Interview with Art Clay, Artistic Director of Zurich's DAW07

Rachael Watts: 1/ Can you explain in your own words what DAW07 is, what it aims to achieve, and its relationship to the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich?

Art Clay: Scientific research has long been an issue in academic institution around the world; art, however, has not been included as a research field due a cultural difference between practioniers of science and art. With the advent of growth in the use of newer technologies in the arts, artists have been forced into gaining access to a large pool of knowledge. This knowledge seemed to lie outside of the cultural barriers of the artist's environment, so in order to acquire the needed information concerning emerging technologies, the artists could not turn to the traditional sources of knowledge such as a library since almost anything new must be sought out at the source.

Scientific research institutes that have opened up to having artists join the research team have prospered from the creative mind of the artists in that the flow of ideas and the quality of communication have increased. Artists tend however by their very nature to make research visible, that is to bring the empirical basis of that knowledge into the domains of applied research. This type of cross fertilization is then very clear the reason as to how artistic knowledge can benefit scientific research and vice versa. Also, many projects from scientists tend to be of an abstract nature whose application on more economical levels is not clear.

R.W.: 2/ What role do you see technology having in relation to contemporary art practice?

A.C.: The impact of technology within an arts context lies above all in the fact that the technology is used aesthetically and this use is primarily non-utilitarian in function. Viewers, who see how technology is such used, begin to realize that it can be used in creative and other ways than were intended. Also, certain aspects of technology can be presented better and clearer within an arts context. Once the viewers come to understand how the artwork functions, they have a much more clearer idea of what the technology is and how it effects society in general and the cultural environment in general.

R.W.: 3/ Do you think it is fair to say that there is an inherent futurism with works dealing with new technologies?

A.C.: The general tendencies in the arts often follow those in technology. Today, mobile communication is of key importance for both. Art projects using such mobile devices are best at bringing the technology used into critical view. Since good art is often dependent on its originality, the use of the technology can often be innovative, but not always. Artworks that deal with emerging technologies may be innovative, but there are several factors involved here, which determine the degree of innovation. The first factor is that one must differentiate between artworks using commercial technology and those involved in and stemming out of research situations. Commercial technology can often just be a

novel application of research from yesterday or be a new application based in old technology. Other scenarios can be imagined, but the situation in which new research finds a novel application is rather rare. What is important to recognize is that there is no guaranty that artwork will have an inherent futurism just because it applies new technologies. I think that it is rather the social context in which the artwork is presented and how it than interacts with society through the technology (old or new) that it uses.

**Fig. 1. "Going Publik" from Art Clay is an example of an art project that not
only uses innovative technology (Q-bic Belt Computer), but uses it to explore innovative application
in the arts (Real Time Scoring). The computers are located in the
belt buckle and communicate wirelessly with a 3d motion tracking system on the trombones.**

R.W.: 4/ What does the term 'new media' mean to you?

A.C.: I think that the term 'new media' is not as inappropriate as the term "multimedia", is, but it does come close. It seems that we are continuously trying to redefine the term 'new media' for the sole reason that we are not happy with using it or its confining definitions. The term will probably not hold up as a term for very long, because it actually describes new methods of storing data for prosperity rather than an art movement. Also, the term that is used to reference the arts, i.e. "new media art" is as banal as the single word concepts that this term embraces. Terms like "interactivity", "intermedia", "hybrid arts" or the "new arts" come to mind.

R.W.: 5/ How do you perceive the labels 'sound art' or 'sound installation'? And what place do you see sound having in contemporary artistic practice in the arts world?

A.C.: Soundscape, and all of the different approaches to it, basically stem from an interest in recordings of nature, whose original intent was and is more or less to document it. Later, such recordings became popularized through wide distribution and soundscape has developed since then passionately. In comparison with the New Music movement, one

might say that Soundscape is exploring terrain, which is more experimental and at the same time more popular than its New Music counter part. The difference between sound art and music lies in the relationship between the elements found in the works themselves and how these elements relate to one another to form a whole. Music focuses completely on the relationship between elements (i.e. the tones) and how they build up to create a dramatic form; Soundscape focuses on the beauty of each element (i.e. tones, sounds etc.) and how they combine naturally with one another with no recognizable formal content being imposed on the listener by the artist. Soundscape is therefore relevant in contemporary artistic practice in the arts world, because much of today's use of sound in installations for example is based on concepts that are focusing on the use of pure sound.

Fig. 2. Net Derive from Atau Tanaka: An art project that uses commercial technology (Smart Phone with GPS) and innovative ideas in the arts (City as an Instrument). A Smart phone, a GPS receiver and its antenna are located sewn into a scarf like garment.

R.W.: 6/ Due to the intangible nature of sound, would you agree that one is able to transcend one's earthbound experience, time and space through sound?

A.C.: Let us not limit the question just to sound. A number of devices exist that stimulate the mind of the user by visual and audio signals. The fundamental principle applied to each is that a particular train of visual and aural pulses leads to different states of mind. These states include, for example, deep relaxation, heightened creativity and heightened awareness. Often, the aim of the device is to allow users to learn faster or relax deeper, but artists have extended the experience with such devices into the realm of art. The Dream Machine, conceived in the early sixties by Brion Gysin, is a mechanical device that is viewed with eyes closed as it rotates at 12 HZ around a light source located inside it. The light, coming against the eyelids as the device rotates, effortlessly produces a relaxed state of mind. This occurs, because the optical nerve is stimulated and alters the brain's electrical oscillations. Gysin referred to the effect as "interior visions" and in his words the effect of the Dream Machine can be described as a projection of dazzling lights and celestially colored images whirling around inside one's own head.

Fig. 3. Video Peacock from Benoit Maubrey: An Art project which uses primitive technology (loudspeakers and common chips) for more established ideas in the arts, but in a unique way as body sound art. The speakers and amplifiers are located into a plastic transparent membrane that doubles as a video screen

 R.W.: 7/ Have you heard of the term 'techno-shamanism', if so, does its meaning have any importance to you and your own practice, or relevance to the works in DAW07?

A.C.: Well one angle of the Digital Art Weeks could be better understood with that term. The meeting point between today's art and tomorrow's technology seems to echo the "techno" and "shamanism" of that genre. Technology has a magical and mystical side to it, so many artists doing work with obscure technology seem to make a "spiritual" impression. However, the Digital Arts Weeks Program doesn't need a chemically induced ecstasy state to do so, but accomplishes an induced state of pure ecstasy through a technically. Here, the Digital Manadala project comes to mind:

Each visual artist invited submitted static or animated images in the form of "Digital-Mandalas", which are relevant in content and effect to the theme of "inner visions". The Digital-Mandalas get projected into the performance space to digitally enhance it architecturally. To do this, the images are synchronized to the 12 HZ flickering frequency of the Dream Machine, which drives a custom computer program that subtly modulates attributes of the image dynamically. This modulation gently arouses news states of mind in the viewer. In this manner the inner visions of the Dream Machine become outer visions of the installation. Further, to extend the experience in the realm of the senses, a group of audio artists submitted short audio works relevant in content and effect to the theme of "the 60hz hum is the electronic ohm of our times". These audio works are

projected into the space using a stereoscopic loudspeaker system and their playback naturally enhances the psychedelic effects of the Dream machine environment in conjunction with the digital mantras.

R.W.: 8/ According to Marshall McLuhan there is a 'sense bias' that exists in Western society favoring visual logic, a shift that occurred with the advent of the alphabet as the eye became more essential than ear. Do you think we live in a visual world today?

A.C.: Yes, very much so, but things are getting interesting because what was once presented as printed text has been replaced with symbols. This brings about a heightened state of psychogeography in that we move through a city not reading but visualizing. My personal experience is that signs let us enjoy the soundscape of the city than the all those words did. The DAW07 project "The City as an Instrument" fits into the psychogeography possibilities of today in that the project places emphasis on unique art projects using mobile communication technologies to actually 'play' the city as an expressive instrument or place of artistic practice. As an art and technology statement this might be formulated better as follows: Using wearable computing technology within global ubiquitous networks as an art tool allows interacting with society as part of a collective consciousness. This bears significance for the creator of mobile art and also for its recipient participants who likewise realize that personal space endowed with added capabilities and explored as an extension of the self and body points to a global culture of the self in which the individual is not limited to what they are part of globally.

Fig. 4 The Dream Machine from Bryon Gysin. The machine sits on a record playing, rotating st 72 rpm. Along with the light, the rotation causes a flickering. The flickering is then viewed as light impulses with the eyes closed. The light, coming against the eyelids as the device rotates, effortlessly produces a relaxed state of mind. This occurs, because the optical nerve is stimulated and alters the brain's electrical oscillations.

R.W.: 9/ What is your response to the word techno?

A.C.: I think that when it is combined with other terms, such as Shamanism, Animalism, Fatalism, Dadaism, Vandalism, Fetishism etc. it starts to take on a desperately needed new flavor and more interesting aesthetic direction. Pure generic dance music has little to do with progressive art, but it can wrap up events nicely. At the former EWZ power plant, the festival will close with a big party splash centered around pop trivialities based on Warhol's "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" and then melt down into a dance club atmosphere. Before things get pure dance, you can check out bizarre performances, robotic sculptures, installations, a few nasty bands in the tradition of the Velvets. After midnight and last but not least be part of Zurich's party scene, when regionally and internationally famed Djs and Vjs make your bones jitter and your retina stretch beyond your eyelids with techno fetishism mixed together with a touch of Dadaism and a lot of animalism.
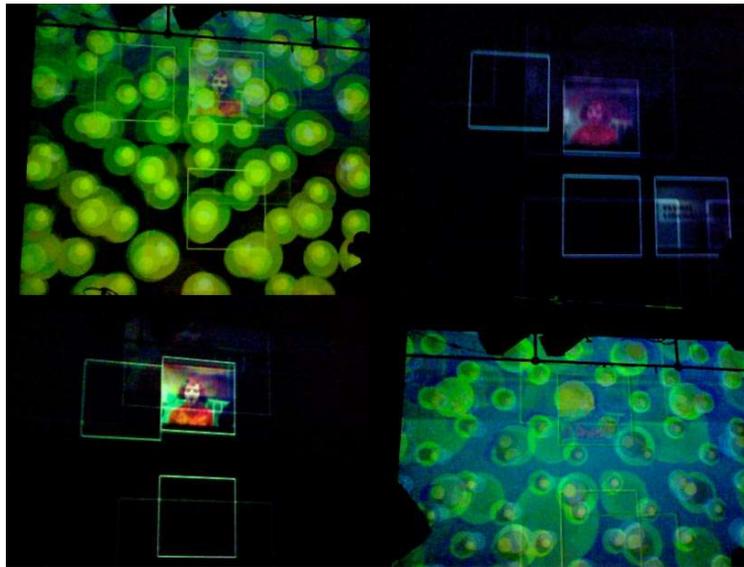

Fig 5. Rip My Disc: A project from Corebounce that unknowingly rips images and sounds out of people's mobile phones as they sit around in a club. The "ripped" material is then combined collage like and then projected on to the wall for everyone to view and listen too.

R.W.: *10/ Finally, how do you posit DAW07 within the arts world globally, and can you see any particular trends arising in this still quite new area of art practice?*

This year's program is based around the themes of the calls the DAW sent out world wide in the fall of 2006. At the famous Cabaret Voltaire, the program sets an accent on performance art using electronic media. The concept of the "performative surround" (the media articulated body in space) makes its way into the program under the guise of two DAW project calls, entitled "Cabled Madness" and "B.I.O.". So we at the DAW are not only making works with a technological long lever, but we are also making impact with that on an aesthetic and social level too.

The term 'Cabled Madness' itself refers to the critic of Joseph Weizenbaum that society went mad when it started to put consideration and trust into things like the Star Wars System of defense. In the same vain, but on a more rational level and without collateral damage, the scheduled performances are works that empower the performer in an explosion of the boundaries of the body and link the audience into the virtual of technologically animated space. Like Weizenbaum's plea for sanity in computer application, the works trigger critical observation in the mind of the audience and counter act the most logical form of evolution in the 21st century enabled by technology: Intelligence without morals.

R.W.: Thanks for your time.

A.C: See you at the DAW07 in Zurich,