

## Networking

### Heimo Ranzenbacher

Observers of the art world are fond of overusing the term "revolution," nevertheless, one can scarcely help but identifying new trends which truly are revolutionary. They find expression in practice, and in the discussions surrounding the tendencies toward dissipation exhibited by both the concept of a work of art and the idea of authorship, as well as in the consequences for the context of aesthetic activity implicit in these developments.

According to Thomas Kuhn, a scientist constructs his conception of reality with reference to certain "paradigms." A paradigm is not a separate theory, but rather a conceptual framework within which data gathered by means of experiment and observation is formulated. It is neither true nor false; instead, it merely reflects a perspective, an aspect of reality. In a certain sense, this also applies to art. From time to time, the history of ideas undergoes a paradigm shift which, along with world views, encompasses aesthetic theories as well. Such a shift has already gotten underway. In science, this has manifested itself in the rejection of the mechanistic-materialistic world view. In art — and particularly in new art, in the art of electronic space and postulated connectivity — immaterialities are taking on decisive significance, whereby a wide range of artistic criteria are also in transition. The new cannot be grasped with the old; the new is unsuited to be applied to the old. Each is relevant only in relation to its respective referential system, and it thus makes no sense to attempt to pit one against the other. In this way, cultural or paradigmatic relevance is becoming a definitive characteristic — if not the central aesthetic determinant — of new art.

The cultural encyclopedia of our age and the novel conditions of a network-linked existence recorded in its pages make it also seem advisable for art to take its leave of Schopenhauer's *Principium individuationis*. Where the fate of individuals is a consequence of dependencies and systematic interrelationships, it becomes virtually impossible to attribute all forms of interconnectedness in life to the fate of individuals. The capacity which has been conferred upon the artist to properly act as an interpreter is affected by this. The fact that we are also confronting the immanent departure of an art, from which we demand more than sheer entertainment value [contemplation, or the stimulation of our interest disciplined along lines of tradition], has begun to radically change the way in which an artist works. The rejection of the work of art in favor of the process, and the relinquishment of the creator's authority over a creation based upon the possibility of processing creations — have themselves turned attention to these possibilities, with technology as their motive force. The way in which these artists go about their work will be radicalized to the same degree as their conception of themselves as creators of "net-works," a selection of which openX has collected.

It might be said that telematic or network-supported art organizes itself as an experimental arrangement for a telematic society. Interactivity expands the rigid borders of works of art into flowing peripheries and introduces into the discourse the concept of form as a participatory magnitude — or leads directly into the process which reaches its consummation in the acceptance or infiltration of its systematic conditions. The artist, in the form of an emphatic abnegation of his status as author, holds up a mirror of understanding in front of the individual's conception of himself as a sovereign being — understanding induced by a totally interconnected world. The art which is constituted in this way is one that emerges out of particularistic experience and acts within a context which its own emergence has helped to bring about.

In science, the consequences of constitutive paradigms are rather more of a theoretical nature [having to do with the theoretical knowledge that forms our view of the world], whereas in art, it is practice itself which is affected — due, namely, to the paradigm shift that has taken place, for which social reality has prepared the way. Taken as a whole, the forms assumed by art seem like those of a project aimed at designing experimental configurations of possible utopias. Outlined experimentally by projects such as openX, they are already taking shape ["as a future which is collapsing upon us" — Gerfried Stocker] in the form of an acknowledgment of technological designs. What seems to be taking place with this acknowledgment is the phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy, meaning that in the process of technology assimilating culture, technology establishes its informational "nature" — expressed through connectivity, immateriality, interactivity and reversibility — as a cultural one.

Analogous to the functionalism inherent in the question of the relationship among mind, brain and world — of such enormous importance in research on artificial intelligence — which no longer poses the question of the composition of mind, brain and atom, rather asks how they are organized with respect to their function, art which organizes itself out of particularistic experience and dispenses with the sovereign author likewise has to do with functional organization which evokes events [processes] and is no longer a matter of the internal and formal organization of works of art [projects]. This seems to be like wetness, which is indeed a real characteristic of water, but which we would never attribute to an individual molecule of water; the phenomenon of wetness occurs only when an adequate number of molecules have been brought together or a sufficient degree of complexity has been achieved in the system "water." Staying with this image — traditional art can be described, more or less, as molecularly oriented [namely, upon the symbolic/iconographic representation of specific conditions]; new art, on the other hand, emerges as a manifestation of the complexity of the system itself. Observation oriented toward the work of art is unsuited to this complexity.

Among the phenomenological characteristics of a work of art is that it permits to being described [and justified] monetarily. It ultimately distinguishes itself through the fact that it specifically legitimizes this through the utilization of a specially designed and managed, monetarily-describable infrastructure set up for this purpose: namely, the entire administrative hierarchy of the art establishment's operational system, from the galleries to the middle-men [both bureaucratic and "free-lance"] to the academies and the purveyors of art history as an academic discipline. Art institutes, museums, galleries, archives, as well as traditional systems and methods of preserving and brokering art can all be named as components integrated into this operating system, a catalog simultaneously articulating the spaces of traditional art as well as the sphere of hegemony over it. Art history and art administration have their own methods of grasp, judgment and attribution of art; by concentrating on the object of art and not on its structure [its structural organization], art objects are generated which are appropriate to these methods.

"The artist" positions himself within this [structural] hegemony. Highly significant is the process of development from liberation to institutionalized freedom, which will be broadly outlined here. In the Romanticism movement that followed in the wake of the Enlightenment, artists developed a new conception of themselves which culminated in the liberation from prescription and constraint to be found in the exclusive dedication to one's own creative gifts. The artist is understood to be the proclaimer of a truth accessible to him alone; originality becomes the core of the concept of genius. This thinking which conceptualized artists as an intellectual elite corresponded to their increasing social isolation. And it is this very cliché which continued to determine their position, despite the picture beginning to emerge that had

its historical equivalent in the Renaissance artist. After all, the engineer-artist has not yet gone beyond society's perceptual horizon.

An additional line of tradition extends from the loss of the client who commissioned works of art, a development which came about as a result of political and social upheavals in the wake of the French Revolution. The political restoration, furthermore, was directed against progressive artists [such as Millet and Daumier], this time as a result of their political involvement on behalf of democratic or socialist ideas.

The relationship of art to dominant segments of society has ultimately continued to be characterized by cleavage and contradiction. Since Antiquity, these powers have made use of art for the purpose of representation, glorification and propaganda. It has only been since the 19th century, after artists severed connections to their traditional clients [who were only partially replaced by the bourgeoisie and private patrons], that they have been able to more effectively counter this process of domination. [To be sure, artists had to play the fool, as well as stand in bread lines, in return for this freedom.] Recognition was ultimately achieved through educational institutions, the art trade and art criticism — not only a relatively inadequate means to further art, but also an instrument of [conceptual] command over it. The so-called bourgeois concept of art basically refers only to the "recognition of the instruments of implementation of judgmental criteria." That is its formal description. Stylistic and thematic innovations against which this concept puts up superficial resistance have nothing to do with its formal definition.

We see ourselves confronted nowadays with a similar development. The ruling powers are proceeding in this matter rather more subtly — they are demanding the confirmation of their unbroken capacity to prevail in the form of organizational correspondences. The operational system of the art establishment is to be interpreted as one of these correspondences. The course of events following the French Revolution, which meant the loss of clients who commissioned works of art, is repeating itself today in the form of the abandonment of an operational system which is to a certain extent assured, in favor of the sphere of a general cultural technology. The political-social restoration which comes about with the recognition of this change is now aimed only indirectly at "progressive artists," as the forces arrayed behind them ultimately share the loss of monetary and infrastructural descriptive models, the instruments of acceptance. But this restorative force also confers something in return upon informational art in the form of the resistance on the part of those forces against the looming loss of effectiveness of their instruments. The mobilization of this restorative force reveals itself most conspicuously when one recognizes the methodology employed by institutions in viewing art [and even in determining what is art] as a process of establishing a fixed place for the institutional structure itself. The difference from the past is that they can, indeed, ignore the new art, but not the change, because if they did, they would relegate their own instrumentarium to ineffectuality and insignificance and, with it, a not inconsiderable segment of their organizational conception of self. And that would ultimately mean that they themselves had torpedoed the bourgeois conception of art [its formal concept], the very one for which they stand.

The cleavage and contradiction which has characterized the relationship of art and power since time immemorial has turned virulent in a completely new way. At the same time, this situation can be considered as an indicator for the problems generally facing our culture as a result of the Information Revolution. Art history as a scholarly discipline [and its allied fields such as art criticism] are very directly affected by this.

In its new form of organization, art seems, in a certain respect, to have continued to follow criteria of the art historical view which, since "Kant's critique of judgment" [1790], have been considered fundamental methodological principles of art history [as a scholarly discipline] and its affiliated instruments of artistic attribution, such as art criticism and brokerage. But the consequences are totally different.

The advent of Kant's [and Hegel's] philosophical aesthetics established a systematic way of looking at things which took as its measure the concept of the truth of the mind in history. The convergence of aesthetic systems and cultural-historical processes introduced in this way formed the basis of a system of judgment with regard to the aesthetic meaning of art [the character of truth]. In the process of acceptance of this principle, the development of the arts took place more or less through their works. The system of judgment basically became a matter of the organization of the object of judgment, the work of art. The development of art formerly met with resistance motivated by the convention which it negated, whereas now that the "character of truth" is realized organizationally, it withdraws from the range of grasp of potential resistance in the process of judgment itself. The principle of the dualistic judgmental system — view and examination — and aesthetic meaning converge. This has consequences particularly for the status of the observer.

Just as chaos research, cosmology, computer science, the chemistry of self-organizing systems and the rather troublesome findings of quantum mechanics have provided support for the paradigm shift in the scientific world view, the foundation of the view of art has likewise been shaken for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that, here as well, the observer is entangled in a most fundamental way within the observed world. This entanglement is even clearer in art than it is in physics, since this observation is subject to the conditions of the appearance of the observed object [i.e. a process]. This paradigm shift is incisively manifested for the observer precisely as a result of traditional methods of observation becoming successively less suitable. In new art, the fields of production, presentation and distribution are collapsing into one another; its appearance is based within the sphere of connectivity in which observation mutates into a processual act.

And as if it were not enough that art history thereby helps bring about the disappearance of its instrumental competence, it is also no longer even capable of corresponding to its own program as a discipline which is, in principle, objectively positioned to the phenomena of art — a claim which raises quite enough contradictions on its own. It had to open up its methods to, and adjust them towards, the conditions of the spatial context of the manifestation and organization of informational art.

Informational art [which can be singled out for its freedom to organize itself and to bring its forms of organization to its forms of representation and thus, as aesthetically recognizable processes] stands outside the formal bourgeois concept of art, which defines itself by means of particular instrumental competence and effectiveness. Informational art carries out the paradigm shift which society implicitly recognizes through its [necessary] resistance — namely, to the solution to the organizational problems with which it has been confronted. The instruments of artistic recognition are poorly suited to the task of comprehending such a paradigm shift. Art history, which not only holds the mandate for the determination of and the judgment upon art, but which also provides the socioeconomic descriptive model of the entire artistic undertaking, is a part of this project as well as an expression of historical consciousness. As such, it is incumbent upon it to create the preconditions for a social and cultural truth alongside that of the mind in history. This task is a prospective one, since social

truth as a standard of measurement in the system of judging art and determining what constitutes art appears to be the truth of the mind in the future.

"The term 'immaterial' is a rather risky neologism. All that is meant thereby is the fact that nowadays [...] that which is material can no longer be regarded as something in an oppositional duality such as that of a subject and an object. The consciousness of immaterialities permits us to comprehend the worldwide process of mediatization."

[Jean François Lyotard, immaterialität und postmoderne, merve 1985]

"Radical constructivism and the theory of autopoiesis teach us that we ourselves consist of individual points, becoming a unified entity which, in turn, exists as an individual point in the inconceivable totality of the universe. Life can only be experienced particularistically, so that every insight is verifiable only in relation to something."

[Gerhard Johann Lischka, kunstforum international, vol. 103]