

The Second—Time Based Art from the Netherlands
Opening Symposium
November 14, 1998
ICC 5th Floor Lobby

Throughout the opening symposium for *The Second* by MonteVideo/TBA (Netherlands Media Art Institute), a continuing theme was how very human the work it exhibits is. The art critic KANAZAWA Takeshi, for example, pointed out that many of the works included clearly communicate the artists' naked feelings and intentions. The ICC Deputy Director/Chief Curator NAKAMURA Keiji, the moderator, noted that *The Second* is low tech but, in contrast to the general run of media art exhibitions, has a human warmth and an eye for the human landscape that has much in common with the 17th century Dutch still life and genre painting tradition. One thinks of the work of VERMEER. In his view, echoes of memento mori resonate throughout both.

MonteVideo/TBA began as an attempt by René COELHO, acting on his disappointment with television after two decades of working in the media, to bring the human factor into the technology. At the start of the symposium, COELHO raised precisely that issue, saying, "Artists run the risk of losing meaningful content and connections with the general viewing public when they hare after the very latest technology." He stressed that his view of media art operates on a different dimension from the pursuit of high technology.

Another central theme in the wide-ranging discussion was defining new arts that differ from those of the past in such qualities as multiplicity, reproducibility, and interactivity that result from advances in technology. Further issues raised included the conservation of media art and the stances of artists, curators, and facilities with respect to conservation; historical restrictions on materials with

the advance of technology and hardware and software problems; and public aid to art in the Netherlands and its relationship to the quality; and subject matter of the work. Other key points the participants discussed include the environment of a work that enfolds the viewer in interactive art, materiality and concepts, changes in art education due to media art, the coexistence and intersections between conventional art and media art, and the relationship between technology-induced homogeneity of expression and potential for originality.

The proceedings may be summarized by a statement from COELHO: "If we take it that media art is, as in the early period of video art, working for recognition as one medium within contemporary art, the stage in which it would be satisfied to be pigeonholed as "media art" is already over. Increasingly diverse media are being incorporated into contemporary art in general; we are making a transition to a stage in which the artist chooses the medium that best meets his or her needs."

While that observation may seem self-evident, given the state of contemporary art in Europe and America, the fact it comes from COELHO who has led MonteVideo, a media art institute, for twenty years gives it extra weight.

Panelists: René COELHO (guest curator), KANAZAWA Takeshi (art critic), Bert SCHUTTER (exhibiting artist), Peter BOGERS (exhibiting artist), Kees AAFJES (exhibiting artist), and SAKURAI Hiroya (artist)
 Moderator: NAKAMURA Keiji (Deputy Director/Chief Curator of the ICC)

[KAMIKANDA Kei]



INTERCOMMUNICATION CENTER

ICC Report

Translation: Ruth South McCREERY

The opening symposium

From the left: SAKURAI Hiroya, Bert SCHUTTER, KANAZAWA Takeshi, René COELHO, Peter BOGERS, and Kees AAFJES



Japanese Image Creators—the ICC Collection
November 13 - December 27, 1998
ICC Theater

In visual imaging as an expressive genre, is video a medium with distinctive characteristics and securing a distinctive position for itself? Yes, for, like experimental film and private film, it has its own qualitatively different expressive vocabulary. This screening underscores that conclusion by presenting a selection of work from the ICC collection by Japanese artists working in visual images. Most date from the mid 1980s or later and are the work of younger artists; these are works created (we presume) on the assumption that video would be the expressive medium. (Several works on film, such as MATSUMOTO Toshio's pathbreaking films, that had considerable influence on people working in the field in that period were also shown.)

What, then, are video's characteristics as a medium? Its strengths would include the equipment's ease of operation and maneuverability, as well as the manipulability of the recorded image (in creating, for example, composite images and special effects). Today, video recording and editing and computer graphics tools have become

so inexpensive, and so powerful, that artists working alone can create works of high technical quality. But technology is not the main story: the artists who created many of the videos in this program regard the video images and the tools used to create them as an apparatus for thought. Acting, shooting, editing—in their view, all those steps intervene to create works in video that may seem at the opposite pole from work featuring SFX effects. Nonetheless, the very simplicity of video tools as an apparatus for thought did encourage many creative artists to begin to regard

video as a new expressive medium. The 17 works screened cover a wide expressive range. SHIMANO Yoshitaka's *TV Drama* (1987) records a performance that satistically destroys a television monitor. *De-sign 1 (kurren)* (1989) by Visual Brains (KAZAMA Sei and OTSU Hatsune) is a series of works produced annually since 1989 that satirizes contemporary society. KAZAMA and OTSU treat the year's hot topics as their material and apply the latest image processing techniques, so that at first glance their work looks like technical simulations of television programs and commercials. YURA Yasuto's *Case* (1994) imaginatively interweaves computer graphics and video images.

[HATANAKA Minoru]



SHIMANO Yoshitaka's
TV Drama (1987)

The NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC] founded the ICC Biennale to explore possibilities of new expressions in media art and to discover, develop, and support outstanding new artists. For the second Biennale, an international panel of nine specialists recommended 28 artists from 14 countries to propose plans for works on the idea of "Interaction," the '99 theme of the Biennale. In the preliminary screening of their plans, held on October 14 and 15, 1998, the judges selected ten artists to participate in this year's exhibition.

As in the first Biennale (ICC Biennale '97), the plans selected include many that skillfully incorporate leading-edge technology. Viewers will find that this body of work is richly varied, addressing not only the other and society but also natural phenomena such as seismic waves and fictional constructs such as stories that unfold according to the viewer's reactions.

ICC Biennale '99 Preliminary Screening
October 14 and 15, 1998

The ICC is delighted to unveil these works, which will open up new possibilities in media art, and, with the second of the series, looks forward to exciting new possibilities for the Biennale itself.

The participating artists are: Maurice BENAYOUN (France), CHIKAMORI Motoshi (Japan), Jean-Marie DALLE (France), Ken GOLDBERG and Randall PACKER and Wojciech MATUSIK (U.S.A.), Perry HOBBERMAN (U.S.A.), Eduardo KAC (Brazil), Martin RICHES (U.K.), Douglas Edric STANLEY (U.S.A.), Studio Azzurro (Italy), and Grahame WEINBREN (U.K.).

Their works will be shown in Galleries

A and D of the ICC from Friday, October 15 to Sunday, November 28, 1999. During the exhibition, one artist will be selected to receive the Grand Prix, which carries an award of ¥5 million, and two artists will be awarded runner-up prizes of ¥1 million each. The judges are Roy ASCOTT, Louise DOMPIERRE, Anne-Marie DUGUET, John G. HANHARDT, Jeffrey SHAW, ASADA Akira, ITOH Toshiharu, YAMAGUCHI Katsuhiko, and NAKAMURA Keiji.

[KAWAI Haruko]

**Nuzzle Afar, A Network Installation
by FUJIHATA Masaki
November 25 - December 6, 1998
ICC 5th Floor Lobby**

The ICC was host to an exhibition and events as part of *Nuzzle Afar*, a network installation by FUJIHATA Masaki. FUJIHATA is presently artist-in-residence at the Institute for Visual Media of ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, or the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe), Germany. *Nuzzle Afar*, which he created while at ZKM, was unveiled for the first time in Japan at this exhibition.

FUJIHATA created *Nuzzle Afar* for the *surroGate_1* exhibition at the ZKM's Institute for Visual Media (November 1 to December 6, 1998). Since it is network-based art, FUJIHATA planned from the outset to present the work at remote locations simultaneously with its presentation at Karlsruhe. In particular, the attempt was to hold *Nuzzle Afar* exhibitions and net events in several locations through cooperation by DEAF98 (the Dutch Electronic Art Festival 1998) in Rotterdam, the Open Research Forum at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus, and the Ars Electronica Center in Linz, Austria.

The work's title suggests two contradictory images: participants snuffing out each other and coming closer together, yet remaining apart.

The design of a space in which two physically distant people could receive such sense impressions was the main idea behind this work, which was in fact built as a shared virtual reality environment that multiple participants can access from separate locations.

For two participants, the same interface is set up at two locations: a control panel, with trackball and microphone, and a screen [Photo 1]. The participant manipulates the trackball to move his or her virtual body, or avatar, forward or backward, left or right [Photo 2]. Images of the participant's face are captured by the camera in real time and mapped on the avatar, so that one can recognize another party in a remote location. The avatars can meet and, if they draw close enough, converse through the microphones on the control panels.

In addition to these basic features, *Nuzzle Afar* includes elements not to be found in earlier shared virtual reality environments. These include a "trace function," which allows one avatar to follow the tracks of another avatar, an "affinity sphere" that forms when two avatars bump up against each other, and a "memory plank" that remains as an objet in virtual

reality as a record of their encounter in their unique affinity sphere.

Given the time difference, participation at the ICC was usually limited to connections between two terminals in the ICC. But, since the ICC stays open until 9 p.m. on Fridays, it was able to hold two "Net Events" as well.

In the first, on November 27, a talk by the artist was also given. FUJIHATA himself gave a detailed explanation of his intentions in creating this work and its background, while showing videos of the exhibition overseas. While talking about the thrust of this work metaphorically, as "creating a telephone for the future," he also demonstrated specific directions in which he is now moving. While the overseas connection was frequently interrupted by frustrating problems with the router in Europe and with the circuits, the experience suggested that ICC's continuing support for experimental ventures such as this will have even greater significance in the future.

[WAKABAYASHI Yayoi]



Photo 1
© FUJIHATA Masaki



Photo 2

The special section on Music/Noise in Volume 26 of this magazine introduced mego, an independent techno/noise ("technoise") label based in Vienna. The mego sound is distinctive—as is everything about this label. The uniqueness of its sound, spun out by deliberately and boldly incorporating elements usually regarded as errors, such as sine

**meگو@ICC—The Further of Techno Music
January 14 - 17, 1999
ICC Gallery D**

waves and other pulse tones and digital noise, is why SASAKI Atsushi has called meگو "the end of techno." The ICC invited the meگو artists to present concerts on January 14, 16,

and 17, and a symposium on January 15. The nine artists who came to Japan make up six groups or "units" within meگو: Pita, General Magic, Fennesz, Farmers Manual, Haswell,

and Skot. Other units that combine mego members—Rehberg & Bauer, Pop, and Fenn O Berg—also performed. Jim O'ROURKE, one of the Fenn O Berg trio, happened to be in Japan for a solo concert at the same time, and thus gave a special performance during his stay. Guest performers from Japan included IKEDA Ryoji, Merzbow, Filament, and Zbigniew KARKOWSKI in what turned into a four-day performance for these Japanese and European techno/noise artists.

The first day began with a performance by IKEDA Ryoji. He performs with oscilloscope, skillfully using minimal sounds from pulse tones and sound collages, and accompanies the sounds by projecting synchronized wave forms. He was followed by Farmers Manual, a trio consisting of Mathias GMACHL, Gerd BRANTNER, and Oswald BERTHOLD. All in their early twenties, they are the youngest group on the mego label. As is true of all mego members, they use only PowerBooks and other notebook computers in performance. With the three facing their notebooks and consecutively altering sounds in response to the emerging sound, their performance, coupled with their young computer nerd looks, was rather humorous. But their sound, almost like a simple arrangement of electronic noise, defied description. During the event, Skot was in charge of the visuals during mego artists' performances. Skot consists of Tina FRANK and Mathias GMACHL, who also is part of Farmers Manual. This team designs mego CD jackets, its Web site, and all other art work for mego and provides visual support for mego performances.

Rehberg & Bauer, another mego unit, consists of Peter REHBERG—aka Pita—and Ramon BAUER of the General Magic unit; while describing their, as it were, music seems futile, one might say they gave us a sound like a worn-out CD, with intimations of techno. Christian FENNESZ (Fennesz), who has been a guitarist, used sampled guitar sounds. Contrasting these units' work, one realized that while they have similar styles, each of the mego units is heading in a different direction.

During the symposium on the second day, Pita, Ramon BAUER, Mathias GMACHL, and Russell HASWELL



Above—Russell HASWELL
Right/top—Farmers Manual
Right—General Magic



were joined by OTOMO Yoshihide as panelists and SASAKI Atsushi as moderator. Statements by Mathias GMACHL, who was interested in the computer's potential, gave the impression that mego members use their collective technology as a shared code, while they come from backgrounds in differing musical styles (techno, noise, electronic music). It was also impressive that they avoided talking about the equipment they use and about software. According to Pita, the software they use is nothing special, stuff that anyone can buy. Whether the results are good or bad depends on how it is used, not the software itself, he says. He also spoke about the negative effects of increasingly simple computers—that they tend to lower the quality of the work.

For the third day of events, AKITA Masami and AZUMA Reiko, who make up the group Merzbow, and Russell HASWELL (Haswell) started the performance by playing together, pumping out high-volume noise that filled the hall. Then came a solo by Zbigniew KARKOWSKI, who is scheduled to have a CD released on the mego label, followed, without a break, by a shift to Pita and the unit called Pop. While Pita performs in several units, each seems to seek for its own sound. Skot performed from the wings of the stage, with the focus on visuals. Their first work, scheduled for release this year, will be on DVD. They were followed by General

Magic, with Ramon BAUER, founder of mego, and Andreas PIEPER. General Magic is the unit closest to the techno style, reminding us that mego did start off as a techno label. Their sound, however, has a somewhat spasmodic, dislocated rhythm.

OTOMO Yoshihide and Sachiko M (Filament) offered a tension-filled performance featuring improvisation by means of sine waves on the fourth day. Then the Fenn O Berg trio (FENNESZ, O'ROURKE, and REHBERG) presented an improvisational sound collage using sampled snippets of familiar-sounding phrases. Haswell's noise performance seemed very appropriate for the person who replied, "More chaotic," when asked where mego was heading. The final event featured Pita, who is the central figure for this label. The moments when the rebounds of his minimal pulses produced noisy (but real) melodies or phrases were quite moving.

As the mego people said in the symposium, their equipment is nothing special; how strange and how sensually appealing music it is possible to create depends on what's in the individual artist. Clearly mego is a rare group of artists sustaining a critical stance with respect to technology.

[HATANAKA Minoru]