

Editorial by Roy Ascott

Cybernetic, Technoetic, Syncretic The Prospect for Art

Those of us involved in art and the technology of consciousness (technoetics) are prepared to look into any discipline, scientific or spiritual, any view of the world, however eccentric or esoteric, any culture, immediate or distant in space or time, any technology, ancient or modern, to find ideas and processes that allow for the navigation of mind and its open-ended exploration. The mind is an unknown territory. What David Chalmers has called the hard problem remains intractable to science, which knows nothing of the location of consciousness, how it arises, or of what it is constituted. It understands as little about the "dark matter" of mind as about the dark matter of the universe.

The two domains may in some mysterious way be linked. The astrophysicist Attila Grandpierre claims that the cosmic, natural and environmental fields are determinative sources of our consciousness:

The organisation of an organism involves fields, which are the only means to make a simultaneous tuning of the different subsystems of the organism-as-a-whole. Fields with their ability to comprehend the whole organism are the natural basis of a global interaction between organisms and of collective consciousness [1].

In Grandpierre's view, the collective field of consciousness is a significant physical factor of the biosphere. Similarly, the concept of immaterial connectedness is advocated by Hans Peter Dürr of the Max Planck Institute for Physics in Munich, who argues that quantum physics reveals that matter is not composed of matter, that reality is merely potentiality. The example of field theories that can contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for technoetic art practice can be found in the new organicism of Mae-Wan Ho, the biophotonic research of Fritz-Albert Popp, the holonomic brain theory of Karl Pribram or the implicate order of David Bohm. Significant also is the research focus of Tom Ray, which has shifted definitively from A-life, in which he has been an acknowledged leader, to mapping the chemical organization of the human mind, providing the first comprehensive view of how psychedelic compounds interact with the human receptome.

Art's preoccupation with the body is giving way

to technoetic investigation and invention. It may be instructive to revisit the technologies of consciousness that are employed in older cultures, where the syncretism of new knowledge and ancient worldviews is explicit. Just as cybernetics analogizes differences between systems, so syncretism finds likeness between unlike things. Syncretic thinking breaches boundaries and subverts protocols. Thinking out of the box, testing the limits of language, behavior and thought puts the artist on the edge of social norms but at the center of human development. Art needs to adopt strategies that can syncretize historical precedent (however remote from prevailing orthodoxies) with advanced research and ludic speculation, combining the attributes of cyberception, moistmedia, quantum reality, the nanofield and issues in the ecological, social and spiritual domains.

If there is a technological revolution in art it lies not simply in the global connectivity of person to person, mind to mind (significant as that is), but in its power to provide for the release of the self, release *from* the self, the fictive "unified self" of Western philosophy. It lies in our ability to be many selves, telematically in many places at the same time, our self-creation leading to many personas and serial identities. This is the appeal of Second Life, as it is to the many narratives and games of generative identity, shape-shifting and transformative personality that artists today are creating. The challenge is to untie the Newtonian knot that binds our perception while extracting strategies from vanguard scientific thought that will inform a technoetic and syncretic practice. An example can be found in biophysics, which brings new dimensions of meaning and value to the evolving terminology of art discourse: long-range interaction, non-linearity, self-organization and self-regulation, communication networks, interconnectedness, non-locality, coherence, macroscopic quantum states, field models and the inclusion of consciousness.

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Reference

I. A. Grandpierre, "The Physics of Collective Consciousness," in *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution* 48 (1997) pp. 23-56.