25 Years of Ars Electronica

A Survey as Memory Theater

Art in the Context of Software and Complex Machines ꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏꞏ

The study *25 Years of Ars Electronica* consists of multiple poster works:
(1)   memory theater—25 Years of Ars Electronica
(2)   media analysis and humanities context
(3)   concept cluster—media/computer science concepts over the course of time
(4)   networks of people
(5)   technical application history
(6)   gestures of arrangement and use

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Memory Theater—25 Years of Ars Electronica

At its core the study seeks to condense roughly 9000 pages of material from the catalogs of Ars Electronica into central statements and key terms. The approximately 4800 blocks of text are ordered according to issues of content in the form of a memory theater. The study attempts to take into consideration the participating artists and theoreticians in a comprehensive form and to establish or maintain a reference to the source texts.

Three phases of development were highlighted in color in the arrangement of details. This makes it possible to trace the influence of the artistic director visually over the course of time. This depiction also clearly shows that even in this very "young" art form, there are a number of manifestations that do not yet indicate any canonized direction.

The left part of the study focuses on performative contributions. The discursive area (on the right) primarily shows issues that were treated in the framework of accompanying symposiums. Project names were purposely left out to allow more space for key statements of content.

Media Analysis and Humanities Context

This detail study indicates the extent to which various years of Ars Electronica are rooted in the "classical" media. Attempted detachment from the "old" media does not appear to be feasible, and a closer analysis (from the view of the art field and in terms of perception theory) shows that this would probably not be expedient.

The diagram shows at a glance how strongly the basic exposition depends on the artistic organizers: whereas the early years were centered quite compactly around certain media strands, a very wide-ranging approach is evident in later years.

This media analysis was confronted with a humanities synchronopsis. This addresses the question of the extent to which Ars Electronica has had a lasting impact on the art/media field in Linz. It is quite clearly evident here how quickly current research topics were accepted as a main theme or a topic for symposium panels. Since Linz offers no university focal point in the humanities, it is fascinating to trace how important issues, literature and authors have infiltrated this city. The role that Ars Electronica plays in this cannot be stressed enough. Were it not for Ars Electronica, Linz would never have had the opportunity to welcome so many "stars." The radical turn to natural science topics (at the end of the so-called postmodern era) is also clearly legible here.

Concept Cluster—Media/Computer Science
Concepts Over the Course of Time

A concept cluster was developed to elucidate how strongly concepts from the electronic media used in the art field coincide with relevant computer science concepts. The key concepts were depicted here in network form as well. The period of use was completed with the help of the memory theater and the Ars Electronica online archive. The art-specific views from the memory theater were purposely left out, in order to determine how the concept field is organized from the perspective of database hits.

Here it is obvious that technical developments have a significant influence on the terminology. It can also clearly be seen how quickly buzzwords become established or what their half-life is.

Network of People

Large-scale projects are generally strongly influenced by their organizers and/or participants. The interplay of important players is represented in an exemplary way in a network form. Among other aspects, a substantial communication structure developed from the worldwide network of jury members.

Technical Application History (Attila Kosa)

Based on art projects shown in Linz, an application history of relevant technologies is represented in a compact form. This is not a comprehensive technical/technological or media history, but instead demonstrates that a broadly based media history could be traced on the basis of the huge number of projects selected in the Prix Ars Electronica or shown in the festival. It is also incipiently evident in this work how quickly the most up-to-date technologies become manifest in the art field.

Gestures of Arrangement and Use

On the basis of verb-oriented notes on Ars Electronica 2003, it should be evident that a media analysis oriented to types of activity (in reference to Matthias Vogel) aids the promotion of the most interesting core areas of "electronic arts."

Translated from German by Aileen Derieg

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The detail study "Technical Application History" was realized by Attila Kosa, who is concerned with academic documentation and knowledge management. The study (memory theater) was translated into English by Aileen Derieg.

Due to the limitations of space, it is not possible to go into the ars-specific contents of the detail studies in any depth here. The entire study is freely available, however, and can be obtained from gerhard.dirmoser@energieag.at.