

# CONTROL

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# ISSUE FIFTEEN

## Editorial

The growing influence in people's daily lives of interactive communication and information processing systems has been a crucial factor during the last two decades, and yet this generally acknowledged phenomenon has been slow to impact itself on the thinking and practice of artists. Earlier attempts in the 1960's and 70's to embody the 'interactive communication network' into art practice, as documented in many previous issues of Control Magazine, have been ignored or at best marginalised by the established institutional artworld. The reason for this is not difficult to see, for the fluid, transient nature of 'event' and the 'process' based practices have put them outside the realm of the vested interests associated with the contained object in art.

However the relentless perpetuation of communication technologies into almost every aspect of contemporary life, especially when concerned with originating the future, has meant that its presence has become an implicit aspect of the 'here and now'. While the manifestos proclaiming the philosophical beginnings of these developments in the late 50's, early 60's could not fulfil their visions because of the limited facility of the technology, the recent explosion of activity has created a climate that is led by the innovation and development of the hardware of manufactured products.

The effect of this on the present thinking and practices of artists has been a consequential change in the relationship of the artwork with people, engaging the audience in the active process of self-constructing the message and the meaning of the work, that opens up the possible functionality of art within society. But instead of such an embracing of the interactive network requiring manifestos to map out the philosophical territory (as previously in the 1960's) its actual embodiment into the normative fabric of everyday society gives it as the accepted starting point, as the parameter to art practice.

This issue of Control Magazine brings together artists from different geographical and ideological backgrounds. The thread that binds them together is that they all, in their individual ways, have entered into an engagement with the interactive channel. Equally, they are all involved with the idea of a future art and its society, although from a variety of differing standpoints. So I consider the diversity of art practices represented here as a good yardstick of the cultural variety inherent in the philosophical thought and pragmatics of its expression associated with the interactive network. For instead of the cultural reduction linked with the authoritative transmissional network that gave us the culture of objects, there is the potential creative richness and self-organisation associated with complexity and relativity. The inherent possible mutuality of the interactive network, given simply by being able to ask a question, and the engagement in a process through time to access 'meaning', strongly emphasises the new direction of contemporary culture. It is to provide a framework for entering into the polemics of the 'new' culture that these contributions by artists are presented here in Control Magazine No 15.

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The Editor invites readers to submit papers, reports on projects, details of future events etc, for consideration regarding their publication in future issues of this magazine.

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15. BPRB

(flyleaf:)

There's no place like home.

(literally it says: As the little clock at home ticks it nowhere else ticks. - pk)

(p. 1)

Down Down Down (in English - pk)

16. RPBB

(flyleaf:)

(State-)prison (of) Dendermonde!

BATMAN IN JAIL (in English - pk)

(p. 1)

- It all started as a joke, I didn't want to hurt anybody or cause pain!

Yes, I know, that's what everybody says and you haven't got one good reason to believe me for that, and yet the fact is that's how it was!

I had taken some drugs and needed money. As it turned out we didn't do nothing but on our way back home we got police on our back for a routine control. We carried arms upon us and I panicked because I have no driving-licence. So I escaped and finally our ride ended up in a shoot-out with the police. Nobody got hurt and that's the important thing. And yet here I am sitting in jail, writing in this blue period book.

I've done 4 months now already and likely enough that may be only the beginning.

(p. 2)

- I don't know if someone ever will read this book and what he or she may think of it, probably nothing good as in the first place I'm not an easy writer and, secondly, I am a criminal, and those people mostly are disapproved of immediately for their label and rightly so as after all I do shit on society and there ain't much hope left for me getting reinserted in our community (in your community). At present I am but 20 years of age and I won't be given another chance any more, quite the contrary!  
F.T.S.

(FUCK THE SYSTEM) (in English - pk)

(p. 3)

- What really should I do with this book?

- Who'll take notice of my story?

NO ONE (in English - pk)

PERSONNE (in French)

NOBODY (in English)

NOBODY

(p. 4)

May 4

- 6:45 a.m.

Slaving starts at 7 and I feel tired already.

To have a job in the quad, simply impossible to me. I hate it but I need it!

- 4.45 p.m.

I'm back, just arrived, and now we go for a walk.

(comment referring to the page being torn:)

Oops

(p. 5) (all in English - pk)

Free your mind

How to die in 4 steps

Step 1 Be stoned

Use, don't abuse

Very soft

Try

Maes (name of a Belgian beer - pk)

Weed

Use

Soft

Shit

Smoke it

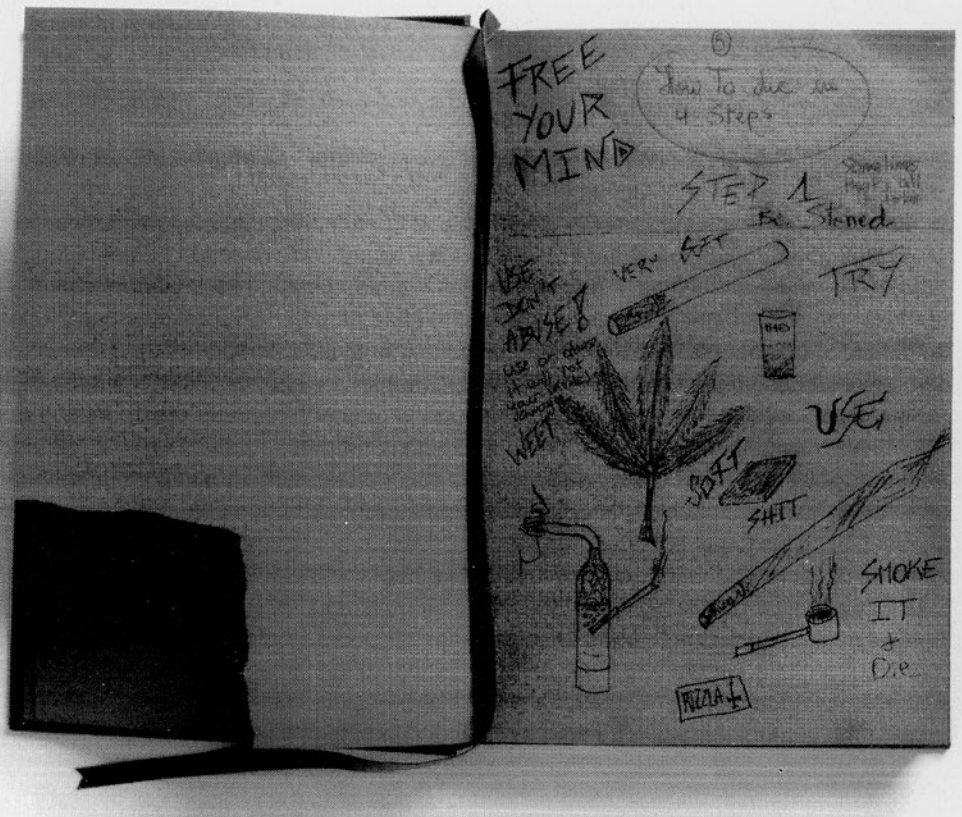
Rizzla (cigarette-paper - pk)

Entitled *The Lifelong Lesson* after one of the inmates' books, this installation involved giving 120 hand-made books - half of them red (Blue Period), half of them blue (Red Period) - to prisoners in the medium security state prison in Dendermonde, Belgium. My request was that the books were to be used in whatever manner they chose for a period of one month, and later the books would form part of an installation in the "Papierbiennale" in the nearby city of Aalst.

During my first meeting with the prison director, Roland Mentens, I was told that although he would support the idea he did not believe that many of his 'clients' would participate because other projects had failed in the past. Nevertheless, they went ahead with announcements about the books and, surprisingly, 60 prisoners volunteered, some taking up to 3 books. After a month, 110 books were returned: the inmates insisted on total anonymity, so the director himself collected the work in order to ensure that the guards were not able to see who did which book.

Contrary to the expectations of the staff at both the museum and the prison, there was an outstanding volume and variety of work. There were autobiographical stories with visual materials provided by images from newspapers and magazines, daily accounts of prison life, charts counting off time served and assemblages with found materials. One inmate treated the book as a base for a kind of sculptural puzzle which, once the solution is discovered, can be unlocked to reveal a hidden mixed-media collage. One made drawings of the barred windows, another a sketch of a man in front of an easel with a blank canvas: some simply slashed pages or burned and tied the books. Several books were taken apart and reconstructed. Some were left blank; some had only short text statements; some went missing.

At the opening ceremony of the city-wide Aalst Biennale, the prison director made a speech about the success of the project and its positive effect on the prisoners and staff. He explained that it made him see the need for some form of art program within these institutions. Although the inmates were not able to attend the exhibition, many of their families and friends did, and a billboard was set up in the prison where they could see photographs and newspaper reviews from the show. Several TV broadcasts featuring the show were watched by inmates on their own television sets. After the exhibition, one of the books was framed and given to the prison and now hangs in the visitors' waiting room.



Page 5 of Book 16

As sites of domination and conquest, cultural institutions often determine who gets to speak and who gets silenced: this piece lays bare the act of judgment itself in regard to the work of art and the traditional role of mastery in art practice. The installation drew attention to the gulf between the 'high' culture of the museum environment and the perceived vulgarity of prison culture. Through their work, the prisoners manifested important concerns of a psychological and political nature about questions of morality, freedom, and the nature of humanity.

I am interested in situating my work within borderline situations whereby meaning arises through an experience, exposing complex and paradoxical identities, probing perceived and subliminal ideals of socially secure ideologies. The choice of a prison arose from the need to involve a large group of individuals who lived together for a certain period of time, facilitating a collective activity which would result in a greater intensity and reflect immediate reactions to a given situation beyond any intentions the individual artist could conceive. The opportunity for these individuals to participate creatively in a constructive process allowed them to exert greater control over the process of their identity and assert an existence otherwise overlooked. Even in the fragmented identities apparent in many works, one often sees the simultaneous processes of inward and outward searching.

The ability to 'remake oneself', if only symbolically in a work of art, has proven to be an important factor in defining a secure identity and in the politics of perception. The processes involved in the making of this piece brought about an unpredictable change, an unprogrammed event, in the cycle of power relations of a particularly rigid and hierarchically defined social milieu.

\* from a book by "BATMAN IN JAIL"