

Lea

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

VOL 17 NO 1 A collection of articles, reviews and opinion pieces that discuss and analyze the complexity of mixing things together as a process that is not necessarily undertaken in an orderly and organized manner. Wide open opportunity to discuss issues in interdisciplinary education; art, science and technology interactions; personal artistic practices; history of re-combinatory practices; hybridizations between old and new media; cultural creolization; curatorial studies and more.

Contributions from

Frieder Nake, Stelarc, Paul Catanese

and other important cultural operators.

M I S H
W V 2 H

This issue of LEA
is a co-publication of

LEONARDO®
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE
ARTS, SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Sabancı
Universitesi

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Copyright © 2011 ISAST

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Volume 17 Issue 1

August 2011

ISSN: 1071-4391

ISBN: 978-1-906897-11-6

The ISBN is provided by Goldsmiths, University of London

LEA PUBLISHING & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Lanfranco Aceti lanfranco.aceti@leoalmanac.org

CO-EDITOR

Paul Brown paul.brown@leoalmanac.org

MANAGING EDITOR

John Francescutti john.francescutti@leoalmanac.org

ART DIRECTOR

Deniz Cem Önduygu deniz.onduygu@leoalmanac.org

EDITORIAL MANAGER

Özden Şahin ozden.sahin@leoalmanac.org

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Ebru Sürek ebrusurek@sabanciuniv.edu

EDITORS

Martin John Callanan, Connor Graham, Jeremy Hight,
Özden Şahin

EDITORIAL BOARD

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

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Nina Czegledy, Susan Collins, Anna Dumitriu, Vince Dziekan, Darko Fritz, Marco Gillies, Davin Heckman, Saoirse Higgins, Jeremy Hight, Denisa Kera, Frieder Nake, Vinoba Vinayagamoorthy

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Roger Malina

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Sabanci University, Orhanli - Tuzla, 34956
Istanbul, Turkey

EMAIL

info@leoalmanac.org

WEB

- » www.leoalmanac.org
- » www.twitter.com/LEA_twitts
- » www.flickr.com/photos/lea_gallery
- » www.facebook.com/pages/Leonardo-Electronic-Almanac/209156896252

Copyright 2011 ISAST

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is published by:

Leonardo/ISAST
211 Sutter Street, suite 501
San Francisco, CA 94108
USA

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

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

Leonardo is a trademark of ISAST registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Offices.

All rights to the content of this issue reserved by Leonardo/ ISAST and the copyright holders.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Volume 17 Issue 1

4

EDITORIAL Lanfranco Aceti

8

ACADEMIC VANITAS: MICHAEL AURBACH
AND CRITICAL THEORY

Dorothy Joiner

14

SOME THOUGHTS CONNECTING DETERMIN-
ISTIC CHAOS, NEURONAL DYNAMICS AND
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Andrea Ackerman

28

HACKING THE CODES OF SELF-REPRESENT-
ATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH LYNN HER-
SHMAN LEESON

Tatiana Bazzichelli

34

ELECTRONIC LITERATURE
AS A SWORD OF LIGHTNING

Davin Heckman

42

PROFILE: DARKO FRITZ

44 Lanfranco Aceti, Interview with Darko Fritz

50 Saša Vojković, Reflections on *Archives in**Progress* by Darko Fritz52 Vesna Madzoski, Error to Mistake: Notes on the
Aesthetics of Failure

56

NEXUS OF ART AND SCIENCE: THE CENTRE
FOR COMPUTATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE AND
ROBOTICS AT UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Christine Aicardi

82

MISH/MASH

Paul Catanese

92

SIPPING ESPRESSO WITH SALMON

Carey K. Bagdassarian

102

THE MAKING OF *EMPTY STAGES* BY TIM
ETCHELLS AND HUGO GLENDINNING: AN
INTERVIEW WITH HUGO GLENDINNING

Gabriella Giannachi

118

COGNITIVE LABOR, CROWDSOURCING,
AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE
MECHANIZATION OF THE MIND

Ayhan Aytes

128

INVERSE EMBODIMENT:
AN INTERVIEW WITH STELARC

Lanfranco Aceti

138

ORDER IN COMPLEXITY

Frieder Nake

142

TEACHING VIDEO PRODUCTION
IN VIRTUAL REALITY

Joseph Farbrook

152

ATOMISM:
RESIDUAL IMAGES WITHIN SILVER

Paul Thomas

156

COLLABORATING WITH THE ENEMY

Shane Mecklenburger

172

THE AMMONITE ORDER, OR, OBJECTILES
FOR AN (UN) NATURAL HISTORY

Vince Dziekan

184

THE CONTEMPORARY BECOMES DIGITAL

Bruce Wands

188

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC -
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Craig Harris

196

ARS ELECTRONICA 2010:
SIDETRACK OR CROSSROADS ?

Erkki Huhtamo

Sidetrack or Crossroads?

Ars Electronica 2010

by

Erkki Huhtamo

University of California Los Angeles
Department of Design | Media Arts
Broad Art Center, Suite 2275
Box 951456
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1456
erhuhta@ucla.edu

After the Ars Electronica 2010 festival was over, the press office triumphantly touted in its communiqué: “90,227 visitors at the greatest Ars Electronica Festival since 1979.” For someone who has visited the festival every year since 1989 (with only two exceptions), it is easy to simply reverse the statement, and claim that this was the poorest – or to put it more nicely: the most mediocre – Ars Electronica of the past twenty years.

Reality never fits neatly within such polarities, so explanations, and perhaps amendments, are needed. True, the setting was unusual. Instead of the customary venues distributed throughout the city (The Brucknerhaus, the OK Center, the Ars Electronica Center, the Art University, etc.), the organizers had taken a unique opportunity and brought practically the entire festival into a single location, a massive industrial complex that until the previous year housed a cigarette factory. The Tabakfabrik Linz was originally founded around 1850. In its present form, largely designed between 1930–35 by Peter Behrens and Alexander Popp, it is considered a monument of modernist architecture, and a landmark of the city.

The move was a gamble that produced very mixed results. True, the logistics must have been formidable, partly because the infrastructure, including the all-important IT structure, was in no way in place to house a major arts festival. The venue’s uncertain status (its future use was under debate) also caused limitations. Although the labyrinthine corridors and halls looked – and even smelled – as if the workers had moved out the day before, I heard that even such simple and necessary acts as hammering nails to the walls were strictly regulated.

Considering the formidable challenges, and the limited time in which the transformations had to be made, the organizers had performed wonders. An ample entrance area had been created, and the factory yard turned into a food and beer court. Obviously the local promotional machinery (including the jungle drum) had worked well. Although it would be interesting to know by what kind of mathematics the organizers determined that there were over 90,000 visitors (by the total ticket sales?), the Tabakfabrik was indeed crowded, particularly during the festival’s first weekend.

The vast majority of the visitors were local townspeople, from young families with babies to grandmothers and grandfathers. Many of them seemed to have been attracted by the unique opportunity to have a peek at the well-known building complex, which was open for the general public for the very first time. Another attraction was the outdoor food court that offered a kind of Oktoberfest ahead of its schedule. Indeed, downing beer and tasting local specialties in this special location was a pleasant experience, in spite of the variable weather.

The real problem of the festival was what should have been the center of everything: its artistic and intellectual offerings. Perhaps preparing the venue

had been such a time-consuming undertaking that the organizers had simply ran out of energy to think about what to exhibit. There may have been a bit of panic: the Tabakfabrik was so large that filling it in a satisfactory way was very difficult. This may partly explain the prominent presence of a kind of trade fair or “Messe.” True, the theme was “Repair,” but one may still ask what commercial exhibits of house insulation companies have to do with electronic arts.

Just a few short weeks before the festival was supposed to begin, there was no detailed information about the program available on its website. Snippets started appearing after I (and probably others) started repeatedly asking for it, and reminding the organizers that they were running the risk of losing their international visitors who had to make their travel arrangements (several non-Austrian people I know decided to stay away for this reason).

The cold fact is that there was very little extraordinary, ambitious, and challenging work on display; something that would have warranted the long and costly trip to Linz. Ars Electronica had turned into a very local town festival, offering next to nothing for international professionals, electronic art fans and insiders looking for cutting-edge art, media and technology, as well as high-level intellectual debate. Interestingly, this was implicitly confirmed by the press office’s final communiqué that focused on figures, but did not mention anything at all about the contents of the festival.

I remember numerous highlights from the Ars Electronica I have attended during the past twenty years, but I have hard time recalling even a single truly important experience from the 2010 festival. I saw no exceptional and path-breaking performances. The conference, once again chaired by Derrick de Kerckhove, lacked energy and originality, and was mostly poorly attended. The exhibitions suffered from the



The robot Dirk by Electric Circus at the Ars Electronica 2010.

Photograph: Erkki Huhtamo

limitations of the venue, so video documentations too often took the place of the works themselves. Interactivity was rare – “don’t touch” signs were common.

Even the Golden Nica winner Eyewriter, an innovative eye-tracking device (but not an artwork), could not be tried personally (this was done without problems at the crowded Japan Media Arts Festival in Tokyo in February 2011). The creator of another prize winner, the astonishing remote-controlled robot named Dirk, told me that the organizers had asked him to submit just a video documentation. He refused, and brought the robot to the festival on his own. Pushing its shopping cart around the factory area it became a central attraction. Countless baffled visitors tried to find out if it was a real robot, or a human being posing as one.

Ars Electronica has always had to dance the tightrope between local interests and international relevance. Local politicians and businessmen provide the money, and expect something in return. In 2010 they received plenty, I think, seeing the townspeople appreciate their investments. The international relevance of Ars Electronica, however, was put in serious jeopardy. As a small, but telling, sign, most of the festival’s long-term international supporters, those who have helped to make it what it is, were not even invited to the Prix Ars Electronica Gala, the main social gathering of the festival. They were left outside to their own devices.

While preparing for the next edition, which is unlikely to take place again at the Tabakfabrik (so I hear), the

festival organizers should look into the mirror and ask themselves some serious questions. Whom are we serving? Are we concerned about advancing the cause of the electronic arts on a superior and truly international level (as during the festival’s glorious past)? Or are we content with degenerating into a popular but artistically and intellectually lame/tame local mass event, serving Bier, Wurst, and a little bit of electronic arts on the side? ■

ISTANBUL 2011

LEA

KALERA

Sabancı
Universitesi



photograph Murat Germen,
Muta-morphosis #79, Istanbul,
150 x 85 cm, 2011, 7 editions + 2 AP,
courtesy of C.A.M. gallery.

