



Roy Ascott (ed), *Art, Technology, Consciousness - mind@large* (Intellect Books: N.E. Hassalo St. Portland, Oregon, 2000), £24.95, US \$44.95 Hardback, 204 pp., ISBN 1-84150-041-0 published in the Journal of Consciousness Studies, Volume 9, No. 1 (2002)

Roy Ascott, the founder and director of CAiiA-STAR (University of Wales College, Newport) has been pioneering for many years with internationally acclaimed conferences the place of cybernetics, telematics and interactive media in art. His second volume *Art, Technology, Consciousness - mind@large* is the collection of lectures, presentations and interventions of the 2nd International Research Conference *Consciousness Reframed* which was held in Newport in August 2000. It is an outstanding approach which addresses contemporary theory of consciousness, the creation of meaning and emotion and the mind as both the subject and the object of art.

As pioneer in the philosophy and technological impact of the digital culture, Ascott and his colleagues (they come from very different research backgrounds such as the physical sciences, art, media and design) go far beyond the dominating hype of the so-called *innovative* digital debate which too often turns out to be pure "moonshine" regarding the claim of media art's overarching capacity in encompassing artistic encounters with the technological reality. The volume's focus is in fact both on and *beyond* digital culture and it includes aspects of artificial life, robotics, performance, computer music, architecture, telematic art and biotechnology.

Our culture is at the point, it seems, where the commitment of new kind of *visionary pragmatism* (Ascott) is an imperative. Today new scientific experiments like teleportation and superluminal tunneling whose interpretations are at stake, challenge us to become more open-minded. This is exactly the point where the volume offers a wide number of contributions to radically rethink the nature of awareness and cognition by identifying key questions rather than definitive answers. Eduardo Kac's *transgenic artwork* presented and explained is an illuminating example of how media art today is capable of exploring the intricate relationship between biology, belief systems, information technology, dialogical interaction, ethics and the internet. Most contributing artists and scientists included in this publication have been involved in a variety of public exhibitions and the majority of their work is available online.

The volume presents in my opinion the most up-to-date discussion at the intersection between art, technology and consciousness. It addresses a wide range of topics ranging from the concept of intelligence (Ted Krueger) to the bicameral mind (Gregory P. Garvey) and the nature of memes in visual art (Nicholas Tresilian). John Cowley, the author of a contribution titled "A Quantum Mechanical Model of Consciousness" refers to Henry Stapp who suggests that the universe could be considered as having an 'informational' structure, rather than

consisting of "rock-like" particles. We are tempted to get exciting new thoughts and perspectives which in fact are a challenge to our definition of being human, consciousness and the physical world.

Roy Ascott's suggestion that we currently see an artistic shift, 'as silicon and pixels merge with molecules and matter' and thus intelligence is about to spread to every part of the living is understandable and even compelling. He foresees 'the insertion of a new but very ancient technology' - that of the psychoactive plant. And Ascott even goes one step further when he claims that art is the search of a new language and new metaphors for the means of re-defining ourselves. Our identity has become transformable. This means that the many selves hypothesis, like the many worlds hypothesis of physics (Everett) is necessary to life and liberty in a culture where cyberspace and post-biological life meet. Ascott proposes a new reality with new *technoetic* networks (Greek *noetikos*, mind/consciousness) in which consciousness is both the subject and object of art. This means that the artist not only embraces new technological developments and theories of mind, but explores the practices and perceptions of other cultures and traditions. For many of those cultures, the ritual ingestion of plants is entailed, leading Roy Ascott to propose a kind of *vegetal reality*, invested in a psychoactive plant technology, to compliment the virtual reality of interactive digital technology, and the reactive, mechanical validated reality of the everyday world.

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