

Adeena Mey You are most famous for your essay "ABC Art" considered the seminal text on minimal art. But film has played an important part in your career as an art historian, critic and curator. You have also taken part and witnessed all of E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology)'s events. Could you go back to that episode?

Barbara Rose E.A.T. was born, really, when Bob Rauschenberg had a sculpture (*Oracle*, 1962-1965) that he wanted to be a kinetic piece and a sound piece at the same time. He didn't know how to do it. But Billy Klüver, a Swedish engineer who had moved to New York and worked at Bell Laboratories, was a close friend of artists like Johns and Rauschenberg as well as film maker Robert Breer, Robert Whitman and others interested in using technology as a new medium. At that time, there were quite a few Swedes living in New York. For example, Pontus Hultén, Öyvind Fahlström but also Swedish American Claes Oldenburg, there was a kind of Swedish connection and Billy Klüver was part of it. I was actually there the moment Billy figured out how Bob's piece *Oracle* could move and make sound. Then they decided they wanted to create a collaboration between artists and engineers.

Billy persuaded Bell Labs to have artists in residence. The artists who wanted to work at Bell Labs - and there were quite a few of them - collaborated with engineers. It was originally the artists' conception, then engineers would figure out how to realize it. E.A.T. also became a vehicle for filmmakers and artists interested in film and kinetic art. A number of filmmakers were involved with this early idea of Intermedia. In fact, Howard Wise had a gallery in which kinetic art and sound art were shown. Len Lye had a show there. He was not involved in E.A.T. But E.A.T. was an umbrella group for scientists and artists to collaborate. Anyway, Rauschenberg was always at the frontier. And we wanted to make experiments in Intermedia. Nam June Paik was already doing video. All these things were in their incubation and there was a will to move out from painting, sculpture to media.

There was also another E.A.T. program which was not connected to Bell Labs that placed artists with other big corporations. So John Chamberlain was sent to the Rand Corporation. John ended up making films. He did one called *Thumb Suck* which was on three different screens projected at once. Probably the inspiration was *Chelsea Girl's* (1966) by Warhol, which is projected on two screens. I wrote about *Chelsea Girls*. I also wrote "Kinetic solutions to pictorial problems" in *Artforum* about how films solve some pictorial problems, which was mainly about Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy.

It was published in *Artforum's* special film issue from 1971, edited by Annette Michelson.

Of course, Annette was terribly important. She moved from Paris to New York in 1966. She already had a tremendous background in film, having worked with Noel Burch and was the star of one of his films - she played a dominatrix in *Noviciat*. She learned Russian to go to the Soviet Union and study the early film makers there.

How would you explain the encounter between the rise of intermedia practices and the use of technology in art?

Rauschenberg wanted to work with any material, cardboard, junk, and he thought of technology as a medium. Robert Whitman, who was influenced by the Czech *Laterna Magica*, used films in his happenings. The idea was that technology was a medium like, say oil painting. They were less interested in making a film or a video than in technology as a medium to animate objects and images.

This led artists to work in space that were neither film theatres nor white cubes.

Well, to go back to E.A.T., it was Billy who persuaded Pepsi Cola to let E.A.T. have the pavilion at Expo 70 in Osaka where I went with Klüver, Whitman, Breer, etc. One of the intentions behind E.A.T. was to break down barriers in everything. Also cultural barriers. So we went to Japan where I negotiated the contracts. At the time Japanese women had few rights and were relegated to serving men. We worked with Fujiko Nakaya, a cloud physicist and other women physicists, which was quite radical at the time. In Osaka there were around thirty of us, living together communally.

Pepsi had built this awful Buckminster Fuller dome. So we got Fujiko Nakaya, and the American physicist Thomas Mee to come up with a way to make steam to cover the structure so that it would only look like a cloud. So our pavilion was actually a cloud on the hill, with pipes also coming out of the various junctures of the Fuller Dymaxion building. So that it was invisible from a distance. Everything was an experiment. We had the largest circumflex mirrors in the world. Everything came out as a problem we tried to answer through collaborations between artists and engineers. There were performances, one by Remy Charlip in the mirror space, and David Tudor

wired it for sound in 360 degrees, which were very advanced concepts.

The pavilion was conceived to be an instrument that could be played so that we could have these happenings which employed sound, movement, video, projections. And the whole floor was wired so that everywhere you walked would have a different texture, there was a part with turf, grass, then you would walk into a part that had sound of the country, different sound in another part, then in the middle there was a big glass floor and ceiling which you could look down into where Bob Whitman had projections. His work was projected on the floor and you could see it on the ceiling. At Expo '70 there was another technology show curated by the Los Angeles County Museum, which was then shown as part of the L.A. exhibition Art and Technology (1971). There Whitman worked with the engineer John Forkner so that there would be projected images also involving mirrors so they seemed to move out in three dimensional space. They weren't exactly holograms, and they went back and forth in space.

But one day the executives of Pepsi Cola told us what we were doing was insane and that we had to stop. They wanted to turn the E.A.T. pavilion into a disco but we confronted them and it remained the E.A.T. pavilion.

As part of the program there was a part entitled "on live programing" that emphasized participation. Were these events related to discussions around concepts such as real time or immediacy?

There were more ideas than we could execute. Remy Charlip did a performance in the central space with the circumflex mirror in which you could see imaging floating in free space. Participation was from the people of E.A.T. not really from the general audience.

These questions of real time and immediacy were very much present in the art world in general at the time, especially with those involved in happenings. Whitman and Breer were really important in this area more than any one else. Whitman integrated films in his performances for instance. In *Prune Flat* (1965) for instance, he adopted the technique of the *Lanterna Magica*. He did very inventive things like projecting images on the ceilings.

Andrew Uroskie says that *Prune Flat* could be interpreted as a "theatre of projected images".

Well it was. The images were projected against the screen and the performers would be standing in front of the images of themselves and step out on to the stage as if they were materializing from the film projection. In other words the real performance was projected and recorded on the screen and then the performers would walk out so that they seem to walk out of the movie onto the stage. All of Whitman's performance involved

projections, as I recall. There were incredibly inventive. He was a real pioneer.

For Whitman they were "theatre pieces" and Michael Kirby wrote about them in the context of happenings.

Michael Kirby was part of the discussion and took part in some E.A.T. performances as well. And you also had Jean Tinguely who was living in New York and was already a kinetic artist. It was a very international moment in New York, you had the Swedes, the French, there was Niki de Saint Phalle doing live performances. Arman moved to New York where he did kinetic pieces. When I saw the first piece Tinguely did I was in Paris, I was sitting outside the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris and there was a guy who was creating paintings but they moved.

The question of kineticism comes up a lot in that context.

The floor in the E.A.T. pavilion was interactive, and all of the pieces were always in motion. For instance Rauschenberg's piece, which he did later, which lights up as you walk up by it was totally interactive. Len Lye was in New York at the time. We were very aware of his work, but it seemed to be coming from some place else. And we all knew for example Takis, he had a show in New York. That's real kinetic art not based on painting but on earlier ideas about movement. And the Zero Group, which is connected back to, say, Moholy-Nagy and the early kinetic pieces. E.A.T. was coming out of something else, totally different, connected to the American love affair with technology as well as the idea of a theatrical installation. It was a desire to also use time as an aspect of visual art, time being the fourth dimension. If you look at Rauschenberg, you see many works include clocks. So there was this desire to use time.

I would like to go back to 9 Evenings. Several of the evenings had moving images. *Fahlström* showed his film on *Mao and Bob Hope*; *Alex Hay* had his face projected behind him in a kind of feedback.

Yes, the artists worked on a very sophisticated level. But the most complex piece was Rauschenberg's, *Open Score* (1966). It featured Rauschenberg playing tennis with Frank Stella. The floor and the rackets were wired. Every time the racket hit the ball there would be a sound and it was videotaped and projected in real time. Every time they hit the ball one light would get lower and the game was over when it was all black. The projection was on a wall above your head so that you could see it. It was a feedback. You would see the actual action then see it larger, projected. And because of the way it was wired, every time they hit the ball a light would go out

and the game was over when all the lights were out.

You said you were working with the most advanced technologies of the time. How was film perceived in that technological context?

We just saw it as a material. The Rauschenberg piece had to use video to contrast real with projected action. However, film was certainly an avant-garde preoccupation. I curated an exhibition called *Films by Painters and Sculptors*. I showed Man Ray, Oldenburg who made a movie of a happening, Lucas Samara's *Self* (1969), Smithsonian' *Spiral Jetty* (1970), all the films that had been made by painters and sculptors. It was an obvious leap, and someone who made the leap successfully like Julian Schnabel who is a terrible artist but great filmmaker who managed to do Hollywood films. Robert Longo also made Hollywood films shown in traditional movie theatres. As a matter of fact we went to Anthology Film Archives all the time.

I also taught a course at UC Irvine on the history of avant-garde films. And I did an exhibition with Moira Roth on Marcel Duchamp, the first one on the West Coast after Walter Hopps' Pasadena show, called *Marcel Duchamp Choice or Chance*. The idea was that Duchamp was really there. He had done some radio speeches so I got those tapes. I interviewed everyone who knew him, like John Cage, Jasper Johns, Octavio Paz, and Hans Richter. Those sound tapes were playing the whole time. I also had every movie that Duchamp had participated with, and Richter who I was friend with gave me *Dreams that money can buy* featuring Duchamp as an actor. The films were projected in the exhibition all the time. Every film that Duchamp had ever been in as well as every film he made were part of the exhibition on a loop constantly. There were also slide projections of Duchamp. This was after I came back from Japan to teach at U.C., Irvine. But I suppose I was inspired by E.A.T. which was incredible. Everyone was experimenting, even though sometimes it didn't work. And it didn't go back to anything. It didn't go back to Dada, it didn't go back to early film. It was innovative. What is happening today in video, in projections really was anticipated by E.A.T. The difference is that E.A.T. also had the goal of social transformation and group participation. It was like Rauschenberg and Klüver, idealistic and utopian. In the context of late capitalism, that spirit has been lost, replaced by shock, sensation, and huge scale.