

Technoetic Serendipity: Celebrating 10 Years of the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program in Shanghai, the Planetary Collegium 30th anniversary and Roy Ascott 90th Anniversary, at ISEA 2024

Clarissa Ribeiro, Roy Ascott, Eleanor Zhang

Affiliation: Roy Ascott Studio, DeTao Masters Academy at the at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts

Location, Country: Shanghai, China

Contact Emails: cr@clarissaribeiro.com, roy.ascott@btinternet.com, zhangtingting@detaoma.com

Abstract

In 2024, the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts marks a significant milestone—its 10th anniversary. This institutional presentation at ISEA 2024 aims to showcase the journey of the program, highlighting the innovative works and outcomes produced by its talented 4th-year and 3rd-year students who were incentivized to submit short papers and artist talk proposals to the ISEA 2024 Student stream. Roy Ascott and Clarissa Ribeiro— Technoetic Arts Program Director and the recipient of the Pete Townshend Endowed Senior Lecturership in Performative Technoetics (2023-2024), will shed light on the intersection of art, science, and technology, as manifested in the students' projects and the studio education radical innovative philosophy. A unique element of the proposal involves organizing an edition of the 'LASER talks at Roy Ascott Studio' at ISEA 2024, providing a platform for intellectual exchange and exploration of aspects of Technoetic Aesthetics. The Planetary Collegium was conceived and established by Roy Ascott as the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts (CAiiA) 30 years ago, in 1994, at the University of Wales, Newport. At ISEA 2024, the joint celebration invites former Planetary Collegium Ph.D. researchers to contribute by sending short video testimonials, showcasing the evolution of Technoetic Arts from their particular perspectives over 30 decades of history. This joint celebration at ISEA 2024 is intended to serve as a testament to the global impact of the Planetary Collegium program in our field worldwide and the impact of the Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts designed by Professor Roy Ascott with the collaboration of Clarissa Ribeiro and the seminal team back in 2014. The short video messages from former Planetary Collegium Ph.D. researchers and former students from the T Technoetic Arts Program in China will be shared, offering heartfelt congratulations on the 90th birthday of Professor Roy Ascott.

Keywords

Technoetic Arts, Roy Ascott Studio, LASER Talks at Roy Ascott Studio, Performative Technoetics, Planetary Collegium, Roy Ascott Studio Advance Program in Technoetic Arts, Shifting Temporalities, Roy Ascott 90th Anniversary.

Introduction

Born on October 26, 1934, in Bath, Roy Ascott is an artist, theoretician, and visionary thinker [1] whose impact has resonated since the 1960s, leaving an indelible mark on the global digital art community. Renowned for his numerous publications and works, Ascott has exhibited at prestigious venues, including the Venice Biennale, Shanghai Biennale, Milan Triennale, Ars Electronica Festival, Plymouth Arts Centre, and the Incheon International Arts Festival in South Korea.



Figure 1. Roy Ascott during the Prix ceremony 2014, Photo: Florian Voggeneder [1].

When asked for advice to young media artists creating their own works [1], Roy Ascott, a Visionary Pioneer of Media Art, emphasized the importance of leading from the heart. He suggested working from the inside out, prioritizing a genuine and emotional response to the artistic situation rather than being solely reactive to tools or technology.

Ascott cautioned against the common tendency in the field to respond exclusively to the latest technological trends or conform to gallery conventions. Expressing concern about the allure of cutting-edge devices like iPhones and iPads, he underscored the potential danger of becoming infatuated with technological sophistication. Instead, he urged emerging artists to first identify what is important from a heartfelt perspective and then choose tools that are most appropriate for the artistic vision.

The crux of Ascott's advice lies in avoiding the trap of technology for its own sake. He acknowledged the prevalent tendency in interactive art to prioritize technology without a deeper connection to artistic intent. By encouraging a more rounded and holistic approach, Ascott advocated for a conscious alignment of heart-driven creativity with technology, ensuring that the tools chosen serve and enhance the artistic purpose rather than overshadowing it.

In formulating the curriculum for the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts [2], Roy Ascott envisioned a revolutionary perspective where the behavioral ritual serves as a creative principia. This concept carries profound implications, suggesting the potential to instigate a transformative shift in human behavior. Ascott's proposal delves into the idea that engaging in behavioral rituals can cultivate an elevated awareness of global issues including safeguarding peace, protecting human rights, and establishing the framework for international justice and fighting climate change. The curriculum as it is implemented by Professor Clarissa Ribeiro who is the Director of the Program, is privileging experiments on Performative Technoetics, emphasizing the unique opportunity for students to actively participate in 'performative data visualization' experiences.

Through these experiences, students are encouraged to not only interact with but become entangled with artifacts—be they relational systems or more-than-relational objects. This engagement is seen as a dynamic action expressing real-time data, allowing for the visualization of information through active involvement. Ascott's vision involves a profound belief in the power of action to influence perception and behavior.

Crucially, this approach implies a recognition that a dynamic integration of art, science, and human values is not only possible but also highly desirable. Ascott envisions a cultural landscape where an essentially cybernetic vision serves as a unifying force, seamlessly blending art, science, and human values. In this visionary framework, the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program seeks to nurture a new generation of artists who, through their creative endeavors, contribute to a holistic and cybernetically informed cultural paradigm.

Introduction to the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts in China

Founded on the visionary definition of Technoetics [3] by Roy Ascott, the 4 year Bachelor program embraces a convergence of digital, telematic, chemical, and spiritual dimensions, the program challenges students to delve into the realms of consciousness and connectivity through a diverse array of technological and artistic mediums.

Roy Ascott's vision of Technoetics propels students towards synthesizing art that navigates the complexities of telematics, nanotechnology, quantum computing, cognitive science, pharmacology, and esoterica. This syncretic approach compels students to explore planetary connectivity, bottom-up construction, augmented cyberception, field consciousness, and psychic instrumentality.

Within this rich tapestry of exploration, students engage in a broad spectrum of artistic practices, spanning digital telecommunications, Internet connectivity, screen-based hypermedia, intelligent architecture, robotics, virtual reality, artificial life, sonic art, and more. The program's aims and objectives are rooted in developing technoetic art practice in China at the highest international level, fostering progressive teaching, learning, and research that embrace cybernetic, telematic, technoetic, and syncretic methodologies.

The curriculum structure [2] was designed and pioneer implemented by Roy Ascott in 2014, in conversation with Professor Clarissa Ribeiro as part of the studio seminal team that included Mujin Bao, Stavros Didakis, and Sandra Alvaro. Professor Ribeiro was invited to move to Shanghai after one year in Los Angeles as a Fulbright-founded Post-Doctoral Scholar, working as a researcher at the James K. Gimzewski Lab and a member of the UCLA Art|Sci Center and Lab collective.

In the program conceptions, threads, such as Telematics Narrative, Moistmedia, Syncretic Environment, Behavioural Studies, Cyberception and Communications, weave together various aspects of the technoetic arts. Skills are imparted incrementally, aligned with the developmental needs of each student's work, and are facilitated through scheduled access to skill stations. Course modules, designed collaboratively based on the lattice model, reflect the emergent yet stable nature of the curriculum. Subjects include Comparative Paradigms of Art — Bridging East and West, Cybernetics, Moistmedia, Narrative, Cyberception, Behaviour-Identity-Environment, Tools, Software and Systems, Personal Development, and Critical Integration/Methodology.

As the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program propels students into the forefront of technoetic exploration, it remains a dynamic hub where creativity, technology, and consciousness converge to shape the future of artistic expression, being the students successfully admitted for MFA programs abroad including programs at MIT in the United States and The Royal College of Arts in the UK

The Planetary Collegium 1994-2024

As conceived and directed by Ascott, the Planetary Collegium [4] stood as a dynamic assembly of artists, theoreticians, and scholars committed to transdisciplinarity and syncretism. Its overarching mission was to advance research in the practice and theory of new media art, with a particular emphasis on telematics and technoetics. The culmination of this research journey resulted in the conferral of the University of Plymouth [4] Ph.D. to doctoral candidates and post-doctoral research actively pursued within the Planetary Collegium.

Under Ascott's visionary leadership, entangled with the leadership of the nodes Directors, the Planetary Collegium attracted an impressive array of internationally well-established figures, including artists, musicians, performers, designers, architects, theorists, and scholars, all engaged in groundbreaking doctoral and post-doctoral research. This vibrant community extended beyond its core members to include supervisors, honorary members, and general members who aligned with the Planetary Collegium's aims and interests, actively participating in its ongoing development.

The Planetary Collegium [4] took pride in its geographically dispersed membership, reflecting its commitment to global inclusivity. Research sessions and public conferences, primarily held in Asia, Australia, the Americas, and Europe, further contribute to its international character. Nodes established in Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and China served as vital hubs, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across continents.

A significant and entangled facet of the Planetary Collegium is the internationally acclaimed research conference series, *Consciousness Reframed: Art and Consciousness in the Post-Biological Era*. Instituted by Roy Ascott, this annual gathering brought together presenters from all over the world, creating a platform for rich discourse on the intersection of art and consciousness. This conference series encapsulated the Planetary Collegium's commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and fostering a global community dedicated to exploring the transformative potential of new media art. In 2024, an edition of the international conference will take place in Shanghai and telematically from July 5 to 7. The theme for CR 2024 is "The Chimæric Mind," exploring the ethical, philosophical, political, spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic facets of the profound intersection between machine and human cognition. In a world where artificial intelligence propels discussions across disciplines, challenging our understanding of reality, self, and the potential futures of humanity, our conference aims to dissect and envision the implications of this synthesis.

Final Considerations

The institutional presentation at ISEA 2024 in Brisbane is intended to reflect a commitment to pushing the boundaries of art, technology, and consciousness. The integration of Leonardo ISAST's LASER talks at Roy Ascott Studio, together with the inclusion of short video messages from former Planetary Colleagues worldwide and former students from the Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts in Shanghai, is an invitation to the ISEA 2024 community to celebrate together the legacy of Professor Roy Ascott's didactic perspective and the impact of his propositions and initiatives under the umbrella of a Technoetic Aesthetics, underlining the interconnectedness of the global community shaped by his influence through the programs he implemented and directed.

The commitment to a rounded and holistic approach, leading from the heart, echoes throughout the presentation. It serves as a guiding principle, urging artists to prioritize genuine emotional responses over the allure of the latest technological trends.

May this celebration inspire continued innovation and collaboration in the ever-evolving intersection of art, technology and the mind.

Acknowledgments

Roy Ascott, Clarissa Ribeiro, and Eleanor Zhang acknowledge the contribution of the faculty and students of Roy Ascott Studio Advance Program in Technoetic Arts, the leading contributors from DeTao Masters Academy and the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts.

References

- [1] Roy Ascott, "We Should Lead From The Heart", 1. October 2014, interviewed by Martin Hieslmair, *Ars Electronica*, 2014, accessed on January 14th 2024, <https://ars.electronica.art/aeblog/en/2014/10/01/roy-ascott-wir-sollten-unserem-herzen-folgen/>
- [2] Roy Ascott, "Roy Ascott Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts," accessed on January 12, 2024, <https://www.royascottstudio.com/>
- [3] Roy Ascott, "Technoetic Aesthetics: 100 Terms and Definitions for the Post-Biological Era (1996)", in Roy Ascott, *Telematic Embrace, Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness*, Edited and with an essay by Edward Shanken, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003, p. 375-383.
- [4] University of Plymouth, "Planetary Collegium," accessed on January 12, 2024, <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/planetary-collegium>
- [5] Clarissa Ribeiro, "Open call for submissions — CR2024 International Conference Consciousness Reframed 2024: The Chimæric Mind," accessed on April 5, 2024, <https://sites.google.com/view/consciousnessreframed2024/theme>

Authors Biographies

Dr. Clarissa Ribeiro, Program Coordinator of the Roy Ascott Studio Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts at SIVA/DeTao in Shanghai, has been honored with the Pete Townshend Endowed Senior Lectureship in Performative Technoetics (2022-2024). Ph.D. in Arts (ECA USP Brazil, Poéticas Digitais/CAiA hub of The Planetary Collegium, UK), Fulbright Postdoctoral Scholarship awardee (UCLA, Art|Sci Center/James Gimzewski Lab, US), M.Arch. (IA USP, Brazil), B.Arch, member of the UCLA Art|Sci Collective (2013-present), is the chair of the first Leonardo/ISAST LASER talks to be hosted in Brazil/Latin America (2017-present). The core of her explorations is the interest in cross-scale information and communication dynamics that impact and shape macro-scale emergent phenomena. She explores the metaphysics of information visualization in subversive morphogenetic strategies that welcome the animistic to navigate ecologies as cosmologies.

Roy Ascott, recipient of the first Ars Electronica Golden Nica award for Visionary Pioneers of Media Art, focuses on the impact of digital and telecommunications networks on consciousness. His work has been shown at the Shanghai Biennale, Venice Biennale, Milan Triennale, Biennale do Mercosul Brazil, European Media Festival, INDAF 2010 Korea, and the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris. His work is in the permanent collection of the Tate Gallery, London and other notable collections. He has advised universities, arts councils, media centers, and festivals in Europe, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Japan, Korea, USA and UNESCO. He is the founding President of the Planetary Collegium, an international network for doctoral research. In 2012, Roy Ascott became DeTao Master of Technoetic Arts at the DeTao Masters Academy, to promote the development of teaching and research in art, science, technology and consciousness in China. Since 2017, he has also been the Chief Specialist of the Visual Art Innovation Institute at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

Eleanor Zhang (Zhang Ting Ting) is the Personal Assistant to the 'Roy Ascott Studio' at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, DeTAO Masters Academy, and the 'Advanced Program in Technoetic Arts. Eleanor graduated from Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics. Since 2016, she has been responsible for assisting all programs, events, and activities in the Studio, including teaching, exhibitions, workshops, field trips, and publications. Zhang Ting Ting actively contributes to the delivery of the courses, discussing theoretical and practical didactic aspects of the program philosophy with faculty, administrative, and students.