

Karl Heinz Maier/Hans Kropshofer **Fernleihe — Ferntausch**



A Tele-lending and exchange Library

In the context of the Forum for the Experimental Use of Space and Resources (Fern — Forum für experimentelle Raum- und Ressourcennutzung), we have been making our library of works containing over 2,000 books, magazines, catalogs and videos available to the public free of charge since July 1, 1998. It will be managed as a mail-order lending library, together with a swap pool that has also been set up. A complete directory of material available for lending or exchange can be ordered from us as a printed catalog, or accessed in the Internet, which offers the possibility of direct ordering and offering.

Borrowing and Swapping — An Interdiscourse

A

The enormous speed with which potential artistic venues are recognized as such and staked out as niches to then be rapidly transformed into arenas of competition, production and consumption is now a part of the struggle for survival in the business of art.

The social meanings of art are increasingly absorbed into creations offered up as means to attain self-realization by the recreational industry of a mature form of capitalism; these social meanings are dissolved, and artists are employed as lubricants to keep the cultural machinery running.

And in those institutional settings that art calls home, middlemen carry on a campaign of their own, working out the strategies legitimating their own existence in what is construed and politically instrumentalized as the "public interest." Art is dealt with as a narrated tale, and delivered to a public that is not addressed as the producer of a culture but rather waited on as a consumer of it.

In light of these background conditions, we are putting a few conceptual constructions to the test — artist, exchange, public, work, form and informed-ness of artists' modes of action and mechanisms of production, and their social relevance within self-generated spheres of autonomy.

By intentionally undertaking the publication and dissemination of our library of works, we are staking our own capital and material, activating our own resources, in the elaboration of our artistic production. These resources, aside from their utility values, represent real, subjective

needs and interests within the collection, which we are making available — just as a library does — as individual volumes that can be obtained by means of lending or exchange. The arts themselves become focuses of desire.

With this desire, we are participating in the processes of opinion formation about art beyond the venues and spheres of action intended for this purpose: the process of seeking out the tele-public takes place by means of social systems already in place for the dissemination of information and goods — ranging from the Internet to the local paper, from the supermarket to the neighborhood convenience store, from the school to the outlets of the art business, from the printed flyer to the formally-delivered speech.

Decisive as to whether tele-lending and tele-swapping will be capable of establishing themselves as a separate sphere of action alongside economically-motivated constructions of needs and concentrations of knowledge (such as the exploding field of e-commerce in the net) will be the procedural strategies as well as, ultimately, the conception of self developed by all of the individuals involved, including those of our financial supporters, and in light of social formational processes.

B

The real public of the marketplace is disappearing. Exchange among human beings takes place in abstract networks. There are users at the terminal points and exploiters at the nodes. The development of virtual space proceeds with such enormous speed that society capitulates in the face of it. New social forms cannot establish themselves; they are choked off in the tangled undergrowth of cyberspace.

We are all linked up in a variety of ways to networks that we do not comprehend, that we are incapable of influencing, and that deprive us of the right to decide about the information we receive. The Internet as a battlefield in an economic war: the point is to get users onto the net, to tap them, to exploit them. The cultural potential of virtual space that transcends space and time becomes atrophied and wastes away.

We are not imploding in the new ontological mode of virtual cyberexistence; we are informationally strung-out biomachines appended to the monthly-service-charge end of the net.

The battle rages around the paths of communication. The Starwars among the mighty nodes of the information and communication monopoly have already flared up. Countering it is the strategy of organized anarchy: network-linked communication in public virtual space, which ensures a balance between distance and proximity in the new mode of the virtual.

The act of exchange is primal, anonymous intimacy. Ego and alter ego really/intimately confront one another to enter into a relationship by means of the mechanism of abstract values in the act of exchange. The universal and abstract character of goods makes possible exchange at a distance. The actors disappear beneath the paths of circulation. New network forms enabling immediate transaction of social/intimate/ occupied objects, not arrayed hierarchically between ego and alter ego, make a counterstrategy possible. These networks can grow, become more tightly interwoven, increase their range, increase the speed of their circulation and thus

create new linkages and structures, virtual communities and groups.

The access to the library and databank makes non-commercial forms of transaction available to the users. They take up contact with unknown third parties who assume clearer contours for them — not as real people, but as a concrete conception. The contents and the extent of the available offerings depend on the decisions of all those who are involved in this project. The end result is unforeseeable.