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Audio: Michelle Kuo: Research and Development. Experiments in Art and Technology

Michelle Kuo (New York): Research and Development. Experiments in Art and Technology, 1966ff.

Lecture Audio: http://troublingresearch.net/audio/michelle_kuo.mp3

Lecture (on invitation by Tom Holert), June 22, 2010, 7 p.m.

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

Room M20

Schillerplatz 3

A-1010 Vienna “Art” and “research” have, throughout modernity, been divided—one aesthetic, the other technological; one autonomous, the other applied. But in the 1960s, this binary was fundamentally challenged. My talk focuses on one epicenter of that irruption: Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), an organization formed by Bell Laboratories engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer and the artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman in 1966. E.A.T. aimed to facilitate collaborations between artists and engineers. It posed art as a specific type of research, a model of experimentation and construction parallel to engineering, invention, and nonlinear systems. Engineers, the group hoped, could grant artists access to new media and materials, while artists could simultaneously alter the methodologies of instrumentalized, industrial research. Participants ranged from John Cage and Andy Warhol to Mel Bochner, Carolee Schneemann, and Robert Breer. Indeed, E.A.T. upset teleologies of modernist invention and technical innovation alike. The projects I discuss demonstrate that the contact between disciplines of engineering and of art production were to shift the terms of aesthetic process itself. Models of postwar industrial research and development actually provided the possibility of alternate, unforeseen paths: ludic and non-functional modes of production that resulted in unstable objects or technological failure; organizational networks that did not follow conventional kinds of collectivity. I view E.A.T. as an attempt to grapple with, on the one hand, the increasing foreclosure of key aesthetic strategies in the postwar period; and on the other, the extraordinary systems in place for technocratic expansion and control. Out of this impasse, this crucible, would develop the conditions of possibility for contemporary modes of artistic research and knowledge production. Michelle Kuo is editor-in-chief of Artforum. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University in the History of Art and Architecture, writing a dissertation titled “To Avoid the Waste of a Cultural Revolution”: Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), 1966-1974. Kuo has written extensively for publications including Artforum, Bookforum, October, The Art Bulletin, and TDR/The Drama Review and is the author of “9 Evenings in Reverse,” in the exhibition catalogue 9 Evenings Reconsidered: Art, Theatre, and Engineering for the MIT List Visual Arts Center in 2006. Forthcoming essays will appear in exhibition catalogues for MuMOK, Vienna, and the Hayward Gallery, London this year. Academy of Fine Arts Vienna