IDEA/International Directory of Electronic Arts
Foreword to the Second Edition, 1992-1993

Utopia in the Technological Era

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February 2, 1992

The history of art in the 20th century is also that of the individuals who dreamt of Utopia within society. With the development of new technologies artists have been led to redefine the dream of Utopia. Some have initiated new methods for the creation of artistic works, by using existing technology in their work. Others, who did not have such means at their disposal, have seen in the advent of technology an event engendering a whole range of artistic possibles.

Even if the technological means existed to realize them, many artistic projects have not materialized because they required substantial financial backing which was not available. In other words, these projects could not be realized for technical and financial reasons.

Different artistic attitudes can be observed which seem to oscillate between two extremes : an artistic practice using technology and based on a realistic approach on the one hand, and on the other an approach in which the artist constructs a dream of artistic possibles - such a dream serving to reveal the value of a lack of realism inherent in artistic purpose.

This guide is a directory of public and private organizations, research centres and schools where "utopian" artists gather together. Such centres as Inkhuk and Vkhutemas where all those who were part of the Russian constructivist avant-garde movement came together, the Bauhaus of Weimar, the Institute of Design of Chicago, Black Mountain College in North Carolina or the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, which were founded in some cases before the Second World War, all bear witness to the presence of a dream in which technology is envisaged as a tool for the construction of Utopia.

In 1977 the Plastic Arts and Mixed Media section (Sôgô-zokei) opened at the University of Tsukuba in Japan ; then followed the creation of the Media Lab at MIT in the beginning of the 1980's. The Kunsthochschule für Medien of Cologne and the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie of Karlsruhe were founded in the second half of the 1980's. 1991 saw the opening of the Center of Art and Technology, one of the departments of the National Institute for the Arts of Taiwan. At the same time as these organizations were developing and becoming known internationally, festivals and exhibitions of electronic art as

well as exchanges between artists were organized and enabled many artistic works and performances to be presented.

However the utopians of art and technology do not always belong to a research centre or a school. Some of them are engaged in independent undertakings. Those who no longer have links with organizations, or have obtained their university degree, have no ready access to production facilities. Artistic works - in principle unique and original, even if technology and the media have played an important part in designing them, sometimes exist only in an experimental form. Non-profit community facilities are then needed to produce them. But is that not a Utopia for utopians ?

So as to answer this need I myself have proposed that a centre for artists concerned with the environment and media be built on the island of Awaji in Japan. A committee is in charge of realizing the first stages of the project and is in the process of sharing out the different sites, with the help of the Regional Council.

Designed around two sets of facilities, one for plastic arts and the other for media arts, the centre will also include a library, a cinema, a restaurant and an exhibition space.

Today we must occupy regions in which the price of land is still reasonable rather than the great metropolises such as Paris, New York or Tokyo. Thanks to the new communication media, the "artists colonies" will feel much more at ease far from towns, both in terms of space and of time.

The colony of artists of Awaji will channel its activities so they may contribute to the foundation of a Utopia in which any habitation is temporary, in accordance with Charles Fourier's "butterfly principle". With the formation of these "utopian" networks on an international scale, a "space for the creation of images" will come into existence and develop night and day with the assistance of ISDN systems and computers.

We are now entering a planetary era in which this type of activity has become a necessity.