

# THE E-MAIL INTERVIEW WITH GUY BLEUS

by Ruud Janssen



“Art and mail-art are founded on belief and unbelief, on the discourses of myths. A myth is a story, arisen via the limited information one has gathered. Networkers receive incomplete information and imagine myths about one another. Mail-Art creates a **collective** mythology, stories in the minds of the networkers, stories about networkers, events, personal experiences, facts, etc. The image-building is especially based on the first impressions and the whole of received information. Every slumbering story is true and untrue, always changing, never finished.”

Edited by

**Joel S. Cohen**

(The Sticker Dude)

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## Introduction by the Editor

For a long time I have been enamored with archivists and historians who specialize in alternative culture movements. Like the role played by storytellers of indigenous cultures, they help to document, disseminate & revitalize what mainstream culture would pass over and dismiss with its “sponge of namelessness,” because it does not tickle the fancy of powerful/moneyed interests.

This booklet represents a unique collaborative and historical exploration of Mail Art, which is a massive worldwide movement of creative correspondence that attempts to “level the playing field” of mainstream art as exemplified by museums, art galleries and other establishment art scenes.

This interview of Guy Bleus, who is located at his Administration Centre archive in Wellen, Belgium, by Ruud Janssen-TAM of the TAM Rubber Stamp Archive, The International Union of Mail Artists (& more), of Tilburg, Holland, is part of Ruud’s ongoing Mail-Interview Project. In this project he is interviewing scores of mail artists and publishing the results, both online and in book form whenever possible.

Both the interviewer and interviewee are artists, organizers, archivists and historians immersed in the totality of the mail art process. Even with little or no remuneration or expense money, they nourish, toil endlessly and pursue their passion for the international mail art network.

I am pleased to edit and produce this book, which contributes to the “good works” they generate on a regular basis.

—Joel “Sticker Dude” Cohen, 1998

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Guy Bleus - 42.292

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Cover image: An Egyptian Scribe, The First Administrator

# THE E-MAIL-INTERVIEW WITH GUY BLEUS

Started on 03-11-1994

**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 08-04-95 (via internet)

Guy Bleus-42.292:      Answer -1

**A.** One could simulate the virtual existence of a slick mail-art paradox. On the one hand, that nobody ever gets involved in a metaphysical or mythical mail-art network. Because “the” corporate network, that is, the network as a well defined body, does not exist. On the other hand, that an artist who comes in close contact with the links of the Netland, gets absorbed by the spongy mail-art web.

**B.** Every day and every night, we (= you & me & all the other networkers) experience the art-rites and rituals of the mail-art life . We “b-e-c-o-m-e” the incarnation of the eternal mail-art values — panta rhei (panta rhei is an expression of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus; it means, everything flows)— & finally, we “a-r-e” the Netland . Surely we could deny the significance and estimation of being a mail-artist, but we don’t and nobody really knows why, nobody knows the true meaning. Mail-art is communication-art and the reinforcement of communicative aesthetic processes. As such, the continuity of a non-historical “now” is one of the most important aspects. The influence of this so called “timeless” issue will increase during the electronic and digital future of art . At least, if there is any future for (mail-) art. If there is any perspective for the fine educated and gentle human race; but if so, let’s communicate, let’s bark together. W@W@W . Whoof@Whoof@Whoof.

**C.** Ruud, in the introduction of your mail-art interview project you wrote: “This project I mainly started for my research about the history of mail-art.” You know my opinion about history & particularly the history of (mail-)art. History is a myth and a lie (\*).

(\*) *Argumentation about history as a myth can be found in the foreword “Art as a collective mythology: Mail-Art”, that I’ve written for the book “Mail-Art: An annotated bibliography “ by John Held Jr. (1991). ( See Appendix I for the complete text) My publication in Dutch “Een dialoog tussen de postbode en zijn elektronische schaduw, alsmede een algemene discours over Mail-Art, meer bepaald een onderzoek naar de grondslagen van een communicatief kunstfenomeen” (1st ed., 1991 / 2nd ed., 1994) also treats this issue. This work is an anthology of some of my texts.*

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**MAIL-ART IS COMMUNICATION-ART AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE AESTHETIC PROCESSES.**

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**D.** Of course, I could tell you about my early individual mail-art experiences, which could be placed in a historical context. e.g. my first correspondence art and poetry project in 1968-75, with a network of Belgian artists and poets, and, which resulted in the publication of “Subterranean II.” It was edited by the Academy of Art from Gent in Belgium. My juvenile mailings which were censored when I was a pupil of 12 years old at boarding school. The exhibitions of my mail-art at the Free University of Brussels and the Gallo-Romeins museum of Tongeren in 1974. In the mid-seventies I saw “artistamps” for the first time. It was in a small gallery in Hasselt and the artist was E.F. Higgins III, aka Doo Da Post. These are only memories and anecdotes. Every networker has his or her own anthology of interesting and/or boring stories. And all these so-called facts could develop into new myths of the historical world of mail-art . &/or: “Ray [Johnson] is God - Let’s pRAY. LET’S RAY. Or, “condemn yourself and you are always believed; praise yourself and you never are”, as Montaigne says.

**E.** The genesis of mail-art stays a problematic issue, because it is correlated to its definitions and meanings. And, there does not exist “one” absolute and complete interpretation or explanation about mail-art. So, it is historically impossible to give an exact answer to the basic question: “who, where and when?” Mail-art is not the cognitive creation of one specific person at a particular time. It is a **synergetic** art-process of cooperation and communication. Mail-art means the rearrangement and conversion of the zeitgeist (the spirit of the time). The artistic roots of mail-art are the small correspondence networks of several art movements of the sixties and seventies, such as The New York Correspondence School; Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, Gutai, concept art, poesia visiva, The Avenue B School of Art, etc. Yet, there seems to be something in our “human nature,” that wants to mythicize and mystify. The wonderful legends of Ray Johnson and George Maciunas are repeated so many times that they must be true. But these idealizations neglect the conceptual and aesthetic influences of so many other artists, such as, Blaine, Groh, Below, Rehfeldt, Kostelanetz, Gaglione, Banana, Espinoza, Crozier, Shimamoto, Kocman, Cavellini, Vigo, Pittore, Evans, etc. The trans-national mail-art network is the result of a web of communicative and artistic processes. It is a continuous “evolving” Netland.... The previous opinions do not diminish or dishonor my esteem for phenomenal artists, such as Maciunas, Klein, or Johnson.

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**MAIL-ART IS A "PELL-MELL" OF STORIES, TALES, RECITALS AND REPORTS. IT IS NOT A COMPLETE ENTITY. THE MAIL-ART SOCIETY IS A VIRTUAL FRAME-WORK ENCLOSING AN ARTISTIC CHAOS; IT IS A PELL-MELL OF RECIPROCITY AND EXCHANGE.**

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F. Mail-art is a "pell-mell" of stories, tales, recitals and reports. It is not a complete entity. The mail-art society is a virtual frame-work enclosing an artistic chaos; it is a pell-mell of reciprocity and exchange. The History of mail-art is a selected reconstruction of histories, events, facts and artifacts. Like Chronos, the god of time, was eating his own children, the eternal Netland history is eating the netlanders. Well, who cares? Yet, every mail-art networker must be encouraged to write his or her own history of Netland. Mail artists are post-historical myth-makers. Mail-Art is a "collective" mythology, an inter-personal and reciprocal history.

G. Dear Ruud, It's high noon. The e-spirit is still willing, but the virtual stomach is weak. I could appreciate a good dinner by now. With luck & energy — GB-42.292

*RJ : The nice thing about the interview with you is that you have written down so many views, thoughts, etc. Most of the things I would like to know about you I can look up in your books, catalogues, etc. If history is a lie, you are giving lots of stuff to historians to write the history. Why do you publish that much? (I hope you did eat well before answering this second question!)*

(Because of the long silence I wrote several times to Guy Bleus if this was the only answer he was going to give, or that the interview would continue. As usual, Guy is quite busy, and only months ago I received the CD-ROM that documented his artistamps exhibition. The first CD-ROM catalogue in mail art. On July 24th I received a letter from Guy in which he wrote that the interview will continue in the autumn of 1996).

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, I received a postcard from Guy Bleus from Copenhagen. I guess it is no coincidence that just this summer there is the large exhibition at the Postal Museum there in Copenhagen, and I am sure Guy Bleus visited that too.

Reply on 28-05-1997 (via e-mail)

(The e-mail was sent twice. The answer was an attachment, and the first time I couldn't find the attachment. The second e-mail contained an attachment I couldn't decode, so I forwarded the e-mail to my e-mail at the college where I work. There I could decode it and e-mailed Guy that I succeeded in reading his second answer. At home in Tilburg again I fitted the text into the interview so far and e-mailed Guy the next answer. Prints on paper were sent as well).

GB : 2. From GB to RJ

A. Dear Ruud, today (05.29.1997) I well received the interviews of Carol Stetser/Ruud Janssen and Edward F. Higgins III. As you know, I keep every postal item (envelopes, postcards, documents, ...) in the **networking archives** of the @dministration centre-42.292\*. Sometimes I ask myself how to conserve the many xerox-pieces of mail-art in the archive. It is another historical mail-art problem. The transitoriness of mail-art artifacts is an irreversible reality, that wants to cling the experiences of the past to the unwritten "history" of the future. Anyway, when networkers come to visit the archive in Wellen, I always feel lucky to show them their own files or archival boxes. Especially when they come from abroad. During the years there were many net-visitors such as Chuck Stake, Bill Gaglione, John Held Jr., Anna Banana, Mark Bloch, Neal Taylor, Vittore Baroni, Jurgen Olbrich, Formentini and Lorenzi, Géza Perneckzy, Peter and Angela Kustermann, Colette and Gunther Ruch, Barbara Moore, José Oliveira, Ruud Janssen, etc. Every meeting is a mail-art congress, a good occasion to discuss about the communication technology, the information problems of the **Netland** and/or to create co-art works. Indeed, I went to Copenhagen in Denmark, last summer. I did two performances there, one with fax-paper, transmissions and scents; the other one with "slick" signs, stamps and scents.

B. Answering your second question . Yes, you're right, with my publications I make it much too easy for the a/r/t/h/i/s/t/o/r/i/a/n/s. For me, publishing is communicating with the never-ending Netland. It is meant as a form of communication about the communication-arts. Herewith I use the facilities of administrative institutions who search cooperation. Mostly they ask me to do an individual exhibition and then I propose to start a networking project. It always begins with splendid perspectives and promising opportunities. By taking these chances I offer other mail-artists a possibility to publish their work. According to the unwritten rules of mail-art, networkers deserve to receive a catalogue when they participate in a mail-art, fax- or internet-art project. However, it is a constant fight to realize this right. It's not that I want or don't want to publish that much. Mail-art and **administration-art** include publishing. Furthermore, it's always a series of coincidences. It just happens. Maybe it is my /f/a/t/e — following my intuition. A lot of networkers often forget - ask Crackerjack Kid - how much hard work it is to accomplish a printing.

\* The Administration Centre-42.292 is the name of my mail-art archive (see enclosed text, Appendix 6). The number 42.292 is my pseudonym since 1979; it refers to my registration number in the Benelux Trademark Centre in The Hague, Netherlands. As an "artministrative act" the word Guy Bleus became a trade mark, registered under the number 42.292. Most of my work can be called administration art or artministration, because it is made with/on old administration forms or, it is an intervention in the existing (mail-art and official) administration.

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**ACCORDING TO THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF MAIL-ART,  
NETWORKERS DESERVE TO RECEIVE A CATALOGUE  
WHEN THEY PARTICIPATE IN A MAIL-ART, FAX- OR  
INTERNET-ART PROJECT.**

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It is a continual close encounter with the existence of non-enthusiasm and artistic apathy. Yes indeed, mail artists may have the permission to criticize the mistakes in their actual addresses . @dministration can never exclude (the wisdom of) human errors: like 1) medical science: penicillin; 2) psychology: learning via errors.

**C 1. Tempus fugit (time flies).** Today, it is 2 years after my last answer from April 1995. Meanwhile, blue mail came out of the blue. X-ray Johnson is dead — Jo (one of my best friends, he was 42) is dead — The thoughts of Sören Kierkegaard are dead --left for the mice of history to nibble on their remains. And Copenhagen does not know how to deal with its great philosopher.

**C 2.** In the meantime there was (and is) my @dministration’s productions: the 3 CD-ROM’s, the psychedelic show, the e-pêle-mêles, the walls of scents, the private art detective, the mail-art exhibition in the postal museum of Brussels, and the retrospective artzines shown in the e-mail-art archives in Hasselt. Sometimes when I’m down, I’m tired of being the administrator of all these art activities.

**C 3.** In May 1997 the smiling network experiences seem to be remastered & digitized; but I’m still in love with black vinyl (LP records) “psychedelic” bands such as: The Savage Resurrection , The Seeds of Internet, the 13th Floor Elevators, Moby Grape, Fever Tree, Quicksilver Messenger Service, H.P. Lovecraft, United States of America & Ultimate Spinach.

**C 4.** Electronic thunder simulations are not new, they merely are the logical consequences of an old tradition: art and philosophy dancing in the muddy footsteps of science and technology. The mystic owl of sister Minerva flies at night. (Minerva, Roman Godess-patroness of arts and wisdom.) Always-too-late-mail-art, never in time for the golden deadline.

**D.** Waiting for the Pell-Mell Network. With Luck & Energy.

Guy Bleus - 42.292

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*RJ : How do you experience the Internet and the e-mail after some years of practice. I know that you wrote texts about this subject as well (which I could use as appendixes to this interview if you like), but I am also interested in how far the electronic communication is integrated in your daily life.....*

Next answer on 3-3-1997 (e-mail with attachments)

GB : 3 Dear Ruud. Dear Question Number III

It would be nice if you could attach (as an appendix of this interview) the following texts:

- 1) "A Dialogue between the Postman and His Electronic Shadow" (1994). (Appendix 2)
- 2) "Telecopying in the electronic Netland" (1991) (Appendix 3)
- 3) "In Quest of Netland" (1991). (Appendix 4)

YES -and/or- NO -and/or- Always //

The Ultimate Spinach of the **Internetland** doesn't "determine" my final snake-dance

Electronic, telecopying or postal communication aren't the issues at stake. Loving the wonderful things one does (and/or does not) today & tomorrow.

Following the changing concepts of art - in my blue Velvet veins.

Experiencing the echO of the white - e-mailed - rabbit.

Constructing, deconstructing and recOnstructing.

The non-electronic @dministrative Scents.

Eating the flowers of the Net-O-land.

Coming home Again

e/v/e/r/y/ night.

Every night

every day

Again.

waiting for the remembrance of the Electronic address

the silver rope behind the PO Box

the silent resonance and suspense

W-ithout the ancient platonic

W-hite shadow of a stamp

W-aiting for the sweet

the pleasure

Of repetition . (((thepleasureofrepetition)))

Dancing in the ssswamping Inter-net-land

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**THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT OF THE UNDERGROUND  
MOVEMENT OF THE QUICKSILVER SIXTIES IS STILL  
EXISTING IN MAIL-ART. . . . MAIL-ART IS A  
PHILOSOPHICAL SUBCULTURE, A PART OF A  
DIALECTICAL COUNTER-CULTURE, AN ARTISTIC  
UMBRELLA, A BELIEF IN COMMUNICATIVE LIFE  
VALUES; AN EXISTENTIAL FAITH IN POETIC AND  
PSYCHEDELIC MESSAGES.**

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While Johnson's Nothings are @t stake  
& - Nothing is crYptic anymore  
There is no need for A  
Young Wittgenstein  
Anyway

With 42.292-Luck and Energy

Guy Bleus  
gb@pophost.eunet.be

***RJ : Can we still find the spirit of the sixties in the mail-art networking?  
Or is mail-art already absorbed by the big Administrative Monster....?***

(This question Guy formulated himself in one of his in-between e-mails he sent to me.)

Next answer on 31-7-1997 (e-mail)

GB : 4 A4 to Q4 . An Inter-net-View

A. Dear friend Ruud, you follow an intelligent interview strategy: asking me my own questions. It reminds me of an interview about mail-art I did completely alone with myself in 1979 for the magazine of the alternative gallery "Space Z" in Antwerp. It was the period of "administrative installations and performances" (including identity cards of the planet Mars, interplanetary artistamps, interstellar weddings and divorces, diploma's, certificates, driving licences, indirect correspondence, etc.). As for me, the independent spirit of the underground movement of the quicksilver sixties is still existing in mail-art. The free and autonomous Netland is not absorbed yet by the mainstream of the big Administrative monster. Mail-art is a philosophical subculture, a part of a dialectical counter-culture, an artistic umbrella, a belief in communicative life values; an existential faith in poetic and psychedelic messages. The darker than dark demons can't eliminate this philosophy. The threat of

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the A-monster is not a social or economical problem, but an issue concerning the psychological and kaleidoscopic attitudes of the individual networker. As long as she or he refuses to sell her or his soul, the artistic Trip will continue. But without a doubt, the principal question of succession remains. Will the next Internet-generation still be interested to burn down the new electronic and virtual communication media?. Or will the lack of critical perception swallow the future MTV/CNN/NBC NonSense? However, I'm convinced that we should have confidence in the *Aristotelian* potentiality and artistic inspiration of the new millennium generations.

**B.** Some weeks ago I heard the sad news about Jo Klaffki's dead. It's all so enigmatic. I saw Joki on the German television, a few months ago. And now, he's gone to the eternal netland of nothings.... Without youthful cyber-desires, the Pell-Mell Network of the @dministration Centre looks like a poetical cemetery. Finally, it does not mean that much. Sometimes I ask myself "when will it be my turn?" not because I'm so afraid of dying; but there are still so many (art) projects to realize. I'm not ready — for the ultimate deadline yet.

**C.** from wellen — wiTh luck and **EnergY**

Guy Bleus - 42.292

**RJ : (Lost question!) - I did send participation to Guy's new project.**

Next answer on 26-10-1997 (via e-mail)

**GB :** 5 A to Q Number -V- / via e-fax

Dear Ruud

Remark GB: the fifth question was: "What are your future plans?"

**A.** Thank you for the "Working in an Art-mine" fax- and e-mail work. My plans — now and in the near future: at the moment I'm doing the lay-out for the "networkers are miners" catalogue. Soon you'll get a copy of it. There are 50 participants, including a lot of mail-art friends such as Baroni, Ciani, Altemus, Felter, Cole, Gaglione, Held Jr., Hubert, Groh, Maggi, Nielsen, Padin, Perneczky, ...

**B.** During the hot summer of 97 there was a lot of work to transform the old movie house, where I live, in order to create a bigger space for the ever growing networking archive. For example, The Administration Centre receives more and more mail-art collections, sent by networkers who stop doing mail-art. It is my aim to open the networking cinema space "The Scents & @dministration Centre-42.292" on January 1, 2000.

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**ADMINISTRATION HAS TO BE ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE AND NOT FOR A HAPPY FEW. AN OPEN@DMINISTRATION IS A BASIC RIGHT OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.**

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C. Meanwhile, a new mail-art project is going on: "1001 Desks/1001 Bureaus: FOR AN OPEN @DMINISTRATION" in Groningen (Northern Holland). The exhibition will take place in the autumn of 1998. If everything goes well, a new CD-ROM catalogue will be released. Every participant is invited to transform the printed postcard, picturing the office desk of the mayor of Groningen. A desk is a symbol of administration. Yet, this project is not against administration on itself, but it is against administrative oppression, it is against the abuse of power and authority, against "white collar" bureaucracy. Administration has to be accessible for everyone and not for a happy few. An open@dmistration is a basic right of a democratic society.

D. Another mail-art project is actually running: "Artbiorix - AGAINST CULTURAL OPPRESSION" in the cultural center of Tongeren (Belgium). Deadline: 06.30.1999. A catalogue will be printed. The exhibition, with all the entries, is scheduled from June 11 till September 11, 2000. In addition, a number of mail-art catalogues & other artifacts from the T.A.C.-42.292 archives will be shown. At the opening of the exhibition, we would like to include a cloning festival, "The Resurrection of Artbiorix" and an Ambiorix-mail-art parade.

There are very few and incomplete historical sources about AMBIBORIX. No-one knows what he exactly looked like. Not a single image of him has been preserved, not even a written portrayal. Ambiorix was the king of the "Eburonen" ("people of the yew tree"), who lived mainly between the rivers Rhine (Germany) and Meuse (Belgium). They had good, almost friendly relations with the Romans. That is why Caesar saw no danger in putting up a winter camp near them in 54 B.C. But Ambiorix had studied the Romans very attentively and learned a lot from them. He adapted their strong points (psychological tactics, quick action, ruthlessness) while exploiting their shortcomings at the same time (unfamiliarity with the territory, inner conflicts). His speech to the Roman camp-officers was a masterpiece of diplomacy and subtle persuasiveness. It goes without saying that we don't know exactly which words he really spoke and which words Caesar put in his mouth. His success proved the accuracy of politics he pursued and his keen insight. Julius Caesar found in him a worthy opponent. Unfortunately for Ambiorix is that he belonged to a small and relatively weak tribe- He was no match for Caesar in the end. Cf. some Indian tribes. We don't know exactly how he died. Probably he succumbed to his injuries. History doesn't mention him anymore. This mail-art project has nothing to do with war and militarism. It's a peace-project about RESISTANCE, underground, cultural values, communication, lies, myths, heroes and HISTORY.

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E. The next exhibitions in the E-Mail-Art Space in Hasselt are: Clemente Padin (10/97), Pascal Lenoir (11/97), Ruud Janssen (12/97), Ben Vautier (01/98), Gianni Broi (02/98), Fernando Aguiar (03/98), Piermario Ciani (04/98), Jürgen O.Olbrich (05/98), Gonzo (06/98), H.R. Fricker (07/98) and Anna Banana (08/98).

F. Ruud, these are some of my plans for the **future**. At the moment, many post-surrealistic and strange things are happening in my life. I really don't know what to think or believe about these "Private Art Detective" experiences. I can't tell you now the who's and why's, but I wrote it all down in the text "The CD-ROM Mystery." Printing this document (at this moment) could compromise other mail artists. Therefore I'll wait a few years with publishing it.

G. From Wellen — With Luck & Energy  
Guy Bleus - 42.292

RJ :

(I didn't ask a question! However I did send a contribution to a project that Guy Bleus is undertaking, where he selects single short statements for an "Emailart & Internetart Manifesto". Also he is working on several other things about which he wrote in answer # 5 and again in # 6)

Next answer on 2-12-1997

GB : To: tam@dds.nl  
Subject: Internet Mail-Art Interview / Future plans / Manifesto

6 Interview/Answer/Question/Number -VI

Dear Ruud

A. Miscellaneous. The 1400 invitations of the mail-art project in Groningen "1001 Desks/1001 Bureaus: For an OPEN @DMINISTRATION" have been sent. Please participate to this new "anti-bureaucratic" project. It was not easy to get a photograph of the desk of the mayor from Groningen. Since 1978, I did a lot of administrative installations with office desks. For instance, in Antwerp, Brussels, Gent, Leuven, Amsterdam, Groningen, Maastricht, Munster, Köln, Aachen, etc. In the meantime you must have received the Fax-and Internet catalogue "Working in A Coal-mine / Mail Art Networkers are Miners". Tomorrow opens your individual exhibition in the E-mail-art Space in Hasselt. Sometimes there are a lot of visitors (students, artists and art critics). Many netartists ask me to show their work, but it is only possible to do 12 shows in one year.

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**I'M NOT RESTRAINED BY AN ORTHODOX ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTE.I'M A COMPLETELY FREE NETLANDER. ALL MY WORK IS A PARODY OF THE NEUROTIC BUREAUCRACY. VERY FEW ARTISTS SEEM TO COMPREHEND THE SOCRATIC IRONY, THE ADMINISTRATIVE MOCKERY AND SARCASM.**

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**B.** The E-Manifesto & **rejections:** I don't reject statements for the emailart & internetart Manifesto project, even when they are sent by fax or snail mail. Worrying about the kind of communication medium, is not my cup of bergamot tea. I'm not restrained by an orthodox administrative institute.I'm a completely free netlander. All my work is a parody of the neurotic bureaucracy. Very few artists seem to comprehend the Socratic irony, the administrative mockery and sarcasm. Probably they are much too Serious.

Your electronic statement was not the only one that was not transmitted via the internet, e.g. Galàntai and Perneckzy did the same. There are already 29 participating networkers, such as, H.R. Fricker, Jas W Felter, Baroni, Ciani, Bennett, Honoria, Sarah Jackson, Banana, Artoposto, Altemus, Hoffberg, Tisma, Jensen, Friedman, Padin, Petasz, Fierens, Summers, Broi,...

I always accept ALL the (positive and negative) entries. If someone participates in my art projects and sends it using another medium, it doesn't matter. I never reject. For example, works of a fax-art project, which were not transmitted by fax are also accepted (ask José vd Broucke). The quintessence of Netland is not the type of communication media used, but the communicative values, the works of communication themselves, the works of art. For the E-Manifesto: see Appendix-5

**C.** On Saturday, 15 November, I did a performance in gallery Les Brasseurs, in Liège: "Now Ray is dead, I smoke Johnson." From 6 p.m. till 6 a.m., I smoked 6 packages of Johnson cigarettes (25 x 6 cigarettes). The same night, networker Charles François showed me the alcoholic underground scene of Liège. Since then, I don't feel very well about smoking.

**D.** Mail-art begins where the utilitarian use of the communication systems ends. It transcends the utilization coefficient. Maybe a little "more" enthusiasm, fair-play, mutual respect and real friendship is needed in the network. Only a small number of mail-artists understand how much work it is to organize projects with hundreds of participants and sending every participant a free catalogue or a CD-ROM. It means a full time engagement, night and day: all work and no p(l)ay. And sometimes, not even a single word of appreciation or recognition. But I do continue networking, because I love the mail-art-sress, the deadlines, the stamps, the spam-boys,(Guy, What are spam-

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**ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF MAIL-ARTISTS UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH WORK IT IS TO ORGANIZE PROJECTS WITH HUNDREDS OF PARTICIPANTS AND SENDING EVERY PARTICIPANT A FREE CATALOGUE OR A CD-ROM. IT MEANS A FULL TIME ENGAGEMENT, NIGHT AND DAY: ALL WORK AND NO P(L)AY. AND SOMETIMES, NOT EVEN A SINGLE WORD OF APPRECIATION OR RECOGNITION. BUT I DO CONTINUE NETWORKING, BECAUSE I LOVE THE MAIL-ART-SRESS, THE DEADLINES, THE STAMPS, THE SPAM-BOYS, (GUY, WHAT ARE SPAM-BOYS?) THE SOFT-ART-WARE, THE PERFUMES, THE ENVELOPES, THE FRIENDSHIP, THE SURFING IRONY, AND OF COURSE, I'M NOT A QUITTER —UNTIL I RETURN TO SENDER.**

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boys?) the soft-Art-ware, the perfumes, the envelopes, the friendship, the surfing Irony, and of course, I'm not a quitter ——until I return to Sender.

E. The (electronic) future of mail-art?. The end of mail-art has been announced so many times, but the fringe network is still alive and kicking. The mail-art network is a too solid and/or rigid construction to expect fast “fundamental” structural changes during the coming years. Maybe there will be more personal encounters, more fax-art and internet-art projects. Maybe an antithetical, separate PC mail-art network will assume a definite shape. However - concerning my hypothesis - the fine and amazing tradition of ex-changing and trans-changing art and other (visual, audio, video, olfactory, etc.) information via a communication system, including the organization of all kinds of art projects, will stay in the 21 century. In Netland a lot of artists can find a constructional and satisfying alternative for the morbid situation of the contemporary arts-industry. Mail-art has no real manifestos, restrictions or rules. Yet, the strict indications to organize a project, (no fee, no jury, no returns and a catalogue to every participant), must be respected. Only the implementation of these basic rules will maintain the everlasting network during the new millennium. Mail-art is an alliance of marginal networkers. They know that Netland is not utopia, but it is a good place to live. A mail artist is never alone, never together. The spatial distance is the enigmatic condition of interest to keep in contact. Without this mysterious entity, there were much more troubles in Netland. And, at the other side of our blue plaNET, there is always an art companion ready to communicate with, about the the art information flow, about the influences of the man-computer interaction upon the mail-art-society or about the flourishing future of the Netland. Mail-art, being the **mother of the internet**, is a cyber-city that never sleeps.

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**IN NETLAND A LOT OF ARTISTS CAN FIND A CONSTRUCTIONAL AND SATISFYING ALTERNATIVE FOR THE MORBID SITUATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS-INDUSTRY. MAIL-ART HAS NO REAL MANIFESTOS, RESTRICTIONS OR RULES. YET, THE STRICT INDICATIONS TO ORGANIZE A PROJECT, (NO FEE, NO JURY, NO RETURNS AND A CATALOGUE TO EVERY PARTICIPANT), MUST BE RESPECTED. ONLY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE BASIC RULES WILL MAINTAIN THE EVERLASTING NETWORK DURING THE NEW MILLENNIUM. MAIL-ART IS AN ALLIANCE OF MARGINAL NETWORKERS. THEY KNOW THAT NETLAND IS NOT UTOPIA, BUT IT IS A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE.**

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**F.** One can always find answers to questions that were never asked before. Netopia has just begun.

(Here we can close the Internet Mail-Art Interview)

With Luck & Energy

Guy Bleus - 42. 292

## **Appendix 1**

Art as Collective Mythology: Mail Art by Guy Bleus, written for An Annotated World Bibliography of Mail Art, by John Held Jr., Scarecrow Press Inc., USA, 1991

The history of art is often a solidified lie dictated directly or indirectly by comedians, merchants, and rulers. Likewise, the history of mail art will degenerate into an objective assumed lie. Yet it is doubtful that one shall ever be able to answer “exactly” when and where mail art arose, because many answers are possible and valid. Maybe mail art started in Japan in the fifties, maybe in the USA in the sixties, maybe in Europe in the seventies. It is all dependant on many different factors and in the first instance “what” on really means by the idea of “mail art.”

The more concentrated and centralized power is, the stronger will be the affirmation of one state of affairs, of one specific truth. “The” history is mostly just one history, pretending to be complete and without mercy for the unknown. The names and works of those who are powerless will be swept away

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with the sponge of namelessness. Antithetical to Hegel, Th. Adorno said that the whole is untrue. So, apart from the idea of “history” the “history” does not exist. And equally the history of mail art does not exist. Every mail artist can tell his own story, his or her own history of mail art. And one history is not more true than another one.

This view of the history of art refers to what has been called “art as an individual mythology”: artists realize their own history and myth. Applying this idea to the mail art network (=all mail artists together) it means the realization of a collective mythology. Here every mail artist has his/her role and function. But not one role is more true or important than another. Every judgement of value stays a mere personal judgement. It can’t be generalized in the mail art circuit without injuring the democratic principle of co-partnership in mail art. A mail artist and his/her work are more or less important for another mail artist depending on the intensity of their communication and the interpersonal impressions of all this.

Every mail artist must be encouraged to write his/her own mail art biography and bibliography (bravo J. Held!), so that all this culminates in a collective bio-bibliography, a network of crawling signs of the mail art life. The epistemological problem, if there must always be a relation of truth between the artistic activities and the places “where” or the period “when” these activities happen, stays an open issue. Anyone is free to transform the objective assumed lies of the history of art into subjective or intersubjective lies or truths.

Since the urinary bowl of Duchamp, everything can be art. Since Beuys, everybody can be an artist. It all depends on the way one looks at it, on the way one thinks. The aesthetic observation, the perception and the state of consciousness become more important than the created object. M. Blanchot: “The reader makes the work; while reading it, he creates it; he is the real author, he is the conscience and living substance of the written thing.” Art is no longer a schoolish game, played according to “specific” rules (except for the academic, folkloristic, and technical-traditional art). It is played according to undetermined rules. This is not a contradiction because it is necessary to change the rules in accordance with the needs of the time and the situational modalities. More important (vitaly important) than monetary considerations, the works of art of the art fetishes are the instincts of self-preservation, the wild intuitive thinking and the processes of creating. But even these processes

may not become the object of worship in an infertile way. Life is evolution, so is art. A cybernetic interplay of action and reaction. This feast of questioning and answering, of writing and writing in margins (J. Derrida), of intellectual and artistic creating, of an art that is never finished, is the real art of this age. It finds its most important representation in the communication-art or mail art.

## Appendix 2

A Dialogue Between the Postman & His Electronis Shadow by Guy Bleus, written in 1994, first published in 1995 in Dialogues, with texts by Boetti and Lawrence Weiner & edited by Luk Lambrecht (Museum of Actual Arts, Hasselt Belgium)

The position of the mailman as the ultimate man in the (pre-)electronic communication process.

1. The history of communication is a lie. Because the story is only a story and therefore incomplete, selective and interpreted. Blatantly absent in the recollection is the anonymous, that which doesn't have the power to make itself known, but that equally can make sense and be sublime. The conversations between past, present and future are always fragmentary and/or prophetic; a mishmash of truth, semi-truth and fiction, the tension between reality and illusion.

2. It is not actual to surf on the social waves of communication. For the mailman is not a son of a media tycoon like Berlusconi, but he is necessary for the delivery of the mail and for Mail-Art. The Postal worker is not an artist, but he is an irreplaceable moon shining over the processes of communication. The mailman is **unknown**, yet not without significance within the story of postal arts, day and night.

3. The eclectic novel of the new communicative space threatens to strangle the romantic narrative lines of man in communication. Technology dehumanizes the games between sender and receiver, but who is going to bother with the urbanization of cyberspace? Is there enough space for an **ethic** of the "social" superhighway?

4. The mailman is a communicative **anachronism**, but on the other hand he makes the same transfer of information visible. He is an essential trace within communicative reality. The letter carrier is not the owner of the information. But he is more than a symbol or an icon, moving on the level of language, in the language play between word and meaning. The mailman is a referent on the level of reality, a human of flesh and blood. It is of course nostalgic to

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presume that the 21st century will cherish the same totem animals as the 20th. Electronics are the guillotine of the mail (as a system of information). Postcards, post marks and stamps are the memorabilia of administrative rituals from a recent past.

5. “The end of a workers era is the beginning of...” Even Mercury, the mailman of the Gods, is impotent to complete the previous sentence. Ten years after 1984 we see an Orwellian hurricane approaching and no one knows where and when it will hit. Or are all skeptics wrong, and there is an interactive and **electronic nirvana** lying ahead of us?

6. The spring of communication is over. The installation’s artifacts look back and take different positions: where is the (symbolic) center of communication? Which strategies do exist to save the frivolous adultery of democracy in a so-called “**decentralized**” cyberspace?

7. A long time ago the earth lost its position as the **center** of the universe to the advantage of the sun (16th century). After God, the ultimate man dies too (19th century). Yet, a materialistic consumption clone of man stays alive and kicking. The human subject has been buried, but some are waiting for a resurrection.

8. The epistemological question of present communication is (still) possible, but is socially and historically irrelevant. The vulture of power relations circles especially around the correlation between the quality and the quantity of communication. Not the values, but **numbers** rule the planet. The merchandising of information is a fact.

9. The distance between people gets increasingly smaller as the speed of communication increases. In theory this implies that the world will end in **one** point that is situated between nowhere and everywhere.

10. The social function of the mailman (the effective contact with man) disappears because of the increase of telecommunication. The notion of “social” gets a new dimension. One can be alone yet be very social within the myth of cyberspace. The psychology of personal space needs to be reconsidered urgently. Can this be a matter of pathological communication? Indisputably there is an increase of alienation regarding the “real” fellow human being. But what is real? What is virtual?

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**THE NOTION OF "SOCIAL" GETS A NEW DIMENSION. ONE CAN BE ALONE YET BE VERY SOCIAL WITHIN THE MYTH OF CYBERSPACE. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSONAL SPACE NEEDS TO BE RECONSIDERED URGENTLY. CAN THIS BE A MATTER OF PATHOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION? INDISPUTABLY THERE IS AN INCREASE OF ALIENATION REGARDING THE "REAL" FELLOW HUMAN BEING. BUT WHAT IS REAL? WHAT IS VIRTUAL?**

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11. The **contradiction** between man and machine is getting smaller. The machine that increases alienation among human beings within the social system, brings people closer together. The paradox of the cyberspace traveler or "netizen."

12. A tribute to man seems unsuitable. The letter carrier who contributes to the realization of mail-art, who is the carrier of postal art, is invisible. Man has become but a broken-down metaphor.

13. An individual "pro-mailman" position is not an a-political theme in a time when man is subjected to the machine. The French philosopher De la Mettrie becomes the spiritual father of media-analyst McLuhan and cyber-writer Gibson. (The French philosopher Julien Offray De la Mettrie-1709-1751- is the first one to speak about "man as a machine". The same kind of cybernetic opinions which are found in the works of McLuhan and Gibson.) Where is the **information-proletariat** situated in this process of communicative "progress"?

14. A human approach of the post and communication commits itself on the level of the **labor** and labor-intensity. The notion of "unemployment" threatens to loose its meaning in a new social reality, and thus get a new dimension. To be unemployed doesn't apply anymore to man only, but to the lack of electronic communication equipment as well. On the other hand, the same electronics create a wave of unemployment.

15. A political subject would be to recognize the superhighway as a culture of **power**. It is being whispered that the Internet is an "anarchist" way, without hierarchical structure, without leaders. Gossip or Truth?

16. The attention to the role of "man" in the communication system is reduced to a linguistic or semiologic matter. The ethical consequences of hunger, of stress, of feelings, of shortages or of friendship in communication seem to be lost in the wrong millennium. Human activities disappear in the postal process "apparently" by an increase of electronic communication. The **monitor** "estheticizes."

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**THE SEDENTARY, ELECTRONIC HUMAN BEING WHO IS ENCLOSING HIMSELF IN ORDER TO DO "HOME SHOPPING" BY MEANS OF HIS MONITOR AND HIS KEYBOARD, WILL HAVE TO APPEAL TO "PEOPLE" WHO DELIVER THE PARCELS HOME.**

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17. Yet, one thing in this interactive story is forgotten: the sedentary, electronic human being who is enclosing himself in order to do "home shopping" by means of his monitor and his keyboard, will have to appeal to "people" who deliver the parcels home. Hence the post's function to distribute products will increase. Unless everything gets in the hands of privatized courier services. A political option with relation to "cocooning."

18. Mail-Art becomes inspired by the hard labor of postal workers. Their manipulations of sending and receiving, the postal packages filled with information, the postal tools like stamps, ink and paper become used by artists as new artistic methods and materials. Mail-Art is an ode to the unknown mailman.

19. The proper functioning of the postal services is accentuated by the individual project "indirect correspondence," this means correspondence via a detour. For instance references to fictive persons and/or addresses. On the schemes of the itinerary and also on the very same circulating letters appear traces on the post, in the snow of time and space. These **traces** indicate the respect for pieces of mail and the accuracy with which the postal system operates.

20. Opposing this are electronic appliances (such as telex, fax, modem) that alienate and/or eliminate man and reduce communication to mere efficiency. The long strips of fax paper posted on walls emphasize the **shortcomings** of electronic communication. Smells or perfumes for instance can't be transmitted.

21. In the construction of the Cathedral of Communication the **anonymity** of the mailman is an essential fact. His ephemeral contacts with correspondence, the content of which he will never know. An intuitive retrospective of the evolution of (electronic) communication shows a system of objects and traces, in which the letter carrier as a concept accentuates the democratic aspect of the postal services. An extracting sculpture about postal and post-postal thinking, feeling and wanting.

22. The present is always the past to the future.

23. Fall 1994

## Appendix 3

Telecopying in the Electronic Netland by Guy Bleus, written in different versions during the mid 1980's and published in mail-art catalogues; translated into German for the book Elektrografie-Analoge und Digital Bilder by Klaus Urbons, Dumont Buchverlag, Cologne, Germany, 1994

1. The world is a FAX-VILLAGE. After A. the aerogram, telegram and mail-gram, B. the telephone and telex; there is C. the facsimile or telefax. Artefax is more related to telephone(-art) than to mail(-art). Networking or(tele-)communication-art is the lowest common denominator.

2. The **myths** of facsimile. The father of the fax is the Scottish physicist & clock-maker Alexander BAIN (1818-1903). His invention of 1843 has been improved by Frederick Collier. Blakewell (1847), Giovanni Caselli (1865), G. Little (1867), Senlecq de Ardres (1877), Shelford Bidwell (1881), N. S. Amstutz (1892), Buss (1902), Arthur Korn (1904), Edouard Belin (1907), Diekmann (1917), American Telephone & Telegraph Company (1924/1925), Western Union (1924), Nec (1927), Wise (1938), Xerox Corporation (& RCA) (1950/1961), The Firm of Rudolf Hell (1965), Magnafax-Xerox (1966), Ricoh (1970), etc. Circa 1970 appears the first prototype of a laserfax. During the eighties the facsimile apparatus spreads worldwide. In 1990 the firms of Sharp and Starsignal present the first prototypes of colortelefax. Meanwhile fax has become an art medium.

3. **Facsimile** N. (< L. Fac, Imperative of facere, to make + simile, like), 1. An exact likeness, reproduction, or copy: abbrev. fac.; 2. the transmission and reproduction of printed matter by a process involving the use of radio broadcast, microwave relay or regular telephone lines.; adj. of or having the nature of, a facsimile; v t. (-led, -leing), to make a facsimile of - in facsimile, as an exact likeness.

4. **Copy** < O. Fr. < ML. copia, copious transcript < L. copia, abundance). A Copy has to be truthfully by definition. "Hotel Astoria, October 22, 1938" is mostly accepted as the first text in history of the xerography. It was accomplished in New York by the American physicist Chester F. Carlson (1906-1968) and his assistant Otto Kornei. Yet the true father of the photocopy should be the German professor Johann Heinrich Schulze who completed the very first photocopy in "1727" in Altdorf (Nurnberg). The fact is that many praiseworthy inventors never will shine in the cruel spotlights of the photocopy-history. Anyway, today anyone can make a photocopy and become an artist at the push of a button. Although copy-art & telecopy-art have separate technological roots they certainly are artistic networking nephews.

5. **Fax-art** (also called “Arte(e)fax” or “telecopy-art”) is a logical consequence of the economical evolution of the telefax machine. There are no fax transmissions if nobody can buy a fax apparatus. Telecopy art does not respect the same standards as xerography or copy-art. The latter is an event. It is the artist who indicates at a particular moment which photocopies are artistic works and which are not. Fax-art needs an electronic process. It is tele-communication art. The artist can transmit his or her image or work, but he or she has not the full control over the facsimile equipment of the receiver. So the aesthetic aspects of the faxwork become of secondary importance in comparison with the communicative aspects. In other words, a work can only become fax-art if it is transmitted.

6. The first international fax art **projects** go back to the early eighties with important projects as “The World in 24 Hours” (September 27 & 28, 1982) as a part of the “Ars Electronica 1982” organized by Robert (Bob) Adrian. Or “pARTiciFAX” (Electronic Mail) (June, 1984) Co-ordinated by Peeter Sepp, Lisa Sellyeh, Mary Misner, Michael Bidner, a. o. with participants from Africa, America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. In the late eighties fax becomes an integrated part of the mail-art network. In this respect we can receive more and more mail art projects mentioning a telefax number, so the artists can choose themselves if they want to send their work via post or fax. Many networkers have already curated or organized specific telefax or artefax projects, e.g. Artpool/Galantai, Guy Bleus, Peter Brandt, Paolo Bruscky, Piermario Ciani, Natale Cuciniello, Ko de Jonge, Charles Francois, Mauricio Guerrero, John Held Jr., Giuseppe Iannicelli, Lora Jost, Christian Pfaff, Klaus Urbons, etc. Good advice for fax performances or fax projects is to have permanently more than one fax line open. “Waiting” to have contact seems to be an essential aspect of telefax communication, because the lines are always busy.

7. The transmitted or received telecopy is always an **original**. The context or intention of the transmission can be false, but not the transmission itself. Indeed, a fax doesn’t lie, it is the true result of a communication process. It is the interaction and the result of a spatial and temporal process.

8. Since fax art is electronic mail art, one can also transmit “**indirect** fax-works.” X sends a facsimile to Y with the request to transmit it to Z (now Y can add or erase some aspects of the fax before sending it to Z). This is a good and fast method to realize co-works in no time.

9. Faxing can transform the notion of **time**. By obstructing the “original” (not transmitted) text or image one can influence the duration of the fax transmission. For instance, one can manipulate the telefax machine by withdrawing, stretching, pulling up, pulling further our (a part of) the transmitting

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**ART COMES FROM THE FREEDOM AND LUXURY  
SUSTAINED BY ONE'S SOCIOECONOMIC PLACE IN  
SOCIETY, WHICH GIVES ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES  
NECESSARY TO CREATE THE TYPE OF ART WHICH AN  
ARTIST DESIRES TO CREATE.**

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pages. Besides these vertical maneuvers also horizontal (zigzag, shaking or waving) actions are possible. Moreover the misuse of the electronic apparatus can be repeated All these operations will affect both the process of the fax transmission and the transmitted image or work. The latter can also be influenced by interventions on the fax paper: heating, crumpling up, the use of corrosive liquids, etc. These operations can give wonderful and unexpected results and change the fax process. But of course all these artistic interventions are not highly recommended for the well-being of your telefax machine.

10. **Opponents** of telefax as an artistic medium correctly emphasize its shortcomings. Faxing is more expensive than postal networking. One can't transmit scents or 3-D objects. Facsimile means "selection." One can not receive several faxes at the same time (with only one telefax line), etc. All these remarks are true. But the "problem" is that "every" artistic medium has its own limitations. For instance, Mail-art is not the proper or adequate medium for a sculptor. So, sculpture is highly selective because a block of marble or blue stone is more expensive than a fax transmission. But these art forms are beyond comparison and doing so means confusing concepts. Sculpture, film, mail-art, photography, computer art, fax art, etc. are different ways of artistic expression. Possibility, feasibility, money, idiosyncrasy and preference are some of the applicable notions in this tasty jumble.

11. From an ideological or ethical point of view all art media mean "**selection**", even the democratic mail-art networking. How many mail artists are there from North Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, Tibet, Lebanon, Iran, Sudan or Somalia?. Art comes from the freedom and luxury sustained by one's socio-economic place in society, which gives access to the resources necessary to create the type of art which an artist desires to create. Fax is fun. It has no ethical or ideological implications. Except this one: the (electronic) (mail art) world has become a "global village" with many "blind spots."

12. To fax or not to fax is not the question. Faxing or telecopying just adds new electronic perspectives to the existing mail-art activities. The consequences will not cause an inflation of the networking communication or replace the previous mail-art rituals. **Exploring** all the additional electronic possibilities means a new stimulus for the eternal Netland.

## Appendix 4

In Quest of Netland, by Guy Bleus, written for the Mail-Art Manual for the Portugal Mail-art exhibition in the Cultural Centre of Heusden-Zolder, Belgium, 1991

“When Z. was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains.” (Friedrich Nietzsche)

1. The mail-art network is a free communication structure of hundreds of artists exchanging visual, verbal, olfactory, etc. information. Nobody **owns** this network. Every newcomer can make use of it without any restrictions. He or she has the same rights like everybody else. But of course, networkers have their preferences and prejudices. Mail-art networking is a social and psychological art process with golden mountains and silver valleys.

2. Mr. Network doesn't exist. If the anthropomorphized network must have a sex, it is **hermaphrodite**. Mail-art is not black or white, hetero or homo, Belgian or Italian, young or old. Private networking has nothing to do with mail-art. Mail-art is open, not closed, not “or”, but “and. There is room for “every” ideology, religion, philosophy, etc. Contradictory opinions are possible. This yields a colorful web of fascinating “and” boring subjects of discussion.

3. “The” Network doesn't really exist. Every networker or mail-artist has her/his own mailing-list. All these **overlapping** mailing-lists together with their communicative activities form the global network.

4. There is always something rotten in the belly of the big planetary system. The situation can be dramatic for this or that particular artist. But it never seems to be tragically for the **future** of the whole mail-art network. A lot of mail-artists have left the network building for personal reasons. Sometimes they came back, sometimes they didn't.

5. It is the task of each networker to look out that the eternal Netland doesn't become a chilly cuirass without heartbeats and emotions. Mail-art may not be a principle or system maintaining itself. The art is less important than the artist. The **networker** is more important than the network.

6. Pretending that the art is **dead** (Dada) or that the history of art is dead (H. Fischer) is wishful thinking. Hegel was “not” the last philosopher. History is not dead. Art is alive and kicking. With deceptive regularity all social and cultural relations change. The thing, the concept and the word evolve - and so does their relationship. The mail-art network of the flowery sixties ( with its “flower power” & underground postal art) differs from that of the fluorescent nineties(with electronic mail art). Nothing is (eternal), everything becomes.

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7. History is a selective and flexible lie. Finally, the history of mail-art networking will choose a handful of **heroes** representing the whole movement. It will select the names and games of a few Flux artists, a few correspondence artists of the early years and some others. Does it make sense to say that this won't happen? Anyway, the problem is, how to overcome this historical injustice? By publishing a complete list with "all" the names? And what will be the standard? A mail-art Network enclosing all the participants of mail-art projects and shows, including both sporadic and permanent, regular and irregular participants? History will always be a gray cheese with many holes.

8. Will mail-art become the self-fulfilling **prophecy** of the most important art-movement in the history of art? How important is it to exile mail-art networking - as long as possible? - from walking into the slick main street of art?

9. For years, creative artists have mentioned new names to indicate "mail-art." Yet 90 % or more of the networking processes are happening via the postal services. Is mail-art threatened by awakening egotism and/or egocentrism? It won't be for the benefit of the Network to divide the cake and tear it into pieces. Neoism, Noism, Smile, Art-Strike, fax-art, telephone-art, computer on-line art, Aggressive mail-art, Tourism, Administration, NEONICS, IUOMA, EON, etc. etc., are all wonderful aspects and enrichments of mail-art Networking - but they can't replace it. Is mail-art the metaphorical **Leviathan (giant)** of all the likes and dislikes in the Netland?

10. Are you sleeping? Some mail-artists are tired, tired of being involved again and again in mail-art projects, shows, magazines, etc. Therefore postal experiments and artistic deviations can be a good antidote for dull routine mail-art. For instance: how will other networkers react when X doesn't glue (enough) postage stamps? As long as the experiment didn't happen, only hypothetical answers are possible. Will the receivers refuse to pay the tax? Will they only pay the first time? How would mail-art function when "all" mail-artists refuse to glue postage-stamps and refuse to pay the tax? How much communication would be possible? 1993: a year without postage stamps. Such departures keep mail-art networking interesting, because the reactions or feedback's of the communication are unpredictable. The success of an experiment doesn't really matter. It opens perspectives, thoughts, surprise, wonder and astonishment in the dormitory of art. The adventure is never boring, but it can be embarrassing.

11. A successful mail-art experiment was the "**decentralized** world-wide mail-art congress" in 1986, organized by Gunther Ruch & H. R. Fricker. One international mail-art meeting can never solve all the problems of the Network. It is impossible to realize that all mail-artists come to one place. So, the decentralized "local" mail-art meetings are a very good alternative.

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**THE SUCCESS OF AN EXPERIMENT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER. IT OPENS PERSPECTIVES, THOUGHTS, SURPRISE, WONDER AND ASTONISHMENT IN THE DORMITORY OF ART. THE ADVENTURE IS NEVER BORING, BUT IT CAN BE EMBARRASSING.**

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In 1992 the follow-up of 1986 will happen: "Where two or more artists/networkers meet in the course of '92, there a congress will take place. " Yet, it is doubtful that there will arise general solutions for the entire network. But the congresses are more important than the solutions. The meeting is the message.

12. A gripping networking experiment of the same kind, replacing the postal rituals, is **Tourism**. It is the opposite of archivism or administration. The latter is a sedentary activity, classifying the mail-art items for posterity. The administrator is a domestic type.

13. For the tourist **home** is everywhere. Home is where (s)he is. Home is always here, never there. When a tourist can't overcome this psychological problem, (s)he becomes homesick and unable to enjoy her/his travel. Nevertheless, the tourist will always return to her/his real home. Otherwise (s)he isn't a tourist anymore, but an inhabitant.

14. For most networkers mail-art is an "artistic" home. A **shelter** from slickers, juries, fees, monetary compulsion, creative detention, etc.

15. In a certain way all mail-art is a **sedentary** and static activity. Every mail-artist becomes identified with the place where (s)he lives; that is, Held is San Francisco, Baroni is Viareggio, Blaine is Ventabren, Crozier is Sunderland, TAM is Tilburg, Dr. Groh is Edewecht, Maggi is Milano, Hubaut is Barfleur, Figueiredo is Porto, Bentivoglio is Roma, etc. An evil for every mail-artist is to move frequently. A good example of a very dynamic networker is Wally Darnell. Do you know by heart where his latest address is ? China, Saoudi-Arabia or USA ? In this respect a pronunciation as "the address is the art" is very significant.

16. **Traveling** can be exciting. There are the fascinating aspects of alienation and entanglement while learning another culture. On the other hand there is the negative aspect of avoiding responsibility. One dares to undertake actions one wouldn't dare at home. This can be funny, but also annoying for the local inhabitants. Tourism as the big sunny money making machinery is a form of escapism. Freedom ----- as an organized flight.

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**ON THE ONE HAND THE IDEALISTIC ASPECT OF  
WRITING TO AN UNKNOWN OR MYTHICAL PERSON IS  
OFTEN MORE INTERESTING THAN WRITING TO A  
"KNOWN" PERSON OF FLESH AND BLOOD.**

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17. School-journeys have an object in view. They must be educational and are mostly boring. If they aren't tedious, it is on the spots that they weren't planned. The best memories one has about school-journeys are especially those made during childhood. Children make each journey adventurous. Tourism is traveling without a target. The crusades weren't touristic.

18. Traveling is playing with the notions of time and space. One can travel through the history of plastic arts. One can journey through the depths of the own **mind** and memory, like Marcel Proust or Søren Kierkegaard often did. After all, everyone owns an incomplete map of the world. Every netlander discovers his/her descriptive model of mail-art. (S)He develops conscious or unconscious a vision and action-plan of what (s)he thinks that has to be done in the Network.

19. Art and mail-art are founded on belief and unbelief, on the discourses of myths. A myth is a story, arisen via the limited information one has gathered. Networkers receive incomplete information and imagine myths about one another. Mail-Art creates a **collective** mythology, stories in the minds of the networkers, stories about networkers, events, personal experiences, facts, etc. The image-building is especially based on the first impressions and the whole of received information. Every slumbering story is true and untrue, always changing, never finished.

20. On the one hand the idealistic aspect of writing to an unknown or mythical person is often more interesting than writing to a "known" person of flesh and blood. The unknown has the advantage that one doesn't know his or her short-comings. The unknown networker has no boring tics, is not greedy or envious, etc. On the other hand the personal contact humanizes the networking relationship, brings it to real proportions.

21. Networking-Tourism: the messenger is the medium and the message. The visitor-artist is the art-work and the art-medium.

22. Tourism is not only locomotion, it also includes **rest**. But unexpected or unannounced guest-artists will not always be welcome. They will have to take account of the personal situation of the host(ess) at that specific moment. "Am I welcome?" "How many days can I stay?" "Who will provide for the

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**NETWORKING IS A PRAXIS, A FLUID SYSTEM OF  
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entertainment, the dinners, etc.?, are not always superfluous questions. Maybe an ethical code about Networking-Tourism is desirable. (Cf. the generally accepted imperatives in mail-art: no jury, no fee, no rejections, documentation to all). Sometimes there is a need for a clear agreement about hospitality in the Network.

23. Interludes or personal contacts are creative processes. The dialogues and conversations are emotive and intellectual performances. After a while the initial idealistic meeting becomes more and more realistic. Knowing is losing one's **innocence**. Too much Tourism or personal contacts will mean the end of mail-art Networking. Art and mail-art need a certain spatial and psychological distance. The taboo of total communication. Postal and touristic derailments can harm the Divine Network. Secrets are diamonds, but curiosity is harder.

24. Mail-art and Tourism are more than slick methods of art that display and conceal, communicate and stop communicating. They don't obey the rules of the rude Monologue ( the monologues of most gallery artists), but produce "permanent" semiotic games of information, gentle interactions of values. A **dialectics** of signals and signs. Herewith, the journeys of letters or persons are not fundamental different. The inner adventures of senders and messengers are continuously present.

25. There are as many opinions about the essence and meanings of the phenomena of mail-art and Tourism, as there are netlanders. And maybe more. Networking is a praxis, a fluid system of opinions and ideas, without dogmatism or orthodoxy. Networkers are mavericks in a postal or touristic context.

Ultimately, Z. will always leave the Mountains.

Guy Bleus (Wellen, 1991)

**Appendix 5**

**RE: THE E-MAIL-ART & INTERNET-ART MANIFESTO**

1. As an artist you're not bound to administrative or bureaucratic restrictions: never mind the netiquette. (26. 11. 1997 17:52) CET - Central European Time).

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2. Only senders can be located. (27. 11. 97 01:46).
3. Mail Art forum is “oneworld” - a conference on plexus chalkboard. (27. 11. 97 04:02).
4. As an artist you use real e-mail artistamps when posting your e-mail art. (27. 11. 97 08:49).
5. Like telefax, email should be a tool and not an intrusion. I value my privacy and I don't use email for network art projects. Email, snail mail, telefax, and telephone are different processes. I prefer to use them in specific and different ways. (27. 11. 97 12:59).
6. Mail art, it ain't deep, it's thick... (27. 12. 97 14:17).
7. E-mail art will finally free you from illegible handwritings (your server won't deliver messages that are not perfectly addressed, like your dumb post-man does). We're neat, man. (27. 11. 97 17:24).
8. E-mail-art swarms and buzzes total / contact fades the self becoming / eyestrain headache, falls away. . . (27. 11. 97 19:57).
9. Our art messages travel free from our hearts without stylistic judgments or other prejudice. s (27. 11. 97 22:11).
10. As a mail artist you're not bound to any specific communication-form. (27. 11. 97).
11. Mail art mostly means sending snail mail and receiving it, and I remain very active doing this. My joys in using e-mail are to discuss the movement, share ideas, network with fellow mail artists, but I see this as tangential to the movement. Not all have computers and modems; postage can be purchased by almost anyone. (28. 11. 97 15:37).
12. Greener and cheaper than fax or regular paper mail. Besides ASCII suits my minimalist/writer side well. All the GIFFs are eminently disposable (much like mail art). (29. 11. 97 0:06).
13. It ain't mail-art, if it isn't mailed. E-mail is networking, not mail-art. (29. 11. 97 04:07).
14. The value of stock about the “email art enterprise” is fixed at 1 small bag of candies. Don't package the email art productions. (29. 11. 97 09:06).
15. Mail artists who participate in email art and other internet-based creative collaboration will use and encourage mail art network values of freedom, non-juried participation, gracious appreciation, and documentation-to-all when participating in electronically based communications projects. (29. 11. 97 14:57).

- 16. After mail-art comes e-mail-art and after networking comes internetworking. Only the techniques and terms are different. The essence is the same - art of communication. (29. 11. 97 22:41).
- 17. Net Art is not Mail Art - Mail Art is not Net Art. (01. 12. 97 11:43).
- 18. Signs travel here as connection directs the weight of freedom as a dream disappears but won't give up. (01. 12. 97 23:23).
- 19. By doing mail art one defines oneself as an artist. (02. 12. 97 05:25).
- 20. E-mail is not an umbrella for mail artists. It is a mere emergency, quick fix for instantaneous communication. Snail mail is the only mail for mail artists. (02. 12. 97 08:35).
- 21. In between each and every time fraction is a space equal to the necessity of the visual sense obligation; thus we are pondered by one another even as we are stretched to the inner-outer limits of a community shriek. (03. 12. 97 18:26).
- 22. Electronic exchange is like the model of an atomic system - spirals, smashing, swirling, and linear acceleration. Electronic communications sometimes cause a rash of energy, other times they dissipate into space and nothingness. (03. 12. 97 19:38).
- 23. Expose the whole fucking edifice. Everything comes back as merchandise. Subvert the dominant position, let's all be on top! (04. 12. 97 02:32).
- 24. Mail Art is not sufficient but consoles us. Mail Art is not a spirit floating in space but has his feet strongly buried in earth. (05. 12. 97 11:25).
- 25. Now we can attach a picture, a sound or a video to our e-mail: a can of beer would be better! (06. 12. 97 11:25).
- 26. E-Mail Art is instantaneous, inexpensive and broad based, but lacks the rustle and texture of human communication. The true revolutionary knows that it's a life's work. (8. 12. 97 7:48).
- 27. As long, as (some) humans have no idea who they are, is art. (22. 12. 97 20:50).
- 28. Don't mix up artistic communication with commercial communication: the possibilities as well as the limitations of the used (electronic) media are involved in this required distinction. (24. 12. 97 11:24).
- 29. Mail art is not a statement of fact, or even a series of statements. It is a process placing the participant in a state of flux. (25. 12. 97).
- 30. Snailnet goes to Internet (26. 12. 97 18:19).

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- 31. Don't pass the deadline. (28. 12. 97).
- 32. eMail Art is the next best thing to talking to my friends in the network. (Talking to my friends is the next best thing to visiting them.). (A.D. )
- 33. I like e-mail if the deadline is today, but I don't like speedy deadlines and immaterial mail - snail mail is better than a quick nothing. (A.D. ).
- 34. E-mail-art is a small part of my mail-art communication. E-mail = messages. Slow messages with real communication will be of a high value in the 21th century - Mail-art and e-mail-art can built new social networks.(A.D. ).
- 35. We need to substantiate the interactivity with clear and strong ideas, with which to fall in love and make others fall in love. (A.D. ) December 31th, 1997.

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- 1. Guy Bleus / 2. H. R. Fricker / 3. Plexus / 4. Jas W Felter / 5. Ken Friedman / 6. Leo Duh Fitchi / 7. Vittore Baroni / 8. John M. Bennett / 9. Sarah Jackson / 10. Ruud Janssen / 11. Artoposto / 12. Reed Altemus / 13. Anna Banana / 14. Umberto Principi / 15. Honoria / 16. Andrej Tisma / 17. K. Frank Jensen / 18. Spencer Selby / 19. Shanofnj / 20. Judith A. Hoffberg / 21. David Cole / 22. Daniel Plunkett / 23. Steven Perkins / 24. Clemente Padin / 25. Charles François / 26. Joel S. Cohen / 27. Pawel Petasz / 28. Géza Perneczky / 29. John Held Jr. / 30. Gyorgy Galántai / 31. Mr. Colori / 32. Rod Summers / 33. Piermario Ciani / 34. Luc Fierens & Annina Van Sebroeck / 35. Gianni Broi.

All kinds of remarks are welcome. The complete list of statements including the e-mail addresses are printed as a booklet Edited by The Administration Centre-42. 292 / G. Bleus / PO. Box 43 / 3830 Wellen / Belgium / gb@pophost.eunet.be

## Appendix 6

1. The Administration Centre - 42.292 (T.A.C. - 42.292) is a living archive of "Communicationism," of the postal rituals and communicative gestures of the Mail-Art Netland. It is based on the democratic principle that "Every" piece of mail, (envelopes, postcards, letters, ...) is meaningful, in the socio-cultural context of the mail-art circuit. So every artist or non-artist is treated with the same care. The idealistic purpose was, and is, to store up the entire narration of what happened by classifying "all" the results of mail-

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activities received from the Eternal Netland, but every archive will tell the true story of its own web.

2. As of 1998, the whole collection comprises original works, and/or information of ( plus or minus) 5000 Networkers from over 60 countries. The classification is in alphabetical order and per country. Every artist has one or more files and/or box files (if a lot of works are present.) Individual numbers refer to an accurate index-system, so that everything can be found easily.

3. The administration archive is divided into separate units: Artiststamps, Artists' Books, Artpaper, Assemblings, Audio-art, Copy-art, Fax Art, Graffiti, Magazines, Mail-art, Performances, Postcards, Posters, Internet-art, Rubberstamp-art, Small-Press publications, video-art, Visual poetry, etc.

4. Over the years a lot of mail-artists and those interested came to Wellen for a visit at the administration centre. From abroad there were artists such as Banana, Baroni, Bloch, Dresscher, Dudek-Durer, Formentini, Gaglione, Graf Haufen, Handa, Held Jr., Janssen, Olbrich, Oliveira, Perneckzy, Ruch, Stake, Taylor, Timar, Kustermann, Lorenzi, Van Dijk, and so on. Several students used documents of the archive for research.

5. Since the foundation of the administration centre, in 1978, a lot of exhibitions with works from the archive have been realized at different places, e.g. "Mail-art pARTy", Gemeentehuis, Leopoldsburg, 1979; Gallery Ruimte Z (= Space Z), Antwerp, 1980 (with emphasis on indirect correspondence and mail-art by children); I.C.C., Antwerp, '80; Vub, Brussels, '81; De Warande, Turnhout, '81; Ciap, Hasselt, '82; De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam, '83; Stedelijk Museum, Tienen, '84; Cultural Centre, Valkenswaard, '85; Gallery Il Ventuno, Hasselt, '86/'88; Dominikanenkerk, Maastricht, '88' Cultural Centre, Genk, '89; Cultural Centre Heusden-Zolder, '91/'93; Public libraries of Hasselt, Zonhoven, Heusden-Zolder, Bilzen, Genk, '91-'92; Zoo, Antwerp, '92; Cultural Centre Anderlecht, '92; Ptt Museum, The Hague '92; De Fabriek; Eindhoven, '93; etc.

6. Attention: Don't throw it away. Do you have problems storing your superfluous mail-art related things (old or new envelopes, postcards, documents, magazines, etc.) Don't burn it, send it to:

**The Administration Centre - 42.292**

**Mail-art Archive, Guy Bleus P.O. Box 43, 3830 Wellen, Belgium**

**Phone & Fax: (+)32-12-74.14.15 (Night and Day)**

**E-Mail address : gb@pophost.eunet.be**

7. Netland Archives are poetical cemeteries of memories, activities and curiosities. In memory of the Unknown Netlanders, they file the present for posterity.