COMMONPRESS MAGAZINE Nº 56 – CONTENTS

I. Exploring Mail-Art

Although thousands of artists "practise" Mail-Art there have been only a few attempts to come to a better comprehension of the whole realm of Mail-Art. There is a need for theory and intelligibility.

From my experience as a mail-artist, this text is a suggestion to start with a rational analysis of Mail-Art in order to come to a coherent socio-cultural theory and a clear synthesis of the "total" phenomenon. I think that inquiries (especially those, made by mail-artists) into the nature and about the different aspects of Mail-Art will give a clearer view upon the communication and the misunderstanding and will only benefit the good working of the planetary Network.

This text is meant for everyone interested in Mail-Art, but especially for mail-artists. Some points are very contestable. But Mail-Art demands for an echo. So, all kinds of response and feedback

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are   very   welcome.   Ideas   procreate
new ideas, new and better (more rational)
insights   in   concepts   and   activities.
Friedrich Nietzsche said that understanding
stops   action.   Yet,   the   "survival"   of
Mail-Art   is   dependent   on   the   "common"
thoughts   of   mail-artists   about   Mail-Art.

The Word: "Mail-Art"

1. Etymology

From a philosophical, idealistic angle there has been proposed that a thing only "really" exists, when it has a name (concept). Nevertheless, we must admit that there have been Mail-Art activities "avant-la-lettre".
The first terms to indicate these activities were e.g. "flux-post", "mailings" and "correspondence (art)". The term "Mail-Art" has presumably been used for the first time in the early seventies. But it is historical hard to say "exactly" who, where and when.

2. Grammar

The word "Mail-Art" is a <u>class-name</u> (not a proper name). It is used in different ways:

a) concrete: 1) as a <u>noun</u> (substantive): e.g. in: "Mail-Art is an art-forum", "rubber-stamps used in Mail-Art", "the Mail-Art of John Evans".

   2) as a <u>noun</u> in the function of a direct object: e.g. in: "to do Mail-Art", "doing Mail-Art", "to make Mail-Art", "making Mail-Art".

b) abstract: as an <u>adjective</u> (attribute): e.g. in: "a Mail-Art Show" or "a Mail-Art message", "Mail-Art languages".

3. Spelling

The phonetic spelling of Mail-Art is "MEIL a:t".

The stressed syllable is here written in capital letters. The way of writing the word "Mail-Art" is not always the same.

E.g. with or without capital and hyphen. The next seven ways of writing are mostly used: a) Mail(-)Art; b) Mail(-)art; c) mail(-)art and d) mailart.

Anyway, the term "Mail-Art" is preferred instead of its (approximately) synonyms "post art", "postal art", "art-mail" or "correspondence art". Sometimes we meet the terms "arte postale" (It.), "Post-Kunst" (Germ., Dutch), "art postale" (Fr.), "arte correo" (Sp.), etc. Otherwhere the word "Mail-Art" is written as its homonym "Male-Art" as a kind of joke, just as "Fe-Mail Art".

4. Meanings

It is a complex matter to define the word "Mail-Art", because it is used with more than one meaning. When we ask about the meaning of Mail-Art, we can ask about a) the meaning of the word and b) the meaning of the thing (already knowing the meaning of the word, asking about its purpose).

To define the word "Mail-Art" we can employ different ways:

a)   definition by equivalent words: sometimes the term "Mail-Art" is used equivalent with "correspon- dence art"; but some people make a distinction between both, saying that "correspondence art" is a way of interactive, personal and direct communication, while "Mail-Art" is a way of unpersonal, undirectional, one-way communication. I think that this distinction is not relevant for recent Mail-Art

(which includes the categories attached to "correspondence art"). Other equivalent words (but with probably a different connotation) are "post art", "postal art", "Art by mail" and "Art-Mail".

b) ostensive definition: making the meaning of "Mail-Art" clear, not by using words (verbal communication), but by e.g. showing someone Mail-Art (or pointing at, or confronting). (E.g. when Lon Spiegelman says: "The only way to really know mailart is to live it").

c) definition by connotation: referring to all the associations the word "Mail-Art" has in the minds of the people who use it. The emotive (poetic, pictorial, ...) meaning of the word.

d) definition by denotation: referring to "all" the objects (every individual thing) to which the word "Mail-Art" is applicable.

e) With Ludwig Wittgenstein we
can consider the word "Mail-Art"
as a tool, performing some job
in our communication: the meaning
is the use.

The most remarkable used meanings
of the word "Mail-Art" are:

(1) (Product) work of Mail-Art (an
object, a thing, a message, ...):
this can be for instance: a copy-art-
work or a stamp-art-work that
has been transmitted (mailed).
E.g. in: "an example of Mail-Art",
"a piece of Mail-Art", "good Mail-
Art", "Mail-Art is never juried",
"Mail-Art exhibition".

(2) (Process) process of creating Mail-Art
(an activity): e.g. in: "to do
Mail-Art", "doing Mail-Art".

(3) (Structure) art movement based
on exchange: a planetary network

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of thousands of artists and non-artists
exchanging (art, communication,
semiosis) with one another and
using communication media as
art media (post, telex etc).
"a circuit, a web, a community,
a system, ...", "perhaps the most
important art movement in the
world today" (Pittore).

(4) (Medium) multilateral art form
based on exchange: a language
using communication media as
art media (post, telegraphy, ...),
"an instrument, a form, a way,
a means of communication". Mail-Art
is a language (medium) using
languages (media).

(5) (Concept) extension of the meaning of
"mail" using the word "Mail-Art":
"Mail-Art" used as "communication-
art", not necessarily related to
the communication medium "post",
but extended to all other communica-

tion media (telegraphy, teletext, telex, computer networking, electronic mail, telephone, communication via radio, television, walkie talkie, balloons, etc).

(6) (Concept) extension of the meaning of "art" using the word "Mail-Art". E.g. in: Mail-Art is "a cultural strategy (Carrion), "a complex activity that is not art after all" (Baroni), "a new cultural strategy", "a democratic idea, that anyone can give and receive art" (Morgan), "a new artistic, cultural, social world" (CDO).

(7) (Mixing) Sometimes the word "Mail-Art" is used simultaneously with more than one meaning.

Conclusion: the word "Mail-Art" is not ambiguous by itself. But it is sometimes used ambiguously, when there is uncertainty about which meaning(s)

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is (are) being used in the particular
instance.

The Object: Mail-Art

5. Practice

Mail-Art is a "multilateral" art-form. It includes artists' books, audio- and video-art, periodicals, copy-art, assemblings, artists' postage stamps, language-art, postcards, recycling-art, stamp-art, etc... In my text "Mail-Art-Initiation" (in the Mail-Art Atlas - 1982/83) one can find a summary of the mostly used techniques/materials in Mail-Art. The text does not pretend to be complete. In principle we can say that, as long as a work can be transmitted or mailed (integral or in parts) all techniques, materials or methods can be used. And sometimes it is difficult to make a clear distinction between them.

Some techniques: collage, photography, decollage, assemblage, hand writing, graffiti, drawing, performance, typewriter, assemblings, stamps, etc, etc...

Some materials: (mostly not to heavy):

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envelopes   aluminium,   (handmade)
paper,   seals,   stamps,   wood,   glass,
plastic, scents, etc, etc...
Some   methods: direct   communication,
indirect   communication,   fictitious
communication (no address), chain-letters,
collective   collage,   assemblings,   etc,
etc...

6. History

There are already written enough short histories of Mail-Art to repeat it here all again: Futurism, Dada, Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, New York Correspondence School, etc. So I refer to the many articles on this subject in other Mail-Art catalogues and magazines. Yet, History is still waiting for a representative book about the "entire" Mail-Art Network. For one can doubt about the significance of a "local" history of Mail-Art. There is no specific history of Australian, Italian or American Mail-Art. Even historical, Mail-Art has to be considered as a "planetary" phenomenon, not as something "national" or "continental".

7. Economy

The economic process of Mail-Art includes
e.g. the production, distribution and
consumption of material and immaterial
Mail-Art goods in the world. Typical
is that these three components (mostly)
stay together in the hands of mail-artists.
Mail-artists don't distribute their
art via official galleries, but by post.
The distribution and production of
Mail-Art can only become detached
from one another in theory. E.g. a
letter (message) that is not mailed
(transmitted) is (usually) not considered
as Mail-Art.
From an economic point of view the
existence and working of Mail-Art
returns to an ancient form of bartering.
Mail-Art is a primitive structure of
direct and free art-bartering without
our classic medium of art-exchange,
the fetish "money". In this respect
we must agree "in principle" that
the mail-artists or art-exchangers

value the received higher than the
exchanged. Otherwise they would not
exchange! This is also due to the
 fact that they (mostly) value the
"act of exchanging" (the communication)
itself higher than the "objects or informa-
tion of exchange". So the "exchange-value"
does not really matter. (But this
is not an absolute assertion).
This economic aspect of Mail-Art can
be indicated as "idealistic". The exchange
is based on mutual trust, confidence
and belief. But the idealism is not
forever. E.g. when artist X never
answers the sendings of Y, sooner
or later the one-way communication
or pseudo-exchange will stop. So,
the "materialistic" aspect of receiving
an answer (in the form of a personal
letter or a catalogue) is especially
important for its "psychological" (and
practical) consequences: staying in
communication.
For the production of Mail-Art a few
conditions are necessary concerning

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time, energy (creativity) and money. Are Mail-Art activities expensive? The answer is an ambiguous one: yes and no. It depends. Yes: sending a postal package of 200 colorcopies (airmail, registered, express) from Belgium to the U.S.A.; No: sending an aerogramme from Japan to Brazil. But when a mail-artist would participate in "all" present projects, the conclusion is undoubtedly: it is "very" expensive. Nevertheless, in comparison with the other art-communication-media (telex, telephone, telegraphy, facsimile or telefax, ...) the post-medium is a "relative" inexpensive way for art-communication. This economic aspect is one of the reasons for the success of Mail-Art. So, let's pray Hermes, the postman of the Gods, that the medium "post" will stay payable for every brother- or sister-in-mail. The future of Mail-Art is closely (causaly?) related with this economic problem.

The consumption of Mail-Art consists

especially in the participation of Mail-Art
activities (prosumption). So it is,
as already said, mostly related with
the production and distribution. An
exception for these correlations are
the Mail-Art shows. Here, an (often)
non-participating public is enjoying
(consumes) the "results" of the Mail-Art
activities.

Some other economic problems are:
selling and buying Mail-Art? Earning
your living with Mail-Art? The relation
of Mail-Art to the economic substructure?
Its relation to the economic art-world
(no relation?)? Has Mail-Art really
an own (subsistence) art-economy?
Etc.

Lastly, a non-idealistic and economic
truth: the mail one gets from others
is proportionate to the time and energy
one has spent on one's own sendings.

8. Psychology

One of the subjects of the psychology of Mail-Art is the study of the processes, motives, reactions and nature of the mind of the mail-artists. Self-actualization, prestige, satisfaction of inner impulses, motivations, emotions,... it is hard to say what is the personal pressure behind the Mail-Art Whip. But for a better understanding of Mail-Art it is perhaps more interesting to stress some "social" psychological interactions. A mail-artist is often a disappointed artist. Not disappointed in art, but in the art-industry of the leading galleries and museums. Being a member of a planetary art movement helps him to transcend this isolation and alienation in art. In the Network the mail-artist is a part of a big art-community but without losing his/her own identity and individuality. This unity of thousands of pARTners creates a feverish enthusiasm of co-operation

and a protective feeling of solidarity
on a basis of pluralism and tolerance.
The triumph of Mail-Art results e.g.
from the fact that there is a psychological
equilibrium of ME and WE, of ego-
and sociocentrism. But especially the
thrill of working together with hundreds
of artists is an extremely new experience
and sensation in the evolution of art.
When communication is encouraged,
competition is reduced. Yet the usual
human "conflicts" in the global (social-
psychological) environment of Mail-Art
can not be denied. But it is again
the power of communication that can
create new solutions for these old
human problems.

9. Sociology

The social psychology of Mail–Art is
is engaged in the study of the mail–artist,
the individual. The sociology of Mail–Art
enquires especially the structure and
functions of the Mail–Art Network and
Mail–Art as a socio–cultural phenomenon
(micro–sociology).
It sounds nice to say that the Mail–Art
Network is an exalted, mystical Entity
without rules, roles or system. But
that is only wishful thinking. Accepting
Mail–Art as an international "group"
of artists, we may remark that it
has its "own" socio–cultural activities,
intercourse, convictions, values and
norms. This "spontaneously" arised
group with a horizontal (not an hierar-
chic) structure is not a "created"
organisation to fulfil specific goals.
But it is an "open" (everybody can
join it) and functional (utilitarian)
group, which can be called a dynamic
socio–cultural "sub–system" with tendencies

to become a more static socio-cultural "system". During this framing evolution it is the question if the museums and galleries will accept the "entire" Mail-Art-ideology (e.g. acceptance of junk-mail) or only will attract (recuperate) quality-mail to affirm again the traditional opinions about aesthetics and art. These dysfunctions will obstruct the integration of the Mail-Art Network and finally lead to its discontinuation. If Mail-Art and the Mail-Art Network want to survive they have to take into account certain sociological and social psychological remarks: social identity; social affirmation (support); agreement between personal expectations and the interactions of the member(s); mail-artists working at the periphery of Mail-Art; freedom and control of the communication channels (censorship); group-problems of homogeneity, stratifica-tion, participation, aims, evolution, etc.; the functions and role of the Mail-Art works in the Network; etc...

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Mail-Art is an encounter-place of mail-artists of different social classes, different cultures, different ages, different ideologies, etc. But maybe of more significance than the ways they differ from each other, are the aspects they have in common: what brings and holds the together.
What are the boundaries of the Mail-Art circuit? Mail-Art has anchored on an existing medium (the post) to devellop a new art circuit, loose from the official art circuit. But how isolated is this new structure? And what are the intentions of mail-artists with the network in the future? Three options are possible.
1) Discontinue the circuit and stop Mail-Art. 2) Mail-Art can become a complete autonomous circuit, without any alliances or contacts with other art circuits. It would be a mere marginal network (as it maybe was at the begin-ning). But to conserve such a situation of a close circuit, it ought to be more organized and take into account the

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traditional problems of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. 3) Today Mail-Art has grown into a position where it keeps contacts with the official art circuit. Yet there are often problems of communication and misunderstanding. How to overcome these problems? How to maintain the Mail-Art identity and how to prevent that Mail-Art does not become just another still-born art movement? I agree with Cracker Jack Kid, that it is high time to organize an international Mail-Art Congress to discuss about all this.

10. Art-criticism

How to judge Mail-Art? The answer
is clear and obvious: Mail-Art can
not be judged! Paraphrasing an expression
of Günther Ruch, I would say: "There
is no good or bad Mail-Art. There
is Mail-Art or no Mail-Art".
Mail-Art-criticism has nothing to
do with traditional art-criticism. Of
course one can criticize the "art-level"
in one specific Mail-Art-work, but
it is no. use doing so. Mail-Art is
good AND bad Mail-Art.
To grasp the essence of the phenomenon
of Mail-Art, one has to consider quality-
mail, "true sendership" AND junk-mail,
dull-mail, chain-letters, etc. as Mail-Art.
Otherwise one cannot understand it
as a "whole" (cfr. Baroni). However,
nobody is obliged to send, accept
or appreciate junk- or quality-mail
against his will. For instance, X does
not like trash-mail, but that is not
the point! From the view of "Mail-Art-

criticism" the problem is meaningless when formulated like this: "is it bad OR good Mail-Art?". The main question of Mail-Art-criticism is: "Is it Mail-Art or not?". This does not imply the act of traditional judging (good-bad; accepted-rejected; beautiful-ugly; etc), but of recognizing. This brings us to the question: "What is Mail-Art?". (For more information about this subject, see: 4. "The Meanings" and 12. "The Communication".)

Remark about Mail-Art and display. Mail-Art is communication-art. "Mail-Art in it's most pristine state can be found in the mailbox. (...) Part of the inability of critics to understand the Mail-Art medium can be directly attributed to Mail-Art "gallery presenta-tions". (...) The importance of intimacy in Mail-Art is lost in the "global collage" concept of Mail-Art display" (Cracker Jack Kid). Maybe a Mail-Art show about "How to display Mail-Art?" can yield new visions to avoid this

lack   of   communication   in   the   future.

11. Ethics

When we say that Mail-Art is "the art of no rules", we mean that there are no 'explicit' rules. Because there is a hidden consensus about e.g. the defense of communication, human rights, milieu hygiene, democracy, freedom, peace, tolerance, ... and the fight against anti-communication, fascism, racism, dogmatism, apartheid, injustice,...
These aims and principles can be interpreted in an individual manner, depending on the personality and opinions of the mail-artist.
So the normative ethics of Mail-Art can be called 'relative'. It is closely related to time, space and specific circumstances. In fact there is only a real Mail-Art 'policy' concerning Mail-Art shows. Namely: 1° no fee; 2° no jury; 3° no rejections (all works displayed - no selection); 4° documentation, catalogue or participation-list to all the participants. Although most

curators of a show (usually mail-artists themselves) accept these spontaneously arised regulations, they are not obligatory. But if a curator does not respect them, boycot and protest of the other mail-artists "can" be the result.

Ethical problems are often difficult and embarrassing, for instance, 'how' to exclude deceivers and profiteers from the Mail-Art Network? 'How' to stop dishonest curators? What are the most effective and peaceful Mail-Art weapons? A strict description of an ethical code can maybe harm the aspect of "openness" (deter newcomers) of the circuit and degenerate into an undesirable radical orthodoxy and orthopraxis. But all this are accute and "real" Mail-Art problems asking for an adequate solution.

12. Communication

Communication is the transmission of information. Mail-Art is communication-art (via post, telegraphy, telex, telefax, computer, telephone, ...). In its most extreme form communication-art is art without a material object (e.g. telephone art). The products are only the results (registration) of the processes. These products (things, memories,...) are less important than the processes (the activities). Mail-Art is also process-art. In principle, the Mail-Art activities of interrelationship are more significant than the Mail-Art artefacts. In its best form or shape Mail-Art is always a cooperative activity: a direct or indirect dialogue.

It is not my intention here to analyse the complete process of Mail-Art communi-cation (source of information, message, sender, coding, medium (canal), entropy (noise), receiver, decoding, destination, feedback, ...), but to stress some

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aspects of it.

A. The Mail-Art Work

The reason-to-be or function of a Mail-Art work is "to-be-transmitted" (the term used in a wide sense of e.g. "to-be-mailed", "-communicated", "-exchanged"). All the other functions (decoration, depiction of a theme, ...) are secundary and "can be" missed.

The process of a Mail-Art work can be divided in different sequences. Yet it is impossible to indicate one specific moment "when" an object (a thing, a message, ...) becomes Mail-Art.

1) The Phase of Coding

A message (idea, emotion, ...) is intended to be mailed (transmitted). It becomes translated (coding) in a work of art, junk, etc. Herewith a (verbal or non-verbal) (personal or general) language is used as a medium ("Art by Use", Mr. Morgan?). The meaning of the work is related

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to a) the intention(s); b) the use
of the language(s) (media) and c) the
interaction of a) and b).

2) The Phase of Transmission

A work is transmitted (mailed). It
"experiences" the impact of the language
(possibilities) of the communication-
medium (in a wider or smaller respect).
The meaning of the transmission (of
a work) is related to a) the intention(s)
to use (the language) of the medium;
b) the working of the medium itself;
c) the interaction of a) and b).
The transmission itself becomes finally
a part of the work (part of the process).

3) The Phase of Receiving and Decoding

The act of decoding a received work
can cause a lot of semantic problems
(understand the original meaning(s),
inferences, interpretations, ...).
Yet, the decoding is necessary, because
Mail-Art becomes senseless without
it. In this respect Mail-Art "needs"
a "collective" activity.

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Let us now consider some possibilities whether a work can be "decoded" (translated) as a "Mail-Art" work or not.

a) The received work is intended to to be (become) Mail-Art. The intention is clear. Conclusion: a "Mail-Art" work.

b) The received work is not intended to be (become) Mail-Art. The intention is clear: the work was only mailed for reasons of "transport". So the original meaning of the transmission was "transport". For instance, the letters of Hölderlin to Hegel. Calling those mailings (a posteriori) "Mail-Art"? Is such labelling a completing of the meaning of those letters or only confusing concepts?

c) A work, intended to be (become) Mail-Art got lost in the post-medium. Conclusion: entropy in the communication process?

d) A work is not transmitted, not intended to become Mail-Art. Conclusion: no "Mail-Art" work.

e) A work is intended to be (become) Mail-Art, but for some reason, it was never transmitted (mailed). Conclusion: call it "passive" Mail-Art or "no" Mail-Art? Can a work be "a priori" Mail-Art? So, the Mail-Art-coefficient is only intention?

f) Remark: In my opinion anything <u>can</u> be placed in a Mail-Art context, not by "calling" it Mail-Art, but by "mailing" it Mail-Art!

4) The Phase of Feedback and Response

When the decoding of a work is finished, a new phase of (re)coding can (and is expected to) start. The Mail-Art work can become classified (filed) and be the impulse for another Mail-Art work (an answer). Or the original work can become transformed (re-coding) into a new work.

Without any feedback or echo, Mail-Art is merely a repetition of the traditional artistic one-way-communication. Process-art becomes again nothing but product-art. Such a Mail-Art monologue is completely

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senseless. Meaningful Mail-Art means always a dialogue between sender and receiver.

B. Senders and Receivers (or the Mail-Art Network).

One "organized" Mail-Art communication network does not exist. Every mail-artist has his own mailing-list, which comprises his (smaller or wider) circuit. When someone is talking about "THE" Mail-Art Network, he is talking about all those (overlapping) circuits together.

Since the early "slow motion" correspondence of a few artists, Mail-Art has evolved into a structure of global measurements with "fast motion" effects. Thousands of mail-artists are communicating with one another every day (= every night!). It is evident that this entails a lot of communication problems. For instance, the impossibility to correspond with "all" the mail-artists. How can this enormous Mail-Art avalanche be caught?

a) Leaving Mail-Art.

b) Working harder. This is no solution at all. The harder one works in the Network, the more answers and mail one gets and the harder one has to work... This paradox culminates in a situation of (Mail-Art) stress, because one wishes not to disappoint the expectations of the others. Mail-Art: easy art?

c) Computerized tele-communication. Maybe the future good working of the "whole" Mail-Art Network can be found in technology. But today this solution would be very undemocratic. Most mail artists are unable to buy a highly perfected computer. So it would be overhasty to change the post-medium for a tele-communication medium.

d) Grouping of mail-artists. Groups of mail-artists working together and corresponding with other groups of mail-artists, so that the whole Mail-Art Network would be divided in groups. This could

be a local and temporary solution for the actual overwhelming Mail-Art activities. But it would of course create a lot of new problems (coordination, distance, ...), asking for new solutions.

e) Selection. It is very hard and disappointing to select. Who to select? What projects? Why? It is one of the inevitable "undemocratic" aspects in recent Mail-Art. But it is often a necessity for the individual for not becoming "!!!!!!!" (=nuts).

f) Take it easy. This is also a form of selection, but in this case of the survival of the slowest.

Anyway, Mail-Art also creates a lot of other communication problems: e.g. misunderstanding, no response to a sending, not receiving an entry, an entry getting lost in the post-medium, X not being mentioned in the catalogue, Y not on the mailing-list, Z not having received an invitation, etc., etc... It is very difficult to explain these problems to beginning mail-artists

or non-mail-artists. Mail-Art is so awful "human"! Sometimes it is a source of joy, in other cases a sea of annoyance.

Sender - receiver conclusion: one of the most important aspects of Mail-Art is the shifting in the artistic communication process from the traditional artist - audience monologue to: 1°) artist - audience communication (e.g. in Mail-Art show) with possible response (dialogue) AND 2°) artist - artist communication with possible response (dialogue).

C. Patterns of Communication.

Mail-Art communication can be reduced to "patterns" of communication. These patterns can be divided in "(semi-) direct" and "indirect". For more information about indirect correspondence patterns, I refer to the Mail-Art catalogue "Are You Experienced? L.H.F.S." (Brussels, 1981, Microfiche N° 17). The next mentioned patterns are (semi)direct:

1) **The Chain.** cfr. chainletters

$$A \longrightarrow B \longrightarrow C \longrightarrow D \longrightarrow E$$
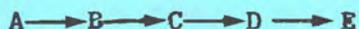
2) **The Wheel.** cfr. Mail–Art shows, Mail–Art projects, assemblings
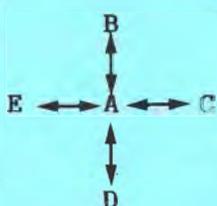
3) **The Circle.** cfr. collective collage, collective audio works, etc.
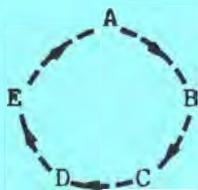
4) **Combination (of 1), 2) or 3)).** e.g. 2) and 2) (= Commonpress; Bambu; Care.)
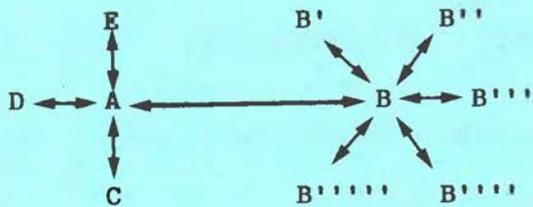
13. Philosophy

1. "The" philosophy of Mail-Art does not exist. Every mail-artist has (the right to have) his "own" philosophy of Mail-Art. And in principle, every mail-artist has the right to disagree with the previous sentence.

2. The term "philosophy" has different meanings. I don't use it here as "science of sciences", but to indicate some general (meta-empirical) reflections.

3. Mail-Art is team-work. Thinking about Mail-Art is "thinking together".

4. Time. "Art is in its performance and direction dependent on the time, in which it lives, and the artists are creatures of their epoch" (Dadaistic Manifest, 1918). "(...) therefore it is perhaps impossible to define 'art in general'. There is always but an historic art, i.e. related to its tech-que, its ways of expression, its parti-cularity of style (...)" (Georg Simmel,

1918). Mail-Art is not a "deus ex machina" to save art or life. It is what it is and nothing more. Related to time, Mail-Art is an aesthetic-artistic and socio-cultural challenge, never found in other times: a global network of thousands of artists. It is the biggest art-movement, that has ever been in the history of art. And it keeps on growing every day ...

5. Space. Today time and space are experienced as relative concepts, especially through the evolution of technology. These experiences bring a new global consciousness. Our inner environment (space), being a miniature of the outer space, we find a planetary scope and vision in Mail-Art. It means crosscultural and universal co-operation, a bridge over the traditional cultural cleavage between east - west, north - south. In its best shape, Mail-Art is "internationalism", or better "transnationalism"!

6. Art. "The anarchy of taste" (Wilhelm

Dilthey). "If someone calls it art, it's art" (Don Judd). In the past art was mythos, science was logos. Today the art mytho-logy has but one "real" art standard. The philosophy of art is the philosophy of "money". Art has become a money-making machine.

Bank. The philosophy of Mail-Art is the data-bank of all the ideas about it.

Synthesis. Mail-Art presents no synthesis of art. Mail-Art is not the art of arts. But it opens a socio-cultural gate to think and operate in a synthetical direction. It offers no "structured" model of preceding art-techniques, art-movements, etc., but rather a collage and assemblage of them. Mail-Art is the laboratory and lavatory of the present art-labyrinth.

Tradition. Mail-Art causes a deflation of the primary artistic communication. The fresh roots of Mail-Art absorb their food in subterraneous traditions.

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10. Boundaries. The earth is the sculpture and canvas on which mail-artists operate. Optimism: in the far future the planets will take over these functions.

11. Information. We have learned to reject all kinds of information, if they do not "correspond" with our learned ways of thinking, feeling,...

12. Artefacts. The objects of Mail-Art are not so important after all. This has nothing to do with conceptual art or with dadaism (in the sense of anti-art). Mail-Art is communication-art. It needs a new way of thinking. A lot of traditional artists who do not (or will not) understand this, quit (sooner or later) the Mail-Art Network, because of pure aesthetic quality-aspects of junk-mail objects. But more significant than these Mail-Art products are the Mail-Art processes, the experiences, activities, performances, ritual actions, ... Either the "common results" of these processes

(which can be mental, e.g. memories, or material, e.g. a catalogue), nor the "individual results" (the Mail-Art objects) can give more than only an "illustration" of the real meaning of Mail-Art: the living communication. Maybe electronic (computerized, tele-communicated) mail will indicate the "relativity" of Mail-Art artefacts in a clearer way and better stress the meaning of the global cultural circuit and its communicative relation-ships.

13. Tele-. Instant communication via tele-communication media will of course cause new Mail-Art problems of immediacy. Perhaps it is the "distance" in time and space (via the post medium) that keeps mail-artists together. It gives them enough time to think, to get certain emotions under control and to send less impulsive (read: less "agressive", "intolerant", "competitive") reactions.

14. Communication. Art or "the philosophy of stuttering". In a certain way art repeats itself. "Art 'lives' through influencing other art, not by existing as the physical residue of an artist's ideas. The reason why different artists from the past are 'brought alive' again is because some aspects of their work becomes 'useable' by living artists" (Joseph Kosuth).

15. Archives. Mail-Art archives are (living) cemeteries of memories and curiosities. The 42.292 Mail-Art Administration mummifies all the received results of Mail-Art activities. It files the present art communication for posterity: 'indirect' communication.

16. Direction. We can say about Mail-Art what Friedrich Schiller said about religion. "Which religion do I believe in? None of those you have mentioned. And why not? That is my religion!".

17. Consciousness. Mail-Art creates a new "methodological consciousness"

of collaboration and co-participation, of crossing geographical boundaries and the mental borders of art, of crossing the frames of art-objects.

18. Knowledge. Human knowledge is colored, relative and limited. "It isn't enough that people should know one another; they should know one another on terms of <u>equal status</u>" (Kurt Lewin). Mail-artists are not equal, but equivalent (equal in value).

19. Tolerance. Mail-Art aims the acceptance of being, thinking, feeling, acting, ... differently! The co-existence of anti-thetical standpoints is possible.

20. Time. Our time is one of coctails, mixture, raguout, eclecticism, inter-disciplinarity, ... In the same way Mail-Art is association, combination, an art-mixer and art-modulator.

21. Aims. "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed..." (Preamble of the Consti-

tution of the UNESCO). Mail-Art "is/ aims" friendship, individualism, democracy, peace, diversification, brotherhood, pluralism, tolerance, co-operation, acculturation, freedom and liberation, decentralization, no leadership (horizontal instead of vertical communication), reciprocal relationships. If Mail-Art is dreaming, it is "dreaming together".

22. Understand. Only within the 'frame of reference' of a planetary connection, a wider artistic and cultural context the phenomenon of Mail-Art can be "really" understood and interpreted.

23. Art and its meanings. We are prisoners of our concepts (notions). Art as decoration. Art as art. Mail-Art as life, a map of the world, a universal language, an attitude to life, a 'strategy of experiences' (Laing), eco-centrism. "As far as Mail-Art serves life, we want to serve it!"

24. Tautology. In principle, the traditional

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tautology of art: art = art (it is
art or not) is rejected in Mail-Art.
Mail-Art is art and Mail-Art is not
art. This is not a contradiction,
because it depends e.g. on the circum-
stances, the intentions, the context.
There is an art-level and a Mail-Art
level. Art? Mail-Art!

25. Taboo. The game of traditional art
does not allow to place the concepts
of 'art' and 'not art', 'culture'
and 'nature' in one specific model.
Yet, Mail-Art does not change in the
first place the artistic 'rules',
but it is democratizing the socio-
cultural conditions to participate
in the artistic field. Freedom in
art means that one can 'choose' his
own aesthetic-cultural aims. Usually
the mail-artist is not a homo economicus,
but a "homo ludens" (Huizinga). Games
and plays are the basis of all culture.
In this sense, Mail-Art has nothing
to do with amateurism, Mail-Art is
professionalism! It means cultural

emancipation of repressive think-tanks.

26. Misunderstanding. "Worüber man nicht schweigen kann, davon muss man sprechen" (nach Ludwig Wittgenstein). Sending 'no' information is also sending information. But does it communicate? How much of our communication is based on misunderstanding?

27. Communication. Sharing activity Mail-Art encourages dialogue, because the latter contains a maximum of reciprocity and communication.

28. Mail-Art is terms of dialectics: the thesis 'understanding' and the anti-thesis 'misunderstanding' meet one another in the synthesis 'Mail-Art dialogue'.

29. Mutual communication. Zarathustra to the sun: 'Du grosses Gestirn! Was wäre dein Glück, wenn du nicht die hättest, welchen du leuchtest! Zehn Jahre kamst du hier herauf zu meiner Höhle: du würdest deines Lichtes und dieses Weges satt geworden sein, ohne

mich, meinen Adler und meine Schlange"
(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1883).

30. Analogy. Analogical thinking is sometimes
confusing. Anyway. The Mail-Art Network
is a real open University (Universitas),
where artists learn and teach one
another. They exchange and interchange
art, information, passions and ideas.
Mail-Art is a 'learning process' via
experiences, of trial and error in
the wider process of artists' communi-
cation. It is a new stimulus for art
as a universal language. Mail-Art
networking is togetherness and for
thousands of artists and non-artists
this planetary communication is a
cultural and artistic alternative,
without the pressure of "one" absolute
model of art, reality or society.
Mail-Art is an (organic) transnational
Plant, a Nettle with different offshoots
and rootstocks. It is not a "chain"
depending on the strenght of 'each'
of its parts (members). Many first

generation mail-artists left the Network but the Plant keeps on growing ...

31. The future of Mail-Art. Every important art movement brings a new hypostasis. This hypostasis concerns a new form, or at least a technique or an idea to reach a certain form. (The foregoing does not mean that art is 'mere' form, but that contents need form to exist). For instance, 'concept' as hypostasis in conceptualism (a 'mental' form is also a form); 'the artist' in perfor- mance-art; 'land' or 'nature' in land- art; 'anti-art' in dadaism; 'motion' in kinetic-art; 'light' in light-art; etc. So, every art-movement has its limits. The transcendence of a limit creates a new limit. The hypostasis of Mail-Art is 'exchange' or 'communi- cation' or 'correspondence'. In case someone would say that Mail-Art has 'no philosophy', 'no content' or 'no hypostasis', this would be its hypo- stasis! But it would be a lie to say

that Mail-Art has no limits. When
the ultimate object of an art movement
is its own "form" (or idea), it becomes
dogmatic. Dogmatism means the end
of art. So the future of Mail-Art
(and of art in general) is the trans-
cendence of its own limits, i.e. its
self-destruction. Or paraphrasing
Friedrich NIetzsche: "Mail-Art is
something to be surpassed". But Mail-Art
is not an ordinary art movement or
art form. It develloped and "is" a
new "art circuit", a new medium. As
long as this Network stays healthy,
Mail-Art has an independant future...
Mail-Art is not but a "form", it is
a method. Mail-Art is "on the road"-art,
not "near the road"-show-art, it is
a process...

32. Proof. Mail-Art becomes what it becomes
and nothing more. But how to distinguish
what Mail-Art "is" and "wishes", what
"is" and "ought to"? The proof of
the pudding is in the eating, not
in the receipt.

33. Time. "The mark of our time is its
    revulsion against imposed patterns.
    We are suddenly eager to have things
    and people declare their beings totally.
    There is a deep faith to be found
    in this new attitude – a faith that
    concerns the ultimate harmony of all
    being" (Marshall McLuhan, 1964).

34. Mail-Art is a creative child of this
    new way of thinking. It tries to anticipa-
    te the cultural and artistic processes
    of communication in an electronic
    environment.

35. Message of the exodus: one can always
    see it from another angle of view
    or experience it through another medium.