

L
CATALOG

FAIR
AND
WIDE

BY LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF

This issue of LEA
is a co-publication of

NYUSteinhardt
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development



LEONARDO
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE
ARTS, SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Sabancı
Universitesi

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

LEA is a publication of Leonardo/ISAST.

Copyright 2013 ISAST

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Volume 19 Issue 5

December 15, 2013

ISSN 1071-4391

ISBN 978-1-906897-21-5

The ISBN is provided by Goldsmiths, University of London.

LEA PUBLISHING & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Volume Authors

Lanfranco Aceti and Omar Kholeif

Editors

Özden Şahin, Catherine M. Weir

Art Director

Deniz Cem Önduygu

Editorial Board

Peter J. Bentley, Ezequiel Di Paolo, Ernest Edmonds, Felice Frankel, Gabriella Giannachi, Gary Hall, Craig Harris, Sibel Irzik, Marina Jirotko, Beau Lotto, Roger Malina, Terrence Masson, Jon McCormack, Mark Nash, Sally Jane Norman, Christiane Paul, Simon Penny, Jane Prophet, Jeffrey Shaw, William Uricchio

Editorial Address

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Sabancı University, Orhanli - Tuzla, 34956

Istanbul, Turkey

Email

info@lealmanac.org

Web

www.lealmanac.org

www.twitter.com/LEA_twitts

www.flickr.com/photos/lea_gallery

www.facebook.com/pages/Leonardo-Electronic-Almanac/209156896252

Copyright © 2013

Leonardo, the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is published by:

Leonardo/ISAST

211 Sutter Street, suite 501

San Francisco, CA 94108

USA

Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) is a project of Leonardo/The International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology. For more information about Leonardo/ISAST's publications and programs, see <http://www.leonardo.info> or contact isast@leonardo.info.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is produced by Passero Productions.

Reposting of this journal is prohibited without permission of Leonardo/ISAST, except for the posting of news and events listings which have been independently received.

The individual articles included in the issue are © 2013 ISAST.

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC CATALOG, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 5

Far and Wide

VOLUME AUTHORS

LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF

EDITORS

ÖZDEN ŞAHİN AND CATHERINE M. WEIR

The Leonardo Electronic Almanac acknowledges the kind support for this issue of

Sabancı
Universitesi



Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



NYUSteinhardt
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

This catalog is a LEA production with FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology). It follows the first major retrospective on Nam June Paik in the UK with an exhibition and conference organized by Tate Liverpool and FACT. The exhibition Nam June Paik, December 17, 2010 to March 13, 2011, was curated by Sook-Kyung Lee and Susanne Rennert.

LEA acknowledges and is grateful for the gracious support provided to this publication by the Estate of Nam June Paik. In particular special thanks go to Ken Hakuta, Executor, Nam June Paik Estate.

Also, special thanks go to Mike Stubbs (Director/CEO of FACT) for his support.

Contents

- Lanfranco Aceti **06** *The Global Play of Nam June Paik: The Artist That Embraced and Transformed Marshall McLuhan's Dreams Into Reality*
- Omar Kholeif **10** *The Future Is Now?*
- Emile Devereaux **22** *To Whom It May Concern: Nam June Paik's Wobulator and Playful Identity*
- Tom Schofield **46** *Data Materialism in Art Making*
- Gabriela Galati **54** *The Electronic Representation of Information: New Relationships between the Virtual Archive and its (Possible) Referent*
- Jamie Allen **70** *Traveling at the Speed of Paik: An artist-researcher visits the Nam June Paik Art Center*
- Jeremy Bailey **90** *A Statement on Nam June Paik*
- Richard H. Brown **104** *Zen for TV? Nam June Paik's "Global Groove" and "A Tribute to John Cage" (1973)*
- 130** *Introductions and John G. Hanhardt Keynote Speech*
- 150** *John G. Hanhardt Q&A session chaired by Sarah Cook*
- 166** *Roy Ascott Keynote Speech*
- 184** *Ruth Catlow Speech*
- 190** *Anton Lukoszevieze performance*
- 200** *Roy Ascott in conversation with Mike Stubbs*

THE GLOBAL PLAY OF NAM JUNE PAIK

THE ARTIST THAT EMBRACED AND TRANSFORMED MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S DREAMS INTO REALITY

What else can be said of Nam June Paik and his artistic practice that perhaps has not been said before? My guess is not very much... and while I write my first lines to this introduction I realize that it is already sounding like a classic Latin 'invocatio,' or request to assistance from the divinity, used by writers when having to tread complex waters.

Nam June Paik and Marshall McLuhan are two of the numerous artists and authors who inspired my formative years. If one cannot deny Paik's love of play and satire imbued in popular culture and used to disguise a real intellectual and conceptual approach to the artwork, neither can easily be discounted McLuhan's strong advocacy of the powerful tool that technology can be, so powerful that is able to obscure and sideline the message itself in the name of the medium.

"Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase 'Media is message' was formulated by Norbert Wiener in 1948 as 'The signal, where the message is sent, plays equally important role as the signal, where message is not sent.'"¹

The construction of this hybrid book, I hope, would have pleased Paik for it is a strange construction, collage and recollection, of memories, events, places and artworks. In this volume collide present events, past memories, a conference and an exhibition, all in the name of Nam June Paik, the artist who envisaged the popular future of the world of media.

Paik remains perhaps one of the most revolutionary artists, for his practice was mediated, geared towards the masses and not necessarily or preeminently dominated by a desire of sitting within the establishment. He also challenged the perception of what art 'should be' and at the same time undermined elitisms through the use, at his time, of what were considered 'non-artistic-media.' Some of the choices in his career, both in terms of artistic medium and in terms of content, can be defined as visionary as well as risky to the point of bravery or idiocy, depending on the mindset of the critic.

That some of the artworks may be challenging for the viewer as well as the art critic is perhaps obvious – as obvious was Paik's willing-

ness to challenge the various media he used, the audience that followed him and the established aesthetic of his own artistic practice. Taking risks, particularly taking risks with one's own artistic practice, may also mean to risk a downward spiral; and Paik did not seem to shy away from artworks' challenging productions and made use of varied and combined media, therefore re-defining the field of art and placing himself at the center of it.

*In the following decades, Paik was to transform virtually all aspects of video through his innovative sculptures, installations, single-channel videotapes, productions for television, and performances. As a teacher, writer, lecturer, and advisor to foundations, he continually informed and transformed 20th century contemporary art.*²

Therefore, it seems limited to define Paik as 'the father of video art' when his approaches were to resonate in a multiplicity of fields and areas.

Paik's latest creative deployment of new media is through laser technology. He has called his most recent installation a "post-video project," which continues the articulation of the kinetic image through the use of laser energy projected onto scrim, cascading water, and smoke-filled sculptures. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Paik's work shows us that the cinema and video are fusing with electronic and digital media into new image technologies and forms of expression. The end of video

*and television as we know them signals a transformation of our visual culture.*³

When Mike Stubbs and Omar Kholeif approached me to create this book, the challenge was to create a structure for the material but also to keep the openness that characterizes so many of Paik's artworks and so many of the approaches that he has inspired.

I found the best framework in one of Paik's artworks that was presented for the first time in the United Kingdom, at FACT, in Liverpool, thanks to the efforts of both Stubbs and Kholeif.

My fascination with the *Laser Cone's re-fabrication*⁴ in Liverpool was immediate and I wanted to reflect in the publication, albeit symbolically, the multiple possibilities and connections that underpinned the Laser Cone's re-fabrication and its medium, as well as Paik's and McLuhan's visions of the world to come, made of light, optics and lasers.

*The word laser is actually an acronym; it stands for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Nam June Paik undertook a residency with Bell labs, who were the inventors of the laser. It was here that he created his 1966 piece Digital Experiment at Bell Labs, exploring the stark contrast between digital and analogue and his fascination with technology in its material form. His work with Bell set the precedent for artists and musicians to start using technology creatively in a new way.*⁵

This catalog became a tool to mirror and perhaps 'transmediate' the laser installation "made of a huge green laser that [...] conjoin[ed] FACT with Tate Liverpool. Travelling 800 metres as the crow flies, the beam of light [...] made] a symbolic connection between the two galleries during their joint exhibition of video artist, pioneer and composer Nam June Paik. Artist Peter Appleton, who was behind the laser which joined the Anglican and Metropolitan cathedrals in Liverpool during 2008 Capital of Culture, [was] commissioned by FACT to create the artwork, *Laser Link*, which references Nam June Paik's innovative laser works."⁶

The catalog is in itself a work that reflects the laser connections, the speed of contacts, the possibilities of connecting a variety of media as easily as connecting people from all parts of the world. In this phantasmagoria of connections it almost seems possible to visualize

the optic cables and WiFi that like threads join the people and the media of McLuhan's "global village" and the multiplicities of media that Paik invited us to use to create what I would like to define as the contemporary "bastard art."⁷

Lanfranco Aceti

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*
Director, Kasa Gallery



A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

For me personally this book represents a moment of further transformation of LEA, not only as a journal publishing volumes as in the long tradition of the journal, but also as a producer of books and catalogs that cater for the larger community of artists that create bastard art or bastard science for that matter.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Nam June Paik, "Cyberated Art," in *The New Media Reader*, eds. Noah Waldrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, 229 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).
2. John G. Hanhardt "Nam June Paik, TV Garden, 1974," in *Permanence Through Change: The Variable media Approach*, eds. Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito, and Caitlin Jones, 72 (New York and Montreal: Guggenheim Museum Publications and The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, 2003).
3. Nam June Paik/Nam June Paik Studios' official Web site, "John Hanhardt's essay," <http://www.paikstudios.com/essay.html> (accessed January 10, 2013).
4. *Laser Cone*, 2001/2010, Nam June Paik in collaboration with Norman Ballard, installation view at FACT. Photographer: Stephen King.
5. FACT, "Laser Cone," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-cone/> (accessed January 10, 2013).
6. FACT, "Laser Link," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-link/> (accessed January 20, 2013).
7. Art as a bastard is interpreted, in this passage, as something of uncertain origins that cannot be easily defined and neatly encapsulated in a definition or framework. "Art is often a bastard, the parents of which we do not know." Nam June Paik as cited in Florence de Meredieu, *Digital and Video Art*, trans. Richard Elliott (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2005), 180.

The Future Is Now?

Far and Wide: Nam June Paik is an edited collection that seeks to explore the legacy of the artist Nam June Paik in contemporary media culture. This particular project grew out of a collaboration between FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, and the Tate Liverpool, who in late 2010-2011 staged the largest retrospective the artist's work in the UK. The first since his death, it also showcased the premiere of Paik's laser work in Europe. The project, staged across both sites, also included a rich public programme. Of these, two think tank events, *The Future is Now: Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik* and *The Electronic Superhighway: Art after Nam June Paik*, brought together a forum of leading artists, performers and thinkers in the cross-cultural field together to explore and dissect the significance of Paik within broader culture.

This programme was developed by a large group of collaborators. The discursive programme was produced by FACT in partnership with Caitlin Page, then Curator of Public Programmes at Tate. One of our primary research concerns was exploring how Paik's approach to creative practice fragmented existing ideological standpoints about the visual arts as a hermetically sealed, self-referential canon. Drawing from Bruno Latour, Norman M. Klein and Jay David Bolter, among many others – our think tank and, as such, this reader, sought to study how the visual field has proliferated across disciplines through the possibilities that are facilitated by technology. At the same time, we were keen to examine how artists now possess a unique form of agency – one that is simultaneously singular and col-

lective, enabled by the cross-embedded nature of the current technological field. ¶

These positions are explored throughout the reader and our programme and in this special edition of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac. Here, the artist who goes by the constructed meme of the "Famous New Media Artist Jeremy Bailey," tracks Rosalind Krauss's influence and transposes her theoretical approach towards video art to the computer, examining the isolated act of telepresent augmented reality performance. Roy Ascott gives a nod to his long-standing interest in studying the relationship between cybernetics and consciousness. Eminent film and media curator, John G. Hanhardt honors us with a first-hand historical framework, which opens the collection of transcripts, before further points of departure are developed.

Researchers Jamie Allen, Gabriella Galati, Tom Schofield, and Emile Deveraux used these frameworks retrospectively to extrapolate parallels, dissonances and points of return to the artist's work. Deveraux and Allen focus on specific pieces: Deveraux discusses Paik and Shuya Abe's *Raster Manipulation Unit a.k.a. 'The Wobulator'* (1970), while Allen surveys a series of tendencies in the artist's work, developed after he was invited to visit to the Nam June Paik Center in South Korea. Galati and Schofield stretch this framework to explore broader concerns. Schofield considers the use of data in contemporary artwork, while Galati explores the problematic association with the virtual museum being archived online.

It is worth mentioning at this stage that there were many who joined in contributing to this process, who did not partake formally in this reader or the public programme. Dara Birnbaum, Tony Conrad, Yoko Ono, Cory Arcangel, Laurie Anderson, Ken Hakuta, Marisa Olson, all served as sources of guidance, whether directly or indirectly through conversations, e-mails, and contacts.

Still, there remain many lingering questions that are not answered here, many of which were posed both by our research and organizational processes. The first and most straightforward question for Caitlin and I was: why is it so difficult to find female artists who would be willing to contribute or speak on the record about Paik's influence? It always seemed that there were many interested parties, but so very few who were eager to commit to our forum.

The second and perhaps more open-ended question is: what would Nam June Paik have made of the post-internet contemporary art scene? Would Paik have been an advocate of the free distribution of artwork through such platforms as UbuWeb and YouTube? Would he have been accepting of it, if it were ephemeral, or would he have fought for the protection of licensing? This question remains: could an artist charged with bringing so much openness to the visual arts, have been comfortable with the level of openness that has developed since his death? There is much that remains unanswered, and that, we can only speculate. *Far and Wide* does not offer a holistic biography or historical overview of the artist's work or indeed its authority. Rather, it serves to extract open-ended questions about how

far and wide Nam June Paik's influence may have travelled, and to consider what influence it has yet to wield.

Omar Kholeif

Editor and Curator

FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology

-
1. See: N. M. Klein, "Cross-embedded Media," in *Vision, Memory and Media*, eds. A. Broegger and O. Kholeif (Liverpool and Chicago: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

TORONTO

VANCOUVER

VENICE

ZAGREB

The Future Is Now / Nam June Paik Conference / FACT and TATE Liverpool

ROY ASCOTT IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKE STUBBS

This text is a transcription of a speech from:

Nam June Paik Conference

The Future Is Now: Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik
presented by FACT and Tate Liverpool

Friday 18 February 2011

MIKE STUBBS: The first time I met this young man was in 1979. I drove down to Newport in south Wales from Cardiff, where I was an art student. I actually studied under John Gingell, who is unfortunately now deceased, but who shared some of the same qualities and values as I suspect Roy Ascott still maintains. At art college, I was a boy who was not bad with video, knocking about with half inch black and white video and three-quarter inch U-matic: an artist experimenting with videotape and performance. I was told about this bloke over in Newport who was mucking about with fax machines and robots. Being quite curious myself, I thought I might go and meet him, and that was my first meeting with Roy in his studio.

Earlier on today I was actually trying to get Omar Kholeif to find us a fax machine so we could be reminded what one looks like; then I thought that he could perhaps bring me a hammer as well, so I could smash it, as some kind of performative act. It was then that Omar said I couldn't do that because the finance department still uses the fax machine every day, which I was surprised to learn. The fact we're still using it just goes to show that some of our so-called redundant technologies are not as redundant as we think they are. I wanted to use this example in order to open a conversation about Roy Ascott's

own inquisitiveness, his own curiosity, and how he would apply the knowledge of these discrepancies to learning to play with technology.

ROY ASCOTT: Well, I suppose it started in a way... let's leave aside magic.

MIKE STUBBS: Why leave it alone?

ROY ASCOTT: Well, just for the moment. When I studied under Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton, the experience produced in me an extreme psychosis. That is because you've got two wonderful minds, two wonderful artists but completely different people and approaches: Pop Art and Constructivism. When I was there, at Newcastle University, I spent a lot of time in the library stacks, where I came across this really weird book called *Cybernetics and Business* by F. H. George. At the time I didn't know what cybernetics was, I just thought "what?" So I opened it up. It had inside special words such as "feedback," "retro-action," "black box," all of which were magic to me. I thought, "Jesus, what is this stuff?" From there, I then looked at Ross Ashby's design for a brain, or rather for the computer as a brain. I have got to tell you, this was written back at a time when the value debate was still going on between analog and digital computers. They were still talking about artificial neural nets as possible way forward, it's that ancient. Nevertheless, it was an utterly fascinating book. I was a kind of star student of Hamilton and Pasmore so I got, or was more or less given, a job down in London to set up a department, which ostensibly would be pursuing some of their research interests. At the time, they had this new idea called 'basic design,' which the department was to study. While I, in the interim before I

got to London, read all of these books and I began to think cybernetics could replace all this rubbish of anatomy and perspective that you had to do, which were useful tools but for another kind of art. Cybernetics, which was about dynamic relationships would be the tool to replace it as an underlying discipline. So, to answer your question: you quickly move, though not directly, my move was from cybernetics to biology first of all, but then you do quickly move to computers and to the idea of computational systems. So that was the shift.

MIKE STUBBS: I wanted to go earlier, I'm sorry.

ROY ASCOTT: Earlier than that?

MIKE STUBBS: I was hoping to find out more about the time before you decided to go to college, or when you decided to become an artist, or even knew what an artist might be. Whether you had any early reflections as a child?

ROY ASCOTT: I don't know, I realized later what they might have been, in a way. I was born in Bath, down in Somerset, which is an interesting place in terms of all its history. Firstly, the Romans took it over and they left some very interesting monuments and artefacts. Later, the Georgian period gave it the same wonderful architecture as you have here. Later again, it was also a great gaming center, Owen Ash brought the idea of gambling to the city in a big way. Then, all around it are places like Silbury Hill and Avebury, these ancient, psychic sites and a whole mythology that attaches to the idea of the instrumentality of geographical features. You know a mound is not just a mound, that's what I meant by magic.

MIKE STUBBS: But we are post-rationalizing though aren't we?

ROY ASCOTT: Oh yes, absolutely so.

MIKE STUBBS: I know you love language and you love making up words. So you have actually helped us define a new way of thinking by coming up with some of the new terms. To be honest, it was shame to see you rush through that presentation, especially as I saw a longer version of it about a year ago. That could have been a four-hour lecture for some students in... Russia. Given that time, we really would have got down into what the concept of 'pharma' means for you. Not only that, but how your interpretation of technology is not about the digital, it's not about video, and it's not even about processing data. That really interests me in terms of some sort of contemporary utopianism, whether that is us witnessing via television events taking place in, for instance, the Middle East or North Africa; through to the conditions that we live and work in within Liverpool and the everyday. I'm curious about that sense of hope that we might have around what could be described as a collective intelligence. Can you go into that for me?

ROY ASCOTT: That's what I mean by the idea of the hyper-cortex, if we would be prepared to realign the anatomy, as we understand it, and try to look instead at the anatomy of the collective. The collective mind, as I use the term, is not a hive mind but an extremely dynamic set of parts that are constantly shifting. It's more and more possible with telematics to understand a dynamic mind. We are not just talking about collective agreements on things, we're talking about a dynamic thinking that's going on all the time. Contemporary networks like Facebook, as much as it is maligned in some ways, are really about that. They are about dynamic thinking, so it's a different kind of collective, but that's the best interpretation of this idea of collective consciousness.

Mike Stubbs: I'd like to try and connect this to the inquisitiveness or curiosity that Nam June Paik, would have had, both as a contemporary of yours and as somebody who enjoyed playing. I am really interested to know what you might be saying to the young people in the room who are the practitioners, or studying the context and the culture. What you think we might be moving to in terms of a third sense, let alone a second sense? Maybe to speculate on the future?

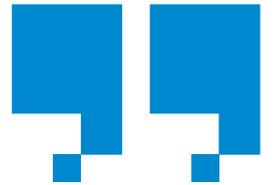
ROY ASCOTT: To speculate on the future I think we will inevitably be thinking about the city: what it is and what that might mean. It's a very old structure, a very old and classical idea that has outlived its point. Where we had that strange dichotomy of city and country, urban and rural, we now have to rethink space, and rethink structures in space. It is not just going to be about extreme poverty, which is already widespread throughout the world and is coming to a street near you, if not your street, within the next year or two. Not just extreme poverty, but the whole rethinking of what it is to be living together, where we are living in a variable reality as I tried to describe in the talk. A variable reality where we shift seamlessly between these states of being, and where we take on more responsibility and do not leave it to some ideology or to a church to define who we are. We are actually now more bravely set about defining ourselves. All this is tied up with the idea of living together and how physical space might be configured in doing that. I think what we could call architecture is one important thing to be looking at.

MIKE STUBBS: Does that mean we have to give a large part of ourselves away?

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, I think I understand what you mean. If as a part of that process, as an important element of the greater transparency of ourselves, then yes, I think we are slowly shedding extreme inhibitions about private thought. I think the two big S words, salary and sexuality, used to be two very private things that one didn't talk about, but those and many other things are now openly discussed.



To speculate on the future I think we will inevitably be thinking about the city: what it is and what that might mean. It's a very old structure, a very old and classical idea that has outlived its point.



I think the passage of ideas through one's mind will become ever more transparent, leading to a profound change in our relationships.

MIKE STUBBS: As we potentially move into a much more mechanistic society, due to burgeoning poverty and mass population, are classical modes of individuality things that we can no longer afford?

ROY ASCOTT: Again, I think that redefinition is the word. I don't think it's so much about loss, but it is a matter of redefining what it is to be. Without sounding horribly vague about it, I think we are having this forced upon us anyway, and progressively we will rethink what it is to be a human being and how autonomous we are in relation not only to everyone else, but also to everything else. This mechanized environment, where more and more machines and systems can anticipate our needs, also creates a kind of anticipatory environment that changes the nature of desires.

MIKE STUBBS: Before I throw it open to the floor, is that what you might share with Nam June Paik? An essential need to communicate

and to be part of a bigger world than yourself? That's what I'd like now to end our conversation with, if you are all right with that.

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, thank you.

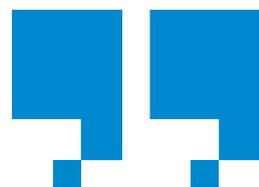
MIKE STUBBS: Then I would like to ask the members of the audience here to come up with some questions for Roy. So over to you please.

AUDIENCE: The story about the fax machine got me thinking about notions of authenticity. The reason that the finance department is working with a fax machine is that banks do not accept e-mails as being authentic, whereas the fax they do. This is completely stupid because you can fake both just as well, but the idea persists that one is somehow more authentic than the other. Is this question of what is authentic and what is fake even interesting anymore?

ROY ASCOTT: Oh yes, it is hugely interesting. We have had centuries of being told where the authentic self is located, who will authen-



What Paik was foreseeing was something beyond the artists' process, to how we exist in a media flow. I'm not sure if the question of invention really occurs anymore. We are in this flow not just of media but of life, which I describe as this variable reality, in and out of video; in and out of all these different worlds.



ticate it and how, and which behaviors make it authentic and which don't. I don't have an answer to what comes out of that, but I believe that questioning this idea of authenticity on every level is important; certainly in terms of the self. That then, of course as I'm sure you know, leads to questions of ownership. These questions only make sense in this world where, with present company accepted, museums are designed really to ensure the investment of wealthy investors who, rather than investing in second hand materials, invest in pictures. They do this because you can run from one country to the next if you get attacked. I've no doubt that in Egypt instead of collecting Louis XIV sideboards, Mubarak collected paintings.

MIKE STUBBS: Perhaps more importantly, in terms of biological material and biological assets, or rather in terms of the authenticity of the individual, that also raises a really big set of questions.

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, sure! Even now the bio-industry, in terms of facial restructuring, altering body parts and so on is big business. This is important because it is big business not on a purely medical level but a very commercial one. So then of course, the authentic body is completely passed out of consciousness.

MIKE STUBBS: Does it take identity with it?

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, I agree, identity goes with it.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. As Mike said, Roy, your presentation raised a number of provocative issues and terms. I just have one question. On one of your charts you had the modern, the postmodern and you had...

ROY ASCOTT: ...Syncretic.

AUDIENCE: Yes, you talked about the postmodern process and the syncretic flow. I was just wondering if you could expand on those terms?

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, well, I think that the aesthetic values and artistic practice in the modernist period were concerned with material objects and space. In the postmodern period, I think what we saw was increasing interest in the process, in performative work. I'm not talking necessarily about performance art, but rather the whole business of making work and what that was about for the artist. You could let people in on that with video and documentation, but this was not the only way in which process came to be extremely important. This importance was felt particularly in the field of new technology and art, which we see in the work of Nam June Paik. However, I think what Paik was foreseeing was something beyond the artists' process, to how we exist in a media flow. I'm not sure if the question of invention really occurs anymore. We are in this flow not just of media but of life, which I describe as this variable reality, in and out of video; in and out of all these different worlds. These worlds are no longer separate: we clutch at this, we pull from that and we flow with this. Even process, in the postmodern sense, was something that took place in a studio or other special place but it's not like that anymore, now it is a flow. That's what I'm trying to point to really.

MIKE STUBBS: Can I just add to that? Your starting point was about contemplation, but being in a flow, contemplation, if it exists at all, is in the real time and it is in the nanosecond. Therefore, if we base our

analysis in terms of all of our conceptions of time, these have totally shifted within the arc of your lifetime.

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, they have shifted within the course of my life. I am a special medical case where I can be walking, let's say through Bath, where I have all these memories and some of the time they are very vivid. This is probably an unhealthy position to be in. Nevertheless it is an interesting position, is it not? We designate it, what it is called? Psycho...

MIKE STUBBS: Psychogeography?

ROY ASCOTT: No, no, I'm talking about when people have many mind-sets. It is a condition that psychoanalysts have treated as a sort of complaint, remember that we have to seek the unified self. I got attacked quite heavily in Argentina, because as someone said that there are more warm couches in Argentina than anywhere else in the world, and when I attacked Freud in the national newspaper they went absolutely berserk. So fortunately that whole idea about having to be a unified self is getting back to the reality that we are many selves. I mean Peter D. Ouspensky, who was another person out there in the margins and not brought into polite discourse, was also talking about that.

AUDIENCE: As much as I hate bringing any kind of conversation back to Facebook, you mentioned the idea of this activity being a transparent kind of thinking, if I'm not mischaracterizing what you

said. The lady's question about authenticity brought me back to that and subsequently to performativity. I was wondering if you have any comment on these aspects as a thinking process?

ROY ASCOTT: Of Facebook?

AUDIENCE: Yes, so are people in making themselves more transparent also performing?

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, you're absolutely right. I find it absolutely fascinating and I've spent a lot of time on it, getting into this flow. Those of you, almost all of you, who are on Facebook will recognize the feed through which all the messages just flow, messages you may or may not catch. One might say "Was at Aunt Betty's today and we made soup," then Jim is talking about "the nano-principles," someone else is saying something; all of this is going on in the flow. Whether they are talking about Aunt Betty or talking about soup doesn't really matter. This is because it is desire speaking: it's saying 'I want this to be the case,' so perhaps it is also a fiction.

MIKE STUBBS: All right we've got about three more questions lined up. If we can make quicker points and quicker answers now because we are going to run out of time.

AUDIENCE: Hi Roy, both you and Nam June Paik have an enviably positive, or utopian, imagination when it comes to technology. Both

of you were imagining futures for technology long before it was capable of being what you envisaged. Therefore, in a sense technology has caught up with your imaginings. It sort of does the things you hoped, but it doesn't seem to me that the utopian imaginings have been fulfilled in any way. So my question is quite simple: is it possible and is it still appropriate to link hope, so human good, to technological development?

ROY ASCOTT: I certainly think it's possible; I think it's got to be employed and we've got to find ways in which that can be the case. I think that the way technologies, in the very full sense I am using the word, need to be brought to bear on the idea of self-definition and of being instrumental in the world. Let's not talk about jobs and skills, let's talk instead about the instrumentality of human minds and human bodies in social situations and rethink education in that way. My answer is yes, I don't think that this utopianism is foolish and it's not empty. To go back in time, at first there were only eight or nine people working on telematics and we used to get horrendous comments at conferences about the fact that the whole of Africa was without telephones. Yet, within two decades everyone has a mobile phone. Now, you don't need cables, you don't have to wire Africa, you can use the same technology that made satellites possible. I hope I've answered your question.

AUDIENCE: You talked about object process and where we are currently in terms of flow and identity, referring back to Facebook I was wondering if all these technologies and systems actually pose

a paralysis or a crisis of identity? In as much as we can look at the homepage, filter through it and pick out moments and points in time from a multiplicitous overview of other peoples' identities. Do you think for the actual individual it can pose a gridlock or a return to where actually living becomes an outside, external world and we become blocked within ourselves?

ROY ASCOTT: It's a good question but I don't think so at all. It's bad that we focus our talk so much on Facebook, but I think in the generic form of behavior and consciousness we see a flow between interior states and external statements. That's the sense I have at two o'clock in the morning as I close down by running through that stream of stuff. I get the sense of minds, I get the sense of people and I get the sense of worlds both interior and external. So no, I think there is a very broad field of awareness and consciousness that is activated and expressed through that flow. What is interesting is where that might lead given these models, or this particular model of Facebook, which has taken hold of the imagination of so many people. Where might that lead generically? That I think is an interesting question. It is a question that a lot of people are asking now and not just for money, but because of the fuller implication of it, philosophically if you like.

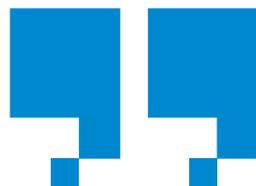
AUDIENCE: I have two questions. Firstly, I'm wondering if you meant to imply that the shamans you spoke about in the beginning are using ancient technologies and techniques that flow into contemporary technologies? Does that then mean contemporary technolo-

gies are extensions of ancient ones? Would you kindly talk a little bit more about this?

ROY ASCOTT: Yes, that's very much what I was talking about. I had to say it very briefly, but I think that if we are going to look at technologies then we must look at all technologies. I think one of the oldest is Yoga, a somatic technology. I think the instrumentality of the shaman however, which goes back for more than a millennia, is about activating psychic space. The notion of psychic space is not one we're comfortable discussing, but this place has its own psychic space that could be restructured in many ways. We often use music to achieve this but of course the Shamans have more devices, more technology at work to do that. That's why it's very interesting to me that in Korea new businesses will pay a lot of money for a shaman. I was at one ceremony not so long ago when something known as the National Treasure was there. It involves many sorts of very strange practices – including the corpse of a pig – but everything that is going on, dance, color, light, sound, music, words, and so on, is instrumental in changing states of consciousness or the field of consciousness. It's a very old technology and I think we would do well to examine that as much as we examine oncoming technologies of a chemical-colloidal or computational kind.



I think it is more useful for human beings to understand evolution as a product not of the mind but of an organ, namely the brain, which can access a pre-existing field of consciousness.



AUDIENCE: My second question is about the body as a response to my Cartesian mind, so using an embodiment to talk. Now you are saying that consciousness needs to be re-thought, but it is sometimes very easy simply to return to the Cartesian mind. So how do you go about redefining the mind and what kind of frameworks do you use to do it?

ROY ASCOTT: It's really about shifting the balance. In my case I want to shift from what I think is this almost childish notion of meat generating mind. I think it is more useful for human beings to understand evolution as a product not of the mind but of an organ, namely the brain, which can access a pre-existing field of consciousness. I can't say that this is the truth but it is closer to what I think might be the case. We now have technologies that reflect that awareness, such as asynchronic telecommunications, that are a sort of modern technological equivalent of this idea of a field of consciousness. I have given a lot of thought to the Australian-based philosopher David Chalmers, who has written very usefully about the idea of how the mind, how the brain, relates to fields of consciousness. We have

this terrible disease in Western science of thinking that correlation equals causation and we like to think that lighting up parts of the brain creates conscious states. Whereas the argument might be that a field of consciousness exists and the brain is an organ of access to it. For me, that changes a lot of our ways of thinking about human beings and our understanding of very old practices and the potential of new kinds of technological practices. I'm sorry, I completely lost the thrust of your question.

AUDIENCE: Thank you! I just wanted to tell you I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to ask you a question and I hope I can make the question make sense. I think you are absolutely right and it's wonderful that artists are going to examine the mind in all its aspects. However, other cultures have been examining it and have tapped into many of its aspects that we in Western culture have denied for a long time; not only that but they've made amazing use of these different aspects. What concerns me is that the only reason that we, Western culture, are really interested in it today is because capitalism and digitization make it possible to own what the mind does by

way of the patent, because digitized information can be patented. At one time it couldn't and our interest now is not only scientifically driven but market driven. I'm concerned about the implications for art in particular, given how it is so often assimilated by the market. I'm very worried about this and just wondered if you had any thoughts about those aspects of examination into the mind?

ROY ASCOTT: Wow... That is an excellent question with many aspects that one should try to answer. We have talked about authenticity, but we have not spoken about ownership, and clearly there is an issue of exploitation. I can't really answer that question straight up, but I would say this: as artists, or whoever we are, interested in these issues and taking a creative position relative to them, we've got to act fast. You are very, very right to bring the ghost of capitalism to play on it. Going back to when there were half a dozen of us using these telematic systems for artworks, capitalism always loomed over us. My answer now is the same as it was back then: if

we don't get there first and show, as I say, that there is love in the telematic embrace then the corporations will sure as hell set the standard. Now I think, with things like Facebook, we are ahead of the game and we are always ready to see the capitalist monster move in. The more we can do to explore and exploit creatively the potentials of the mind and technology which are opening up the better, but keeping at bay this capitalist approach. That's not answering your question, but is a sort of sideways on to it. The rest of it I would be quite happy to discuss later.

MIKE STUBBS: I am going to add one thing onto that and then we are going to close this session. Again, maybe we can refer this back to where Nam June Paik was positioning himself as a trickster. In terms of the historic uses of linguistics, disguise and poise, that positioning is of course a process in itself. Ultimately all any of us as cultural practitioners, theorists, or artists can do is to do something; and when you are not doing something, someone is doing something else. Maybe it's not good enough to be passive, but if you want to be passive recognise, that maybe of action in itself. That's all the questions for now, can we have a big round of applause for Roy Ascott, please? ■



**Operational &
Curatorial Research** in
Contemporary Art, Design,
Science & Technology