

## Gerfried Stocker

### 20 of the 20th

Media technology and contemporary methods and modes of processing information have not only engendered and stimulated forms of artistic expression which have no correspondences to conventional artistic disciplines, but have also brought forth a new understanding of art and its protagonists.

During Ars Electronica's two decades, the festival and the activities surrounding it have not only been a proving ground of models for confronting and dealing with art in a way that is appropriate to these times in which digital technologies serve as implement, material and theme; rather, they have also undertaken theoretical situation reports that have given rise to the formation of a consensus in the general discourse and provided inspiration for day-to-day artistic practice.

"Media art" positions itself in particular as art existing in a state of dependence upon mediatization as the fundamental condition in accordance with which the reordering of our society takes place. Correspondingly, its manifestations are rather systemically motivated than oriented upon their nature as a work of art. In contrast to the results of a procedure by means of which "media" are reduced to a utility value determined in the context of operations in the art business and which are thus, as a rule, still emotionally accessible, media-systemic works often make themselves accessible thanks solely to rational arguments. The question of what it is precisely that makes it art is, on one hand, a consequence of this positional shift of art from the market into the field of systems, and, on the other hand, the introduction of a rational discourse which is the precondition for the formation of a consensus.

Ars Electronica's 20th anniversary would of course constitute grounds to conduct an archeological dig through the strata of artistic development; above all, however, it provides an occasion to attempt to identify emerging approaches to a critical—or rather, fully mature, which is to say: minus the hype—path of further development. In a matter befitting a jubilee conceived in this way, the anniversary celebration will feature the Beusch/Cassani (TNC Network; see their contribution to this volume) special symposium entitled "And what is it that makes it art?", as well as the presentation of the projects *Videoplace* and *I Met-a-Morph* by Myron Krueger, *Bump Into Each Other* by association.creation, *OMV Klangpark* with Michael Nyman and representatives of the digital music scene, and *Liquid Space* by Werner Jauk and Heimo Ranzenbacher.

These works, which seem so completely incompatible at first glance, do have at least one common denominator though: they take up the issue of an expanded conception of space and the public sphere resulting from telematics and virtuality. This common denominator is significant above all for the above-mentioned dependence of media art upon mediatization in a social context, since the term "public space"—defined in a legal sense as a public asset (like streets, city squares, rivers) and characterized by the fact that it is available for public use and may be utilized by anyone in accordance with certain regulations—increasingly needs to be defined more precisely in order to remain a concept that can still be communicated in the wake of the informatization of everyday life. The public sphere—of interaction, of communication, of information—resists being characterized in a conventional way, ultimately due to new conceptions of "public-ness" as a consequence of an expanded concept of space. On the basis of spatial metaphors like cyberspace and telematic or virtual space, domains of action have established themselves and are lived out in actual fact (net communities, for instance). The space of public ideas owes its existence in its current form to an originally

closed system of production and distribution whose conditions are becoming successively public in the real world as well.

The work of art determined by the operations of the art business implicitly confirms the conception of public and space in accordance with their conventional characterization; the systemic predisposition takes into account the expansion and diffusion of spaces and publics. The nature of this confirmation also reflects an understanding of the conditions under which the social unfolding of this process of cultural transformation occurs and the concomitant shift in artists' conception of self that a wide variety of different settings have placed at their disposal.

Myron Krueger represents to a consummate degree the type of engineer-artist who has made a massive contribution to technical systems and the development of individual devices—a highly decisive aspect of this 20-year segment of media art history. Michael Nyman's encounter with representatives of the digital music scene is a matter of the application of related theoretical conceptions and their highly divergent formal manifestations; *association.creation* is representative of working in a collective group and working on telematic simultaneity as matters to be taken completely for granted; Jauk and Ranzenbacher close this circle in that they implement theory in art in order to test the contingency of practice and theory.

Myron Krueger is considered to be a media art pioneer who, on the basis of his technical knowledge, already developed at a very early stage an impressive virtuosity in the field of interactivity, and received the first Golden Nica for Interactive Art in 1990. The intention here is to present an artist who has been at work in this field for an extended period of time, and to show an early work, *Videoplace*, and a recent one, *I Met-a-Morph*, in order to illustrate the path of his individual artistic development and to shed light thereby on general developments in the field as a whole.

A similar peg is the basis for Michael Nyman's confrontation with the sampling generation, though with the difference that this will not only mark the contours of a line of development, but will translate it into music as well.

Bringing together Michael Nyman—whose compositions basically come about in conventional fashion—and representatives of digital music—sound art, sampling and techno—alludes to processes that Nyman employed at a time when the technological means to perform sampling as we know it today were not yet available. One of the central style elements of modern music (musical production)—the recombination of musical material taken from outside sources—was anticipated by Nyman on the level of musical notation. For the *OMV Klangpark*, the simultaneous application of both methods to one another in reciprocal fashion generates the form in which they are to be presented to the public.

*association.creation*, as a collective of relatively young artists, personifies a formerly demonstrative team-thinking approach to carrying out projects—in this case, one of rather unspectacular physical dimensions whose telematic nature, however, is prototypical for an intelligent infrastructural installation arrayed in an urban environment and an art form whose realms of effectiveness are "public spaces." Transcending the respective localized events occurring in two different cities, the interaction and communication of the individuals present at both locations, which is made possible by the telematic furnishings set up on-site, is a precondition for experiencing telematic simultaneity.

*Liquid Space*, on the other hand, is being put forward as an attempt to proceed from theoretical and aesthetic assumptions regarding art and science, as well as on the basis of a theoretical project discourse capable of generating fruitful further development, in order to arrive at new aesthetic outcomes. Theory formulation is, to a certain extent, formalized into the process of generating art. The beginning of this work-in-progress is marked by the "citation" of an interactive installation which influences the perception of place as well as the system of communication about this system.