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Unsorted: An A to Z for SonicActsX

by Arie Altena et al, with an introduction by Taco Stolk
Sonic Act Press/de Balie, Amsterdam, 2004
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Sonic Acts started in 1994 with presentations by students from the departments of Sonology, Composition and Sound and Image of the Conservatory in The Hague, the Netherlands. In recent years, the festival organization has been professionalized, which led to the renowned 2003 edition *Sonic Light* and in September 2004 to *Unsorted*. On the occasion of the 10th edition of the Sonic Acts Festival, *Unsorted, An A to Z for Sonic Acts X* was published.

Where the festival consisted of three consecutive afternoons and nights of live performances, a film programme, a two-day conference and an exhibition, *Unsorted*—cleverly printed in an extremely handy pocket size format, making it something that can, and should be read anywhere—is a collection of essays and articles on 'information arts'.

Information arts covers art forms that "in form and content are rooted in the information society." What these art forms have in common is that they do not adhere to the old paradigms and classifications of the art world, and they "defy several paradigms on which traditional art forms are based" (p 65). So far nothing new.

Where other curators and organizers generally try to impose their classification system on these new art forms, for this publication the Sonic Acts publishers have taken a slightly different route: unsorted. That is to say, sorted by alphabetical order, not by author, but based on the first word of the title of the essay. In this way, the *Colophon* can be found on page 32, and the *Introduction* starts on page 54.

Unsorted opens with Lev Manovich's *Abstraction and Complexity*—a short essay from his upcoming book *Info-Aesthetics* on the relation between abstraction, realism and science, comparing early twentieth century abstract art and its relation to the science of its day, drawing parallels to the contemporary situation.

Following that is a slightly older, but still valid and inspired article by Stephen Wilson on why artists should take part in the process of technological research.

Next is *Collectives and Art, a Few Remarks* by Arie Altena on how the artist as the lone genius has become the centre of a network, regularly operating in collectives, across boundaries of art forms or even both within and outside the art-world. Echoing Bruno Latour, Altena concludes that "life is messy" (p. 30).

After the *Colophon*, *Unsorted* continues with an interview with Driessens and Verstappen titled *Generating Art*, which is later complemented with an interview with Casey Reas under the title *Organic and Conceptual Systems*. These interviews are the only two texts that approach the topic from an artist's more practical point of view and at some points are almost too literal examples of

implementations of theoretical texts that preceded.

After these interviews we find the *Introduction* and *Programme*, from where the essays continue with tobias c. van Veen's feedback loop on modernism, post-modernism, futurism, the spread of technology and its political consequences in "The Reverb Engine".

Will's (Stuart) paraphrase from Kandinsky's "Über das Geistige in der Kunst" entitled "Yellow—among others, quoting Scriabin on a parallel between yellow and a state of joy—closes this beautiful collection of thought provoking essays, all printed on yellow paper.

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