Vorspiel
**Christoph Steffner**
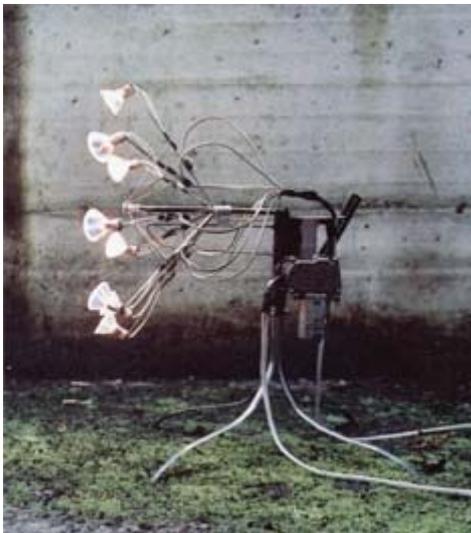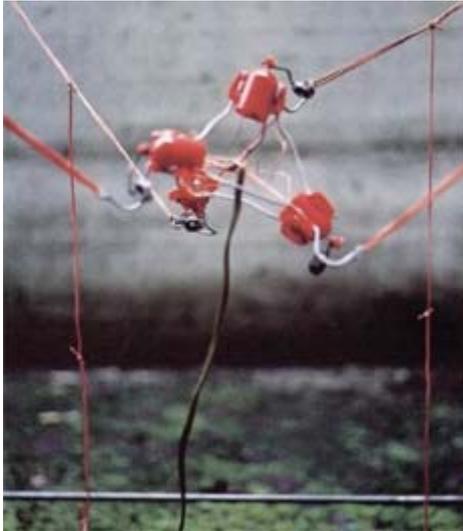
Hear the Gods laughing

Eleonora Louis talking to Christoph Steffner

L: Could you give a rough outline that would characterize your work? It's a fairly wide spectrum.

S: The work itself normally has a structural nature, objective. In any case, it is not anecdotal. As far as the selection of media is concerned, the spectrum is wide. I have given the virtual medium back its privacy by directing it at itself. I have, so-to-speak, taken up two features of a system and processed them, as is also the case in another form, in the film machines. However, there I did invent one feature, the condenser.

L: You have been working on these machines for about five years now. What was that specific interest that took you away from drawings and pictures, to the machines?

S: Both in Linz and in Berlin, I worked parallely on drawings and film work. In the case of drawings, there always was the inclination to work in series and blocks. References set in automatically between the pages; not intentionally, that was a part of the game. I spent a lot of time on installations, interchanging and modifying. Normally the context is a formal one and the subject matter can wander.

L: It is then a matter of displacing the individual elements among each other, a matter of a game.

S: Yes, and in the case of films it was. An approach to music was an original intention; from the rhythmic element or generally from the structural one. In the main issue I worked with different recording speeds. Most films are cut in the camera; from a situation or as a concept. The "African Impression Machine" the first film machine, was a temporary break from conventional filming.

L: And what would be the common context, the common idea running through your works?

S: Multiplicity in the widest range of game types. This runs right through practically all my work from the very beginning. An affliction that caught me even as a child. I could leave nothing the way it was. I always changed things. Variants of variants, an impulse towards

relativizing. As a rule, I tried to explore a system itself rather than to transport something by a system. This reflexive tendency is almost always present. The "I Ging", the book of transformations was such a case. First of all observations of nature are employed and are put into a system that can then be used for other systems, social matters. It always functions on the basis of a dynamic power game and is in use as the oracle book. I reversed the process for a time. I tried to steer a certain sign towards a physical state that I had headed towards. That worked, as in the course of time I got a feeling for how certain states lead to certain signs. With the sign "The Productive", "The Creative" I probably managed this up to five or six times in succession. Why it worked here and not with others is obvious, as this is an extreme, unequivocal state. The sign consists entirely of Yang strokes. In the case of "Oracle", you must be able to keep this specific state open. As far as psychology is concerned, I consider "I Ging" as being much more efficient than psycho-analysis, as it is a direct stocktaking; it can be directly experienced and that is not the case with psycho-analysis. As far as the Creative is concerned, 1 would still like to say that this role is largely overestimated and wrongly assessed today, at the expense of sensibilities.

L: But there have been movements that wanted to eliminate so called Creativity or to redirect it. Here, I think of Duchamp, among others, or the Raymond Roussel machines of fantasy. In his case, he even has machines which produce pictures themselves or music. Here, there is no human individual as a creative force, as these produce biological-technoid objects from their own system. There is no longer any inventive genius.

5: Yes, it is not a matter of giving the psyche to be best. By doing so I would hopelessly degrade the observer to become a voyeur. It is a concealed class thinking. I create lively systems which function but which don't throw out anything concrete; it depends on the types of games. This is a latent state.

L: You do therefore not provide any certain stipulations for the observer?

S: No, otherwise he would not be able to feel the latent element, he needs free space for this. And he should get it, as I also demand this.

L: The machine creates a situation?

S: Exactly. As it also places the object in the space, it forms a space. It is physically very present. This is the common basis with the observer, a prerequisite. The game, that is — the movements, the Displacements -which have a certain softness.

L: What role exactly does water play in your machines?

S: Water itself has no form, it adapts itself. In the case of the water machines it is channelled to a closed circuit. Three water jets centre on a swimmer and set him in rotation. This doesn't work exactly, as there are irregularities and turbulences. The rotating swimmer is projected onto a wall as a virtual picture parallel to the object.

L: Is softness for you an element of your concept of beauty? It is also used in the film machines, where pictures are only insinuated, becoming more precise and then immediately becoming softer again, less clearly defined.

S: The texture picture in the "Jetztmaschine" (Now Machine), is purely accidental. The film is drawn chronologically for the projector. What resulted at the front at the condenser is just accidental.

L: But it has an unbelievably intentional aesthetics.

S: Yes, of course it has aesthetics. And that buoyant chaos which relatively unforms and fluctuates in quite a certain way. There is of course always a sector which one can estimate beforehand. In the case of the film machines, the priority constantly jumps back and forward between the structural picture and the individual picture. This interaction between two aspects of a system was staged there.

L: What is actually beautiful for you?

S: Nature is beautiful. Nature is much more beautiful than art. But such an opinion is unimportant as what results is a certain view of the world. Heraclit said: The most beautiful, the most perfect world is like a chaotically stacked dung heap. A good metaphor for the coincidence of things. Again it is a matter of the coincidence of the Creative — the lap of chaos, which in a latent form involves all creations. Nature is as it is and it could just as easily be quite different.

L: Have perceptions from scientific, philosophical systems been transferred to a private system here?

S: The machines are very private systems with one exception. That is, those machines which are attached to architecture -to this static system. I have baptized them "parasites." Some wind themselves round pillars. Some prefer the corners. They do this relatively discreetly, but persistently.

L: A step inside the public space, into the public system?

S: A new type of game. In the film "Sans Soleil" — Tokyo, masses of people tossing and turning that is what it is more or less called: "One way of winning back a certain beauty from the city and that is to read it as scores."