POSITION STATEMENT FOR PANEL KÜNSTLICHE KUNST - "ART AND AESTHETICS IN TIMES OF THE ARTIFICIAL"

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Artificial art künstliche Kunst", as it was called) was the self-contradictory term coined by Max Bense in Stuttgart in 1965 at the ocassion of one of the first exhibitions of what later became known as computer art. The term was meant to distinguish, in words, art with the computer from that without, computer art, from non-computer art. The artificial has since then tremendously gained in strength, and reality sometimes gets replaced by virtuality. It may be worth the attempt to consider art and aesthetics under this aspect.

1.   Art has always been artificial. And yet, mirrored by the machine, traditional art appears as if it was natural. Really, "artificial art" is, and should simply be understood as, machine art: art that gets created through a process marked by partial delegation of certain activities to a machine. Delegation by the artist, of some of his or her activity to some other actor, is nothing special or shocking. Virtually no artists produce their brushes and paints themselves. And Rubens or Vasarely, and many more, were managers of delegation as well as creative men.

2.   Information aesthetics was the heroic attempt in the sixties by Max Bense and Abraham A Moles and their disciples to use the mathematical concept of information as the guiding principle for an analysis of aesthetic processes, both analytic and generative. Although, on a very general level, some exciting insight into the nature of aesthetic processes was gained, the attempt failed miserably. Nothing really remained that would nowadays arouse any interest for other than historical reasons.

3.   The failure of information aesthetics is due to its most fascinating starting point: the radical idea of an aesthetics of the object. All subjectivism was to be banned from aesthetics: Measure instead of value judgement, number instead of feeling, mathematics instead of psychology An aesthetics of the object was supposed to produce methods of measuring the object such that a feature vector of quantitative and descriptive factors would replace the aesthetic object. It appears obvious, in retrospect, that this approach was bound to cripple as soon as the concept of an information, that was independent of the perceiver, crippled. Not many are left nowadays who still believe in such a concept. A radical aesthetics of the object is hard pressed when asked for the difference between aesthetics and physics of the object. This is so because there

is no aesthetics without value judgement, and there is no value judgement without human subject

4.   Information aesthetics failed when it became clear that information was no objective measure, but rather a subjective construct. Yet information aesthetics was successful in introducing the aesthetic object as a "sign", i e. as a semiotic entity. This great assumption has tremendously gained in importance. It has become the central idea of a different approach to aesthetics. Information aesthetics became a semiotic aesthetics. As such, the object as well as the subject are subsumed under the notion of sign "Sign" here, of course, refers to the fundamental concept of semiotics, as, e g., in Peircean semiotics.

A semiotically grounded aesthetics not only opens to the discourse of postmodernism, it also links parts of aesthetics to informatics, which, in this view, turns out to be a technical semiotics. "sign" is central to informatics, it is central to aesthetics, and it is also central to postmodernism Postmodernism is, of course, the times of enhanced artificiality.

5.   Any formalistic approach to aesthetics is, of course, only capable of addressing the lower levels of aesthetics. In particular, if computers are to play a role in the game, whether analytically or generatively, only computable aspects of aesthetics can be addressed.

6.   Treating any real process by computer pre-supposes three reductionistic steps: a semiotic transformation of things to signs, a syntactic transformation of signs to representamens (Peirce' concept), and an algorithmic transformation of representamens to computable structures

On the other hand, this very process of reductions opens up the field of aesthetic semioses for new algorithmic works, and thus for a new kind of aesthetic experience. The field of algorithmic semioses is still to be explored aesthetically, both on the analytical and generative levels. An aesthetics of algorithmic semioses is more likely to produce interesting results for sequences of objects than for individual objects. Its genuine realm is the small difference more than the grand gesture, the animated film sequence more than the great painting on the wall.

7.   In a coarse simplification of computer art, we may identify two transformations that occupy the artists The first type of transformation takes the world as it is given, and produces an aesthetic sign by abstraction The second type of transformation takes the world as it is thought up, and produces an aesthetic sign by concretization. The first transformation takes our bodily experience of moving in time and space as its starting point. The second starts out from our experience of dreaming and thinking. The first type, the abstract one, is exemplified by Harold Cohen, the British in the West of America. The second type, the concrete one, is exemplified by Manfred Mohr, the German in the East of America

8.   Virtuality is not the opposite of reality. It is part of reality[1] Virtual reality is the semiotic domain of reality Actual reality is the corporeal domain of reality. We now encounter signs in the state of algorithmic semioses. This is a definitely new aspect of art, and of the sciences as well. It is the aspect that makes so many wonder. It is a fascinating, but grossly overrated, aspect. It is the cause of rather stupid speculation on the autonomy of the machine. For a normal human being it is wise to remain relaxed. We always tend to interpret the world by projecting our currently most beloved artifact onto it, and then to interpret the artifacts by projecting ourselves onto them I prefer to take the things, including myself, for what they are, and what I am.