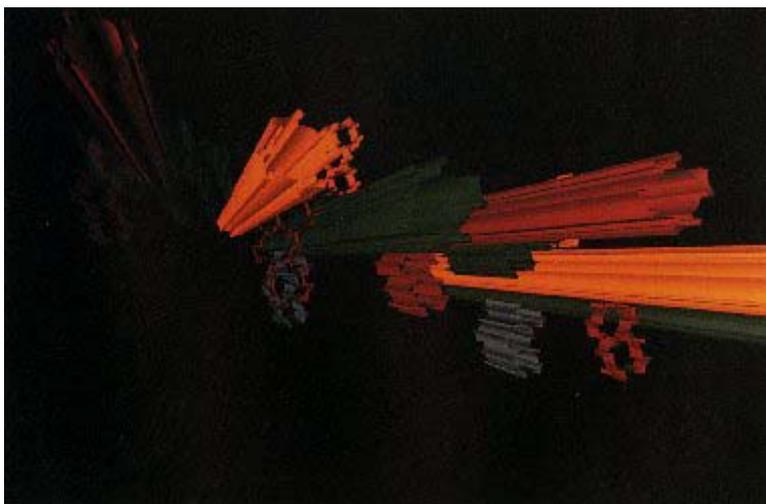
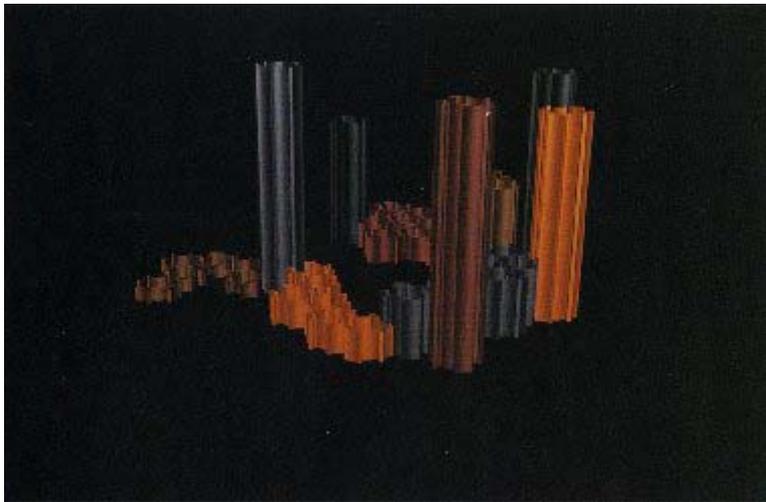
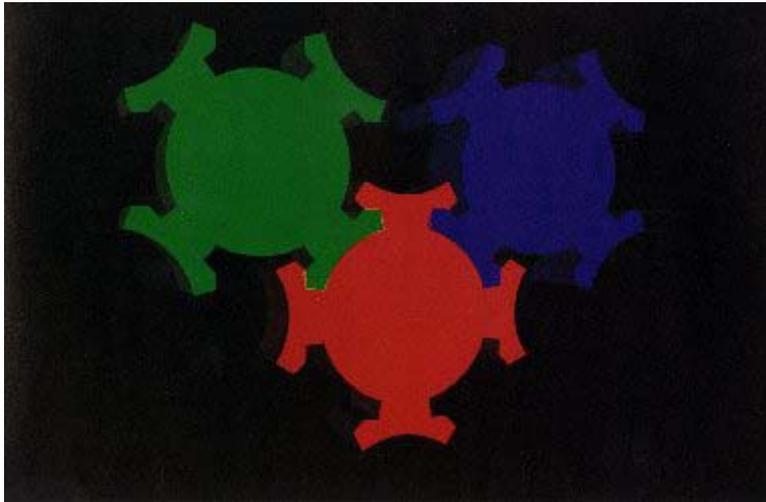


TRANS-FORM
PETER SANDBICHLER



Conventional wisdom puts the artist at the origin of artificial life. Or perhaps the place of its origin is only made possible by the presence of a skilful creative being, just like the purposeful order, the telos, that is imposed on the process of life from then on. Science fiction cinema, for instance, which usually resorts to anthropomorphic creatures to pose questions

about artificial life, likes to tell creation myths and tales of suffering. At its beginning stands a (mad) scientist on the borders between industry, art and science, with his goal-oriented intentions and a certainty about right from the beginning about how artificial life is supposed to go.

What comes out of this is in most cases just a tool-like robot, a copy of (human) life, or to be more precise, some of its mechanistically reduced functions, while the emergence of life in the artifice is provided when the Golem becomes violent; that the replicants in Blade Runner develop a memory and demand longer lives or that the law enforcement combat robots in Robocop only seek out their own targets; in short, that within the homogeneity of a once fixed program implementation, an insurmountable heterogeneous movement constitutes a monstrous disturbance: a deviation signifying that artificial life would like to forget its origins and escape the hand of the artist.

Out of the cinema, into the grand foyer of the Brucknerhaus. There, it could be said, stands a big aluminium sculpture named Trans-Form, because the artist Peter Sandbichler, it could further be argued, put it there.

There is in fact in Sandbichler's work, as there is in the hundreds of aluminium pipes of varying lengths that are connected end to end, a creative decision about the so-standing (or so-lying), about the posture of these sculptures. Some have no definite up or down, a priori, no position or integration of their parts; the rightness of which is open to individual judgement. The table with bended legs (1988) has a surface plate and four wooden legs, each in the shape of a J, and which can be bolted together in many different ways — or on the other hand, not at all: a three-legged table and a leg as a luxury extra — so that the table has a different posture every time and the sculpture goes through the full repertoire of its existential possibilities. How the table stands, and what it is, is determined by a decision that must always be made in the context of, and in reaction to, a space, a situation, and which puts a momentary view through a process of virtual transformation.

The posture of the aluminium sculpture Trans-Form is once again the product of a radically empirical choice opening itself to its surroundings, and its artistic life process begins where a topically and materially occurring process of transformation allows the origin initiated by the artist to become forgotten. The image by which all the pipes are laid end to end in an invariant chain-forming code, is open to eight possible directions, of which no more than four can be in use at any time. That means the sculpture can be taken apart and put back together again, not at every point but at a number of points. This concept goes beyond the choice of the power of the imagination, to the plastic transformation of the arrangement, in which all active observers can intervene and bring about changes by manually reconnecting the pipes.

For Sandbichler, to install is in a real way no longer just to exhibit, but to adjust, and above all it is no longer his intervention through which the sculpture lives. The mad scientist releases the creature, and the metal colossus becomes a monster, not just by disappearing as an alien presence and reappearing suddenly in unexpected places, but by growing, becoming deformed, changing unpredictably. Trans-Form is an artificial being that interacts with its environment, its metabolism is an unending mechanistic production cycle without a stable form of identity. After completion of its installation and exhibition, Trans-Form will have become something else, will have moved and changed its position in space. Perhaps this metamorphic being with its continuous body comprised of 500 metres of aluminium piping will have multiplied through division; no-one knows whether or at which points this profile

chain assembly will break apart and a new sculptural entity will be born; only to snake away from its kind when given the chance.

Whoever wants to can pretend to be the mother or father of a new piece of artificial life, or purloin a small pipe to take home from this un-surveillable place, thus contributing to the total deterritorialization of the piece. In the extreme case, not a single pipe would be left of Trans-Form in the end, and the epidemic spread and duplication of this artificial life form would, from a location point-of-view, look like its disappearance, its death. The decisive factor though is that by reassembling and messing around, the humans become a part of the reproductive system and vehicle in Trans-Form's life process, without which the latter would have to be subject to the control of a human consciousness. Instead the sculpture owes its wild, aimless, rhizomatic growth to the multitude of intervening actions which come together through the Trans-Form machine, but are not causally dependant on each other; a non-individual (therefore divisible), unconscious process. None of the momentary transformation conditions can in itself represent the creature of this life, and the substance of Trans-Form flows only in its differentiations; no act of assembly is privileged above the others, not even those of Peter Sandbichler, but each one is decisive because it creates something new.

As for the criterion of shaping memory, one of those by which artificial life is judged ... : aluminium is patient and forgetful (though it can reveal traces of aging), but a video camera set for time lapse photography will record various stages in the life of Trans-Form for posterity and, where possible, reveal who really did take a pipe home with them.

[erratum-page]

This text has been deleted by mistake from Drehli Robnik's contribution on Peter Sandbichler and represents an essential part of the essay.



That the posture of a sculpture does not follow any transcendental plan has little to do with artificial life, and the phase portraits of its possible variations do not yet constitute movement or any actual process of changing. In Sandbichler's Ikosaeder, a parasitic work of art on a building, on a facade corner of the Vienna Biozentrum Dr.-Bohr-Gasse, the transformation of the sculpture is also defined purely as a possibility: going consistently beyond the architect Buckminster Fuller's method of representing the surface of a (world) sphere through 20 equilateral triangles, Sandbichler's sculpture presents a globe whose equivalent surfaces have departed from the laws governing the spherical shape and whose geographical relationships have fallen into disorder, or to put it a better way, into a different order. The contours of the countries and continents on the globe's 20 hingemounted triangles face each other the wrong way, not like a mistake but as a production of difference, as an encouragement to the residents and other observers to "think" the fragmented geopolitical body of the earth back together into a different order; although the familiar representational form of the globe would lead to only one thought synthesis; which in turn is only one possible choice among many possible truths about the recreation of the world.

Drehli Robnik

TRANS-FORM (THEORETICALLY EVENT OF INFINITE PARTS)

Sculpture is an open system. It consists of any number of parts. Its position in space is variable, just like the other parameters that determine its shape.

As new spaces are opened up (computer generated, artificial spaces), a sculptural concept also has to change. Just as the function, morphology, meaning and bedeutungsraum (verticals, horizontals, social sculpture ...) of sculpture/the sculpture concept has been transformed in recent decades, altered concepts are now being introduced into the theory and practise of sculpture creation (the flexible, variable, randomized sculpture).

The sculpture model takes shape on the computer. The surroundings are at first artificial, before the work is extrapolated into real space. The creation and design of the model is subject to random processes that the artist no longer consciously controls. A form (shape) is created through "blind" scaling, transformation, positioning (in that the computer model only takes into account one spatial view). This way the artist escapes the traps of a formal aesthetic. The elements of the sculpture can be changed in the space by the viewer.

This has the effect that even in its solid form the sculpture has no definitive and final shape but is put in a processual and historical context.

Through the altered function of the sculpture and its variability, its temporary, provisional ordering also become models of social, biological, chaotic contexts and systems, as changing one parameter influences others.

Constanze Ruhm