

Born Detroit, Michigan, 1932  
Resident New York City

The Hudson Institute was the first out-of-state corporation to be contracted to A & T. In February, 1969, we wrote to Herman Kahn, Director and co-founder of the Institute, requesting Hudson's involvement as a Sponsor Corporation, and by mid-March, through follow-up correspondence with President Max Singer, an agreement was reached between Hudson and the Museum; it was left to our discretion to select an artist to place in residence, and a Sponsor contract was signed.

In a brochure published by Hudson, they describe themselves as,

a private, non-profit research organization studying public policy issues, especially those related to long range perspectives, to U.S. national security and world order, and to social and economic development. Its goal is to promote better communications and understanding among those working on public policy problems, and where necessary, it seeks to develop special techniques to aid both research and exposition for this purpose . . . .

The Institute strives to bring together a diversity of viewpoints as well as skills in a staff that works together in an organized manner, yet in an atmosphere of freedom and inquiry . . . . Hudson tries to provide a degree of time and detachment which is rarely possible in the studies of an official agency, and a degree of focus and integration which is rarely available in a university or center for international studies . . . .

The Institute's location, at Croton-on-Hudson, offers a quiet, pleasant place to work. Situated in open, hilly country overlooking the Hudson River, about thirty miles north of New York City, it is convenient to rural and suburban housing and is less than one hour from Manhattan by car or train.

In April, 1969, Jane Livingston met in this consciously idyllic environment with Mr. Singer and his assistant, Gail Potter. We had already discussed the possibility of working at Hudson with James Byars—he seemed a sufficiently extramundane spirit to deal in such an abstract and rarefied atmosphere as this—and Byars expressed unqualified enthusiasm over the prospect. (We had earlier, in Los Angeles, discussed with Byars the notion of working with one of the corporations contracted to A & T before Hudson entered the project. Gail Scott visited Jet Propulsion Laboratory with Byars in January, 1969. They met with JPL physicist Dr. Richard Davies, and spent most of their touring time viewing the space module displays, which fascinated the artist. Byars was not at all interested in working with specific objects or materials to make a physical art work; instead, he pressed Davies about the possibility of sending a rocket-propelled vehicle to Mars. This request seems to have struck Dr. Davies as implausible, and the Byars/JPL connection ended at that.)

Therefore, it was with Byars in mind that JL conversed with Mr. Singer and Mrs. Potter at Croton-on-Hudson. It wasn't in her power exactly to prepare the Hudson personnel for Byars' visitation, and indeed we had no preconception of what he might choose to do. Mr. Singer agreed to receive Byars, and to allow the collaboration to evolve as it might. JL was given a tour of the buildings and grounds, and took away with her a number of Hudson Reports on various weighty and unrelated international topics.

Byars began his collaboration on May 19, 1969. For the first two or three weeks, he actually lived at Hudson—"They have a dormitory for generals," he said, "where they're putting up with me." (Actually this dormitory houses students, most often, who come during the summer to "soak up the atmosphere.") After that, he commuted from New York several days a week; he continued to work until July 20, returning after a trip to Europe to work periodically through November and December. One of the first important events in the collaboration occurred early in his residence, when Byars attended a weekend briefing held for the benefit of Belgium's King Baudouin, who arrived just as Byars did, and at which Herman Kahn presided and spoke at length.

In order for us to keep some record of the course of the Hudson/Byars project, the artist and JL devised a schedule whereby they would speak by telephone once a week at an appointed time. The first of these weekly conversations took place right after the symposium, and Byars was elated. He was beginning to formulate the terms of the project he intended to carry out with, or through, Hudson, and he mentioned four points he wished to pursue. Characteristically, they are ambiguous in intent and mystifying in style, but these ideas were to be the basis of his continuing approach. The four points, as dictated by Jim, are these: 1) "The exultation of being in the proximity of extraordinary people." 2) "The one hundred most interesting questions in America at this time." 3) "The next step after  $E=MC^2$ ." 4) "One thousand superlatives about the Hudson Institute."

Byars talked of making a trip around the country to interview certain illustrious Thinkers, and perhaps thus invoke the one hundred significant questions. This proved to be economically unfeasible, so he established a private telephone World Question Center. He found, in his words, that "there is a terrific prejudice against asking questions." It occurred to him to state, "axiomatically," as he said: "Product: ten thousand pauses caused by asking people for questions that they are asking themselves." He conceived the idea of prevailing upon the Gallup people to run a poll for him, and even went so far as to request promotional space in the major U.S. magazines. (This never worked out.) At one point, following a phone conversation with James, Betty Asher wrote in a memo to MT: "His Three Ambitions: Artist-in-residence at the Pentagon (a letter from you

would be helpful). To get the Nobel Peace Prize for Herman Kahn. To run Herman Kahn for President."

Byars' contact with the Hudson Institute personnel seems to have consisted mostly of series of statements or questions mimeographed or otherwise duplicated and circulated in-house. One of the first questionnaires given to the Hudson employees requested "One hundred superlatives on Herman Kahn." Byars' own first "superlative" is, "I-fell-in-love-with-Herman Kahn-because-I-knew-in-advance-that-he-could-speak-four-hundred-words-a-minute." He made a number of items not intended to elicit response, but simply given gratuitously, such as hundreds of thin strips of paper, seventeen inches by one-quarter inch, reading "PUTTING BYARS IN THE HUDSON INSTITUTE IS THE ARTISTIC PRODUCT." [1]

JL received a letter from Byars describing his first sub-project at Hudson:

J. I hand delivered to  
every staff member the  
Pink Book (as an attitude note)  
and the exultation slip—  
next day in white suit  
the white questionnaire  
all as intro. J.  
P.S. They loved it.

According to Gail Potter, who remained fairly close to Byars throughout his tenure at Hudson, there was in fact a general attitude of hostility on the part of the Institute personnel to Byars' presence. There were, in her words, "a lot of square people who felt that what Jim was doing was a



waste of his time and their time." Mrs. Potter felt that after the first two or three weeks, there was not much serious interaction between the artist and the Hudson staff. He continued to spend more time wandering about in the halls, chatting with people at random, than in the small office which was reserved for him.

Byars did spend considerable time with Herman Kahn,

either at public occasions or in private—he estimates that he had, overall, about twenty hours of informal conversation with Kahn, at his home or at Hudson. Gail Potter said she guessed that Byars "spent as much time with Herman as anyone ever does."

Some months after the Byars/Hudson collaboration ended, JL spoke to Herman Kahn by telephone and elicited some comments from him on James and his impact at Hudson. Kahn immediately observed that the response of Hudson staff to Byars seemed to be rather clearly divided between the younger people—under thirty—who liked, or were amused by Byars, and those over thirty, who were hostile to him. (Byars says this is a silly statement.) Asked to give his own thoughts as to why this might have been true, Kahn replied, "Most people, unless they are very young, still see *art* today in its old fashioned roles: art as religion, art as heroic, art for entertainment. Art today is none of these things. It's *happening*. That is what Byars is about, and one has to accept this to accept Jim." Kahn went on to remark in general that "God and Darwin got buried, and once Darwin is buried, the Puritan ethic goes with him. Jim understands this and is trying to move in this direction. There's the question, then, as to whether Jim is symptom or cause. Probably he's symptom."

When pressed for an opinion on the real *intellectual* value of Byars' World Question Center project itself, as opposed to the fact of the artist's presence at Hudson generally, Kahn said finally, "Well, of course it's a totally undisciplined and uninformed project." Perhaps the most interesting comments made by Kahn to JL involved a process of questioning his own motives regarding Byars' presence at Hudson. Kahn asked himself, "Why are we bothering with Jim? After all, I want the organization to run right. The presence of someone like Jim is theoretically subversive of that goal." Kahn never, even by implication, answered his own question. Byars, for his part, had some comments in answer to Kahn's observation. Significantly, he feels that "Herman tends to view things rather categorically; he generalizes as a matter of habit. He doesn't, however, see *art* in general as a category of enormous interest for himself or for the world—he tends to view it as a luxury."

Among the people Byars contacted by telephone during his first period of residence at Hudson were Alvin Weinberg, Director of the Atomic Energy Commission—his question was, according to Byars, "Axiology?"—and Marshall McLuhan, who responded, "What do you mean, questions?" Byars visited Princeton on three different occasions, where he met with Physicist Eugene Wigner (there is no record of his response that we know of) and astronomical mathematician Freeman Dyson, who allegedly said to Byars, "We're getting red light from outer space." Whether this was intended as a question or a statement is not ascertained.

In July, Hal Glicksman visited Hudson for a day; he happened to be there during a seminar on U.S. Policies: Domestic and Foreign. [2] Talking with JL about the conference later, Hal said, "It was one of those meetings that I guess Kahn is famous for—bringing together all types of people and presenting several different lectures on current social problems. We heard Kahn's lecture in the late morning and had lunch with him, and then attended part of an afternoon session."

JL: How did you feel Kahn was responding to Byars, or was he?

HG: He was. He was very outgoing, and somehow when a person is that rational and is asked a nonsensical question, the question and answer just don't jibe. Kahn's answers were so straight and so good to the questions that were basically ridiculous and supposed to open up the person's flow of thinking, and Kahn would answer it more or less directly. Like Byars would ask, 'What's the most important question of the twentieth century?' and Kahn says, 'Well, this question is on three levels. First of all there are cosmic questions like, How is the world created, does God exist and this sort of thing. We can dismiss those.' Then he goes on to outline the three most important questions of the current day. I forget what they were . . . Viet Nam and this and that. I mean he has answers for Jim—that's the important thing.

Byars felt that although he maintained a stimulating relationship with Kahn, Kahn was not particularly helpful in supplying interesting questions. (He was not, after all, seeking answers.) Indeed the artist said, "If I had limited myself to Hudson I would have failed. Only by extending myself out into the world was I able to gather questions at all."

The peculiar quality of the dialogue between Byars and Kahn when Byars was trying most persistently to invoke Questions comes out in fragments of the taped conversation between them, made on the occasion of Hal's July visit:

Byars: I'd really like to ask you for one hundred questions . . .

Kahn: Are you going to be around tomorrow at all? . . .

Byars: It's very interesting how difficult it is to find questions. What is an interesting question in 1969?

Kahn: That's not our problem. Our problem is too many questions . . . There are different levels. Some say the most important questions are religious. Is there a purpose to mankind? Is there any meaning to existence? Now the atheist of course says no, man is the measure of himself. But that turns out to be wrong, in some funny way . . .

Byars: I'd be very happy to have whatever analysis you would make.

Kahn: To me an important question, for example, is, Can a computer transcend human beings? I suspect the answer to that is yes. I find it a very unpleasant prospect . . . The computer may write better poetry than human beings, better drama, make more perceptive judgements . . . I think before the end of the century you'll be saying yes to that . . . It may turn out that the only way you can do this, is that the computer itself will have to learn by experience. That seems very clear.

In the selection of questions compiled by Byars at the end of his Hudson collaboration and published in book form, none was authored by Kahn. In explaining why this is, Byars cited a remark made to him by Hudson employee Frank Armbruster. Armbruster said, on the subject of posing questions, "Most of the world is concerned with problems which they think have imminent solutions." Byars' response to this was, "I'm not *interested* in solutions. No one could get this through his head, including Herman Kahn."

In the spring of 1969, Byars had been in Antwerp to participate in an exhibition there. Through his contact with the man in charge of Belgian cultural affairs, he arranged with the Belgium Radio and Television network to sponsor a live television and radio program, on which Byars would appear and hold his World Question Center, simply by telephoning certain forewarned people and engaging in dialogue with them while being televised. The following letter was sent to MT, requesting his availability during the time of the program:

On November 28th 69, the B.R.T. will broadcast a live program about and with James Lee Byars, the first artist in residence of the Hudson Institute, Croton, N.Y.

James Lee Byars (Detroit 1932) asks questions, asks himself questions. It is quite surprising that he need not refer to another world or to another reality, but simply appears as *the* reality of our world. He does so in the most simple and direct way. His significance does not lie in what he says or does, but in the attitude out of which he tackles everything, in the man who is behind it. Everything he does, even if it seems exceptional according to the usual standards, is so obvious and coherent that we easily can approve of his ideas and, with him, look at our own behaviour and our own world like a stranger.

You have been chosen by James Lee Byars to be telephoned during the program, together with a few other personalities. So, on the 28th of November, between 10 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. (GMT), Byars will ask you some questions, which he thinks important or about which he wants your opinion. All the questions and answers are to

be in English. This program might be the beginning of a world question center, as Byars puts it.

We kindly request you to take part in the program and therefore we would ask you to return the enclosed letter as soon as possible (deadline: 22nd Nov.). Five hours before the program we will call you for the final checking.

We should be most grateful if you would cooperate.

Yours faithfully,

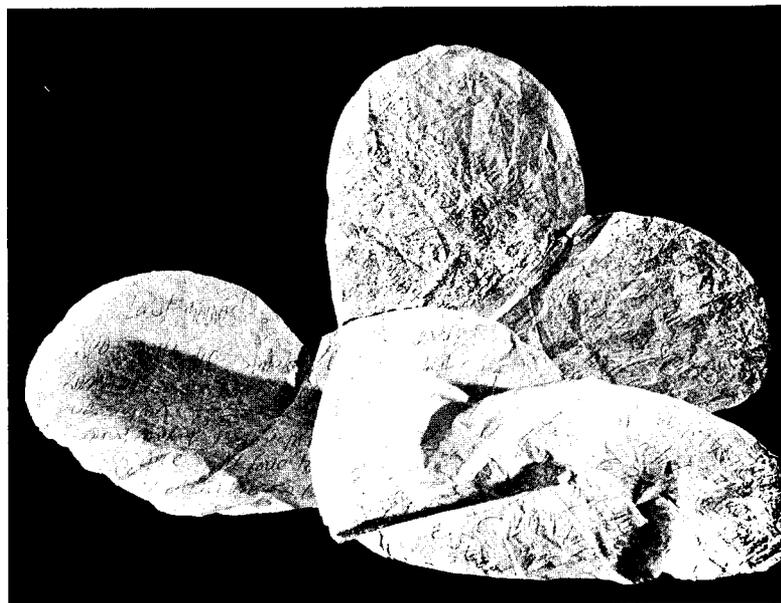
Bert JANSSENS.  
Program Controller TV.—  
Flemish Department (B.R.T.)

The program was not entirely successful from Byars' point of view in terms of the "profundity or seriousness" of the questions elicited, but as an event it came off excellently. Byars sat, in costume, in the midst of a group of fifty students from the University of Brussels, who acted as operators. About twenty people were telephoned, most of them Europeans, some in America. Walter Hopps, at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., was on hand in his office with a group of other gentlemen selected by Byars. One of them, a Mr. Rosenkrantz from the National Institute of Health, asked what Byars considered the most successful question of the hour: "What is the body of the cognitive instrument?" At the end of the telephone question period, the students present with Jim in the studio were invited to ask questions, and then the viewing audience was given a phone number to call the next day if they wished to call Byars with questions. The phone was busy for hours, according to Byars, and thus the experiment ended propitiously.

On December 8, we received from Byars, on orange painted paper cut in the shape of a pronged devil's tail, a message saying in part, "M. Babe, the World Question Center on TV was sensational in both Belg. and Holland—one most extraordinary part was an Angelic Belgian voice reading at ten second intervals my 100 ?'s (like clone me?) . . . Sorry I missed you on the world phone (Telstar was crystal clear)"

And shortly thereafter he added, on a pink tissue paper tail appended to an enormous white paper circle:

. . . with the World Question Center on TV I asked for a min. of intro. without speech or sound—they said 30 sec. max.—at the end of a simple quote on the poss. of an electronic simulation which may within the decade jump all languages and earthpeople 'BEEP' 'BEEP' at U.N. Understood radios TV broke down and 4 minutes of total silence and perfectly still cameras was transmitted to all of Belgium and Holland (50 people in a pink ring sitting—looking straight ahead and 5 in a pink pants on chairs in the middle on my rt. a transparent blond and on my lt. a transparent blue girl from Ghana)



Throughout the course of Byars' project, he was thinking about possible ways of participating in the Expo 70 exhibition. We received numerous letters from him with suggestions for such a project. As early as June, 1969, James sent us a list of ideas:

I CAN  
GET THE BOY SOPRANOS  
AT ST. THOMAS CHOIR  
SCHOOL TO SING THE  
QUESTIONS (FANTASTIC HIGH  
SOUNDS) USING ONLY THE  
LANGUAGE AS MUSIC—  
IT COULD BE MOSTLY  
AUDITORY PRESENTATION?  
I VIEW 'JUST THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO RESPOND' AS A SHOW  
TO TELEPHONE 1000 PEOPLE  
IN AN AREA ASKING FOR THEIR  
QUESTIONS AS A SHOW.  
THIS CAN BE DONE IN WHATEVER  
DEGREE OF TECHNOLOGY  
THAT IS AVAILABLE (VOCALLY  
IN PERSON OR PHONE OR  
RADIO OR TV).  
I'VE TAKEN ON ANOTHER  
PART OF THIS PROJECT TO  
TRY AND COLLECT  
'50 SINGLE SENTENCE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES'  
GIVE ME YOURS?  
MAYBE SOME WILL TAKE  
ME SERIOUSLY?  
ANOTHER PART THAT COULD  
BE BEAUTIFUL—  
A MOVIE OF FIRST SIGHT—  
PEOPLE MEETING  
FOR THE FIRST TIME—WHAT  
DOES THE FACE TELL?—DOES  
IT MATTER IF YOU'RE TIRED?  
(DOES 1 FATIGUE?)—WHAT  
COULD YOU SEE IN 100 FACES?  
IT APPEARS TO ME AS A PERFECT  
SILENT MOVIE—OR A VIDEO  
SYSTEM PROJECT—THE  
MOOD OF A PERSON'S FACE IS  
INTERESTING 100 MOODS

At the end of 1969, BA spoke to James by telephone and drafted this memo:

J. Byars called and would like an answer today or tomorrow re his participation in EXPO.

He claims he is asking so little:

1. Opening day or night, he would be present with a Sony pocket tape recorder and the voices of Viva, a child (ascertained by the child who could whisper the highest among those who make up the St. Thomas Choir), Herman Kahn and Byars.
2. Gold sheet or hole in the wall (1 inch) for Byars lips through which he would emit one question a minute OR a 6' x 3' gold leafed panel for same purpose.
3. A superwoman (of his choosing) with whom he would exchange questions and/or dialogue for an hour. (Nothing more, I hope!)
4. Police protection if we can't include him in the exhibition in one of the above manners.

The idea that finally became most persistent in Byars' mind was that of presenting his compilation of questions in the form of an edible book. In a letter written to us, he said,

. . . The figs. on the dissolve paper are \$3.70 per 100 sheets for 8½ x 11 (spec. price to me from the Chem. who invented it). Maybe I can get it for less and assume that Hud. will print it—I do want it to be exquisite however . . . the world's *first eatable public* book . . . The cover hopefully will also be eatable . . .

At the time of Byars' request that the Museum help to produce the edible book with funds from the A & T budget, we had no funds available. Hudson was also asked to produce the book; they finally agreed to print an edition of 100, but on non-edible paper, with one question to a page in hairline type. The text is as follows:

This book is eatable?  
Merry X?  
Woo?  
O?  
I'm the self-appointed World Question Center?  
Putting Byars in the Hudson Institute is the Artistic Product?  
E=MC<sup>2</sup>, next?  
I have perfect question?  
This is question theory?  
Say it is yours?  
The question of perfect speed and total elasticity?  
A proposition is public question?  
Clone me?  
Which questions have disappeared?  
Do you have an affection for question?



What's the difference between asking and telling?  
 He grabbed my nose and said what do you want a  
 nonlinguistic question?  
 Put your hypothesis in general language?  
 Imagine the palpability of question?  
 Did Plato forget question?  
 Is all speech interrogative?  
 Ho! Ho! Ho! is the same in all languages?  
 Call all earth attention to a signal?  
 Arro, is repeat. info.?  
 I'll give you 5 min. of face?  
 What questions are you asking yourself?  
 Think yourself away?  
 My business is asking and access?  
 I'll get her question grammar?  
 Read Plato's nonsensical definition of the Good?  
 "Forget it" is a treatise?  
 Put your autobiography in a question?  
 The question is the answer?  
 A Pompidou?  
 Is self-conscious option enough?  
 Trancequestion?  
 I fell in love with Herman Kahn because I knew in  
 advance he could speak 400 words a minute?

What's fancy for those in power (does it keep them  
 healthy)?  
 A '69 question?  
 My only desire is to explain everything?  
 I listed all the Universal Questions before?  
 What's your general honorific sweetie?  
 Put question in the Encyclopedia Britannica?  
 I am the complete history of the world?  
 How to meet a General, "Imagine I have short hair and  
 birds on my shoulders like you once had"?  
 This question is capable of questioning itself?  
 The ghost of question?  
 Starquake?  
 I'm the Unofficial Poet Laureate of the United States?  
 Make a soliloquy on question?  
 "Well?" was her favorite question?  
 Question is Big Art?  
 What's the difference between quantity and quality?  
 How to fall in love with a phone call?  
 Are all people interchangeable at some live level?  
 How does he question and how does he eat?  
 The world is so fantastic why make up?  
 All questions consist of establishing the notion of asking  
 followed by a nominative?

The Earth at least?  
 His head weighs 25 lbs?  
 Exalting question is surprising?  
 To present the opportunity of possible response is the  
 exhibition?  
 I can repeat the question but am I bright enough to ask it?  
 Multiply a question?  
 Find the world question in a week?  
 He asks 100 times or not at all?  
 Mathematics HaHa?  
 Imagine being possessive of a question?  
 Questions are gifts?  
 I'm full of Byars?  
 My work is civil defense?  
 You're the person they pretend doesn't exist?  
 Herman Kahn'll be a Buber by 50?  
 What's the speed of an idea?  
 He has the heaviest question in the U.S.A.?  
 Questionboon?  
 I'll be the Artist in the Pentagon, next?  
 Make a question was the whole exam?  
 Suppose the context around this question?  
 I quit you?  
 All questions rise in intonation?  
 The first sentence I ever read was "I can see you"?  
 Israel is a philosophical mistake?  
 A ? Zoo?  
 Numbers don't count?  
 Ask is New English?  
 Limit all talk to the sound of O?  
 It takes 5 minutes to come down to your level?  
 I'm 1/16 Jewish?  
 Drop hello?  
 Empty mouth, what's the matter?  
 Her questions are her ornaments?  
 The world's smartest man got mad when asked for a  
 question?  
 Axiology? from The Director of Atomic Energy?  
 I've done Anglo-Saxon?  
 If you ask for something that doesn't exist you deserve it  
 on the intelligence of the request?  
 Questionbully?  
 Suddenly he's a collar, a necktie, and a lapel?  
 Credit is to identify your question?  
 My tongue is insured for \$50,000?

In July, 1968 Greg Card sent a project proposal, an excerpt of which follows:

Nine three dimensional paintings, suspended:

Color:

Variations on three colors (Red, Green, Blue) in two forms . . . transparent and semi-opaque.

Medium:

Polyester resin (crystal clear in original form) and fiber-glass cloth or matting. Colors will be mixed in the resin according to the formula for each painting. Nylon or monofilament wire will be used for the suspension system.

Form and Dimensions:

Cylindrical with cone shaped ends . . . . These paintings to be hollow. All paintings to have a wall thickness of no more than ¼ inch and no less than 1/8 inch with a total outside diameter of approximately 5 inches and a total length of 12 feet. Paintings to be suspended in a horizontal position.

Production Process:

This process is one that I have come to know as spin forming or casting. It also has been brought to my attention that this process has been used with success by the Mattel Corporation and experimented with by a few other concerns.

James Byars has made himself into a work of art. Therefore, in the Museum exhibition, we will present a film of Byars. In it, he will appear life size, delivering a monologue.

Jane Livingston