



NOT IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, A SKETCHY SURVEY OF ABOUT TWO YEARS WORTH OF COLLABORATIONS, ACTIVITIES, CONSTRUCTIONS AND PLANS.

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FIVE SHORT TEXTS TO PREPARE THE GROUND FOR A TENTATIVE THEORY OF RESPONSIBLE
CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTATION

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Not wanting to be alone. Social work in a different sense. Like Exquisite Corpses. When the product remains undefined until the very end, authorship is a shared affair and meaning arises not from intention but from chance encounters. Juxtapositions like that of Lautreamont's Sewing Machine, Umbrella, Dissecting Table.

The idea that an idea is put to rest when it becomes a blueprint, which is to be executed faithfully, that it is awoken again when the print is altered. Improvisation not as mode of creativity, whatever that may be, but as a sign that something is in change. When you run into art, ask yourself: is it still moving? Or is it still? Can you make it move? Or does it make you still? A way of speaking (making meaning), not in symbols but in analog patterns. How does the world mean? It is not a novel. It is not a picture. Nor a science book.

FIVE SHORT TEXTS TO PREPARE THE GROUND FOR A TENTATIVE THEORY OF RESPONSIBLE CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTATION

My writing, and it is writing in the continuous form as I hope to arrive somewhere through the activity itself, aims for an experimental, process-oriented, open ended quality which is frequently associated with avant-garde art of the sixties. It does not outline a position. Positions have the tendency to work like fortresses, they can and in most cases will be attacked. The alternative to holding a position might be described as a sort of drifting. This is a drifting to explore if and how one can appropriately be in the tradition of sixties avant-garde experimentation today. Most prominently it will address the concept of lifelike art.¹ Although numerous art objects from the sixties enjoy the status of prominent icons of modernist innovation, the indeterminate attitude towards art making, that was present

¹Allan Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," Artforum, October 1983, p.37-43.

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A FAITHFUL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE UPSTAIRS ROOM WITH ALL ITS CONTENTS realized in San Diego, 9/92, was a situation in a warehouse space, announced to the local art going public as an installation. A workshop, a kind of lab, containing a group of mechanisms that performed therapeutic functions. Some of them were in working order, others were being assembled. They were appliances and could be applied to and by whoever came to see them. I was present as a lab technician or therapist or fellow patient most of the time.

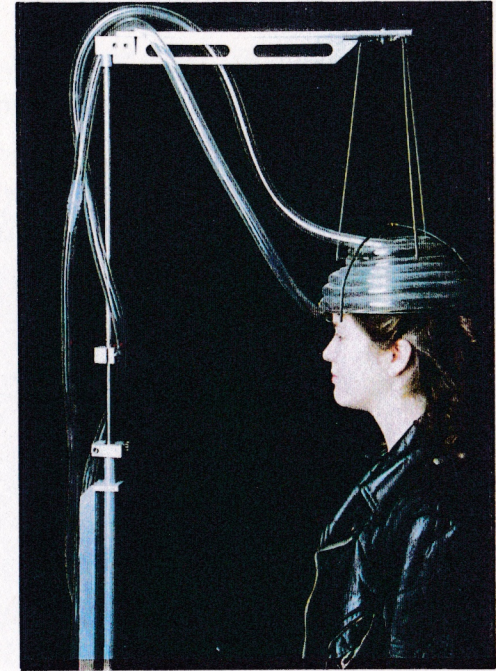
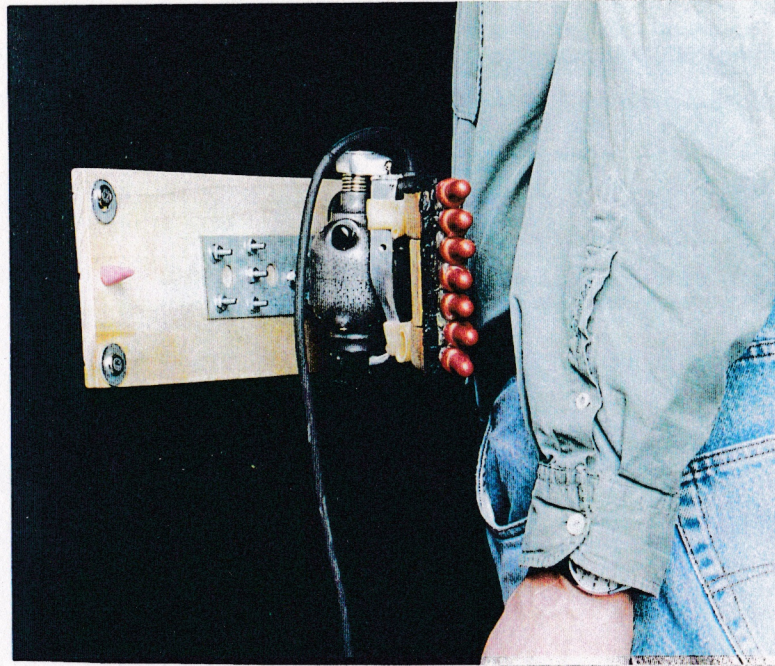
Liquid Inducer A mechanism for two persons. Clear water is pumped through a circular system circulating in loops around one person's brain and around the other person's belly. This is done as long as desired by both participants. A kind of connection, a rustling sound as the water flows by, a technician adjusting headgear and bellygear.

in chance operations, in Happenings and Events as well as in many other developments of the sixties, leads a marginal existence in the current art world.

1) AN INCOMPLETE AND BIASED HISTORY OF THE SIXTIES

During the late fifties and sixties an exodus occurred among artists away from the defined areas. They went out into what they called the real life and the real world. The objectives were, put in simple terms, to revitalize art, to make it meaningful again in the larger culture, by avoiding the restrictions of a conventionalized and commercialized art market and the pressure of a specialized academy (of mostly painters) and its dogmas formulated by quasi-papal critics like Clement Greenberg. The sixties avant-garde was both a generational reaction against an overbearing establishment and a moral movement against the political corruption of the artist and the work. Much of the conventions within the art world were seen as enforced through market mechanisms. Capitalism was identified as the un-

Massager
Liquid Inducer



derlying ideological structure of individual artworks as well as the overall system. The role that avant-garde art and art institutions played in American cold war propaganda and the advocacy of free market capitalism are examples of what a great number of artists wanted to abandon.¹ Beyond that it was understood that the traditional contexts as well as the genres and media actually carried a lot of information. They were seen not just as places or means to do art but as the structural expressions of ideologies (capitalist, imperialist ideologies).

During the first burst of energy categories got somewhat fuzzy and indeed hard to name. What is the "art" in an event by George Brecht that we encounter merely as text on a kind of business card, which could read as both instructions or poetic description? What is the purpose of Claes Oldenburg's Shop, a store front operation that sold plaster sculptures (or were they imitations?) of pastry and everyday objects. Who is the audience for Richard Long walking a straight line somewhere outdoors? Who is the artist in a participatory

¹Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," Artforum, June 1974, p. 39-42.

Massager A device to give someone else a massage over considerable distance. An exchange of touches which requires quite some negotiation. A detachment through machinery and space and, at the same time, the technological extension that alone allows and renders possible such contact.

Touchables A collection of small objects that fit easily into one's hand. Cast from Latex or silicone or made out of plastic, they all are somewhere between toys and prosthetics. I like to touch them, as do most visitors.

Rapport Goggles A pair of silicone goggles connected via an electronic circuit. Worn simultaneously by two persons they block out all vision and display instead three pairs of blinking lights. One pair gives a steady blinking signal to both persons, and possibly lowers the frequency of their brainwaves, another one blinks in step with the breathing of the person wearing the other pair of goggles, and the third pair of lights blinks in synchronicity with any ambient sound, be it the conversation between the two persons or a train going by outside the building. It is a connection that closes everything else out, including for that matter the person one connects

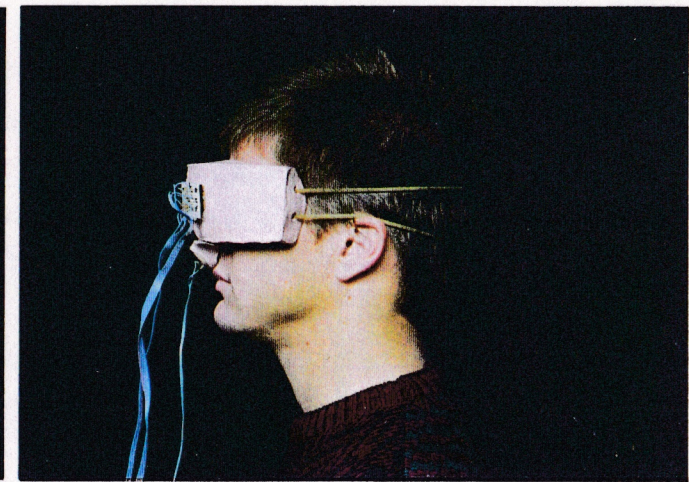
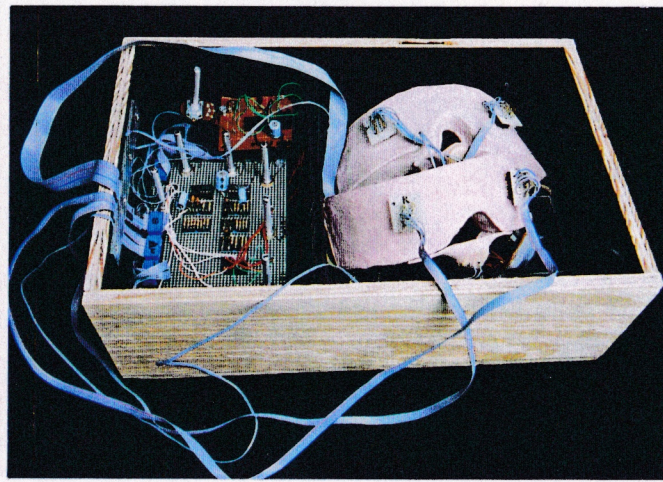
work like Allan Kaprow's 1963 Happening "Push and Pull, a furniture comedy for Hans Hofmann" in which the audience members (or are they collaborators?) moved furniture from one room to another and rearranged them freely?

Today we look at calm waters again. Happenings, Events, Activities have developed into Performance Art and what that means in the majority of cases is theatrical stage-performances or Theater. And Theater has conventional structures and a traditional purpose: education and entertainment. The performance artist Holly Hughes claims that Performance Art took the place of small, experimental theater productions which are not funded at all in most American theaters as they are run as private businesses and dependent on ticket sales.¹ Environments became Installation Art which by now is a highly conventionalized genre of its own; so much so that Ilya Kabakov writes about the "Total Installation" as the genre of the future which as a completely organized and formalized form of art will take the place of painting in the museums.² Instead of getting rid of conventions, the expansionist rush of the sixties led to a speedy broadening of the system itself, a proliferation of genre, to include the new areas as "New Genres" (new conventions). It has bred an audience that

¹ Holly Hughes in a radio interview with Dan Irwine on "These Days," KPBS Radio, San Diego, June 1992.

² Ilya Kabakov, "In die vierte Dimension," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, September 19, 1992.

with - or rather: that person is included only as a translation of possibly irrelevant patterns into flickering lights. Again you establish and interaction as you destroy it.



Rapport Goggles

thinks of itself as connoisseurs of New Genre, much the same as people used to sport a refined taste for painting or theater or violin virtuosos, and it brought about artists like Kabakov who try to write the academic directives for that school of New Genre.

Another prominent point of attack was the institution of the museum and its ability to digest anything that happened in the arts and quickly transform it into art history. Art, potentially a process, meaningful for and contingent on a specific situation, is historicized, its meaning pinned down and rendered ineffectual when it enters the museum setting. It becomes just another footnote in the narrative journey of art history that leads from Mesopotamia right to New York, with stops in Greece, Rome, Northern Italy, and Paris. (A friend of mine called it the "Occident Express"). Museums are collections of evidence supporting a nineteenth century fantasy of progress and cultural evolution. The majority of artists that stepped up in the sixties, determined to put an end to this function, are now an integral part of the narrative and have, by the way, played a similar role in establishing American cultural hegemony overseas as abstract expressionism did in the fifties. Rauschenberg, Dine, Fluxus, Conceptual Work, Beuys just to name a few examples of supposed anti-museum art and artists that we can now find in every museum. As critic Dieter Daniels puts it: