

Emerging Creativity

From the experimental array *openX* to *electrolobby*

How do you go about exhibiting something in conjunction with the Festival when the object to be exhibited actually doesn't even call for exhibition? And what's more, when that object even resists representation as part of an exhibition in a conventional artistic context—broadly speaking: temporary and/or spatial segregation from the public sphere in which the origination and comprehension of the exhibited object would take place in accordance with generally binding conditions? The topos "art," which is summed up in the work of art, derives one of its norms from this segregation. ://Art¹, which is based on the superimposition of production, mediation and reception, however, simultaneously, with the sphere in which this superimposition arises, engenders the dissolution of the topos "art" into a disposition. These and other similar considerations were the influences behind the introduction of a presentation format—initially as "Network" and thereafter as openX—of ://art projects whose primary milieu is the virtual space of networks.

The name *openX* was meant to demarcate the nexus of virtual and real space. Its epithet, "an experimental array," is derived from the designation used for scientific methods—(variable) circumstances for the purpose of observation from which insights can subsequently be derived. Of course, this did not automatically raise the claim to scientific authoritativeness; rather, it was meant to characterize the effort to come up with a form of presentation for ://art whose existential conditions and conditions of production are one and the same, a form of presentation that makes expressive statements about the mode of ://art and its milieu regardless of the particular project being presented. Whereas artworks, in their dependence (meant also in an aesthetic sense) upon the so-called White Cube—or, rather, its corresponding systems of operation and ways of conducting business—prove to be rooted to a particular place, art in the Internet is per se devoid of such connections to some physical location. The challenge was to come up with a venue design inherent in which was the dissolution of such connections to some physical location. The necessity that arose from the Network presentations to develop a successor format engendered the large-scale space metaphor employed by *openX* beginning in 1997, and *electrolobby* launched this year can also be regarded as a continuation of this series of experiments.

In the meantime, Internet-based works of art have been part of many media art exhibitions. The theoretical nature of these questions has been responded to—depending upon the nature of exhibitions and their curators—in practical fashion for the most part by displaying them by means of screen projections etc., which is to say that the issue has been avoided. If the messages (of ://art) revolve around the audience, and thus, turning away from a linear information schema, refer back to a communication structure, then the staging of the message in order to enhance its attractiveness is completely absurd since this once again places the message in the focal point. A practice that effectively accentuates that which resists classification according to the concept of the work, however, not only contradicts the principal characteristics of art projects, but also implicitly constitutes the attempt to canonize them in a traditional manner. This is counterproductive to say the least; the focus dominates the insight.

On one hand, this process of cooptation mobilizes the resistance of ://artists; on the other hand, though, a consequence of this is that turning away from art pursued as a

business goes hand in hand with the rejection of the discourse of art. This development resembles what happened in leading-edge computer music a few years ago when many pioneering musicians became increasingly uneasy with the academic environment of the institutes and festivals devoted to this form of art, which resulted in them moving on to experimental pop music or striking out on totally new paths. Just as the music industry was suddenly forced to acknowledge that, thanks to the Internet and MP3, the really exciting new developments were taking place beyond the realm of their influence and those propagating them were having no trouble finding an audience, museums and festivals might soon suffer a similarly unpleasant fate—the recognition that the perpetuation of old patterns of thinking has indeed brought together a collection of web-sites, but that these exist merely as remnants relevant to contemporary history and the history of art, and that the music is now playing on a completely different dance floor. In light of these consequences, presentation of these works of `://art` must take their theoretical mode of proceeding into account just as aesthetic theories must be considered in evaluating such projects.

From the very outset, the format of openX was linked with the intention of shedding light upon the culture of `://art` in a way that resists setting up an exhibition environment that necessitates a “different” behavioral mode of encountering and appreciating such works. To foster the experience that the messages revolve around the receptor—and to show how this is so—the experience for the observer and the project creator was meant to dovetail so that they would revolve around one another. The “large-scale office space” with its multitude of PCs did to a certain extent faithfully reproduce the network, which also constituted an operation that, because of the entities making it up, could be designed in any given way. The `://artists` ran their projects at their workstations and came into contact with one another as well as with their audience. Still, to maintain that one is in cyberspace is nothing more than a metaphor. Furthermore, the existence of cyberspace as a mere parallel reality with independent laws that are far beyond the immediate horizon of our observations and experiences did not deserve any special attention. Then, it would be nothing more than a destination for a short outing, like the sea is for inhabitants of the Alps. The evaluation of cyberspace thus refers to the emergence of a techno-cultural milieu existing on this side of the relevant metaphors. Pierre Lévy coined the term “emerging creativity”² to describe the characteristic aspect of this milieu.

Beyond the state of techno-euphoria, in the wake of which, for instance, the “New Economy” is trying to trademark cyberspace, it constitutes itself through the effective and potential link-up of technologies; it is not the so-called “new media” that are its basic information but rather the observations of how, as a result of its use that has rapidly multiplied and become something taken completely for granted, an open, dynamic system has established itself as a “culture of networking” within our culture. The capacity to be linked up within a network is a cultural characteristic and not a natural one. Network linkage is a process to which the “stuff” of the culture is (deliberately) subsumed or by which it is (inadvertently) encompassed. The connective culture of things is an emergent phenomenon of cyberspace, for the observation of which openX opens exemplary windows.

This “culture of networking” is however not only the object upon which *openX* and the projects presented in this context focus, but is also binding for the programmatic agenda for the development of this format.

`://art` also continues to stand for its cultural relevance; however, this is not based upon historical or thematic considerations, but rather to a much greater extent—as already stressed—upon the appropriation of the `://mode` of being a statement. (A picture of a

cyborg on a blackboard would be irrelevant; its form would be at odds with the subject.)
 ://art that refers to communication structures will therefore organize itself in accordance with such means as are appropriate to formalizing the processes of communication. Its appearance then mirrors its organization no matter what particular content is being communicated. It shares this aspect with the programmatic agenda of *openX*. Cultural relevance in the sense outlined above appears among the motifs for (://)art to organize itself anew and to be the decisive, fundamental element. And this is also the basis of its reference to scientific authoritativeness, theory (formation), analysis, etc. (In contrast to this, art that goes about organizing itself, formalizing and theorizing in conventional fashion acts in the mode of hysteria.) Likewise, cultural relevance can be considered the paradigm of the experimental arrays of *openX*. The informational task incumbent upon a festival demands proceeding in didactic fashion; whether this takes place in a way that makes a claim to ://artistry—as may appear to be the case in light of the above elaborations—is insignificant for the very same reason.

No matter how the large-scale office space metaphor is assessed in retrospect, its fundamental motif—replacing the exhibition venue with a workplace and an area that facilitates interpersonal contact—ought to be carried on as a binding programmatic approach. The current experimental array in the form of *electrolobby* formalizes and instrumentalizes the contact among project presenters and observers just as the *electrolobby* itself plays this role with other elements of the festival.

-
- 1 In the artistic scene under discussion here, the term “art” often provokes skeptical reactions that, however, apply above all to the *topos art*. The difference, along with its operative and organizational consequences, has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere. Here, for reasons of brevity, acknowledgment of this distinction will be primarily typographical through the use of the symbol ://.
 - 2 Pierre Lévy: *Die kollektive Intelligenz*, Bollmann 1997, p. 128.