

## “Correspondences”

Jane Greengold and Chris Tanz

“Correspondences” explores the correspondence between concrete poetry and conceptual art; between postal language and ordinary language; between sending/receiving letters and private theater. The article presents part of an actual correspondence between friends/poet-artists attending to the act and experience of corresponding, and making the language of correspondence visible.

“Correspondences” is an art work/visual essay that takes place at the juncture of conceptual art and concrete poetry. Visual art and poetry have been thought of in the recent past as distinct art forms. Now, by moving in opposite directions, they have come together. Conceptual art sought to “dematerialize” the art object,<sup>1</sup> and concrete<sup>2</sup> and visible<sup>3</sup> poetry to objectify the poem. The art object grows more and more verbal, and the poem more and more visual. Matter converts to energy, energy to matter.

Concrete poetry is made of words used as visible objects, not as ideas. Conceptual art uses words, because the words carry ideas and ideas are the material of the art. “The concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read; . . . the visual poem is a material object in space.”<sup>4</sup> Conceptual artists aim toward the “progressive elimination of the object” and its replacement with ideas (expressed in language).<sup>5</sup>

Very little explicit exploration has been done of the convergence of these art forms. “Correspondences” is not a critical discussion of the phenomenon but was done with it in mind and bridges whatever gap remains between the two enterprises.<sup>6</sup> Many of the pieces of correspondence are themselves concrete poems; the correspondence as a whole is a conceptual art work of which “correspondence” is both the form and the substance.

In the individual pieces we are exploring the correspondence

not only between concrete poetry and conceptual art but between postal language and ordinary language. We are looking at these languages and finding the poems visible in them. We are toying with the conventions of letter writing imposed by the post office and by general habit and expectation. Spoken language has changed; literary conventions have died; paint has edged off the two-dimensional surface of a rectangular canvas. But correspondents are still writing “sincerely” and “cordially” on the bottom lines of their letters, and putting their stamps on the upper-right corner of their envelopes.

We are exploring the drama of corresponding. Opening a letter involves suspense. It is private theater. When someone speaks to you, the message unfolds gradually. But inside the envelope the message is already fully formulated, whole.

We are testing limits of the postal system: will there be a successful passage between the mailing and the receipt of the letters? In some of the pieces the work consists of the relationship between the envelope and its contents; in others it is simply the envelope itself, or the relationship between several envelopes; and in still others it lies inside the envelope.

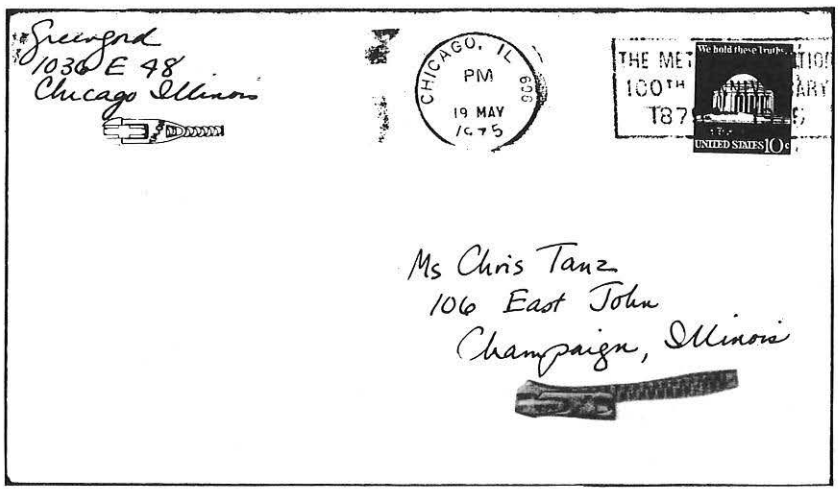
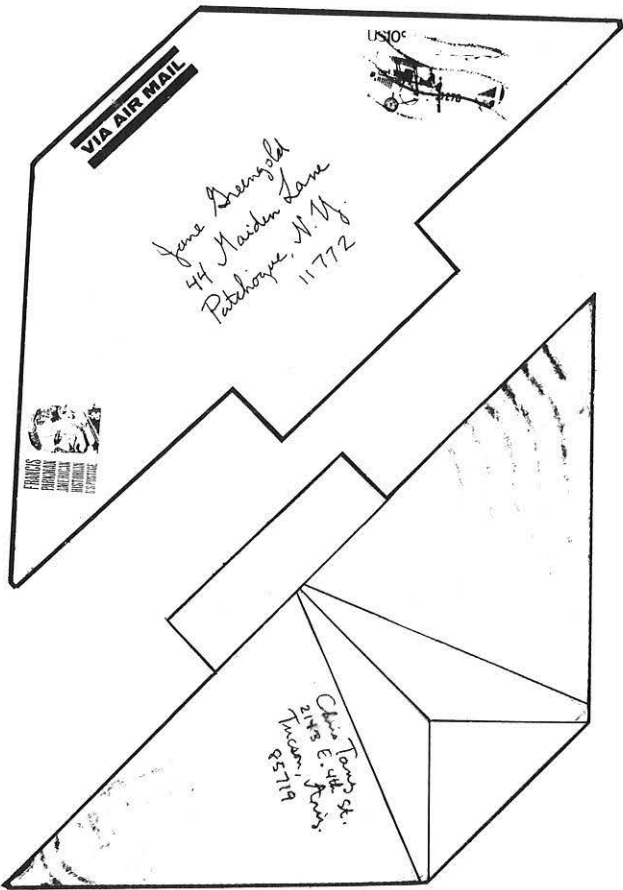
Some, who have classified themselves or been identified with conceptual art, have used the postal system as their vehicles: Ray Johnson’s myriad mailings from the New York Correspondence School; On Kawara’s “I got up” postcards;<sup>7</sup> Douglas Huebler’s *42nd Parallel*, which in his words “used an aspect of the United States Postal Service for a period of time to describe 3,000 miles of space” by sending letters to and retaining receipts from fourteen locations on the 42nd parallel;<sup>8</sup> Nam June Paik’s postal event in which he mailed pennies to many friends;<sup>9</sup> and Craig Del Gaudio who tested the postal system by mailing theoretically unmailable objects and then exhibited evidence of their mailing and receipt.

But none of these works has been about the words and the language and the experience of corresponding. None has been about the poetry of the words and the events. “Correspondences” draws attention to the postal language we accept without thinking. It finds the poetry in the material of our mail—without having to take it out of context and move it into the rarefied atmosphere of a poetry manuscript. The poems take place where

they are in life and their publication only helps the reader to see that the poems are there—in his or her mailbox. To paraphrase John Cage, a leading conceptualist of music/theater: “Theater takes place all the time wherever one is and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.”<sup>10</sup> Letter writing itself was once an art form—“Correspondences” finds the art left in the form, and makes it visible.

The illustrated pieces represent only a small percentage of the correspondence that has passed between us to date.

1. The phrase “dematerialize” comes from critical writing about the “conceptual,” “idea,” “process,” “anti-form” art movements. See especially Lucy Lippard, *Six Years, The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973; and Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972.
2. A primary anthology of concrete poetry was originally published by the *Chicago Review* in 1967, edited by Eugene Wildman, and reissued by Swallow Press, Chicago, 1970. Also see, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, edited by Mary Ellen Solt, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970; and *Imaged Words & Worded Images*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970.
3. For a discussion of visible poetry, or Poesia visiva, see *Chicago Review*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1974; and *Italian Visual Poetry 1912-1972*, edited Luigi Ballerini, Finch College Museum, 1973.
4. Solt, p. 7 & 60.
5. Meyer, p. xii.
6. The exhibition Language and Structure in North America (November 1975) presented by the Kensington Arts Association, Toronto, and self-styled “The first large definitive survey of North American Language Art,” brought together works previously described as concrete poetry (or word-imagery as Richard Kostelanetz, the curator of the show prefers) and conceptual art, under the umbrella “Language Art.” This show and its catalogue (published by the Kensington Arts Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1975) do bring the two arts together and reveal their striking resemblances, but still without critical discussion of the process of the convergence.
7. See *Artforum*, VI (October 1967), 50-55.
8. Lippard, p. 49; Meyer, p. 147.
9. Lippard, p. 61.
10. John Cage, *Silence*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1961, p. 174.



GREENGOLD  
1036 E. 48  
Chicago Ill  
60615



SURFACE MAIL

Ms Chris Tanz  
106 East John  
Champaign, Ill  
61820



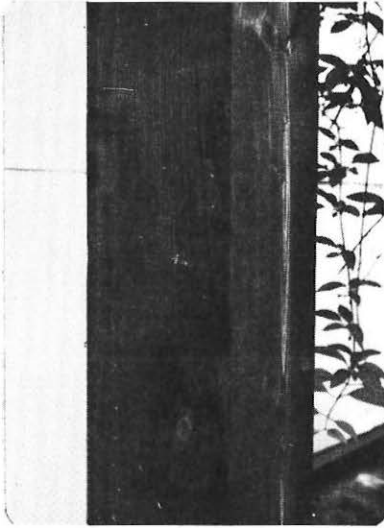
USIO 200 Years of Postal Service



Jane Greengold  
44 Maiden Lane  
Patchogue, New York 11772



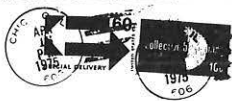
AIR MAIL



**SPECIAL DELIVERY**

Cesarean section: the operation by which the fetus is taken out of the uterus by an incision through the parietes of the abdomen and uterus, when the obstacles to delivery are so great as to leave no alternative.

Stevens  
1036 East 48th St.  
Chicago, Illinois 60615



**SPECIAL DELIVERY**

Ms. Chris Tanz  
106 East John Street  
Champaign, Illinois 31820

*Handwritten:* Kenneth Victor Stevens

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM  
REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SELECTIVE SERVICE LAW...

KENNETH VICTOR STEVENS

SELECTIVE SERVICE NO. 30 F 67 103 1123

RESIDENT REGISTRATION  
Ontario (Wayne) New York  
April 8, 1964 Rochester, NY

THIS WAS REGISTERED FOR THE 19 April 60

*Handwritten:* James J. [unclear]

LOCAL BOARD NO. 83  
2ND FLOOR, ROOM 4  
COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING  
LYONS, NEW YORK

REGISTRATION DATE  
REGIONS  
CLASS  
AGE

107

ANY PERSON WHOSE STATUS OR CLASSIFICATION IS CHANGED...  
MAY BE ASSESSED THE PENALTY OF A FINE OF UP TO \$500...  
THE LAW REQUIRES YOU TO HAVE THIS CERTIFICATE ON YOUR PERSON AT ALL TIMES...  
IF AN ERROR HAS BEEN MADE IN YOUR LOCAL BOARD OR IN THIS CERTIFICATE...  
IN THE FEDERAL SERVICE DIVISION, AND YOU DESIRE A CORRECTION...  
PLEASE, MAIL A WRITTEN STATEMENT OF AN OTHER FACT CONCERNING...  
YOUR CLASSIFICATION.

*Handwritten:* Springfield  
1036 E 48  
Chic Ill 60615



**REGISTERED**

860730

*Handwritten:* DARLEN  
5-22-65

*Handwritten:* Ms. Chris Tanz  
106 East John  
Champaign, Ill  
61820

(3)

**FINAL NOTICE**  
MAY 27 1975

