

International Symposium for Media Art

# Art & Technology:

Changing Times, Contemporary Trends, Future Platforms

Report [PDF ver.]

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## Preface: About the Symposium

In July 2016, Arts Council Tokyo and the Japan Foundation Asia Center co-hosted the international symposium “Art and Technology: Changing Times, Contemporary Trends, Future Platforms.” Arts Council Tokyo is an organization that has a central role in cultural activities launched by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and the Japan Foundation Asia Center is an institution that runs cultural and art exchange programs with the rest of Asia. Though they have planned and launched various projects across different artistic genres to invigorate the arts and to promote international exchanges, this symposium was the first event they had jointly hosted that was geared toward media art.

In recent years, countries and regions in Asia have not only achieved economic growth but also demonstrated dynamic changes in the arts and cultural activities they offer. Media art has emerged from those changes as a contemporary form of artistic expression combined with technology. It has found a wide range of use in the art scene, and has also acted as a catalyst for the emergence of creative sectors and social change. This symposium was organized as the first step toward the creation of new platforms for media art in Tokyo and the rest of Asia. It served as an opportunity to acknowledge and share contemporary issues in the contexts of local history, culture, and society, as well as in cultural policies, and also introduced many different media art projects launched across Asia. The event attracted much attention in the run-up to its opening. It received about 300 visitors on opening day, and what transpired at the symposium was live-streamed for large audiences around the world.

The panelists presented and discussed their views based on their experience and insight. Their comments on what defines media art and what its future should look like in Tokyo were truly thought-provoking. As the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games approach, Tokyo has been attracting more attention from around the world. The symposium successfully identified where media art in the city can start from to shape and establish its presence in society, and to define its role in cultural administration as well as cultural and art exchange projects.

Finally, in organizing this symposium, we were privileged to receive special help from NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC], which generously offered the venue and their expertise in tangible and intangible aspects of the event, and incredible support from many other people. We wish to express our sincere gratitude for all their help.

Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture)  
The Japan Foundation Asia Center

February 2017

## International Symposium for Media Art **Art & Technology: Changing Times, Contemporary Trends, Future Platforms**

Today, media art is often showcased at cultural facilities, educational institutions, and festivals around the world. It emerged from various forms of artistic expression created as pioneering experiments in combining art and technology from the 1970s. Artworks that depend on contemporary technologies have developed alongside the social phenomena of economic growth, technological innovation, and globalization. They not only inspire us to continue creating something new, but also enable us to develop a critical eye on society and try out new art forms.

This report serves as a record of the symposium “Art & Technology: Changing Times, Contemporary Trends, Future Platforms.” The symposium presented how media art as a form of artistic expression had changed over time and what contemporary hands-on projects had been launched. Furthermore, the international guest speakers with different backgrounds examined the relationship between art and technology in different lights to suggest what a new platform for art and culture should be like to connect the present with the future, society with art, and individuals with the public.

Time and Date: Saturday, July 9 2016, 13:00–18:00

Venue: NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]

Organized by

Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture), The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Specially Supported by NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]

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Session 1 | Lectures

# Media Art: Historical Shifts in Japan and Hybridity of Asia

This chapter provides an overview of how media art in Japan has changed since the Japan World Exposition (EXPO '70), in tandem with social change over the decades. It also presents international trends in media art, especially in Southeast Asia.

## Lecturers' Profiles



**Minoru Hatanaka** (Chief Curator, NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC])

Born in 1968 and graduated from Tama Art University. Minoru Hatanaka joined NTT Inter-Communication Center [ICC] in 1996, prior to the facility's opening. He has curated exhibitions at ICC, including group shows such as *Sound Art—Sound as Media* (2000), *Silent Dialogue* (2007), *[Internet Art Future]—Reality in Post Internet Era* (2012), and solo shows featuring the work of Dumb Type, Maywa Denki, Laurie Anderson, Kazuhiko Hachiya, Rhizomatiks, Arata Isozaki, Otomo Yoshihide, John Wood and Paul Harrison. He co-curated *Roppongi Crossing: New Visions in Contemporary Japanese Art 2004* (2004, Mori Art Museum) and curated a Japanese artist showcase at Sónar Music Festival (2006, Barcelona).

<http://www.ntticc.or.jp>



**Yvonne Spielmann** (New Media Researcher)

Professor Yvonne Spielmann is a leading scholar of technology, media, and art, and has taught in Europe, America, and Southeast Asia. Her publications include *Hybrid Culture* (2010, Suhrkamp Press/2012, MIT Press), which examines the essential hybridity in Japan's media culture, and *Contemporary Indonesian Art* (2015, Logos Publishers/2016, NUS Press), which discusses the close interrelationships between politics and aesthetics in contemporary Indonesian art in the context of Southeast Asia. A Japanese translation of her landmark *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (2008, MIT Press) was published in 2011. From 2012 to 2015 she was Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts at Lasalle College of the Arts in Singapore. In 2016 she was a Visiting Research Fellow at NTU Center for Contemporary Arts Singapore.

<http://yvonne-spielmann.com>

# The Transition of Art and Technology in Japan

Minoru Hatanaka Chief Curator, NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]

When speaking of “art and technology” in Japan, its history has shown the rise of two unique eras. The first is the technology art movement, which originated in the 1950s to 60s, and reached its peak in 1970. The other is media art, which is the movement spanning from around 1990 to the present. Since the word “media art” did not exist in the 1960s, if we refer to the 60s movement as technology art, I would like to differentiate the period in the 1990s and afterwards as the media art movement, which also includes activities undertaken by NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC].

## # Technology art emerged simultaneously in various parts of the world

Technology art in Japan was spearheaded by the group Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop) in the 1950s. Comprised of members rooted in music, art, literature, and theater, among others, the group incorporated numerous new technologies into their artistic expressions. The technology art movement that came to the forefront during the rapid economic growth period of the 1950s to the 60s, came to a culmination at the Japan World Exposition (EXPO '70) held in Osaka, in 1970.

Around the same time, overseas, the art and technology movement also existed as a contemporary trend. Group Zero of Germany was formed in 1958, followed by Gruppo T of Italy in 1959, and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in Paris in 1960. A group called E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology), founded in 1966, actively advocated the collaboration of art and technology. Its key figures included Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg, both former engineers at Bell Laboratories.

Also in 1969, Jeffrey Shaw, who is a guest at this symposium, formed the Eventstructure Research Group in the Netherlands. I think their work can be classified as a type of environmental art; for example, they installed a balloon-like sculpture inflated with air as a play area to be used as a public space, and they also applied those sculptures to stage productions of concerts, as well as experimented with staging using lasers. I think their approaches are directly linked to what artists like Rhizomatiks, also our guest today, are currently engaged in.

Going back to Japan during the same period, in parallel with environmental art, there was a similar rise in technology art with various related exhibitions. These works were characterized by the use of new materials such as aluminum and plastic, and exhibited in such ways as to make the viewer aware of the environment. One example was *the International Psy-Tech Art Exhibition “ELECTROMAGICA '69,”* which took place in April 1969, as a major international event at the newly erected Sony Building in the Ginza district. Katsuhiro Yamaguchi, the central artist of the group Jikken Kobo, organized the event with the cooperation of several companies, and attempted to create an environment using the building itself as a display device. It can be said that this was a form of environmental art using light, movement, and sound, using an entire building. As we walk along the streets of Ginza today, you can see that the facades of fashion brand buildings are turned into displays, indicating how innovative his project was.

Also at the EXPO '70 in Osaka, a number of pavilions screened “expanded cinema.” This is a form of cinema that uses multiple screens simultaneously, similar to how video installation is displayed today.

Subsequently, video art came to the scene in the latter half of the 1970s, followed by computer graphics in the 1980s. With these movements as a backdrop, The International Exposition,

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Tsukuba, was held in 1985, where the landmark attraction was the Jumbo Tron, a huge screen display developed by Sony.

### # Art is inspired by new technology

Media art, on the other hand, became known as a genre from the late 1980s onwards. Against the backdrop of the age in which video and computer graphics grew popular and personal computers (PCs) became widely available, media art has developed up to the present, alongside the progression of these technologies and media, as well as the development of advanced technologies.

Furthermore, as PCs became widespread and computer performance advanced at a rapid pace, an art form where the viewer becomes



part of the work, so-called interactive art, entered the scene in the 1990s. With the introduction of the Internet, this art form became more common in the 2000s, and has led to the current post-Internet era of the 2010s. I believe that digital fabrication such as 3D printing, is the epitome of the novel technology that is linked to the current art and technology trend.

The relationship between art and technology can be affected by a wide range of factors; for example, when a new technology creates a new form of society, or when new materials are produced from industrial technology, they can both inspire new types of artistic expressions. Futurism, an avant-garde artistic movement in the early 20th century, as well as the pop art movement in the 1950s and 60s, are both prime examples of art forms born in response to the rise of a technology-oriented society.

A Futurism piece entitled *Intonarumori*, created by Italian painter and composer Luigi Russolo in 1913, originated from an idea that a society in which living environments become increasingly filled with noise, may also alter humans' sense of aesthetics.

Let's also look at pop art, popularized by the collages of British artist Richard Hamilton and works by American artist Andy Warhol. They can also be regarded as works reflecting the modern society of the time. Hamilton's piece, titled *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* is most likely driven by the awareness of how people's livings were changing at the time. Warhol, on the other hand, engaged in the appropriation of advertisements and mass media, a characteristic of American pop art. He is also noted for his quote "I want to be a machine," evident in his mass-production of silk screens of photographs that appear as from a catalog, and calling his studio "The Factory."

To summarize what I have talked about up to this point, I believe that there are three ways for art to accept technology.

The first is art that is inspired by new technology. This is when new media is directly used in the artwork itself. The second is art that is inspired by a society created by technology. This is probably not limited to any form of expression media. Rather, it is an artistic expression in response to an increasingly technology-oriented environment. The last is art inspired by production techniques and materials, resulting from technological advances. Movements like digital fabrication are connected to this trend.

## # Art “creation” and technology

At the beginning of my presentation, I mentioned that the environmental art and technology art movements in Japan reached their peak in 1970 at EXPO '70. So, what was this EXPO like? This event was Japan's biggest national project since the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and a number of corporations, researchers, architects, and artists were involved in the construction, as well as the visuals and sound effect creation of the pavilions. For Japan, this was a major event symbolizing one of its pivotal moments in modern history. Some major pavilions known to have been designed by artists included the Festival Plaza (Kenzo Tange, Taro Okamoto, Kisho Kurokawa, Arata Isozaki), Pepsi Pavilion (E.A.T., Fujiko Nakaya), Pavilion Textiles (Toshio Matsumoto), Steel Pavilion (Keiji Usami, Toru Takemitsu, Yuji Takahashi, Iannis Xenakis) and Mitsui Group Pavilion (Katsuhiko Yamaguchi).

Take a look at this photograph from the exhibition by E.A.T. titled *E.A.T. – The Story of Experiments in Art and Technology* held at the ICC in 2003 (Fig.1). You can see in the back of the Pepsi Pavilion produced by E.A.T. Their artistic expression traversed genres including art, music, and video, and was dubbed as “intermedia.”

Here is another photograph from the same exhibition for your reference. This is Andy Warhol's 1966 work called *Silver Clouds* (Fig.2). Warhol had only the idea of a mirror-like object floating in air and reflecting the surrounding environment. It was E.A.T. engineers who brought his idea to life by applying polyethylene film, chiefly used by the U.S. Army at the time.

We can get a glimpse of the tone of the modern art scene at the time from a 1969 essay by art critic Atsushi Miyakawa, titled “Forfeiture of the hand—Machine as a symbol and thoughts on manual crafts.” Miyakawa perceived the years up to the 1950s as the age of the machine, while the 1960s and onwards was transitioning to the age of electronics technology, and viewed the advent of electronics as something that would “produce a new dimension on the subject of ‘art and technology.’” He also commented, “as the concept of ‘creation’ in art was contemporaneous with usefulness, productivity and the advancement of ‘machines,’ closing up on “seeing” is also contemporaneous with the transformation of technology itself.” Here we can sense the concern people of this period had about technology taking over manual crafts, as if the tradition of artists creating their works by hand, a concept that had been sustaining art, was endangered. It can be said that the idea of humans becoming unnecessary has emerged, which may be similar to issues like singularity in the current age. However, Miyakawa interpreted this positively, seeing it as a transition of “hand” to “eye,” “creation” to “seeing.”

However, behind the EXPO '70, which was in essence a culmination of technology art, the *10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter* was held in the same year. This exhibition is known for its minimalistic displays, as if the material as it is simply tossed onto the gallery floor. While this may seem like a diversion from our topic about technology, it is noteworthy to mention the



Fig.1 Exhibition space for *E.A.T. – The Story of Experiments in Art and Technology* (organized by NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC] in 2003). It featured a photo of the Pepsi Pavilion (in the back) at the Japan World Exposition in 1970 (EXPO '70) and a reproduction of *Floats* by Robert Breer (1970/2003). Photo: Kozo Takayama Courtesy: NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]



Fig.2 Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds*, 1966. Installation view of *E.A.T. – The Story of Experiments in Art and Technology* (2003, NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]) Photo: Kozo Takayama Courtesy: NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]

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emergence of the Mono-ha movement in the Japanese art scene in the late 1960s. Mono-ha, translated as the “school of things,” is not a typical group. Citing from the catalog of the *Mono-ha Reconsidering* exhibition held at the National Museum of Art, Osaka in 2005, this was a movement of “artists who formed their works by combining or independently using ‘things’ such as rocks, trees, paper, cotton, iron sheets, and paraffin,” who then “took the mundane ‘things’ themselves and presented them in extraordinary circumstances, in order to strip them of their pre-existing perceptions, and unlocking a new world.”

The reason why I’m mentioning this is because I have a feeling that it is connected to the views of Atsushi Miyakawa. Technology art, which came to its peak in a sense in 1970, slowed down along with the end of rapid economic growth. What came to the forefront instead was Mono-ha, a non-technological, naturalistic movement. In fact, Lee Ufan, the theoretical leader of Mono-ha, argued for the “rejection of creation” in his publication. The idea by artists to “create by not creating” I think implies their opposition toward a society where technology replaces humans.

In contrast, during the height of Japan’s student movement in the late 1960s, a related sector called Bikyoto, or Artists Joint-Struggle Council, also emerged. From this sector, an artist named Kosai Hori created a work using videos and tape recorders to revisit the issue of “why create?” in the age following technology art and Mono-ha. Around the same time in 1972, the group Video Hiroba was formed by members including Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, Fujiko Nakaya, Nobuhiro Kawanaka, and Hakudo Kobayashi. They also explored expressing ideas using video, a property inherent in media.

A while later, 1970s-born video art began to flower in the mid-1980s. Artist and critic Tetsuo Kogawa said in 1987 that the alternative use of technology, for instance the early video art works, “partly restored power to the domain of the hand”; in other words, art and technology, which have been detached in modern history, have been reunited with the emergence of electronics technology.

### # Media art continuously gets upgraded

Following the rise of video art and the resulting re-emergence of technology art, and as the term media art gradually became acknowledged, ICC was founded. The activities of ICC started with a basic concept in 1990, followed by the 1991 exhibition *The Museum Inside the Telephone Network*, where visitors could enjoy artworks, texts, and messages by artists, writers, and critics, through telephones and fax machines. On the eve of the age of the Internet, this innovative exhibition introduced a new way of sharing artwork through the use of NTT’s own telephone network, and its communications infrastructure. Later, ICC officially opened its doors in April 1997.

ICC can be said to have opened during the second peak of art and technology. The mid-1990s was an era in which media art was drawing attention as a new art wave, including overseas movements. Accordingly, the opportunities and creativity of computer science were beginning to be applied in the realm of media art, as various media artworks both inside and outside Japan were introduced. These include interactive art, work based on artificial reality studies using virtual reality, and work incorporating biological systems studied using artificial life (Fig. 3).

In fact, one of the reasons Billy Klüver founded E.A.T., was in the hopes of utilizing technology in creative fields such as art, and to see new technology emerge with art as the objective.



Fig. 3 Agnes Hegedüs + Jeffrey Shaw + Bernd Lintermann + Leslie Stuck, *conFIGURING the CAVE*, 1997. ICC Collection  
Photo: Takashi Ohtaka Courtesy: NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]



The background for this idea was that advanced scientific technologies were not something close to us. Rather, they were the subject of national level projects like military and space exploration. In the present day, however, through initiatives such as open sourcing, it seems to have become possible to handle technologies like programming as handiwork, and to turn them into artwork. In other words, the use of technology itself is now in the realm of handiwork in current media art, and the media art genre is no longer distinguishable from other art forms, just for its use of machines and electronics.

Here is a media artwork by Seiko Mikami titled *Eye-Tracking Informatics* (Fig.4). It is based on her 1996 work *Molecular Informatics*, and has been continually updated until 2004 and presented all over the world. Moreover, the work was recreated in 2011 as an update using open source at the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM], and was also exhibited at the ICC. This is a good example of how it has become possible for an artwork to be updated by a third party, as the actual artist does not necessarily have to take direct action.

Up to this point, I have discussed how Japan's art and technology movement has progressed in parallel with the emergence of new technologies, and constantly responded with the birth of new movements. The current form of media art differs from its predecessors, from technology art of the 1960s to video art of the late 1970s, and even from different forms of media art born in the 1990s and onwards. The rise of post-Internet art is an example, and movements like digital fabrication have expanded to various domains outside of media art, coupled with the spread of 3D printers and laser cutters, and linked to the popularization of these technologies. At the same time, various technologies that were previously not in the category of art, such as those expanded in the entertainment field, biotechnology, and space exploration, are waiting to come in contact with future art.

As the circumstances show, it seems that the current era leading up to 2020 is quite similar to what was going on in 1970. I therefore believe that, along with conducting activities to make technologies accessible to the public, we should reconsider the future of art and technology, including how technology art declined in the 1970s.



Fig.4 Seiko Mikami, *Eye-Tracking Informatics*, 2011  
Photo: Keizo Kioku Courtesy: NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC]

# Shifting the Divide: Artistic Positions of Media Convergence and Cultural Diversity

Yvonne Spielmann New Media Researcher

More recently, I have been working in Singapore and researching the Southeast Asian context, but some of my previous research is related to media art in Japan. Today, I would like to address some of the issues in art and technology without going back to its history. I am interested in discussing my observations not so much on the advent and progression of technology, but more on what is currently happening with the multitude of technology available to us and how the younger artists in the Southeast Asian region are adapting to such environments.

## # Critical interventions into networked cultures

As a starting point it will be useful to identify the present-day environment that determines current practices and aesthetics as they intersect in media-cultural applications of current media technologies.

The overarching characteristics of the present-day global society are permanent flow, constant change, interconnectedness, and endless mergers. They, for the most part, are associated with the fluidity and constant changeability of media borders, remediation and reappropriation of cultural and artistic processes and production, and the increase of “traveling” concepts across cultural contexts of the East and West. In this situation, I propose to take a closer look at conceptual frameworks that have fostered thinking in complexity and promoted a high level of connectivity. The focus lies on artistic practices that not only make use of digital technologies and access cultural forms on the global scale, but also take a critical stance and pursue creative interventions into the networked processes of the present.

When we want to determine how artists can take a critical position amidst these interwoven fields, it will be worthwhile to observe points of interference where their aesthetic positioning suspends expectations and shifts perception. In this sense, creative practices become experimental and critical. The premise for such artistic responses is their necessity to reflect on the state of art of the present: a present where everything is expected to be traced, connected, surveilled, controlled, communicated, and diffused worldwide.

A shift of perspective from media convergence to cultural diversity in the arts manifests itself in approaches of inventive intervention. This means, existing devices and practices, including their functions, are deliberately misused, remodeled, and changed, in order to make us aware of the ways in which we have learnt to understand, accept, and also “communicatively” adapt to mediated environments and cultural settings in many areas of everyday life. In a sphere of expanded hybridity, this current strand of development in media culture seems to newly challenge the location of culture itself.

To understand these artistic interventions in social and cultural relationships that are constantly confronted by present-day “networked societies”—to borrow Manuel Castells’ term—and to see them in the broader understanding of art within global politics, we need to think about media and cultural connotations as networks themselves. By situating artistic-creative practices in networked environments, we can investigate the socio-cultural structures that prefigure and shape such environments in which novel technical applications, references to tradition, and other cultural contexts are embedded.

Clearly, artistic-creative practices do not emerge in neutral spaces. Rather, they are

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configured according to an existing order, with specific parameters of social acceptance and control, and develop at specific times and locations. This does not liberate us from the economic, cultural, and political peculiarities and interrelationships among the times and scrutiny of spaces in which such practices emerge. By analyzing artistic responses to such situations of the present, we can investigate how far developments of art and technology contribute to the idea of connectedness. Thinking about connectedness and complexity in networks is an important instrument in raising discussions about the contextual attributes that constitute conceptual frameworks of inter-medial convergence and cultural diversity.

### # Conceptual frameworks: intermedia and cultural hybridity

Interestingly, the idea of connectedness and networks, I think, has its cultural roots not so much in Western, but rather Eastern philosophy. Byung-Chul Han discusses, networking in Asian thinking does not, in philosophical terms, rely on subject-object relations, dualisms, and interrelationships that are of Western origin. From this, we can think that creative practices in the Asia-Pacific sphere manifest a seminal understanding of interconnectedness that characterizes a cultural specificity and is highlighted in the use of media



technology. I quote Han, “The Far East thinks in networks....The Far East has an almost natural connection to technical networking” (Han, 2005). And, in view of this, artistic responses to global networks of convergence and fusion need to be regarded according to what role cultural components and specific rootedness play in achieving new patterns in the framework of complexity and connectivity.

Local relationships *are* precious as cultural contexts matter in terms of their roots. By the same token, they need to be understood as *traveling* concepts—I am referring to James Clifford’s observation here—so that their routes are of equal importance. As such, the spatial relations of locations are important factors in understanding connectedness in non-Western artistic practices. How they are used, in turn, to reshape and reconfigure social and artistic practices is equally critical.

Furthermore, to better understand this kind of cultural hybridity, I paraphrase Terry Smith’s critique of the inflation of contemporaneity, where he asserts that, in contrast to global art, which is predominantly underpinned by Western concepts, contemporary art should be genuinely understood as “global contemporary art” because its very notion expresses diversity, not uniformity. And, I hereby follow, among others, Indonesia’s leading art critic Jim Supangkat saying, “This diversity is what has distinguished global contemporary art from world art.” This implies that contemporary art in Asia conceptualizes temporality in different time frames than Western art and appreciates asynchronicity as well as synchronicity as its specific features.

The aim is to achieve and promote a more dynamic, transmedial, and transcultural perspective for further research into globally connected art and technology thinking. Its essential relevance and value lies in establishing an appropriate contextual understanding of the mutual interactions, the cross-relations, adaptations, and interconnectedness between Western and non-Western concerns in the Asia-Pacific. So I wish to raise such awareness and set forth the direction for further scholarly research about the roots and routes—again, James Clifford’s

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concept from *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997)—of contemporary art across the region. And for this, I find it necessary to develop a new theoretical framework for the discussion of contemporary art in Asia, Asia-Pacific, and also Southeast Asia, because the art production in this region is developing fast and has entered the global debate and art market. Digesting all kinds of media and technological developments, it remediates computer games, manga, anime, and animation, produces new artifacts of youth culture, and addresses cultural diversity and identity, nation building and post-colonialism. In so doing, it revisits ethnic, political, and colonial conflicts, and is changing the perception of contemporary art on a global scale.

I propose some artistic interventions that exemplify and illustrate Southeast Asian contemporary art's accelerated dynamics, beginning with preceding concepts of intermedia and media conversions from the Western perspective that have reached art globally in digital culture, and moving onto specific works by Southeast Asian artists.

### # Intermedial encounters between film, video, and computer

The first example, *ALIAS YEDERBECK REDUX* (2011/2016) by Frank Geßner from Germany, is a cinematic installation of a panorama projection that interlocks elements of *expanded cinema* and of animation film in a spatially immersive presentation (Fig. 1). It evokes a new genre that demands fresh terms and descriptions. The author, initiator, artist, and protagonist multiplies himself in the work in several dimensions and functions, as he explained in his 2014 presentation "Expanded Animation Cinema" at the ZKM.



Fig. 1 Frank Geßner, *ALIAS YEDERBECK REDUX*, 2011/2016

This is an exemplary case of intermedia conversion. It consists of twelve screens or panoramas, each composed of twenty-one displays of three by seven, arranged clockwise in a precise temporal progression. Unlike a painted or computer-animated, virtual 360-degree spatial construction, here no coherence of visual-narrative is achieved; it is discontinuity that stands afore.

Each screen, or block, projects twenty-one portraits, each based on a central figure, or alias, who acts as the marker for the virtual forms of the multiple selves in digital culture. Then we have the cinematic images present various experimental studies in cinematographic representation. For example, the panel picture, seriality, horizontal-vertical layering, condensation of time-and-space in a moving picture, animated sculpture, and the tableau vivant, and the transition from analog to digital compositing. Finally, the artistic-creative research engages in an aesthetic discourse on the interactive potential of the simulated space within the panorama painting and of the temporal succession within the projection of film. In the condensed pictorial space, with accelerated and decelerated depictions of motion, this form of interaction and dialogue brings the nature of painting, photography, and film come into play with one another, and conjures them anew in the digital mode of animation. It refreshes the discourse on the digital mode of animation, resulting in highly hybridized forms of crisscrossed connections between the real/virtual, fictional/simulated, and other kinds of animated image fields and narrative spaces which can all be cited, re-mixed, and re-arranged in completely different ways.

Geßner creates this conceptual site by shifting the cinematographic principle from the linear to non-linear narrative development. That is what creates the *expanded animation*: while given a different starting point on the linear, horizontal time-axis, each screen of the dodecahedral panorama unfolds simultaneously. This synchronization of the linear repetition—a multiplication of repetition—makes the cinematographic animation an endless duplication, an "expansion," thus generating the *expanded animation cinema* and reflecting on the site or sphere beyond its own media-specificity and limitations.

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## # Network thinking of diversity and difference

I would like to now give two examples of Vietnamese video art for thinking about networks as a new cultural form. To begin, a brief historical overview.

The examples of video art that I am going to touch upon are characterized by Vietnam's communist governmental system and the historico-cultural division between the North and South that culminated in the Vietnam War. Video art developed after the country's political opening since the 1990s and emerged significantly more at the end of 2000. However, Nguyen Nhu Huy, a video artist and curator-initiator of the private art space Zero Station in Ho Chi Minh City, explains that it is still difficult to obtain licenses from the authorities to show video works, and that there is no market for video art. According to him, young artists can hardly show their works, much less sell them. Foreign influences and initiatives thus play an important role for contemporary art in Vietnam. This is partly a result of strict censorship, which, as in Indonesia and Myanmar, affects above all literature and performance art, and it is also partly a consequence of inadequate or nonexistent training and infrastructure in Vietnam.

Historically speaking, the effects of Vietnam's North-South divide are reflected exemplarily, among many genres, in video art. And it must also be noted that there is a "local" Vietnamese and "international" Vietnamese divide that also parallels this. That is to say, artists who have studied in the United States and returned to Ho Chi Minh City are considered, inside Vietnam, "international" Vietnamese artists who, for the most part, have better technical and aesthetic preconditions than the under-funded collectives and the "local" artists who were born and trained in Hanoi. Artists in Hanoi, generally speaking, battle against the interventions of censorship and also lack of resources, and start with a disadvantage in the availability of technology and market in comparison to the "international" artists based in the South.

Although these differences have become less apparent in the course of the 1986 revision of the politico-economic reform (*Doi Moi*), they still affect the present conditions in art; censorship is still maintained. And although private enterprise is permitted and encouraged, the lack of infrastructure allows only a narrow window for artists to succeed. Vietnamese art did not experience an upturn until the 1990s, first in the "traditional arts" such as painting and lacquer work, followed by performances and video installations, which mold the present-day landscape of Vietnamese art. In Ho Chi Minh City, Sàn Art shows video art from Vietnam and Southeast Asia, while Zero Station regards itself as a site for workshops, discussions, and presentations. With almost non-existent means, critical and scholarly explorations of the developments in video and media art are pursued.

I am interested in the Japanese-Vietnamese video artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, who was born in Japan and educated in the United States. He is one of the most internationally successful artists and has exhibited at the biennials in Venice and Gwangju. His installation *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam: Toward the Complex – For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards* (2001) addresses the divisions that have pervaded throughout the history of Vietnam (Fig. 2). Local fishermen pull heavy rickshaws underwater over the seabed. This recalls the Vietnamese refugees who tried to leave the country and died during the attempt in 1975 after the North overran Saigon and renamed it Ho Chi Minh City. Despite the country's unification and growing interest by the international art scene since the



Fig. 2 Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam: Towards the Complex – For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards*, 2001 © Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba Courtesy: Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo/the artist Commissioned by Yokohama Triennale 2001

1990s, in the context of contemporary art, the North-South divide still remains in the country's and its people's subconscious.

The other example are the twin artist-duo Le Brothers who are from Hue, a town on the border which once divided North and South Vietnam. Their artistic practice is very performative, taking up historical events from the times of the Khmer Empire, the French colonization, and the Vietnam War and referring to various religious practices. It is worth mentioning that, Buddhist rituals were in particular forbidden in South Vietnam. Through such topics, they challenge their own tradition and history, culture, and present-day political ideologies. The three-channel video installation *Into the Sea* (2011/2013) shows the two brothers in a boat on the river where the two halves of the country meet (Fig. 3). While imitating Buddhist meditations, performing ritual acts, or fighting each other, the twins are tied together with a red ribbon; an umbilical cord that ties North and South Vietnam. This symbolism recalls Buddhist burial rituals, the red flag of the communist regime, and the countless victims who were lost in the Vietnam War.

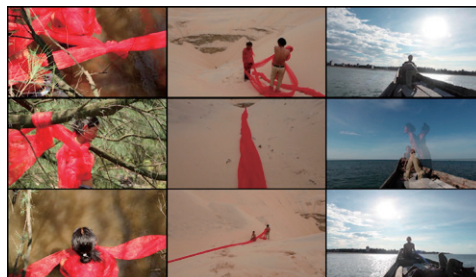


Fig. 3 Le Brothers, *Into the Sea*, 2011/2013 © Le Brothers 2011–2017 - Culture Of Peace Ambassadors to Vietnam for the Worldwide Peace Marker Project collective Collection of the artists

#### # Global contemporary Indonesian art and design

Another example are the Indieguerillas, the duo based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In Yogyakarta, there are not so much video art practices as more of transdisciplinary, trans-genre practices, particularly among younger artists. Indieguerillas stand somewhere in between art and design and provide an impetus for Yogyakarta's contemporary art scene. They belong to the digital-native generation who are familiar with various media and the Internet, but are also familiar with the Indonesian alternative scene that first began developing in the 2000s. With backgrounds in interior design and visual communications, their productivity extends to all kinds of media, ranging from painting, installation, and print, incorporating the pop culture, alternative music, and design scenes of a time when the Indies culture in Indonesia was booming in the market, first in Jakarta and then in Bandung. Magazines and objects made by the Indieguerillas are sold in stores where Indie music finds its clientele. Here, we see a new, young culture emerging and developing its own means of production and distribution.



Fig. 4 Indieguerillas, *Golden Nation*, 2015 © Indieguerillas Courtesy: Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

In their works and practices, the Indieguerillas take up the theme of the government-citizen relationship, oftentimes pushing the boundaries of governmental critique. While incorporating current popular trends from Japan or Korea, the Indieguerillas continue to use old characters from *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) that are familiar to everyone, insisting that one must know one's own culture, one's roots. So the *wayang kulit* figures, which permeate the world of the Indieguerillas together with popular culture icons such as Superman, advertising emblems, robots, and science-fiction figures, are a constant component of their aesthetic conception of making traditional forms fit the present.

The triptych *Golden Nation* (2015) is an acrylic painting framed in brass, in which the Indieguerillas turn their gaze to the role of social media in Indonesia (Fig. 4). The work displays

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“brand-name wares” as if in gift boxes. With the triptych’s golden frame, the artists point to a national development where social media has become a platform on which to exhibit personal materialism rather than to communicate with others. They subversively enwrap their critique against the state of the nation in golden boxes. Their critical stance against consumerism is also recognizable from their works, be it painting, sculptures, or installations, all of which are saturated with *wayang kulit* characters and their black humor.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the importance and necessity of re-evaluating and re-analyzing the specific environments from which media art is born today. Investigating how artists negotiate with, adapt to, and occasionally challenge the media-saturated, networked landscape provides us with the opportunity to expand our scope of research to far greater depths. Southeast Asian or Asia-Pacific artists contribute to and, at the same time, critique “global art” precisely due to their site-specificity, their located-ness, their roots. But it is also their strong connection and flexible adaptation to the states of art and the nation or region that define their practices and criticality.

Session 2 | Presentations

# Case Studies in the Interface between Socio-Technology and Art

The guest speakers at the symposium were international artists who experiment with various forms of expression using contemporary digital technologies. They each presented their views on the dual themes of “art and technology” and how they apply those views to their artistic practice.

## Speakers' Profiles



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### **Daito Manabe** (Artist / Rhizomatiks)

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Born in 1976, Daito Manabe graduated from Tokyo University of Science and the International Academy of Media Arts and Sciences [IAMAS]. He uses programming and interaction design to create ways of discovering the inherent appeal of programming, computers, phenomena, and bodies. He is the technical supervisor for the music group Perfume's live performances and has directed music videos for Nosaj Thing, FaltyDL, and Squarepusher, as well as collaborating on projects with a wide range of other musicians and artists, including Ryuichi Sakamoto. He founded Rhizomatiks in 2006 and since 2015 he has co-directed Rhizomatiks Research with Motoi Ishibashi to create projects with a stronger emphasis on research and development.

<http://www.daito.ws>



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### **Andreas Siagian** (Artist, Engineer / Lifepatch)

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Based in Yogyakarta, Andreas Siagian is an artist with a background in civil engineering. His interest in interdisciplinary practice began when he was in college, where he studied programming languages to create a software for highway geometric design calculation and planning. His activity includes installations, workshops, and festivals with a focus on the creative community, alternative education, DIY/DIWO culture, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Lifepatch is a citizen initiative formed in 2012 with a group of experts in other fields. It aspires to develop local resources and skills through technology and education. In 2014, Lifepatch won the Digital Communities Honorary Mention at Prix Ars Electronica.

<https://andreassiagian.wordpress.com>



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### **Jeffrey Shaw**

(Artist / Director, Centre for Applied Computing and Interactive Media [ACIM], City University of Hong Kong)

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Born 1944 in Melbourne, Jeffrey Shaw has been experimenting with new media since the late 1960s. He started creating interactive projects in the 1980s and remains a leading figure in the field of media art. His frequent collaborations with engineers and programmers have produced many works that suggest new meanings and perspectives on technology. He was founding Director of the Institute for Visual Media at the ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 1991 to 2002. After six years as the Dean of the renowned School of Creative Media at City University of Hong Kong [CityU], he is currently CityU Endowed Chair Professor of Media Art and director of the Centre for Applied Computing and Interactive Media [ACIM]. In 2015 he was awarded the Ars Electronica Golden Nica for Visionary Pioneer of Media Art.

<http://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com>



## Rhizomatiks: 10 Years of Activity

Daito Manabe Artist / Rhizomatiks

Media artist, Daito Manabe, who founded Rhizomatiks in 2006, employs media art techniques for various works such as collaborating with advertisements and commercial facilities, as well as exhibiting his works at museums. Rhizomatiks has steadily expanded its fields over the years, and currently has three divisions: architecture, design, and research. As director of the Research Division, Mr. Manabe engages in almost all aspects of its activities, from computer programming and graphic creation, to project planning and production.

### Higher level of engineering supports production

Since Rhizomatiks celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, I would like to look back on our 10 years of activity.

Rhizomatiks originally started with three members, focusing mostly on Web and UI design. In 2008, a video work we uploaded on YouTube garnered much attention, and in 2010, we won wide acclaim for a television commercial for Nike, as well as the supervision and production of videos for the concert of popular female techno pop group Perfume. Perfume concert stage productions attract a great deal of attention for every concert tour, for the use of cutting-edge visual equipment and computer technologies.

As we took on more advertisement and entertainment-related projects, and also made several television appearances, Rhizomatiks' visibility grew, and the types of projects we are engaging in have changed over the last few years. Especially in the past year or so, we have had fewer visual or Web production works. Our main projects have moved on to those involving actual spaces, such as stage production, projection mapping, and installation. For example, we were in charge of the planning and staging of the final event before the close of the National Stadium.

Rhizomatiks itself is also gradually growing in size. We now have a number of engineers with higher-level expert knowledge, and we are geared up to support other bases like analysis technology and machine learning, whereas before I would have done everything from engineering to graphic



creation. We currently have 30 staff members, and our annual sales, which were 6 million yen 10 years ago, have grown to 1.0 billion yen. Our largest client in 2016 is Google.

### Technological advancements accompanying innovative ideas

Rhizomatiks has been continuously active around the world, including exhibiting installation art at domestic venues such as the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM] and NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC], as well as participating in various media art-related festivals overseas.

While the work exhibited at ICC in 2006 was a simple piece that involved interactively changing LED patterns set on a staircase, in the following years, our works became more and more complex in design, along with the advancement of technology. There have been many instances of commission work where the interactive art technology tested in art projects has been requested to be applied at commercial facilities.

There have also been numerous projects where we supported artists as engineers, notably the sound installation work *filmachine* jointly created by a musician, Keiichi Shibuya, and a complex systems scientist, Takashi Ikegami, also displayed in 2006 at YCAM (Fig. 1). All of these experiences have formed what Rhizomatiks is today.

In addition, we are continuously taking on independent projects that are not commissioned by corporations or other organizations. These projects aim to realize Rhizomatiks' own unique ideas.

The difference between commission works and independent projects is whether there is some form of constraint, and the former do not always allow us to do what we wish. Therefore, in order to proactively embody a novel idea, we must continue to work on independent projects, even if it means investing large amounts of funds.

Take, for example, our collaboration with Elevenplay. The dance piece features a space consisting of several dancers and numerous objects, with audience members wearing head-mounted displays and riding automatically controlled mobile chairs through the space (Fig. 2). The company allocated its R&D budgets to the development of this piece, which was presented to the public in 2015 as an independent performance. This dance piece, titled *border*, demonstrates our accumulated expertise in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) combined with Elevenplay's performance and choreographer Mikiko's bodily expressions. It successfully developed into an unprecedented performance that currently enjoys invitations from companies based in such overseas locations as the Silicon Valley and Montreal.

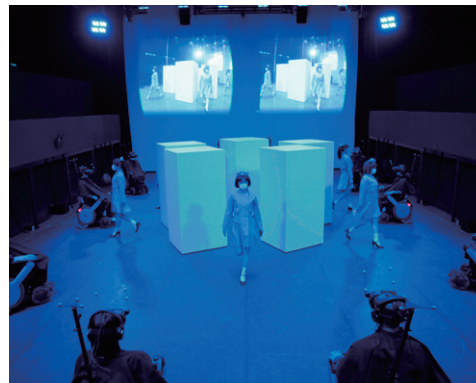
**During the past few years, Mr. Manabe has been actively working on a dance piece project using drone technology.**

I am thinking of how we can pair drones with AR, synthesizing wirelessly sent images with computer graphics (CG), to create artwork. The technological issues have been resolved, but the challenge is how we can provide the audience with the image of traveling back and forth between real and virtual spaces. We are continuing discussions among Rhizomatiks' staff to make this piece come to life.

As technologies, devices, and applications evolve daily, if the first party to announce an idea is the winner, then the one that has the latest machine would be advantageous. Therefore, innovative ideas are very important, and we are searching for the best venue to unveil the piece, and continue the process of trial and error to culminate in bringing the ideas to life as artwork.



**Fig. 1** Keiichiro Shibuya + Takashi Ikegami, *filmachine*, 2006  
Photo: Ryuichi Maruo (YCAM) Courtesy: Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]



**Fig. 2** Dance piece *border* (2016), a collaboration between Elevenplay and Rhizomatiks Reserch  
Photo: Atsushi Tanabe  
Courtesy: Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]

## Professional Amateurs

**Andreas Siagian**

Artist, Engineer / Lifepatch

Andreas Siagian is an artist-engineer based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is co-founder of an art and science collective called Lifepatch. In Indonesia, a collective is a popular form of an initiative launched by artists, and has the country's political background to thank for its development.

### The emerge of the art collectives and creative communities

Indonesia is the world's largest island country, with more than 13,000 islands. It was a Dutch colony for a long time from the 1600s. In 1945, nationalist leader Sukarno declared independence and became the president; in 1949, after an armed struggle, Indonesia won independence from the Netherlands. Then a coup d'état in 1965 set the stage for the New Order under Suharto. In 1998, students across the nation, dissatisfied with Suharto's dictatorship, occupied the parliament building and organized massive demonstrations on the streets, finally bringing down the Suharto government, which had ruled the Indonesian archipelago for over 30 years.

This means that 1998 marked the beginning of a new era in Indonesia. Suharto had banned any organized activities and interactions among different organizations, and consequently artists and experts in different fields began to form art collectives as communities right after he resigned. Therefore, 1998 stands out in Indonesia's art history as a highly political year.

Among the famous collectives launched in the post-Suharto years is Taring Padi. The group centered its activities on festivals in Yogyakarta, and its art projects that aimed to change the status quo in Indonesia were notable. There are many other different collectives that focus on specific areas of activity. They all came into being thanks to the demise of Suharto's dictatorship, and have continued to develop by organizing numerous art events, festivals, and workshops designed to support art projects in Indonesia, since the national government won't develop any infrastructure for the arts.



### Collectives enabled collaborative projects

Siagian's practice is largely influenced from his involvement in the emerging art collective and creative communities.

As for my career as an artist-engineer, my interest in interdisciplinary started during my college years from 1998–2005. I always wanted to combine my civil engineering formal education background with information technology, and so I started to learn programming language as an autodidact. After graduating, I already had experience in developing civil engineering software for highway geometrical design and calculation. From there on I obtained interesting software through different networks and I was introduced to creative programming. These factors nudged me into media art.

As an introduction to interdisciplinary collective work and professional amateur practice, let me introduce you to the piece titled *Intelligent Bacteria: Saccharomyces cerevisiae (IB: SC)* as an example. The team known as the House of Natural Fiber (HONF) presented this piece, but the main people who work in this piece are Nur Akbar Arofatullah (Akbar), Agus Tri Budiarto (Timbil), and Julian Abraham (Togar). The three of them led the project to collaborate with microbiologists, scientists, and artists to create it. They had drawn inspiration from the methanol poisoning that claimed many lives in Indonesia at the time. Since the country's liquor tax was incredibly high, people took to mixing hazardous alcohol with other substances, which led to lethal methanol poisoning cases in society.

This drove scientist Akbar to suggest that people should make liquor themselves. Together with Timbil and Togar, they experiment with local tropical fruits to make safe-to-drink wine that can safely be produced in a kitchen. They distributed their findings from the experiments by conducting many open workshops, which random audience attended after seeing the publication through social media (Fig. 1). They eventually demonstrated the fermentation process, and also presented an electronic installation that used a microphone and amplifier. The installation was a simple instrument to sonify the fermentation process and turn it into an electro-acoustic sounds. It won the Transmediale Award at the art festival held in Berlin, Germany in 2011.

In 2012, Timbil, Akbar, Adhari Donora, Budi



**Fig. 1** Fruit Fermentation Workshop in Survive Garage, Yogyakarta, 2012. Photo: Agung Firmanto



**Fig. 2** Lifepatch member in 2015, from Left to Right: Sita Magfira, Nur Akbar Arofattullah (Akbar), Arifin Wicaksono (Becak), Budi Prakosa (Iyok), Andreas Siagian (Ucok), Agus Tri Budiarto (Timbil), Ferial Afiff (Al), Agung Firmanto (Geger), Wawies Wisnu Wisdantio, Adhari Donora (Ade), Mohammad Fadhol (Dholy)



**Fig. 3** Lifepatch's *Moist Sense* (2013) in Media/Art Kitchen, Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre, 2014. Photo: Jo Lene Ong

Prakosa, Agung Firmanto, and I, founded a collective called Lifepatch – citizen initiative in art, science and technology in Yogyakarta, and in the following years, we embarked fully on our projects while boosting our membership (Fig. 2). Today, Lifepatch consists of 11 members who include programmers, designers, and scientists other than artists, and we work in a space with a small laboratory. Our activities center on DIY workshops in which we focus on the distribution of interdisciplinary collaboration and self-developing amateur practices.

Besides offering workshops, Lifepatch has presented artworks, such as an example in 2013, when we presented an electronic device to present an installation titled *Moist Sense* (Fig. 3). The idea was creating a simple interactive installation using affordable materials and accessible technology. Using an affordable CMOS chip that cost only 20 cents apiece to make, *Moist Sense* combines a potted plant with several electronic circuits so that it “sings” when it has more water.

### Long-term individual and institutional collaboration process

We were privileged to do intensive collaboration with scientist Marc Dusseiller from Switzerland, co-founder of the global Hackteria network – open source biological art. Lifepatch has been part of the global network of Hackteria and Marc has been coming to Indonesia regularly to extend our collaboration. As a result, in 2014, Hackteria and Lifepatch co-organized HackteriaLab 2014 – Yogyakarta.

We also did other collaborations apart from that. Together with Budi Prakosa we did solid collaborative open source project based on Babygnusbino, an ATtiny85 micro-controller development board that is compatible with Arduino IDE. While Arduino normally costs around \$20, Babygnusbino offers almost the same functions with fewer features and can be made by hand for roughly around \$1, so it is significantly more affordable for Indonesians. Furthermore, the project is open-source, which means the blueprint can be copied and modified, and we have offered workshops to teach participants how to make and use it.

We then initiated a long collaborative project using the ATtiny85 chip called 8-bit Mixtape. The idea was to develop a playful pocket-size synthesizer based on the ATtiny85 chip to generate and modulate algorithmic symphony from 1 line of code. The user can create music on the spot just by manipulating the pots and switches on it (Figs. 4, 5). The project produced many variants in the process, which we also use it as a way to distribute knowledge on DIY electronics through workshops activities. This project has been ongoing since 2013 and we keep on developing it and invite others to join the project.

## Experimenting as a way of communication

In 2013, I did collaboration with two Australian artists: Michael Candy and Pia van Gelder. We created an installation titled *MOS (Mountain Operated Synthesizer)* that made Mount Merapi, an active volcano in Indonesia, into a musical instrument (Fig. 6). The mountain is always shrouded in fog, and the installation was designed to convert the humidity, temperature, and wind captured with its sensors into sound. The idea of the installation is to respond to the constantly changing weather in the mountains and make it audible. We also did this piece by looking also at the local myth surrounding Mount Merapi, in which the local considered it as a deity, which protects the city of Yogyakarta. So our project was also to make an instrument for to be played by Merapi himself. Unfortunately, Mount Merapi erupted one month after we installed the piece, so I'm guessing the collaborative work is most probably destroyed.

The collaboration of the piece called *MOS* was done through the Instrument Builders Project, which was curated and initiated by Kristi Monfries and Joel Stern. The project itself was a project between artists, musicians, and instrument builders from Australia and Indonesia to engage in collaboration in order to build sound instruments/installation during a 3-week residency production program. The project was executed thrice, twice in Indonesia and once in Australia.

I participated in 2 out of 3 of the projects and the final result was exhibited in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 2015. The Project acted as a catalyst for the creation of many other different artworks, all of which were collaborations between artists and experts. This shows how vital collaboration is for creativity. I think this project is one of the most influential projects in my personal practices, as it created the environments for collaboration to produce and realize ideas in such an intense time. It also values the process of interaction in the project and encourages experimentation to realize ideas even though its failure factor is relatively high.



Fig. 4 8-bit Mixtape – Classic edition, is maintaining the original idea of the project Photo: Andreas Siagian

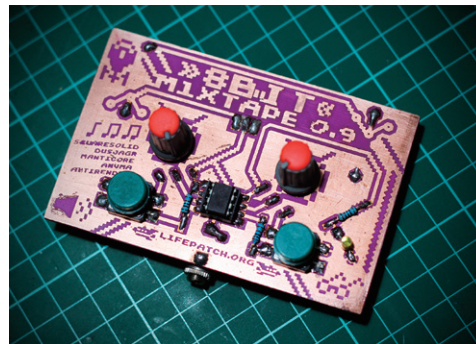


Fig. 5 8-bit Mixtape 0.9, a workshop modul used by Lifepatch Photo: Andreas Siagian



Fig. 6 Pia van Gelder, Michael Candy and Andreas Siagian, *MOS (Mountain Operated Synthesizer)*, 2013. Part of The Instrument Builders Project Photo: Pia van Gelder

## The Art to Come (and Where It Came From)

Jeffrey Shaw

Artist / Director, Centre for Applied Computing and Interactive Media [ACIM], City University of Hong Kong

Jeffrey Shaw, who started his career as an artist in the late 1960s, led the technology art scene at the time, and has since been at the forefront of media art. Mr. Shaw's presentation centered on some of his best known creations from a period of over 50 years.

### In the late 1960s, spectators became principle actors in art

Previously, the viewer was merely a spectator of art, whether it was a painting, a photograph, or the cinema. However, in the late 1960s, a revolution occurred. Artists shifted from making things to creating situations, resulting in works where the viewer can inhabit immersive spaces of representation. One example is *MOVIE MOVIE*, presented at a film festival in 1968, in which a projection screen was inflated to project images from various angles (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Jeffrey Shaw, *MOVIE MOVIE*, 1967



Fig. 2 Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City*, 1989



The viewers were invited to jump into the inflated screen and be embodied in the cinematic space. From this period on, the spectator became the principle actor in art.

Then in the late 1980s, technologies including virtual reality (VR) and digital imagery became part of art, and this art form came to be collectively known as 'media art.' *The Legible City*, a work presented at the 1989 World Design Exposition held in Nagoya, is a prime example of media art at the time (Fig. 2). As the viewer pedals a stationary bicycle set in front of a screen, the image on the screen changes, creating the impression of cycling in a virtual environment. Hence, it was a work that is transformed by the actions of the viewer.

### Important key for the future of media art

Furthermore, Mr. Shaw mentioned several key factors concerning future media art modalities.

The first is the panoramic gaze, where the viewer can step into a 360-degree surrounding screen and enjoy what is now a Google Earth-like experience in a panoramic projection environment, or one where the viewer can move freely within a monitor to appreciate the environment, like a virtual art museum, for instance. On a related note, 3D is also an important factor. In *PLACE - Hampi* (2006), produced at the World Heritage Site of Hampi, India, stereo panoramic photo cameras were used to create a fusion work between photography and virtual reality (Fig. 3). Moreover, a quantity of media art incorporates interactivity as a modality, where the viewer performs

the artwork, and with the introduction and advancement of computers, this has become more and more complex and elaborate.

Another important notion is that the viewer is the camera. In a cinema, the viewer is usually obliged to sit and see what is shown. However, with a 360-degree panoramic image, the viewer controls the point of view. There has been an actual installation where the viewer sits in a rotating chair surrounded by a screen and chooses what area to focus on, depending on where the chair is moved. In this case, the viewer becomes the director and editor of the image provided by the artist.

Another modality that is bound to be important, and has already been tested in various ways, is the conjunction of the real and virtual. The *Golden Calf* from 1994 was an initial attempt at introducing augmented reality (AR). When the viewer points a tablet at an empty pedestal, the monitor reveals a 3D golden calf (Fig. 4). These technologies can nowadays be applied to mechanisms like reproducing an environment such as a cave using wire frames, so that when you point a tablet at an empty wall, the full-scale cave painting from the cave appears on the monitor.

Another important modality is the notion of distributed and recombinatory narrative. In *T\_Visionarium II* (2006), the viewer can edit in one's own way from a database of 30,000 video clips existing in a 3D space. The metadata attached to each video allows the viewer to create certain groupings of these video clips, or search using arbitrary tags like love, anger, joy, running, sitting, male, and female, and cluster the images to construct the viewer's own combinatorial narrative (Fig. 5). On the other hand, the notion of generative and self-organizing is also an important modality, where the behavior of a computer system is completely self-regulating, and acts within those parameters, but will never repeat itself.

## Art and technology is a conjunction and a disjunction

In recent years, Mr. Shaw's activities have been focusing on re-enacting and re-embodiment cultural heritage from the viewpoint of what technology can do for the past, rather than for the future.

In the Dunhuang cave project, the cave's interior was photographed by laser scanning and processed in 3D and other effects to reproduce it in a different setting. The viewer could simulate looking around the cave while shining a torch, and in addition, a mechanism to turn music on, and a gimmick from which 3D dancers appear were applied inside the cave. This was not just a reproduction; it was the re-embodiment of a culture through technology.

There is also another effort to visualize the

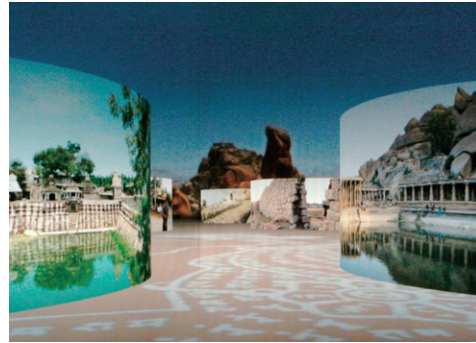


Fig. 3 Jeffrey Shaw, *PLACE - Hampi*, 2006



Fig. 4 Jeffrey Shaw, *Golden Calf*, 1994



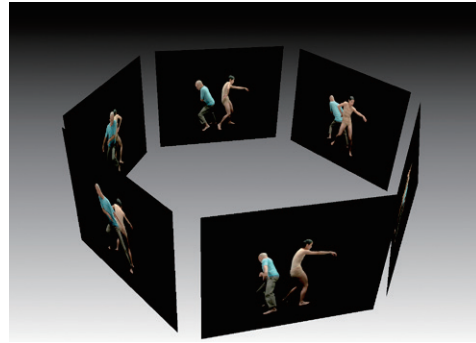
Fig. 5 Jeffrey Shaw, *T\_Visionarium II*, 2006

movements of Intangible Cultural Heritages, and we have archived the movements of such people as Hong Kong's *kung fu* masters, Indian dancers, and Japan's *kyogen* actors using motion capture technology.

In a more modern approach, there is an image work that filmed a dancer, Saburo Teshigawara, from six different points of view with 3D cameras (Fig. 6). By walking around a device with corresponding screens set for the different camera's viewpoints, you can see Teshigawara's performance on a one-to-one scale, as if he is dancing right in front of your eyes.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr. Shaw summed up the relationship between art and technology in the following way.

Technology is always future-oriented to escape the imperfections of the present. This represents the feeling that even when a technology that is somewhat better than the present one comes forth, the present is inadequate. But on the other hand, art lives in the present and espouses life's imperfections. The fusion of art and technology is a conjunction and a disjunction at the same time, and artists working with technology must embrace them both. The only thing that counts and where art comes into play is what is happening from what we do now.



**Fig. 6** Installation image from *Double District* (2009) collaborated with a dancer, Saburo Teshigawara



Session 3 | Discussion

# Tokyo's Range of Possibilities as a Platform for Media Art

What can media art do for society? The guest artists and curators discussed potential roles media art can play in Tokyo in looking toward the Olympics and what directions it can take to continue developing after the huge international event has ended.



Panelists

**Jeffrey Shaw × Andreas Siagian × Daito Manabe × Minoru Hatanaka**

Moderator

**Kazunao Abe**

## Moderator's Profile



**Kazunao Abe** (Deputy Director, Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM])

Born in 1960, Kazunao Abe graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts with a major in aesthetics and visual art theory. From 1990 to 2001, he was co-curator of Canon ARTLAB, a cultural development platform established by Canon Inc. He then joined the team preparing to launch Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM] and since the center opened in 2003, he has overseen all of its activities as Artistic Director, (since 2012 Deputy Director). Major exhibitions include Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Amodal Suspension* (2003), Ryuichi Sakamoto and Shiro Takatani's *LIFE – fluid, invisible, inaudible...* (2007), Otomo Yoshihide/*Ensembles* (2008), Seiko Mikami's *Desire of Codes* (2010), and international group show *Art and Collective Intelligence* (2013).

<http://www.ycam.jp>

## Cultural strategies should be artist driven

—— Now, we will move on to a discussion session by today's panel of guests. The following questions are part of the background. What media art should Metropolitan Tokyo activate so that the art will work well in the Tokyo Metropolitan Festival and other events held in advance of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, or in the promotion of art scenes and the development of systems for those scenes? How can platforms for media art be established in Tokyo and across Asia? From the viewpoint of you as creators of artwork and messages to the public, we wish to receive your suggestions on what is needed as we look toward the future.

Let's start with Mr. Andreas Siagian. Mr. Siagian, you are based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and also interact with various other regions. Do you have any specific suggestions, such as what you hope for Tokyo to act on?

**Andreas Siagian (Hereinafter AS):** All art and the practice of artists are strongly connected to social conditions. Therefore, I can't comment on the current status of Tokyo, but I can tell you what is different about Tokyo and Indonesia.

In our country, as soon as we try to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach in art creation, we tend to struggle. Even if you are looking for education in media art, there is no such school with a structured curriculum. You can say it is still in cultivation, but the problem is that there is very minimum structure to support it. Perhaps one response to this situation is the art collective, where artists manage their own working spaces. Because they have to build everything from scratch, that allows the artists themselves to participate in society. Through the struggles of organizing and managing themselves, they have now grown to be able to also function as a training ground.

Events like HackteriaLab (Fig.1) held in 2014 by our organization, Lifepatch and Hackteria in Switzerland, also O.K. VIDEO, a Media Art festival organized by Ruangrupa in Jakarta since 2000, are both examples of such programs that have been launched by artists.

Japan is a big contrast to our country. While we are still struggling, in Japan there are already systems like the Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences (IAMAS), fusing art and science over many years, and putting media art in practice. The underlying social background, I think, determines the differences in practice between Indonesia and Japan.



Andreas Siagian (▶ pp. 15, 18–20)



Fig.1 Temporary laboratory situation in "HackteriaLab 2014 – Yogyakarta," an event organized by Lifepatch and Hackteria Photo: Adhari Donora Courtesy: Lifepatch

—— Each city has its own background and economic status. Moreover, geographical differences like being located continentally, as opposed to being surrounded by ocean, can create different flows of people and goods. Such conditions can lead to differences in the way of communication as well. While there is no perfect utopia for everyone, how can we overcome these differences between regions? I believe that, in addition to Tokyo and Indonesia, Singapore and Hong Kong also carry some form of

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imperfections, while they have distinctive features that may represent a form of utopianism.

Countries and regions in Asia may take different stances and present different imperfections. Given this fact, I wonder if truly meaningful interaction would be possible between them. Mr. Jeffrey Shaw, what do you think?

**Jeffrey Shaw (Hereinafter JS):** The starting point of discussion is, who wants what, and why? Now, if the starting point is to serve the interests of media artists, then you can simply ask the media artists what they want, and then they will tell you. If you want to serve the interest of Japanese media artists, you can ask Japanese media artists, and if you want to ask the international community, you can ask it. If you want to focus on Asia, then ask other Asian artists what it is that they want.



Jeffrey Shaw (▶ pp. 15, 21–23)

The key is to give them the opportunity without defining what they want in advance. Therefore, one strategy is to make sure things are artist driven.

However, I suspect this question comes from Japan's philanthropic attitude in its cultural strategies, which is a political issue unique to Japan. This issue is connected to future political agendas and cannot be overlooked.

If you want to promote the creative industry as a political agenda, the answer is clear. You can promote the media culture of Japan. If you want to make connections with other Asian countries, then hold exhibitions of Japanese media art in these countries. It can also go the other way around, which would bring media artists and their exhibitions from these countries to Japan.

So, you need to have a whole range of strategies and models. Japan already has numerous models, including museums, workshops, and artists in residence. In the first place, you need to actually define what your real objective is, to better understand it, and then once you have a clear sense of where your objective is, then you need to collect the best possible advices to achieve that objective.

As far as connectivity is concerned, there are many effective mechanisms. If you want to have creative connectivity in Asia, you can join research projects with cultural institutions and universities across Asia, as well as with the artists themselves.

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## Artists' involvement with the public

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—— If Tokyo is to launch something in the future, what should it choose? The project shouldn't be something that tries to benefit everyone; rather, it should be something specialized and must actually be launched. I believe that, if Tokyo is to create its own media and cultural scenes, approaches and outputs that cater to conventional arts and museums may not work well, especially if they are meant to provide something that looks toward the future. In that case, what should the future look like, what processes and systems should we develop to realize that vision, and what else should we propose?

Mr. Manabe, as an artist based in Tokyo, do you have any preferences on how you wish for things to be? For example, Rhizomatiks is now able to self-produce works within its organization and deliver

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them. Something may be missing there, however. Do you have any suggestions about opportunities or platforms for projects of a more public nature or for works that can be presented at public facilities?

**Daito Manabe (Hereinafter DM):** We have conducted workshops before in other Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, but most of them ended up being one-off projects. But for us, creating an artwork is usually made possible only through a long period of research and development. So, I think there would be many opportunities if these projects become something like joint research.

However, in the current state, this would be easier if the partnership was with a corporation, but for example, when it comes to partnering with overseas artists or universities, there needs to be someone in between to coordinate. If there is an opportunity like that available, I would be very interested.



Daito Manabe (▶ pp. 15, 16–17)

—— In that case, how much time and on what scale are needed for it to be workable? Media art in particular requires time just to develop a concept, because it needs to be backed up by technology. You have works that finally came into shape after years of incubation. Both Mr. Hatanaka and I as curators have experienced something similar many times. This indicates that something like a system designed to help develop works in progress is the key. I believe Mr. Shaw's works also became increasingly convincing in different contexts as they continued to develop under the same base concept. We would love to hear your suggestions for alternative ideas or platforms from an artist's perspective. These ideas or platforms should not be modeled after one-off festivals that offer only fleeting excitement.

**DM:** In 2015, a new cultural complex called the Asia Culture Center (ACC) was established in Gwangju, South Korea. It is quite a sizable facility, and puts a lot of focus on media art as well as other types of art. At ACC, the curator said that they looked to the YCAM (Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media) as a model in various aspects. For ACC's opening, Rhizomatiks participated with an opening exhibition that lasted about half a year, and also conducted projects involving workshops and lectures on the technology used in the exhibit. In total, we spent about one year in collaboration with ACC. I feel that with a similar time frame available, it would be possible to create a new project.

—— So, to bear in mind some publicness, there needs to be a way to allocate a certain amount of time to do research while being continuously involved.

**JS:** From the perspective of the supporter, it is probably difficult to invest in the artist's research. However, I am thinking that research itself can be made much simpler. Researchers tend to make research very complex and may take four or five years to fulfill its trajectory. If you have a research trajectory that is going to take a team of 20 people five years, even because cooperation and projects as its outcome under artists' motivation are all worthy, what will happen? If you ask yourself who is going to pay for that, you know it may not be a very realistic approach.

Generally, artists will adapt to the circumstances in which they operate, and they can come up with realistic approaches. For instance if an artist works with YCAM, they will understand the circumstances and adapt their project to what YCAM requires. The same goes for working with universities; it is possible to conduct ambitious research by taking advantage of the circumstances.

Another important axis is the ability of artists to access the public. An artist makes

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something, but also needs a platform that allows their work to be brought to the public. The public in turn is allowed to view and enjoy the fruit of this labor. To realize this, it is necessary to discuss and reflect on the issue from various viewpoints. If the aim is to improve publicness, there needs to be many frameworks in place, including drawing from interdisciplinary frameworks. Instead of relying just on experience, there should also be intelligent discussions.

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## For the coexistence of festivity and sustainability

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**JS:** Additionally, engaging with the community will also be important for artists. This should not be something that is temporary; it is about valuing continuity, becoming socially integrated and being socially meaningful. This may need to involve an educational aspect and to have ways to encourage the involvement of students. In my point of view, there are many different objectives for art, and there are various roles and methods that artists can offer. Therefore, you need to determine the method that is consistent with the objective.

If Tokyo says that “we want a long-term vision to create a platform that will last for the next 50 years, and make it an important platform for media artists from all over the world,” once you have that vision in place, then you can start to talk about how to realize that.

—— Publicness and the public sphere are definitely key concepts. How far can the real public spaces in each city coexist with virtual public spaces? And how much openness should be there?

Mr. Hatanaka, what are your thoughts in response to Mr. Jeffrey Shaw’s comments?

**Minoru Hatanaka (Hereinafter MH):** Along with the rest of Japan, Tokyo is currently gearing up for a huge party: the Tokyo Olympics. We could simply refer to media art as a representation of modern Japanese culture, and there is a public sentiment that the reference would work. However, we already experienced the party called the Japan World Exposition (EXPO '70) in the 1970s, and saw the rise and fall of technology art and media art at that time. Thanks to that lesson, we can envision how technology will be put into use after a party of that magnitude, for example. As times like this repeats themselves, I think we need to look for effective measures as we move toward the next big party. This is the notion I included in my presentation today.



Minoru Hatanaka (▶ pp. 03, 04–08)

In fact, in the second section today, I was very interested to see how the artists’ conversation would mesh together. However, I didn’t feel any sort of gap at all when listening to the three artists’ talks, which suggests that there is an underlying common value among them.

I actually felt the same thing when I visited Indonesia in March. I met with Mr. Siagian in Indonesia and visited their community as well. While we were talking, I found out that people in their community have read the great book from the 1970s titled *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (New York, Pantheon Books) by Victor Papanek, and that they share values presented in the book. It was as if what is written in the book was put into actual practice. Maybe you can call it “technology for the real world.” The way such media and technology are

used is probably very important for these people. Given that YCAM just launched a BioLab (Fig.2), I have the feeling that activities similar to those launched by Lifepatch, Mr. Siagian's collective, have already begun.

On the other hand, as we are in anticipation of the Olympics, which is, in a sense, a huge entertainment event, there is an aspect that some sector of media art is headed toward supporting that festivity.

—— But isn't the concept of parties and festivity originally something indigenous? In that case, wouldn't it be possible to link Tokyo with festivities rooted in local communities?



Fig. 2 A glimpse of "BioLab" (2016) held at Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM] Photo: Naoyuki Obayashi (roiDESIGN) Courtesy: Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]

**MH:** But I don't think it's easy to find something indigenous in modern day Tokyo. That's why the party will have to be a virtual one. A virtual party has no substantial nature of a real historical event, and it can be histrionic and overly ambitious. The challenge is how to work on those aspects, and how much of a sustainable proposal we can make for such a virtual event. In this light, what Mr. Shaw told us resonated with me. I also believe that how sustainably we continue our cultural projects and programs is crucial when we look five to ten years ahead. I think it would be ideal for opportunities like the Olympics to set the stage for virtual festivities ambitiously designed to coexist with a project that is more practical and rooted in the community.

—— A proposal or call for an event designed toward the survival of art, rather than a one-off brilliant festival like fireworks, would probably work better. I mean, hosting an event and offering services through art would create a festival designed to demonstrate our values to the world, and this type of festival may make it easier to connect to the rest of Asia and the world. Mr. Siagian, do you have an opinion on this?

**AS:** When an artist gets to know a local culture, before you know it, the production has already begun. In media art, a function called "lab," I think, is useful for creating such a festival. For instance, at Medialab-Prado in Spain, a media artist would propose a project and open up possibilities for collaborators to join the project in an open lab. Because of the open platform environment, it would naturally create involvement with local people. Similar programs are held at various places, but for us in Indonesia, the important thing is to first adapt these models from around the world to our own culture and region.

One example of this is a project on a micro-computer called Babygnusbuino that we are collaborating on with the community Hackteria (Fig.3). It involves a system with simpler functions than the microcomputer called Arduino, which is used globally, but it can be produced easily and more cheaply. This has been a joint project since 2013, but initially, a scientist, Marc Dusseiller, from Hackteria would just come and spend one month every year with us. As we got to know each other, we started discussions like why we use the system, and why we are sticking with this simple system that cost one dollar to make rather than the 20-dollar Arduino. It was a sort of

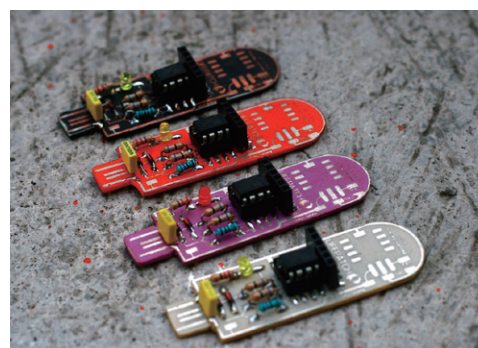


Fig. 3 Babygnusbuino – Tropical, Lifepatch edition Photo: Andreas Siagian

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a collision of different cultures. For them, buying the Arduino for \$20 is still affordable. But for Indonesian people, that's not the case. That's very expensive. So, we continued thorough discussions, and as I said in my earlier presentation, we decided to put this project out as open source.

I think it is important that we continuously have this kind of physical meeting so that we can accumulate our differences and small improvements, which keeps the project going, and leads to achievements ahead. We need a social model and culture that allows this type of research and experimenting.

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## Financing media art

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—— Now, let's take some questions from our audience.

**Questioner 1:** This question is for Mr. Manabe. Media art is something that is hard to know when it is complete, and also takes a fair amount of time to produce. Once you decide to launch a plan, money is probably your No. 1 issue. What kind of difficulties did you face during the early phase of Rhizomatiks?

Also, to Mr. Siagian, I would like to know if there are forms of support like scholarships or investments that you wish Indonesia as a country could have, or if there are currently any at this point.



Kazunao Abe

**DM:** It's true that there are more ways now to raise funds than before, such as by crowd funding. For example, when I was working on my thesis project at IAMAS more than a decade ago, I only had about 100,000 yen to spend. Nonetheless, I think I was trying to work within the limitations to come up with a solution that was realistic for me.

Also, afterwards, I was working at the institute for some time, but couldn't find a way to balance work with production. That's why I came up with the idea to start our own business and manage our own funds. Although I'm a hands-on type, and want to get physically involved in production, I was lucky because the other two start-up members were producer types, and were good at collecting funds. I find that when media artists launch a business together, they often end up with people that have similar sets of skills, for example all members are hands-on types, and there is no producer, or they clash because their specialties are too similar. In that sense, I still consider the diversity of our organization when hiring new staff.

**AS:** In Indonesia, we do not have any kind of support from the government to begin with. That's why we have so many art collectives, because it is impossible to do everything yourself. A lot of artists formed strategies to make collectives since 1998, but a majority of them disappeared within maybe four years. Learning from these numerous success and failure models, we have to come up with our own method. We try to apply past methods, and through the trial and error of modifying them accordingly to our contexts; we share with others what we discover.

Between the communities, we have this kind of "gasoline" where we exchange the

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experiences of surviving or organizing something. For example at Lifepatch, we do cross funding, and also take projects outside, so if we have leftover materials they can be taken to the art lab. We also conduct workshops on organization management. We are learning how to survive as we progress.

Our workshops are generally free, and we do not make any profit. If we charged five dollars, nobody would come. Four dollars? Maybe some will. Because technology is still an exclusive to them, these workshops are very important for us to create an audience for media art, and to let people understand what we are doing.

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## What can artists do for social issues?

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**Questioner 2:** Recently in Japan, there are trends such as artists in residence and revitalization of local communities through design. I would like to ask Mr. Manabe if you have any ideas on what can be improved. Also, Mr. Siagian and Mr. Shaw, if you know of any such programs that utilized media art to revitalize specific regions, please tell us.

**DM:** For me, it all depends on what is requested. If the request is to simply “create an artwork,” I can do whatever I feel like. But if the client is expecting something to happen as a result of that work or project, for example if there is an aim to bring in more tourists, that is very different than simply taking part as an artist. If there is a specific issue to be addressed, I would have to do research on it and write out a prescription like a town doctor, which is, in effect, to be a consultant. But media art is often misunderstood to be something like that, and sometimes I do end up taking on both roles.

—— I think media art has both a site-specific aspect and a site-surpassing aspect realized by networking. When the client and the artist both approach each other without that notion in mind, I feel it is hard to achieve the desired site-specificity and publicness.

Mr. Shaw, how about you?

**JS:** One particular experience I can talk about is a project on intangible cultural heritage. Traditionally, museums have an academic approach to things, and professionals try to handle intangible cultural heritage at their will, but I think there are many weaknesses hidden there.

I would like to stress that this is my experience from my own practice. There is a very interesting intersection between art practice and intangible cultural heritage, in the sense that the artist can bring opportunity to re-embodiment, reinterpret, and reconstitute the past into the present as a meaningful contemporary experience. Of course, in the process of doing that, the artist must engage in an exchange with local communities, because what brings these heritages to life are the needs of the local communities.

For instance, the current project we are doing has to do with *kung fu*. This is not the famous *kung fu* that we all know from the movies; it is *Hakka kung fu*, which is a very local tradition of *kung fu* with local masters with their own dialect, and has very much to do with the developing and understanding of an idea-syncretic local practice of martial arts.

—— The YCAM also hosted an exhibition in 2014 titled *Open Call Laboratory – An Exploration into Social Anthropology in Asia* (Fig. 4). The term “exploration” in this title connotes a concept similar to that



of the “dive” presented in *Earth Diver* (Kodansha) by Shinichi Nakazawa. In this book, the word “dive” signifies what connects the past and future. The actions taken using the media have the opportunity to reconstitute or re-visualize images that have been completely buried in the past. This means that intangible items like cultural folk tales and traditions passed down as experiences only can be preserved as legacies in a format other than linguistics. I think this is something media and technology should consciously work on from now on.

Mr. Siagian, what about you?

**AS:** I will also speak from my experience, where we did this project with a village that is located in the riverbank area of a big city called Surabaya. This is an illegal village, so to say, because the people are immigrants from other small cities and build their house and stay there on the riverbank. As there is a government regulation that says you have to be 50 meters away from the riverbank, the people built cardboard and concrete houses along that line. Of course the government knows it is there, but since its illegal, the government didn't give adequate infrastructure like in other villages. It is very challenging for an artist or art collective to solve such a social problem.

We spent one month with the villagers and found out they didn't have electricity and water. Regarding electricity, they actually solved the problem themselves because they found a power source from somewhere and hooked it up to their houses. But the second problem was really challenging. It was water. They live just beside the river, and what was most ironic was, there was the municipality waterworks bureau right beside them. Clean water is right beside them, but they cannot get access. So a friend of mine said, “OK, we lack knowledge on this topic, so let's contact a friend who is a scientist.” We were taught how to filter water from the river and tried out many filtration methods. And finally, we were able to set up a filtration system. However, the people didn't know how to maintain it. If it breaks down, nobody would be able to repair it. This was a project from the government, but you can see how inadequate it was.

So, we come back to the starting point again, that the only ones that can solve the problem in a place are the locals. It isn't us, because we are just facilitators. The only things we could do were to teach them techniques, how to obtain materials and give them multi-day workshops until they can utilize the necessary methods themselves. Finally, they were able to obtain a very simple filtration system and drink water safely. However, I think the reason why we achieved this was because we had a connection with the local community. There was a mutual acquaintance that facilitated on our behalf with the village.

If we were called to a village in Japan, we may not be able to solve anything. I gained a valuable insight from this experience, which is that we the artists do not solve the problem. We can only be facilitators to introduce techniques that the people can use for themselves.

—— Media art has been in its first step, where we worked on something inside white cubes at museums. Now, I feel that we have reached the second step, where we ask how we can interact and what we can do with raw realities, including ecosystems and real life in society. We can say that Tokyo is among the world's largest consumption cities. I believe that, while we admit and accept this fact, we must create an elaborate blueprint for new actions and how to take these actions in order for Tokyo to become a media art hub. We are glad that we were able to receive various inspiring suggestions today, instead of pushing toward a single conclusion.

Thank you very much for your time today.

\* This document consists of edited excerpts from the discussion at the symposium “Art & Technology.”



Fig. 4 A scene from the exhibition *Open Call Laboratory – An Exploration into Social Anthropology in Asia* (2014, Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]) Photo: Ryuichi Maruo (YCAM) Courtesy: Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]

## An Asian Positioning on Media Art

Masaki Fujihata Media artist

### Social awareness and art practice

During the 1990s, when media art began to receive recognition, Japan attracted attention alongside the likes of Germany and Austria. This was thanks in large part to the opening of the NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC] by Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT) to commemorate the 100th anniversary of telephony in Japan, though it is no exaggeration to say that at the time only Japan stood out as ahead of the pack in Asia. It is thus important that this symposium on art and technology took place at ICC, bringing together participants from around Asia to produce a meaningful discussion about how this field will develop from now. In the 1990s, there was a tendency for media art to be seen as anticipating the cutting edge of technology. But today, when media technology has completely permeated our everyday lives, artistic expression that uses such media has taken on a historical scope and become closely entwined with present-day social issues.

Thinking about media art in this condition today is synonymous with thinking about the position of contemporary art in society. It then becomes necessary to think about it from the question of what type of role Japan has taken in the world since modern times until now. Particularly in the postwar era, Japan's level of social well-being accelerated to a whole new level by rapidly acquiring and employing technology from the United States. The reason for this economic advance is said to be Japanese dexterity. And yet it was not simply due to dexterity per se, but surely was made possible by experiences underlain by Japan's long history as well as its profound social culture. A society with a complex cultural background already has an abundance of comparable experiences and examples to draw on for understanding other cultures. This richness of culture has brought about rapid technological advances in Japan from the beginning of the Meiji (1868–1912) until the postwar periods. In the recent development of media art in Japan, I think there is this high comprehension of and receptivity to technology.

### Diversity through art enriches the world

Throughout many discussions held in the 1990s, particularly in Western Europe, media art was said to have emerged out of the intersection between science, technology, and art, and its very significance was in the crystallization of these discrete fields as works of art. Until now, this kind of discussion has been understood as expedient for revitalizing academic fields that had become extremely atomized. Considering that, historically speaking, the categorization of science, technology, and art as separate disciplines was part of the process of forming modern society, I believe media art is something that represents the potential for (re)integrating them, something that functions as a means of transcending the very modernity in which they were made. For example, revisiting the diverse range of instruments made for scientific experiments around the eighteenth century with a contemporary eye, we can see traces of Man's complex thinking behind their creation. While functioning as effective tools to realize the goals of experiments, these instruments seem to also exist as works of art, or "media art" pieces. And by virtue of this dual dimension—of functioning as an

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instrument while also revealing the activity of a person—we could surely almost call these media art. That these instruments are now housed and stored in museums testifies to the fact that we value them above and beyond mere scientific applications.

This way of thinking has accumulated within a history that unfortunately centers on Western Europe, though it is worth considering that if our understanding of the terms “science,” “technology,” and “art” had differed from their original meanings, things may not have necessarily developed in the same manner. What I have misgivings about is that the terms “science” (*kagaku*) and “technology” (*gijutsu*) in Japan are often used interchangeably and, moreover, there is a lack of understanding of “art” and thus, by extension, a particularly poor understanding of the relationship between society and art. Intrinsic to science is the quest for truth, while at the heart of technology lies the materialization of potential. A scientific quest is an incredibly personal and incredibly solitary activity. But technology, once it has been invented and completed, is transferable to others and even the specific steps toward its invention are frequently shared. The general understanding of art in Japan would seem to be an extension of this kind of understanding of technology. It is a way of thinking in which the level of craftsmanship-like perfection is seen as synonymous with its value as a work of art. Making something beautifully or well always occupies the privileged position in our value judgments. Indeed, the concept of art has played an important role in the birth of modern society. For the monarchy and nobility who needed to invent an authority that could take over the power of the Church, a mimetic representation of the world through a scientific view of the universe, such as the invention of the clock, proved effective as an alternative that could give them a new position independent from God. However, an important contemporary concept of art is that it is a manifestation of an individual’s inner creativity and unique worldview. When our perception of the world navigates into a single value, art creates diversity in opposition to this, which then enriches the world. In this context, art and science both occupy the same solitude of not being understood by the public, of deviating from common sense. It is precisely this solitude that is the reason for my own existence and necessity for expressing myself.

### **Art’s critical misuse of technology**

As I said, in Japan there is a history of attempting to understand art based on the understanding of technology. Art education started as a superficial importation and imitation of Western European art—a phenomenon that is not limited to Japan but takes place all over Asia. In other words, people who are “good at painting” are actually good at copying “good paintings.” Manuals or some model examples are requested even in classrooms for teaching media art. No one can learn art; art is not an object of study. However, within such a framework of understanding about art, we now need to think about how to situate or think about art that uses latest technology as its medium.

Incidentally, “technology” exists for me as an object or material for contemplation. The majority of technology is invented without a clear goal and only a few successful examples are manufactured into products that then circulate in society. Thus, technology has unknown possibilities in virtual, almost all of which are left undiscovered. In order to unearth these, I believe that it becomes important to deal with technology with a critical eye. Or it is necessary even to misuse technology. I believe this has the ability to restore the original relationship between technology and humanity; it is the ability of art. We might call this kind of misuse, *bricolage*. Indeed, this kind of idiocy is needed to oppose technology that has become so incredibly industrialized and domesticated by capitalism.

This is basically my personal opinion and scheme of things, the way I see things, which is ahead of its time. The world, it seems, remains stuck at a stage where everyone is still obsessed with consuming cutting-edge technology and enjoying it as

entertainment. This is particularly the case for countries that came into contact with technology without seeing the actual process of its invention: for them, technology must seem almost god-like, as if it has suddenly descended from the heavens. Here, technology is still outside the hands of men, and instead is something that exists in the realm of the divine. Surely this is how technology is understood today in some Asian countries.

### **Liberating technology from capital**

Japan currently occupies a fragile position in regard to other Asian nations. For example, promoting media art as an art form that handles technology critically provides a valuable opportunity to think about art itself and, in the sense of enhancing equal opportunities to interact with technology, assumes promoting democratic ideas in the global context. However, on the other side of this democratic spread, influenced by the wave of globalization, is the strong possibility of it being regarded as compliance with Western Eurocentrism and, as such, there must also be those who argue that it is not necessarily Japan's role to engage in such endeavors. Moreover, while there are many examples of Japanese media art that receive acclaim, they do not necessarily belong in this particular context. When we consider that much of the praise is an extension of the assumption that artworks must be made beautifully through the skillful use of technology, it possibly becomes necessary to reinterpret this as a kind of "Japanese uniqueness." And yet, I do not think there is meaning in situating media art as, say, an extension of the craftsmanship that has continued since the Edo period (1603–1868), and, from the perspective of foreign nations, such a view would surely be understood merely as foolishly extolling the ethnic superiority of Japan, which cannot be accepted abroad.

It is worthy to note that within the rapid development and changes in information technology over the past twenty years, the actual manufacturing of electronic devices is done here in Asia. Why don't Swiss clockmakers build smartphones, for example? Surely there would be nothing strange about them making a handmade smartphone that would be sold for an excessive price. And yet, the components inside the phone will always, undoubtedly, end up being made in China. Why? Well, a factory to assemble parts too small to be made by human hands would not be cheap to set up in Switzerland, nor would you be able to compete with the speed of change in information technology. Indeed, in areas where this type of industry exists, people are now being completely mechanized in order to maintain and keep up with the change: humans are becoming part of factory machinery. Historically, this could be seen during the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe, but it is happening once again today in Asia. Technology is completely under the control of capital. And, if we think about the causes behind this, we might consider that Japan's role is to promote works of art that portray humans as living beings rather than machines, and the mission of media art is to liberate technology from capital.

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#### **Masaki Fujihata** (Media artist)

Masaki Fujihata is one of the pioneers of new media art in Japan. Beginning his career working in computer graphics in the early 1980s, he used stereolithography to materialize 3D models into sculptures before shifting to interactive artworks during the 1990s. In 1996, he became the first Japanese recipient of the Golden Nica at Ars Electronica with *Global Interior #2* (1996). His highly acclaimed *Field-Works* series is a collection of works beginning with *Impressing Velocity* (1992–1994) and continuing until *Voices of Aliveness* (2012) that connects real and virtual spaces by adding GPS data to video, demonstrating new possibilities in recording and memory. Prior to becoming professor emeritus, he served as director of the Graduate School of Film and New Media at Tokyo University of the Arts from 2005 to 2015.

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## Symposium Organizers' Profiles

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Arts Council Tokyo develops a variety of programs to encourage the creation and dissemination of arts and culture and to promote Tokyo as an international city of artistic and cultural attractions. In order to improve the infrastructure and environment for new artistic and cultural creation, Arts Council Tokyo plays a key role in Tokyo's cultural policies by implementing programs that explore Tokyo's originality and diversity, promoting international cultural exchange, and providing opportunities for promising young people who engage in a variety of artistic and cultural pursuits.  
<https://www.artscouncil-tokyo.jp/en/>



### The Japan Foundation Asia Center

The Japan Foundation is Japan's principal independent administrative institution dedicated to carrying out cultural exchange initiatives throughout the world.

The Asia Center, established in April 2014, is a division within the Foundation that conducts and supports collaborative initiatives with its Asian—primarily ASEAN—counterparts. Through interacting and working together in Japanese-language education, arts and culture, sports, and grassroots and intellectual exchange, the Asia Center pursues to develop the sense of kinship and coexistence as neighboring inhabitants of Asia.

<http://jfac.jp/en/>



International Symposium for Media Art

## **Art & Technology:**

**Changing Times, Contemporary Trends, Future Platforms**

Report [PDF ver.]

Published: March 10, 2017

### **Publisher**

Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture)

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### **Editors**

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### **Editing & Writing**

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### **English Editing**

Meiko Sano (The Japan Foundation Asia Center) (pp. 09–14, 33–35)

### **Translation**

LinkTrans Simul, Inc. (pp. 01–08, 15–32, 36)

### **Translation Cooperation**

Akinori Iwaya (pp. 09–14, 18–23, 25–32)

### **Proofreading**

LinkTrans Simul, Inc.

### **Photo**

Kenichi Aikawa

### **Design**

Iuko Matsukawa