

# **On Media, On Technology, On Life**

## **Interviews with Innovators**

**Editors**

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# Preface

This is the second book in the series ‘Interview with Innovators’. As with the first, this collection of interviews is rooted in events that took place in Seoul, South Korea as an integral part of the Seoul BioArt Festival organised by Biocon Labs of Seoul National University. The festival featured an exhibition of contemporary BioArt on the theme of abundance, bringing together a wide range of international artists whose work represents an important cross-section of BioArt output over the last decade. A parallel conference hosted talks by these invited artists on the subject of ‘wet media’, exploring the role of emerging technologies in arts practice, the use of living materials as an artistic medium, and how scientific knowledge (for example, of infection transmission scenarios and evolutionary processes) can ground new artistic work – together capturing a boundless vision of innovative and meaningful interactions between humans, machines, and micro organisms. A reflection on this work from Arthur Clay comes under ‘**Becoming Media: Yesterday's Fiction; Today's Reality**’ on page 4.

Although the planning of this second volume of Interviews for Innovators originally featured only core participants from the conference, it was decided to expand its remit on the key issues being presented by inviting further artists to take part. With a larger roster of artists, it became possible to focus not only on the use of wet media in new work, but also to explore the concept of becoming media – a consequence of bringing living processes and organisms into play. With the depth and variety of work at hand, we would need a conceptual framework to mould the book into a

coherent whole, whilst enabling authors to explore their own work in a way commensurate to their own vision. For this, we turned to the writing of Robert Mitchell. Mitchell points to a new understanding of living media that is a synergy between its material properties and its function as a communicative tool, driving highly dynamic and generative characteristics that can be termed *vital communication*. Through Mitchell's theory of media, it becomes possible to explore artworks not just in terms of what they are made of (or the story they have to tell) but in terms of how they reconfigure relationships between living materials, tools, techniques, people, and institutions to ask new questions of life itself. We explore this in '**Media and the Theatre of Life Innovation**' on page 8.

The book comes in interesting times. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are faced with unprecedented challenges to our health, communities, economies, and freedom of movement. We are also seeing a new confrontation with other forms of life and the many ecosystems of which we are (only one) part. It is in such circumstances that the arts may prove an important factor in how we grapple with such issues, offering a more tactile, multi-faceted, and media-rich approach. It is through new, cross-disciplinary collaborative partnerships with artists that we can come to a deeper understanding of these challenges (what it is to truly know them) and the immediate or possible-future impacts of our interactions with other life. It lends a certain hope in knowing that human minds are a creative tool which, when put to work, can address even the greatest challenges.