

Each artist was invited to create his own contribution to this book, a situation which meant that the material presented would be either directly related to the actual work in the show, or independent of it. Therefore, this book is essentially an anthology and considered a necessary adjunct to the exhibition. Contrary to the McLuhan thesis, books are still a major communication system, and perhaps becoming even more important, given “the global village” that the world has become. After all *Time* magazine is available almost everywhere on Wednesday mornings.

The material presented by the artists is considerably varied, and also spirited, if not rebellious—which is not very surprising, considering the general social, political, and economic crises that are almost universal phenomena of 1970. If you are an artist in Brazil, you know of at least one friend who is being tortured; if you are one in Argentina, you probably have had a neighbor who has been in jail for having long hair, or for not being “dressed” properly; and if you are living in the United States, you may fear that you will be shot at, either in the universities, in your bed, or more formally in Indochina. It may seem too inappropriate, if not absurd, to get up in the morning, walk into a room, and apply dabs of paint from a little tube to a square of canvas. What can you as a young artist do that seems relevant and meaningful?

One necessity is, therefore, at least to move with the cultural stresses and preoccupations (as if you had a choice), particularly with the obvious changes in life style. The art cannot afford to be provincial, or to exist only within its own history, or to continue to be,

perhaps, only a commentary on art. An alternative has been to extend the idea of art, to renew the definition, and to think beyond the traditional categories—painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking, photography, film, theater, music, dance, and poetry. Such distinctions have become increasingly blurred.

Many of the highly intellectual and serious young artists represented here have addressed themselves to the question of how to create an art that reaches out to an audience larger than that which has been interested in contemporary art in the last few decades. Their attempt to be poetic and imaginative, without being either aloof or condescending has led them into the communications areas that INFORMATION reflects.

Superficially considered, some might seem to be directly involved with dandyism and the “gesture,” and while some are, others use these as approaches to more subtle, sophisticated, and profound ends. The activity of these artists is to think of concepts that are broader and more cerebral than the expected “product” of the studio. With the sense of mobility and change that pervades their time, they are interested in ways of rapidly exchanging ideas, rather than embalming the idea in an “object.” However, the idea may reside on paper or film. The public is constantly bombarded with strong visual imagery, be it in the newspapers or periodicals, on television or in the cinema. An artist certainly cannot compete with a man on the moon in the living room. This has therefore created an ambiguous and ironic position for the artist, a dilemma as to what he can do with contemporary media that reach many

more people than the art gallery.

In the reevaluation of their situation, some artists have attempted to extend themselves into their environment and to work with its problems and events. Some have become aware of their own bodies, in a way that has nothing to do with the accepted idea of the self-portrait, but more with the questioning and observing of sensations. Others have embraced natural phenomena in ways that are at times romantic and at times bordering on scientific.

An intellectual climate that embraces Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, the *I Ching*, the Beatles, Claude Lévi-Strauss, John Cage, Yves Klein, Herbert Marcuse, Ludwig Wittgenstein and theories of information and leisure inevitably adds to the already complex situation. It is even more enriched by the implications, for example, of Dada, and more recently happenings and Pop and “minimal” art.

With an art world that knows more readily about current work, through reproductions and the wide dissemination of information via periodicals, and that has been altered by television, films, and satellites, as well as the “jet”, it is now possible for artists to be truly international; exchange with their peers is now comparatively simple. The art historian’s problem of who did what first is almost getting to the point of having to date by the hour. Increasingly artists use the mail, telegrams, telex machines, etc., for transmission of works themselves—photographs, films, documents—or of information about their activity. For both artists and their public it is a stimulating and open situation, and

Essay in *Infomation*, Museum of Modern Art, New York

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certainly less parochial than even five years ago. It is no longer imperative for an artist to be in Paris or New York. Those far from the “art centers” contribute more easily, without the often artificial protocol that at one time seemed essential for recognition.

Inevitably for art film and videotape are growing in importance. It is quite obvious that at this point they are major mass media. Their influence has meant that the general audience is beginning to be unwilling to give the delicate responses needed for looking at a painting. Artists are beginning to use this to their advantage. They hope to introduce a large public to more refined aesthetic experiences.

The films and videotapes in this exhibition and listed in this book have often been described as “minimally structured,” which means that the content is non-narrative and that the style, while being almost an extension of *cinéma vérité*, is like so much of the other work in the show, simply a method of distributing the visual information that interests the artist.

The general attitude of the artists in this exhibition is certainly not hostile. It is straightforward, friendly, coolly involved, and allows experiences which are refreshing. It enables us to participate, quite often as in a game; at other times it seems almost therapeutic, making us question ourselves and our responses to unfamiliar stimuli. The constant demand is a more aware relation to our natural and artificial environments. There is always the sense of communication. These artists are questioning our prejudices, asking us to renounce our inhibitions, and if they are

reevaluating the nature of art, they are also asking that we reassess what we have always taken for granted as our accepted and culturally conditioned aesthetic response to art.

It is only too obvious that there are unpredictable implications for the established systems. For example, the whole nature or collecting is perhaps becoming obsolete, and what is the traditional museum going to do about work at the bottom of the Sargasso Sea, or in the Kalahari desert, or in the Antarctic, or at the bottom of a volcano? How is the museum going to deal with the introduction of the new technology as an everyday part of its curatorial concerns?

I have purposely made this text short and very general. INFORMATION will allow for a more careful and thorough analysis of all the aesthetic and social implications of the work. My essay is really in the galleries and in the whole of this volume.

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Postface

Embalming: Museum Collections after the “INFORMATION” (Rehashing an Obsolete Anxiety)

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When the book entitled “Information” was prepared and the exhibition of the same name was held in summer 1970, Museum of Modern Art in New York tried to expose the dilemma, which a place called *museum* confronts when it deals with modern art (the latest art at the time), to the public eye. This project raised a question of how art should be, not as an object, but as information with its exchangeability. However, there is no difference between media for exchanging information about art, and media for art that deals with exchange activities of information. This division is obscure to begin with, and the purpose of the former and contents of the latter naturally repeat differentiation and dedifferentiation. A clue to verify significance of rehashing this question, which the museum itself took up for discussion forty-six years ago, will be found in what project creator McShine called “material” and its subsequent development. The material was believed as something specific that lies between “information” and “object,” but not media themselves. Some art which passed through the mesh of the museum as well as that of the collection, in other words, some percentage of the material saved from the loss in ephemeral “material” which once made up the previous “situation” were left in the archive for the time being as so-called

non-museum sedimentation. The remains of the “material” now calm down the differentiation/dedifferentiation process on the side of “object,” and are *therefore* looked back on and gradually transplanted to the museum.

In modern times, the meaning of the word “museum piece” was partially reversed. Years ago, the extension of the concept of obsolescence and museum pieces (old things) were undifferentiated. However, due to the rise of “museums of modern art,” the museum, as you know, started to collect new things. When museum pieces have become literally relics of the past, that is, during the Postmodern era, museum collections and “contemporary art” plunged into an endless spiral repetition.

Whether to use communication technologies as transmission methods of expression itself or as transmission methods of “information” about expression was risky division from the outset, and only paying attention to it, you could understand a complication that was happening in the art of this era. (This complication was generalized without being resolved.) When art expressed through media such as mail, telegram and telex was approved as transportable or telegraphic expression, “documents” were included in such a new paradigm. From the beginning, there were no criteria to tell expression itself apart from “information” about expression. The “material” which McShine praised as “extremely varied” got stuck along the grain of “contemporary media.” And today, when familiar works from the archive are displayed in the museum, we customarily call them “conceptual art.”

Making changes in magnetic tapes for videos (reel-to-reel, U-standard, β system, and VHS-standard) was a motive “to extend the idea of art.” On the other hand, magnetic tape technology of computers such as Linear Tape-Open (LTO) was reconsidered, while the life of HDD was supposed to be five years, certainly shows expectations for embalming of “ideas” and “information.” When video shooting of a performance as “material” was conducted at a studio without any audience, Bruce Nauman’s “video performance” was extended as pure information and exchanged. However, due to obsolescence of methods for extension or exchange, that is, obsolescence of the environment of operating equipment, video art became the target of embalming in an instant. Now you might wonder if there was any era when a museum was crowded with bodies (new mummies) who were going to somewhere other than a mummy morgue, and when it strove for embalming so hard. Such a question is irrelevant because museum collections have been like that since the beginning of its history. *Therefore*, we need to rehash McShine’s concern, which was once refused as unnecessary anxiety, became out of date, and considered obsolete.

(translated by NISHIZAWA Miki)

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