HENRY CHOPIN-ELECTRONICS AND THE COMPUTER

"Never will science be able to do more than provide the imaginative edifices of the mind with arms and new elements. Science would not outlive man, but man could outlive science." Elie Faure: L'Art Moderne, Paris. 1948 edition.

I was one of the first to launch sound-poetry — the poetry that made use of electricity and electronics, going beyond the poetry of the written page and the phonetic poetry that was current between 1905 and 1945. This was around the year 1955.

There were a few of us concerned with a type of orality relayed by tape-recorders and also with our voices, which made use of the technical means that the progress of discoveries in recording placed at our disposition. We considered that, just as in the fourteenth century there had been the great revolution of printing, in the nineteenth and twentieth century another revolution had resulted from the use of electricity.

Therefore we used electronic means, but I wish to make absolutely clear that we used and are using them without the slightest respect for these contrivances, which remain, in fact, little more than useful devices for us and not an aim, just as the painting is more important than the brush, and man more important than the 'computer arts society'.

We also used these means out of respect for the first inventor of the recording-machine — the Zutist, Charles Cros, who gave birth to this type of appliance before Edison — a man was at the origin of the machine.

Over a little more than fifteen years, I have produced a score of works of electronic poetry, about fifteen of which have been published in my review OU (the first and still the only anthology of sound poetry) and later in Sweden, in Holland and in London. I have introduced this sound-poetry into about twenty countries and fifteen radio stations- there was even a survey of public opinion carried out concerning this subject in Czechoslovakia in 1965.

Finally, I must have published some seventy works of sound-poetry by various authors — from Sweden, England, France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, U.S.A, Belgium, etc.

Then, with Francois Dufrêne, I sonorised the exhibition 'Light and Movement' in Paris in 1967, using light modulators in Yaacov Agam's pavilion; I also made the first audio-poetic film, with Luc Peire and Tjerk Wicky in 1963, followed by a second with Gianni Bertini and Serge Béguier in 1965.

This is a rough outline of those of my activities which are concerned with electronics, and contiguous to the computers I am now going to discuss.

But I must first of all state what I have been able to discover by the use of electronics.

Before using the latter, I knew that discursive, didactic language and alphabetical language imposed limits on human imagination and creation. I also knew, by experience, that since the classical age, language had become so intellectualised as to be reduced to an arbitrary system of logistics, language becoming a useful means for exchange and a so-called spiritual utility. And no more than that. Since the classical age, time, by unifying the languages in each nation, had destroyed the freedom of the imagination, by canalising men's observations into grammar (that ridiculous skeleton grafted onto language, and forming a ruling force over life) and into spoken or written language.

In short, language had become mediocre, because it had been normalised — I say this without questioning the rare wonders that exist in language, produced by certain poets.

Language had, in fact, become constraint. So I made use of electronics since I had neither the time nor the means to train choirs, such as I had heard, for instance, in the Soviet Union, India and Annam. And also because these choirs belonged to works that had come from the past, like others that I had heard in Lapland.

For a new century, something new had to be created.

The result was that, by using electronics, I realised that one single man could become a multitude of choirs and that my single voice, too, could become more than an orchestra. Reproducing my voice — which had been trained in diction and recital — at eight or twelve different speeds, arranging these with the help of between four and fifty two superimpressions and, moreover, by using microphones very near the mouth, so as to make my physical labial force heard, I became aware of a multitude of phonemic values going far beyond any alphabetical language, and far beyond the sounds used by man to exchange impressions or opinions. So, just for the sake of counting, I have never been able to sort out the 40,000 or so phonemic variations that a single voice can possess — I say 40,000, just as future generations will say even more.

In this way, I discovered a life in continual expansion, just as the whole of creation must be.

At the same time, the computer arrived on the scene, as a monster in the hands of politicians, as a recuperator of memory-stocks in the hands of researchers. But the inventors and researchers of computers have forgotten one very important thing — they have forgotten that computers were made only to work from what already exists, and that is extremely limited (e.g. to reproduce Beethoven) — they are incapable of producing pre-Chopin. So the computer is always running after me, as it runs after life and after any man.

So this, briefly, is what I think of the computer. Give me it, so that I can prove — (remember Rimbaud saying 'La main à plume vaut la main à charrue') — that the hand with a computer is just as good as the hand with the plough. If you like, it is no more than the car I use to take me to London, but — and this is urgent — get it out of the hands of petty dictators, of petty industrialists, who use it for repression, whether morally, emotionally or in reality. Do not become the accomplice of those who make use of our lives.

November 1970
Henry Chopin, The Gate House, Station Lane, INGATESTONE, Essex, England.

JOHN WHITNEY FILMOGRAPHY

1939-1940

Untitled of lunar eclipse, 8mm, color, silent, 5 minutes.
TWENTY-FOUR VARIATIONS, with brother James Whitney, 8mm, color, silent, 5 minutes.
Three untitled films with James Whitney, each 8mm, color, silent, about 5 minutes average.

1943
FIVE FILM EXERCISES# 1, with James Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 5 minutes.

1944
FIVE FILM EXERCISES # 2-3, with James Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 4 minutes.
FIVE FILM EXERCISES # 4, with James Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 6 minutes.
FIVE FILM EXERCISES # 5, with James Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 4 minutes.

1951-1953
CELERY STALKS AT MIDNIGHT, 16mm, color, sound, 3minutes.
HOTHOUSE, 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes.
MOZART RONDO, 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes.

1955
LION HUNT, 35mm, color, 3 minutes.
BLUES PATTERN, 35mm, color, 3 minutes.
PERFORMING PAINTER, 35mm, color, 3 minutes.

1961
CATALOG, 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes.

1967
HOMMAGE TO RAMEAU, 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes.

1968
PER.MU.TA.TION.S, 16mm, color, sound, 7½ minutes.
EXPERIMENTS IN MOTION GRAPHICS, 16mm, color, sound, 20 minutes. (Originally made in 1967 as a silent titles ASPEN TALK, sound added in 1968.)

1969
CRIA, with son Michael Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 8 minutes.
BINARY BIT PATTERNS, with Michael Whitney, 16mm, color, sound, 8 minutes.

1970
Film for IBM pavilion at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan. Two films in progress.

Filmography compiled by Richard Brick for his interview with John Whitney which will be published in Film Culture.

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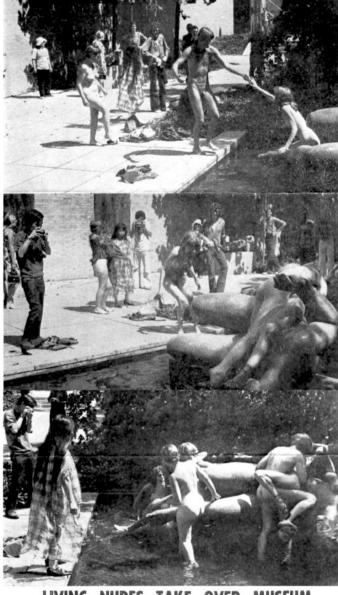Herbert A.Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial.M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969. pp.123, $5.00.

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LIVING NUDES TAKE OVER MUSEUM

NEW YORK, Mon:

THE NUDES at the Museum of Modern Art yesterday were not just paintings and statues. Six young women and two men shed their clothes and frolicked in the sunny Museum garden and reflecting pool amid larger-than-life nude statues.

The bare romp, staged by Kayol Kusama, a 29-year-old Japanese sculptress, took Museum officials by surprise. Miss Kusama, who previously staged nude "happenings" on Wall Street and near the United Nations, said the Museum was a place where "you can take off your clothes in good company."

And so her accomplices did, as 200 visitors and an astonished security guard looked on in apparent shock.

As the eight nudes stood in the pool and mimicked their stone and metal companions, Chief Security Officer Roy Williams pleaded with them to get dressed. But the young people held their poses.

Miss Kusama said the display had a serious purpose—to protest what she called the museum's lack of modernity. She called it a "mausoleum of modern art."

Williams, after 20 minutes, convinced the nudes to dress and leave. As he escorted them from the enclosed garden on West 54th Street, he warned them never to return. (AP)

SEE UNDER UNITED STATES

LONDON

6 January 1971 Colin Emmett: Interactive Graphics for 3-D Structures. 3 February 1971 Malcolm LeGrice: An Evening of Computer Animation. Both meetings at the British Computer Society, 29 Portland Place, London, W.1. at 7.30 pm. For members and guests.

One of London's best bookshops is COMPENDIUM BOOKS, 240 Camden High Street, N.W.1. Tel. 01-Gul 8944. Open Monday till Saturday 10-30 am - 7.p.m.

Apart from a large and exciting stock on politics, ecology, fiction and poetry, they stock London's largest collection of 'underground' publications, many from America.

BRIGITTE BARDOT (pictured here) has joined a Committee for the Defence of Private Lives. For an annual £7 10s. subscription the Committee aids its members to fight in the Courts intrusions into their private life "by the Press, books, radio and TV."
WOT! NOT COMPUTER?
Evening Standard, London, 4.12.1970.

GERMANY

Nürnberg Institut für Moderne Kunst has recently published the first number of "Mitteilungsblätter", edited by Heinz Neidel.

The Braun-Preis for Technical Design worth D M 10.000 has been won by Juergen Jaehnert and Avel Lintner for a teaching computer for data processing that for the first time organises all required elements into a formal unity. There were 149 entries from 16 countries.

Karlheinz Stockhausen has formed a new Ensemble for experimental electronic music since his return from Osaka. Two of his pupils have formed a group called 'Feedback', they are Johannes Fritsch from Cologne, and the American Rolf Gelhar.

The Max Planck Institute for the Physiology of Work at Dortmund wants to develop objective methods for controlling the teaching of musical instruments. Dr. Christoph Wagner is head of the team of researchers who are employing an electronic calculator.

Werner Heisenberg gave the main speech at the annual meeting of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. His subject was 'The significance of beauty in the mathematical sciences'.

UNITED STATES

Swallow Press is now distributing the '1971 Anarchist Revolutionary Calendar' by Torwald Faegre, $ 2. It is illustrated with woodcuts, cartoons and photographs, and for each day of the year gives an event in revolutionary history. A MUST for the computer executive practicing radical chic. He will also be expected to have handy the Directory of Amerika's 490 Most Controversial Periodicals, 1968, Guideline Publications, 21813 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley, (where else?) California, 94705. This is a useful adjunct to Muller's From Radical Left to Extreme Right, Campus Publishers, Ann Arbor, 1967.

First reports soon after the opening of the SOFTWARE exhibition which appeared in Village Voice, indicated that artists were having difficulties with the organisers. Now an open letter signed by many of the exhibitors has appeared in the December issue of Studio International. This makes sad reading. According to the letter the show is going to Washington. As we said in the last issue of PAGE, check.

Computer People for Peace have a new address: c/o Dolphin Center, 137 West 14th Street, (third floor), New York, N.Y. 10011. Phone: 212-924-0894. The Dolphin Center serves as the office and meeting place of other groups. CPP issues a newsletter called INTERRUPT. Why not write in for a sample copy. Membership dues are $ 10 per year. Until recently the group was known as Computer Professionals for Peace.

There are now about 100 members of the Society in North America, and the formation of an American branch on the pattern of CASH, the Dutch CAS, has been discussed. Such a group might organise some events, produce one issue of PAGE each year, and be responsible for membership records in North America. Alan Sutcliffe would be glad to hear from anyone prepared to set up CASUS.

The picture on the cover is from INFORMATION, the catalogue of an exhibition organized by Kynaston McShine last summer. This volume consists of over 200 pages, with many illustrations and documents. There is an extensive bibliography, list of exhibitions, etc. Like the other recent New York exhibition SOFTWARE, there is a strong emphasis on Conceptual Art. The price is $4. Order from: Marna Thoma, Department of Circulation, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. U.S.A.

WHERE NOW?
ALAN SUTCLIFFE

Some attitudes were agreed by those of us who first met two years ago to talk about forming the Society. They were attitudes of neutrality and inclusiveness. That is why we chose the commonplace name of the society, even while agreeing that the term Computer Art was to be deprecated. It is still a convenient shorthand for 'creative work in which a computer has been used'.

I felt that any such work deserved a showing and its author a hearing. No matter how trivial, I thought it was significant that someone had used a computer to make something. Jonathan Benthall criticised this viewpoint in a letter in PAGE 8. While I hope that we were approaching a time when works in which a computer had been used would be judged independently of that fact, I did not think we were yet there.

For me now that time has come, and to my first critical rule (was the work one that could not so well have been done without a computer) I add a second — was it worth doing anyway? More fail than pass.

Are we now approaching the next state that I foresaw — where it is no longer remarked at all that a computer was used in making a work, where a Computer Arts Society seems as anachronistic as a Paper Arts Society would, (the use of paper in the arts is pervasive and its influence significant). Certainly we are approaching it, but we have a long way to go.

Although they can be combined, there are two distinct ways of using computers in creative work: for process control and for procedured art. In process control some existing equipment or process, such as an electronic music studio or film animation, is automated. This is not so much the creative use of computers as the use of computers in a creative process.

"It is one thing to aim for a particular timbre of sound and then to search for the means of making such a sound and timbre audible. It is another thing to provide for a series of events to happen and then to discover the timbre of the sounds so generated." Using these words of Herbert Brun, procedural art is to provide for a series of events to happen and to discover ......

There is no worthwhile use of computers in creative work, known to me that does not come into one of these two categories, process control or procedural art. I think these are the areas that should be concentrated on in the activities of the society. Both are sufficiently little understood for the society's basic aims of encouragement and communication to be valid. Both call for serious thought, work and discussion, and I hope that the society can provide a context for some of it.

COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY, AIMS AND MEMBERSHIP

The aims of the Society are to encourage the creative use of computers in the arts and to allow the exchange of information in this area

Membership is open to all at £1 or $3 per year; students half price. Members receive PAGE and reduced prices for Computer Arts Society public meetings and events. The Society has the status of a specialist group of the British Computer Society, but membership of the two societies is independent.

Libraries and institutions can subscribe to PAGE for £1 or $3 per year. Extra copies will be sent to the same address at half price. No other membership rights are conferred and there is no form of membership for organisations or groups. Re membership, subscription, circulation and information; write to Alan Sutcliffe.

COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY ADDRESSES
Chairman: Alan Sutcliffe, ICL, Brandon House, Broadway, Bracknell, Berkshire.
Secretary: John Lansdown, 50/51 Russell Square, London W.C.1.
Editor of PAGE: Gustav Metzger, BM/Box 151, London W.C.1.
Dutch Branch (CASH): Leo Geurts and Lambert Meertens, Mathematisch Centrum, Tweede Boerhaavestraat 49, Amsterdam, Holland.

HOLLAND

Computer-Aided Architectural Design Seminar Series. Three weekend workshops in CAAD in Rotterdam are being organised by Bond Nederlandse Architekten, and the Bouwcentrum. The dates are: 8-9 January: 15-16 January: 22-23 January, 1971. With speakers from Holland and Britain. Details from Mrs.M.Daru, CAAD Seminar, Rotterdam-3, Postbus 299, Weena 700, Holland.

In a few months time, the Dutch branch CASH will produce its annual number of PAGE. Would those members who wish to contribute to this in any way, please write to the Dutch Editors as soon as possible.

ANYONE FOR DAVOS?

The first European Management Symposium, organised by Centre d'Etudes Industrielles, Geneva, will take place in Davos, 24 January -5 February 1971. The meeting is aimed at senior executives, and speakers include those indispensibles of the international high-carat lecture circuit, Galbraith and Kahn. Before dashing off to see your travel agent, remember that the £500 registration fee does not include board and lodging. The executives will be regaled with a sight of the Computer Arts Society's travelling exhibition (seen by over 5,000 people at Computer 70 at Olympia, London, last October). The centre-piece of Computer 70, the Eco-Game will also be installed at Davos as part of the Symposium. Let's hope there will not be the constant waiting to access the game as at Olympia. George Mallen is flying over to install a revised version of the game; he will be assisted by Society member Mike Sender. This number of PAGE will be handed to participants.

STATEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the kind comments of Gustav Metzger at the end of my article in "PAGE II" and also put on record my thanks to CAS friends and others who during the past year have given me encouragement and help in keeping my work going. Jointly attacked by acute diabetes and financial collapse just over a year ago, there have been times when I have been tempted to abandon my research for a more comfortable and materially rewarding course, but there has always been somebody around to urge me on. Although severe limitation of resources has inhibited work on some of the more practical aspects of the work, the consequence of this constraint has been to eliminate some previous errors and greatly strengthen the theoretical intersection with existing knowledge in many areas. Thus my "rural ivory tower" image has been as much due to circumstance as to any motivation on my part.

With regard to the intuitive content of science which is close to that of art, all but the most hide-bound experimental reductionists would acknowledge its significance. For instance Sir Peter Medawar has called our attention to the role of imagination and the limits of objectivity in science[1] and J. Hadamard has made us aware of the role of imagination in mathematical discovery[2]. Nothing however describes the background to my own work more cogently than the following quote from Spencer Brown, which seems to me so potent of idea that it is worth presenting at length.

"Unfortunately we find systems of education today which have parted so far from plain truth, that they now teach us to be proud of what we know and ashamed of ignorance. This is doubly corrupt. It is corrupt, not only because pride itself is a mortal sin, but also because to teach pride in knowledge is to put up an effective barrier against any advance upon what is already known, since it makes one ashamed to look beyond the bonds imposed by one's ignorance. To any person prepared to enter with respect into the realm of his great and universal ignorance, the secrets of being will eventually unfold, and they will do so in a measure according to his freedom from natural and indoctrinated shame in his respect of their revelation. In the face of strong, and indeed violent, social pressures against it, few people have been prepared to take this simple and satisfying course toward sanity. And in a society where a prominent psychiatrist can advertise that, given the chance, he would have treated Newton to electric shock therapy, who can blame any person for being afraid to do so?

To arrive at the simplest truth, as Newton knew and practiced, requires years of contemplation. Not reasoning. Not calculating. Not busy behaviour of any kind. Not reading. Not talking. Not making an effort. Not thinking. Simply bearing in mind what it is one needs to know. And yet those with the courage to tread the path to real discovery are not only offered practically no guidance on how to do so, they are actively discouraged and have to set about it in secret, pretending meanwhile to be diligently engaged in frantic diversions and to conform with the deadening personal opinions which are continually thrust upon them. In these circumstances, the discoveries that any person is able to undertake represent the places where, in the face of induced psychosis, he has, by his own faltering and unaided efforts returned to sanity. Painfully, and even dangerously maybe. But nonetheless returned, however furtively."[3]

This profound and continently passionate statement speaks for all of us, artists no less than scientists, who seek to probe our present ignorance of our selves and the Universe, rather than follow the well-trodden and less risky paths favoured by our paymasters. Humanity is prepared to spend hundreds of millions on "homo bellicosum", "homo ludens" and "homo trivians", one would have thought a million or so for "homo potentians" and "homo hypotheticans" would be a sane investment.

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2. HADAMARD J   The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field, Princeton University Press, 1945

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Gordon Hyde, 11 The Close, DUNMOW, Essex, CM6 1EW

THE FIRST HONORARY LIFE MEMBER

The Computer Arts Society will elect each year as honorary life member a person who has made an outstanding contribution in the creative use of Computers.

The first honorary life member of the Society is John Whitney. He has recently taken up the post of Professor of Art at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91109. A Whitney Filmography and Bibliography is included in this issue of PAGE.

THE WORLD AROUND US-OR WHAT COCA COLA CALLS 'THE ECOLOGY'

In the course of nine months this year the car has turned from hero to villain in the minds of the people of Tokyo. 71% of those questioned in a survey do not wish to own a car. Evening Standard, London, 21.11.1970, p.11.

Finland has made the use of disposable bottles for beer and soft drinks illegal. Norway may follow suit.

WORLD EAR PROJECT BY KPFA RADIO

KPFA has initiated the World Ear Project in an attempt to bring all our ears a little closer. We are asking our listeners and friends all over the world to send us recordings made in common places of the sounds that surround our daily existance on the surface of this planet. The settings will be both natural (the open fields of Nebraska) or man-made (a street corner in Amsterdam).

The environments in which these recordings are made become the sole subject of the project. We welcome receiving tape recordings made at the highest fidelity possible, and this usually means either 7½ or 15 inches per second on good quality ¼-inch wide recording tape. The recording should be at least 10 minutes in duration and at most one hour. With each tape please supply the following information to insure proper broadcast: 1) details of environment recorded, including location, date, and time, with some remarks on what the sight looked like; 2) technical data including speed (7½ or 15 i.p.s.), full, half, or quarter track, mono or stereo; 3) make and model number of tape recorder used, and the microphone used; 4) your name, address, and telephone. Tapes should be properly packed for mailing, preferably in cardboard tape mailers, and sent to: WORLD EAR PROJECT, KPFA/FM 94,2207 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, California, 94704. U.S.A.

The KPFA Music Department is run by Richard Friedman and Charles Amirkhanian. Richard Friedman is a Society member, so when you write to KPFA, address your mailing to him, and mention CAS. He would be interested to broadcast other kinds of tapes than the ones specified above-music, poetry, and various kinds of documentation. Friedman's phone is: (415)848-6767 ext.6.

COMPUTER ART BOOKS BOOM

Next year will see the publication of books on computer art in Britain and in Germany. Now another book, to be published in America, has been announced. Leslie Mezei, a foremost authority on computer graphics, has been entrusted with the editing of a book to be produced by the New York Times in collaboration with Computers and Automation Magazine. The intention is to bring together the best art which has been done with the aid of the computer. The book will be published next Autumn. A letter from Dr. Mezei which reached us after the last issue of PAGE went to the printer, gives a deadline of 20 December 1970 for submission of material. Since we were asked to publicise this information, you might send any material you wish to submit immediately, explaining the delay.

Send only a few of your best works. Black and white material would be best on glossy photostats (G4 line might be best), or send the original. Only a few colour plates will be used in the book. In the case of film, the publishers might work directly from the film if of sufficient quality. For each work give title, medium, equipment, date, brief description of program. Also comments on why you made the work, what you like about it, etc.

Dr. Mezei would also like to have statements on computer art, views on its future, etc. The publication of the book may coincide with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Some of the works submitted may also be used in future issues of Computers and Automation; your submission of works to Dr. Mezei, will carry with it your permission to use it for any of these purposes. If you have any other queries please contact. Dr. Leslie Mezei, 56 Hurlingham Crescent, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada. Phone: 416-447-0753 (evenings and weekends) 416-928-6320 (in day time).

LEICESTER

The Architect Student Group, Leicester Polytechnic, has arranged a series of lectures under the heading: The Use of Computers in Design. These lectures take place on the 9th, 16th, 23rd, 25th February and 2nd March 1971. Speakers will be in order-Mark Lee; Dr. Christopher Evans; Dr. Thomas Maver; Geoffrey H. Broadbent; John Lansdown; Dr. Roger Gill. There is no admission fee, and everyone is welcome. Further information from Leslie Gili-Ross, Architecture, Leicester Polytechnic, Oxford Street, Leicester, England.