

Visible Language 30.2 features New Media Poetry, Poetic Innovation and New Technologies, edited by Eduardo Kac. This is the first international anthology to document a radically new poetry, challenging even the innovations of recent and contemporary experimental poetics, including revolutionary work by artists from Argentina and Brazil, the U.S., the Netherlands, France, Portugal and the UK. The only thing missing with this issue is the CD-Rom that is the necessary partner in seeing what is being done in this fascinating medium which bridges many movements, many art issues, many media.

Small Press Review for August-September has news from Bob Grumman who reviews the websites for Visual and Concrete Poetry including the Grist On-line Home Page, the Light & Dust Home Page, Hyperotics, the Electronic Poetics Center Home Page and ubuweb. There is also a review of Score #14, 1015 W. Clifford St., Pullman, WA 99163. **Factsheet Five** was reviewed by Bob Black in April 1997.

The New York Times Magazine for September 18, 1997 is dedicated to What Technology is Doing to Us, which includes an article by Laurie Anderson on "Dazed and Bemused" in which our electronic age makes us all players in a performance-art piece. Included is an Electronic Gallery with full-page works by artists such as Jenny Holzer, Gary Hill, Daniel Lee.

Washington Review for August/September presented a special issue on Artists who Make a Difference, featuring those under-acknowledged in the fields of film, theater, arts administration, dance. Featured is Helen Frederick: Founder and Director of Pyramid Atlantic in an interview with Buck Downs.

inter (art actuel) our to Quebec features Fernand Dumont, poet and sociologist of culture, highlighting Hygienism, 20 years of Contextual Art by Jan Swiszlinski with texts on Things as They Are and Art as contextual Art (a manifesto). Included is a performance/installation by Felipe Ehrenberg entitled *to Calibrate cynicism* (in three languages) plus lots of news and notes. Fine publication on your newsstand or from Les Editions Intervention, 345 rue du Pont, Quebec, Quebec G1K 4M4, Canada.

A CONVERSATION WITH KLAUS GROH

During the Eyerhymes International Conference in June in Edmonton, Canada, I had the great pleasure to visit with Klaus Groh, renowned in the Mail Art, Visual Poetry and Book Art world. It was the first time I had seen him since 1975, when he was in San Francisco for the Banana Fest.

Kurt spoke about how he performed the *Ursonate* of Kurt Schwitters (only six or seven minutes of it) in the Square at the Embarcadero. He was in the U.S. at that time (1975) because he had written his thesis on the New Dada on the West Coast - the new Dadaism on the American West Coast--which he prepared for his Ph.D. in Art Education, at the University of Oldenburg.

He had also written a book on Concept Art, *If I had a Mind*, published by Dumont in Cologne. It was well received and in a short time it was out of print. Some years later, they asked him to do a book on Concept Art/Land Art in the Eastern European countries, since the first book by Jiri Valoch and Geza Pernecky about the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, published by Dumont Verlag, had also been well received. But a book on art in Eastern Germany by Thomas could only be published if Groh's book would be suppressed, so although the book was published in 5000 copies, available for only 1 1/2 months, then it was cancelled. He discovered that the roots of conceptualism and land art are different in the East than in America or Europe. Published material is "samizdat" or home-made, and the largest collection of Samizdat is in the University of Bremen today. In the meantime, Groh was transforming all his personal research into his education as teacher.

Over the years, he has organized lots of exhibitions under Mail Art, which was called Correspondence Art in his time, whereas Ray Johnson and the New York School changed it to Mail Art. Groh carried the theme of Mail Art to Europe, with Wolf Vostell and Robert Rauschenberg being the dominant figures at the time, to transport artistic ideas through the mail. "Mail Art is not an -ism, but a channel to distribute art. For artists in Eastern European countries and in Latin America, Mail Art was a possibility to cross boundaries without traveling, without visas, passports, and controls. The biggest Mail Art collection in Europe is the Polish-controlled system in Warsaw. Every piece of mail which had a red triangle stamp with a number in it was copied, because it was considered a mail art activity and therefore, subversive."

In the DDR (East Germany), there was the same problem with mail art. A lot of mail artists had problems with the government, but actually many "mail artists" were members of the Secret Service (the Stasi) and were serving as spies for the government. They spread mail art invitations around for exhibitions, and they wanted to know who from the West were working with this "terrible group". They collected all this information about dubious personalities in a center, a so-called Gaust Archiv, an archive in which they kept big files on people such as Klaus Groh. He found his file held more than 200 pages, and because of the new Freedom of Information Act, he now has a copy of all his files from the Berlin Archive. All the postcards Groh received in English from other countries were translated into German, and he knows this because you can see the translations made in pencil, which have no sense at all most times, because of some of the outrageous messages on mail art. The real importance of Mail Art was stopped, according to Groh, when the wall came down. The political and social reasons for doing Mail Art were rendered mute at that time. As Robert Rehfeldt used to say: *Say something about anything or anybody will say something about you. Or Mail Artists of the World, Unite!* At that time, Robert was sending many messages out to the world, with a secret message between the lines.

After 1989, Mail Artists changed. What could they do now? "Some of them just want a collection, others just do stupid things. But I think that those who do Mail Art now should do something like poetry—where the word and letters are the main thing, emphasizing the word. Mail Art in one way has words that have meaning, while other aspect should be concrete poetry and visual experiences. And there are special pattern poems, using letters as mystical elements in the German culture. If an illiterate sees something written, there is something mystical about it, since he reads what someone who is not present is thinking. You can read what anybody thinks about something in that moment, but the person who created it is many miles away. In the whole history of human existence, there are technical means to transport any kind of information and emotions, which is a mystical experience, because you don't see the person who wrote it, but you know exactly what it means.

According to Groh, e-mail or fax-art is not truly mail art, because mail art is material. And Mail Art can be humorous. As Schiller wrote, he explained, a human being is only a human being if he plays. To play high quality games is interesting.

In 1977 he was invited to Calgary to do a book exhibition and concept art by Biron Gysin, Paul Woodrow and Clive Robertson. In 1988 he was invited by Philippo Menessis in Sao Paulo to exhibit and lecture. He used to teach at the University of Oldenburg as lecturer, and some of his students (about 7 or 8) have continued to do mail art in the network. In 1990, he was invited by a club of journalists in Havana, Cuba to do a book exhibition at the University of Havana, and then he attended the Mexican Conference of Visual and Performance Poetry in Mexico City in 1996.

He and his wife now have a small Salon/Theater/Exhibition Gallery in their home in Oldenburg. They have had exhibitions of the books of Mirella Bentivoglio from Rome, Milan Knizak, Ken Friedman, John and Astrid Furnival, Henning Mittendorf, Andrej Dudek Durer, and many more. I reminded him of his great *Buchobjekte* exhibition at the University of Oldenburg in 1986 with an amazing exhibition catalog of 400 pages and an extraordinary binding.

In addition to the exhibitions, they do have theater performances (rather classical) such as work from Brecht, Kafka, Becket as well as concerts and political cabaret. Because Oldenburg and his wife Renate live on the "backside of the moon in the countryside", they have become the cultural center in that area, so government and banks are interested in sponsoring their programs. It is good public relations for them, and excellent for the artists, for the patrons, and for the audiences. The house can hold 55 people, and performers have come from Switzerland, Australia, Holland, Italy, and mostly from Germany. Because they will be celebrating their 10th anniversary in 1998, there will be a big festival next year. For those interested in sending mail art, attending salons, or just "getting to know" Klaus Groh, contact him at Postfach 1206, D-26 182 Edeweicht-Klein Scharrel, Germany. He's been there, done that, and is still doing mail art, book art and is a catalyst for the alternative.

