



NEW MEDIA

METHODS AND PRACTICES

CONFERENCE ESSAYS
QUEBEC, CANADA
MARCH 25TH AND 26TH, 2014



A HAZY THEMATIC

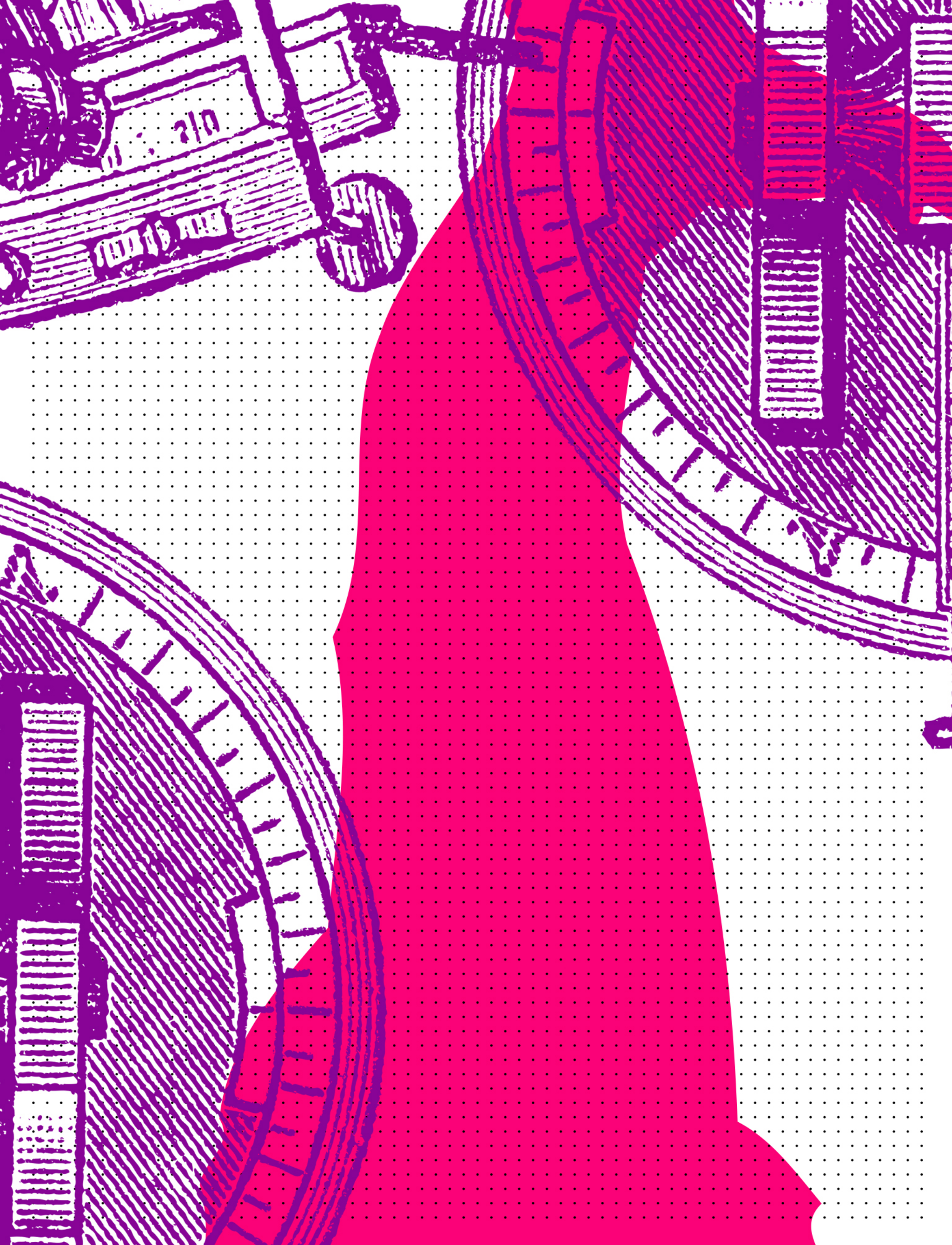
Without preparing conference proceedings per se, Avatar chose to publish five essays of personal reflections. These texts take the reader to the heart of the issues raised during the presentations and performances of the *New Media: Methods and Practices* conference, held at the Salle Multi of the Coopérative Méduse on March 25 and 26, 2014.

Two of the authors, Julie Faubert and Nathalie Bachand, agreed to participate in the conference as observers. Another contributor, Émile Morin, who also hosted the event's presentations and meetings, summarized his own research on the notion of the *dispositif* (apparatus). Last but not least, Jocelyn Robert, Director of the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval and partner of the event, expressed a dual point of view: of both institution and artist.

Organizing a conference on the current practices of “new media” with a vague theme certainly expands the parameters of discussion, but it also imposes the need to see and show, in different ways, the dynamics engendered by digital culture and media networks, as well as their ramifications for the methods and practices of artists. Starting from this premise, Avatar embarked on the adventure of a collective creation directly through the conference itself with a presentation of David Tudor's *Rainforest IV*. As a contribution to this publication and in memory of this shared artistic project, I have attempted to outline the process that led to its recreation.

In short, the observations made in this publication relate to the changes that have been occurring in artistic methods and practices as a counterpoint to digital and media art. To conclude, it should be noted that there is a direct resonance between these dynamics and the fields explored by Avatar. Enjoy your reading!

CAROLINE GAGNÉ





RAYS OF LIGHT AND RAYS OF SOUND: TRANSVERSALS READINGS

A strange role was proposed to me. A very particular role among all the possible roles (in life, as an artist, in a conference...): to be both fully there—looking, listening, taking in everything—and not there, somewhere else, on the outside, in the process of understanding, making connections, combining what is heard and seen with all the other things inside us, which are already creating noise, turmoil.¹

Two images dominated my thoughts when witnessing the parade of presentations, performances and discussions that took place last March 25 and 26 under the heading of *New Media: Methods and Practices*. First was the image, planted in our heads during the first hour of the conference by Avatar's artistic director Caroline Gagné: a moving beam of light that activated and illuminated everything around it, attempting to reveal what lies at the centre, without touching it directly. It was an image of knowledge, a way of knowing, something

¹ This is what being an observer is like, it seems to me.

that could be associated with transdisciplinary approaches, with a certain horizontality. Rather than exploring things in depth and increasing our store of information, it directed our attention *to the side*, around, close by. With subtlety, soundness—and accurate imprudence, I would add. It wasn't a question here of looking at the works as results to be grasped, or manifestations of meaning to analyze, identify (i.e. recognize as the *same*...), but rather to expand our view to embrace the full range of attitudes, frameworks, structures, constraints, ways of doing things ("forms-of-life," we might say, alongside Giorgio Agamben), which are involved in situating the artistic statements in time, space and in relation to current artistic propositions. To see art *at work*, to see it progress, finds its way, its meaning, by trying—even if we know it's often a waste of time—to silence our presumptions and preconceptions.

Then, there is the other image, a very concrete one this time, traversed, inhabited by bodies and sounds: roughly twenty, highly diverse suspended objects (a rusty gasoline barrel, a PVC tube, a mirror, a bicycle, a pail, cardboard boxes...) that resonated in the half-light of the Salle Multi of the Méduse complex in Quebec City. Speaker-objects through which visitors wandered, going from close-up listenings—the stop sign that seemed oversized, circumscribing a listening area with near-palpable boundaries—to a listening of the whole, the sum of objects and their sounds, between which exchanges were interwoven and acoustic forms stand out. *Rainforest IV*² depicts a "relationship between the world and its objects," remarked Julien Ottavi in his presentation; it is a system in which the figure of the artist-author disappears, resulting in a necessary collaboration between performers, but also between the sounds and objects: "a form of contemporary music that is much closer to the world in which we live."³

The electroacoustic environment preceded the words in the geography of the conference, serving as a kind of antechamber to the discussion; we thus

² *Rainforest IV* is a collaborative sound environment conceived by composer David Tudor and performed for the first time in 1973 at a workshop he conducted at the New Music in New Hampshire Festival. As part of this conference, Julien Ottavi (Apo33) presented this performance with artist Alexandre Berthier, and Najoua Bennani, Alexandre Bérubé, Jean-Michel René, students from the École des arts visuels.

³ Julien Ottavi, March 26, *New Media: Methods and Practices*. A number of quotations in the present text are from conference participants. Their names are mentioned in the body of the text, without footnotes, to avoid encumbering the text.

entered the second hall, the one chosen for our exchanges, strongly affected by the singular presence of these sounds and objects. Its horizontal approach—with neither centre nor hierarchy—contrasted with the classical arrangement of the adjoining room in which people sitting in tiers observed others on a raised platform with the standard equipment: microphones, chairs, portable computers, projection screen. Julien Ottavi referred to this as the “standardizing processes that entrap us,” questioning our ability to redirect or extend certain forms, certain mechanisms, which are far from neutral, as Foucault and Agamben have shown. Jacques Rancière states that “at least one more thing can always be done other than what is being done.”⁴ And would not the role of art be precisely this, to do this “one more thing”? The meetings between an artist and a condemned man (Jackie Sumell and Herman Wallace), the complex processes involved in apprehending a certain human geography (Victoria Stanton), the word paintings installed in several apartments in the low-income housing projects in Quebec City: are these not all ways of extricating oneself from the expected, predictable encounter frameworks of our Western lives?

Two images, then: a beam of nomadic light and these back-and-forth movements of sound in the space. In both cases, there is motion; the thoughts and experiences are mobile, they come and go, are not fixed. *New Media: Methods and Practices* approached these artistic practices from several angles, shaking up immobility, identity and—perhaps?—the designation of things. The questions heard in murmurs during these two days of exchanges and encounters—because we should certainly not pose them directly—exploded any attempt to reduce so-called “new media” artistic propositions to strictly technological aims. Art moves, it is not rooted to the spot, it refuses a nominative and referential framework, as illustrated by Frédérique Laliberté’s fiddling of telepresence (*Les àlenveritudes*), the salvaged objects linked by back-and-forth sounds (Julien Ottavi and others, *Rainforest IV*), Victoria Stanton’s “meetings in space,” Jackie Sumell’s “interruptions,” Alain-Martin Richard’s “moments of shaking,” an artist-run centre’s explorations of “other ways of inhabiting reality” (Danyèle Alain, 3e Impérial), a digital creation space linking art and science (Patrick Treguer, Le Lieu multiple), and the

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Chronicals of Consensual Times* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 10.

transdisciplinary artistic, technological and theoretical laboratory of Julien Ottavi (Apo33). Arising from these heterogeneous interventions are the complex dispositives (Agamben, 2007)—technological, human, material, social — which artists invent and in which they displace themselves in order to generate new sensory experiences. Does the term “new media” here thus become superfluous, awkward, inappropriate?

The obstinacy to name, circumscribe and identify that characterizes today’s world—and the art world in particular—prevents us from seeing through things, from perceiving fields of meaning that are as yet unnamed. In this light, I was delighted to learn that this conference lacked a theme⁵: instead of a theme was a position, a way of approaching contemporary creation. A semblance of disorder seemed to weave its ways through the event: something that persisted in being nameless nevertheless linked us together in the half-light. In spite of—or owing to?—the eclectic nature of the projects, it was possible to glimpse the lines of underlying meaning from which the actions and statements of the artists emerged—with the help of those invaluable individuals who help the process along. “The conference finally crystallized a desire to make sense within a complex system,” remarked Patrick Treguer at the last plenary discussion. Whether it be the inquiries of Jackie Sumell with regard to binary logic, from which several forms of violence spring (solitary confinement, massive arrests), the mental maps of Victoria Stanton or the diagrams that allow Julien Ottavi “to do things and to think about things,” it is always a matter of avoiding reductiveness, of opening the field of experience (and sometimes that of knowledge) to what is to come. Should we not be cultivating the joy of destabilization, the taste for what one does not know as an (ethical) necessity?

JULIE FAUBERT

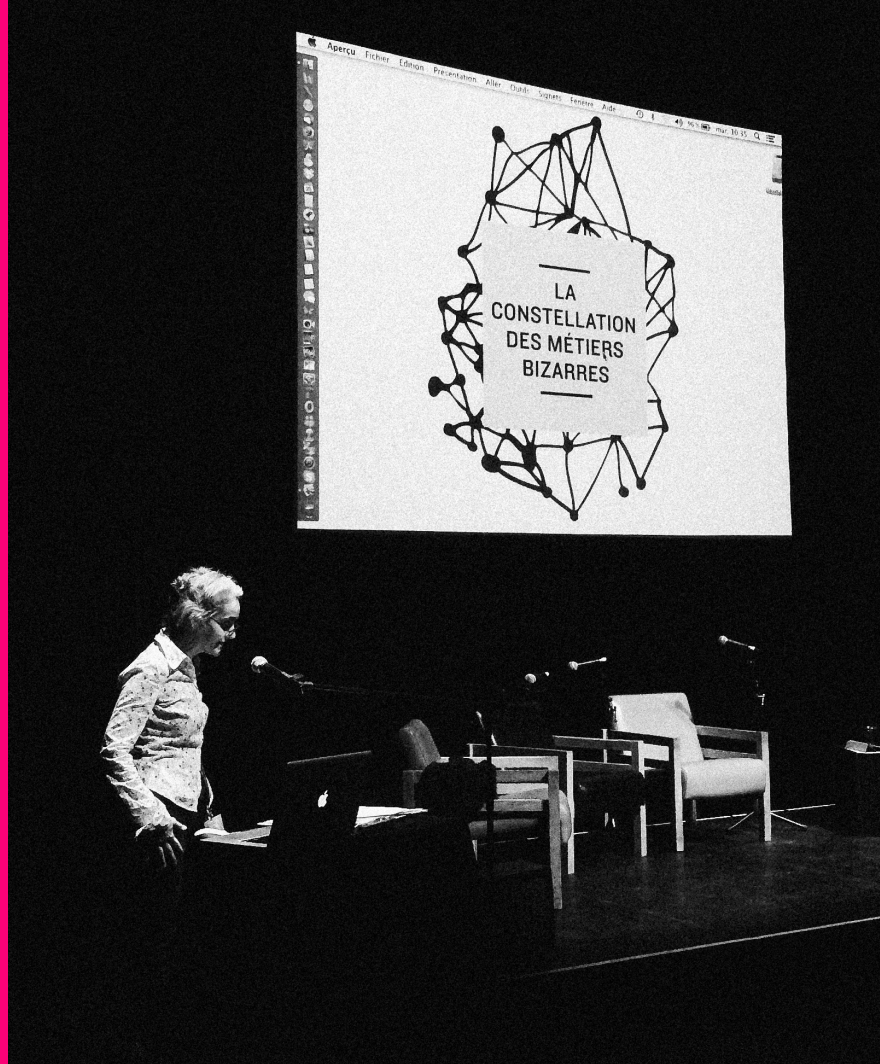
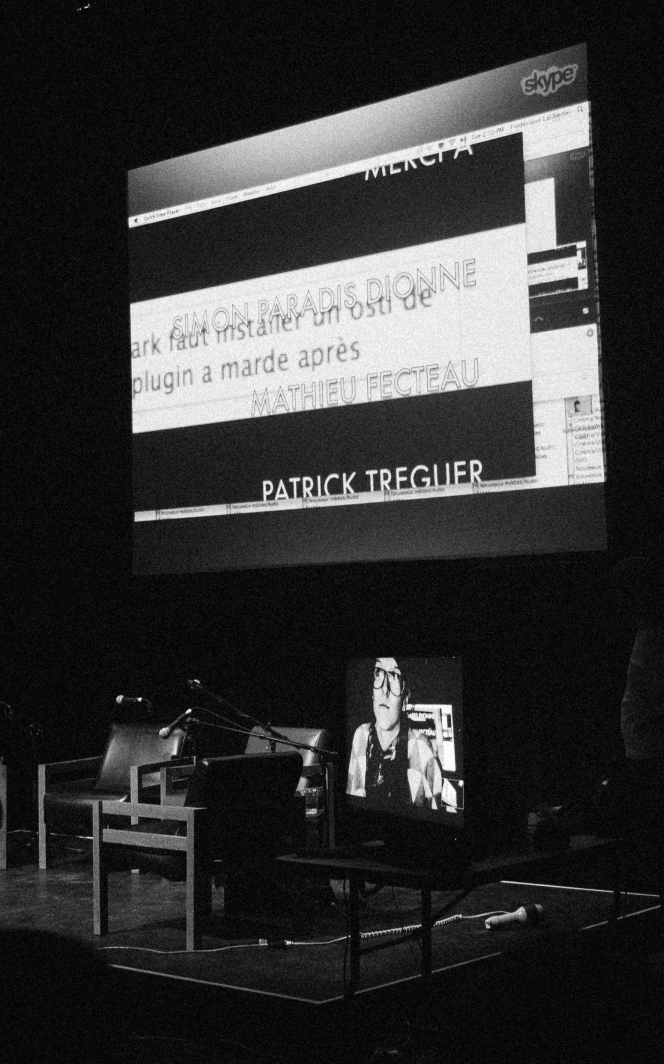
⁵ To my mind, the title *New Media: Methods and Practices* is a non-theme: the affirmation of a desire not to thematize art, practices, etc.

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POST-CONFERENCE REFLEXIONS

Around the middle of January, the Artistic Director of Avatar, Caroline Gagné, invited me to attend a conference—as an observer—that was being held in the spring of 2014. Avatar, an artist-run centre in Quebec City, is devoted to the creation, production, presentation and dissemination of audio and electronic art. It is unique in Quebec and Canada, playing an essential role in the ecology of the artistic community, in particular through its openness to the outside world. On March 24 and 25, I thus found myself at the conference entitled *New Media: Methods and Practices*—with eyes wide open, ears to the ground.

It may be best to start at the end: at the final plenary session, when the terms *self-determination* and *indetermination* were mentioned for the first time (at least within my earshot). They struck me in the most singular way. First, because they turned out to be the key words behind the conference; second, because the concepts had to be incorporated into the constellation I had been trying to map out for the last forty-eight hours.

Continuing in reverse order, the installation-performance *Rainforest IV*, the seminal work by pioneering sound artist David Tudor (1968-1973), opened the

second day of the conference, in its performance version. For the occasion, the work was interpreted by sound artist Julien Ottavi (also the founding director of Apo33, an organization based in Nantes), as well as students from the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval.¹ The first thing that should be pointed out about *Rainforest IV* is that it is a work based on collaboration and exchange. Not only was it the subject of a collective creation-interpretation exercise, but it invited the public itself to participate in the second performance at the conference's closing ceremonies.

Now back to the beginning. Over the course of the presentations, certain elements stood out more than others. Two in particular seemed to emerge on a recurring basis: on the one hand, the presentation of structures and methods that called for collaboration; on the other hand, practices that unfolded through exchanges—including *Rainforest IV*, which served as a catalyst for reflections on the second day. The question then arose: where are the new media? Nobody, or almost nobody, had so far even mentioned them, except occasionally to negate them. If the subject seemed off-limits, it was primarily because it was of little concern to most participants. Another question then followed: why invite people who are unfamiliar with new media to a conference on new media? To what end?

The premise underlying the conference's presentation text is that "propositions in current art are invariably directed towards a *new media* end." The assertion raises questions, to be sure: it can be read in various ways. Does it mean that artistic creation is a perpetual process of updating itself, at the core of which lie the seeds of what would eventually be called "new media"? As the same text affirms, moreover, it is a matter of "gambling on an approach based on ill-defined problematics." The notion of "media" embraces "all forms of structures, paradigms or networks," technological or not, which artists draw upon to create. As a result, there is a nebulousness surrounding the notion of "new media": it has been turned into an imprecise, polysemous term, which exceeds its own perimeter of meaning and which, in a way, takes it beyond itself.

¹ These student-artists included Najoua Bennani, Alexandre Bérubé, Audrey Bérubé, Jessica Bilodeau, Marie-Hélène Bochud, Carolyn Fortin, Vincent Fournier, Rosalyn Harrop, Jade Lacroix, Simon Laprise, Francis Ouellet, Rémy Pelletier and Jean-Michel René.

In opening the conference, moderator Émile Morin freely quoted Wayne Ashley (director of FuturePerfect in New York): “The new is no longer new... So what comes next?” As many have observed, the Avatar conference is emblematic of the post-media/post-digital² era. Referring to a realm beyond digital as we know it, these terms have proliferated in recent discourses, and their omnipresence denotes a disappearance.³ Some saw this coming long before others: Negroponte spoke of it in 1998 in “Beyond Digital,” his last monthly article in *WIRED* (a magazine he launched in 1993), predicting the programmed banality of digital. More recently, the theme of the latest edition of *transmediale*, entitled *Afterglow*, announced the end of the party of the digital era, with its promises of instantaneity, immaterial infinity and ubiquitous communication. In the introductory text to the Berlin festival, we find this statement: “*Afterglow* conjures up the ambivalent state of digital culture, where what seems to remain from the digital revolution is a paradoxical nostalgia for the futuristic high-tech it once promised us but that is now crumbling in our hands. The challenge that this moment poses is how to use that state of post-digital culture between trash and treasure as a still not overdetermined space from which to invent new speculative thought and practice.”⁴ Although we are at a critical juncture in the post-technological revolution—a time when our technological trash is sent to neighbouring continents under the pretext of giving them our old “toys”, when “programmed obsolescence” are the watchwords in marketing strategies, when we are henceforth slaves to our digital tools, endlessly tethered to the Internet—it is also a time to develop this still-indeterminate space where we’ll rethink a new situation.

This puts us in the context of the “self-determination” mentioned during the closing of the conference. By advancing the notion of incertitude and inexactness with regard to methods and practices, Avatar is placing itself in a position of resistance to the dictatorial attempts to define artistic practices—and to the technocentric attitudes that circumscribe certain practices as if one

² The terms post-media, post-digital and post-technological are used interchangeably in this text.

³ Paraphrase of Gregory Chatonsky in the introductory text for Emmanuel Lagrange Paquet’s exhibition *Histoires d’interactions*, presented at BIAN 2014 (<http://bianmontreal.ca/artistes/emmanuel-lagrange-paquet>).

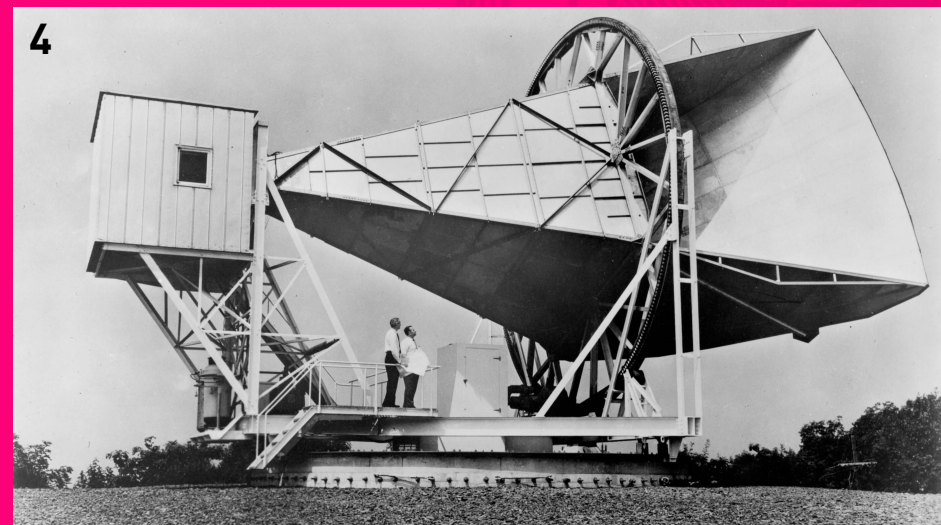
⁴ <http://www.transmediale.de/content/afterglow>

were taking possession of property. Indetermination, and therefore self-determination, thus become essential conditions for sparking ideas and for reserving a space for reflection, to rethink the current issues of the post-digital/post-media era.

To go back to the beginning, during the conference we observed on the one hand the presentation of structures (Patrick Treguer from Lieu multiple) and methods (Danyèle Alain from 3e Impérial) that invite collaboration, and on the other hand, the presentation of practices (Victoria Stanton, Jackie Summel, Frédérique Laliberté, Alain-Martin Richard) that develop through exchanges. We also noticed the scarcity of elements arising from new media and the prevalence of a post-media logic—conscious or not—underlying the conference. In a kind of aside, we then saw Julien Ottavi and Paul DeMarinis elucidating *Rainforest IV*, conferring upon it a special aura and, it would appear, a form of authority.

Is this emergence of themes that mirror modes of human relations a consequence of today's post-media condition? Are our deserts of technological waste inducing us to reinject humanity into our so-called "future" projects? Or, as stated by Victoria Stanton during the plenary discussion, would this be the only option that could save us from the predicted catastrophe? Certainly, collaboration and exchanges are working strategies—methods or practices—that are part of a collective modality: at least two individuals are necessary for any event to happen. Whether or not the event in question contains a "new media" component, it is defined by the concerted action of individuals, and therefore by an underlying desire, motivation or aim. In the end, the object or media element is always in human hands—extended out of desire—although it sometimes slips through our fingers.

NATHALIE BACHAND



ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DELAY

I am one of those who feel that the processes and procedures, the methods and practices of artistic creation are often more important than the final work itself. I always try to learn about them, in any case, since they contain the codes that will shape the work, from conception to presentation. They constitute the framework of the creation, leaving traces as obvious as they are necessary to the work's existence. This is not to be confused with the use of certain technical/technological tools, which also strongly influence the result, in the manner of an aesthetic mould whose traps must be openly acknowledged and confronted.

The processes that interest me relate to the rules of development and presentation. They are the necessary conditions, specific to each work, that govern its creation; they dictate how the mechanisms determining its conceptual and physical structure will operate, as well as those mechanisms involved in its presentation to the public, which define its listening parameters.

These heterogeneous conditions constitute and act upon the work's *dispositif*, an all-embracing term first proposed by Giorgio Agamben. Normally translated

in English as *apparatus*, the *dispositif* refers to the functional processes by means of which a systematized activity is carried out. It is “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions or discourses of living beings.” It is a “set of practices and mechanisms” and the “network of these elements.”²

From this perspective, the apparatus is at the centre of the work, comprising not only its functional and presentational mechanisms, but its entire range of components. Determining these elements is an exercise unique to each work, and can therefore only be touched upon here. Suffice it to say that the elements fall within the following parameters.

The trigger

The apparatus of the most outstanding works is found in their conceptual base, and already contains, beyond any ideas to be conveyed, the mechanisms that will govern their creation and conditions of presentation. The apparatus lies directly within the work’s conceptual framework.

Such is the case with *Etiquette*, by the British performance company Rotozaza, which they describe as *Autoteatro*. Its initial concept, its triggering device, is based on an excerpt from Jean-Luc Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*), in which a philosopher and a prostitute converse at a café. The audience is aware that this work is modelled on the film. Its borrowings and philosophical reflections, as well as its mimetic reproduction of the social space and communication, lead us to suspect that these elements serve as more than inspiration: they are the work’s trigger and conceptual matrix. The work is enacted by two audience members sitting in a café, as in the Godard film. It is here that Rotozaza puts into practice its concept of *Autoteatro*, whereby the audience performs the piece itself, for each other. Both audience members wear headphones, which creates an isolated space in which each person hears a voice suggesting which gestures are to be made—in a precise orchestration—to generate a story in which the spectators are the lead actors. Here we find the context of the triggering mechanism (the table, the two protagonists and the nature of the philosophic exchanges). The apparatus of the work is both the trigger and the underlying framework.

Constraints and conditions

The *dispositif* or apparatus is defined and formed by the process of creation. Procedures or processes more than (new or old) media, they are the conditions under which the work is generated. While it is inevitably fuelled or influenced by the mechanisms or technical tools employed, the work is framed by the creational rules and conditions. The apparatus here, in other words, is the work's architectonics.

Christian Marclay's *The Clock* is a marvellous example of this, being at once the initial apparatus, the trigger (which also dictates the creative process) and conceptual base. The apparatus here, imposed by the initial concept, is the strict temporal framework of the borrowed images, which all include an obvious reference to time (clocks, dials, watches taken from films), and which follow the intransigent rhythm of real time. This simple logic of construction, which once in place is unstoppable, leads to a 24-hour cinematic framework in which the images coincide with the passage of each single minute. What makes Marclay's work so remarkable is that its apparatus is based on a very simple rule, which shapes the work from concept to presentation (viewers must be there at precisely 11 o'clock to see the images that refer to that hour). Visible and active from one end to the other, the structure leads us to understand that here the work is the apparatus, the content and the container, controlling from the outset the conditions under which it is produced, oriented, modelled and received...

Conditions of reception, interface and temporality

Varying of course according to the nature of the work, the active apparatus at times entails more specific creative conditions, including the necessity of a temporal framework (as in the work by Marclay) to operate in a more subtle, but equally important, manner. This framework determines the conditions for either creating or listening to the work, precisely defining a meeting space, an immersive time for the viewer. We may thus include the sound strategies inherent in certain works that so often define this meeting space. The spatial organization or interface of the work are both potential components of the apparatus.

These variables—and potentially multitudinous components—of an apparatus influence the work's conditions of reception. In them we find an important questioning element, linked to the mechanisms governing the encounter between the work and the audience. These works often depend on the visitor/spectator's initial reception of the information, which makes them aware of the processes set in motion in the work's environment, and the way in which this information is received.

At times this occurs through the elimination of distance, through a forced proximity well beyond the participatory model, in an art of sensation and experience, of deviation or orchestrated destabilization of the mechanisms of perception, when intentional accentuations or additions transform the information interpreted by our brain, creating a kind of augmented reality.

This mechanism of reception can be found, in a subtle and eloquent manner, in Laurent Grasso's *Uraniborg*.⁵ This colossal work is highly complex architectonically, with numerous rooms linked by long corridors with openings: windows offering remote views of an installational space that can only be visited from a distance; doors leading to installations that appear to be independent of each other. Through this group of autonomous units, each resonating and responding to the other, Grasso involves us into a multi-work space that must be traversed, but that remains impossible to see in a single, fractional walk-through. In the words of Agamben, the work's power stems from the fact that "the apparatus is the network of these elements"; it operates through the multiplication of elements, a compartmentalization that excludes an overall view, in a conditioning of the visitors' reception that makes them active participants in linking the received codes.

By focusing on one element in particular, however, we can detect a trigger that appears to drive the whole. In the middle of one of the rooms of the installation, Grasso presents an image of the Holmdel Horn Antenna, which he then re-uses in the form of a scale model. A magnificent scientific device developed in the 1960s by Bell Telephone Labs, this instrument was able to detect cosmic microwave background radiation, traces of thermal radiation left by the Big Bang. This fabulous instrument reflects the artist's interest in what humans are able to perceive and understand. The horn antenna is once again the

triggering device around which the entire work seems to revolve, not only with regard to its subject but in particular the manner in which it refers back to our condition as visitor. This apparatus relates to the work's conditions of reception imposed by the artist, which directly include us in the process of perception and comprehension from which it originated. There are multiple trajectories possible here, like a series of connections among the constituent elements; the apparatus is thus the work's active and pivotal element, the code by which it becomes readable, its compositional structure, its interface with the public, spatial configuration, temporality and mechanics. The work as a whole is based on a deliberate conditioning of the spectator's listening experience.

The nostalgia of delay

I sometimes feel nostalgic about the delays that would occur in the videoconference transmissions we used in certain adventurous projects of the 1990s: the half-second delay (or more), an obvious technological flaw that nonetheless set up a rich wait-time, that created an attentive and delicate act of listening. This sort of delay is a bit like the Horn Antenna: aimed towards the limits of the universe, it attempts to hear the most distant echoes. In this space-time that separates us from the event, do we not also find the "density of time" variable and the distance that fills all acts of perception? In an era in which we are led to believe in the illusion of the immediate, and in the disappearance of delay, this notion seems to me to be of great interest, whether it be the delay on the edges of the universe or that of the reverberations of David Tudor's *Rainforest IV*.

New media, old media

The term or notion of "new media" has always bothered me somewhat, for it presupposes the sudden appearance of a new instrument, new technology, new concept, a belief in the illusion of instantaneity, of invention in the sense of an abrupt emergence of "newness," which is often produced only through an accumulation of discoveries and through their combination over a long period of time. The delay is still there.

In *Buried in Noise*,⁶ a superb publication exploring the work of artist Paul DeMarinis, Bernd Schulz writes: "Media technologies are not the result of a

sudden invention, but unite various strands of development that have varying historical depth. There is no linear growth of knowledge. At the margin of the convoluted paths of the history of technology and ideas lie many abandoned or forgotten projects, completed or unfinished devices and concepts.” DeMarinis’ impressive work stemmed from laboratory experiments that the artist manipulated, transposed and transgressed. Through his reroutings of sometimes forgotten technological phenomena, through the strangest “chimeras” he discovers along the way, he leads us to understand that art is a complex amalgam of borrowings and hijackings.

With regard to new media, he makes us see how old they really are, or at least the extent to which they contain long delays and echoes from distant worlds.

And if we look for the new in these complex amalgams, can this not be found in the new potential forms of creation? Cannot the overall apparatus behind the work stem from new combinations that allow us to perceive new forms, fusions and connections?

In the above-mentioned works I find this multiplication of codes and connections, along with a clear understanding on the part the artists of the multiple facets of the apparatus deployed. In some ways, these artists subscribe to what I would call an “aesthetic of complexity,” not one of vague connections but a logical aesthetic governed by precise rules, intrinsically linked to the “triggering device” at the project’s source.

If we could trace the multiple links that unite all the elements of a complex apparatus, we would end up with a manifold representation of all the connected elements comprising the apparatus, from their conception to the rules governing their creation, comprehension and sensorial reception, including the social context in which they unfold. From their creational trigger to their final visible form. A map of the creative conditions and inputs, a visual representation (occurring with a certain delay) allowing us to examine and interpret them.

“Artists can talk about our world by choosing which data to visualize.”⁸

This illustration of the aesthetic of complexity is probably best presented in Manuel Lima’s *Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information*. In this rich work we grasp the importance of the intersection between visualization and networks (if there is anything new in this era, it relates to the profusion and multiplication of available data), of mapping out complex systems, of the connectedness of the elements. From these relational studies, modes of multiple and variable connections emerge, requiring the creation of a new syntax to examine and make sense of this profusion. Without being new—for it has been used for centuries to illustrate and understand a variety of phenomena—data visualisation now rests on even more complex paradigms, which shake up the traditional codes. It is offering, in a way, a new representation of the world, a new amalgam, a new media.

ÉMILE MORIN

¹ Dispositif no 1. *Initiation ritual for young monks* (photo taken near a Buddhist temple in Thailand, Émile Morin, 2009).

² Giorgio Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?” in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 14, 23, 30

³ Rotozaza’s *Etiquette* was presented at Mois Multi in 2011.

⁴ The Holmdel Horn Antenna was designed by Bell Telephone Laboratories and is found in Holmdel Township, New Jersey. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmdel_Horn_Antenna

⁵ Laurent Grasso’s *Uraniborg* was exhibited at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal in 2013.

⁶ Bernd Schulz, “Another View of Technology,” in Paul DeMarinis, *Buried in Noise* (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2010).

⁷ *Fragments of Gericho*, Paul DeMarinis, 1991. This work authentically recreates what is probably the world’s oldest audio recording: a clay cylinder containing voices of the past. By directing a laser beam at the revolving vase, the vibrations of another era can be heard. This work by DeMarinis is a component of *Edison Effect*, which was presented at Obscure Gallery (Quebec City) in 1992.

⁸ Manuel Lima, *Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011,



POETS' NOISE

Preamble

Today I am a professor, but I was for a long time directly involved in artist-run centres, and am thus quite familiar with their inner workings. When I became a professor, I have to admit I was surprised by the number of artistic projects that had to be considered. How many per year? One hundred, two hundred? Obviously, not all of them will be revolutionary, but according to the law of averages, some will clearly stand out from the rest, shaking things up. Owing to academic freedom, encouragement from professors, a certain freshness of youth perhaps, there are occasionally—or even frequently—works that are *extraordinary, unprecedented*.

This is one of the reasons, in fact, that I accepted Avatar's invitation to help define the conference's objectives. By being able to see both sides of the river—the academic and professional institutions—at a single glance, the differences were clearer to me. And what struck me the most was that the names that artists-run centres give themselves (... *in visual arts*, ... *in media arts*, ... *in sound and electronic arts*, etc.) do not correspond to the approach of the young artists.

The possibility that they ever corresponded to anything real in the past —aside from the requirements of subsizing bodies— is another matter, but it has become increasingly clear that young artists do not describe their works in this way. Not only are their methods different, but it is precisely this invention of methods that differentiates them. They are thus always a step ahead, venturing beyond the centres who themselves rewrite the forms. Whence the idea of this conference: to examine the methods of different artists and in the process to self-examine the practices of Avatar—and artist-run centres in general—as a hosting structure. Whence also my introductory comments spoken in the event's first hour: that I hoped that those who came to learn more about the methods of media artists would be disappointed *because* we would move beyond this disciplinary paradigm.

Amble?

By way of example, let us consider the work of Frédérique Laliberté, which I have now observed at both the school and at this conference. I first became familiar with her approach at the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval, where she took one of my classes. In a project for a course entitled *Vidéo et interdisciplinarité*, she made an oral presentation with a computer slide show. The slide show in question related in turn to a slide show, which included videos on how to make videos, with on-screen windows containing files that were actually images of windows containing files, and that were included in the slide show videos... The presentation, then, was itself a presentation of a presentation of a *mise en abyme* set in a *mise en abyme*, the container of which was the content, the artist getting lost inside on several occasions, with everyone—artist and audience—finally giving up on this labyrinth chasing its tail. For another project, Laliberté created an installation in which visitors were given instructions regarding the movement of the objects therein, either directly or by her recorded voice (this recorded voice ironically designating the *other* voice as *Real-life Frédérique...*). Visitors interacted within the space according to the commands of the same voice coming from two sources, which sometimes contained contradictory instructions, or at any event imprecise; everything was supposed to take place in under fifteen minutes, but finally stretched to three quarters of an hour, without anyone knowing more about the objective at the end of the exercise than at the beginning.

After receiving her degree a few years ago, Frédérique Laliberté was invited to this conference to present what she calls her *àlenveritudes*. As in previous works, the performance-video she presented at the conference re-juggled the codes, her approach suspending the suspension of disbelief needed as much in conferences as in films. Frédérique appeared on screen, thus framed within a box. She was somewhere in Europe—at least this is what we were told—speaking to us via Skype. The Internet connection was weak. There was also an assistant on site who climbed up or down a ladder according to the artist's instructions. On-screen images suggested that the artist was possibly on the premises, on the 5th floor of the building, even if other clues indicated she was somewhere in the south of France. Other computer images reminded us that what we were seeing were merely images, which could have been recorded well before the event—and all of this constantly contradicted our docile desire to believe in the image, to embrace the screen, to remain in a state of credulity. A layered, fragile and masterly performance.

Somnambulate on the other side?

Grammar is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a connecting thread: no grammar, no communication. On the other hand, it is a powerful censoring tool: what it does not allow to be said, it forbids. This is a trait of all communication systems. Noise must be excluded... which explains the value of poets.

The network of artists-run centres—which were first perceived as noise in the art system—slowly evolved into a system of their own, with its codes, possibilities and exclusions. While we might have hoped (wished?) that the network had remained a collection of autonomous and parasitic cells, it developed into a system, with its own grammar, excluding at the same time the organizations feeding off its primary signal. And not only did this standardizing tendency lead to a policy defining the type of members of the network, but this policy originated from the centres themselves. How many times has a group rejected or ignored an opportunity under the pretext that, from a *disciplinary* point of view, the activity was not “part of its mandate”? Freedom weighs heavily and the attraction of power—over others or oneself—is strong: we have thus formed our own system of self-surveillance, and it would not have

surprised Foucault to see that it comes with a confessional procedure conducted “by one’s peers.”

Artists name their activities *photographic*, *media*, *visual* or *interdisciplinary*, and then feel obliged to believe in the distinction. Once the label is clearly displayed, the customer is always right. The flags unfurled help to create stability, and the perpetuation of the system becomes its own primary objective.

We are at a turning point, however, with regard to the value of words and grammars. The spread of knowledge exponentially increased with the invention of the printing press. Once texts were set in ink on paper, it became possible to circulate ideas everywhere, to share discoveries or opinions, to construct archives for future reference, to build special sites for discussion and learning based on rare collections of printed works—sites we would call *universities*. But this universal distribution came at a price: to be disseminated, knowledge had to be fixed, stable. If it is written that Darwin’s ship was called the Beagle, it has to be the same name tomorrow. The impact of the printing press was equalled only by the inertia of the printed text itself. To print and circulate a text required a huge amount of effort, material and coordination. Before printing, proof had to be made that writings would remain. To be written is to die a little.

Now our texts have become volatile, living objects. What I write on my web page could easily change tomorrow; this text included in an electronic publication could be updated from a data base after each reading. Electronic networks now ensure the spatial distribution of information, and this distribution can be flexible, updateable, corrected in real time. Why can’t our artist centres be photographic in the morning and performative the same night? What is forcing us to endlessly steer the same steady course? Why exclude? And what artistic practices are truly current in this sense, which could serve as new building blocks for our collectives?

Walking in formation

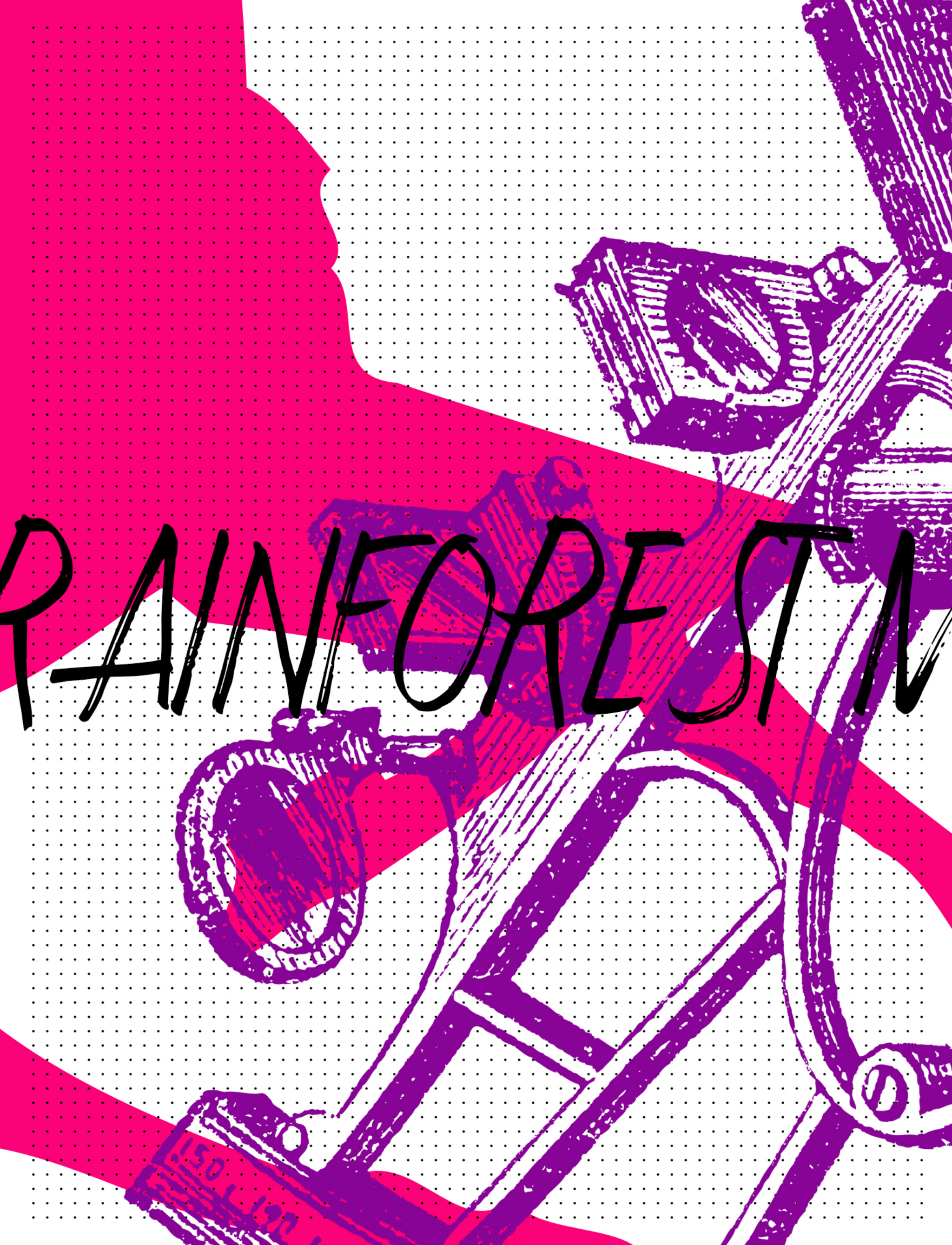
The methods of Frédérique Laliberté and a number of other artists—such as Jackie Sumell and Victoria Stanton—working in similar ways (that is, *in other ways*, as I am sure is now clear) are at once effective and personal. Not only do they shun such epithets as *media*, *visual* or *interdisciplinary*, but they either do not operate within these parameters or contradict them. So where, in our network of artist-run centres, can we hear them?

That Avatar has taken the initiative to reflect upon these approaches, based on the testimony of artists working at this very moment, is commendable. But much more is needed to ensure that the network catches up with the community it aims to serve.

Walking in formation, line-abreast, is a military approach that worked well when confronting armed groups organized hierarchically. It no doubt became obsolete in the era of anonymous terrorists and urban guerrillas. If artist-run centres wish to move like resistance units, they should perhaps think about adopting strategies to suit.

JOCELYN ROBERT

RAIN FOREST





RAINFOREST IV : AN ECOSYSTEM

I first heard about *Rainforest IV* in September 2013. It was owing to my background no doubt, which is based on a vocabulary and way of thinking specific to the visual arts. The artist Jérôme Joy, when he was in Quebec City for the *Grand Happening* celebrating Avatar's 20th anniversary, informed us that Apo33 had recreated this work by David Tudor in Nantes. Considering it "part of the classical repertoire," the project's initiator and director of Apo33, Julien Ottavi, set up the collaborative environment for the sound improvisation and helped develop its apparatus.

After an exchange of e-mails, a partnership was formed with the artist with a view to creating, for our conference, a new version of *Rainforest IV*. A number of stages ensued. First, a vision had to be worked out, a shared vision of a work situated midway between installation and musical composition, in addition to planning a process of creation that would take place, at least in part, at a distance. Then the construction of resonant objects would have to be organized, prior to the installation. Choices, in other words, had to be made.

We were confident that the experience of collective creation would lead us not only to the heart of the cooperative process, but directly to the questions of “free,”¹ of authorship and Internet creation, and the notions of *dispositif* (apparatus) and artistic disciplines. Avatar, in fact, has always paid special attention to the notion of collaborative work, in particular through its activities held the year preceding the conference. For us, *Rainforest IV* would serve as a synthesis: it would take up several issues raised during the conference’s preparatory discussions.

These discussions were undertaken by the Avatar team with such people as Jocelyn Robert, the conference partner, artist and director of the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval, as well as Émile Morin, who agreed to assume the role of moderator for the exchanges and presentations. Our first observation was that the media arts had no fixed method: “In the landscape of the arts, in both Quebec and abroad, there are a multitude of different artistic approaches. The artists, however, often work in isolation, without going beyond their disciplinary field, so that the various disciplines are isolated from one other and their methods rarely shared.”²

Certain questions thus arose. Are artists organizing their works in new ways? Are they working alone or in groups? With or without digital technologies? How are the works, regardless of their form, making use of multiform languages? How are they reflecting the instability inherent in the methods of creation? How are the structural models set up to support the artists adapting to the needs, so difficult to identify, of artists that are equally difficult to define?

At this stage, the goal of the conference was to shed light on these issues, to make them the field of exploration and information-sharing. Discussions would

¹ As used by Julien Ottavi, in particular to describe the *open source*, the term “free” refers, in the present context, to an attitude of transmission and sharing of knowledge that transcends the concept of property. In this regard, see Julien Ottavi, “Le libre intuitif et la pratique du libre,” [on-line], in Apo33, “Le libre et les nouvelles pratiques de création : open source modular art-efacts,” [http://apo33.org/dokapo/doku.php?id=le_libre_et_les_nouvelles_pratiques_de_creation_open_source_modular_art-efacts&DokuWiki=jbkghlphem].

² Excerpt from the project’s preliminary text.

center on their relevance, the ways they could enrich the practice of artists, and with respect to which one could eventually make choices.

In this context, *Rainforest IV* served as a forum for the creative process and aesthetic choices. Along with Apo33 and Avatar,³ the production involved numerous artists who constructed the resonant objects, as well as the performance of March 26, 2014.⁴ Julie Faubert, a professor at the École des arts visuels, also incorporated the project into her course outline and organized a Skype encounter between Julien Ottavi and her students at the beginning of the semester to launch her students' research. They subsequently spent several weeks reflecting upon the contextual issues raised by *Rainforest IV*, as preparation for understanding and constructing the resonant devices, with the assistance of Nicolas Désy.⁵

From the outset, everyone seemed to agree that *Rainforest IV* is a landmark in electronic art and experimental music. For my part, in addition to being attracted to the form of the sound installation, I was drawn to a phrase used by Julien Ottavi. In an e-mail, he used the words “*a work of continuous existence.*” Without making a detour into generative art, it made me think that something elusive was at play here, something that allowed the work to be restaged, time and time again, for over forty years after its creation. Apart from the fact that the spatial configuration proposed by Tudor—like a musical score—was new for its time, insofar as the electronic mechanism was an integral part of the work, there remains today a deep fascination with its inter-resonating “sculptures.”

In addition, in the series of events leading up to the conference, we discovered that Paul DeMarinis, an American artist and professor of sound and electronic art at Stanford University in California, had worked with Tudor for the first version of *Rainforest IV* at the Espace Pierre Cardin in Paris in 1973. The opportunity to invite him to take part once again⁶ was too good to miss. He agreed to participate in the conference via Skype and to recount his

³ It should be noted that the fabrication and assembly of the device were made possible through the expertise of Mériol Lehmann and Simon Paradis-Dionne.

⁴ The commitment shown by Alexandre Berthier throughout the process cannot be overemphasized.

⁵ At the École des arts visuels, Nicolas Désy is a Teaching and Research Technician, as well as an audiovisual specialist.

⁶ The works of Paul DeMarinis were presented at the 2008 and 2009 Mois Multi in Quebec City.

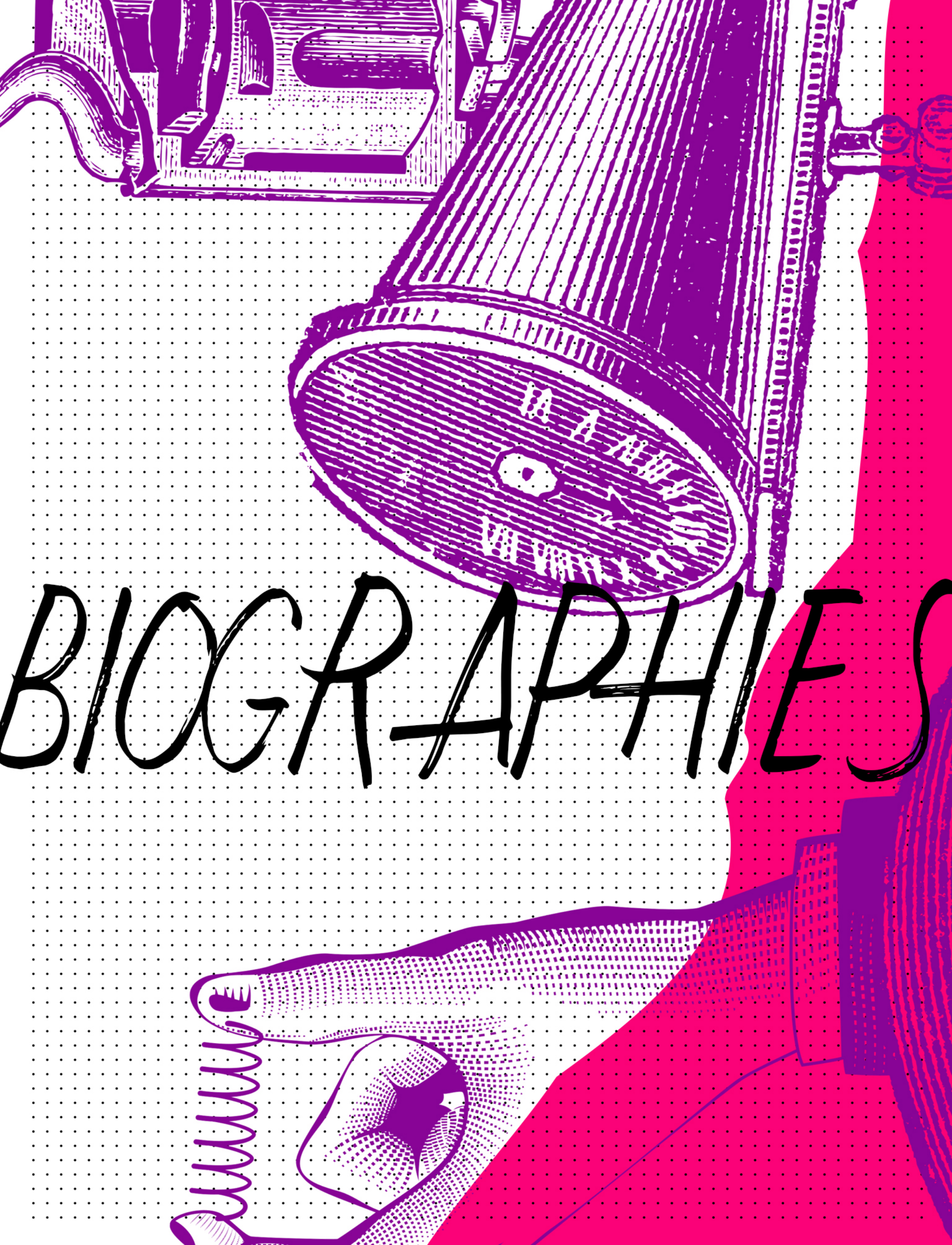
experiences. Moreover, he had just finished using *Rainforest IV* for his last seminar with his students.

If I have gone into detail about how things came together, about the connections that led to this veritable Internet creation, it is because these details provide a fuller picture of this shared experience. Whether “new media” or media art, an artistic proposition is developed prior to the finished work, a proposition that goes well beyond the material result: the apparatus transcends the work’s materiality.

An art form with no fixed identity within a discipline, with unclear boundaries, is analogous to the view of an astronomer who observes the planets, invisible to the human eye, using infinitesimal clues provided by neighbouring planets. Another comparison can be made with the sextant, which measures the altitude of celestial bodies by deduction rather than direct measurement. It is from this dual perspective, then, that the Avatar conference was planned: structured around a nebulous problematic, it sought “clues” from participants with widely diverse backgrounds and expertise.

But let us return to this phrase *work of continuous existence*. It relates not only to the duration of the installation and collective performance, and to the points of resonance among the objects, but also to the multiples revivals of *Rainforest IV* and the collaborative work, research and improvisation over time, in all eras and settings. It is in this respect that the work is so fundamental. Although based on electronic—and now digital—mechanisms, it still offers an experience outside of any specific discipline. Is it not true that an ecosystem is always part of a larger ecosystem?

CAROLINE GAGNÉ

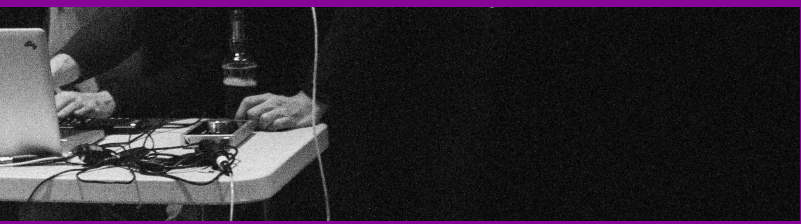
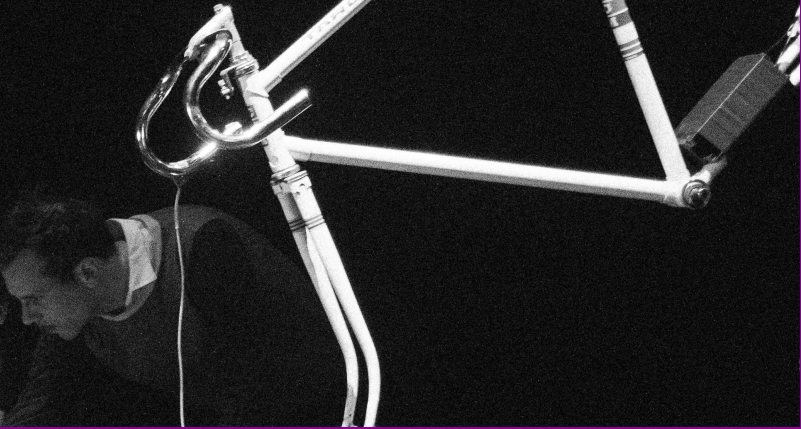




JULIE FAUBERT

Julie Faubert explores the space that the body occupies/unoccupies in the West and examines this basic duality in our perceptions, spaces and words. She is greatly inclined towards mixing up: ideas, time, bodies, gestures, places. She likes to say—for the moment—that she creates situations (public, critical, aural, etc.), meaning contexts in which a place, ideas, sounds, images and gestures put an experience into doubt. Tirelessly critical of the numerous ways in which the endemic conformism of our society is engendered, sustained and extended, she hopes to be on the side of things to come.

Since 2011, she has created numerous installations and interventions into and out of which writing and spatial practices, the collection of objects and relational practices, and listening contexts and urban wanderings enter and exit. Like many others, she has exhibited her work in Quebec, the rest of Canada and Europe. She is currently completing a doctoral degree (“Public Space and Urban Renewal: Art and Society”, Universitat de Barcelona/Urban Planning, Université de Montréal) which addresses more specifically urban aural paths and the aesthetic, ethical and political issues tied up with the presence of the body in public space. She teaches at the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval.



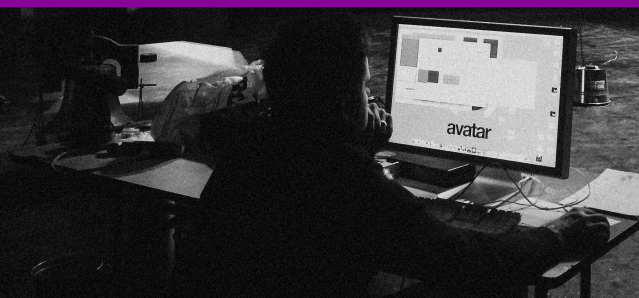
NATHALIE BACHAND

Nathalie Bachand is in charge of development for the Elektra International Digital Arts Festival – that creates as well the International Digital Arts Biennial (BIAN). She edited *Angles Digital Arts* (2009) and contributed to the group publication *Tactiques insolites : vers une méthodologie de recherche en pratique artistique* (2004). She writes, notably about visual and media arts.



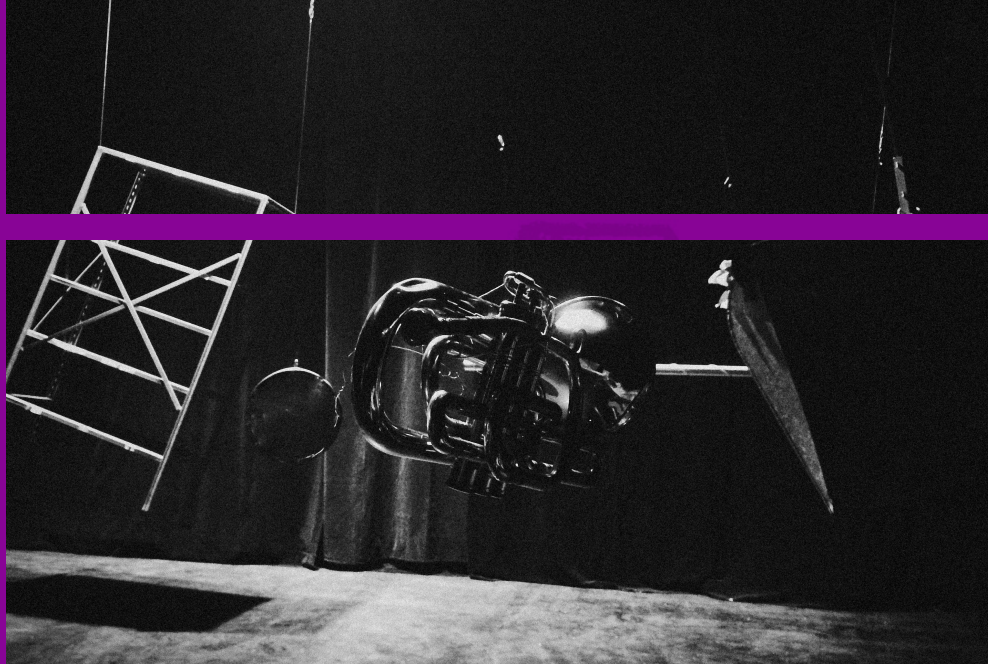
ÉMILE MORIN

For thirty years, Émile Morin has been an independent artist based in Quebec City. His numerous installations and stage works have been presented in Europe, Australia, the United States and Canada, at such sites as the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, Tesla Berlin, BEAP Festival in Perth, the Banff Centre, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Morin was the Artistic Director of Avatar from 2001 to 2006, during which time he gave the centre an additional mandate: the development of electronic art. He oversaw this area as a co-director from 2004 to 2007. Morin was also the Artistic Director of Recto-Verso and Mois Multi until 2011. Based on what he calls an “aesthetic of complexity,” his artistic practice uses and intertwines several disciplines in the creation of installations, scenographic spaces, immersive works and “dramatic” constructions. The uniqueness of his works stems from a multidisciplinary approach that systematically draws upon multiple mechanical devices that reproduce or distort the effects, phenomena and movements of nature, and sometimes the primary functions of the objects themselves. In creating these audio and visual devices, the artist is attempting to provoke and modify the viewer's modes of perception, his understanding of the space that he inhabits and that surrounds him. For several years, Émile Morin has made intensive use—with a critical eye—of the new technological tools.



JOCELYN ROBERT

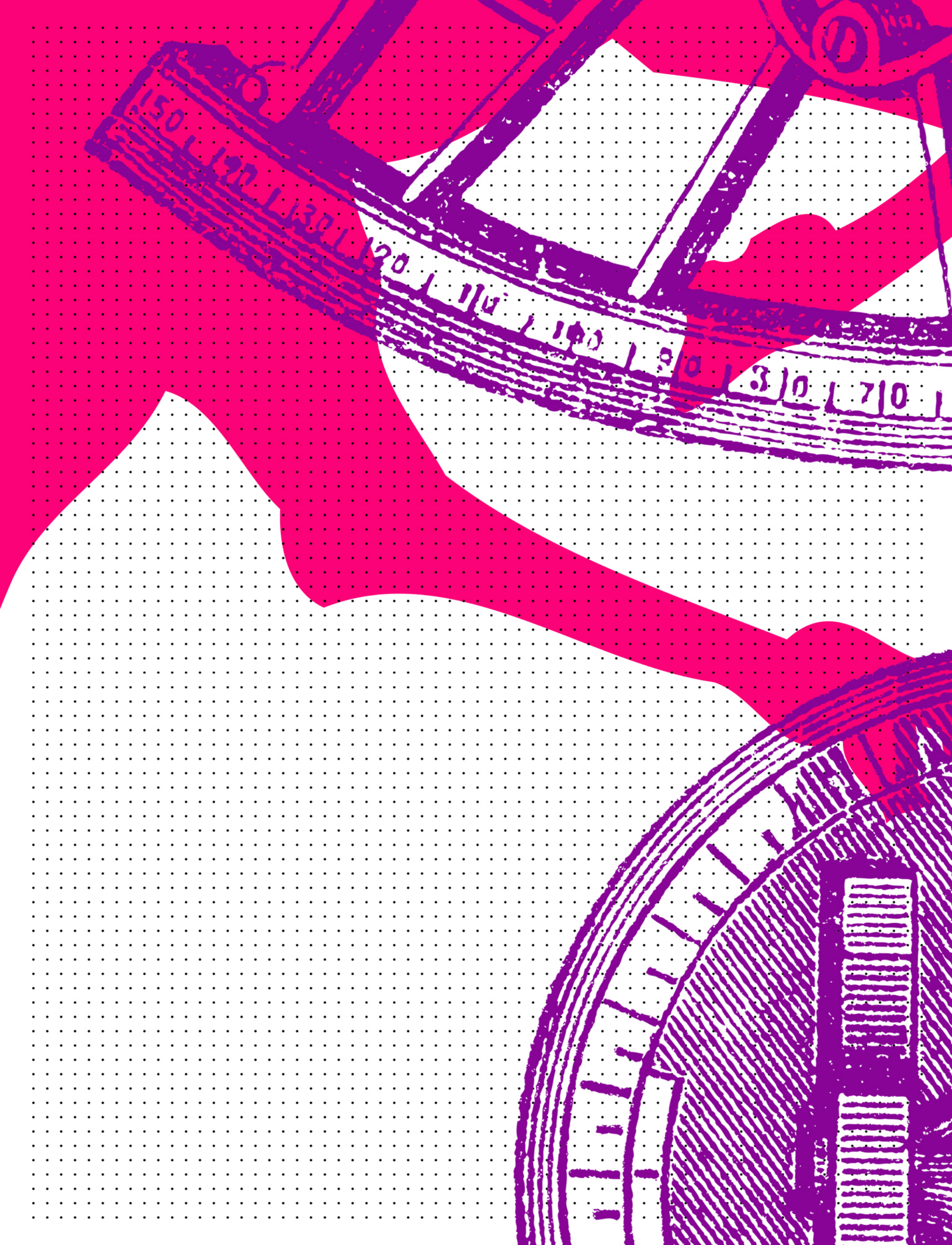
Jocelyn Robert is an interdisciplinary artist working in such fields as audio art, computer art, performance, installation, video and writing. His installations have been exhibited internationally and his sound works are found on over thirty CDs. His texts have been published by Le Quartanier (Montreal), Ohm Éditions (Quebec City), Errant Bodies Press (Los Angeles), Semiotext(e) (New York), and in a number of art catalogues, notably by Ars Electronica and Sonambiente (Germany). His work has been featured in many publications, including two solo catalogues, one by the Galerie de l'UQAM and the other by VOX. He founded the audio and electronic arts centre Avatar in Quebec City in 1993, and was involved in the creation of the Méduse cooperative. He has taught at Mills College, Oakland (California) and at the Université du Québec à Montréal. He is currently the director of the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval.



CAROLINE GAGNÉ

Caroline Gagné has developed a practice in visual and media arts that is rooted in the sites she explores, particularly in the way they convey latent content. Based on research begun in 1998, after receiving a BFA in visual arts from Université Laval, her work reflects her deep commitment to the arts: drawing, Internet art, installation and sound art are all part of her multiform practice.

Highly active in her community, she has been the Artistic Director of Avatar since September 2013. She has also taken part in several artist residencies, solo and group exhibitions, and international events in Quebec, Cuba and Europe. In 2011, a commission from Avatar led to the creation of CARGO, presented at Mois Multi 12, which earned her a Prix d'excellence des arts et de la culture from the City of Quebec. In 2012, she obtained an MFA in interdisciplinary art from Université Laval in Quebec City, where she lives and works.



NEW MEDIA: METHODS AND PRACTICES

The conference *New Media: Methods and Practices* was held in Quebec City on March 25 and 26, 2014 at the Salle Multi of Méduse, and organized in partnership with the École des arts visuels of the Université Laval and the Galerie des arts visuels.

SPEAKERS

Patrick Treguer – Manager at Lieu multiple (France)

Danyèle Alain – Artist and director at 3e impérial (Quebec)

Jackie Sumell – Artist (USA)

Victoria Stanton – Artist (Quebec)

Frédérique Laliberté – Artist (Quebec)

Alain-Martin Richard – Artist (Quebec)

Julien Ottavi – Artist and director at Apo33 (France)

Paul DeMarinis – Artist (USA)

HOST

Émile Morin – Artist (Quebec)

OBSERVERS

Julie Faubert – Artist and professor at École des arts visuels of the Université Laval (Quebec)

Nathalie Bachand – Development manager for the Elektra Festival (Quebec)

CONFERENCE PARTNER

Jocelyn Robert – Artist and director at École des arts visuels of the Université Laval (Quebec)

INSTALLATION

Jackie Sumell's *Herman's House* (USA)

PERFORMANCE

Frédérique Laliberté's *à l'enveritudes* (Quebec)

INSTALLATION/PERFORMANCE

David Tudor's *Rainforest IV* by Apo33 and Avatar (France and Quebec)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude goes out to all those involved in the planning and organization of the conference and publication: speakers, artists, collaborators, active members and the Avatar team. We would like to extend our special thanks to Jocelyn Robert, Director of the École des arts visuels, a partner of Avatar.

The publication of *New Media: Methods and Practices* was made possible through the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts , and in particular its Special Initiatives Program.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

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Publishing and Distribution:

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541, rue De Saint-Vallier Est, suite 5-62, Quebec City (Québec) G1K 3P9

Tel.: 418 522-8918

Website: avatarquebec.org

ISBN: 978-2-920512-15-3 (iBooks - FR)

ISBN: 978-2-920512-14-6 (iBooks - ENG)

ISBN: 978-2-920512-13-9 (PDF - FR)

ISBN: 978-2-920512-16-0 (PDF - ENG)

Legal Deposit:

Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec, 2015

National Library of Canada, 2015

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Avatar is an artist-run centre in Quebec City. Since 1993, it has been involved in the creation, production, presentation and dissemination of works by artists in the field of sound and electronic art in Quebec, Canada and around the world.

