 7-6-1996 (e-mail)

JAH: I find that with the tremendous flow of snail mail, email, and faxes, it is difficult to write even a good letter to anyone. I find I write great letters to my friends when I am abroad but never at home. It just doesn't stir the soul to communicate at length when I can get on the phone and call anywhere in the world and hear that voice and talk at length. It is not like a letter, which is composed and seemingly more emotive because there is time to think but it

gets the message across. Then there is a fax machine which allows one to send a facsimile document to anyone in the world too so there is no mystery anymore about communication at least, instant communication. The occasional piece of mail art that comes in the mail moves the soul but it is not a constant anymore. Yet, a whole new class of students is learning what mail art is they are excited and delighted and creative and you cannot complain about that too!

My time is divided into so many segments that I am seldom moved to do mail art even when requested. It has to be a heavy invitation and much time to think about it before I am moved to do it so it is not a priority for me. As for quick answers to quick questions, I use email, fax mail and the telephone and all that means is communication and nothing else.

I flit between the world of art and libraries, archives and mail art, book art and trade books so it is difficult to sort it all out even daily. I prioritize the mail and deal with the important stuff (money, business, etc.) first and then try to leave some room for fun but oftentimes, that gets waylaid to a later date, or never. I am sure that for some people I am a zero, because I do not respond to their mail. I do not automatically answer unsolicited mail, although I feel a burden and responsibility to do so. My intentions are noble, but oftentimes my actions do not match my intentions. Alas! As I said before,

I thought we were going to have more time to do creative things what with the invention of electronic technology, but ironically enough, we have less time to do what we want to do and less time to do what we have to do. Too much information, too many people, too much to do.

RJ : This "too much to do" sounds very familiar to me. But a lot has been done by the network. In the last decade also lots of publications have been written about mail art. The major books mostly done by male mail artists by the way. Do these books give a good idea of what the network has been all about?

Reply on 23-8-96 (e-mail)

JAH : Both John Held and Crackerjack Kid have produced volumes which are a tribute to their passion and their dedication to the field. When I entered the "network" it was strictly mail art and I participated not only as an "artist" (which I am not, but I feel I can make it in the Mail Art world by using techniques and media which allow me to do something aesthetic) but also as an admirer of the freedom that Mail Art allowed to everyone from any walk of life, any ethnic or racial denomination, any background at all. I appreciated that freedom. The intermediary was the International Postal System, which functioned fairly well except for a few select sites such as New York City, Washington, DC and especially Italy--all of Italy! Technology certainly changed the language and the

techniques--and now the "network" means more than mail--and includes fax and email. I am a firm believer that Mail Art means Postal Mail Art--and that is the mystique of it all. If it is fax or email, it is NOT Mail Art--it is something else, perhaps even "networking".

When Anna Banana had her Fe-Mail Art Show producing a marvelous catalog in addition, I felt it was a tribute to those women in the Mail Art world who get short shrift. The volumes that have subsequently been produced in the 1990s seem to pay small tribute to the women in the network, never emphasizing their differences, but certainly not producing great testimonials to their contributions to the field.

I feel there are many women in the field who will never get recognized for their long-time participation, such as Pat Tavenner in California and Pat Fish in Santa Barbara. For a short moment, their 15 minutes ð la Warhol, they were appreciated, but there are still chapters to be written about ALL the artists in the network--not just some. The books that are being written now are much better researched than before, and because of new technologies, they can be updated and corrected shortly before being committed to the press. As a result, they are much more respected. The last chapter has not been written in this field, but at least some chapters have been written, and very well indeed.

RJ : Any chance that you will be doing a book on mail art in the future?

(On October 26th 1996 I had a short meeting with Judith Hoffberg when she attended the talk I did at the Stamp Art Gallery in connection to the exhibition I had there about the TAM Rubberstamp Archive).

reply on 3-2-97 (e-mail)

JAH : As to the bibliography that been generated from the male mail artists, I can vouch that Crackerjack Kid's book is invaluable; some of the essays are so brilliantly written that they can serve as essays for other disciplines as well. I cite David Cole's essay, for instance, on collaboration that makes such a poetic statement that I have just read it out loud for audiences in universities. I would say that as soon as the Academy gets a hold of these alternative movements, the language becomes rarified, the illustrations become portraits, and the book becomes obsolescent before its time, since it takes so long for university presses to agree to do such books. The information, therefore, is dated as soon as it is published. But it is a start and by being paperback (and by the way, expensive) not everyone can buy these books, but at least they are in libraries and faculty members buy them so it is a big leap forward.

I am sure that because Americans have a problem with languages, they are missing out on many volumes which are printed in Dutch or German or French or Polish and we hardly get word of them unless the network distributes them. As a result, I too have been left out of that list, since I am not as active a mail artist as I used to be, and as such, have been informed most of the time by Stamp Art Gallery, since they seem to be on the cutting edge of information about the Network, thanks to the assiduous interest of John Held and Picasso Gaglione.

There never is enough information around and well informed articles are few and far between. Now that interests of mail artists seem to veer toward fax, computers and artistamps, there seems to be less mail art by the "old guard" and much more interest by rubber stampers, young students, and those just discovering what mail art is about. At any rate, the younger people really love the whole concept, and see it as another venue for barter, exchange and cooperation.

RJ : The Postal Museums here in Europe have been focusing on mail art in the last years a lot. Exhibitions were held in Postal Museums in The Hague (Netherlands) Brussels (Belgium) , Bern (Switzerland) , Copenhagen (Denmark) , and just today -- as I write this on 19-6-97 -- the Postal Museum in Berlin opens a mail art exhibition. Some museums have also started with building their own

archives by buying up archives from some mail artists or just by starting their own mail-art projects. What do you think of this development? Where does it lead to?

(never received the next answer. Interview was stopped).

PETER KÜSTERMANN

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH PETER KÜSTERMANN (GERMANY)

Started on: 30-12-1995

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

Reply on 7-1-1996

(On this Monday, just before 6 o'clock, I got a phone call from Peter Küstermann. He said he liked the idea very much and that he wanted to use many different communication forms in the interview. His first answer he then gave, and I recorded this interview of which you here find the text-print):

PK : In 1982 I was still a normal person. Then I met Don Jarvis, we were reading poetry together. In the interval, this tall slim man in a grey suit shoved a small booklet over to me, whispering "Wanna read that?" Curiously me, sure I wanted, that changed my life.

The booklet contained congratulations, texts and pictures from all over the world for Robert Quercus's 90th birthday. Maybe you know that that is the latin species name for an oak tree; I had to ask. And I learned that Robert stood in front of Don's Council flat.

It had not made me suspicious that Don Jarvis had a color toner photocopier in his council flat (which means cheap housing from the city for poor people) already in 1982. And my fate was sealed when I bought the documentary booklet about Robert's birthday from Don, for an outrageous sum. He explained its high price with those just seven words that have haunted my mail artist's poor soul ever since: "I must make up for the postage."

Of course I squeezed out of Don all the details about this wonderful worldwide non-commercial network of artists who had congratulated him on Robert's Quercus 90th birthday. In the 13 years since, I have launched a series of mail art actions myself and made just as many documentations.

In 1992 I was travelling with Angela as Netmail Postmen carrying mail art around the world. And then we found a sign 'Quercus Robur' on a big oak tree at the other end of the world in Melbourn's Botanical Gardens, and mailed Don a photo with congratulations. After some weeks, back into London again, we celebrated the 100th birthday exactly 10 years later after our first encounter,

together with my mail art godfather Don, who meanwhile has become my godMOTHER, because he paints, writes, and performs as Dawn Redwood now, and who has just been our dear guest for the opening of his one-(wo)man-show in our networking gallery in the Cultural centre of Mail Art Mekka Minden. Isn't that an appropriate biological pseudo name for the daughter of "Robert Quercus"?

RJ : Lots of mail artists travel, but for you it has become a real way of life it seems. I remember getting mail from you from the most strange outer corners of the world, where you have been travelling to with Angela. What has been the most impressive travel, and why do you travel that much?

Reply on 29-4-1996

PK : Our most impressive travel was our worldwide one-year FREE PERSONAL DELUXE NETMAIL DELIVERY Project in 1992, in which we carried 4000 hand-registered pieces of mail art over 100,000 kilometers and across more than 50 borders between 350 networkers and 173 Decentralized Networking Congresses, using over 150 trains, 160 buses, 100 taxis, even a mountain rail, a canoe, and a sled - and all that in our postal uniforms. It was a pleasure that you joined the project as participant yourself!

As for our motives, let me please quote from our book "Networking Discussions", published by Byron Black in Jakarta/Indonesia in 1993:

"We carried + sorted mail art on trains, campgrounds, airports, between Siberian ice and Chinese rice - an anachronism in the age of personal computers, faxes, and communication satellites. Imagine carrying art letters, a beer bottle and even an umbrella and a kangaroo bone by hand around the world in a postman's uniform, in a super-marathon. Exploiting yourself, supported by the gentle hands of your artists friends. Such cul-tour-ing was exactly what we did from the first to the last second in 1992.

On the whole, this project was an extreme PHYSICAL experience, which was only possible in mutual support and constructive criticism between the two of us:

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

* getting used to different climates quickly: within 2 weeks from -45°C in Siberia to + 45°C in the central Australian desert.

* experiencing the microclimates of every participant's and host's personal environment, not only on a physical level, but also very intensely on

an emotional level, and of course also mentally; behind EVERY single postcard we found a WHOLE creative personality: attractive, adventurous, inviting = worth our undivided attention.

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

* lots of energy went of course into the mere organizing of such quick hit-and-run travelling. We would have liked to stay longer with quite a few networkers, and are carrying home a series of appointments and invitations to visit each other, also for bigger mutual projects, in the future.

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

An important motive: meeting REAL people in flesh & blood to get an authentic view of the world, not by mass media. Another one: experiencing many new feelings and thoughts beyond sometimes limited verbal communication. Never before has the world been so open for MORE than mail; our fathers were at war with each other, foreigners got stigmatized as scapegoats, the world ruled by national prejudice. We CAN behave

differently today, understanding freedom not only as a chance, but as an obligation. Peace is not only the absence of war, but a space to be filled.

Networking as a chance for personality in shallow, standardized mass societies which manipulate and exploit our working power - as a chance to give your own art and work a historic dimension, creating one's own personal international net of friends.

This mind-extending experience included not only the collection and delivery of "mail as art" and "art by mail", but also so many emotions, surprises, personal goodies and background stories from the participants of our project in the 'Global Village'.

Networking, as an extended dimension of mail art, becomes a very physical experience, once you expose yourself to the other artists' projects: transporting handwritten art messages across oceans on your shaved head, delivering Net Mail sitting in a congress bathtub, or being the postal part of a sculpture made out of naked persons.

When our fathers, and also our grandfathers, traveled in uniform to other countries, that meant disaster. Who knows if our children will have to stay home because immense traveling costs, due to the exhaustion of our national resources, will make such a journey a privilege of the rich? So; for us the chance of longtime travel on a shoestring is also an obligation, to promote and intensify the network

idea as a peace-creating force against mass society, racism, and commercialized art markets in a capitalist world.

On our global archipelago schedule we find many more active networkers than the usual participant in his own sub-network usually assume: popular names with their own well-deserved history as well as quite some exotic sometimes peripheral mail artists. How shall we keep the network open if not by integrating more of them regularly? Their unprecedented ideas mean progress and development, if the network does not want to petrify alive."

RJ : Besides the traveling you also like to hand-stamp artistamps together with other mail artists when you meet them. When did you start with that and what is the idea behind it?

(after sending this question I received a postcard from Egypt from Peter Küstermann and Angela. Seems like they are on the road again.....)

(on March 5th I received mail from Peter again after a long break. He writes: "Hi Ruud - here's a T.A.M. article for your archive collection. Also I would like to continue our interview. What exactly was your last question? About rubber stamps?" With letter he sent a magazine with in it an article about T.A.M. - Think about Mutation - for my collection of TAM-findings. I sent him the last page of the interview again)

Never received a reply, so the interview was ended.

ROBERT ROCOLA

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ROCOLA (USA)

Started on: 3-11-1995

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

Reply on 13-11-1995

Robert Rocola : Thank you for writing to me. I'll do this as art with you - "networking" doesn't interest me.

(Robert Rocola returned the invitation as a collage. Besides a color-Xerox and some stamps, he also wrote the following text under it:)

1965-66 with Ray Johnson. 1979 - on 5 or 6 people at a time. I hate the mail art network.

RJ : Why do you hate the mail art network? What is wrong with it?

(together with the next question I sent to Robert Rocola some info's on Ray Johnson and some other mail art materials. The question together with the

small texts as a reply to my question I printed on red paper).

Reply on 22-11-1995

RR : Ruud, thank you for the Ray color piece and MM env. The return add-on + everything. I'll send you the #50 catalog for happy nine 61X ciao too - RobZ

(Together with his answer RR sent some bits and pieces in the envelope. Some were inserted in two closed envelopes he put inside the envelope with his small text. Were these pieces a sample of why he hates the mail art network?)

RJ : Do you get a lot of junk through the mail?

Reply on 2-12-1995

(As the answers before Robert Rocola sent a visual reply. He gave some short comments on the things & texts I sent to him and included some visuals).

RR : (see also paper with his reaction!) This IS junk mail. "Some thoughts about (E-) Mail art part-4" It would take 15 min. to read that - "I have to be someplace in 15 min." - just kidding. Thanks for BANK NOTES

You answered too quick - a postcard followed with an answer, of sorts. Beau-regards, RobZ

(Robert used a part of the text to get my address on his envelope. He also made a collage of the photo of the envelope I mail a previous mailing in. The Bank notes are the Fluxus bucks I designed for Ex Posto Facto and am distributing with my outgoing mail. He already informed me before that he would react visual to my questions. For the next question I included Anna Banana's interview and some more pieces of art & texts)

RJ : Answering sometimes takes its time, but sometimes this time is relative. When I feel a question coming up, I send it. Glad you liked the bank notes. What means money to an artist, in this case you?

(the interview stops, Rocola obviously doesn't like a text-version of the interview, so our correspondence changed into a correspondance. Probably I will make a booklet out of that. Wrote about that to Robert on 4-1-1996 and again end may 1996. I am not sure if he likes the idea as he makes a habit of insulting me and in the same letter write some nice words)

ROD SUMMERS

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH ROD SUMMERS – VEC
(NETHERLANDS)

Started on: 18-11-1994

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

Reply on: 9-12-1994

Rod Summers : Dear Ruud, this is the answer to the first question in your mail-interview project:

I began involvement in the mail-art movement in either late 1973 or early 1974, it's quite difficult to be more precise as I destroyed my mail-art archive as part of a performance in De Appel in Amsterdam in 1977. The performance was documented on video tape.

Why did I destroy my collection? I began mail art activity to collect material for a project I undertook whilst a student at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. The project was called 'VEC SECRET

BUREAUCRACY' and collected material with the specific aim of eventual performance destruction. Many noted artists participated in the project in full knowledge of what would happen to their work at the end. A little documentation (other than the video) exists including the shredded remains of works destroyed.

I began mail-arting again in 1978 because I wanted to launch the VEC AUDIO EXCHANGE.....

(together with his answer Rod Summers sent me lots of other info's about his activities).

RJ : When I met you through the mail you were doing the last part of your Exchange project (Tching - The end), so I know how the result looks (hears) like. This VEC AUDIO EXCHANGE was more than the exchange of audio wasn't it? Why did you start it, and why did it end?

(After sending this question to Rod by FAX he tried out my new FAX-software by sending a reaction to my computer. It failed, but the list of erros was a piece of art itself. Rod sent me an E-mail message via Amsterdam to inform me about this, and called it FAXMANIA).

Reply on : 30-12-1994

(Together with his answer Rod Summers sent a diskette with the ASCII-file of the answer and a print-out of the computer-session of the FAX-MANIA at the Digital City in Amsterdam. Also included was a copy of the interview that appeared in the ND magazine).

RS : The VEC EXCHANGE project was launched as a research organ to inform myself what and who else was involved in the Audio Arts movement. But to understand the concept of the project it is firstly necessary to be aware of the fact that I began my personal investigations into recorded sound in 1961, so by the time I decided to launch the exchange project I was well practiced in the techniques of recording, mixing, editing and copying.

In the late seventies the cassette recorder was becoming more generally affordable, and the audio compact cassette was, and still is, standard globally. I had received a few cassettes from mail-artists in the UK (Paul Carter), the USA (Peter Frank) and Brazil (Leonard Frank-Dutch) and had recorded a couple of sound projects with Anna Banana and Bill Gaglione whilst they were on a visit to Maastricht.

In 1978 I travelled over to Warsaw to perform audio on the invitation of Henryk Gajewski and Piotr Rypson. I performed two live works there and the

performances were recorded. On my return to Maastricht I assembled the first VEC AUDIO EXCHANGE cassette from works received and my own works including the two made in Poland. A postcard was made and sent out to the mail-art network, the card informed that the cassette was available in exchange for artists sound works recorded on either cassette or open-reel tape. Reaction was rapid and enthusiastic. A total of 16 exchange cassettes were made in the period October 1978 to end 1983 and over 2000 copies were sent out in exchange for audio works.

Full details of the VEC AUDIO EXCHANGE project are to be found in the essential book 'SOUND BY ARTISTS' edited by Dan Lander and Micah Lexier and published by Art Metropolis in Canada. For the Swedes I am referenced in the book Ljodkunst by Peter R. Meyer in Stockholm. ND magazine Nr. 17 of 1993 has an interview with me in reference to my audio art activities.

Why did it end? Well, only the exchange part of the project ended. I still work in Audio arts and produce and publish audio cassettes. But the truth is the project outran my very meager resources, both cassette decks and the master tape recorder wore out from the excessive use and, as I had/have

no income and get no financial or moral support from any government or institution, I was not in a position to replace the dilapidated equipment, that and just too many of the cassettes that were coming in were of very poor quality, most amateurish, home-music.

There was one other factor that led to the demise of the audio exchange project.... In 1983 I bought my first little computer, a ZX81, and started to use that in the production of my mail-art. By the end on '83 the little hard copy books I was producing on the computers tiny 1 pin printer were being reproduced in books and catalogues of artist books.

I still regularly receive cassettes from around the globe and I'm still sending out cassettes though mostly my own works. My last full production, the cassette 'Church of the Fragile Treecreeper', has just been published in the states by ND magazine of Austin Texas. I regularly work on audio works from other artists such as the Icelander Magnus Palsson. In September ('94) I produced a work with the students of the State Art College in Reykjavik Iceland, and at present I am working on a new production for myself which is an extended conceptual song. After that I am going to produce an international literary cassette, and after that a

cassette of poetry and natural sound recordings. In this year of '94 I have managed to replace several equipment items and (should I be able to work out how to finance it) I am considering reopening the exchange project.

On the first weekend in February '95 I will be doing a performance in Den Bosch and sound will almost certainly be an element of that performance.

RJ : You mention that in 1983 you started using the computer in your work for audio. What else is interesting enough for you to use the computer for?

Reply on : 12-1-1995

RS : Actually I didn't use the computer in audio mode until I bought the Acorn BBC model B which had the most sophisticated sounding voice synthesizer. That was in 1985 I think. I bought it with money I earned teaching audio art in Oslo.

These days the computer and I have a stable and yet still developing relationship, My Amiga 4000 helps me write, draw, paint, develop new graphic images from drawings paintings or photos. Probably it's main function is as a tool in the production of my visual poetry which I print out using an ink jet printer and then disseminate

through the mail art network. Using this technique of combining computer graphics and text as 'desk-top publishing' distributed through the network has brought me in contact with fine accomplished poets.

It is interesting to note that the computer has still not made any significant impact on mail art and is still very much an under-used tool. This reluctance is almost certainly due to the awful user interface employed by early computers, and if that theory is true the general adoption of the W.I.M.P. interface should result in an increased artistic/poetic use of the computer on a home-user level over the next three years.

I've used the computer in so many projects already it would need a database to list them all! I also realize there are infinite other possibilities to use this computer creatively, such as robotics, image generation from mathematical formulae, interactive (hah!) projects whatever, but I use the computer to realize my ideas rather than realizing my ideas to employ the computer.

RJ : Last year Crackerjack Kid tried to start the TELENLINK 95 project. I'm not sure if it really started or not. Only few mail-artists in Europe have an E-mail address. You and me are a few of them.

What do you think that this digital communication will bring to the creative people?

Reply on : 10-2-1995

RS : Until the bottle-neck traffic jams on the access routes to the digital highway are cleared by increasing the number of nodes and lines to the user, the whole concept of E-network and Email is a joke. It usually takes me four or five days before I achieve access to my node which is in Amsterdam! No not a lot of fun to be had there yet, my vote still goes to fax it's fun, fine, now I have a fax/modem and free from subscriptions, at least for the time being...

(Ruud, I wrote a much longer and almost clever text but lost it entirely tiredly trying to make a copy, so this will have to suffice. r.s.)

RJ :lost it entirely. That is what is typical of the electronic communication-forms, especially E-mail and internet. The things I see on my screen I mostly want to have on paper too. This digital format seems sometimes so unreal to me. Guy Bleus soon will start his electronic Administration Center. Can art really be put into the bits and bytes, or shall it always be the sea of possibilities between the zero and one?

Reply on : 24-2-1995

(Together with the diskette we use for exchanging the ascii-version of our text Rod Summers also included a printed version of the interview so far printed with green ink on white paper. Unfortunately I couldn't read the ascii-file with my processor (a data-error) so I had to retype Rod's answer. I told him this by E-mail and sent the next question on disk with a print-out in very-small sized letters and on yellow paper)

RS : Art is subject to continuous evolutionary processes because the human animal and it's thought development is inseparable from the time in which it exists. [Mail art is an element of contemporary art activity. In the beginning it developed from conceptual art but the activity very quickly outgrew it's founding principles and became an amorphic exercise in global communication with strong supra-political dithered] Therefore the artist is obliged to consider whatever technology is available in the pursuit of his or her creativity. We live in the birth-pang age of computers, artists must consider how the computer fits into the artistic toolkit. I didn't throw away my pastel crayons, camera and tape recorders when I became busy with computers and I still buy ink for my fountain-pen and refills for the two different sorts of roller-

ball pens and three sizes of propelling pencils I use, I'm very dependant now, fortunately I can't foresee a world where computers are going to be superceded. After all with this beige box I can both create and communicate and then simultaneously! What we decide to do with the computer and the electronic highway at this moment will determine how the computer develops as a tool for artists of the future. I listen to BBC world service on the radio and have a monitor with CNN on constantly (with the sound turned off), I am an unrepentant information junky.

Hardcopy will always be a desirable outcome of artistic computer usage (see the excellent initiative 'Prints van Oranje' by the dynamic Dutch/Belgian artist group of the same name (They have a section on the BBS Art Doc Comm)). When the computer is as established in the average household, as say television is currently, then the concept of sending/selling sets of sequenced graphics for home monitor (dare I say wall-sized art monitors?) display of computer art becomes a feasibility.

E-mail IS already taking a large percentage of traditional postal methods, and there are supposedly four and a half million new users each month. Guy Bleus Eadmin Center is up and

running if one considers the third edition of his magazine is already circulating the net.

After only three months on the network the volume of my incoming E-mail is greater than I can read!... When I can get through that is (I get about 30/40 pieces of regular mail a week, mostly letters these days).

We surf the waves of contemporary cultural initiatives and do not let ourselves become swamped with the floods, should I say the inundation, with the incoming tides of opportunity. Aye Aye!

RJ : In 1986 H.R. Fricker started with his tourism. He tried to move the mail-artists from behind their desks and let them travel to meet the other artist. In 1992 (DNC) even on wider scale mail-artists met. Is the Internet making us sit back at home again because we need to react on all the information we get through the net.....?

Reply on : 7-3-1995

RS : Good question! Yes it's back to the cocoon with the only signs of life coming out of the telephone wire. The future watchers would have it that all business will be conducted from the home with perhaps a

weekly visit to the office. Well let's put a positive spin on it. If I were to switch entirely from buying stamps to digipost it would save me money which I could use to travel and visit other artists! Hmm? Somehow I don't think so. It's just another tool, it might make things fractionally cheaper. It's all very well for us to shout of fraternity, but the sheer geographical distances between net cells determines that we stay at home most of the time. Besides that, I'm not sure I want to meet too many mail-artists, some of them probably wear grey socks and were born on a Tuesday afternoon or some similar cultural impediment which is embarrassing to a highly sensitive analogue person like me <\ ;->

RJ : Glad to hear you are an analogue person (\ ;-) and you like smiley's too (\ :-). So, you don't like to meet too many mail-artists. Tell me a bit about your experiences with meeting mail-artists. Did you meet most in Holland or did you travel to their places to meet them?

(besides the next question I normally also include some kind of letter with some personal information, about my work, how I use my (old) computer for my mail-art and am thinking about buying a new one. Sometimes the answer to the interview-

question and the personal letter are mingled together in the answer in the interview)

RS: Busy huh Ruud? Tough the old teaching biz? Trouble with an inadequate computer eh Ruud? Finding it difficult to keep up with it all eh? Started to count the days between now and the pension have you Ruud? You probably have the 'flu, I know I have.

I'm trying to progress with my new novel but get endless interruptions, so we all have our frustrations. Let's see now, meeting mail artists, um... I get regular visits by many artists who think that mail-art is a stupid waste of artistic energy and financial resources. Just lately, since the new postal prices were introduced and now that I'm getting more invitations to show my real work, their statements are beginning to look like common sense.

The list of visiting mail-artists wouldn't be very long. Several visit regularly so I'll list the ones that have come here more than once, Anna Banana, Guy Bleus, *An-Dudek Durer, *Pawel Petasz, *Henryk Gajewski, Peter Kustermann (net-mail), Charles François, *Pete Horobin, ***Helgi Fridjonsson, *Vittore Baroni, Emilio Morandi, *Tom Winter, *Ever Arts... Well that's those I remember, several

of these people (marked*) are mates far beyond mail-art and we visit each other when we can. The number of single visits made by artists is more difficult to come after, from the States, like Bloch, Held, Gaglione, Homler, then there are the Galantai's from Artpool in Budapest, Ruedi Schill in Switzerland and H.R. Fricker from the same land.

Mail artists I have visited or met otherwise... also not a lot, when I eventually do get to America I will visit such monsters as John M. Bennett in Ohio, Geoffrey Cook and the rest of the Californian crew. In Canada Anna Banana. I'd like to visit Alex Z in the Ukraine and Ryosuke in Japan. When I travel it is for the purposes of either bird-watching, landscape photography or geology, mail-artists tend to be thin on the ground in the remote places my wife Liesbet and I like to visit.

Several mail-artists I have met are drones without much artistic expression or energy. Actually that is exactly the same within the art world beyond mail-art now I come to think of it. The experimental poetry scene within mail-art remains very positive.

Many of the mail art meets I have attended have been downright silly though there have been exceptions. At the last meet I organized, the HEAVEN meeting for DCWWNC, or whatever it

was called, my friends, the owners of the tearooms provided fine foods and drinks FREE to everyone, all forty attending here offered hash cake, several took it, many for the first time, four people got so stoned they fell over, one very famous French artist pissed himself. Now, when people wrote their reports about the event WHICH WAS A STATEMENT ON DRUGS TOURISM, not a single one was brave enough to tell the truth about the event. So my opinion upon the validity of mail-art as a section of contemporary arts fell dramatically. Everyone APART from Guy Bleus totally missed (or deliberately ignored) the point. But then... Guy Bleus is one of very few who has made mail-art into an art.

This summer Liesbeth and I are going to visit my old homeland of Southern England and Wales, we will be staying with Magnus Palsson in London for a few days whilst we check out Kew Gardens, whilst there we also intend to call in on The A.1. Waste Paper Co. and I have already made an appointment with Michael.

OK that was this bit. A bit strongly influenced by post influenza infection probably but never mind. Incidentally Ruud, if you ever want to visit the VEC you are more than welcome, Best Greetings.

RJ : I notice this interview and our personal correspondance/dence are being mingled here, but in a mail-art interview anything is possible. I must admit I am tempted to answer all those things with a long letter, and I will do so, But first the next question. The things that are written down about mail-art (referring to your experiences on DCWWWWWWNC, add or delete a few W's) don't always give a good impression of the mail-art. It is really true that everybody has formed his own network that is surrounding him/her. Every personal network is worth documenting, and it is a pity only few of those networks are documented good because of the possibilities of the mail-artist. How important is this documenting for you? Should we document at all or should we leave that to others. Is the documenting determining eventually how people will see mail-art. (Sorry for so much questions at once, but they just come up at the moment)

Reply on : 26-04-1995

RS Koowell, we'll use Email for correspondancing and this disc medium for exchange of the interview. Your questions this time refer to:

Documentation of archive materials and the ripples on ones own lake. I have always considered

mail-art a free exchange between consenting artists, a celebration of fraternal communication, an interesting armchair journey. The VEC Audio Exchange Project 1979-1983 was my contribution to the Mail-Art Network, logical as I'm an audio artist.

Genuine original international projects have been very few and far between. Individual contacts have been welded. I have often used the international aspect of mail art to realize personal projects, International mail has an intrinsic value which is exotic, mysterious, even dangerous perhaps? These are, as they always have been, fine emotive elements for consideration during the production of artwork. Documentation of mail art is an art by itself.

The creation of a pseudo bureaucracy as an art project when I was a student at the Jan van Eyck Academy was the How? I became involved in mail-art. I've maintained detailed documentation on three elements of my mail art experience. But first let me tell you the area where there is absolutely NO documentation, postcards and individual items of mail-art are placed in chronological ordered boxes, they are not even sorted out into artist order.

I have perfect analogue triple-cross referred documentation on the audio cassette archive (808 cassettes in the archive). Artists books, catalogues, posters and publications are on a data-base with full and deep search facilities.

A cardex system is the way I maintain addresses and I log what I've received and dispatched on the same card, so basically I can see everything I've received and what I sent out since 1978.

This documentation is only important to me as it still functions as an element of the original pseudo bureaucracy project. For me, only Guy Bleus has IMPORTANT documentation, everything else is absorbed into the arrogant black hole of my anarchistic attitude.

RJ : Do you archive the electronic things too? Do you keep all the E-mail messages you get, the graphics you made etc.?

Reply on : 6-5-95 (internet) 7-5-95 (disk)

(The diskette was brought to me by John Held Jr. and Bill Gaglione when they visited me on 7 & 8 of May after their performance in Paris and their visits to Guy Bleus & Rod Summers)

RS : Yes to both questions, Email is saved to disc, archived to another disc and sometimes I make a small edition of A5 hard-copy books (Lamers Progress) from a session at the email box. I keep all the graphics I make on the computer in uncompressed form on, at the time of writing 14:30, 6 May 1995, 60 DD DS floppies. All the images are logged by title and date of production, disc and directory into a fast and efficient database.

A similar database is used to catalogue the 31 floppies of DTP as visual poetry, fax art, scripts etc. My computer is blessed with a 260 megabyte hard drive of which 30 megs are graphics or DTP files. Slowly computers become inter-compatible in the facility to read each other's graphic output. We just require a little more patience before communication utopia becomes a universal reality.

RJ : Lots of specific dates and numbers in your last question. Are these numbers important to you?

Reply on 13-6-1995

RS : Numbers, dates and lists have a special significance to the follower of poetic reality, like considering the number of bibles hand transcribed before the date Gutenberg got his alphabet block act together and the lists of disappearing species littered pages made

of disappearing trees. Numbers give perspective and dimension to historical time and space. We delineate the greater part of our experience with parameters described in numbers, so, yes, I think you can say numbers are important to me though mathematics is not the strongest of my suits.
[How's your English?]

Magpies can count up to five. The Viking age ended on 25th. September 1066. My computer has ten megabytes of memory. The next life is many lifetimes away. I go on holiday on the 19th. June. This was answer number ten.

RJ : Well, these ten questions with the ten answers gave a really nice view about your involvements in , and thoughts about mail art.

Thank you for the interview!

MARIE STILLKIND

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH MARIE STILKIND (USA)

Started on 16-6-1997

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

Reply on 28-7-1997

Marie T.Stillkind: When Ray Johnson started mailing me items of interest, when he sent me large envelopes with smaller envelopes inside to send to other people (adding or deleting items myself), when he finally brought over large boxes or shopping bags of envelopes to be forwarded to other people, I realized I was part of a network of mailers and mailees ... or as Ray put it , I was now the secretary of the New York Correspondance School. I met him when Albert M. Fine , a musician and student at Juilliard School of Music, brought him to my office in the Fishbowl, where I worked as editorial assistant for the Juilliard Review. Ray and I became instant friends when we realized we had both been to Black Mountain College (at different times) and both knew the same people. It was Norman

Solomon who had introduced me to Philip Glass (the composer and at that time a student at Juilliard) who turned over his apartment at 69 West 96th Street to me. And it was in that apartment that I first met Albert M. Fine (who also became a composer and part of the Fluxus movement). Albert was delightful and I loved him right away. And the more I saw of Ray, the more I liked him, too. Ray was never effusive so it took longer to get to know him and his mysterious mailings. The mailings, I was given to understand, were very important and it was an honored responsibility to see that the envelopes got stamped and mailed to their recipients. The mailings would contain clippings from newspapers, magazines, a dictionary. Each mailing would contain items that were personally relevant to the recipient ; everything was original. This was 1960 and photocopy machines were clumsy and expensive and not available. Ray had quite a list of people to send to. Names that pop into my head were Malka Safro , Thalia Christ Poons, Bob Heide, George Brecht, E.M. Plunkett, Dick and Alison Higgins, Stanton Kreider, Dorothy Podber, Helen Jacobson, May Wilson, Karl Wirsum, Ann Wilson, Toby Spiselman, Richard Lippold, Julian Beck, Norman Solomon, Remy Charlip, Nick Cernovitch, and , of course, Albert M. Fine and myself. Later he included Claus Oldenberg and when Christo came to America from Bulgaria and couldn't speak English, only French, he , too, became a NYCS recipient as was Nam June Paik and the list grew and grew.

HOWEVER what Ray and his correspondents were doing was not termed mail art. We were "correspon-dancing". We were dancing through the mail, through our correspondance. It was a dance..... Ray sent an envelope (one foot forward), the recipient sent an envelope back (another foot forward). Back and forth and including others in the dance and round and round until sometimes what you had first sent out came back to you with additions or deletions or just as you had first sent it. The dance never ended as you continued to send your cuttings to one another.

RJ : Besides the exchange of mail, there were always the (planned or unplanned?) encounters with other 'members' of the NYCS. You already mentioned such encounters (Albert M. Fine introducing you to Ray Johnson; Norman Solomon introducing you to Philip Glass). Were these meetings typical for that time? What happened there?

next answer on 28-8-1997

MTS : We were all basically loners, introverts, but at that time in our lives, we were more sociable, wanted to meet new people. In the case of Norman Solomon introducing me to Philip Glass, it was a necessity. I needed to find a place to live within 10 days. He knew Phil was moving to a loft, so arranged for me to look over Phil's old apartment on 96th Street. It

was full of dead mice and old pianos, plus Albert M. Fine sitting on the floor in the kitchen. I got rid of the dead mice soon after I moved in but the pianos remained there for months before Phil managed to haul them out. They were all upright, one in front of the other. I think he had disemboweled some of the strings. Ray Johnson, however, seemed more introvertish than all of us but in fact his art form was people and people connecting.... networking, I think it would be called today. He would take me to visit other friends of his, who were also part of the New York Correspondance School.

Living not to far from me were Bill and Ann Marie Wilson, soon to be joined by their twin daughters, Ara and Kate. They had a big house or apartment. Sometimes for sending out large boxes of envelopes, I would be 'rewarded' with a mystery party. One evening we went over to the poet Leroi Jones' apartment where he was dressed in a Santa Claus suit and was hosting a big party where nearly everyone was dancing on the floor, which was bouncing perilously. Another time I was taken to a downtown apartment, which was furnished with cardboard boxes and a grand piano and there I met Stanton Kreidler, who was to become a correspondent until he died in 1984. We went through hard times together, Stanton in Denver, me in Florida, but we continued to write and send one another strange cuttings and objects in the mail. We would write, "Thank God, I've got you to write to."

Stanton had an alter ego: Lucia Burneson. She also used to write to me of her quite distinct middle-American middle-class life. When I went back to New York to visit and stayed with the Wilsons at their 25th Street house, Ray brought over Christo who had just arrived from Bulgaria and couldn't speak any English. We tried to converse in French. Not very well though. Ray's outings were always mysterious. He came and got me at my 96th Street apartment and wouldn't tell me where we were going until we got there. And the party or gallery opening or 'happening' were his surprises/rewards to me. Going out with him was like a gift wrapped in tinsel. You never knew what was inside but it was exciting whatever it was.

RJ : Did you ever visit Ray Johnson's home? I understand he didn't like visitors too much.....

answer on 9-10-1997

MTS : I only visited his apartment once. This was, I believe but can't remember exactly, in 1965 when I was visiting New York from Toronto. His apartment was in the Lower Village at 176 Suffolk Street. I'd met Ray somewhere else and he took me there for tea and chat. The apartment was incredibly neat and tidy. There didn't seem to be anything in it except a long trestle table and one cardboard box. It struck me later that behind one of the doors was another room crammed full of his collage material.

In the cardboard box was a completed collage, which Ray inscribed to me, and the rest of the box was full of segments of collages, partial collages and two untrimmed collages. I can describe the box exactly as I just rediscovered it earlier in the year. The box had a label on it from Kremetz & Co. , 49 Chestnut Street, Newark , NJ , and the postmark was May 1st , 1962. I'm looking at it now and it's full of clippings and sandpapered cardboard, which Ray used in strips for collages. There are also a few "Ray Johnson" signatures there so that if I wanted, I could make my own Ray Johnson Collages.

Ray and I used to tear around New York, going places, doing things, so for once, we had time to just sit and chat. I asked Ray a personal question. Bill Wilson had just told me that Ray was having an affair with the sculptor Richard Lippold, who I had met about ten years earlier with his wife, the dancer Louise Lippold. It didn't seem possible. Besides I thought Ray was having an affair with somebody else. So I asked him whether this was true. This was the only time I ever saw him angry. He didn't reply but grew cold and withdrew. He returned to the room with more tea for our mugs a few minutes later and we talked of other things.

When I lived in New York, I had never visited his apartment. I would never go anywhere uninvited anyway and as I'm not very good at finding my way around, people usually took me to their

apartments after having met me somewhere easy to find. I don't think 176 Suffolk Street was in a particularly good neighborhood as Ray was later mugged there, which is why he moved to the Pink House in Locust Valley, New York.

I don't know whether Ray liked to have visitors to his apartment or not. I know that although he was a very sociable person, there was an element of Greta Garbo to him. He was mysterious and private and had secret jokes that you had to figure out for yourself. Enigmatic I think describes him. One wouldn't drop in on him uninvited. At least I wouldn't. He was like a pussycat. You should stroke him and he would purr, but when he wanted to be alone, he would mysteriously disappear down the alleyways of his life.

RJ : Could you give one or more examples of those "secret jokes" that you mentioned. Maybe one you figured out.....?

next answer on 1-2-1998

(With Marie Stilkind's letter she also sent copies of other things. One of them was a letter by Judson Ehrbar from the Juilliard School of Music , addressed to Ray Johnson , at the request of Miss Tavroges' Lawyers after she had received a parcel from Ray with in it a piece of Lamb skin.)

MTS: One of his 'secret jokes' stank to high heaven. I attach the ensuing correspondence. The tearful eye was drawn by Ray Johnson. I, of course, wrote the original letter and just used the stamped signature of the Juilliard registrar. If you remember, I worked at Juilliard School of Music at this time.

Another 'secret joke' that I still have not figured out was when we were watching Peggy Lee on television and Ray said she was high on drugs. This came up a few years later when Ray referred to that incident and said that he had told me Peggy Lee was high on drugs. There was something significant in this that I wasn't and am still not aware of.

Ray had an air of carrying secrets. He would say something, do something and it might not have any significance to you but it did to him. It was like having a partial knowledge of a language and having to pretend to understand the whole sentence, later figuring it out from the context in which it was presented. Some people were turned off by this but I found it very Zen and reminiscent of the Black Mountain College style, where people might say outlandish things which could or would not have real meaning. A lot of my friends had this tendency at this time.... to say things that didn't really make much literal sense but might make the sound of one hand clapping. One listened to the inner applause.

Ray was playing a game that only he knew of all the rules. The rest of us followed.... some more hesitantly than others. Some didn't want to play and didn't like Ray. But not to play was to miss out on the juice of life. When he called, I came. He was like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. He played his flute of fun and games and I was compelled to follow. He sent things in the mail and I was duty bound to deal with them, otherwise I might not hear the flute beckoning me again. I had to play his game, whether I understood the rules, the private jokes or not. I was fascinated by and addicted to his madness.

RJ : You are obviously addicted to words as well. May it be writing letters , reading books , editing , poetry . Do you know where this addiction comes from?

ROY ARENELLA

MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH ROY ARENELLA (USA)

Started on 28-7-1997

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

Reply on 28-8-1997

(In the beginning I received some letters from Roy. He was surprised that I invited him, since he has used the rubberstamp: "Photographer" & not "Mail Artist". He doesn't consider himself a mail artist and hesitated to participate in this project. But Roy always sent me material about Ray Johnson which he knows quite well and that mostly is reason enough to find out who he is..... On August 28th I received his first answer).

Roy Arenella : I've been on the fringe, the edges, of what I understand to be mail art since about 1971 when I began to send out material in the mails in a sustained & coherent way. I began with postcards collaged with pieces of newspaper clippings, mailed to a few friends & family. I called these mail outs NEWSFAX (my own personal

version of the news) and as this project progressed, the list of people who received them grew. Though I occasionally made & sent simple line-drawings, or Xeroxed visual pieces, or material collaged onto cards (& I also once did a small booklet) I finally settled on a format of a single 82 x 11" page of typewriter paper on which I made concrete & visual poems. I used the typewriter mostly, sometimes rubber stamps. Fifteen or 20 copies of each NEWSFAX were made, Xeroxed, then mailed out.

I did not think of NEWSFAX as a little "literary" magazine (or a zine); it was meant to be mailed to a few "select" individuals. I tried to design the single page whenever possible to accommodate the folds made by fitting it into an A-2 envelope. It wasn't available by subscription. Sometimes it was received with a welcome, sometimes not. During the course of 3 years about 36 different "issues" of NEWSFAX were made & sent out to a total of about 25 people. All sorts of people, all known to me. Some people received some issues & didn't get others.

Eventually a good number of NEWSFAX did get sent to & published in magazines, the first of those being Richard Kostelanetz' "Assembling" (where in subsequent issues I saw work of contributors I later learned were mail artists).

But in 1971 I wasn't only putting NEWSFAX into the mails. In the Summer of that year, on a visit to Paris, I met Martine Hahn, who lived & was a student there. For several years (until she came to the USA & we were married) the mail between her apartment in Montmartre, Paris & mine in Little Italy, New York was heavy &

varied. Not only letters such as lovers write but all manner, shapes & sizes of things were mailed -- testing the limits of the postal service's powers of accommodation. (Better then, than now, I think.)

Some of these mailings were only playful; but some were necessary for carrying between us the more serious ideas & feelings which others, who are not living apart, are able to continually share in person. In our trans-Atlantic circumstances we couldn't help but learn to communicate by relying heavily on the mailbox. Though Martine & I were able to spend a few months together each year (we of course spoke with each other expensively on the phone) we both depended on the mails not only to carry informational content between us, but to be, in itself, a form of connection. And since Martine was (still is) interested in collage, in writing, in images (she completed a Masters Degree at the University of Paris with a thesis on Concrete Poetry) our correspondence was a connection which was rich and full of diversity.

All through this time (& since the mid 60's) my major activity was photography. I did mostly personal work, but sometimes paid, commercial jobs. When asked I would say I was a part-time professional but a full time amateur. (The rent was always paid by my job as a social service worker.)

I have had one-person exhibits & have been in group shows in a variety of galleries & alternative spaces, from a temporary wall in a public theater to a posh gallery on 57th Street in New York, as well as a few public & private galleries in Europe.

When I began photography, the gallery scene was very sparse. In many ways it was an idyllic time -- certainly compared to now. But even then my experience with that scene was never really a relaxed & comfortable one. And since then, things have gotten much worse, from my point of view. (This is not the place to explain why this is the case.)

One of the areas in photography that did give me an enormous amount of satisfaction (& that I was very comfortable with) was making small photographs & mailing them out. At first I sent out the salvageable parts of photos (rejected from the darkroom process) in order not to discard & waste them. But as time went by I began making prints expressly to be used as cards to be mailed out. There was something satisfying & sustaining in knowing that my photos would have an immediate & definite use. Each would go out in the mails to one person, (for one person) who would look at it, & read what I'd written on the back. Otherwise the damned photo would sit in a box, doing nothing, perhaps seen by a few friends. What those boxed photos were actually doing was waiting -- waiting & hoping to be hung on a gallery wall. Most of them never were.

My reliance on -- dependence on -- photo/cards was further increased when I found a way to re-work some of the NEWSFAX pieces, (done originally with a typewriter), as photo/cards. Gradually, by the late 70s, competition for gallery exhibitions got tougher & tougher. So called "Fine Art" photography became high profiled, a Big Business, fierce with competition and exhibiting an ego which I

found to be pretentious & obnoxious. I could see that I was beginning to rely more & more on making & sending out photo/cards as my way of doing photography. These little cards, it seemed to me, could carry a whole world.

Because photo/cards combine my interest in photography and the mails, they seem to be any ideal form for me. But I still continue to send out various other kinds of mailings. Aside from NEWSFAX-like pages, I like working with things postal in a personal, autobiographical way. I occasionally do xeroxed pieces, sometimes conceived for & sent to only one person, sometimes sent to several or a group of people. And of course, there are always letters.

RJ: The last year you have been sending me lots of material about Ray Johnson. Did you get in contact with him through the mail or through your photography?

Reply on: 2-10-1997

(After receiving the answer, I also received a postcard with the text : "Begin again Begin again": Optimist's Ring, a NEWSFAX 'as' photo/card.)

RA: The story of my "contact" with Ray Johnson is a non-story, or a story of non-contact, unless I define that word very broadly.

In order to answer your question in an extended way I will have to interpret contact to mean more than is usually meant. Because I met Ray only twice; spoke with him only

once, after one of his happenings, exchanging only a few words about taking his photograph. I sent him a few of my photo postcards; he never sent anything to me. But if you take contact to mean more than just meeting face to face or communicating personally.... then I have plenty to say about Ray. (I'll call him "Ray" here, though it doesn't sound right in my ear, since I didn't know him personally. But calling him anything else would be a little silly; too stiff, too formal.)

While answering your first interview question I was browsing through some papers about NEWSFAX & found an old, yellowing, 3x5 index card on which I'd written:

"Ray Johnson / 65 Landing Road / Glen Cove NY 11542 // Mail Stuff." It was meant as a reminder to mail NEWSFAX to him. But I never did. And I don't know why I didn't. That's the earliest example of what I mean by non-contact.

I wrote you earlier about the best of my non-contacts with Ray: the one that took place a few years ago when my wife & I were leaving the Nassau County Museum of Art where we had gone specifically to buy a few more catalogs of an exhibit that he had at the museum 4 or 5 years previous to our visit. (I had not seen that major exhibition, but had spotted the catalogs in the museum shop on another, previous visit.) As we were walking out the main door of the museum with 2 copies of the newly bought catalog, Ray walked in. I recognized him of course but didn't know him personally. My wife nudged me and suggested that I say hello, acknowledge my purchases & perhaps talk with him. But I shied away from this -- probably worried that I

would appear too much the "admiring fan". My wife -- who is the social part of our family, I the unsocial -- took the catalogs from me & retraced her steps to catch up with Ray. They talked a long time, while I walked around the museum grounds & finally sat in the car & waited for her to return. (For the record, I should say that my wife's version of this story differs from mine a little. She remembers, for example, that she introduced me to him & we exchanged a few words. I remember none of that). When my wife returned she showed me the catalog which Ray had inscribed for us with a few words & a snake drawing. But more importantly -- it turned out later -- she gave me the issue of Rubberstamp Madness which he was carrying & had given to her (because he was featured in it as the cover story). I say "more importantly" because it was from this magazine (via another zine) that I eventually found SHOTS, a photo magazine which over the years has published many of my pictures & has been an enormous source of enjoyment & satisfaction to me. (Thank you, Ray.) But the best & most exciting news my wife came back to the car with was the promise that Ray was going to put us on the list of the NY Correspondence School & that we would eventually be getting things in the mail. But we never did. That never did happen.

After a long wait (with nothing from Ray) I did make a few half-hearted attempts at connection by sending him a few photo/cards. But I heard nothing in response. So much for my second non-contact.

The real contact with Ray (contact in the broader sense that I referred to earlier) came first in an article which appeared

in the mass-circulation magazine New York (early 1970). The short article of several pages & 3 or 4 illustrations has really stuck in my mind through all these years. Of course I'd heard of Ray Johnson before that article & I'd seen his work. And I liked his work. But as I remember it now it was this article which helped me understand a little bit more about what I was seeing in Ray Johnson. There were two things mentioned in it that struck me strongly then & have stuck with me since. Over the years these two remarks have become very important to me.

The first was a little story of a few lines about how Ray once took a taxi ride from one bar to another because of the way the names of the 2 bars related to each other -- either in a punning manner or some other, poetic way (I don't remember now). I thought that this was a terrific thing for somebody to do -- I mean, I had admiration for a man whose imagination is constructed in such a way that it worked on, and with, the real, everyday world -- an imagination that used the very ordinary, but also (somehow hidden) common world to make poetry.

The second thing I remember from that article was a critic pointing out that you couldn't buy Ray's (mail) art; you could only receive it in your mailbox & this was interpreted as undermining the entrenched profit motive of the world of gallery art. Though this could be seen as part of the larger threat that Conceptual Art was staging during this same time, I could more easily identify with Ray's activities than I could with the "heavier" (and often more pretentious & overly belabored) "strategies" of the

conceptualists. Almost everybody has a mailbox & Ray's ideas took the shine off art's snob appeal & in my eyes strengthened the idea that art was an activity, not a professional career.

These two ideas picked up from the magazine article weren't the only important things that I remembered about Ray at that time. Of course there was the work itself, which, as mentioned, I already was looking at. (I had also seen Ray in the flesh occasionally, on the streets of the newly burgeoning art district, SOHO). I liked the work a lot (more than I knew how to say), the formal collages as well as the ephemeral "throw-away" mail art, (liking the latter better, as time passed). For me Ray's work was very appealing; it had a homemade, endearing quality. I liked almost everything I saw. A lot of it looked like work anybody could do, (especially the mail art) but we all know that it's not as easy as it looks. All the material things that go into it are always at hand for everybody to use, but..... who has put those things together the way Ray did?

I don't mean to suggest here that my eyes were always turned only to Ray Johnson on matters concerning art; that is absolutely not the case. But it is true that there was some inexplicable power to his activities & a good many of his ideas that held me longer than the same or similar ideas of other artists -- artists who were earlier, more main stream & famous & respected, "heavier" & more vociferous than he was. Maybe it was his "lightness" his fleet footlessness that kept him always out there in front.

So I kept up these kinds of "contacts" (as an outsider) with Ray's work through the years. I have certainly made no study of it, but my take on it has been -- put simply -- that Ray was a "connector", a lyrical connector -- (yet, himself a loner). I've always chosen to emphasize this aspect of his work rather than the slapstick, dada goofiness part. (This understanding of Ray, by the way, at first made his "final departure" very strong for me: The Connector Severs All Active Connections -- to put it in the glibness of newspaper headlines.)

I think it was at a memorial tribute to Ray, a year after his death (in his hometown library) that I heard someone mention that he had become interested near the end in nature, & had begun taking daily walks along the water's edge, near where he lived. I was happy to hear about that & wondered how this interest would have eventually shown itself in his work. ("Nature" getting less & less attention from "modern" artists these days.) I was even happier to hear that he had gotten interested as well in photography, in taking his own pictures. And it really warmed me when someone said that for his photography he used one of those inexpensive, "disposable" cameras. "Incredible!" I thought to myself when I heard that.

At the beginning of this year I went out to Sag Harbor. I thought that you & a few other people I know would be interested in having a photograph of "...the bridge from which Ray Johnson....." Though I knew exactly where it was (our country house is only at 20 minutes from the spot) I kept putting off driving there. When I finally went, the

weather was typical of one kind of Long Island day: low, gray skies, gray air full of moisture; no color anywhere. I thought by taking a picture of that bridge I'd finish up some unfinished personal business & be done with thinking about it. But of course the connections only deepened. The web got tighter. (Here I am in that web, struggling with this answer to your question!) Maybe this sense of connection is what gave Ray's work the appeal it had for me right from the very beginning, even though I didn't name it then. In a sense it was then already functioning as a connecting apparatus. And a thing like that doesn't get broken easily.

RJ: Your name isn't mentioned a lot in mail art texts, books and other related material. Are you in touch with a lot of people who "call" themselves a "mail artist" (like me)?

Reply on 8-12-1997

RA: A few months ago a poet friend of mine mentioned that he had bought a book -- a bibliography of international concrete poetry -- and that my name was listed in it. I was only a little surprised. But I'd be very surprised if my name were listed in a similar book on mail art.

Perhaps there might be a mention in material connected with some mail art shows I contributed to in the 70's. One, I remember, was a large show with hundreds of artists and probably a few thousand contributors ("The First New York City Post Card Show", 1975). I also remember a few mailings back and forth with Al Souza after contributing to

his "International Mail Art Postcard Exhibition" in 1977 at Smith College in Massachusetts. I contributed work to a show of language art in Toronto ("Language And Structure in North America", 1975). This wasn't really a mail art show, but if I go back over the list of contributors I'm sure I'd find some "names" you would recognize as mail artists. (Ray Johnson was in that show, as well as some Fluxus "names".) There were a few other shows, but these are the ones I remember now. My contributions were either photo postcards or visual poetry.

Most of the people I'm in touch with regularly now don't call themselves mail artists; they are "poets", "photographers", etc. But there are a few recent contacts (besides yourself) who do. One in Washington state, one in NYC, one in the mid-West. There are others with whom I exchange photo postcards; but I would say that they think of themselves mostly as photographers, who also use the mails.

And then I am in touch with "just plain folks", who don't consider themselves any kind of artists at all. Of course, they are the greatest challenge. I can imagine them (when receiving some of the things I send) scratching their heads and saying to themselves "Now what in the hell is this all about !!?" Keeping a communication open with those folks is not an easy matter, is often dismally frustrating. But sometimes it works : and a connection is sustained. And it's a great feeling of satisfaction.

RJ: There are a lot of these "poets", "painters", "photographers", etc. playing in the mail art network. For

me it isn't interesting whether they think of themselves as mail artists or not, it is interesting for me to see what they are doing and how they are evolving. I guess that is why sometimes this "connection is sustained". Sometimes by mail, sometimes in other forms. What interest me most of the time is: Why do people make art? Why do you make art, Roy?

Reply on 2-3-1998

(Before I retyped Roy's answer and sending the next question some time passes in which we still communicate by mail. Roy sent me some of his photo/cards and the magazine SHOTS in which an article by him is included.)

RA: So there is your next question & it's a "heavy" one -- especially if one is inclined to carry it to a serious level. It would be nice to have the necessary knowledge & all the time in the world to try to answer it fully, on many levels. But that's just not the case here. You do the best you can.

Recently we've sold our house in the country & among other things this necessitated that I go through years of accumulated paperwork. This gave me the opportunity to look at some of my old notes & written statements for exhibitions. I found that in the past whenever I tried to write down an answer to a question similar to the one you've just asked me, I tended to be too heavy-handed & unnecessarily complicated in my responses. Looking at those attempts now I am embarrassed at their

pretensions. (As an example I've included a catalog from my photo exhibition at the American Cultural Center in Paris in 1976). As time went by I learned how to use quotes from other people in my answers. In a way, doing that was easier & I could always blame the pretention on the people quoted. I suspect that I will also look back on this reply to you & wish that I could have answered it more clearly, closer to the bone & more honestly.

But I'm stalling now.... your question still faces me. It won't go away. And in good conscience I couldn't say that I don't know why I make photographs; because, to some extent, I do know. And though it's always tempting to hide behind a flippant, dada-like answer or to resort to the Zen practice of turning the question on its head, I prefer to stumble along with a straight forward answer, no matter that it's not as clear as I'd like it to be.

Maybe I can begin by first backing up a little bit.... & mentioning that something bothered me a bit in the preamble to your question: you say that a lot of poets, painters, photographers are "playing" in the mail art network. Now, I'm wondering why that word, "playing" bothers me in this context. Does it mean something different in Dutch/English than it does to me in American/English? I hope that I didn't give you the impression that the non-mail artists I know, who use the mail, are only "playing" at it. And I hope you don't think I am.

No, I'm dead serious about using the mails. I've already told you about my own personal frustrations with the

traditional world of galleries, the art world "proper". I've told you how I don't fit into that world very well (& they certainly don't need to accommodate me). No. Putting my photographs (& words & collages) into the mail & sending them to individual people is the best hope for me now. This seems now to be the best way open for me to "connect". And though you may connect "playfully", connecting, as such, is a serious matter.

Connecting is part of the reason I make pictures. I didn't always think so. I used to think that one could paint or write or photograph only for him/herself. But I think differently now. Having a connection with others gives you a possibility to share what you've made & that's important for the obvious reasons & important also because one needs to have a reaction to what one makes, even if only a silent -- no words -- reaction.

I think that the deepest reason for my making pictures is because it completes a very natural human process. This process starts with the outside world stimulating a thought, feeling, intuition. You work on these things inside your own head/body because there is a human need to react to the world in this way. We are not stones. You take the world inside you and work on it till you are at home with it (or it is at home with you); until it's "yours". You construct (or rather reconstruct) your version of it inside you. But you don't stop there. There is a next step. And that step is to find a way to get what's inside your head, outside of it. You shape the thought, feeling, intuition into a form which can stand outside of you on its own in the "real" world. The form can be a photograph, poem, drawing or

whatever. Naturally you want this thing you've made to feel "right" to you, so you shape it to the thought, feeling or intuition as you knew of those things when they were inside you, when you recognized them as your own.

And as I mentioned earlier, there's still a further step: someone else needs to experience what you've made; it is then that it becomes another "thing" out there in the real world. That completes the process. (Except, of course, for what happens in the people -- including yourself -- who experience what you have made.) You go on to make the next thing. You have begun to create a world.

This whole process is very natural. I don't think about it in exalted, cosmic or mystical terms. It's almost a biological process. To some extent it happens to everybody. Though most people don't allow the process to go further than the "taking in" stage. They don't form & then give back to the world what they've made of it.

Though I promised myself this time that I would answer your question with my own words, wouldn't rely on quoting somebody else, I can't resist it. One of my favorite quotes is from the American poet William Carlos Williams. It reads easily & is not pretentious. In it -- I'm certain -- can be found a good, short answer to your question. "For life is to walk about, to see, which is to feel, to express as we have said, or to sum, to give praise, to put into form what we see which is our only service."

RJ: First. "Playing" was meant positive Roy. One sends something into the network and never knows what comes

out. I used the word playing because of the intention that mail art is supposed to have. Not the sense of "faking". I like to think that Ray also saw the NYCS as a playground for his art. When an artist from another field (poets, painters, etc) plays in the mail network, I mean that he/she uses this network to share his art with others, gains experiences from others, gets stimulations from the network. Playing the network is a positive thing. In your answer I see the same.

To give you an example of this playing. You mentioned in one of your letters you had met with John Evans in New York. Currently I am interviewing him as well, and with the next question to John I told him that I was interviewing you as well. One of the photos you took of John you send as a photo/card to him, and he now forwarded it to me. Now that is how things can go in the network. You never know what happens to the things you send out. By the way, I enjoyed the photo very much! Never knew before what John Evans looked like although I am in contact with him for years.

For me this word playing is maybe important in life as well. Playing is also discovering new things, learning. That is why children like to play so much. When one grows up one should not forget to play, let the child stay inside.

But now I ramble on, I should ask a new question to you Roy. Does this all make sense to you?

Reply on May 20th 1998

RA: Yes, it makes sense to me. It sounds like one of the ways that you are using the word "play" is like we might use it here for sports: the team "put the ball into play". And, of course, after the ball is in play anything can happen. It makes even more sense when you bring the idea of child's play into the discussion -- active, imaginative play, play that engages the child's attention completely.

I find though that once you're out of childhood it isn't easy to play. Everything in adult life seems to be set up against it. Adult "play" is often negative or even destructive. It's doing something but knowing that you should be doing something else, something "important". The paradox is that once you are an adult, it's not easy to play; you've got to work at it. That's what I mean about play being serious.

I wasn't sure what you meant when you mentioned poets, painters & photographers "playing" in the network. You could have meant "play" as something frivolous, or easy; something you do while waiting for the "real" thing to happen. The poet or painter playing in the network until the time comes to get serious in the art world proper. But if I now understand your meaning rightly, then we agree.

By the way, I am very happy that John Evans sent you that photo/card. One of the things I stressed in the article in Shots is that I like my pictures to have use (in the world outside my own head). John has made use of one of them & you have also -- if only by using it to illustrate something to me in your last question. That's great!

(After the answer I got more mail from Roy. One of them a photo/card of Dick Higgins, who he met in May 1998.).

RJ: Knowing a bit more about your photo work (you send me these beautiful photo/cards!) I realize you often like to make portraits. Even portraits of non-existing persons when the lines of nature make them visual for us (examples are the two photo/cards you sent which you made in New York). Is it true that you like to make portraits? Why?

Reply on 29-07-1998

(Because of a break in the interviews I only retyped the question in January 1999 and then sent Roy the next question. In these last months we did exchange mail a lot. Also Roy, and his wife Martine, moved to another address where Roy now has a P.O. Box. A last photo/card I received from Roy was this photo/card, and from his wife I received an e-mail with some photo's of them during Christmas-time 1998/1999. With Roy's answer I received the pages from the magazine SHOTS which published some photo's and a letter of him - issue #51, March 1996)

RA: You're question surprises me! I don't normally think of myself in connection with portraits. Though, God knows, I've sent you a lot of photo/cards & even other types of work which were concerned with the idea of "the portrait". Yet I would not categorize myself as a "portrait photographer" (nor even as a "people photographer"). And to answer your specific question, I don't particularly like making portraits. It's a question of personality & I am just not comfortable pointing a camera at someone's face. Or

maybe I should say that there are other kinds of photography that I like doing much more. But yes, portraits are important to me.

I guess I sent you portrait things because I thought that you might be more interested in them than in the other kinds of photography I do. And I thought that you also might be interested in the subjects of some of these portraits. I try to pay attention to what the receiver of what I'm sending might have an interest in. In the same mail with your question came a photo/card from a photographer in Los Angeles with whom I've recently begun exchanging cards. I think that he's a photojournalist (his pictures -- the subject is always "people" -- look like the kind that are taken on assignment for magazines or newspapers). At first I sent him pictures of the kind I usually do -- very different from his. Recently though, I've gone back through my negatives looking for pictures more like those that he does. I thought this would help build a dialogue between us, rather than the usual 2 way monolog that most often occur in these kinds of exchanges. Of course you have to remain true to your own interests; but if you want to communicate you need to look past yourself a little. Don't you think?

In your question you mention "portraits" I had done that were not really of people but of things you could see the "face" of a person in. In a woodland, a vine shaped itself to form an outline of the profile of a face; or the poster which had been partially pulled off a city wall, leaving parts that formed what looked like a face. I do like finding those kinds of portraits. Of course that can become a superficial

game (find the hidden face). But I think that's not what I do. I think that I make these kind of portraits because they are a substitute satisfaction for the universal need to interact with others, without experiencing that aggressive feeling I get when aiming a camera at someone's head. I am usually as uncomfortable behind the camera as the person being photographed usually is in front of it. When I do photograph other people -- & of course I do, often -- it's much easier for me if I know them personally. I'm more comfortable, feel less intrusive. As you might expect I have a great many pictures of my wife. And my son! -- he's been photographed since the moment he was born & right up until he left home for college.

And I have been taking pictures of myself since I started using the camera (see SHOTS self-portrait issue, enclosed). Mostly reflections, or shadow self portraits. Sometimes I use a self-timer & sometimes I use objects as "stand ins" to represent me. These kind of portraits are easier to do.

When you put all these kinds of pictures together -- & you can add just about any other kind of picture you want -- what you have & can't help but having, is some kind of grand portrait, over time, of the person who made the pictures. In that sense people are always doing self portraits.

RJ: Is there still something you would like to 'capture' with your camera, but haven't succeeded in yet?

Reply on 28-2-1999

(It took some time before I retyped Roy's answer into my computer. During that time I received quite a collection of mail from Roy. Especially the photo-cards were meant to illustrate his latest answer. Besides that he also sent a copy of the magazine SHOTS that he was featured in. Also through his wife Martine, I get now and then e-mails to exchange the latest details of both our lives)

RA: Dear Ruud, The part that I've succeeded in "capturing" with my camera is of course much, much less than what's out there; there are more subjects that are still "free" than that are "captured". But that doesn't bother me a bit.

I see photography as a means of noting down what I look at & see & find interesting. Put simply, it's seeing things. And I understand personal photography to be an effort at accumulating those things seen, like keeping a diary. Ideally, all your photographs should make a pictured index of the contents of your head. When you have a view like this then you're never finished photographing. There's always something more (like the present moment, for example!).

Nevertheless, your question makes me think about how difficult it is to photograph -- "capture" -- some things. I think that "Nature" is one of them. (Because this whole subject is one of my pet peeves I have to be careful not to sound like a born-again religious zealot preaching on a street corner.) Nature doesn't seem to be important to most people these days. Especially people in cities -- the people I know. They are just not interested. It isn't a "cool"

subject, people don't care about it & don't know about it in any personal way. If it rains, carry an umbrella -- that's the extent of the city dweller's practice & serious interest in nature. Or some people might watch a TV show because they like to see chimpanzees or cuddly pandas -- their version of "nature". Other people might spend their two week vacation "in the country": This is the extent of nature's intrusion into the timed lives of most people I know.

This indifference -- this "who cares" attitude about nature is also prevalent in the world of "serious" art photography. It's hard to find good nature pictures in the current gallery scene. Amateurs love to photograph their cats, & sunsets & "scenic views". Sometimes these do come off as good photographs, but mostly they are pictures that follow a formula & aren't interesting. Art photographers (like everybody else) aren't much interested in nature, it's not an "in" subject. Probably it would be more accurate, objective & fair to say that for every good nature picture you can find 1000 better urban pictures.

That's because it's tough to make a good nature photograph. One that's good as a picture -- good as photography -- good at "capturing" the subject it's about (nature). One of the problems is that both photographers & the photographic audience bring certain expectations to the idea of "nature photography". When thinking of "city photography" people don't only imagine huge skyscrapers, or crowded streets. Most people have individualized experiences of cities, sometimes very subtle experiences. The word "City" brings up many personal

meanings, memories, ideas & reactions. Why then do people expect that there should be a lion or tiger or an elephant (or even their cat) sitting in the middle of a "nature photo"? The sky is nature. Water trickling in a gutter towards a sewer is nature. A mouse in a trap is also nature. You take it as it comes, as you find it in front of you in your daily rounds (& not only on TV or in the movies.) Why can't you see nature out of the corner of your eye, or in a glance, or in passing, or while concentrating on something else -- that is, see it in the ways that you see most everything else? Maybe nature should begin with a small, not a capital "n".

When I was a kid I wanted to be a field naturalist when I grew up. Not the kind that adventures along the Amazon & discovers rare species in exotic locales. My ideal was a local man who built a small nature museum & preserve in the suburban town near where I grew up. He could name all the local birds, animals, trees, & plants. He could identify what weed was growing in a crack in your driveway. My interest was not the Wilderness, or Global Ecology -- fashionable topics today with people who often can't name one bird in their own backyard (except for the pigeon). When I look back I realize that as a kid I was interested in a kind of backyard, "domestic" nature (if I can use such a term). Now, what I would like to be able to do is make good photographs of that, photographs that "capture" & construct that idea of nature.

The group of photo/cards I've been mailing to you -- there are a few more yet to come -- are also a part of my answer to your question. The visual part. Maybe that's the better

part. Anyway, I don't want to be too preachy, to sound like that street-corner fanatic I mentioned above; so now I'll stop.

(Enclosed with his answer there were also two color-copies of "postal nature" which illustrates the nature on postage stamps and the ignorance of some clerks working at the postal office.)

RJ: Roy, Thanks for this very personal answer. I believe I should include the photos with the interview, and give the readers of this interview also the visual aspect of your work. Therefore I would like to end this interview with the last 'traditional' question: "Maybe I forgot to ask you a specific question?"

Reply on 6-7-1999

RA: Dear Ruud, You ask if there is a question that you might have forgotten to ask. Reading back over the interview, no unasked question has come to mind. I should say though, that I do have the feeling that I could continue, could keep on answering questions!

I also see that my responses to your questions were usually too long, especially the earlier answers. I wish now I could have been briefer & more precise.

There is something though that I would like to mention. As you pointed out in the beginning of the interview, my rubberstamp doesn't say "Mail artist". But if you've noticed -- in the course of the two years of this

interview -- I did make a new rubberstamp for the back of my photo/cards. It reads Photomail - Arenella. I think that it was involvement in this interview with you that caused that shift, that put the "mail" in my rubberstamp. Also during this same period of time I was fortunate in meeting other mail artists whom I'd only previously read about or known only through their work. I thank you for your share in all of this. And I appreciate -- because of this interview -- having had the opportunity of collecting together some of my ideas & feelings and trying to make them clear for you. I think that the interview has been a very helpful occasion for me. Thanks....

RJ: Thanks for this interview Roy. Also for me it was a learning-experience!

RUDI RUBBEROID

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RUDI RUBBEROID (USA)

Started on 11-11-1995

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

Reply on 8-12-1995

Rudi Rubberoid : Sixteen years ago. At the time I owned a store in Bellingham called "The Postcard Palace", which sold postcards and note cards. I saw some "art rubber stamps" at a trade show and added some of them to the stock of the store. I think Hero Arts was the line I bought. Of course I had to play with them; one day a friend of mine, Bob Urso, came in while I was stamping and mentioned that he was starting a rubber stamp company ("BOBZ) and that stamps could be used for mail art. That was the first I heard of it. He gave me some addresses, including that of F-I-X, which was a bit-of-paper exchange run by Hapunkt Fix. Participating in this got me in touch with the

network. Hapunkt seems to have dropped of sight, but I still, after all these years, have an active correspondence with his then-friend Doro Benditz in Berlin.

RJ : When you got in touch with the network, was your name already Rudi Rubberoid? It seems you are sharing your P.O. Box with a lot of friends....

Reply on 23-1-1996

RR : The name Rudi Rubberoid was designed to be the name of the editor of my first publication, The Rubber Fanzine, which had very little to do with mail art as such. I have had it so long and gotten so used to it that I actually answer to the name when someone phones me. If someone called out "Hey, Rudi!" on the street I would turn around.

As for the people sharing my mailbox, yes, I have a few aliases. It has been suggested that I attend Pseudonymous Anonymous on a frequent basis. The Blaster recently sent me a suitable annotated copy of the most recent issue of the MPD (Multiple Personality Disorder) Journal. This is wild exaggeration. There is Edward R. Gonzo, the Slightly Warped journalist. There is also Ace The Postcard Pal, which was an accidental postle wraparound of the name of the shop I owned, The

Postcard Palace. He is a collector of Kalakala and exaggeration postcards. Some names were given to me; Wingo Fruitpunch was gifted me by the ineffable Eric Farnsworth, who recently also called me The Center Of The Postal Universe. I don't think that one will stick. Too unwieldy. Any Salyer gifted me with Rasta Bob Gnarly, and carved an eraser stamp to match, with Bob as a skull with wild dreadlocks. Sidney Lurcher comes into play as the excruciatingly bad poet who considers John Bennett to be superior to either Shakespeare or Dante. Felino Zepellini was created for my Italian-American correspondents. Billy Joe Ziploc is a good name for when I'm in the mood for a trashy, butt-kicking letter. Grizelda Guthonk gets hit on a lot by nerds who hit on anything female in the post and won't write to men. There are a few others, but not many. I have no trouble keeping them apart and my posties think a lot of them as one big, happy family. Of course, they also put mail in my box for any other odd names they can't place anywhere else. Why do you ask?

RJ : Why I ask? I guess in a way I am curious about peoples concepts in mail art, how they have found a way to deal with all the things that comes on their way in this network. I would like to come

back on the publications. You did more than just The Rubber Fanzine, and one of them was quite interesting, Nomo-The-Zine. What was this all about?

Reply on 6-2-1996

RR : I like to think that The Rubber Fanzine was quite interesting too. It is very hard to talk about one and not the other as Nomo-The-Zine was a direct result of problems I had with The Rubber Fanzine.

Like a lot of American mailarters I was actively involved in S-F fandom for a long time, and very much enjoyed the many and varied S-F fanzines. As a matter of fact, my real introduction to fandom was a package of assorted SF zines that I sent away for. So, of course, eventually I wanted to do my very own zine. Since I was by that time also pretty well involved in rubber stamping I decided to make that my emphasis. The first issue was largely my own work, after that I let other people do the art, I stuck to the editing. The zine had a long (four years) and honorable run, I was quite happy with it for a while. It was one of the first, if not the first (actually I think it was the first) zine to deal exclusively with rubber art, rather than rubber stamping in general, as did

Rubberstampmadness, etc. Now there are quite a few different zines covering that specialized field.

However, TRF operated on a subscription basis, and that was a hassle. Keeping the subscription lists straight and up-to-date was a lot of work, even with the aid of a computer. I am not very good at this sort of thing. And people subscribing felt they had the right to tell me what I could or could not print, which really frosted my mug. I also had complaints that I discriminated against the dreaded CUTE, which was true, but besides the point. I finally spelled out the fact that I didn't want cute contributions, which led to all sorts of nasty little letters-to-the-editor. One of my few criteria was that all contributions had to have at least some rubber stamping in them, and eventually I found I was turning down some very cool stuff on that basis, as well as poetry, rants, photo's etc. So I folded TRF and, after a suitable 'Moment Of Silence' (quite a while, actually) started Nomo.

Nomo-The-Zine was a smaller, more mailable format, could not be subscribed to, printed letters, poetry, drawings, eraser-carved art, just about anything. I did continue to print rubber stamp art, but the emphasis more and more turned to mail

art and its related icons. I had a lot of good contributors; Blaster Al, Musicmaster, A1 Waste Paper Co., Dr. Crankart, Any Salyer, Larry Angelo, Pag-Hat the Rat-Girl, Michael Pollard, Ruud Janssen, the inimitable Fearless Freep, and too many others to name, as they say. Beginning to sound like an Academy Awards ceremony....

I had a very good time with Nomo and I am very proud of some of the issues I put out. It had the distinction of never having printed a contribution from Ray Johnson. (Of course, I never got a contribution from Ray Johnson...) It ran for the same amount of time as TRF and eventually died from lack of interest, partly mine. After I folded it several people wrote to say that they would miss it, but most wrote to say that if I felt it was time to quit then I should quit. Very civilized of them, but not very encouraging. Another large segment of my readers never bothered to comment on Nomo's demise at all. And so it goes.....

I had gotten deeper and deeper into mail art correspondence / exchange and was contacting more and more people and eventually something had to give; I was running out of time/postage/money. Like the Phoenix, I will rise

again from my own ashes, I suspect. Eventually. Or not. I have no idea of what the next zine will look like. Maybe like a ten-pound glazed doughnut. We shall see.

RJ : You say "something had to give", and I guess that stopping editing Nomo-The-Zine made your P.O.Box less full. Are you at the moment able to deal with all the mail that you get in?

Reply on 24-2-1996

RR : Of course not. I had a momentary lull following the demise of Nomo, and then I felt freer about taking on new correspondents and projects. I even actively sought out new people, fool that I am. Some of my new correspondents have proved to be far more active in the mail than I can deal with and require more time and energy than I planned on. I enjoy them, but am not always able to reply to them appropriately in a reasonable time. Most of them eventually realize this and sooner or later back off to a level I can cope with. Some of them don't.

A long time ago I determined that the only fair and proper way to deal with mail was to answer it pretty much in the order in which it was received, and mostly, I do. There are exceptions that require

immediate answers. Generally though, I do stick to "first received / first answered." Usually, if all is going well, this amounts to a two or three week lag between the time I get a sending and when I answer it. Usually. Anything out of the ordinary, such as an illness, holidays, vacations, can increase that time period considerably. The smoldering, moldering mail pile weighs heavily on my conscience and I spend extra time reducing the interval when it has gotten too lengthy, the lag has gotten as long as two months, and sometimes as short as a week. (Not very often). I never claimed to be efficient. Or handsome.

I am aware that I could reduce the lag-time by not getting carried away with lengthy, burbling letters, which I sometimes do. If I hand write/print I am not as prone to do that, but sometimes I write my letters on my computer, and then I babble. At length. I also have to deal with the cat, who wants me to feed her crunchies while I type, or she will sit on my lap, the printer, the monitor, the keyboard, whatever.... It isn't the babbling that I mind, some people even consider my babbling amusing, it's the amount of time it takes. And word-processing on a computer lends itself to revision, amplification, polishing, etc. I can spend a whole evening on a two page letter if I don't

watch myself. The same with the articles. One short article can take me days, and it's not even all that good.

Another time waster is over-polishing envelopes and other artworks; adding or accreting more and more stuff to envelopes and collages, coloring in rubber stamping and xeroxes, carefully cutting out clippings to collage letters that really don't need them, etc. All fun things to do, but time consuming and unnecessary.

I am not terrible good about thinning out the ranks of the unwashed; I suppose that at least 25% of my correspondents aren't all that fascinating and tend to be rather repetitive; I think that over the years I may have "dropped" a half dozen people, no more. I have had at least twice that number "drop" me. Dropping someone implies a judgement about their worthiness, and I don't much care about making that sort of call. Who's to say who is "worthy" of being a correspondent of mine? I'm not big on god-like powers. I very much enjoy most of my correspondents/mailers and consider some of them to be very close friends, even though I have never met them. I don't begrudge them the time I spend on them, I feel I

receive just as much in return. Now you've made me cry.....

RJ : Dear Rudi, what you call "babbling" you might also call writing, and I must say I have always enjoyed reading the things you write. Some mail artists seem to wear a mask when they send out their mail, and don't show their real face, their real feelings. You probably know that I don't answer all the mail I receive, I am just not able to. So I see the main principle of mail art that you respond to the human energy that you get in. So if someone is repetitive or sends something that doesn't interest me, what should I do with something like that.....? Send them just a thank-you note and get the same repetitive answer, or just spend my energy on another piece of mail I am eager to answer to? I'm not sure if this is a question. What do you think?

Reply on 17-4-1996

RR : 1) dunno. 2) Anti-zygote. 3) What? 4) Gypsy moth larvae. 5) Blaster Al Ackerman. 6) Either way. 7) 34.

Are those the answers you were looking for? Cultivate discipline, Ruud.... That was a terrible excuse for a question. Yes, Besides, I think I

covered most of that in my previous answer, didn't I? Perhaps not. I tend to Have My Way, mailartwise, without flaming anyone or patronizing anyone. Not always easy, but I think worth the effort.

One of the most common mail art problem-persons is the "I'm new to mail art, I love it, and I can do more of it in twenty-four hours than you can in a month" person. Comet-like, they flare into existence, shine ever so brightly for a brief while, then as quickly disappear without a trace. I do try to direct these people and point out to them that they will enjoy (mail) life more if they slow down and (um) smell the paper, as it were. I don't think it pays to get annoyed at this sort, once in a while they pupate into Worthy Correspondents. Once in a while one is great fun even if they don't last long. Ziiaiiiiiiiiip!!

I can sometimes enjoy this sort a great deal better than the terrible serious newcomer who, within days of arriving on the mail art scene, issues manifestoes, projects of great import, congresses and Significant Publications, all of which are to be responded to instantly with reams of equally significant verbiage. Yawn! I find that if I take an exceptionally long time to answer them they have

usually self-destructed on the rock of their own ego by then. A lot of problem mailarters solve themselves with time. Lots of time...

Then there is the "Send me dirty photos / send me a photo of yourself without any clothes on" person. One of my pseudonyms is female, but I find that "she" gets no more of these than my "male" nomen. I usually point out that at my age and general physical condition, a photo of me without any clothes on is not a pretty sight. Hardly stimulating, to say the least. I try to explain that I enjoy raunchy humor, if it's funny, but I have several reasons for not finding pornography per se all that fascinating, I won't go into them right now as that is a whole other story, but usually this is effective, though it doesn't, for some reason, translate too well into Italian...

Then there are the people who insist on being non-verbal; an envelope fulla stufh, a collage postcard, a odd chunk of something with postage and address affixed. All of these are ok with me, but I do like to get a few words from these people too. Perhaps because I am extra-verbose myself. Some of my most cherished correspondents do all these things, and still verbalize well. A matter of balance. I have one totally non-verbal

correspondent of some years standing. I would be shocked if he suddenly started "talking" to me. With most of the Non-Verbals I find that continued communication with them, and writing to them when I send, eventually gets a few words back. Sometimes they are non-verbal for a reason; they have nothing to say. Sometimes not. That's the way the sending crumbles...

There is no cure for dullness. A dull correspondent can be a real pain. Of course, you can be dull back. Save letters that you wrote to Ruud Janssen and decided were too dull for such a brilliant fellow, cut off the greeting and send them to your Dull Correspondent. Done a collage or a piece of artwork that just didn't pan out? You know where to send it. Have you accumulate clippings, Xeroxes, etc., that were too dull to send to anyone? That's right; send them on to Mr./Ms. Dull. Of course, this gets you a Dull Reputation, but consider the crowd....

If you really get a dull, repetitive person who won't give up, there are Strategies. If you have sixteen copies of one dull postcard design, send them one by one to the Dull Person over a period of months. Clip out and send a variety of Light

Beer and tampon adds. I doubt they will survive that. Hey, be creative, eh?

RJ : Well, lets go on to another subject. Do you keep track of all the mail that you send out and get in?

Reply on 25-5-1996

RR : Yes, I have for years. Not for "Posterity" but to help me remember what I sent to who and who sent me what. Sometimes, once in perhaps a hundred times, there is reason to do this. I keep the information in cheap stenographer's notebooks, mostly because they don't take up as much room on my desk as a letter size pad or notebook. I have them going back quite a few years now, I don't know why I keep them. A year back makes (a little) sense, more than that is Odd. A little keeping one's toenail clippings in a jar. Someday I will burn all the notebooks. Pretty dull stuff. Illegible to anyone but myself as well. Did I mention how much I dislike archiving?

RJ : No, you didn't mention archiving in this interview yet, but you did wrote it to me once. For the reader of the interview it might be interesting to hear your views on archiving too. So, why DO you dislike archiving so much?

reply on 7-7-1996

RR : For many years I attempted to be a "serious" artist, and dealt with the whole interrelated complex of galleries / museums / critics / art writers / biographers / archivists, and I am/was not impressed. When I finally gave up due to lack of time, money and talent (being a successful artist is expensive nowadays!) I found mail art to be a refreshing change from the mainstream, mostly due to its lack of expectations. However, after a while I had collected some twenty-seven large boxes of mail from other people and found myself willy-nilly being an archivist. On looking over this collection I found that I could easily pass on 50% of it, trash 40% of it, modify and recycle 10% of it and keep just a few items for my own personal pleasure, nothing for posterity. In my opinion, mail art is to send, to pass on, to recycle, not to store away someplace in hopes that someone you correspond with will become famous and you will become rich selling her/his artifacts. Mail art should be kept active and in flux and enjoyed above all. I could go on, and quite often do, but I think I have made my point. Goodbye!

RJ : Well, Rudi, I want to thank you for your interesting answers in this interview. I know that we will stay in contact. Till again!

STEPHEN PERKINS

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN PERKINS (USA)

Started on 23-1-1996

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

Reply on 30-1-1996 (internet)

Stephen Perkins :I got involved in the ma-network in 1984 while I was living in San Francisco. At that time I was doing a lot of Xerox posters that I was putting up in the streets, especially in the Haight Ashbury district where I was living. I would do poster runs at night and plaster selected areas with my latest response to some world event or in response to a more local and immediate situation. The mail art network basically offered me another alternative distribution system. I would send these out to different shows and to publications as well. Looking back through my archives I discovered that the first ma publication that I got published in was an assembling call Idle Time put out by a guy called Dixon in Texas.

It took a while for him to send the publication back and I remember in my rush to see myself in print I wrote and asked him what had happened received an apologetic note saying that it had taken longer for him to put it together than he had planned (my introduction to the periodicity of ma magazines!). Another inspiration to get involved with the ma network were some friends who were putting out an alternative music magazine called Unsound. I helped them with writing reviews and other stuff, and they showed me all the great things they were getting in the mail as submissions lot of this material was from mail artists. I was amazed at what they were receiving and particularly impressed by the internationalism of the submissions. I had moved to San Francisco from England in 1981 and was very aware of keeping contact with what was happening outside of the states.

Inspired by all this activity I decided in early 1985 to start my own magazine. I put out a call for submissions to Box of Water and things just started to flood into my mailbox. At this point I became well and truly hooked on the whole activity. I realized that it was more than just a distribution system but a whole alternative culture that had a history and philosophy as well. Aside from being excited by the visual submissions was particularly seeking image/text work, the other magazines from the network that people sent for review really

excited me. The range of magazines, the different activities covered and the fact that they came from many countries really inspired me and I fell in love with them and with this whole underground publishing culture. The first issue of Box of Water came out sometime in the middle of that year (1985) and I was pleased with the response and immediately started collecting material for the next one. Slowly I also became aware of other people in the San Francisco area who were publishing work from the same network and I became aware of being part of a local community of publishers and artists as well as being part of a larger international community of like-minded people.

RJ : Is "Box of Water" still alive?

Reply on 6-2-96 (internet)

SP : Regarding your question as to whether Box of Water is still alive-it is not alive! I published four issues, one per year from 1985-1988. I was in the process of collecting material for #5 but was disappointed with the visual submissions so was indecisive about doing another issue. However by this time the Art Strike was about to start and I decided that in solidarity with the aims of the strike that I would cease publication of Box of Water. I wrote a letter to the 30 or so subscribers telling them about my intention to stop publishing and that they could claim back any money that I owed them-none did, which surprised me. The Art Strike

was a useful occasion to make changes and re-orient my cultural activities & priorities. So ceasing the publication was just one of the 'surgical strikes' that I conducted on my activities at that time.

I was also doing another publication that ceased production for the duration of the strike and which, theoretically at least, could resume publishing again. This publication was called Schism and was edited by me under the pseudonym Janet Janet.

RJ : It seems that -even after the break- publishing is something essential in your life. Am I right? What does publishing mean to you?

Reply on 13-2-1996 (internet)

SP : I wouldn't necessarily say that publishing is essential in my life, although it has certainly opened up lots of new worlds for me. But getting published is something that can become a kind of addiction in its own right. You ask what publishing means to me. I would have to say that its a vehicle...a vehicle for contact, communication and exchange.

Its a way of amplifying one's ideas, art works and whatever else it is that one feels its important for people to read and to see. Its also a way of operating from geographically decentralized points in which you can enter into a dialogue with others

who are thinking the same way. For me this is quite important, located as I am far from any large metropolitan area and hence any kind of cultural activity that I am sympathetic to. The other thing that makes publishing important to me is that most of my work is done specifically for the page page art if you want to give it a name.

For me perhaps the more interesting question is 'what does publishing do' and within the mail art context I feel it's one of the vital means by which a decentered community maintains contact and the periodicals act as sites at which these people maintain that sense of community, amongst a host of other things.

RJ : What other things do you mean? (ie. what other things do magazines do)

Reply on 31-3-1996 (internet)

SP : There seems to me to be four important themes that emerge when examining magazines connected to the MA network.

Contact:

Quite simply they help establish and maintain contact between people with similar ideas and ideals and they aid in establishing and maintaining a community of like minded individuals. The early 'contact lists' such as the Image Bank Request lists

(although strictly not a magazine, they were however published initially in File) are a concrete manifestation of an active strategy of contact and collaboration. Since the early '70s there have been a number of magazines that might be characterized as 'contact' magazines--ie. magazines that list projects and shows that people can participate in. Klaus Groh's I.A.C. was an early one, Open World by Dobrica Kamperlic and the more recent Global Mail by Ashley Parker Owen are just three that spring to mind. These are vital magazines that help support the flow of information and foster contact and collaboration.

Exchange:

Magazines can be viewed as nodes through which people exchange ideas and different viewpoints. Sites at which dialogue takes place, and dialogue specific to the development and growth of MA culture. I would hazard a guess that the most important developments in defining a MA philosophy or strategy took place through MA magazines. Specifically the development of the following ideas: no juries, no fees, documentation to all and broader tenets like MA and money do not mix.

Another important point of information exchange are the publication reviews found in many MA magazines, for apart from personal contact how is

one to find out about all the myriad other magazines out there?

Internationalism:

I don't think that one can ignore how vital magazines have been within a cultural activity that is inextricably international. They become essential links through which this dispersed community has been able to maintain contact and more importantly maintain a sense of community and cohesion.

Communication:

Let's not forget that at its most basic MA utilizes a communication system the postal service and at the heart of this system is the transferring of 'information' from one geographic location to another.

Obviously MA sends a lot of different materials and messages through this system, but first and foremost it's a communication medium. It links people (potentially links everyone on earth), it disseminates 'information' and it's a system that invites reciprocity. An exchange system.

RJ : Lots of periodicals are developed in the mail art network, and when I read magazines like Factsheet-5 or Global Mail I realize that the network that is really out there is gigantic. The publishing of magazines on the internet has also started, but

somehow I am quite disappointed with the results I got in so far. What do you think of this digital publishing?

Reply on 31-3-1996 (internet)

SP : I really have not experienced a very wide range of digital publishing, but from this limited experience it seems people are just transposing the publishing strategies/paradigms from 'traditional' publishing into a different communication/broadcast environment. I suppose if one is happy to scroll through screen after screen of very uninviting text then I suppose that is OK. But my gut feeling is that I would, at this moment in time, prefer to have it in hard copy in an attractive layout and in a magazine form. In this way I can read it on the beach, on the train, on the toilet etc...

No one seems to have stretched and used the qualities intrinsic to the world of digital publishing to create a magazine that synthesizes the digital environment with the imperatives of a magazine.. People just seem to be dumping their no digital magazines into the digital environment and not building the publication from within the digital environment.

RJ : At the moment you are researching the 'assembling-zine' if I am not mistaken. What was the reason for you to start with this?

reply on 2-2-1997 (e-mail)

SP : Ruud,

Thanks for your packet of information recently and updates on the interviews. I have finally got around to answering your last question. I must admit I am finding this e-mail interview is turning into a very fragmented experience. With all the time between question and answer it seems a certain thread and coherence is getting lost. I am also finding your questions to be very broad and generalized, not that I want specificity as such but at least some kind of conceptual approach to this whole area of networking, a kind of critical rigor, something that I can bounce my responses off. You are at the moment really very much relying on the generosity and largesse of the people you are interviewing. Have you read Geza Perneckzy's book on the Magazine Network, he's the only person up to the moment who has even begun to theorize what it is that takes place amongst networkers, in particular the roles and strategies played out through the magazines. While I appreciate the enormous task you have taken on, and the importance of these kind of oral histories, it just seems that that is all the publications on networking seem to contain at the moment. This would include Chuck Welch's double-spaced monstrosity (a monstrous price it costs too) as well as the beautifully produced catalogue about East German networkers....I'm ranting, I know, but its a

frustration that I know is shared by some others at the moment...and is definitely connected to the fact that I am a graduate student in art history!!

Anyway to get to your question. What was the reason for my interest in Assembling magazines? Well it seems to be that community, creating one and the way we create it can be very clearly seen through the modus operandi of assembling magazines. This is clearly only one example, but since my interest is in artists' periodicals it was natural that I should inquire into this particular publishing paradigm. At one time I thought I would be doing my PhD thesis on assembling, but as it happens I have been persuaded to broaden my scope to looking at artists' periodicals from the beginning of the century up to fairly recently. This has expanded my work considerably, but I hope the challenge proves worth it. Anyway as one way of generating information and material about assemblings I organized a show of assemblings that took place in my front-room-gallery-Subspace in September of last year. While I had a good reception to the show and generated some local media coverage, the important part of the show will be the exhibition catalogue. I am at present about half way through laying it out and I hope to have it finished within the next couple of months. Most of the editors sent in some kind of texts about their publication and assemblings in general, with some other articles/texts about more specific aspects of assemblings related to particular countries. I have

yet to write the introduction and will try and pull together all the various threads that assemblings encompass. But they are really very fascinating publications, they exist somewhere between books and periodicals, they overturn a number of established publishing and editorial paradigms, they are a uniquely open process, and they are one moment in which the heterogeneity of the network is made manifest as well as functioning as a microcosm of the larger networking community that the participants are all a part of. I could go on, but I will leave that for the catalogue.

I'm pleased to have been able to present the first exhibit of its kind in the States (not bad for a Brit!). Coincidentally there is another one planned for later this year at the library at Pennsylvania University, with assemblings from the Ruth and Marvin Sackner archive--that should be a treat.

I think that's about it for the moment. Best to you in 1997

RJ : It took me some time too to get back to you as well Stephen. Actually this isn't an e-mail interview (I am sending you this next question by snail-mail....), but the whole concept of the mail-interview has also to do with the ways we all communicating with each other. Of course this interview can get a "fragmented experience", and so be it. Yes, I know the publications you mentioned, but in this interview I like to focus on your views. You

studied art history. A lot of mail artists aren't trained 'artists' or even have talent when it comes to things like painting , drawing , making collages, etc..... Yet they like to see themselves as 'artists'. Do you think that someday all the mail artists will be seen as artists, or only the few who have been doing something new....?

SP : Finally I'm back to your last question. I have no problem with anyone 'seeing' themselves, or calling themselves an artist. The proof of the pudding is in the work. From this vantage point I might then describe them as a 'good' artist, 'bad' artist, 'boring' artist or whatever. In answer to your question as to whether..." someday all the mail artists will be seen as artists." Well, inasmuch as these people have called themselves 'mail artists' then one has to judge them by the title they have given themselves and for me once again this goes back to the work and whether they have been able to successfully give voice/shape to their original idea and whether this idea was a compelling and interesting idea in the first place. Lets not forget that even 'good' artists can do bad work, and boring art is boring art whether it's on canvas on a wall or sent in an envelope through the mail.

However, this issue of quality is only one aspect of mail art activities and I think the other equally important feature of this activity is the type of communication that is initiated. For instance Mohammed didn't have to be an 'artist' to have

imitated his project, I don't know whether he would call himself one, or even if he was trained as one it doesn't matter. The beauty of the communication strategy that he initiated is self-evident. The works that people created that filled in this project is something that exists at another level entirely. Pawel Petasz and his Commonpress project is another example of the setting in motion of a new communication paradigm. I would suggest that its this level of activity which will be remembered, rather than the particular mail artists and their individual works.

Ruud, I presume you have received the Assembling show catalogue. Let me know what you think!
Best, sp

There never was a next question, so the interview ended here.

KLAUS GROH

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH KLAUS GROH (GERMANY)

(A large part of the interview was done by fax)

Started on: 3-11-1994

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

Reply on: 9-11-1994

Klaus Groh : I discovered the Network idea of Correspondence-Art in 1967 in San Francisco (USA) when I was looking for material for my doctoral thesis at Dada-Post-Dada- and human art activities. Art, distributed by the normal Postal-System really was fascinating for me. I suddenly was deep involved with that great idea. Later I found out, that this kind of publishing art was so important for artists, working in depressed countries - East Europe and South America.

RJ : What mail-art means to an artist is quite a personal view of the artist. Does, what mail-art means to you, differs a lot from what you think mail-art means to an artist in these 'depressed countries' as you call them?

Reply on: 18-11-1994

KG: Yes of course. Mail art just is the way how to distribute art results. Artists in former depressed countries only had this channel to bring their works out of their countries. The postal system in normative rules seldom was controlled, also there was just a small possibility that the controlling official did understand the deep background of a lot of mail art products. A personal view of art is the personal art, but to transport this personal view is another story. So the importance of mail art just is the relative open kind of transporting art worldwide. Mail art is no - ism !

RJ : What does NO-ISM mean? Is it the same as NEO-ISM for you, or do you mean that mail-art just can't be seen as an art-movement or group?

Reply on: 22-11-94

KG: No-ism in my convinced opinion means, MAIL-ART never will become a special ART-STYLE. MA just is a medium to transport ART or was a super-welcome medium to transport art in depressed countries from that time when the iron curtain still was closed! MA you can

compare with any other media like camera or brush. All old and new fixed ART STYLES or ...ISMS can be transported by the postal person to person communication. So MA too! And of course many single persons & groups are involved in that easy system. With MA really everybody can be an artist, but -you can see- with big big differences in Quality! , because there are principles of art in any way!

RJ : This differences in quality is obviously there. Can the quality of mail-art be judged by anybody else then the receiver? Is mail-art understandable for a 'non-mailartist' ?

Reply on : 26-11-1994

KG: If you say ART - No! But if you only say Mail art - Yes! Do you see the difference? As said before, Mail art (like Erotic Art) never will become a special style of art in the Art History! And if you mean Mail art , of course, everybody is able to write and to read letters and all other postal communication possibilities! So everybody can become also a Mail Artist but just a few also can become Artists!

RJ : Yes, I see the difference. You talk about "all other postal communication possibilities". You probably know about E-mail and the possibilities it might brings. Will the digitalization of communication-forms change this mail-art,

or will it just be 'another network in the world of networks'?

(like the previous question I sent this question by my FAX-modem to the FAX-machine of Klaus Groh)

Reply on : 30-11-1994

KG: Ok, I think we have to go back a little. The beginning of MA included one very important point: the personal individual touch, a human sign, the intimacy of communication. You remember - Person to Person, activities in art! (Just using the welcome medium of direct contacts!) And all these - very important part beside the art results, CREATIVITY! - , all these will got lost by using the E-mail. The electronic Communication has only one survival content: The SPEED! Look how fast I get your answer! But it comes from a machine, ONLY COPIES! You have the original. Mail Art always are personal ORIGINALS! I hope there will start another personal NETWORK!! And I hope, the real consequence of MA art could become the visual & concrete Poetry by MAIL, that means the small site and easy distribution. Digitalization of MA will be a very poor variation of the roots.

RJ : But doesn't digitalization bring many new possibilities. Isn't the computer just a new tool artists have to get used too. In business it is used to make COPIES, but an artist can use it to create an ORIGINAL PIECE.

(To give an example, I don't print my texts on paper and than 'feed' it to a FAX-machine to make a Xerox at distance. I use the computer to put my thoughts into words in a digital form, and then send this digital words with the aid of a computer and modem to the analog machine, that the FAX is. The only printed version there is, is the FAX-paper that comes out of your machine. And if there is a bad line, the result is the distorted FAX you received).

Reply on : 3-12-1994

KG: Dear Ruud, of course yes, you are right. But that is not mail-art. Use a new word FAX-art / Digit-art / Copy-art or whatever you want. The original idea/content/aim of MA is the personal touch, person to person, transported by the postal international system.

RJ : O.K., let's stick to the original idea's and aims of mail-art, the things sent by mail. The visual poem you included with your last answer couldn't be sent in a digital way, and I'm sure that that won't be possible for many years to come (teleporting still is fiction). Have you always been interested so much in visual poetry?

Reply on : 7-12-1994

KG: Yes, I did. Working the Alphabet & with words and parts of words and letters are treasure with highest

graphical values. And because the size could be very small MA is predestinated for such kinds of artistic expressions. If you remember my very first MA-works you'll find visual poems from the beginning. So also future will be.

RJ : In your visual poetry you use sometimes a lot of stamping. I recently read you statement "Wer stempelt braucht nicht zu schreiben" (who stamps doesn't has to write) which you wrote January 1976. Can you tell me a bit more about the importance of stamping in your mail-art work nowadays.

Reply on : 14-12-1994

KG: Stamping is the only "original-reproduction" of a hand-made starting project. The hand-made (hand-cut) rubber stamp is a reproduction nearest to an original. Remember that I said to the last human touch in Art-Productions! So if you write by cutting it into a rubber-stamp you always reproduce the original writing by stamping. That's what I mean. "TRY TO TRY" is a similar thought

RJ : Could you explain the thought behind "TRY TO TRY". It seems that "to try" is important to you as I remember another thought of you which was "TRY = LIFE"

Reply on : 28-12-1994 and on 11-1-1995

KG: To try is the permanent decision in all action of life. The human decision should not only be an animal self-

reaction, it should be accompanied by thinking about all consequences and about all alternatives. So mostly there is to each human act an alternative act with similar matching situations. So all activities in everybody's life is a permanent decision, that means permanent TRY to TRY so the consequence is this idea comes to the result TRY = LIFE! So human existence is a permanent decision to try the next step!

All activities in everybody's life is the permanent trial to try, to reach the always best for individual existence. The moment in each second you always have to decide whether you do it or you do it not. The result always is totally open always with millions of possibilities, everywhere. Each step, each movement, each act, everything is in the moment of doing totally open. When it is done there is mostly no return. And from each step you have to decide again - and then again & again. That is life! So, I am sure you have a new understanding view of my main sentence TRY to TRY and also the other sentence TRY = LIFE

RJ : What is your next step in connection to mail-art?

Reply on 12-1-1995

KG: I think, - I told you in parts-, just exchanging postal pieces is not enough to communicate. Mail art has a very important place in artistic activities - special for former depressed countries. Now, these must be started with

completely new artistic fields! So, let's think about what could be possible. Human existence should be in the center for ever! So we all have to try to start again with new QUALITIES in producing things whatever it should be. The new medias (FAX, Electronic, computer, satellite connections, etc. etc.) must include again any kind of human touch! So my idea, my next step, could be again new forms of visual & concrete Poetry , Collages with all printed medias , Sounds with understandable contents , communication with serious feedbacks , TRY MORE! Go on asking.

RJ : How do you achieve that TRY MORE doesn't result in duplicating the same things over and over; that TRY to TRY result in trying to do something without being able to make progress? Or is it that the artist is the person who will always proceed in learning and discovering?

Reply on : 20-1-1995

KG: TRY = Life! So real life always is progress! Always the next in life, accompanied by millions of tryings (tests!) whether so or so (!). And, of course you're completely right: the artist, all creative people are predestinated to proceed, that is human life! So progress (improvements) is very possible by permanent tryings and discovering; all is open, what you find is new and determines the next future. Not only in art, ==> in all kinds of creative existence. "Whoever is creative - lives!" ("Wer kreativ ist, lebt!")

RJ : When I think again about words like predestination, progress, life and trying, I get these philosophical thoughts. Why progress, why trying, what is this predestination? Is the answer an individual one, or is there a predestination for everybody in a larger concept. Have you ever thought about that?

Reply on : 31-1-95

KG: The answer concerning progression, future life, life at all - not predestination! - is not a personal problem, it is a human aim, a human content, a human necessary! So -I said- try doing, thinking and also laughing is an ability, that makes the difference between human and animal beings. The whole history of human existence is based on progress in all fields of possibilities. That there are also bad results, that is the risk of human existence, that is human at all too! Of course, I thought about that in so many situations! Art only is a very small part of that all!

RJ : How important is this art to you? Is it just a small part of your life or are the people that are called artists just the people where the 'art-part' of their life is a bit larger than the average?

Reply on : 9-2-1995

KG: Yes, you are right, artists, musicians, poets, writers, they all are more sensitive getting outside world

impressions and at the same time, they have the ability to express these feelings, their impressions in their media. Just that is the difference to the other people. Because everybody has the same eyes to see, ears to hear, hands with brain to write, but only a few - the creative ones - can handle with what they feel, hear, mention, etc. For me personal art is the most important field in my social environment, art or artistic doing in all possibilities, help me to live - so remember: Try is life! Mondriaan once said, if everybody will be artists, the world will be ok at all. Because active sensitive feeling with doing is life in art, is life!

RJ : On the envelope you send your reply in, you wrote: "Ray Johnson's death touched me very deep. He was the Moses of mail art. We never should forget him!" Were you ever in contact with him? What did you learn from him?

Reply on : 16-2-1995

KG: Yes, but not person by person. 1972 I had to stay for three days in New York. I had a meeting - making an interview for my doctoral thesis with George Maciunas (Father of the Fluxus dreams) -with some friends. Mail Art was just starting to exist. I had a 10 minutes phone call with Ray and deeply was impressed about what he already said about Mail Art. The name Mail Art does not exist. His word for that wonderful mailing communication was correspondence Art and he wrote not correspondence but

correspondance. It should become a game, a happy DANCE , in contact with the other players of that game the international touch of that activity already was the main content. And, dear Ruud, look, what happened, what was coming out of Ray's great idea. He built bridges between creative active people in the world. And look for a way to leave the world adequately. He used just a bridge to jump into his death. Really it was too early, maybe nobody ever will know the reasons. But the great idea lives! The network is gigantic, Ray knew that! So it is quite natural, also mail art changed its first idea - starting serious, getting "just to be in" , up to today, trying to get serious again! We have to look for new contents of the correnspondance art

RJ : So, should I end this interview now, so we can dance and play again, or is there something I forgot to ask you?

Reply on : 22-2-1995

KG: Ruud, no, I think in its complexity this interview gives a small overview around the mail art network. It is a great idea, serious communication just now really is so important and helps complete human existence. It is a big word, but it is true. TRY = Life!

RJ :Thanks for the interview!

RUGGERO MAGGI

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH RUGGERO MAGGI (ITALY)

Started on: 3-11-1994

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

Reply on: 25-11-1994

Ruggero Maggi :At the end of 1975 when I was invited for the mail art shows by the Saõ Paulo Library, by the Librije Beeldende Kunst Zwolle and for the Show "Papel y Lapiz" at Modern Art museum of Bogota.

RJ : How did these 'traditional art institutes' get your address?

Reply on : 9-12-1994

RM : Firstly: "Mail art uses institutions in the places of institutions against institutions". To "Papel y Lapiz" I was invited by Jonier Marin, a Colombian artist (organizer of the show) lover, like me, of Amazon

and with whom I spoke, for the first time, of an eventual Amazonian Archive about -multimedia Ecological Art-. For the other 2 shows is a mystery!

RJ : What is the connection of Amazon and mail-art. What is your "Archive of Artistic Works and Projects" all about?

Reply on : 31-12-1994

RM : At 1979 I went for the first time to the Peruvian Amazon and there, by the direct contact with the immensity and the magnificence of that world and unfortunately with all the ecological problems which, already at that time, were borning, I decided to found an international archive dedicated to artistic projects and works about Nature in a general way and about Amazon in a specific one.

Today, after 12 years of activity, the Archive AMAZON reckons upon the participation of hundreds of artists with their works coming from various countries and it has arranged tens of international exhibitions in all the world.

At these last 20 years of Mail Art I have also arranged other projects like: "United for Peace" - "The Shadow Project" - "Playcare" - "Italian Report" - "Not Only Books" - "Aqurantacinegiri" - Etc..

RJ : The most well-known project from you probably is the Shadow Project. I was lucky to be present during the event in 1985 in Italy where we painted shadows on the ground in Villa di Serio. Could you tell a bit more about the origin of this project, how it grew and if it still is going on....?

Reply on : 30-01-1995

RM : When the 1st atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima 50 years ago, human beings who were within three hundred meters of ground zero were instantly vaporized by the scaring heat, leaving behind only their shadows - the remnants of these innocent victims provide the image and the theme of the shadow project. The silent shadows scattered throughout the city are representations of a sight, which, if a bomb had been detonated would be seen by no one. Unlike the shadows left by a nuclear holocaust, the images painted on the streets are now permanent.

At 1985 I received the invitation from the central shadow project organization in USA to arrange the Italian event to celebrate the Hiroshima Holocaust. How you have remembered, I invited some artists to "perform" with me at the 6th of August (the H-bomb day) at Villa di Serio, near Bergamo, for the biennia of that town. Between others also Enrico Baj

was with us that day. After that event I organized many other shadow project days in Italy (Bologna - Tivoli - Senigallia - Cervo - Pordenone - Como - Scandiano - Etc.), At Dublin, at Minden in Germany, etc.. In 1988 I was invited also to realize the Shadow project in Japan at the same Hiroshima just at the H-bomb day! It was a dream, which had come true! After Hiroshima I and many other Japanese and foreign networkers, realized the Shadow project also at other Japanese towns: Kyoto - Iida - Nishinomiya - etc...

RJ : Are you at the moment planning any new projects connected to mail-art or is your interest shifting into other areas connected to art?

Reply on : 2-5-1995

RM : Since about 10 years I'm developing a theory about chaos art. I have always loved monsters since I was a child. The so-called irregularity, synonym of "ugliness", of some forms has always fascinated me. On the contrary, the aesthetic regularity of some lines, a pathetic attempt at perfection has very often bored me to death.

At a certain age, I also have sincerely tried to deepen the contact, to probe into the knowledge with a possible geometric "beauty", but, to my great

surprise, the squares never were perfectly square, the circles never were perfectly circular, and so on. And yet I realized my work in that period scrupulously following the "ancient rules" thought at school. But nothing could be done: in spite of my efforts. The geometric figures, realized in different materials, did not fit in an exact way or at least in a way satisfactory to me.

There almost was a repulsion of the forms in fitting together. Strongly enough, a repulsion of the forms and not of the materials, which, on the contrary modeled themselves together joining in their greater or lesser roughness. The fault, as I discovered some years later only, though I had already got some signs, was Euclid's and of his deceptive geometry. Yes, it was really the fault of mathematics, which has been administered to us at school and which is introduced as a decoder of Nature, but is very little natural! She is in fact a pure and simple abstraction, so abstract and deceptively regular to forget completely that nature is instead set up by forms, diverse ones: perforated, twisted, fragmented.... Forms however, that are easily fitted in. This world which only appears chaotic, needed a new type of geometry allowing a more realistic measuring of nature: the geometry of the fractals (from Latin "Fractus" : broken, split).

In contrast with the Euclidean forms, the fractals are geometrically irregular forms in every part and present the same degree of irregularity on all scales. The irregular aspect of Nature and her discontinuous side, which have been real monstrosities to science for a number of years at a mathematical level, come at last outdoors and are studied through the geometry of fractals. Now that it's been looked for, CHAOS seems to be everywhere, from the spirals of smoke of a cigarette, which break into irregular spires to the dripping faucet passing from a regular rhythm to a chaotic one. These and other a periodic and now linear movements are clear examples of turbulence, which is at the basis of the study and the relevant visual representation of the strange attractors. Strange not because unusual (in reality they are incredible incomprehensible). A further feature of the strange attractors of of being fractals, i.e. of having a complete structure (independently from the scale of magnification).

Chaotic art must inquire into the inner side of world, at last "cleaned" from the old scientific prejudices, looking for the manifold aesthetic and conceptual possibilities contained in chaos. A part from researchers concerning computer graphics, the possibilities are infinite. For instance, I am

projecting a "chaotic machine", which will be a metal structure 8 mt. high, with a central Plexiglas sphere providing for the insertion of a person which will be the first interference disturbing and therefore shifting to a periodic the movement of the sphere itself, which will also be set in motion by some magnets. Being designed for outdoors, the other "disturbances" will be caused by elements like rain, wind, etc. All the structure will be connected to a computer, which will compute all the relevant strange attractors, and, through a printer, will visualize them on sheets, which will be given to the public.

The great discovery of the science of chaos is that apparently complicated behaviors can become simple if the right graphic representation has been chosen. The images of chaotic art are not only splendid but also contain an infinite series of data and information.

RJ : Did you use the computer before in your art? What is the potential of this machine?

Reply on 28-7-1995

RM: I have just used the computer at the Basel Art Fair (1989) to elaborate some Nazca drawings into spatial signs - all this was a part of my space art

installation at the stand of OURS (Orbiting Unification Ring Satellite) at the same art fair. The result was a series of works reproduced then by copy machine which I have here enclosed. Pierre Restany has written some time ago: "In this society it becomes necessary to recreate the relationship between man and machine, and today this machine is the computer. To re-define this relationship implies the creation of right and true conditions of a dialogue between two types of intelligence: Artificial and human. And it's in the core of this dialogue where Maggi's linguistic research is inserted."

RJ : Are you already working with the Internet or are you planning to? What will be the impact of the Internet on the 'traditional' mail-art?

Reply on 17-8-1995

RM: I have planned to work by Internet for the "Quintessences" project about the death of the Count of Gagliostro and the vital necessity "to free yourself and to gain an essential truth". I wished to realize a plan of the Papal Fortress of San Leo (near Urbino, where Gagliostro died imprisoned) and include it into the Internet system, inviting artists from all the world to visit him (!) at the day of his bicentennial death: 26th of August 1995. All this

was not possible and we are organizing a fax art project with the same spirit! Or better.....
Metanetworker in spirit!

RJ : What will be the impact of the Internet on the 'traditional' mail-art? I've noticed that a lot of mail artists in the USA are using e-mail now besides the traditional mail system? I've written down my thoughts and experiences with e-mail. What are your views?

Reply on 8-1-1996

RM: Dear Ruud, sorry for the delay to answer but I have been in Brazil at São Paulo participating to a great interactive art event and now I'm in Lima from where I'll return to Italy at the 29th of December -- Happy New year to you & your family!

Your question -- Internet is the positive answer to the utopic danger: The Great Brother! Instead of a great central power, the Man has created a fantastic system of millions of peripheral little PC's connected through internet.

Some virtual network museums have been born in in all the world. In USA Honoria and Crackerjack Kid are very active in this sense. In Italy, at Porto S. Giorgio, the first Italian mail art virtual museum

and gallery have been founded. They have opened their "doors" with a celebration of Ray Johnson and a "show" of mine, Internet URL : <
<http://www.sapienza.it/magam> >. I'm planning also two computer-installations: A Telematic Totem and an Anti-Nuclear French tests in Pacific work.

RJ : You write quite optimistic about the Internet. I see also lots of negative sides, like the access to the hardware (no electricity or computers for e.g. African networkers), no money for the access to Internet. Also "The Great Brother" is still there, since the companies that own the telephone-lines can now monitor all the e-mail if they want to. Am I being to negative or are there also real dangers to the Internet?

Reply on 26-7-1996

RM : The poverty in Africa and in all the so-called 3rd world is a tragic, incontestable fact to which naturally also the deficiency of electricity and the following lack of computers are joined.

If a certain kind of mentality and a sadly overflowing culture doesn't change in the rest of the world, it will be impossible for those countries to raise their selves. After having ravaged throughout centuries, now it's time to give back something. But

not in the shape of simple assistance, but building schools, hospitals, etc... Don't send shoes but build a shoe-factory!

However, how in all the cultural mutations (and surely internet is one!) there are some beginning problems but, for me, the game... IS worth the candle! The real danger has always been in the use which man can do and not in the machine.

RJ : I sure agree on that issue with you. Another subject; the mail art projects that are currently done in the mail art network mostly aren't that interesting for me anymore. How is this for you? Do you still participate in all the project-invitations you get?

(because of time & other things that happened in both our lives this interview was broken off. On November 25th 2001 I decided to put all unfinished interviews online as well).

VITTORE BARONI

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH VITTORE BARONI (ITALY)

Started on: 24-01-1995

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

Reply on: 30-3-1995

Vittore Baroni : I got involved in the mail art net in 1977, when I discovered the existence of mail art through the work of G.A. Cavellini - I had seen an ad in Flash Art Magazine for G.A.C.'s "Free" Art Books - I wrote him, got the books, started a correspondence with G.A.C. (my first contact!) and soon with Anna Banana and all the other late 70's regulars. The rest is history!

RJ : Is mail art itself history, after the death of Ray Johnson?

Reply on : 20-4-1995

VB : As I wrote in the latest issue of ARTE POSTALE! magazine # 69, the sad demise of R.J. in a way is an event/date that signals the end of the "golden age" of mail art, that big phenomenon that Ray was instrumental into originating in the early sixties and that probably had its peak moment in the first half of the eighties. January 13th 1995 also means the completion of a cycle, with fax/e-mail/internet/etc. picking up the inheritance of "snail mail"/ correspondence. It must be pointed out that those learning to travel the electronic highways have a lot to learn from postal networkers (with years of experience behind them) in terms of strategies, share-work practices and open frame of mind. So mail art is a bit more "history", but its teachings will live on.

RJ : Could you explain what you mean with strategies, share-work practices and open frame of mind. What are the teachings you would like to live on?

Reply on 27-10-1995 (printed text and diskette)

(I've sent a few times copies of the question and some samples of finished interviews to Vittore Baroni. His answer came in a large envelope with lots of info's. Also there was a diskette in it, but as I tried to read it, I discovered that it was for a Macintosh computer. Since

the file was not transformed to a DOS-file, I could read the printed version and retyped the whole answer)

VB : Dear Ruud, sorry if I disappeared without answering to your latest mailings, I didn't mean to be rude bur really from May to September my work (almost) 24 hours-a-day at the Hotel makes it impossible for me to deal with any kind of correspondence. I don't even open the damn envelopes, sometimes. Now I'm back home and trying to put things into shape, while answering to the latest question of our mail-interview, I also try to put some order in my head regarding what I feel about the network today, and what I want to do from now on (more ramblings in next Arte Postale!).... So here I go, reverting to paper (my last disk was by mistake an MS-DOS translated Mac text, but this is yet again a Mac disc on Word 5).

Question: something to do with what is exactly the legacy that mail art leaves to internet surfers?...

A lot of people approach Internet and electronic networking with a strictly utilitarian attitude, they are looking for financial gains or sexual encounters or whatever. Others enjoy the possibility/power to chat with millions of people, but have nothing to say to them, so it's only a big waste of time and money: to me it is like those Hi-Fi freaks who own

incredibly expensive stereo playback systems and use them to hear the same ten records, technology nerds into communication. I hope that some of the "golden rules" of mail art will find their way into the cyber-community, because what I see and read now regarding what's going on in the Net isn't always that free and open. I must first of all admit that I do not own yet a modem and I only used Internet a few times through the courtesy of a friendly neighbor who has an access and University pass-word. But I do read a lot about it in international magazines (Wired, .net and the like), so I know more or less what is going on, regarding my favorite subjects. I noticed a lot of resistance against the new media from old-time mail artists, especially those who do not use a computer daily. I do not feel like that, I am really enthusiast about the possibilities of the new media, but I tend to be also realist: I will wait till there will be a Internet link also in my town¹ (and by the way, even local phone calls in Italy may become very expensive if you do a long call, so using Internet for hours is not cheap

¹ On the moment this interview was finished there were many access points to the Internet in Vittore's Hometown.

around here!), also I will wait till the jargon and hype surrounding the Net will have vanished a bit, when it will be just another common communication system added to the existing ones, then I will start doing my electronic projects, probably not leaving the postal medium abruptly but little by little. A book like Chuck Welch's *Eternal Network* I think can be of great help even to people who have never heard about mail art and will never practice mail art (or who are not interested in art altogether), as a sort of preliminary introduction to the spirit of free networking: it's something totally different from the tons of Guides for Internet surfing you find in every bookshop, because it is founded on over thirty years of intensive experiences in the field of free and open exchange-communication. It is a wealth of wisdom that you just can't sum up in a few words or even in a single book, but I believe a mail artist approach to Internet will always be much more free-and-easy than the approach of people who had no previous networking experiences. If mail art arrived where Internet is today, connecting the whole planet in a web of spiritual energy, using a much cheaper medium, at the same time I believe strongly that mail art as a phenomenon has lost much of its significance now that Internet is spreading: it will

be just anachronistic to continue using stamps beyond a certain (and very near) point in time.

Everything reaches a peak and then starts to drop, mail art probably had its peak in '92 with the Networker Congress thing, and now with the death of Ray Johnson the cycle is complete, the only thing that can be done is tell the whole history in a more complete way (like the books by Géza Pernecky, John Held Jr., Chuck Welch are testifying), museums and collectors can enter the scene and eat the remains. Those who were there for the excitement (& warmth & enlightenments) of it and not for the glory, will move on to better occupations. Of course it will take years and years for the big wave to pass completely and dry out, there is still an enormous amount of activity in mail art, and with Global Mail we also have something the Network always lacked (except maybe for the short life-span of Vile and a certain period of Umbrella) and always cried for, a magazine to act as a forum and reference point, a small but reliable solid island in the chaotic mailstream. I do not intend to stop printing my own Arte Postale! magazine yet (at least three issues are planned for this winter, starting with a Baroni-Bleus collaboration), and there are still things that I need to do with the postal system, but I do not feel tied

emotionally hands and feet to it: I am a networker at heart, and I use the more satisfying and more affordable instruments I can put my hands on. If I had the possibility to phone all around the world for almost nothing, I would use the phone, if I had a voice strong enough to get over the mountain, I would just scream and scream. Before year 3000 something better than Internet will be invented, and we will all be finally able to tele-transport ourselves P.K.Dick-style wherever we dream to go.

RJ : Some readers of this interview might not know your magazine "Arte Postale!". What is your magazine about?

Reply on 24-11-1995

VB : I discovered mail art in 1977 and the following year I was already corresponding with an ever increasing number of contacts, a hundred or more, so I soon reached the point when you are not able anymore to find the time for elaborate original answers to each and every single mailing. I needed something readily available to trade with other networkers and that could become the focus for my postal activities, so the natural step to take was to create my own magazine, like other mail artists did before me (at the time, I was particularly impressed, even more than by the "glossy" Vile, by

an American Xeroxed publication called Cabaret Voltaire, that showed you could make a strong original magazine with just a black and white photocopier).

And that's how ARTE POSTALE! (with - often forgotten! exclamation mark, to me a reminder of the excitement of my first encounter with the mail art medium) was born in October 1979, as a totally non-profit publication, distributed only through the postal system and wholly dedicated to the aesthetics and philosophies of mail art.

Through perseverance and a few weird ideas that did hit the mark, it has become one of the most well known and long-lived magazines in the whole Eternal Network. The title is simply "Mail Art!" translated into Italian, as I wanted it to be from the start a "pure" mail art publication, totally rooted in the correspondence milieu. There never was a fixed size or periodicity, though in the first three years I was able incredibly to maintain a monthly pace (I was a young student and single then, with a lot of free time in my hands!), now I am lucky when I am able to publish more than two issues a year. After five or six issues completely printed on cheap paper-plate off-set machines (I later turned to photocopies for a better resolution quality), always

produced in 100 numbered copies, the magazine gradually turned into an "assembling" publication, gathering together original pages contributed by various international networkers, while I still printed the cover and a few "home pages". I don't remember exactly from where I got the idea in 1979, but probably I was aware of the Assembling magazine by Richard Kostelanetz (though at that point I still had not actually seen one) and I had received some collective mail art publications (though they looked more like artistic "portfolios" than magazines, with loose pages and minimal editorial work). From the beginning, I wanted Arte Postale! to look like a "real" magazine, not an arty multiple, so I always stapled all the pages together, never mind the "preciousness" of some of the works, sealing sometimes the smaller bits into bags or envelopes glued to the pages. Though there were often themes to stick to, participants were usually totally free regarding the size and medium of their contributions (often someone would send a hundred totally different pages), so I also got several tridimensional oddities, like plant leaves, glass beads, ping pong balls and bee-wax bas-reliefs. This forced me sometimes to adopt unusual formats, the most bizarre issue being the "boxed" N.24, with mostly 3D works and

resembling a marriage between a mail art mag and a Fluxus box. To do a "gathering mag" is big fun only if you deeply and sincerely love the mystic side of the self-publishing experience. Each time you are confronted with a different challenge of finding the best way to bring into harmony an array of disparate works, so it is never a mechanical practice, it is like stitching together a Frankenstein creature and trying to infuse some life into it. The boring aspect is of course the actual work of collecting page after page to put all the copies together, once a scheme and order of assembling is decided, but I usually did this in the late evening, while listening to music or watching films on TV with an eye, often with the help of my mother (!) who was also sitting in, so with only 100 copies to go it never took more than two or three very relaxed working sessions. I think one reason why some of us just feel a sort of orgasm when they finally hold in their hand the first finished copy of a self-publication lies in the fact that we are a generation raised in a global media environment, we are used to get most of our views on the world from the printed page and to assimilate magazines since we are born (I'm talking of people born in the fifties or sixties, younger generations are much more video-centered): the fact of actually editing

and publishing a mag is for us the (often unconscious) accomplishment of a cathartic reversal of roles. It is like when a video-recorder first entered into your house, making you feel that you no longer depended on what "they" wanted to show you: now you could decide what movie to watch and at what pace and which scene you wanted to see again and again. But it is even more than that, now you can star in the movie... Well, anyway, as even the best games tend to become tedious after some time, I decided to stop collecting original pages starting with issue N.52 (it was supposed to be N.51 really, but a lot of people kept mailing things in a hundred copies even after I discontinued the call for contributions - I still get the odd accidental package now after ten years, so unforeseeable are the network circumvolutions!). This change left me free to vary and experiment with the number of copies produced, ranging from the single copy of the special "homage issue" (N.53, this was put together by Mark Pawson as a terminal tribute to the "assembling days" of Arte Postale!, with unique pieces by fifty-some different networkers, it came like a total surprise and I liked it so much that I decided to give it a proper AP! number) to the 600 copies of issue 63 (with a 7" vinyl record by my group Le Forbici di Manitu

inside, singing the Let's Network Together hymn) and the "unlimited" issues N. 60-61-69 (xerox-copies always available). The most successful and fun to do issues have been the "mail art show show catalogue" N.47 (I organized a project requesting fake mail art invitations, to be diffused to short circuit the net!), the bumper N.50 "silver issue" (a real silver knife sent from Canada hidden in one of the copies), the "mail art handbook" N.55 (a sort of half-serious synthetic guide to happy networking), the "mail art & money do mix!" N.56 (I sent money out to networkers with optional requests on how to use it and I glued a real coin to each cover: not only a free magazine, but a mag that pays you to be read!). Differently from several mail art bulletins and publications that consist mostly of reproductions of ads and lists of invitations to projects (these may be useful as a source of information, but I find them really boring as magazines, if not done with the craft and passion of a Global Mail), I always wanted each issue of *Arte Postale!* to be a sort of personal/collective little art-work in itself, with many hand-interventions in each single copy (folded pages, blots of colour, small glued inserts, rubberstamped images, etc.), like a miniature "artist's book" minus the pretentiousness of priced gallery art. So instead of

using the small space available (lately, I try to keep AP! under the weight of 20 grams, to save on trees and postage) to reproduce invitations and lists of addresses, I prefer to focus each time on a single theme, selecting the most inspired contributions and arranging them so to make a collective statement on that particular topic (of course also all the contributors not reproduced in the mag - to include always everything would be economically and technically impossible! - do get a free copy).

In sixteen years, over 500 networkers from approximately 35 different countries, ranging from elementary school kids to well respected artists like Ray Johnson and Ben Vautier, participated into Arte Postale!. In pure mail art spirit, no form of censorship or selection on the original "assembling" contributions was ever applied. Each contributor always receives one or more free copies of the issue he/she is featured into. Up till issue N.63 the magazine, though 99% distributed or traded free in the network, was also made available at a low cover price to interested non-mail artists, through the diffusion of small mail order catalogues, but given the difficulties of such a minimal form of distribution - sales never repaid even the cost of printing the catalogues! - since issue N.64 it has become totally free: you cannot buy the new issues

anymore, and I decide who is going to get them for trade or as a gift (only a few back-issues are still available in a very limited number of copies). A complete (or almost complete) collection of the magazine is housed in several international archives, such as the Administration Centre/42.292 Networking Archive in Belgium, the V.E.C. Archives in Holland and the Sackners Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Miami Beach, USA. And yes, I have spotted recently some deleted early issues of AP! already offered at high prices in specialized catalogues for collectors of avantgarde publications: I don't know if I should be proud or angry about it, for sure there is nothing I can do (and unfortunately I don't have a secret stash of back-issues under the roof!), I guess it's inevitable that such ironic turns of events may happen... One thing I've been ruminating about for quite some time now is if I ever want to stop doing Arte Postale!, and I just made up my mind to reach at least issue 100, that would be a nice point to stop (or to turn into an electronic publication, who knows - but then the name will have to change definitively). This still leaves 28 issues to go, and that means that Arte Postale!, like mail art itself, will still be around for quite a few years...

Ruud, I'm not sure if I have sent it to you already, anyway here is a complete list of the AP! editions so far (please note that some of the issues appeared with a different "fake" logo, still retaining the Arte Postale! numeration):

- 1 - DEMONIA - October 1979 - edition of 100 copies
- 2 - PATTI SMITH ROCKIN' DEMONIA - November 1979 - 100
- 3 - ART SONGS FROM DEMONIA - December 1979 - 100
- 4 - MORE POLITICAL SATIRE: POST SCRIPTUM - January 1980 - 100
- 5 - CAVELLINIANA - February 1980 - 100
- 6 - AMERICAN MAIL ART DADA 80 - March 1980 - 100
- 7 - REFLUXUS ISSUE - April 1980 - 100
- 8 - AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ISSUE I - May 1980 - 100
- 9 - UK SPECIAL - June 1980 - 100

- 10 - AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ISSUE II - July 1980
- 100
- 11 - AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ISSIE III - August
1980 - 100
- 12 - ALL STARS ISSUE - September 1980 - 100
- 13 - T-SHIRTS ISSUE - October 1980 - 100
- 14 - DEVELOP MY DREAMS - November 1980 -
100
- 15 - (teacher with kids) - December 1980 - 100
- 16 - VISUAL POETRY ISSUE -
January-February 1981 - 100
- 17 - ETOATLERPSA! - March 1981 - 100
- 18 - THE YAHOO BULLETIN - 1st April 1981 -
100
- 19 - THINK ABOUT MAIL ART - May-June
1981 - 100
- 20 - UT FONA RES - July 1981 - 100
- 21 - 44 88! - no date (July 1981) - 100
- 22 - MIDSUMMER ISSUE - August 1981 - 100

- 23 - THE YAHOO BULLETIN (II) - September 1981 - 100
- 24 - BOXED EDITION (in 3D cardboard box) - October 1981 - 100
- 25 - THIS ORDER - December 1981 - 100
- 26 - YEARBOOK 1981 - 31st December 1981 - 100
- 27 - POSTCARDSBOX (in cardboard box) - January-February 1982 - 100
- 28 - CONFIDENCES - March 1982 - 100
- 29 - CRISIS OF #29 - April 1982 - 100
- 30 - EAST-WEST CONNECTION - May 1982 - 100
- 31 - (vintage postcards) - June 1982 - 100
- 32 - BIDEET - July-August 1982 - 100
- 33 - (mask cover) - September 1982 - 100
- 34 - ARE YOU IN LOVE? - October 1982 - 100
- 35 - BIENNALE DE PARIS - November 1982 - 100

- 36 - (badges cover) - December 1982 - 100
- 37 - S.I.N.EWS I - January 1983 - 100
- 38 - CONCEPTUAL MAFIA - March 1983 - 100
- 39 - LEWD CARESS (also CARE N.8) - April 1983 - 100
- 40 - (old Forte dei Marmi photo) - May 1983 - 100
- 41 - S.I.N.EWS II - June 1983 - 100
- 42 - POST-ART GUERRILLA - July 1983 - 100
- 43 - NETWORKART - August-September 1983 - 100
- 44 - (postman & drummer) - October-November 1983 - 100
- 45 - S.I.N.EWS III - December 1993 - 100
- 46 - A TRIP TO AKADEMGOROD - January-February 1984 - 100
- 47 - MAIL ART SHOW SHOW CATALOGUE - March 1984 - 100
- 48 - MCMLXXXIV! - April-June 1984 - 100

- 49 - THE MINIATURE ISSUE (in cassette box) -
July-September 1984 -100
- 50 - SILVER ISSUE - October 1984 - 100
- 51 - S.I.N.EWS IV - January 1985 - 100
- 52 - SCRIPTA VOLANT - February-March 1985
- 200
- 53 - HOMAGE A VITTORE BARONI - no date
(April-May 1985) - 1 copy only (this issue
organized and edited by Mark Pawson,
who also produced and distributed an
unnumbered transparent xerox-sheet with
names of contributors)
- 54 - CORNUCOPIA - June-December 1985 - 300
- 55 - MAIL ART HANDBOOK -
January-December 1986 - 500
- 56 - MAIL ART & MONEY DO MIX! -
January-June 1987 - 100
- 57 - THE BOX GAME - July-December 1987 -
500
- 58 - THE B.A.T. MANUAL - January-December
1988 - 300

- 59 - ALTERNATIVE PHILATELY -
January-June 1989 - 500
- 60 - (the making of) NETZINE - July-September
1989 - unlimited edition
- 61 - SMILE - October-December 1989 -
unlimited edition
- 62 - B-ART ISSUE - January-December 1990 -
500 (250 with insert booklet by Günther
Ruch)
- (no Arte Postale! in 1991)
- 63 - LET'S NETWORK TOGETHER (with 7"
record) - January-December 1992 - 600
- 63b- META-CONCERT IN SPIRIT (cassette) -
January-December 1992 - 93
- 64 - UTOPIA INFANTILE (V.B. & Robin
Crozier) - January-March 1993 - 100
- 65 - GLASS ENIGMA (David
Drummond-Milne) - April-June 1993 - 100
- 66 - THE ONE-MAN SHOW - July-September
1993 - 100

- 67 - STICKERMAN SCRAPBOOK -
October-December 1993 - 100
- 68 - ARTURO G. FALLICO SPECIAL -
January-December 1994 - 100
- 69 - RAY JOHNSON LIVES! - January-February
1995 - unlimited edition
- 70 - THE NO INSTITUTE/JÜRGEN O.
OLBRICH - March-April 1995 - 100
- 71 - FUN IN ACAPULCO - May-September
1995 - 300
- 72 - ONE YEAR LATER - 1-13 January 1996 - 81
- 73 - A DECK OF POSTCARDS -
October-December 1995 - 100
- 74 - MY OWN PRIVATE INTERNET - 14-17
January 1996 - 300
- 75 - LUTHER BLISSETT MAN OF THE YEAR -
18 January-1 April 1996 - 100

And the following one is a short essay I wrote for the recent exhibition of the whole Arte Postale! collection organized by Guy Bleus in his mail art gallery space in Hasselt, Belgium - it was not used in the catalogue magazine so it's still unpublished:

ARTE POSTALE! 1979-1995: MEMORIES OF A MAIL ART MAGAZINE MAKER

As the old saying goes, I am not an artist, I am a networker. When I started utilizing the mail art net, I was looking for something that the traditional art system could not give me. At that time, in the late seventies, I tried to restrain myself as much as I could from creating "fine" images. I did not want to make "artworks" and develop a style or please myself aesthetically. I wanted to find new ways to communicate my ideas, avoiding all the usual traps and cliches of the gallery-museum-critic-artmagazine routine. I was very young and naive, and of course I was also wrong (a style always develops in spite of yourself, and you can't hide away indefinitely your love for pencils and colours), but my clumsy idealism led me instinctively to fully and wholeheartedly embrace this correspondence art thing. It was so liberating, the whole anarchic idea of Mail What Thou Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law. Furthermore, operating at distance (as those travelling the Internet are realizing thirty years later) permitted you to disguise yourself with harmless trickery, switching sex, age, status, credo and (pen)name as fast as you could lick a stamp. It was not art in the traditionally accepted sense, yet

you could pretend it was and "play artist" with hundreds of others grown-up kids, create new real/fake art myths and throw them in the face of the official Artclique, or simply forget that such a thing as a cultural elite existed and make up your own ideal (net)working dimension, a planetary web with you at the centre.

For me, a networker is a new kind of cultural worker, with a new role in society and new tools and strategies of intervention at his/her fingertips: a sort of "cultural animator", a meta-artist who creates contexts for collective expression, instead of traditional art works. I always felt that, in the mail art medium, the "art work" is not represented by the single postcard or letter I mail, but by the whole process of interaction with my contact(s), including their replies and the spiritual link that is activated between us. A complete mail art project, a collection of contributions from dozens or hundreds of different people (not necessarily "artists"!) responding to one request or theme, is another form of what I regard as a proper networking art piece: not the single contribution, but the sum of all the interacting mailings. In this sense, photocopied (or off-set printed) and self-distributed mail art magazines, often including manual interventions and original pages submitted

by various contributors, are yet another form of genuine art work generated by networking practices. I consider the thousands of copies of *Arte Postale!* that I lovingly hand-assembled one by one in the past sixteen years as the best single documentation of my multifarious activities as a full-free-time networker. While many content themselves with simple lists of names and addresses, I believe there are infinite ways to turn a mail art catalogue or magazine into a fully satisfying little art piece in itself. All those unexpected holes or original fragments glued on the pages, one-of-a-kind enclosures or hand signed messages are not intended to mimic the preciousness of pricey artists' books, but to make the experience of reading a mail art magazine as fresh, unique and intimate as that of reading a personal letter. If only in a few cases I have been able to achieve this, then I am an happy networker.

RJ : Thanks for this extensive overview of your magazine and the philosophy behind it. In all those years you must have received lots of mail art. Is it all still at your place? Do you keep an archive or do you recycle a lot?

Reply on 27-12-1995

(With his answer Vittore included a diskette with the text as he had written it on his computer, Unfortunately it was a MAC computer, and since I use a DOS machine, I could not read the disk nor the text. Vittore also included some photos of his archive which I will use as illustrations when possible, and some small hand-made postcards).

VB : In the past fifteen years or so I remember very few days without a piece of mail in my mailbox. When that happens, I know that the post office might be on strike or that it must be a very special day indeed (with a mild sense of relief built in the very experience!). This means that yes, I have received a tremendous amount of mail, but luckily I have never been a compulsive collector and I always recycle a lot of what came in. My room as a young student was not that big, and it had to function as studio and archive of mail art besides containing all my books, records, clothes and stuff. There was no way I could save everything, so my line in action from the very start was to throw the most useless trash-mail in the bin, save the books, catalogues and zines for the library, keep only the "artworks" (classified in alphabetical folders and files, arranged under authors' names and geographically) and the envelopes that contained enough meaningful drawings, artistamps or rubberstamps. This means

that most of the personal messages, envelopes and trivia has been recycled as new envelopes, submissions to assembling publications or material for collages. This still leaves a LOT of paper material and 3D pieces.

When I moved to my new house in 1988, I had to pack everything into dozens of crates, it took me one year to put everything back into shape in the new E.O.N. (Ethereal Open Network) mail art studio-archive, that is now located in two small rooms under the roof at Via Battisti 339, Viareggio, Italy. One room is just a storage space, with boxes containing the works belonging to single projects, theme exhibitions, series of panels of my own work, etc. The other room has a library-wall with all the catalogues and magazines, plus all the folders and larger file-cabinets for the contacts with whom I have long-standing relationship, and files with the other mixed authors, divided geographically.

Downstairs I have a small "home gallery" space with temporary exhibitions by single mail artists, of materials culled from the archive. I must add the archive is in a perpetual state of "orderly disorder", I am a very orderly type and I like everything to be neatly arranged, but I never seem to be able to keep pace with the upcoming mail.

At the time of writing, there are at least ten big cardboard crates full of answered mail that need to be subdivided into the various files, but who knows when I will be able to perform this lovingly boring task. I usually sneak up into the mail art room at odd times, very early in the morning before everyone wakes up or late at night when everyone sleeps, so I rarely spend there more than one hour a day, and that's just time enough to answer a few letters and develop some new ideas. Right now the archive would need at least another room, as it has become really full up to the brim with materials. I am thinking right now of an unheard of manner to deal with the space problem, you'll read all about it in a future issue of Arte Postale!

RJ : This space problem is something I hear from a lot of active mail artists. I am very curious about your solution, but I will wait till you publish it in your future issue of Arte Postale!. Let's focus on something else. In 1986 there was the "tourism" and in 1992 the "DNC-year". Were you active in those events too? Is meeting the artists, you are in contact with by mail, a logic step in mail art?

Reply on 17-1-1996

(Vittore wrote me that he will type the answers and questions all on his MAC-computer. Since I can't read

the MAC-diskettes, he will keep track of the words, and will then transform the final interview with the help of a friend to a DOS-diskette and send it to me).

VB : Yes, I did participate partially in both the big "decentralized congresses" of Mail Artists (1986) and Networkers (1992). In the first case, it was mostly through mail friends who came and visited me in Forte dei Marmi, where I still lived at the time. I got really very frequent visits from mail artists throughout the 80es, not one month passed away without someone dropping in unexpected, while in the 90es visits are very few and far between (this must mean something: either people has less money and travelling has become more expensive, my image as a perfect guest has changed, we have all grown old and with family ties, "tourism" is no more that exciting, I really don't have an answer for this, maybe it is all these reasons put together). In the second case, I helped H.R. Fricker from the very start to formulate the call for the World-Wide DNC92, so I felt much more directly involved, I travelled to several Congresses in Italy and to a major one abroad, the one held at Hans-Rudi's house in the Swiss mountains. I have many great memories and sweet anecdotes about all my mail-art meetings throughout the years, and not a single bad one, so I definitely think that

meeting in person after a long acquaintance through the post is a positive thing, but I would not call it a "logic step" in mail art (it's probably just an "inevitable step"): when you meet, it is no more "mail art", regardless to the fact that you do cooperate "live" on a performance or creative work or you just sip tea and chat, it's a totally different kind of experience. I think meeting mail art contacts now and then is an healthy thing to do, it helps you to put certain things in perspective and to go more in depth and into details in conversation (though, with phone before and Internet now, you can do more of this also at distance), but to meet too many people too often, unless you are unemployed and with all the time in the world in your hands, is just putting an useless stress on your already difficult daily life schedule. Also, a strange thing I noticed is that even if a meeting is very intense and positive on all accounts, usually you tend to correspond less (or even stop corresponding) with someone you have met in person. I guess it erodes the myth we all slowly build around respect and friendships "at distance", a little part of its magic is always lost in the process.

RJ : Will this magic stay there with the new communication forms the internet brings us? On-line chatting and video-phone..... Or the

"anonymous" mail art by "snail-mail" shall survive this?

Reply on 24-2-1996

VB : Some forms of "magic" will probably disappear with the end of snail mail, in a few years or decades, like this strong romantic feeling associated with the history of love letters (letters to the loved one abroad, at war, in prison, etc.), we will miss the collections of letters by great poets, writers and artists, and so on (or we will start seeing collections of e-mail messages in print). But other forms of "magic" will be introduced by the new media, like the possibility of taking on different identities (and even change sex) in the Internet, while probably you can do the same through on-line dialogue and on video-phone: you just have to alterate your voice or do a good make up job, it is easy to fool everyone! So all in all it will not be a great loss, because it will happen very gradually, people will have time to adjust to it and come up with all sorts of new pranks and "creative" transgressions if they want to. You can remain anonymous even if you meet someone else in person, you can change your looks a bit and just insist that your name is Luther Blissett.

RJ : You mention "Luther Blissett". I've read the article about yet another "universal" name, like I knew "Monty Cantsin" and "Karen Elliot". Isn't the repetition I see in a lot of mail art initiatives the indication that the mail art network is ready to vanish gradually?

Reply on 19-3-1996

VB : I haven't noticed a particularly relevant increase in "repetitiousness" in the mail art network in recent months or years: to my knowledge, it has always been there! That of mindless cloning of ideas or of repetition of cliches is maybe an unavoidable side-effect of all interesting phenomena and exciting activities, it is always easier to imitate than to be original and too many people are just plain lazy (God bless their unstressed lives!), so I guess this only helps you to select the correspondents with whom you really love to trade stuff...
Regarding "multiple names", their history goes back a long way before Monty Cantsin was born in the mind of Mr. David Zack, as you can read in a chapter of Stewart Home's 1988 book *Assault on Culture* (that by the way I am in the process of publishing in italian for the small publishing house AAA I just founded with my ex-TRAX partner Piermario Ciani). I am involved in multiple name

strategies since 1980, when I created the ubiquitous conceptual group Lieutenant Murnau: with my present band Le Forbici di Manitu I am assembling right now a retrospective CD of Lt.Murnau's seminal "plagiarist" recordings, to be released later this year on the UK label Earthly Delights. I truly believe the negation of the singular identity in favour of a shared name is a wonderful and radical development of some networking philosophies inherent to mail art (there is no single "artwork", the process or the collective project is the artwork, there is no centre, each cell is at the centre of the net, etc.). I don't believe, though, that much has been obtained by Cantsin, Eliot, Mario Rossi, Bob Jones and all the other "historical" multiple names, especially if compared with what the Luther Blissett Project has been able to accomplish in Italy in just two years. Since the beginning of 1995, for the first time the multiple name concept has really been embraced by a large number of people working secretly in several towns (there are now groups of Blissetts in Rome, Bologna, Udine, Rovigo, etc.), and it would take a whole book to report you all the media pranks that have been successfully played to the italian national TV, to big newspapers and publishers, etc. In fact, there are already three books out in Italy on the Blissett case (and a fourth one

will be published in May '96 by AAA: Totò, Peppino e la Guerra Psichica), plus several magazines and pamphlets (a few things are now being translated into English in London), there are also several Luther Blissett radio shows on independent radio stations and tons of articles from the press every month. So this is not the repetition of an old concept, but rather the beautiful big flower that has finally blossomed out of all those minimal old seeds. It is growing fast, you can maybe compare it to the Church of the SubGenius for the kind of fringe people it usually attracts, but it is much more radical in ideology (all Blissett materials are no copyright and the battle against copyright is a favourite cause for Blissett, while the SubGenius is a deposited trademark!), the stated aim being to cause panic into all media, to challenge and sabotage all the centres of Power and Control everywhere. The Blissett Project goes way beyond the problems caused by an enflated ego, so often a burden in all (mail) art circles, and it goes way beyond being simply an "art project" (so maybe I should stop discussing it here!): it is cultural terrorism at work.

RJ : This news about Luther Blissett is quite interesting for me. I thought to be quite well informed about what is going on in the network, but it seems that

this Luther Blissett-idea is especially being developed in Italy, and hasn't reached the network that well yet (I only remember seeing the name on some xeroxes I got from Italy, and then there are the beautiful artistamps that Piermario Ciani designed for his Blissett-project). It seems that in the whole network, Italy takes a special place when it comes to networking within a single country. Any specific reason?

reply on 10-04-1996

VB: There are two main attitudes towards this "mail art" activity as a whole: one attitude consists in escaping the prison of the closed official art system (artist-critic-dealer-gallery-museum-passive audience) just to end up building another (more satisfactory) small ghetto-utopian fairyland (the "network" seen as a circle of "friends", where everyone knows each other and what is going on: mail artists-catalogues-exhibitions-magazines-meetings-more active mail artists); the other attitude consists (and I subscribe to this one) in seeing the mail art practitioners as just a tiny fragment of a global networking phenomenon (including the small and underground press, the tape network, what happens in free BBS, in some areas of the Internet, and then again fax-zines, phone-phreeks, ecc.)

where no one is physically able to keep trace of every net-focussed thing that is going on in the planet, and where really anything can happen to link human consciousnesses together (without necessarily the need of an "art" tag). Italy is part of the global network just like any other geographical or linguistic area, so if a project is well developed here you can't say it "hasn't reached the network", it simply means that in the case of the Blissett project Italy has become the centre of the network (that will spread from there), just like in the case of the Decentralized WorldWide Congresses of 1992 Switzerland functioned as the originating centre of that project: it's not a dogmatic thing, the centers are always different and shifting places, each one of us is at the center of the whole network, but surely every project must have to begin somewhere... (regarding Blissett, I must point out that there are several english-speaking Luther Blissetts in UK, USA, Holland, Germany, Australia: I can provide several addresses if you want, also see the contacts list and English text found in Internet reprinted in issue 75 of Arte Postale! plus LB has written with Stewart Home the pamphlet Green Apocalypse and published another booklet in UK recently, Bob Black has written about LB in the USA, I included a text in english from John Berndt/LB in the book

Totò, Peppino e la guerra psichica, etc., but what is really interesting is how the Blissett project has managed to satisfactorily sabotage and infiltrate the big national media: never assume something isn't happening in the network if you do not know anything about it, I was also pleasingly shocked when I first found out about the Blissett project, just because it proved me that so much can be happening before that even a "seasoned" networker like me finds out about it...). Italy has always been at the forefront of mail art activities (just see the number of Italian participants to any catalogue, compared to the size of our country!), so it comes as no surprise to me that there is also a number of projects being developed in our own tongue (there are so many more things that you can do when everybody speaks fluently the same language!), a lot of small poetry magazines for example have opened their pages to mail art since the late seventies here, and I doubt a lot of these mags have spread beyond the borders, as they were all written in Italian. There are probably many reasons for this, but I guess it depends a lot on the strong background of political awareness of the average Italian student, the cultural agitation of the movements of protest of 1969, 1977, and of the early 90's really left their mark on several generations of

young people, who got used, among other things, to the mail art and networking ideas through several influential magazines (Amen, Decoder, Neural, Rumore - I wrote for years a "networking" column for the last two of these high circulation magazines, reaching thousands of readers - not to mention the small zines like Arte Postale!, Na, Fuck, Sorbo Rosso, Il Sorriso Verticale, Underground, etc.etc.) and books (Opposizioni 80, No Copyright, Last Trax, to name but a few). I think that besides Italy, maybe only in the USA (through the influential work of Factsheet Five, Global Mail, The Church of the SubGenius, Hakim Bey's "Immediatist" theories, Chuck Welch and John Held's books, etc.) the networking practice has become so widely rooted and accepted as a relevant contemporary cultural strategy belonging to everyone, and surely not limited to artistic practices. But inevitably this situation will gradually spread to larger cultural areas. Like millions of other people, I was thinking and doing "networking" for a long time before discovering about mail art, and I am & will be thinking and doing networking in and out of mail art also as I grow old.

RJ : The expanding of the network is mentioned by other mail artists as well as an important goal in

networking. Do you think that everybody can be an artist? Do you think that everybody can be a networker?

Reply on 11-5-1996

VB : Of course everyone can be an artist (good or bad, it does not matter), but this surely does not mean that everyone should be an artist! Luckily, we have all a different brain and a slightly different idea of what is good for us. As the old saying goes, differences are what really spice up the world. At the same time, a little bit of creativity surely makes your life more complete, just like a little bit of sport makes your body feel better. Those who never consider exploring their own creative potentials (and I don't mean they necessarily have to paint a picture, it can just be arranging the flowers in a vase, or making up a lullaby for your son, etc. etc.) surely are missing a good reason to live up to be 100 yrs old. The same applies to the fact that everybody can be a networker, with the difference that, strictly speaking, everybody already is a networker (of one sort or the other), unless he has always lived alone in a desert island with no form of communication available, not even with the birds and bees...

RJ : Another topic that seems to be very vivid at the moment in the USA is the mail art & money issue.

Lon Spiegelman introduced the sentence "money & mail art don't mix" more than a decade ago. What are your thoughts on this subject?

Answer on 5-7-1996

Question received on May 17, 1996, mailing of the answer delayed till July 1996 (the printer of Vittore's computer broke down at the same time he started his summer job)

VB : I just wrote a very long and detailed letter on this subject the other day, to an american networker called Joy who gave an university lecture on Fluxus & mail art: in that occasion the issue was raised of the fact I did offer in a recent issue of Arte Postale! magazine "slices" of my archive for sale (that was my provocative solution to the "space problem" discussed earlier in this interview). I reproduce here my letter (minus some personal remarks) that I think can sum up well my own position on the money issue.

"(...) Going straight to the "money & mail art do not mix" affair, I guess every generation of networkers is confronted with this same issue and reacts more or less in the same way. I was very active myself in the late seventies, campaigning for the unwritten "golden rules" of mail art (no jury, no rejects, no

prizes, no prices of admission, free catalogue to all, etc.) whenever I found someone trespassing the line of fair conduct by asking an admission fee to a mail art show or money for a mail art catalogue, etc.. At the time I even got myself into a little bit of trouble (by writing a provoking "purist" mail art leaflet in the mock-shape of a Red Brigades message...) and surely into endless postal debates, that sometimes spilled onto the pages of Umbrella and other network-related zines. What is nice but a bit boring at the same time is the fact that (misinterpretations aside, which anyway always abound!) my position was and is very much alike the one outlined in your letter, that is in turn very similar to the conclusions that any sensitive and judicious networker will get to with just a little pondering: the exchange is FREE, for each show or project (or magazine) ALL participants should receive a free copy of the documentation (surplus copies of catalogues and magazines can be sold to general public, of course, on a generally no profit basis), it is ethically very UNFAIR to sell archives (or single pieces of mail, for that matter!) you accumulated as personal gifts (though there is no law that can prevent you from doing it, if you really want), much better to donate them to interested institutions, and so on and on and on.

As I just said, this is all very reasonable and very simple to understand by everybody, but I just happen to have already lived the whole dispute a few times during my experience that spans several "generations" of networkers, so it is just getting a little more boring each time around... (I should simply reach back in my old papers and photocopy ten years old leaflets and articles, then circulate them again to show that nothing is changing - but I just don't have the time to search through my very chaotic archive... it's so much easier to think up something new!). Fact is, I don't like to play the networking game with a "boy scout attitude" - to quote an appropriate expression once used by my friend Al Ackerman - and instead of writing politically correct "netiquette" manifestos I much prefer to stimulate reactions on a given topic by playing pranks and hard-to-tell jokes (if it's too easy to spot, it is no more a good hoax), acting absurdly and (in my intention at least) "creatively". In the early eighties I devoted one whole issue of my *Arte Postale!* magazine to the Mail Art & Money dilemma, titled provokingly "Mail Art & Money DO Mix!" (a real coin glued to each cover) and documenting the reactions to a mail project for which I had sent several real banknotes, with amounts ranging from 1 to 50 dollars in different

currencies, to contacts around the globe, with humorous requests attached like: "buy me a gift with this money or drink it to my health" or "you are a wonderful artist, keep this money as payment of the mail you just sent me" or "you are a terrible artist, keep this money but please stop mailing me stuff"...

The same "absurdist" approach I adopted recently with the text ironically titled "The big sell out" included in a micro-issue of *Arte Postale!* #74. I had just read news of Ray Johnson's letters starting being marketed and of people selling or venting the idea of selling their archives, so I had this very instinctive guts reaction of coming up with a paradoxical idea for "selling out" my own archive as well (the cheapo "sharepiece" concept is an obvious parody of digital shareware), just to see how Net Land would have reacted to this move. I didn't really expect many hot reactions though, there seem to be less and less people in the mail art circles who really care about these issues, and in fact until today your phone call was the only hint of somebody taking my "molest proposal" seriously: I got no reactions at all in the mail, maybe people are too shy to point out that I am doing wrong and they prefer the back-stabbing gossip-spreading technique (my shoulders and conscience are large

enough to take in a lot of eventual bad vibes!), except for just one polite order in cash from a NY publisher/networker (I spent more than 50 dollars to assemble and mail his "share-piece", and he already thanked for it, I'm not sure he got the joke though). Of course, I knew very well that (almost) NOBODY would have spent 50 dollars to get a bunch of old battered letters artistically arranged by me, and even if I DID get an handful of orders, I could manufacture a few "archive share-pieces" by using some of the semi-junk mailart I receive daily and I always end up recycling into my works anyway. It should be clear to you by now that I am not an anal retentive archivist, I always loved to PLAY with the stuff I receive, I recycle most of the envelopes and useless Xeroxes so I never have to buy envelopes and stationery - this saves trees, by the way - there are pieces I receive that I treasure and others that I throw away and others that I play with, I believe it is my right to do so, just as others can do what they want with what I send them.

One key concept here I think is the "no profit" bias of what you do with your mail art archive, not HOW you use it. Not all of us are collectors at heart or have the time and energy to file orderly thousands of pieces. I have often tried to print top quality issues of my zine Arte Postale! or of other

networking-related projects (like the TRAX series) and I always lost A LOT of money in the process. I always mailed free (expensively by air mail) copies to ALL the participants contributors to ALL my projects, and then I tried to sell the remaining copies to cover at least part of the printing costs, but I soon learned that people who are in the mail art network just plain don't like to buy stuff (it's totally OK for me, and that's why since 1993 my mail art zine has become smaller and with no price attached), while distribution through other underground or official channels just proved not to work at all (very few copies sold, and two distributors out of three will not bother ever paying you back, I still got credits pending all over the world...). I was never inclined nor lucky in getting funds for my projects from any kind of organization or institution, I always preferred to work independently with no pressures or hustles from anybody, this also means that when I have done a good publication or a small hand-assembled catalogue I always paid from my pocket, giving what I believe is a fair "gift" in exchange for the materials submitted to my projects. I sure wish half of the projects I enter into every year would do the same, but usually it's just a two pages Xeroxed list of addresses you get, which I find most of all a very

un-artistic practice. Even with just two photocopies you can do wonderful mini-books... Though I have a good "normal" job, helping out my father in his Hotel business from May to September, plus another low-income job all the year round as a professional rock journalist and freelance writer, I find more and more difficult to keep up with the cost of running a family and at the same time communicating with hundreds of friends, that's why sometimes I have to keep silent for months or why I haven't been able yet to save enough money to buy me a modem, a bigger computer, a subscription to a server and start up using E-mail, as I'm sure I will do in a not too distant future. But I assure you I never intended to become rich by selling pieces of my history, I'd rather starve or sell my record collection than part ways with letters like yours, that have touched a nerve of my being (and that's the essence of NETWORKING to me)."

RJ : Well, maybe this interview will touch some more nerves of other networkers when it hits the network. I guess with the Summer that has already started, it is time to end the interview unless I forgot something important to ask you?

Reply on 17-7-1996 (complete text via e-mail)

(The last answer from Vittore Baroni came together with a 58 KByte file which contained the complete text of the interview. So far Vittore has been the first to type all answers on his computer, and therefore I only had to adjust the complete text on my own text-processor a bit for the final result)

VB : I really enjoyed answering to your questions and I am a bit sad that this is the last one, as I am sure there are numberless things worth discussing about mail art that have been left out (memories of Cavellini, the Neoist Camps and APT fests, the TRAX saga, marriages arranged and broken through MA, etc. etc.). I believe that a project like your "mail-interviews" is very important to the spirit of mail art, exactly like the Decentralized Congresses of past years, because it activates on a (semi)public level A COLLECTIVE REFLECTION on a phenomenon that tends naturally to remain invisible and private. Yours was a very simple idea, but that will surely be fertile of positive results, and for this I must thank you enormously. As this seem to be already a very long interview, I will end up very briefly with the hope that other projects with the relevance of your "mail-interviews" will continue to appear now and then unexpectedly in the mail art net, giving back strength and voice to a warm sense of community that often seems to

dissolve into "silent" and mechanical exchanges.
DO KEEP IN TOUCH!

SVJETLANA MIMICA

THE MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH SVJETLANA MIMICA (CROATIA)

Started on: 4-11-1994

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

Reply on: 17-03-1995

Svjetlana Mimica : Well, how and when I entered in mail art. It has been during '89 when I first met (late?) Tihomir Govoskovich, Croat from Vojvodina (ex-Yugoslavia). We met each other casually, via one magazine for meeting new loves. We've never become more than friends, but really very good friends. As he knew I draw (in that time, I used ink and pencils in my art and made drawings of various shells, which has been my favorite motive), he gave me good advice (I didn't think I'm so good!) and - an invitation for a mail art action WEST-EAST in Seattle at CW-Post-AFGN Gallery. I

sent materials and waited for a year to receive an answer! The answer came from a young artist-writer Carli Andrechak from Seattle. We had some projects together during '90 and '91, but when the war began, we've lost the contact. The reasons you know (reasons from her side). I've never heard again from her or from Tihomir. I only knew he's been arrested by Serbian chetniks and (probably, maybe) killed. I plan to stay in mail art all my life, in any situation. Mail art helped me to survive psychically in bad events of the war and gave me beautiful friendships and experiences.

RJ : Can you tell me a bit more about how the mail art contacts changed since the beginning of the war. How did it change things for you?

Reply on : 28-4-1995

SM : At the beginning of the war against Croatia '91 a lot of mail art contacts have been lost because of the embargo on our frontiers (at the beginning of the war, Serbian Army stopped all mail & trade on the Croatian frontiers, so the sacks of mail have been lost forever!). After the liberation of frontiers by Croatian Army, mail fluctuated again. It was sometimes strange and opened enemy-letters from some Serbs (ex-friends) and their sympathizers from abroad. I tried to tell them the truth which I

saw with my own eyes and ears, from my own experience! Some of the foreign mail-artists needed a lot of time to understand the truth! Some of them never understood. But, I also met really good people who helped us with food and art-materials from time to time. I can only thank calmly to all who helped and help me!

Prices of the mail get higher, so I can continue my mail-art activity only with help of very good friends in the network and some others who help me to send my private mail (not mail-art). I don't want to lose good friendship because of the mail-prices! I hope it'd be better if I could go to work abroad. And I hope that old lost contacts will continue again. That we can find a way together for making art and make a mail art international Fellowship (or brotherhood). We can also establish International Association for help to each other. I wrote more about that in my last year's issues of the "Light" - review.

RJ : Could you tell a bit more about the magazines that you publish?

Reply on : 15-06-1995

(Between the sending of the third question and receiving the answer to this lots of things happened

in Bosnia. The UN bombarded the area Pale near Sarajevo-center after an attack of Bosnian Serbs on Sarajevo. And as a result the Bosnian Serbs took hundreds of UN-observers as hostages. New troops from the UN are flown into Split-airport, to form a 'rapid response force' for future events. At the moment I receive the answer most hostages are released, and the extra troops are in Croatia and partly already in Bosnia. Nobody knows what will happen next)

SM : Sorry, I can't find your third question anymore. Maybe you asked me about my zines. I'm sorry, but I packed my art-materials in case of new bombardments, so I don't know where it is now.

Well, I started with "Light of the he-Art" in early 90's and it became more popular during 1991 , during the Serbian attack on Croatia. It's been a sort of usual mail-art newsletter, with some funny texts , interviews on the streets, poetry and from 1994 with black & white photos and little gifts. It goes monthly and is written in English. The other zine, called "Serious Intentions", has 10 to 20 A4 pages, black & white , texts , photo's , Xeroxes , reports , interviews, etc. It goes since 1992. The first time it was an underground-zine, with half A4 pages. Till 1994 it became A4 paged, with gift, and it is issued

every 3 months. I also edit "International Poetry Magazine" once a year, and I am preparing some new publications (Global Art , Emotions , and Obsession). Every of them is some sort of free catalogue of mine of some other art or literature works. They are all made on the computer since 1993. I plan to edit some zines in Italian language too.

RJ : In your "Light of the He-Art" you often interviewed people in the street. You also tried to explain them about mail-art. Have you succeeded in that or is mail-art something only understandable by people who practice it?

Reply on : 28-06-1995

SM: Yes, I always tried to explain to the people, who I interviewed on the streets, what mail art really is. Only few of them (people who worked abroad) knew what I was talking about. The most of all others showed some suspicion. They don't believe it can function without money, so they refused to collaborate on the exhibitions I gave them instructions "how to do". I think mail art can be understandable only to people who lived abroad and know "how Europeans live wonderful". Maybe the most clear answer I received from one young artist last week: "What can you expect here? People

live bad, very bad, they haven't even the everyday food. While lots of them commit suicide, you can't expect enthusiasm & creativity of young artists, unemployed and with so many existential problems...."! When you haven' got the food + life, you can't think about some other "luxury" things.... or maybe you can.... The sense of man is to combat the bad situations and to win them. I think so... and try to live so!

RJ : For most mail-artists it is quite easy to mail out some letters a week. What problems are you facing if you want to mail - for example - a letter to me. Can you just buy a postage stamp and put the envelope in a mail-box (as for most mail-artists in non-war zones it does)?

Reply on 28-7-1995

SM: No, I can't just buy a stamp and put it in the mail-box. It's usual if I send letters inside my own country. But is I mail it abroad, I have to bring it, opened to the officer and to explain what I send and why, who i.e. are you. I know they'll read it when I go out, not in the same post-office, but spies who work only on opening the letters. When I started with mail art, every letter I received has been wildly opened, the same with my letters abroad.... Even now, but only if I write to some new

person or some new person writes to me. I receive opened letter or something misses.... stamp or some invitation.... I can't color envelopes, if I do it, post-office wouldn't receive it, they don't like to receive stickered (with stickers) letters and if I put a rubber stamp they treat it as an official letter. The same control exist on the phone-lines (they are listened, but not always) or if I gave a small announce in the local papers - for friendship, someone called me and asked strange things - they wanted to know (they always act as foreigners, but with very bad English!) if I am interested in export- import job, drug abuse or simply sex.... It was very wildly. Then it stopped. I receive all letters closed now, because they know all addresses I correspond with. I know they'll read it. It was in a local paper '91 , but somebody negated it; the reaction of people has been justifiable right against such a practice!

And postal rates grow higher from time to time. We have to pay extra taxes for every letter abroad (not for inside my country). That's all.... I can't send letters so often because of that, especially to non-European countries. Very few officers know what IRC is! Nobody understands mail-art. "What is this?" they always ask, and when I explain, they don't understand. Sending packages outside the country is very complicated, with custom duties, a

lot of questions etc. It is not easy to be a mail-artist here, but even a hobbyist of correspondence. You are promptly under suspicion! Now all employees in the local post-office know me well and they are polite, but if I'd go to some other office... the procedures will be strong again.

RJ : How do you explain mail-art to somebody that doesn't know it. Could you tell me what you think mail-art is all about?

(Between the receiving of the answer and the sending of the next question the war started again in Croatia. This time the Croatian army attacked the Kraijina-area, the part of Croatia that was occupied by Bosnian Serbs. But which part of land belongs to whom is difficult to say in this former Yugoslavia.....)

Reply on 28-8-1995

SM : For me, mail art is an avant-garde process in art between artists who want to communicate and make actions together. When I try to explain "what's it all about", people always ask me: "But, is it payable?" When I explain, they seem disappointed and try to undertake me. They always say that I do it in the wind and even say that I am "mad" in their eyes. "Silly lady who make it without money!". I try to explain mail art with the help of

the texts you and Ruggero Maggi wrote. And I always see people look puzzled as if they see lies. They expect more money possibilities, and when there are none, they treat me as a guilty person! (When I want to give mail-art invitations to someone the first question is: "How it can work without money? You do believe I'll give my works moneyless and without salary? Are you stupid?" I had extremely ugly situations and I feel ashamed for the mentality in my country, especially in my town. Money is God to Split's people, and I'm a black sheep between them.

RJ : Sending out mail for you is now difficult. I also remember that once your mail-box even was stolen. Does all the mail sent to you arrive. Do you have any indication what is lost?

Reply on 12-9-1995

(Between the sending of the latest question and receiving of Svjetlana's answer lots of things happened in Bosnia. The UN and the NAVO started bombing targets near Sarajevo to try to convince the Bosnian Serbs to move their larger weapons from the 'safe zone', till today with no success. In Geneva the talks about a peace-settlement are progressing but if peace is near, nobody knows....)

SM : Yes, sending out mail is now difficult for me. See the reasons in my earlier answers! Once or twice my mail box was stolen, too. Some letters never arrive or arrived opened (visible to touch) or go to the customs where I have to pay enormous amount of money only "for seeing inside" (they tell so - inspection of the inside costs!). And nobody asks you, do you agree with it. The most of the mail from persons they already know arrives to me. The new persons are under suspicion for them and their letters are always opened or destructed or just don't come! I have indications what is lost only if people write me 2nd or 3rd time and say what they've sent. Sometimes postmen robbed the letters or money. I know such cases. Fortunately, our postman is good. So, the robber is somebody else. Who? Sometimes they (the robbers) are newcomers or children (teenagers from bandit's local groups). I can't indicate what misses to me if the person doesn't write me again. Or if I write to somebody new and he doesn't answer, I can think 2 solutions: 1) he/she wrote, but it didn't come, 2) he/she didn't reply. What's the truth?

Sometimes, I know some countries from where the letters don't arrive well (or they're missed and lost) - some from Belgium or from South Italy. It's very often. Other countries are O.K.. Russia, Romania

and Hungary are always problem. I never received any documentation or letter from these countries. Documentations from the USA are often stolen, because they are nice and interesting!

RJ : You also started now to work on a new zine called "Vidik". What is this magazine about?

Reply on 7-10-1995

SM: Yes, I also started now to work on a new zine called "Vidik" (the View). What is the magazine about? First I have to say that "Vidik" is NOT a mail art magazine, it is not mine, private fanzine, but a state's literature, poetry and art review, with strong judgment made by a group of Croatian (local) writers, poets and painters, including me, as a director of Redaction. It'd go 6 times in a year and prints work from anonymous young artists - from 15 to 20 years old max. We hope to find people that are interested to collaborate (they'd be payed) in the local high schools and universities, as through the newspapers and TV-net too. Foreign authors are also welcomed (I'll make translations of texts and poetry into Croatian language, texts and poetry needed, but b/w photo's are also welcome. When you'd send us works, send your CV too, thank you! We are preparing the first issue at the moment.

(between the receiving of Sojetlana's answer and the sending out of my next question, a temporary stop has come to the fighting in Bosnia, but still the situation is unclear. The war might intensify, or real peace might become a reality.)

RJ : After you written your last answer, the situation in Bosnia has changed a lot. What is the news you get about the situation in your own country? I watch the local news (Dutch, German and English news) and see the CNN-news channel. Am I getting a good view about the situation from that?

Reply on 6-11-95

SM: The situation in Bosnia and Croatia now. I think the whole situation is getting better (peace?), but some places in Croatia are still occupied (Vukovar, Banaiya) and it's needed to liberate them. Bosnia is still hell on Earth. When will it be changed? The NATO-troops will be welcomed. Our papers don't talk so much about Bosnia! This week is ELECTION-week! Today I'll go to vote. I don't expect any changes at the top. All politicians only promise to change the bad inner situation (unemployment etc.), some of them want to stop the import of foreign goods (like in socialism). I can only hope they won't win! We need good, new state, not an eastern closed country like before! I

don't know if CNN has right or not. I don't have the time to watch TV!

RJ : The mail art network is changing rapidly now because some mail artists are changing their communication-forms and start using the electronic mail (e-mail) with the help of computers and computer-networks. Some do it because it is cheaper for them, but the letters become digital messages on a computer-screen. What do you think of these developments?

Reply on 25-11-1995

SM: I don't believe that the new kinds of E-mail and copy computer art will replace mail art. These new kinds of "art movements" (for me) kills the sense of really valuable mail art works. Letter and art work remain the only existing valuable thing in mail art. Personal work on the paper or canvas or... anything but not an electronic, cold light of PC! I use the PC not for art (I haven't modem), copy art from mailing zines, but I don't feel it as a real art! It's a way of communication for very few persons who have PC's and fax. What about others? Mail art isn't society of a "few artists" from the richest countries, but of the artists from all over the world. E-art work in the Museum? Oh, no! It's anti-artistic! The cold

world of cyberpunk. I mean, it's similar to it from some point of view.

RJ : Well, I guess it is time to end this interview now. The peace seems nearer than ever with the signing of the peace-treaty in USA, and I hope the coming time things will get better in all parts of the former Yugoslavia. I want to thank you for this interview!

The MAIL INTERVIEW newsletter

(Original Newsletter as published in 2001 to document this long-time project)

Exploring MAIL ART and the new ways of communication:



The MAIL INTERVIEW project.

The Mail Interview project started in 1994. This is the newsletter that explains the History, the process, and to be short all important aspects of the project.

ISSUE: December 2001

TAM PUBLICATIONS Nr. 010391

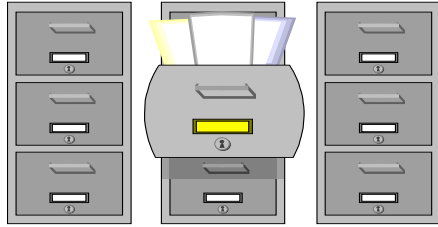
The MAIL-INTERVIEW project

This Mail-Interview project in fact is the investigation, to find out why others do MAIL ART, how they started and how the new communication-forms affect the way the mail artists work. This newsletter is updated several times a year, so the text is changed when something new happens with the project.

The history of the project

The Mail Interview project started in October 1994. I remember reading a copy of an interview published in the magazine ND, and was very interested in the story the mail artists were telling. Only a few hours later I decided to start some interviews myself. Not in the traditional way...

The interviews I wanted to do should go by mail, but since this isn't the only way the mail artists communicate, I



extended the idea and would allow all possible communication forms for the process. The fun would be that there are no rules for this. I send out the first question, and choose my communication-form, and the receiver can decide for himself/herself, which form to choose for the answer.

A nice example of how this can go is the interview with Peter Küstermann from Germany. He called me and gave a verbal first answer. I recorded the answer, transcribed it and sent the answer with the next question to him. He stated to me that he wanted to use as much as possible the different communication-forms, but as it is now he hasn't replied to the last question for a long time.

The process of the interviews has changed over the years. At first I made one series of 12 people I wanted to interview. But as time passes by and sometimes the answers came only in after long times, there grew a series of interviews. At the moment the seventh series is

underway and none of the series are completely finished yet today (1998).

After starting up the first interviews there soon came the moment when to decide what to do with the finished interviews. To keep track of all the words that come in and go out, I have typed all these questions and answers into my computer. Once the interview is ready it is only a simple task to print the final texts. But here I developed the principle to send the complete text to the interviewed artist, and to ask him/her to proofread. The first interview to get ready was Michael Leigh's interview, and after receiving his reactions, I made a booklet out of the interview in a small edition and sent it to some of the other mail artists I was interviewing. That was the start of the booklets, with as a reaction that: more mail artists wanted to read the interviews and asked for the booklets.

The publishing of this first booklet reminded me of the fact that it was the beginning of a larger series, so the cost factor was involved. Not only the interviewed artists would be interested in the interviews, in fact the whole mail art network would like to read them. These factors lead to the situation in which it is now. A large series of interview booklets have been published and people are able to subscribe to the series. Because not everybody has the money to subscribe I looked for another way to make the

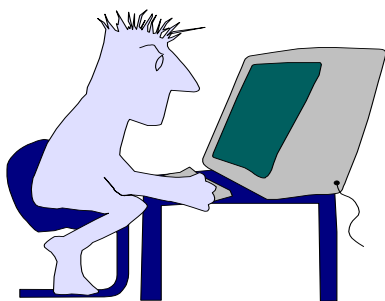
texts available, and that lead to publishing the texts on the Internet (thanks to the help of Jas W. Felter in Canada)

Publishing of interviews

After the first published booklet, things went very fast. Today's over 36 booklets have been published and more will come out in the future. The publishing of the booklets is a process on its own. The first were a bit primitive, but gradually I invested more time to do the layout and to make them look better. In 1997 I even started with the making of colour-versions for the interviewed artist, and also sometimes others take over the publishing of the booklet-version.

Vittore Baroni published his interview as a special edition of ARTE POSTALE! , and the interviews with Tim Mancusi & Guy Bleus will be published by The Sticker Dude (Joel) in New York , USA. As time passes by more experiments will be undertaken. To give you an idea, the upcoming interview with Jonathan Stangroom will contain in it a specially made copy-art work by Jonathan himself.

Publishing on the WWW



One of the communication-forms I was interested in is the electronic form. Since I work a lot with computers, I started to use the Internet as well end of 1994. This meant I could send and receive e-mail messages as well. How

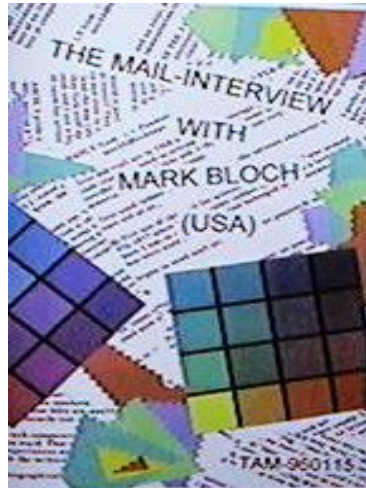
to arrange a Web-Site was then still unknown to me. Jas W. Felter from Canada was already experimenting in that field and I asked him for help. He then offered to publish the interviews in his Museum-Library, and after experimenting with the sending of complete interview-files, he transformed them into HTML-documents for me and put them online.

Changes in 1996. Thanks to Joy McManus (USA) I got the address of Geocities in Los Angeles, and Joy even arranged the site for me. This free space I started to fill since June 1996, and my learning of HTML-language started. I built up the site in steps, but only as a kind of medium between all the texts that I have produced. The interviews are still put online by Jas W. Felter, who I owe a great THANK YOU for all the work he has done for me. Thanks to this

publishing online, the interview became accessible for everybody.

Subscribing to the Interviews

Unlike what most people might think, there are only very few subscribers to the mail interview booklets. At this moment only 8 subscribers and most of them are subscribers for a long time. Bruno Sourdin from France is the one who subscribed for a very long time. Sometimes I get those letters, mail artists asking for all the interviews, and they don't realise what kinds of costs are involved.



The latest subscriber is the Library of the MoMa (Museum of Modern Art in New York). They already received the complete set of the interview-booklets (since I think it is important that the information is available in these kind of institutions as well). Their reaction was that they wanted to subscribe to

the upcoming issues. Subscribing to the interviews means you get the booklet-versions, always the extended versions. Sometimes there are special things that belong to the interview, and when you order back-issues you are never sure if you'll get it complete. I mostly make limited editions (like 70 or 50 copies) , and once they are gone, I only can send you the print-out of the text. The costs of subscribing is at the moment US\$ 3,-- inside Europe. Outside Europe it costs US\$ 4,-- This only covers the real costs since I don't make any profit out of this project at all (in fact each interview probably costs me several hundreds of dollars!). If you want to order older issues, please ask for the form I made for this. Due to the limited edition I normally print I only have a limited amount of booklets available and sometimes certain issues are already sold out. This printing out of the text is something everybody could do since these texts are put online as well. Ask anybody you know who has access to the interviews, and he can find all at:

<http://www.iuoma.org/>

On this site you have access also the other things I have done, like the newsletter of the TAM Rubber Stamp archive, the 'thoughts about mail-art' texts, the ' secret thoughts about mail-art' series, and even a copy of this newsletter. Also information about the IUOMA, texts from other mail-artists and links to several other sites connected to mail-art.

Overview

Over the years lots of interviews are published. In previous newsletters you can find the overviews of the publications. In 1995 I used to do two different versions. One was just the plain text, and a special edition was made including illustrations. For these illustrations I used the artefacts that I gathered during the interview-process. This might include enveloped, copies of FAX-messages, e-mails, etc.

What happened after these first interviews is that people suggested that I should interview myself. A silly proposal in my eyes, as if I would know which questions to ask myself. I then told the ones who asked such a

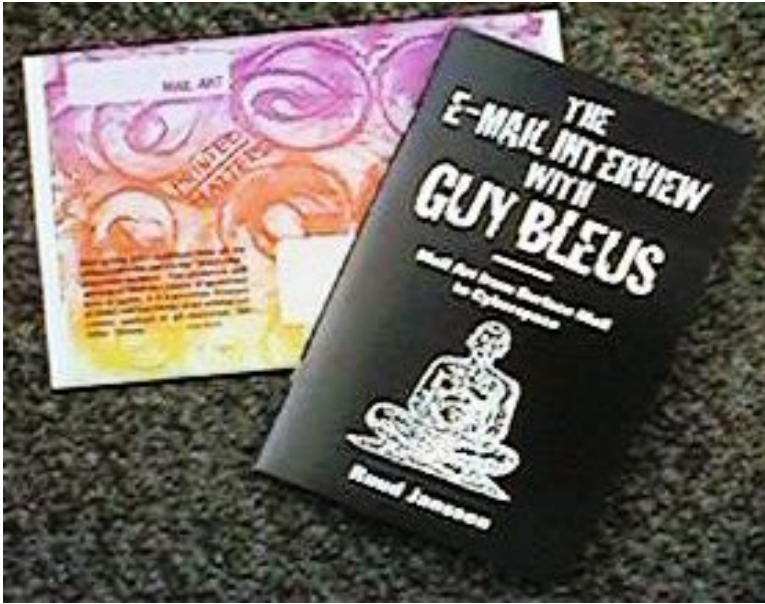


question to start an interview on their own which I would include in the series. As you can see in the next year those interviews came out as well.

The interview with Ray Johnson is a story on its own. I never expected that he would reply to my mail, but strange enough he instantly replied to the first question. Typical

Ray, but he answered in his own unique way. On the invitation there is the text that one could answer in any length one would like. Ray wrote on the invitation the length of the diagonal of the A4 paper I sent to him and asked for the next question. Sadly enough the third question I sent to Ray never got answered. On January 13th he committed suicide in New York.

For the year 1998 some more interviews are already scheduled. Although some of the booklets of 1997 still have to be published, the process of finishing the interviews is sometimes not in my hands. The simultaneous aspect of the interviews causes that. One of the interviews that ended was with Edgardo Antonio Vigo. I sent him the 'traditional' last question in which I ask if there is nothing I forget to ask. A way to give the interviewed artist a chance to say whatever he wants. In Edgardo's case, the answer never came because he died end of 1997. Another sad detail is that the interview I did with Dick Higgins (USA) was one of his last ones. He died last November 1998 in Canada. Also Norman Solomon died before I was able to conclude the interview. It seems he was seriously ill and his wife informed me after his death that Norman explained her he wished the interview would be published anyway.



A careful reader will notice that there is again an interview published with John Held Jr. The reason for that is quite simple. The first part of his interview was done while he was in Dallas. The last mail he sent from there was for the interview, and he moved to San Francisco. I even met him there, where he was working for the Stamp Art Gallery together with Bill Gaglione (the Gallery stopped to exist end of 1997...!) And the second part of the interview explains what happened in San Francisco. Also the interview with Litsa Spathi will be published in parts. The first one is textual (and in German language). The second part will be a visual one (as an experiment I will try to publish the visual part on the Internet as well).

At the moment I am far behind with the printing of the interview-booklets. Some interviews are finished and already published on the Internet, but the booklets still have to be printed. Also some interviews are waiting to be continued. After 3 years of this intensive work I am taking a break. Soon I hope to continue with this work, and already some interviews are started again. The name of the people whose interview is now in progress is still not published. I send out these papers in which people can suggest others to be interviewed. This on its own is a project too. Some mail artists suggest themselves, while others make good suggestions and mention a reason as well. I plan to publish these papers as well, but there is only that much a single person can do.

Future Plans with the Interviews

Lots of ideas for the future, but I will see what is possible. It is always a matter of time, money, and possibilities. But I will give you an idea of the plans:

First plan is to publish a book with most of the interviews. Problem is to find a publisher. Since the first priority was to get the interviews read by others, the texts are already published on the Internet, so the final book has not first

priority. The whole process of the interviews has produced a lot of artefacts also, and that would make a nice documentation.

Second plan is to exhibit the complete artefacts the mail interviews brought to me. All the mail, letters, envelopes, enclosures to the answers, it is enough to fill a museum. Guy Bleus already exhibited the booklets end of 1997. All booklets that got published in 1996 and 1997 were exhibited at his E-mail art space in Hasselt. Maybe when the complete project is finished I could interest the Postal Museums for this. They are faced with the changing world of communication as well, and most Postal Museums have shown interest in mail art the last years. They might even help in getting this first plan realised. Through my internet-site I already got an invitation from the Queens Library Gallery in New York to send in some work for their upcoming exhibition about "Fluxus, Mail-Art and Net.works". No surprises since all three aspects come out clearly in my project. The recently purchased book "Fluxus Codex" (by Hendricks, published by Abrams, easy to order through Amazon.com electronic bookshop), shows clearly how Fluxus and Mail-Art are connected. Also I did interview some Fluxus-Artists, and some interviews that are in progress have some nice and funny connections.

Third plan is to translate the interviews into other languages. Some are already available in Spanish (online

and hardcopy by P.O.Box in Barcelona), and soon they might be available in Italian and Russian too (I have given permission to translate and publish some interviews in that language). There are also interviews in progress in the German language, and who knows I might find time to translate some of them into Dutch. The first interview in German that got finished was with Litsa Spathi from Heidelberg (Germany), and three more interviews are in progress in this language. As a Dutchman I learned three foreign languages at school, so I know the language quite well, an advantage) But for the time being I will have to find time first to continue the time-costing process of doing the interviews. The mail-artists that sometimes write me don't understand the work that is involved in the process of one interview. The retyping of all the texts, the cost of the mail , the time it takes to understand the way the interview is going and to see to it that the interview shows what the hell mail art is all about. Last problem is always to get the finished interview ready to be read by others. Correcting the text, and getting it published (on the WWW and the booklets).

As told before, at the moment I have taken a break with the interviews. Because of some changes in my life (like a new job and new interests in art) I have stopped the process for a while. It is my aim to continue and complete the project. To publish the last set of interviews that are underway. People who subscribed to the interviews and already have

sent in money don't have to worry. They will get their copies eventually, or will get their money back. If someone wants to subscribe to the future-issues, that is possible as well. But I am not doing this project to earn money, nor is anyone doing mail-art to get rich....

Please copy and publish this text if you want. I only will send out a limited number of copies into the mail art network.

Ruud Janssen - TAM

APPENDIX-1

(Overview some historical dates – published in 2001)

October 1994: Start of the mail-interview project

1995: The first hard-copy versions of the interviews hit the network and the possibility of subscriptions.

June 1996: The first texts are put on the internet. With the help of Jas W. Felter (Canada) a virtual library is built at his site. On my own site more background information about my many activities are accessible and links to other mail art related information are made.

October 1996: Meeting with several people I am interviewing / have interviewed, in California , USA , while I was there for the exhibition of the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive at the Stamp Art Gallery

- December 1997: Exhibition of the Mail-Interview project and some of my mail-art at the Cultural Center in Hasselt, Belgium , organized by Guy Bleus.
- 1998: A break in the process of the interviews because of other activities & change of job. The Sticker Dude (USA) publishes interviews in a professional way (Guy Bleus & Tim Mancusi) , And P.O. Box (Spain) published Spanish translations of Interviews with Clemente Padin and Edgardo Antonio Vigo. Also the first interview in German language appears (Litsa Spathi)
- 1999: The mail-interview project is part of an exhibition in New York (USA) at the Queens Library Gallery called: "Fluxus, Mail-Art and Net.works" (January/March 1999). First visual interview is published on the Internet.
- 2000: Interviews that got finished in 2000 or later are only published on the

internet. No booklets are published yet.

2001:

To end up the mail-interview project all unfinished interviews are gradually being published on the Internet. Preparation of a book with these last sets of interviews and a selection of previously published interviews is researched.

Dec 2001:

All unfinished interviews are published at www.iuoma.org and this newsletter is published.

APPENDIX-2

(Overview of Archives the interviews are available in)

1. Sackner Archives - Florida - USA.
2. Museum of Modern Art Library - New York - USA.
3. TAM-Archive - Breda - Netherlands.
4. Modern Realism Archive - San Francisco - USA.
5. HeMi-Archive - Frankfurt/Main - Germany.
6. Administration Centre - Wellen - Belgium.
7. Perneczky Archive - Köln - Germany.
8. Spillkammeret Collection - Denmark.
9. Artpool Research Center - Hungary.
10. EON - Archive - Via Reggio - Italy.
11. The Museum Of Communication - Bern - Switzerland.
12. Nobody Press Collection - Heidelberg - Germany.
13. JCM - The Museum Library - Canada.
14. Signal Review Archive - Beograd - Yugoslavia.
15. National Centre For Contemporary Art - Kalingrad - Russia.
16. Staatliches Museum Schwerin - Schwerin - Germany.
17. Museum für Post und Kommunikation - Berlin - Germany.
18. Banana Mail-Art Archive - Sechelt - Canada.
19. Clemente Padin Archive - Montevideo - Uruguay.
20. Eternal Network Archive (Chuck Wlesh) - Hanover - USA.
21. R.A.T. Mail-Art Archive - Liege - Belgium.
22. Günther Ruch's Archive - Genève - Switzerland.
23. VEC Archive - Maastricht - Netherlands.
24. Documenta Archive – Kassel – Germany.

NB. Not every archive has the complete collection, but the mentioned sources have mostly about 20 or more interviews in their collection. The JCM - Collection has them in digital form online.

INDEX

Africa	223
Afzet	43
Al Ackerman	45, 186, 261
Albert Fine	42, 44
Amazon	174, 215, 216, 292
Amsterdam	44, 96, 100, 126, 127, 128, 132
Anna Banana	44, 96, 106, 110
Anne-Miek Bibbe	71
Art Naphro	44
Arte Postale!	228, 231, 233, 236, 238, 242, 243, 245, 248, 256, 259, 261, 263
artistamps	85, 87, 91, 92, 93, 94, 112, 119, 247, 254
Artpool Research Center	298
<i>ascii</i>	133
Ashley Parker Owen	197
assemblings	201, 202
Barcelona	292
BART	91
BBS.....	134, 255
Belgium... 11, 60, 106, 112, 237, 244, 276, 296, 298, 299	
Ben Vautier	11, 236
Bern Porter	50, 51
Bill Dobbs	44
Bill Gaglione	44, 85, 106, 128, 141, 290

Birger Jesh.....	53, 54, 56
Bosnia	270, 275, 277, 278
Box of Water	194, 195
Brain Cell	35
Brazil.....	47, 128, 222
Breda.....	3, 8
Bruno Sourdin	287
Canada.....	284, 285, 289, 295, 298
Carlo Pittore	12, 13, 14, 44
Cavellini.....	44, 59, 96, 106
censorship.....	38, 40, 56, 236
Christo	146, 148
Chuck Welch	18
Church of the SubGenius	254, 257
Clinch Magazine.....	17
CNN.....	134, 277, 278
Commonpress.....	53, 203
computer	18, 20, 30, 38, 45, 47, 54, 72, 87, 94, 100, 107, 127, 130, 131, 132, 134, 136, 142, 143, 172, 181, 184, 220, 221, 223, 227, 229, 246, 249, 259, 264, 265, 271, 278, 283
Congress	15, 230
Correspondence Art	15, 86
Crackerjack Kid	18, 109, 111, 132, 222
Dada	205
Dadaland	96
Dallas	290
Daniel Plunkett.....	77
DDR	54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 61
decentralized congresses	249

Decentralized Networker Congress	17
Dick Higgins.....	289
DNC92	250
Documenta Archive.....	299
Ed Plunkett	44
Edgardo Antonio Vigo	289, 296
Enrico Baj.....	217
envelopes... 68, 69, 87, 92, 123, 145, 148, 185, 228, 233, 247, 262, 273, 292	
Ever Arts.....	137
FAX.....	288
Fluxus 8, 40, 87, 89, 97, 100, 123, 146, 163, 213, 233, 259, 292, 296	
Fluxus Codex.....	292
France	11, 287
Frankfurt.....	298
G.A. Cavellini	226
G.A.C	226
Galantai	59, 137
Gazetta.....	55
Geff Hendricks	44
George Maciunas.....	213
Germany	283, 293, 298, 299
Géza Perneckzy	230
Global Mail	39, 78, 103, 197, 198, 230, 236, 257
Greta Garbo	150
Günther Ruch	11, 14, 299
Guillermo Deisler	59, 60
Guy Bleus 46, 59, 103, 133, 135, 137, 138, 141, 142, 243, 285, 292, 296	

Hans-Ruedi Fricker	11
Heidelberg	293, 298
Heigndesign	24
HeMi	298
Henning Mittendorf	55, 58
Henryk Gajewski	128, 137
Holland	60, 71, 81, 106, 136, 237, 256
Honoria	8
Hungary	276, 298
Internet	8, 284, 285, 291, 297
interview	8, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 295, 296, 297
invitations	12, 47, 59, 107, 117, 137, 224, 235, 274
Irene Dogmatic	84
Italy	11, 60, 298
IUOMA	288
Jan van Eyck Academy	126, 140
Japan	57, 138, 217
Jas W. Felter	284, 285, 286, 295
John Evans	42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 168, 169
John Held Jr	25, 26, 79, 141, 230, 290
John M. Bennett	138
Jonathan Stangroom	285
Joy McManus	286
Judith A. Hoffberg	96
Jürgen Olbrich	11
Julia Tant	24
Karen Elliot	252
Ken Friedman	97, 100
Klaus Groh	197, 205

Kurt de Gooyer	98
Leonard Frank-Dutch	128
Litsa Spathi	290, 293, 296
Lon Spiegelman	11, 58, 100, 102
Luther Blissett	251, 253, 254
Mail Queen	83, 84, 86
mail-art	11, 16, 22, 50, 53, 54, 77, 288, 294, 296
Mail-Interview project	282, 296
Marie Stilkind	151
Marilyn Monrou	24
Mario Rossi	253
Mark Bloch	43, 44
Mark Pawson	235, 241
May Wilson	44, 146
medium	286
Michael Leigh	44, 71, 283
Michael Northam	80
modem	20, 132, 228, 264, 279
Modern Realism Archive	298
MoMa	8
Mondriaan	212
Monty Cantsin	251, 252
Museum of Modern Art Library	298
Museum-Library	286
N D	77, 78, 79, 80
ND	282
New York.....	8, 13, 45, 50, 88, 102, 109, 145, 148, 149, 150, 155, 156, 160, 163, 168, 169, 285, 287, 289, 292, 296, 298
Nobody	298

Nomo-The-Zine	180, 182, 183
Norman Solomon	289
Open World	197
Pat Tavenner.....	44, 110
Patricia Collins.....	63, 69
Patricia Tavenner.....	81, 91
Pauline Smith	44
Pawel Petasz	11, 58, 59, 137, 203
performance.....	12, 47, 79, 126, 130, 141, 250
Peter Küstermann.....	283
Peter Küstermann from.....	283
Peter W. Kaufmann	17
Philip Glass.....	145, 147
Photomail	175
Piermario Ciani.....	252, 254
Piotr Rypson	128
Postal Museums	112, 292
postal system	20, 104, 106
Queens Library Gallery	292, 296
R.A.T. Mail-Art Archive.....	299
Raphael Nadolny.....	34, 36
Ray Johnson. 42, 44, 50, 59, 85, 103, 104, 122, 145, 147, 149, 151, 154, 157, 158, 160, 161, 162, 163, 182, 213, 222, 226, 230, 236, 261, 289	
Renegade Library	25
Richard Lippold	146, 149
Robert Rocola	122, 123
Robin Crozier	63, 242
Robin James	79
Rod Summers	126, 127, 133, 142

Romania.....	276
<i>Roy Arenella</i>	46, 48, 154
Rudi Rubberoid	178, 179
Ruggero Maggi.....	215, 274
Russia.....	276, 298
Ruth and Marvin Sackner archive.....	202
Ruud Janssen ... 1, 3, 8, 11, 24, 34, 42, 50, 53, 59, 63, 77, 81, 96, 122, 126, 145, 154, 178, 182, 188, 193, 205, 215, 226, 268, 294	
Ryosuke Cohen.....	35, 57, 59
Sackner Archives	298
Salvador Dali	35
San Francisco	44, 85, 90, 91, 93, 193, 194, 290, 298
Shadow project	217
Sonja van der Burg	43
Staatliches Museum Schwerin.....	298
<i>Stamp Art Gallery</i>	111, 290, 295
Stanton Kreidler	148
Stefan Szelkun	24
Stofflet and Crane	15
Svjetlana Mimica	268
TAM.....	1, 3, 281, 288, 294, 295, 298
TAM Rubber Stamp Archive.....	295
<i>TAM Rubberstamp Archive</i>	111
TAM-Publications	1, 3
Telenetlink	18
The Museum Of Communication	298
The Sticker Dude	285, 296
Thierry Tillier	11, 12
Tom Winter.....	137

tourism.....	53, 135, 249
TRAX	252, 263, 265
Ulises Carrion.....	59, 96, 106
Umbrella	97, 100, 101, 102, 103
USA....	8, 11, 42, 50, 77, 81, 96, 122, 128, 145, 154, 155, 178, 193, 217, 222, 237, 256, 258, 276, 279, 285, 286, 289, 295, 296, 298, 299
VEC.....	299
Vittore Baroni	11, 59, 137, 226, 227, 265, 285
Wally Darnell.....	44
Walt Evans.....	44
Whitney Museum.....	88
Wired	229
Wolf Vostell	100
Wulle Konsumkunst.....	11
WWW	293