

Art by Telephone, 1969

An Unsound Transcription

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2008

first of all I will first tell you
it's called the fairly large number
f-a-i-r-l-y
large number
the one million digit number
a separate program for a computer
now I'm going to read the program to you now...
okay
okay
now uh
have eleven cards um the first card
the first card is the name of the program
program hang up

uh, now what does it say on the card
the exact words say what,
or whatever you have?
program hang up.
program?
hang up
how do you spell that?
h-a-n-g u-p
oh, oh

that's just the title
that's on the first card

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I read the description right now?
yes. okay.
what I would like in one of the rooms of the museum of the exhibition
to have a corner reserved
to be filled up with
rags, scrap, eh, paper or different old things like that ah
for that to be
filled up the corner

in order to fill up the corner I need one or two sheets of plexiglass
if possible
I guess two sheets 8x4 together
would make a square 8x8
six on the corner

in order to make a triangular space triangular uh, the base
to fill them up with scrap papers, scrap rags,
uh, everything uh, like that
old clothes, to make enough
to fill up the corner

uhhh, what would you say, uh the content of the piece will be?
context?
content— well, how do you expect people to react to it?
what do you have in mind?

I have in mind about about quantity... mental garbage
I thought it would be involved in articulation of material garbage
...it's a sign of the quantity
of... the sediment of the society
consummation

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art Oriental art
brought to you by the person who might...
by telephone
Oriental rug by telephone
well could be the label would say: Oriental rug
(your introduction)

the rug would really be okay, a rug of quality
would be okay it would be either not too bad nor good
somehow on that level would be, would be okay

the label then would make it not okay
because you don't have stolen things

it's tripping somebody up
seeing the label, letting people know
the label tells them to, uh

so where is it, in the label, or in the rug,
or in interaction between the two?
or interaction between the viewer, the rug and the label?
or between the viewer, the rug, and the label and the museum?
it's uh, it's all of those things.

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what I've been trying to do for the last
or at least one kind of thing I've been working on
for the last couple of years is trying
to push an idea of uh uh of things a little bit further I'm I'm
somewhat y'know of things of things I did I think there are some interesting
areas in which can be
further pushed
and so uh, I did a series before this idea where I was using photo mulching
on the canvas or you know straight lettering on the canvas but
using sign fingers or uh
photo processing and so on but
... is the hallmark of traditional painting

but so uh but that's the only reason I, I, I uh
what I've done through subject matter, I've gone around and
with a friend and he just walks around and when he sees something that
interests him he just points to it and then I photograph his pointing to that
whatever it is he's interested in

I make no judgments whether it's interesting or not I just photograph it
so uh and the artist is

first two things I've done in the series is pointing to a radiator cap on a table
and the other one is pointing to a hole in a uh tomato plant, uh, hole
in the leaves of a tomato plant
uh and uh
the whole intimate problem of what's interesting in the visual field you know,
what you're looking at and uh uh

so, uh, uh since the hand is a large part of that thing

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I have some oral works, that're, that're uh,
I don't know if you've heard about these where uh
I did one in Montreal which was given to an
I phone in the oral work
on the oral thing of this work

and it was simply labeled on the wall
with the descriptions to the listeners
that they ask one of guards for the work
so the guards carry the work which was the
word, uh
simply the word talk
on the oral level so

I have other words like whisper and different ones that're related to that
do things right on the spot kind of getting at the

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and ah um a series of works which I call

and some sections my
uh ahhh time to
break down the psychology of
the language by going
on language uh language
constantly going through the

and also at the same time
someone once said that uh written English is
closer to written German than spoken ah is
to written

so I wanted to see
the varieties of structures
to language

something would happen if it
kept going from one language
which was spoken to one which was written
and the texts that are chosen to be translated

almost a game of international telephone ah, is is something
which is ah, been written about
which is about my perception
folding back on itself

and uh the text, the text which is uh
by John Chairman from an article in uh, Arts International
from last November eh titled Rauschenberg and Graphic Art

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hi. well, uh the project I'm working on now that's occupying my, all of my time is a kind
of research into uh the possibility of moving land masses over the... Sierras uh
and it occurred to me that this might be a good opportunity to uh to

see where the opinions are on the project uh, this is a very large project which has all
kinds of aspects
so far I've been working on the technical aspects for example

how can the geology for example
how for example

not to lose the coal mines, that's important uh
how to float a land mass over um, over the ocean,
and things like that

what is the effect on people's lives when their land is uh moved to another place on
the surface of the earth
and what are the psychological effects

and all those things come into play

so uh this is part of the research...
it's a public opinion poll?

it's a kind of public opinion poll, exactly

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for a long time uh I've been interested in what
sound light
the fact is that uh
I've seen a lot of light sculptures but often when I
see um, public photographs and the photographs are taken
and uh darkened
is to see is uh
they are a low level of illumination
and so uh what I want to do is to take a number of them
say, somewhere between 40 or 60
and hang them up in a room like spaghetti
so that they'd all be facing one way

and uh you'd walk into a room
and just have them hanging there
these strips
and at the other end of the room, uh
mount them as close to the ceiling as possible

I'd have a very strong 500 or 750 uh watt lamp
the lamp would have heavy violet gelatin and it would also be motorized so that it
would go on and on in cycles of uh 30 seconds and
what I'm trying to get here is the fact that

it's absolute darkness and
as it gets dark and the strips

and doesn't get acclimated to the dark at all
and all of a sudden it starts gettin' light again
and lighter and lighter and lighter

until the whole room is intense violet
and you just see these uh, these stupid looking uh strips
standing there and I wanted to have no light tension at all
and that's all the idea behind the piece

it's called ah, *Ultraviolet*

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simply that you would fly me out there
on the spot uh
red Benjamin Moore kind of enamel
and I would like to go out in the middle of the spot and if it's
in this case
then I would like to have a...
to make a spot, a round spot 20 feet in diameter
then I would like to have a red silk disc with me in the middle with two
armholes
instead of the headholes
so I could walk out there with a telephone also in prearrangement
with Robbe-Grillet,
and he would uh, speak to to Robbe-Grillet in his room
Paris his publishing house awaiting calls
I suppose

and it would be a good time
please pick up the phone and say nothing
pick up the phone and say...
that's right
...and say click

it would be an incredible dramatization of the importance of... yes
I love Christopher Marlowe the only line that Shakespeare ever wrote
in his entire works

uh the symphony of words
I mean, that's a ritualistic question

hello! and I love it and it uh

anyway, I've learned a great deal from the phone and
I'm excited about it and it, it uh I mean it's

a very exciting uh possible choice for me
and I love it
as far as I'm concerned, the more uh, dramatic uh the more elegant it is, the better

what I would like to do is simply walk into the room with
carrying my complete nudity of Barbara Rollins
and I sit down and make the call

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simply uh
two assemblies
ah one consists of ah ten eight foot cedar fence posts
cedar?
cedar fence posts
okay

uhhh at either end is wrapped uh nine inches of foam rubber
um we take the cedar fence posts and place them in uh the trough

okay, on top of the rubber, in between the rubber

uhh and this is probably something you have to remember
that the 2x4 side of these troughs is an outside edge they
form like a rim to hold in the ah cedar fence posts and the rubber,
the foam rubber, it's actually like uh like foam rubber wheels resting in
uh, you know those garage lifts..

um

you drive your car over and it picks it up

ah-ha

something very similar to that

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what we're talking about is having uh uh
wire

between two walls

uh can you hear me?

yes

uh trying to mix up uh..

wire, and uh uh uhhhh

and uh the uh cars wire

but uh and uh

in between two walls and uh

the uh

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(----)

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yeah it's called *Dial-a-Poem*
and uh at the museum here we'll have uh
four telephone lines connected to an automated answering service
each one will have uh a separate two minute message by uh 36
poems uh poems by 36 poets and they will be changed everyday

who are the poets?

well there's 36 and it's uh Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, and Anne Waldman,
and myself, and Jim Carroll and uh Abbie Hoffman and uh...

anything they want to do
and we have like
twelve uh twelve uh two minute pieces from each poet

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stainless steel table coated with a clear plastic coating
same kind of table that's used on boats and airplanes
and uh you can find it anywhere
anywhere hardware store
and basically the piece is

a little louder I can't quite hear you

okay basically the piece is a cable is stretched uhhh
from approximately 4 to 6 inches underneath the ceiling
horizontally corner to corner around the room and it goes
over one corner down to the floor
so it's a vertical line along the ceiling
forgive me, horizontal line along the ceiling and
a vertical line from ceiling to floor
it will have to be supported by a like a very fine
diagonal wire like some kind of piano wire

it's the kind of piece that either disappears or comes across uh very
strongly, I think, uh

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ideally, the wall should be empty
and the blank wall and uh nothing of any visual interest
and the only thing that uh uh that I even ask is
a noticeable difference in temperature from the
space that you come from uh and the space that we are talking about

but it's empty but cold room?
yeah
the whole thing is that uh meteorological

for that matter you can extend almost anything that is being
presented in galleries and museums uh
couple thousand years
in a slightly different manner

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I am interested to discover whether the results are
what the result would be if I were
to
in a room
I may well
and uh
results in uh concrete between
a frame of references

and uh, a question of mine for the last year now
uh

the subject
the head of the girl
photography would normally be extended
by the hand of the artist

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well, the piece...
pick up the telephone it turns on the tape recorder and you
start to speak you hear your own voice after a while with
whatever else is already on the loop
gradually
well, the first person to pick it up would probably hear it
but by the time the loop came back where it started for the second person

it starts to get a signal
what would keep the thing from erasing itself?
it would have to have something, it would have to be disconnected
a lot of people would probably say... it's not a very...
or something like that

well I mean just gradually get a vocal collage built up
it's conceptually new for me I've never done visual art
I mean that's not to say I haven't made cartoons and so on from time to time
but I can't draw
you're more interested in literature
instead of performing from time to time

yeah. when I married Alison I said I was going to leave the visual stuff to her.

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trans-Arthur, number A. trans-Arthur, number A.
okay
uhh, uh that would be uh his phone number and uh the city and area code
uh you know say Arthur A from Atlanta, area code such and such uh and phone
number would uh be listed, uh, and secondly
Arthur uh Ball, you know,
B-a-l-l in Baltimore
uh then Arthur Carr, or y'know, whatever it is,
it's all the Arthurs uh with the first last name of a-b-c
26 Arthurs
uh from cities and the first uh available city would
same letter like A
uh for you know
Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, whatever

oh yeah there is one thing
below this list there is simply a statement saying
'Call any of the above numbers and ask for Arthur'

now you know

ooh, Arthur telephone
and this would be

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well, the point is that um the piece would be painted on the wall directly on the wall
with uh transcribing

and stripes of two feet wide
at the end of the wall
from the ceiling to the floor
and that would be anywhere you want in the museum

and so they're thin stripes

just goes from one code to ten codes

what is it that you find particularly appealing about it?
uh, what engages you?

uh, I don't have anything
I, I, I like the idea of having a different kind of culture
on the same wall but uh...

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I just like the idea of a photograph uh uh simulating a door
over which the photograph
the doors on the museum uh toilets should be photographed by a
very accomplished photographer who would um set up the camera in such a way
probably in a way 8x10 or 4x5
with absolutely uh square negatives and then I would print it again square
in the exact size of the doors
then you would have two photographs
of toilet doors exactly the size of the doors
and then you just switch 'em
you put the men's on the women's and the women's on the men's
so uh you know, the environment inside is one that people are uptight about anyway
and if there's any kind of confusion about it
I guess it will

a series of uh directions or decisions
which include turning round and round
and uh I found that many people did turn round and round
and I find also that invariably they come back to the point
and say well, why did I

and there's some serious kind of growth and progress happens
with that kind of process

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what I'm doing is at about 12:08 around the world

I'm doing one piece for each city

what's the nature of it?

um well, human media, uh, well Douglas gallery in Vancouver
thirty seconds television
and Australia I'm doing fourteen newspapers all of Australia ah
but it's all one work

now, what is exhibited in a museum or gallery uh or or a gallery
space exhibiting labels
one label for each um city
so uh on that label is specific information uh about the piece
done in that city that's in the language of the city that it's done in

about a dozen labels a bold line across the wall
in different labels
cities

the only one I'd do by telephone is Chicago

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collect money?

what I'm hoping is that the auctioneer will be able to create
uh, you know, a reasonably exciting event
okay

you know and uh the purpose of making the point in the first place is
to have this exciting event

which is really the work

what I'm dealing with is that uh

creating event for the

area and uh event

everything as an impulse

what you get in the long run

things that were designed for the sole purpose of making something happen that
afterward had no reason to have happened you know it doesn't matter what has
happened

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uh, I want uh, using a hard pencil, to draw a 60x60 inch
square on the wall uh

move the square to a grid of one inch squares of 60x60
in other words that'd be 3600 squares of one inch squares

now, uh, draw horizontal lines in some of the one inch squares
uh draw vertical lines in some of the one inch squares,
draw diagonal lines from upper left to lower right in some of the
squares,

within the boundaries of each square?

right, uh diagonal lines from upper left to lower right in some of the squares
each line may be superimposed and some of the one inch squares may
be left blank, the person that does this can exercise his judgment

I think of it more like a composer who writes notes
and then a uh the pianist plays notes
but in that kind of situation there's ample room for both to
make a statement

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I want the length of a
thinned out as much as possible
and also tape a small section at the bottom
I don't know if this describes to you the kind of thing that I want to do
but uh I wanted to have the bottle's surface uh flying into a glass door, and I don't
want the glass door to shatter or anything but
against
the glass flattened out

uh what section of the body?

well I was thinking of the shoulder
well uh, not the head but just the shoulder or the upper part
and the bottle

if we could shoot several takes of this that would be fine
yeah
we could do one where it wouldn't go through the door
but it would come at an angle, say about a 60 degree angle,
and uh hit the glass, or impact against the glass,
and it would frame on that and the camera would be stationary
and the uh the body would come in to the frame uh
hit the glass, impact against the glass and then move away

and then I've made other films where I don't have really anything to do
with the camera, someone is so much better at it than I am
it's a matter of my describing what I have to do what
I want and having it done

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you would stand in one place and take the phone here's what I want you do is to take the telephone or the receiver whichever we could if you could take the telephone so that you don't break the connection be careful of the dials and the button and grab it between your thighs and cross your ankles then put the receiver down or let it dangle and hold your arms straight out from your shoulders with your palms up and fingers tight together looking straight ahead uh if you wanna try it and tell me if it works out alright after you get yourself in that position the project is to try to jump up uh up and down on a table which I will give to you then I can hang up or stay on the line, it doesn't matter and you would hold the telephone between your legs and continue to jump until the end of the tape jump jump jump I'll stop after a little while and you should continue by yourself

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some things
in one way it would be a way to keep up with what I was doing
like I would say maybe uh finished uh a bottle of
today
or something like that
or I met so-and-so
or if something happened to me you know

so there would be kind of a um I
someone living with me you know uh
sort of a following a pattern of thought

very personal, yes

and then I might
whatever I felt like, or an observation on something
you know, whatever concerns my mind.

it would almost always be a constant set of
the weather, and the place, and uh
uh my events
so that it would be uh uh today
we would call it *Today* by Claes Oldenberg

one thing I wanted to get in here
is there's gotta be séances or spirit writing
you know when the seer's getting messages from the other world
she writes it usually on the blackboard

and she follows, her hand is supposed to be possessed by the absent spirit you know
and uh sort of follows whatever the spirit wants to send
and so it's the moment of materialization is kind of exciting

so like we could schedule it at the opening so that uh the messages
come directly and start to appear, y'know

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what I like about the idea basically is that uh uh
while I'm here in New York in a small way the way I've grown up,
the way I lose or gain weight is going to affect the

the part I like about it is that uh uh it's uh
it's going to be a prevalent thing of of during the
the fact that every minute
whether sleeping or up
there is going to be a slight kind of uh fluctuation
which will at the beginning of each week
affect you

so it's like it's like
the ingredients of course are pretty common
in the building
all of them stay in the building

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take um a subject
projecting image
and uh put it in the wall
take rectangle on wall
try to
set it such a way so it could fill the opaque whiteness
on the wall
head on
the projector

and then develop the film and put it
another projector
take the first projector
project it on the wall

so you have two squares, two rectangles
one projected light one film

