



## CHAPTER 11

# COMMUNICATION: 44 STATEMENTS

*Guy Bleus*

1. There was a *time* without Mail-Art. There will be a time without it.
2. The task of Mail-Art is to bring disinformation into the information systems, discommunication into the communication systems, *emotion* into the logical systems.
3. The world is not the world. There are *different* networks of ideas about the world (in the minds of men/women and in minds' extensions).
4. From a holistic point of view, there are no Mail-Art objects, there are Mail-Art *relations*; differences that we notice by comparing things. Relations are thought-patterns.
5. The essential feature of Mail-Art is not imitation/mimesis (Plato), beauty (Kant), expression (Croce), form (Bell), signs (Goodman). It is communication. The notion "communication" is no more or less *mysterious* than the previous universals. It is the transfer of (aesthetic) information, the exchange of (aesthetic) meanings.
6. All "things" communicate. They cannot "not-communicate." This idea concerns objects not intended to communicate. We *communicate*—we can do no other.
7. The *meaning* of a Mail-Art tool becomes determined (or modified) by the use of a communication system. A postcard receives its meaning via the sending.
8. The efficiency of a Mail-Art message derives from its ability to *provoke* communication.
9. One aim of aesthetics is to construct a *value-system*, a logical model of taste to judge or condemn works of art.
10. Unconscious or not, mail-artists are not without aesthetic *preferences*. Yet, their individual aesthetic opinions don't have much influence on the communicative working of the Network.
11. *Aesthetics* is the theology of Art (Flam).
12. In principle, every Mail-Art work is unfinished. It is an aesthetic text asking for a *reply*. Every work starts a new process, a never-ending story.
13. Mail-Art is a movement without aesthetic manifestos. It doesn't maintain its unity and unanimity thanks to the existence of a bundle of principles or a constitution, but through the fact that there are no communicative prescriptions. Mail-artists always communicate, again and again. The keystone of Mail-Art is *reciprocity*.
14. Mail-Art is a *communication sculpture*.
15. Mail-Art is not an artistic island. It is a cultural *peninsula* of the socioeconomic continent. An appendix that could be called a consciousness of art in a non-poetic space.
16. "This work of art has two folds!" one said. Most Mail-Art works are FOLD, but this aspect has no influence on the quality of the information. Of course, it can injure the monetary value of a work. Mail-Art is dog-eared communication, *dog-ear-art*.
17. Nothing is new on our road to X. There are only relics, fetishes and simulacra. The *iconoclast* stops striking

matches...the temperature of which art catches fire and burns.

18. There is no art any more. There are only aesthetics: the aesthetic perception and experience of senders and receivers. The closed teleological system with intrinsic, artistic values is open. Only *contemplation* determines what is considered as an "aesthetic object." There are no real works of art; there are only objects that are observed differently, in a functional or non-functional, artistic or non-artistic way. With changing contexts (aesthetic or not).

19. Essentially, the aesthetic communication is more important than the objects of art. The *durability* of the communication-works does not matter. Their effect is in the moment. From this point of view communication archives are a contradiction.

20. Three years without "art": Art Strike 1990–1993. It's easier to kill the *causes* of art, the artists, than it is to ruin the idea. Eliminating the word "art" will not solve the problem. But it can indicate how some mail-artists think and feel...Can Mail-Art achieve a transvaluation of art?

21. Every system—and the Mail-Art system too—is remarkable and fascinating in the places where it *fails*. These shortcomings can teach us to avoid new stupidities and bring new insights.

22. *Conflicts* of values: What's more valuable, a healthy hundred-year-old oak or a painting of Picasso with a value of two million U.S. dollars? Burn the museums...Save the woods...Or vice versa, as we do today.

23. The ocean is big, blue and beautiful, not man-made, not an art. Yet, since the "Socle du Monde" of Manzoni, the whole earth is a *work of art*.

24. The aesthetic space of Mail-Art is "everywhere." The whole world has become a field of aesthetic action. The aesthetic time of Mail-Art is "always." Night or day, mail-artists are *permanently* sending and/or receiving.

25. In the 16th century it took twenty days to communicate from Rome to Paris. Today, the communication mania is permanently busy exploring the unknown. Nobody knows what is *important* or not. The aesthetic values (read "interests") become dictated by Rex Dollar, the King of Mass Communication.

26. The focus of Mail-Art is *not* the unilateral (one-way communication), but the bi- and multi-lateral communication. Nevertheless, mail-artists often "think" as traditional artists, but "act" as mail-artists, and vice-versa.

27. What often surprises me is that mail-artists aren't conscious of olfactory communication and don't give *olfactory* feedback. Because nasal Mail-Art offers a lot of new communicative possibilities...The message (the odour) is crystallized in the medium (the nose).

28. The postal Mail-Art game is not unlimited. The *repetition* of projects is not forever. The Mail-Art Redundancy becomes bigger and bigger according to the psychological outline: confusion-overload-surprise-new-unexpected-recognizable-familiar-known-boring-reiteration-superfluous-tautological. How to overcome this stalemate situation? By starting a new meta- or para-postal game?

29. It's hard to tell what is more important in Mail-Art: the analogical (non-verbal) or the digital (verbal) communication. If one doesn't know a little English, French or Spanish, one is communicatively *handicapped*. The hegemony of the American/English language is a disadvantage for the lesser known languages, but it is an

undeniable benefit for the international Mail-Art Network and is comparable with the pragmatic function of medieval Latin.

30. The grammatical mistakes, the corruption of the language, idiom-blunders, faults of linguistic feeling, etc., can lead to witty misunderstandings, but they don't really matter. Most mail-artists grasp these problems. They *understand* the message and that's what counts.

31. *Art-cliches*: Mail-Art is not an art because there is no art, there is only Money. Art has been dead a long time. A work of art isn't appreciated for its artistic values, but for its commercial or market value. The gallery-keepers and art critics, not artists, are the high priests of the Holy Art. The chaos between the means and purposes of art is complete.

32. Mail-Art tries to escape the Myth of the False Values, but not always successfully. Mail-Artist A can be considered a better artist than B, because A is wealthy and able to print multi-coloured postcards, posters, etc. Mail-artists *invest* "money" into their communication. Those without a piece of silver, let them first cast a stone.

33. Art has lost its provocative function. Some shade of it can be found in Mail-Art. There is no social *criticism* in art. Everything is good. All artists are good. There are no angry artists any longer.

34. Mail-Art means *decentralization* of art communication. The Mail-Art structure is a "comcon," a completely connected communication network. Everyone can write to every member and as much as she/he likes.

35. Deadline stress, failing information, frustrating messages, communication stress, fear of opening the envelopes, "am I included or not?" etc...Mail-Art is sometimes a real *psychological battle-field*.

36. Accidental or telepathic interchange and also *crossing* communication are typical occurrences in Mail-Art.

37. A bizarre aspect of Mail-Art communication is the *dichotomy* "anonymous"—"known." On the one hand, anonymity stimulates openness in the Mail Art Network. Sending intimate, very personal things or information to somebody you don't know (living at the other end of the world) is rather harmless. On the other hand, the communication is mostly amicable and true, although one often knows nothing else but the "name" or "pseudonym" of the other mail-artist.

38. The *sincerity* of Mail-Art communication is frequently caused by the anonymity, not knowing the person (his/her profession, his/her way of life, his/her personality, etc.) behind the name. Of course, the large network makes it structurally impossible to be close friends with all the mail-artists. Superficial communication is often a condition that helps maintain exacting contacts.

39. The continually growing number of artists within the Mail-Art group causes less available time for each mail-artist. The Mail-Art neophyte does not always receive the attention he/she expects and will have to fight to get enough acknowledgment in the *temple* of "reciprocal" communication. The larger the Mail-Art Network, the more impersonal. Don't blame the mail-artists! Blame the system! Does Mail-Art have masonic blues?

40. Most mail-artists are individualists and don't like to be called "members." The Mail-Art Network can be called "human" to the extent that its members *acknowledge* one another.

41. Man is by nature a political animal (Aristotle). In this sense, Mail-Art incarnates a political movement, a social activity, a value-system. Without solidarity or empathy, Mail-Art is an angel with *burning wings*.

42. *Words* fail.

43. Finally, Art or Mail-Art is not important. What we need is a *coherent* communication model of what we want: power, riches, glory and destruction; and/or mutual respect, social justice, ecological maintenance and well-being.

44. Only *owls and oaks* can save us.