UTOPIA NOW

INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL OF MEDIA ART

Ominous To Optimistic / Innovative And Interactive

EXPERIMENTA

EXPERIMENTA UTOPIA NOW
INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL OF MEDIA ART

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NAVIGATING PARADISE UNDER A DIGITAL SKY

NEW MEDIA ART AND THE RECOGNITION OF UTOPIA

AMY BARCLAY

EXPERIMENTA CURATOR

If 'the shock of the new' was the key term signifying the diversity and strength of art and ideas in the 20th century, one might wonder what kind of phrase will unify the 21st century's technologically ravenous multiplicity of art and creative production. Those being shocked were, of course, the audience. The artists, entirely comfortable with the overthrow of tradition, embraced purely abstract representation of form (such as Agnes Martin's eloquent linear accounts of landscape), new materials (Chris Ofili's use of elephant dung, for example), and the value of concept over physical object (Felix Gonzalez-Torres' candy spills are not only touched but also consumed by the audience).

A decade into the new millennium, new materials and 'new media' now require sharper definitions. Starting with high-definition video capture and extending to nanotechnology, biotechnology and intelligent machines, artistic practice is witnessing a determined – if occasionally forced – shift toward the digital. While no one is claiming the death, again, of painting, artists are increasingly exploring where technology can take them in theory and in practice.

If the interactive and screen-based works in Experimenta Utopia Now – Experimenta's 4th International Biennial of Media Art – are any kind of benchmark, the audiences for the next century's creative endeavours are likely to find themselves suitably challenged. Channelling each artist's hopes and concerns for the world as they see it, the artworks presented here demonstrate a rich capacity to unnerve the viewer, provoking complex responses to informed and disquieting proposals.

The scene is set. Today, utopia is obscured by the dappled shadow of dystopian chaos, emerging and receding before our eyes. The artists of Experimenta Utopia Now may hold vivid revelations of the ideal, but demonstrate that the path to it is tremulous and unpredictable. Their excitement, however, is palpable. A new armoury is proposed, a new vocabulary required. Collectively, and metaphorically speaking, they propose that the paper maps and old keys to the world as we knew it are already redundant. The new generations are not literate in analogue materials; only the most advanced technologies can be relied upon to navigate a safe route to utopia now. Optimism and bliss are hunted, desired, but humanity's resolution and strength of vision is being consistently tested by capricious and at times volatile means. Certain artworks in Experimenta Utopia Now endeavour to provide time for gentle contemplation, or for critical reflection on social or historical success or failure. Others resolutely search for perfection. Overwhelmingly, however, there is a pervasive concern with new social tensions, revolutionary terrors – not least in the face of ever more sentient technologies – and anxieties about the future of the human condition.

The impossibility of utopia has haunted society ever since Sir Thomas More's treatise of the same name was published in 1516. Rendered unstable due to the duelling definitions assigned by More of 'happy place' and 'non place', the utopian ideal captivates and taunts those who dare hope for it while remaining utterly fictitious, at least in a truly tangible sense. To date, any given concept of social, religious and political utopia has only ever united a limited segment of like-minded and self-selecting citizens.

Utopia as an expression of a society's hopes became truly prominent during the early 20th century as governments and communities committed to rebuilding cities devastated by World War I. Charged

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with developing informed policies and strategies for the use of land, resources and funds, such architects sought to consider a community's structural, social, economic and cultural needs. The notion of town planning as an organised profession was effectively born in this era.

Modernism as an applied ideal and philosophical force also gathered pace during this time. It dispensed with decoration and history, striving instead for innovation, originality and functionality. Championing advances in industrial, scientific and political spheres, Modernism became central to the agenda for designing a new world. From the spiritual to the rational, revitalised concepts of art and design uniting beauty and practicality were heralded as the path to recovery for the human spirit. Modernists held a utopian desire to create a better world. They believed in technology as the key to social improvement and in the machine as a symbol of that aspiration.

Contemporary society can no doubt see the ease technology brings to daily living, and advocates of reason and science have punctuated the history of Western philosophy for centuries. Today's 'techno-utopians' believe that the true path to utopia can lie only the impassioned embrace of the most advanced technologies, and that utopia will be achievable when advanced science and technology provide the means for ideal living standards to exist. It's the articulation of 'ideal' that rattles us. If the (bio)technology revolution is capable of endowing scientists with unprecedented power to transform human nature – and, indeed, the world we live in – the question of how this superlative intelligence should be employed captivates and divides experts and the general public alike. On such matters art becomes a form of social commentary, carving its own dynamic discussion. On the fraught highwire between utopia, dystopia and techno-utopia, prophetic visions of catastrophe, perfection and uncertainty balance together.

As is characteristic of an Experimenta exhibition, this Biennial unites works of art that are interactive, unique, digitally savvy or technologically exceptional. From high-definition video to singularly original adventures in interactive media, intimate animated worlds to the creation of paradises virtual and impossible, these works showcase the breadth and depth of conceptual dexterity and technological skill fused precisely by each artist.

In light of the concept of techno-utopia, it seems highly relevant that the artists in Experimenta Utopia Now are so technologically informed. Yet as common threads and themes emerge from the exhibition it becomes apparent that the artists' openness to the most sophisticated technology does not necessarily imply a conviction in its overarching ability to deliver a better future.

A dystopian perspective may be seen as the flipside or the reality of utopia, underscoring the impossibility of its existence. AES+F and Ms & Mr each see a collapse in the future, expressed as a vision for society or a more personal battle. Russian collective AES+F is represented by the immersive, three-channel-projection work Last Riot. As its title implies, it proposes the climactic and catastrophic scene awaiting the end of history, of time and society. Victim and aggressor are seamless, too beautiful to be told apart as they trap, slash and stab their opponents. The mutant landscape suggests a paradise gone wrong. Yet no blood is shed, no act of aggression penetrates; they are caught in an endless cycle of destruction against a backdrop of military commotion and natural disaster. In this dystopic state of affairs, the threat is visceral and the end is

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nigh but it cannot ever be reached. Caught in a similar situation of no resolve are Ms & Mr, who plunder their own histories in order to facilitate a series of parallel worlds in which they can always be united. In an animated landscape of icebergs and snow, Mr appears in Two Figures in a Landscape. Though buoyed by Ms's gestures, he struggles in vain to reach his love, a shadowy figure appearing a short but treacherous walk away in deep snow, and she vanishes into the blinding landscape just as he reaches her. Looped, Mr's tale is tragically and repeatedly ill-fated.

In the face of such inescapable madness, the warmth of humour and the acceptance of the absurd can be a most welcome device. Kuang-Yu Tsui unwittingly battles an endless series of water leaks in his apartment (Amstell 88 III) and even his clothes (Sealevel Leaker). In The Hunt, Christian Jankowski reverts to hunter-gatherer methods of securing life's necessities, becoming the 'bargain hunter' of the contemporary supermarket, and Stuart Ringholt's videos Merri Creek and Anderson Rd illustrate that even the most ludicrous of events can be received without fluster and coded normal – or simply accepted as natural – if we so choose. Indeed, the French duo behind Scenocosme positively welcome the supernatural with Akousmaflore, an enchanted hanging garden of plants that, with the use of sensors, are rendered aware of human presence, 'singing' as they are approached or their leaves are gently caressed. Utopia is perhaps the capacity to laugh in the face of the incomprehensible, and be enlightened by the experience.

The digital era has rewritten humanity's control over that which historically was immutable. The sacred natural state of the human body and other life forms is tested in light of new biotechnological fields such as genetic manipulation and cloning. Michael Burton's Nanotopia envisages a disturbing scenario in which the human body is a site for consumer product growth and can be farmed for profit; the similarities between his vision and the abilities of contemporary medical technology suggest they are separated by not so vast a chasm. In Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer's interactive sculpture Life Writer, each letter of the alphabet typed contributes a code that affects the behaviour and outcomes of the insect-like creatures that burst forth onto the page from the resultant text. The artists highlight the lack of control we have over the results of our acts or instructions, whether these are performed deliberately or unwittingly. Marco Bresciani's distinctive face-reading and morphing software that becomes The Digital Picture of Dorian Gray alerts us to the care deserved by the world and the bodies we inhabit today. The technologies that create these works bring an entirely unique experience for the audience. To touch, to affect, or to find oneself read and reflected by an artwork is to unite with the machinery that articulates each concept. Together these works propose that although the era of digital and genetic modification privileges desire – in that it can increasingly cater to individual taste, personal or reproductive 'improvement' – engineered invincibility may not offer the best possible results for the human race.

For a number of artists, the warp and weft of history and future, the virtual and the real form a fabric most intricately yet dubiously woven. The capacity of available technology to help disentangle the strands and reveal inherent beauties and weaknesses is vitally employed. Some artists commentate on the possible state of utopia – or dystopia – as it may appear on earth today, or reflect on the consequences of past social or environmental practices or behaviours.

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Kit Wise presents a seductive rendition of the idealised city in Xanadu . The apparently faultless unity of so many aspects of urban and Arcadian perfection elicits an emotional flux between angst and desire, and provokes interrogation of the qualities of our own reality. Rendered in full HD and composited of imagery of real places, it is sinuously captivating even while problematising one's judgement and comprehension. The only shadows sabotaging this virtual paradise are the specious absence of cultural diversity and the disembodied sense of place and time. Perfection, even in virtual paradise, can feel remarkably destabilising.

As designed by certain historical and dictatorial figures, the 'perfect world' ultimately lead to war and carnage; the unity required by their utopias eventually coerced silence and absorbed the existence of the 'other'. William Kentridge's anamorphic installation What Will Come calls into question the very nature of perception and truth and underscores the nature of history as an account told only by the vanquishers. Rendered in his expressive charcoal drawings are the events and atrocities of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) that began in 1935. The complex scenes that unfold offer an uncertain conclusion; the play of the dual visual planes serves to unsettle the confidence with which the audience grasps the fractured narrative.

The world's future – or at least humankind's ability to look after it – is also cast into doubt by the history being written today. Shilpa Gupta's affecting interactive installation Shadow 3 playfully foretells the consequences of shirked responsibilities. In a dark room the viewer's shadow is projected life size before them, while 'string' from above attaches to the unwitting silhouette. An assortment of cast-off debris slides down the string, like a cable to all we've ever discarded, and the shadow is slowly buried by the bulk of the subsequent cargo. Gupta prompts individual reflection: in your world, is everything in its right place?

A quality of uncertainty in life and living permeates screen-based works by Cao Fei, Patrick Bernatchez and Christopher Fulham. Embedded with irony and sadness, Cao Fei's finely nuanced film Whose Utopia captures moments of individual expression by young workers, emigrants from inland China. They are situated amid hundreds performing relentlessly repetitive tasks in vast a lightbulb factory in the leading economic region of the Pearl River Delta. Utopia there might well stand for the courage to have hope for a better life at all. Patrick Bernatchez's enigmatic film I Feel Cold Today offers an ambiguous narrative journey into an abandoned office into which some unnamed force majeure has seeped, displacing every last worker. Heralding an awkward sense of foreboding, the room is rendered open to the blustery elements; the floor begins to fill with snow. Here, familiarity with one's environment neither ensures predictability of events nor confidence in daily existence. Christopher Fulham's study of shoppers descending an elevator critiques the ability to acquire happiness in the modern world. With jaded expressions and arms full of recently obtained desirable commodities, satisfaction with life and the world still appear elusive.

Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine's stop-motion animation You Were In My Dream creates a comfortable space to interact with a choose-your-own-adventure style narrative while allowing opportunity for the unpredictable to occur. Seated at a booth with a mouse for control, the viewer provides the facial expression that is fed live onto that of the central character, animating the animated.

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A feisty cast of hand-cut paper human and animal characters explore their dreamy forest environment until alternative paths are revealed and the viewer makes a selection via a click of the mouse. This mode of interactivity invites a direct and intimate experience for the audience; however the original sense of being in control of the adventure is slowly destabilised as captivating escapades turn fraught with fickle comrades and occasionally volatile results. Even the joy of choice is embedded with precarious risks.

Amid such visions of ambiguity, absurdity and doubt, where lies optimism? Can utopia exist on earth? Who has found room for hope, and how does it sustain; how is it expressed? In a selection of works a proposal emerges: utopia is found in pockets of time, in moments, or in the appreciation of an idea. It is identified perhaps by one individual alone, or a small number of people. Optimism is not alien; hope not absent. Carefully metered, maybe, but present nonetheless. The Dutch duo forming Blendid Interaction Design create a welcoming interface in the technologically savvy TouchMe. Viewers are invited to press their bodies against a huge glass panel and then press a button to be 'scanned' by the machine. Conceived for use in a fast-paced and impersonal public space, Blendid's work recognises that being reflected in one's environment is central to a sense of belonging. Hans-Peter Feldmann's Schattenspiel assembles a personality-laden cast of kitsch figurines and found objects on a series of slowly rotating turntables before a bank of lightbulbs. Utilising old-school technology in a manner reminiscent of the pre-cinematic zoetrope, Feldmann expresses paradise as a neverending play of shadows rendered in pale layers dancing across a wall. In this world there is no leading role, no hierarchy; every character has its 15 seconds in the sun, again and again.

Demanding more than mere spectatorship, the technologically augmented art championed in Experimenta Utopia Now: International Biennial of Media Art delivers a significant return on the audience's investment of time. The selection of works considered here reveals a network of interconnected and concurrent themes that tap into the utopia-dystopia spectrum.

The knowledge that an ideal or project may fail, or face unfamiliar dangers, has never before stopped humanity from striving for success. If our aspirations help define us as much as the things we reject, looking for utopia now may not seem so preposterous a mission. In this context, phrases such as 'think global, act local' can carry their known environmental meanings while inviting fresh associations. Awareness of the overarching benchmarks for society's betterment is important, but perhaps utopia is best determined by the individual, in the moment, using more modest points of reference; closer to art, life and home.

1 In 1980 the UK's BBC produced a landmark television series titled *The Shock of the New* presented by renowned art critic Robert Hughes, which examined the key cultural movement of the 20th century.

2 See http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1331_modernism/the_exhibition.html for the archive on the exhibition *Modernism: Designing a New World* 1914-1939, V&A Museum, 2006.

3 For a robust discussion on this matter see Dinesh D'Souza's article 'Staying Human: The danger of techno-utopia' in *National Review*, January 22, 2001 http://www.nationalreview.com/

4 Marco Bresciani's *The Digital Picture of Dorian Gray* is an Experimenta Commission.

5 See also Catherine Bernard's paper 'Bodies and Digital Utopia', in *Art Journal*, Winter 2000, pp 26-31.

6 Kit Wise's *Xanadu* is an Experimenta Commission.

7 Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine's *You Were In My Dream* is an Experimenta Commission.

HOW TO BE A UTOPIAN NOW

DAINE SINGER

EXPERIMENTA ASSOCIATE CURATOR

Utopia, a fantasy of a perfect world where the failings of our own world no longer exist, has been employed as a form of social critique by some of history's most influential thinkers. Throughout the ages the concept of utopia has embodied a hope for a better future and the need for radical change to our social and economic systems in order to achieve it. At their core, utopian aims spring from the desire for social transformation, and it follows that utopias are based on an interrogation of human interrelations. Typically a utopia is a place of just governance and joyous citizens free from suffering, with all their needs fulfilled.

The various ideas of what specific form a utopia might take (and the means of achieving it) make the utopian genre rich and frequently eccentric. Utopian ideals have taken many forms: socialist, capitalist, nostalgic, futuristic, technological or Arcadian. More recent concepts of ideal interpersonal relations (and how best to achieve them) have been variously debated in the economic extremes of model socialist utopias (the most notable being Communist China and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and capitalist utopias (for example, the free–market ideals that have come under renewed scrutiny since the recent global financial crisis). Utopian visions can be nostalgic, such as William Morris's idyllic view of medieval industry, or can take the form of technological and futuristic visions.

Utopias can be political and social ideals intended to be practically implemented, but utopianism is also a literary and artistic genre. Dissatisfied with the current state of society, artists have used utopianism in two ways: by envisaging a better state of affairs or by concentrating on the assumed dystopian state and its causes. More frequent in recent times are dystopian visions that focus on the negative consequences of following through on utopian plans or view our current circumstance through a dystopian lens. In the cynical 21st century — an era of much dystopian science fiction — utopianism is eyed with suspicion. Heavy with the memory of too many failed utopian dreams and a prevailing scientific climate of impending doom, 'utopian' has become a pejorative adjective, at best denoting unrealistic, naïve and overreaching plans and at worst bringing to mind totalitarianism.

Some of the earliest ideas of lost paradises have influenced the model for utopian fantasies since. In the Judeo–Christian tradition Heaven and the Garden of Eden are the most obvious models for utopian visions, but there have been many paradises and religious ideal worlds, such as the New Jerusalem and the Promised Land. In medieval times the popular fantasy of the Land of Cockaigne gave the people a peasant utopia composed of the earthy pleasures of food, sex and wine, where the structures of society were inverted and people were free of the work and hardships of daily life. In the Renaissance, concepts of ideal living harked back to Classical times and references such as Plato's Republic. It was during this period that utopian literature developed as an allegorical means to criticise existing social structures and conditions.

The English statesman Sir Thomas More first brought the term 'utopia' into parlance in the sixteenth century, in his fictional account of an ideal society.[1] *Utopia*, according to More's nomenclature, is a non-place (from the Greek *ou–topia*) but also a happy place (*eu–topia*).[2] His Utopia of 1516 was not the first example of utopian literature, but it introduced the term and popularised a genre. More's satirical Utopia allowed the author the space to critique the problems of his society and propose alternative practices, though as a whole the work should be taken as fiction and not as representing More's ideal world. Other influential works of utopian fiction to follow included Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1624), a place of science and learning, and Tommaso Campanella's

theocratic society presented in *The City of the Sun* (1623), both of which expressed the authors' own beliefs on good governance and society under the guise of fiction.

Thomas More's *Utopia* forms the model of the typical utopia, based on the integral contradiction: perfection for some realised through an exclusion of the majority. In order to provide an actual or imagined place of asylum and comfort, the model of utopia requires two particular elements: a dystopic environment from which to escape, and boundaries of separation. Often there is a great journey to be overcome in order to find the hidden or previously undiscovered utopia (such as in *New Atlantis, Shangri–La*, Erewhon or stories of the New World). This formula can be repeated from the island utopia or city-state to the individual haven of the home. As they are based on exclusion, many utopian communities are formed through normative rather than transformative community building. By creating a uniform community, room for dissent and otherness is reduced.

Not that it has stopped many from trying to establish alternative utopian 'intentional communities' in the real world, some of which have flourished on a small scale. In the first half of the 19th century in America and again in the 1970s across the world, small utopian and new–age communes and intentional communities flourished, often based on new ideas of family life, living in coexistence with nature, and new ethical and moral codes.[3] These range from dystopic cults that began with utopian intentions to relatively 'mainstream' alternative collectives, some of which have achieved small–scale utopian visions of harmonious communal living.[4]

While intentional communities often have an ecological utopian focus, recent times have also seen the rise of techno–utopianism in social and artistic discourse. In the late–20th–century rise of new technologies in our lives there are echoes of the way that technology was discussed in the 19th century. In the different theories of 19th–century social reformists including Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Henri de Saint–Simon and even Marx and Engels, as well as in fiction (such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*, written in 1888) was an underlying belief in science and technological advancement serving the utopian reconstruction of society. The general 19th–century belief that technological advancement served social improvement is an extension of the Enlightenment's faith in progress, a belief that suffered many blows in the 20th century. Of the fate of techno–utopianism in the current day, historian Howard Segal writes that "The technologically assisted horrors of the present age — its world wars, its genocides, its nuclear threats — make any hope of major improvements in human behaviour seem farfetched".[5] Today it would be hard to find an artist working with new technology who does not share Segal's viewpoint. And when new-media art is criticised for being too utopian, it is the techno–utopian elements of its history that are alluded to, not the complex ways in which artists today explore the place of technology within our lives.

1960s antecedents of new–media art were utopian in their belief in technology and the possibility of a cybernetic society. Charlie Gere identifies "a utopian 'systems aesthetic', in which the combination of new technologies and ideas about systems, interaction and process would produce a better world".[6] In a number of theories percolating at the time was a move away from formalism towards the study of interrelations, or systems, and of the connections between different disciplines.[7] Likewise, visionaries such as Marshall McLuhan interpreted technical advancement in terms of its future of social revolution, with the ability to expand and redefine the "psychic and social complex".[8]

The trajectory and framing of media art, net art and art using new technologies closely parallels that of the internet (the site of some of its production). In its early days the internet was framed with utopian rhetoric and imagined as a place of digital democracy where participants create the content, freely access information, create identities free of corporeality and spatial bounds, connect with each other across geography and create communities based on their own ideals.[9] The internet was often seen as democratic and empowering because it was thought to be outside the realm of ordinary power–systems. However, even the most enthusiastic proponents of the digital communication revolution now acknowledge that some aspects of communication experiences are devalued by the new technologies and they can be as prone to power abuses as any other space or technology.

The messianic positivism of artists involved in technology underwent a critical reappraisal in the 1970s in light of changing social circumstances. As the earth–shatteringly destructive forces

of technology were felt around the world in the advent of the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear holocaust, artists — like other members of society — no longer saw advances in technology as the natural progression of civilisation, but as uncontrollable and potentially destructive forces.

Today we can place technology's benefits and accept its infiltration with a greater awareness of its pitfalls. Likewise, artists working in the realm of new technologies are now more likely to grapple with the commercialisation and corporatisation of the internet, for example, or the political struggles and power–imbalances of the use of new technologies, than to be trumpeting the future of an interconnected and harmonious world. That is not to say that within a number of years new media has fallen from a utopian to dystopian practice, but that those working within it understand the impossibility of true utopia. Indeed, new media artists, with their connections to technology and the literary and cinematic genres of cyberpunk and steampunk have been more involved in a critique of technological utopianism than most.

Many theorists have noted the distrust of utopian thinking prevalent in the late 20th century,[10] attributing its downfall to a postmodern rupture of modernist faith in progress and grand narratives. The 20th century saw the social implementation of a number of utopias and also saw their spectacular failures, which affected the concept's reputation in all manifestations. The different implementations of utopian thinking in Nazism and Communism have both illustrated the potentially disastrous consequences of carrying through on utopian thinking. Now utopianism is often automatically associated with totalitarianism. Even the free-market utopia that that has dominated our times has taken a battering now that the global financial crisis has reinforced how spectacularly markets can fail.

In our supposedly post–ideological age, can utopian hope still exist, and can it exist without being equated with totalitarianism? There are a number of ways in which artists continue to engage with utopian thinking. Often, dystopian exaggeration is used as a point of criticism for social ills. Alternatively, where artists can once again look to utopias with hope rather than suspicion it is not necessarily evidence that utopian failures are forgotten. Nor does it prove that the world is a more disastrous place in need of utopian dreams, or a place of hope allowing for that dreaming. The change lies in the scope of this utopian hope. The emergence of a moderate utopian imperative in contemporary art is notable outside of new media in theories of participatory and interactive art and the artists associated with Relational Aesthetics. In it is a movement towards a scaled–down and quotidian 'microutopianism' rooted in everyday relations, interconnection, simple pleasures and ethical living.

While history has taught the folly of attempting to implement utopian perfection on a grand scale in the real world, the utopian trope has continuing value as an artistic and fictional means of proposing alternate ways of living. Rather than try to achieve actual utopia, a better way to be utopian is to hope for more than can be achieved and to use utopianism as an imaginative means of debating changes that could result in practical steps towards a better world.

1 Thomas More, *Utopia* (translated from the Latin by John Sheehan and John P. Donnelly) (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984)

2 "Wherfore not Utopie, but rather rightely/ My name is Eutopie: a place of felicitie." Edward Arber (ed), Sir Thomas More, *Utopia, translated into English by Ralph Robinson, His second and revised edition, 1556* (London: Alex Murray & Son, 1869) p.167

3 Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and community: communes and utopias in sociological perspective*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972) p.166

4 There are many still existent utopian intentional communities in Australia including Tuntable Falls near Nimbin, Crystal Waters near Brisbane, Moora Moora in Healesville and Gondwana Sanctuary in Byron Bay.

5 Howard P. Segal, *Technological utopianism in American culture*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p.156

6 Charlie Gere, 'New Media Art and the Gallery in the Digital Age' *Tate Papers* (Autumn 2004) www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04autumn/gere.htm, (accessed 22 November 2009)

7 Luke Skrebowski, 'All Systems Go: Recovering Jack Burnham's 'Systems Aesthetics'' *Tate Papers* (Spring 2006) www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06spring/skrebowski.htm#fn19 (accessed 28 November 2009); Jack Burnham, 'Systems Esthetics', *Artforum* (September 1968), pp.30-35 www.volweb.cz/horvitz/burnham/systems-esthetics.html (accessed 28 November, 2009)

8 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Mentor, 1964) p4

9 Laura J. Gurak, 'Utopian Visions of Cyberspace,' *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine* (May 1997) www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/may/last.html (accessed 28 November, 2009)

10 Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Ag* (USA: Columbia University Press, 2005); Krishan Kumar & Stephen Bann (eds.) *Utopias and the Millennium* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993)

SCENOCOSME

AKOUSMAFLORE {2008}

Akousmaflore 2008 (Installation view)
Interactive installation, plants, audio
Image courtesy of the artists

A hybrid of plants and technology, *Akousmaflore* is an enchanting hanging garden that expresses its sensitivity to gentle human touch or close proximity by singing in response. Embracing the notion that inanimate objects can react when given human attention, and testing the boundaries by which the everyday world is experienced, *Akousmaflore* reaches out and communicates through a scream, a chorus or an acoustic vibration.

The human body continually emits an electrical aura, which, in close proximity to the plants is perceived by tiny concealed sensors. As the sensors are triggered, the interactive experience of conducting a floral concerto reaches saturation point. The *Akousmaflore* plants acoustically express a phenomenon that cannot otherwise be detected by humans, bringing to life a new understanding of the way the world is shared.

GRÉGORY LASSERRE b. ANNECY, FRANCE {1976}
ANAÏS MET DEN ANCXT b. LYON, FRANCE {1981}

Scenocosme is the French artist couple Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt. Their work uses music and architecture to create interactive artworks in which the spectator is invited to be at the centre of a musical or choreographed collective performance.

Their work has been exhibited at: ISEA 2009 International Symposium for Electronic Arts; WRO 09 — 13th Media Art Biennale, Poland (2009); ZKM Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; and 3rd Seville International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2008).

They have also participated in many digital art festivals in France including EXIT, VIA, Scopitone, Arborescence, Mal au Pixel, 38e Rugissant, as well as others internationally: Futuresonic, UK; WRO, Poland; Streamfest; SHARE, Italy; ACM; SIGGRAPH, Germany. Their work has been seen in art and cultural centres including: Kibla Multimedia Center, Slovenia; Carré des Jalles, France; and Maison Salvan, France.

Extract from the book...

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