Program notes

We Write This To You From the Distant Future is a hybrid art exhibition and performance that can be viewed as a collection of contemporary multi-media hieroglyphs that express the exponentially accelerating transformation of society brought about by science and technology.

The exhibition/performance includes the work of 15 international artists, and three artworks have been developed into performances. Juilliard composer John Chin has created a composition for jazz ensemble and *HD Traffic* (2009) by John F. Simon, Jr.. *Inventing Wonderland* is an interpretation of W. Bradford Paley's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland TextArc* (2001-2010) by Juilliard actor Brendan Spieth and composer Michelle Ross and ensemble. *Mission Eternity* (2001-16) by the art group etoy, is underscored with an electronic arrangement, by Edward Bilous, of Bach's "O Gott, du frommer Gott" sung by Elizabeth Farnum.

Much of the artwork continues to tour through Streaming Museum's network in cyberspace and public space on seven continents, and in live programming at partnering cultural centers. (streamingmuseum.org). The work has been exhibited at major international art fairs and festivals, and at an exhibition program curated by Streaming Museum founder, Nina Colosi, at Google's New York City headquarters in 2010. (theprojectroom.org)

Pre-performance art and performance works

In *Understanding New Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan pointed out poet Ezra Pound's reference to the artist as "the antennae of the race": "Art as radar acts as "an early alarm system," as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic contrasts with the popular idea of them as mere self-expression." The work of the visual and performing artists in "We Write This To You From The Distant Future" signifies the evolving boundary-breaking technologies, such as the free flow of information, globalism, and the cracking of the codes of life itself, which will effect what it is to be human in the centuries ahead.

Eduardo Kac is contemporary artist and writer internationally recognized for his interactive net installations and his bio-art. In the 1990s he created the new categories of Biotelematics (art in which a biological process is intrinsically connected to digital networks) and Transgenic Art (new art form based on the use of genetic engineering techniques to create unique living beings). **Lagoglyphs** (2009) is part of a series of artworks in different media which reference and expand upon his controversial genetically altered *Alba* the GFP Bunny, 2000. The real-time animations, continuously flowing and reconfiguring themselves, place emphasis on the generative mutability of writing and the encoded nature of life.

In **Michael Najjar's** *bionic angel* (2006-2008) series, creatures in the throes of transformation are a metaphor for inevitable genetic self-creation and possible immortality of the human body. Najaar achieves a forceful fusion of real and virtual

content: "*bionic angel* refers to idealized body worlds from antiquity and the renaissance, and themes of "metamorphosis" from classical Greek mythology as treated by the Roman poet Ovid. The series takes as its starting point the future transformation and technological control of human evolution. Rapid development in the field of so-called "g-r-i-n-technologies" (genetics, robotics, information and nano-technologies) are enhancing human performance, changing our bodies, minds, memories, and identities, but also impact on our progeny. These new developments will allow us to control human evolution through genetic algorithms and neuronal networks and will elevate the human being to a new and far superior form of existence, adapted to the high-speed data highway. In *the singularity*, the eagle embodies Zeus, the divine privilege of creation. The machine represents control of creation by technology."

The exhibition/performance title, "We Write This To You From The Distant Future", is a line spoken by the narrator in **Immobilité** (2009), a 75-minute feature length art film shot with a mobile phone video camera by pioneer digital artist, director and cult novelist, **Mark Amerika.** The narrator continues, "Our intention is not to haunt you. We know the difficulties you all must be going through. The anxiety you carry around in your time-worn bodies, all of the broken dreams and endless cruelties performed by others who you think should know better. But why is it always this way?" Three short-form remixes of the film appear in the program: *Trail(er) Mix*, *An Image Coming (Spatial Remix),* and *Hauntological*. *Immobilité* is as much electronic literature and art film as philosophical piece, moreover, the title provokes one to imagine how a technologically advanced world will effect what it is to be human and what the world with advanced technology is to become.

HD Traffic (2009) by John F. Simon, Jr., composer, John Chin
Jazz ensemble: Luke Celenza - keyboard and effects, Joshua Crumbly - bass, Morgan Jones - saxophone, James Macbride - drums

Best known for his software and screen-based artworks, **John F. Simon, Jr.** uses the unique properties of digital media to create time-based paintings whose compositions never repeat. His software art is in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art in New York and many others.

*HD Traffic (*2009) is a digital artwork that can react dynamically to real-time information streams taken from the Internet, and reflect the pulse of human movement that is embodied in the flow of traffic and other data. *HD Traffic* combines Piet Mondrian's rectilinear compositional style, with particular inspiration coming from *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and Simon's love of jazz improvisation with the emergent dynamics of object oriented programming. From simple rules Simon is able to coax cubes to form realistic traffic patterns, stopping and starting at intersections, passing each other and avoiding collisions, and even ending up in a giant traffic jam. His software endlessly varies the visual elements of the scene such as the number of vehicles, the street sizes, traffic lights, car speeds, background colors and many more. Like traffic on a city street, the basic patterns are the same but the details never repeat.

Simon describes the collaboration with John Chin: *"HD Traffic* improvises in recursion and surprise accents. Composer John Chin's instrumental regressions are echoed in the loops of the graphical software. Finding common ground in Mondrian's boogie woogie and the rhythms of New York City, this collaboration overlays musical and visual improvisation in hopes of getting just the right kind of traffic jam."

John Chin explains his process: "In conceptualizing the collaboration between myself and John Simon I used *Undercover*, a composition of mine that is open to different types of improvisation using elements of harmonically free form improvisation in combination with effects processors, and tonal improvisation within a framework that uses a series of repeating chord progressions. *Undercover* parallels the evolution of Jazz since the 1940's to the present, much like *HD Traffic* is an evolution of Art since Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-43). This improvised piece is a representation of the evolution of music, art, and technology, and within the performance itself the artwork and music evolve in real time."

"The music mirrors *HD Traffic* -- the improvisers react with each other, much like the colored squares found in John Simon's work. Colors represent different soloists and the soloists themselves trigger still images eventually coming together leading to an 'Artwork Solo.' The improvisers take cues not only from one another, but from the artwork itself, and the artwork performs an 'improvised solo' with the musicians."

Mission Eternity by etoy
Music: J.S. Bach arranged by Edward Bilous, performed by an ensemble of Juilliard vocalists

Mission Eternity (2005-2016) by the art group **etoy,** is a digital cult of the dead for the information society that crosses the boundaries of the afterlife, and challenges the way human civilization deals with memory (conservation/loss), time (future/present/past) and death.

The art group stores the data of a few M∞ PILOTS forever with the help of thousands of M∞ ANGELS who download and run a program on their computer. The M∞ SARCOPHAGUS is a modified 20 foot cargo container outfitted with 17'000 lights reflecting the info sphere of human beings who have passed away: visual information, the voices of the dead, statistics and ascii text collected from governmental databases, family albums, and online sources explore the artistic portrait for information society (ARCANUM CAPSULE). The TERMINUS, a plug-shaped repository, stores the ashes of an M∞ PILOT after cremation. The interactive and networked sculpture links the community of the living and the dead. It travels geo-space like Internet particles (TCP/IP packages) travel our global media reality. On May 26, 2007, etoy transferred the mortal remains of PILOT Timothy Leary into the multiuser SARCOPHAGUS.

Inventing Wonderland, an interpretation of W. Bradford Paley's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland TextArc* (2001-2010) by Brendan Spieth, actor, and Michelle Ross, composer

Ensemble: Michelle Ross - violin, AJ Nilles - viola, Jia Kim - cello, Ben Laude - piano
Pre-recorded music: Brendan Spieth - ukelele, Michelle Ross - piano, Justina Sullivan - cello

W. Bradford Paley coded his first computer graphics in 1973, has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and other cultural centers, and was awarded grand prize at the 2002 Japan Media Arts Festival.

He is a designer who often uses computers to transcribe forms out of information. It is central to his practice that the resulting works are readable: that they can support

discourse about the *subject* of the work as readily, or more readily, than about the form of the work.

There's a developing practice, called Information Visualization or InfoVis, that makes data visible; a small subset of that work succeeds in making it meaningful, too. Paley has written, in his introduction to "InformationEsthetics.com," "Making data meaningful—this phrase could describe what dozens of professions strive for: Wall Street systems designers, fine artists, advertising creatives, computer interface researchers, and many others. Occasionally something important happens in these practices: a data representation is created that reveals the subject's nature with such clarity and grace that it both informs and moves the viewer. We both understand and care."

Paley's *TextArc* is an example of such a data representation; it informed and inspired the creation of this piece.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland TextArc (2001-2010) is a visual index that draws an entire text, line by line, around the outside of an arc; then repeats the text, word by word, just inside. If a word occurs more than once it's drawn larger, at the centroid of all its occurrences. This lets one see which words are used mostly in one place (they're pulled toward that place) and which are distributed in a more interesting way. **Brendan Spieth and Michelle Ross' *Inventing Wonderland*** is interpretive and extrapolates Paley's work, while Paley's work is illustrative or a transcription of the source material.

Spieth and Ross explain their concept: "Paley's *TextArc* takes a linear text and deconstructs it into a logical, visual map of where words occur and how many times they occur. Once it is mapped out, the software reads the text through this map. Although it's possible to use the *TextArc* process with any piece of literature, what makes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* different is the visible logic that *TextArc* reveals. Author Charles Dodgson, or better known under the pen name, Lewis Carroll, was a mathematician and a logician. While *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is well known for nonsensical language and imaginative landscapes, it is also packed with logic. *TextArc* makes logic out of what looks like chaos. We saw it as a brain that when it read itself, looked as though it was firing off thoughts and reactions."

"Our piece takes a trip down the rabbit hole of the writer's brain and searches for the initial motivations and moments of the process. Inspired by the stutter that Lewis Carroll had throughout his life, we explore obstacles through a stutter in the music or movement of the piece. The music grew out of improvisations, which represent the imagination and creativity being unlocked. This piece celebrates the mystery, beauty, and struggle in the search for a beginning."

Exhibition

Eduardo Kac, *Lagoglyphs* (2009) (description above); Michael Najjar, *bionic angel/the singularity*; Mark Amerika, *Immobilité*; Andrea Ackerman, Rose Breathing; Terreform ONE/Mitchell Joachim and Maria Aiolova, *Habitat, Urbanity, Mobility*; Basetrack.org photographers Teru Kuwayama, Balazs Gardi and Tivadar Domaniczky; Andrew Senior, *Nine Billion Names of God*; Rachel Armstrong, Protocells; Kurt Ralske, *Darkness (No Darkness)*.

Hauntological (A Digital Remix) and **An Image Coming (Spatial Remix) by artist and director Mark Amerika,** are among the three short-form video remixes of *Immobilité* included in the exhibition/performance, that are extensions of the dreamlike source material that keeps circulating throughout the various iterations of the project. Composer and performer **Chad Mossholder** and editor **Rick Silva** collaborated with

Amerika. In his version of art-life, we are all born to remix. "What are dreams and active memories if not personally rendered remixes of multi-media source material?"

One of the leading pioneers of early Internet art, Mark Amerika's art and writing has influenced a new generation of artists using digital processes to create emerging forms of art that intersect at the boundary of visual art, live performance, and experimental literature. He is internationally renown as a "remix artist" who not only reconfigures existing cultural content into new forms of art, but also mashes up the mainstream media forms and genres that most commercial artists work in. For example, his body of remix artworks includes published cult novels, pioneering works of Internet art, large scale video projections in public spaces, live VJ performance, and most recently, a series of feature-length "films" shot with different image capturing devices in various locations throughout the world.

The fragmented mobile phone images are captured and edited in an amateurish or DIY [do-it-yourself] fashion similar to the evolving forms of video distributed in social media environments such as YouTube. By creating this low-tech version of filmic narrative where the aesthetic style is influenced by the rich history of more sophisticated forms of European auteur cinema, Amerika both asks and answers the question "What is the future of cinema?" while simultaneously challenging the status and viability of contemporary artworks in an increasingly networked field of distribution.

The art of **Michael Najjar** suggests the possibility of post-human forms of existence and remodeling of the human body, mind and consciousness. Focusing on key components of a society driven and controlled by computer and information technology, his works create visions and utopias of future social structures emerging from the impact of new technologies. The exhibition includes photographic productions from the series *bionic angel* (2006-2008) including *laokoon*, *hermaphrodite*, *figura serpentina*, *spare room*, *bionic angel*, and *telematic dreaming*. *the singularity*, a video created in collaboration with Dieter Jaufmann, is on view on stage, and in the exhibition with its score, Luigi Nono's *Io, Frammento del Prometeo* #8.

Rose Breathing (2003) an undulating cross-species rose, creates a Zen-like meditation as it rhythmically opens and closes in time-altered human-like respiration. Artist and scientist **Andrea Ackerman** has created at the intersection of technology, nature, aesthetics and ethics, a work that prophetically signals the inevitable integration of technology and nature.

Mitchell Joachim and Maria Ailova co-founded Terreform ONE [Open Network Ecology], a unique laboratory for scientists, artists, architects, students, and individuals of all backgrounds to explore and advance the larger framework of green design. Through creative projects and outreach efforts they illuminate the environmental possibilities of New York City and inspire solutions in areas like it around the world. The group develops innovative processes and technologies for local sustainability in energy, transportation, infrastructure, buildings, waste treatment, food, water, and media culture. The exhibition features three areas or their work: **Habitat:** *Fab Tree Hab Village* **(2009); Urbanity:** *Green Brain Micro Climate Towers* **(2006); Mobility:** *Blimp Bumper Bus* **(2008)** and *Jetpack Packing* **(2010).**

Nine Billion Names of God (2011) is an exploration of language, typography and religion by **Andrew Senior.** His art is informed by his technical research in human-computer interaction, multimedia and computer vision, for which he holds several patents. Senior works on speech recognition in the Research group at Google, New York. Drawing on sources from dozens of languages and scripts, *Nine Billion Names of God* choreographs the sounds and symbols of the name of god from many different

cultures, from Zoroastrian chants to the etchings of Athanasius Kircher. The work takes its title from a 1953 Arthur C. Clarke science fiction story where a computer helps Tibetan monks enumerate the nine billion names of god in three months rather than fifteen thousand years by hand, the completion of which will bring the universe to an end. Senior created the sound track that includes *Ervad Soli Dastur* (chanting), anonymous Creative Commons contributors and synthesized speech.

Scientist and novelist, Dr. Rachel Armstrong, has been creating **Protocells** in the lab since 2008. Her artful videos show the life-like activity of this programmable technology that has vast potential for such purposes as removing environmental poisons, growing a reef under Venice to save the ancient city, and performing microsurgery.

Kurt Ralske's *Darkness (Not Darkness)* (2005) is an experimental video with music by Toru Takemitsu, created from images of Iraq in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. Desert, sky, water, fire and oil flow and blend organically, mixing like liquids. Events that actually happened sequentially appear to occur simultaneously. The drift of images suggests omniscient views of a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Appearing in subliminal tempo underscored with silence, is a collection of current **photographs by Teru Kuwayama, Balazs Gardi and Tivadar Domaniczky,** taken while embedded with the 1st Battalion 8th Marines in Helmund Province, Afghanistan. Their website, Basetrack.org, is a new communication platform where families, friends and general public worldwide can view the images and video taken as they travel with the Battalion across their area of operations. Posted on the site and distributed through global news sources, they create an immediate emotional connection to the human perspective of this conflict which standard news reporting is not able to provide.

Similarly, with startling reality, an ancient Egyptian artist created a scene on the western exterior wall of Luxor Temple facing the Nile to depict the battle of Kadesh in 1274 B.C. perhaps to send a message to the future about the devastating consequences of war. With shocking clarity, no stirring of life is seen, only a ravaged landscape, a destroyed city, and even the enemy's dead usually shown in chaotic battle scenes are absent. This visual image goes far beyond the possibility of a verbal message.

The Internet and smart phones are proving to be powerful tools for circulating images that are inciting powerful citizen protests organized by young, anonymous, internet-powered dissidents that are galvanizing local and global communities to topple oppressive regimes. Moreover, there is potential to address other world crisis such as environmental sustainability where, for example, global tree-planting efforts can be organized.

The Internet may be leading to the ideology, cosmopolitanism, which can be traced back to the philosopher Socrates in his famous quote "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world." Philosophers and scholars argue that a global citizens movement will arise and a single democratic global institution can oversee solving the world's ecological and other problems.

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Nam June Paik: "Skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality. Technology has become the body's new membrane of existence."