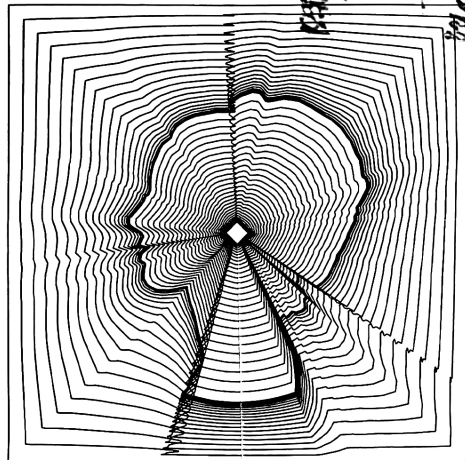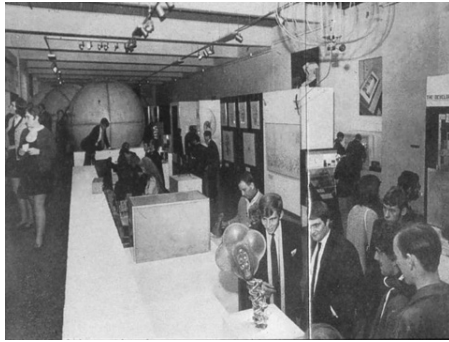# CYBERNETIC SERENDIPITY

TOWARDS      AI

JASIA REICHARDT
BRONAC FERRAN
WILLIAM LATHAM
JOEY HOLDER & AJA
CHRISTIANE PAUL
SOUGWEN CHUNG
K ALLADO-MCDOWELL
MARIANNA SIMNETT
ALEX ESTORICK
DANIEL FELSTEAD
0XSALON
RACHEL O DWYER
SUSANNA DAVIES-CROOK
LAWRENCE LEK
GÜNSELI YALCINKAYA
CONNIE BAKSHI
LUBA ELLIOTT
HEITH

# Introduction

Looking back to look forward, this day-long event explores the patterns, tropes and pervasive elements of artists using emerging technologies, in response to the iconic 1968 exhibition at ICA *Cybernetic Serendipity* organised by Jasia Reichardt who will deliver a keynote lecture fifty-six years on, entitled *Before and After Cybernetic Serendipity.* Featuring talks, performances and readings the day unfolds in a series of propositions and panels that shift between the interrelated topics of machine creativity and AI via the realms of currency and NFTs. Speakers and performers include Jasia Reichardt, William Latham, Christiane Paul, Sougwen Chung, Marianna Simnett, K Allado-McDowell, Alex Estorick, Daniel Felstead, 0xSalon, Rachel O' Dwyer, Lawrence Lek, Joey Holder, Connie Bakshi, Luba Elliott, tarotgpt.xyz and more.

This ICA event is co-curated with DAZED and features editor and internet folklorist Günseli Yalcinkaya and technology researcher, curator and writer Bronac Ferran. Chaired by ICA Talks & Research curator Susanna Davies-Crook

There will be a presentation of archival material, a Cybernetic Serendipity vinyl listening session and ICA Editions will be available and a specially commissioned artwork by VISIO is being produced for the occasion.

# Line Up

**13:00 – 13:15**
Introduction to *Cybernetic Serendipity: Towards AI* from ICA talks & research curator Susanna Davies-Crook

**13:15 – 14:00**
Keynote lecture by Jasia Reichardt: *Before and After Cybernetic Serendipity*

**14:15 – 15:30**
Machine Creativity: Bronac Ferran in conversation with William Latham, Christiane Paul and Sougwen Chung

**15:45 – 16:15**
K Allado-Mcdowell

**16:15 – 16:30**
Cybernetic Serendipity listening session

**16:30 – 16:35**
Screening: Marianna Simnett, *Blue Moon* 2022

**16:35 – 17:00**
break

SESSION 2

**17:00 – 17:15**
*From NFTs to Digital Art: Where are we now?!* Alex Estorick

**17:15 – 18:15**
*In Flow ~ Digital Currents:* Susanna Davies-Crook in conversation with Alex Estorick, Daniel Felstead, 0xSalon and Rachel O' Dwyer

**18:30 – 18:45**
Lawrence Lek: *SimBeijing Walkthrough* is a live game playthrough of Lawrence's ongoing series of virtual worlds, featuring audio-visual extracts from his most recent trilogy set in SimBeijing smart city.

**18:50 – 20:00**
*Towards AI:* Günseli Yalcinkaya in conversation with Lawrence Lek, Connie Bakshi and Luba Elliott

**20:00 – 21:00**
closing set by HEITH

Appearing during the breaks will be video fragments of Joey Holder's Cryptid project, remixed especially for the event, with a collaboration with the musician AJA. Cryptid is a creature which may or may not exist, unrecognised by mainstream science. Cryptid contains shifting, layered footage from laboratory cameras, AI generative images of deep sea creatures and mystical symbology, revealing the interdimensional zone these creatures occupy across popular culture, and their importance to all life on earth.

Additional contributions throughout the day by tarotgpt.xyz and 0xSalon





Joey Holder, AJA: *Cryptid,* 2023

# Descriptions

## Jasia Reichardt Keynote: Before and After Cybernetic Serendipity

Artists' involvement with technology has a long history. At first artists painted machines, then they made them as sculptures, then they used them as tools, and finally, some of them at least, could not do without them in realizing their works. This is not the end of the story but a beginning. With the advent of the computer, some of those who had never put pencil to paper started making art. At first, it was the scientists and engineers who had access to the technology, but within 30 years, there were as many artists who wanted to use a computers to make pictures. At the beginning we could follow the procedure by which every image was made, a significant difference between computer art and art that had preceded it. However, by the 21st century it was becoming increasingly difficult to unravel the layers of material and programming responsible for computer generated pictures. Art started to epitomise post-modernism in its eclectic and enthusiastic pursuit of quotation and manipulation of anything and everything. Now, of course, we are at another stage, waiting for AI to decide what will happen next and what art will mean.
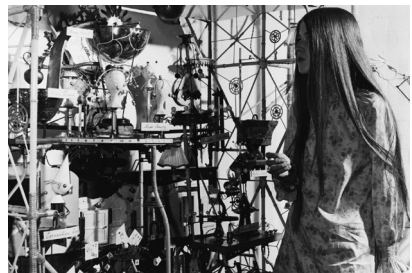
## Machine Creativity: Bronac Ferran in conversation with William Latham, Christiane Paul and Sougwen Chung

Despite AI's present ascendance, artists have been working in innovative ways with computer-based processes for decades and often pushing these in new directions. Machine creativity, first seeded in the 1950s and 60s, is now being attributed by Open AI's CEO Sam Altman to current developments in generative AI. What might we learn from taking a longer-term perspective on generative human-machine creativity? And given this history, what is happening now that seems to be different? Is AI the dénouement of earlier stage art and technology developments or simply another phase in a continuing revolution? Unpacking what distinguishes present AI practices from earlier investigations and considering what critical dimensions of human creativity might be lost in the process, we consider what might be gained from a recuperative loop back to the past that might inform our future present.
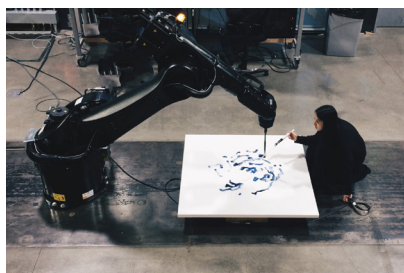


Sougwen Chung: *Drawing Operations,* 2018
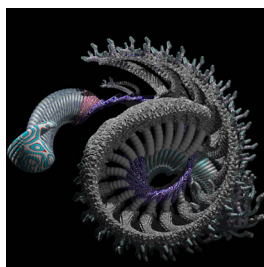


William Latham: *Mutation X Bump Mapped Raytraced,* 1989

**In Flow ~ Digital Currents: Susanna Davies-Crook in conversation with Alex Estorick, Daniel Felstead, 0xSalon and Rachel O' Dwyer**

Can NFTs be radical? Discussion around Non Fungible Tokens crosses the spectrum of critique on incumbent modes of speculation, reinforcing logics of property ownership and denigrating artistic labour – through to hype and support for the democratisation of art and access to the art ecosystem for those usually excluded. What potential is there still to uncover, and what models hold space for criticality, empowerment and artistic practice in this already emerged medium and divisive token-based economy?

**Towards AI: Günseli Yalcinkaya in conversation with Lawrence Lek, Connie Bakshi and Luba Elliot**

What are the possibilities of machine learning within artistic creation? This discussion will explore the current discourse around AI, and how emerging technologies can be used to broaden perception. How can AI-human relationships imagine a future that encompasses the more-than-human? What does it mean to conceive of a world beyond the limits of filter bubbles where algorithms are hyper-curating content for the individual, and how AI can be used to detect bias and disinformation?



Daniel Felstead



Lawrence Lek: *NOX,* 2023

# Editions and Publications

**Cybernetic Serendipity (1968)**
2014
Silkscreen print on Heritage White 200gsm 75 x 101 cm
Edition of 100
£60



ICA is pleased to present the reissue of the Cybernetic Serendipity poster which was originally released in 1968 to coincide with their exhibition curated by Jasia Reichardt.

Cybernetic Serendipity was the first international exhibition in the UK devoted to the relationship between the arts and new technology. This ground-breaking exhibition, designed by Franciszka Themerson, presented the work of over 130 participants including composers, engineers, artists, mathematicians and poets. The exhibition ran from 2 August – 20 October 1968 and was seen by some 60,000 visitors.
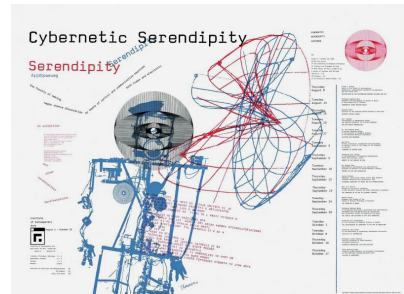
# Bookshop

**Cybernetic Serendipity**
£20.00

In July 1968, a special issue of 'Studio International' was published, 'Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts', which was realised in relation to the Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition held at the ICA from August to October of the same year. The show drew attention to the inventive ways that artists, scientists and technology experts were working together at the end of the sixties.
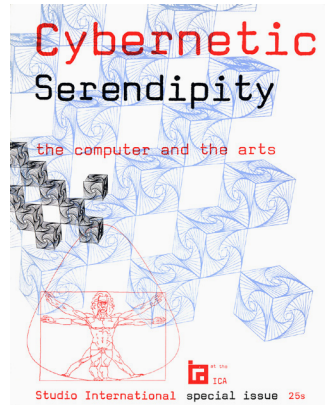
**Cybernetic Serendipity –
A Walk Around the Exhibition**
£25.00

This publication is about the exhibition Cybernetic Serendipity, how it began and what it looked like. The material presented here was initially used in a lecture for ZKM Karlsruhe in 2005. It shows and describes a walk around the exhibition consisting of images of the works displayed with short descriptive texts.
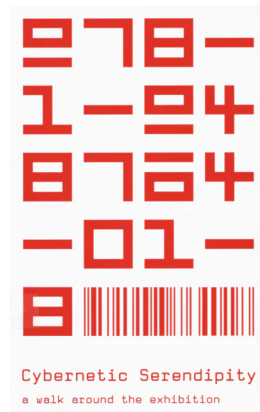
# Recommended Reading

Steven Shaviro: *Extreme Fabulations* (Goldsmiths Press, 2021)

Dexter Bang Sinister (Ed.): *Bulletins of the Serving Library #4* (BOTSL, 2012)

Anne Faucheret & David Jourdan (Eds.): *The Promise of Total Automation* (Sternberg Press, 2017)

Ben Vickers & K Allado-McDowell (Eds): *Atlas of Anomalous AI* (Ignota, 2020)

Laura Tripaldi: *Parallel Minds* (Urbanomic, 2022)

AQNB: *2012-2022 Anthology* (TLTRPreß, 2023)

Diedrich Diederichsen & Oier Etxeberria (Eds.): *Cybernetics of the Poor* (Sternberg Press, 2021)

Breaking Convention: *Essays on Psychedelic Consciousness* (Strange Attractor, 2013)

# Participant Bios

**0xSalon** is a Berlin-based event series, residency program, and project studio operating between art and philosophy. As a community endeavour, the 0xSalon research topics, organises events, and authors lore, critical theory, poetry, philosophy, games, theatre, and visual art.

**K Allado-McDowell** is a writer, speaker, and musician. They are the author, with GPT-3, of the books *Pharmako-AI, Amor Cringe,* and *Air Age Blueprint* and are co-editor of *The Atlas of Anomalous AI.* They created the neuro-opera *Song of the Ambassadors* and recorded and released music under the name Qenric. K established the *Artists + Machine Intelligence* program at Google AI. They are a conference speaker, educator and consultant to think-tanks and institutions seeking to align their work with deeper traditions of human understanding.

**Connie Bakshi** is an artist based in Los Angeles, trained as a classical pianist and engineer.

Working predominantly with artificial intelligence, she probes the language, ritual, and lore that emerge in the coincidence of the synthetic and organic, material and immaterial, the human and nonhuman.



Sougwen Chung: *Wave Film,* 2023

**Sougwen慜君Chung** is a Chinese-Canadian artist and researcher considered apioneer in human-machine collaboration – exploring the mark-made-by-hand and themark-made-by-machine as an approach to understanding systems. Chung's workMEMORY is part of the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum and is the first AI Model to be collected by a major institution. Recently, Chung was named one of TIME's 100 Most Influential People in AI.

**Dr Bronaċ Ferran** is a writer focussing on postwar poetics and contemporary digital practices. She's a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire. Recent commissions include catalogue essays on Stephen Willats (2023) and Waldemar Cordeiro (2024). She has served on Ars Electronica and Transmediale juries and regularly contributes to Studio International.

**Luba Elliott** is a curator and researcher specialising in AI art since 2016. She has worked with The Serpentine Galleries, arebyte, ZKM, Impakt Festival and CogX. Her projects include the Unit London exhibition 'The Perfect Error' and the ART-AI Festival in Leicester. She founded the NeurIPS Creativity and Design Workshop and curated the online galleries *aiartonline.com* and *computervisionart.com.*

**Alex Estorick** is a writer, editor, and curator who seeks to develop socially progressive approaches to new technologies. As Editor-in-Chief at *Right Click Save,* he aims to drive critical conversation about blockchain, NFTs, and Web3. He is also Contributing Editor for Art and Technology at Flash Art. He was lead author of the first aesthetics of crypto art and is an International Selector for The Lumen Prize.

**Daniel Felstead** is an academic and content producer whose practice focuses on the relationship between fashion, technology, and culture. He is the course leader of MA Fashion Media & Communication at the London College of Fashion (UA) and has presented work internationally.

**Heith's** sonic oddities that the Milan producer and imprint head spawn are otherworldly, alien mind jammage woven in unknown synthetics and injected into the spine. Uncanny visitations filter through your senses as their ritualistic rhythms warp and shift, the organic and the digital merging in a breakdown of sonic physics. His last release

on PAN, 'X,wheel' brings these elements together in a glorious celebration of melodies beyond what we know, evoking both the familiar and the fantastic. As described by DAZED, the album "transports listeners into a digital otherworld where strange and unfamiliar sounds are rendered in odd frequencies that feel familiar yet alien, situated in both the faraway future and a distant past."

**William Latham** is well known for his evolutionary art created at IBM in the late eighties. After a twelve year period as Creative Director in Rave Music and Computer Games, he became a Professor at Goldsmiths. His work is in the Centre Pompidou and V&A Collections and many other collections. His VR and generative work has been shown widely internationally, in particular in Japan and China during the past few years.
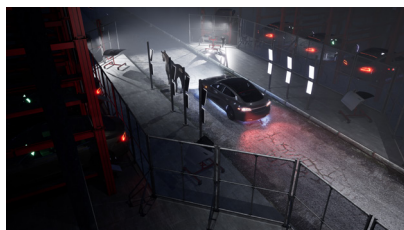


Lawrence Lek: NOX, 2023

**Lawrence Lek** is a London-based artist, filmmaker, and musician known for his ongoing series of virtual worlds set within a Sinofuturist cinematic universe. Often featuring interlocking narratives and the recurring figure of the wanderer, his work explores the myth of technological progress in an age of artificial intelligence and social change.

**Rachel O'Dwyer** is a lecturer in Digital Cultures at the National College of Art and Design. She is the author of *Tokens, the Future of Money in the Age of the Platform* (Verso, 2023), Longlisted for the FT Book of the year Award.

**Christiane Paul** is Curator of Digital Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art and Professor Emerita at The New

School. She is the recipient of 2023 MediaArtHistories International Award and the Thoma Foundation's 2016 Arts Writing Award in Digital Art. Her latest book is Digital Art (4th ed., 2023).

**Jasia Reichardt** is a writer on art and an exhibition organiser. She was born in Poland, educated in England, and has always been interested in the relationship of art and technology. She worked at the ICA 1963–1971, where one of the exhibitions she organised was *Cybernetic Serendipity* in 1968.



Marianna Simnett: *Blue Moon 2,* 2022, courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

**Marianna Simnett** is an artist living and working in Berlin. Simnett uses vivid and visceral means to explore the body as a site of transformation. In psychologically charged works that challenge both herself and the viewer, Simnett imagines radical new worlds filled with untamed thoughts, strange tales and desires.

**Nicola Tirabasso,** also known as VISIO, is a visual artist and musician based in London. In both music and visuals, his output investigates and explores the arcane tangents between reality and the unexplainable. Much like a modern antiquarian, he draws inspiration from a wide range of fictional imageries, repurposing them in intricate, deconstructed, and melancholically haunted landscapes.

**Günseli Yalcinkaya** is a writer, researcher and internet folklorist based in London. She is Dazed's Features Editor and the host of Logged On, a podcast that puts trends under the mircroscope. She's written extensively about AI, mysticism and psychedelia, and as an artist studies the relationship between ecology, magic and inhuman narratives.