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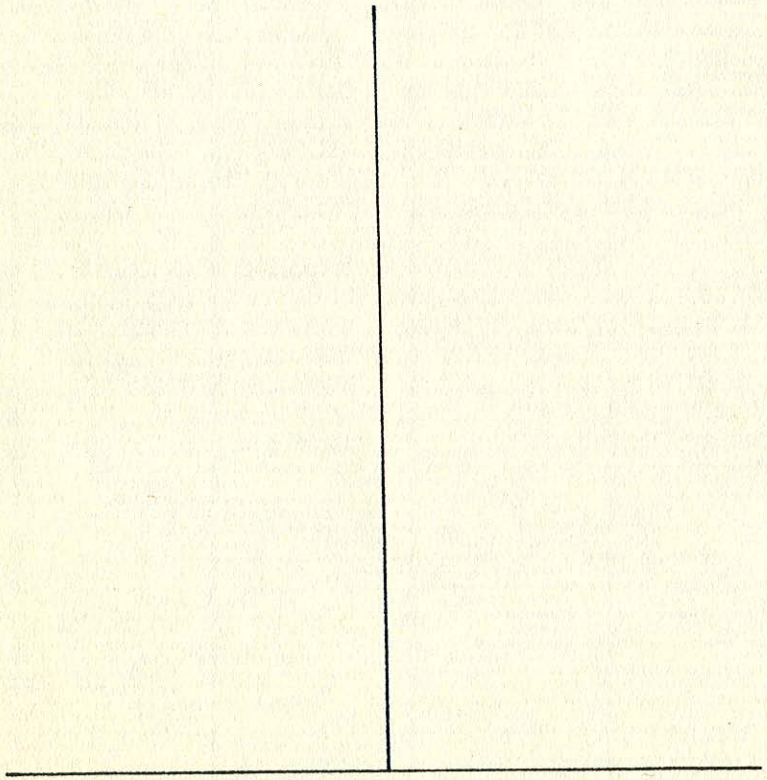
ESSAYS

ESSAY: CONCEPT ART (PROVISIONAL VERSION)

"Concept art" is first of all an art of which the material is "concepts", as the material of for ex. music is sound. Since "concepts" are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language. That is, unlike for ex. a work of music, in which the music proper (as opposed to notation, analysis, a.s.f.) is just sound, concept art proper will involve language. From the philosophy of language, we learn that a "concept" may as well be thought of as the intesion of a name; this is the relation between concepts and language. The notion of a concept is a vestige of the notion of a platonic form (the thing for which for ex. all tables have in common: tableness), which notion is replaced by the notion of a name objectively, metaphysically related to its intension (so that all tables now have in common their objective relation to 'table'). Now the claim that there can be an objective relation between a name and its intension is wrong, and (the word) 'concept', as commonly used now, can be discredited (see my book, Philosophy Proper). If, however, it is enough for one that there be a subjective relation between a name and its intension, namely the unhesitant decision as to the way one wants to use the name, the unhesitant decisions to affirm the names of some things but not others, then 'concept' is valid language, and concept art has a philosophically valid basis.

Now what is artistic, aesthetic, about a work which is a body of concepts? This question can best be answered by telling where concept art came from; I developed it in an attempt to straighten out certain traditional activities generally regarded as aesthetic. The first of these is "structure art", music, visual art, a.s.f., in which the important thing is "structure". My definitive discussion of structure art can be found in "General Aesthetics"; here I will just summarize that discussion. Much structure art is a vestige of the time when for ex. music was believed to be knowledge, a science, which had important things to say in astronomy a.s.f.. Contemporary structure artists, on the other hand, tend to claim the kind of cognitive value for their art that conventional contemporary mathematicians claim for mathematics. Modern examples of structure art are the fugue and total serial music. These examples illustrate the important division of structure art into two kinds according to how the structure is appreciated. In the case of a fugue, one is aware of its structure in listening to it; one imposes "relationships", a categorization (hopefully that intended by the composer) on the sounds while listening to them, that is, has an "(associated) artistic structure experience". In the case of total serial music, the structure is such that this cannot be done; one just has to read an "analysis" of the music, definition of the relationships. Now there are two things wrong with structure art. First, its cognitive pretensions are utterly wrong. Secondly, by trying to be music or whatever (which have nothing to do with knowledge), and knowledge represented by structure, structure art both fails, is completely boring, as music, and doesn't begin to explore the aesthetic possibilities structure can have when freed from trying to be music or what ever. The first step in straightening out for ex. structure music is to stop calling it "music", and start saying that the sound is used only to carry the structure and that the real point is the structure--and then you will see how limited, impoverished, the structure is. Incidentally, anyone who says that works of structure music do occasionally have musical value just doesn't know how good real music (the Goli Dance of the Baoule; "Cans on Windows" by L.Young; the contemporary American hit song "Sweets for My Sweets", by the Drifters) can get. When you make the change, then since structures are concepts, you have concept art. Incidentally, there is another, less important kind of art which when straightened out becomes concept art: art involving play with the concepts of the art: such as, in music, "the score", "performer vs. listener", "playing a work". The second criticism of structure art applies, with the necessary changes, to this art.

The second main antecedent of structure art is mathematics. This is the result of my revolution in mathematics, which is written up definitively in the appendix; here I will only summarize. The revolution occured first because for reasons of taste I wanted to de-emphasize discovery in mathematics, mathematics as discovering theorems and proofs. I wasn't good at such discovery, and it bored me. The first way I thought of to de-emphasize discovery came not later than Summer, 1960; it was that since the value of pure mathematics is now regarded as aesthetic rather than cognitive, why not try to make up aesthetic theorems, without considering whether they are true. The second way, which came at about the same time, was to find, as a philosopher, that the conventional claim that theorems and proofs are discovered is wrong, for the same reason I have all ready given that 'concept' can be discredited. The third way, which came in the fall-winter of 1960, was to work in unexplored regions of formalist mathematics. The resulting mathematics still had statements, theorems, proofs, but the latter weren't discovered in the way they traditionally were. Now exploration of the wider possibilities of mathematics as revolutionized by me tends to lead beyond what it makes sense to call "mathematics"; the category of "mathematics", a vestige of Platonism, is an "un-



natural", bad one. My work in mathematics leads to the new category of "concept art", of which straightened out traditional mathematics (mathematics as discovery) is an untypical, small but intensively developed part.

I can now return to the question of why concept art is "art." Why isn't it an absolutely new, or at least a non-artistic, non-aesthetic activity? The answer is that the antecedents of concept art are commonly regarded as artistic, aesthetic activities; on a deeper level, interesting concepts, concepts enjoyable in themselves, especially as they occur in mathematics, are commonly said to "have beauty". By calling my activity "art", therefore, I am simply recognizing this common usage, and the origin of the activity in structure art and mathematics. However: it is confusing to call things as irrelevant as the emotional enjoyment of (real) music, and the intellectual enjoyment of concepts, the same kind of enjoyment. Since concept art includes almost everything ever said to be "music", at least, which is not music for the emotions, perhaps it would be better to restrict 'art' to apply to art for the emotions, and recognize my activity as an independent, new activity, irrelevant to art (and knowledge).

Transformations - Concept Art Version of Colored Sheet Music No.1 3/14/61 (10/11/61)

The initial object: a sheet of cheap, thin white typewriter paper

Transformation of the initial obj. (obj.1) into obj. 2: soak the initial obj. in inflammable liquid which does not leave solid residue when burned; then burn it on horizontal rectangular white fireproof surface - obj. 2 is ashes (on surface)

Transformation of object 2 into obj. 3: make black and white photograph of obj. 2 in white light (image of ashes' "rectangle" with respect to white surface (that is, of the region (of surface, with the ashes on it) with bounding edges parallel to the edges of the surface and intersecting the four points in the ashes nearest the four edges of the surface) must exactly cover the film); develop film - obj. 3 is the negative

Transformation of obj. 2 and obj. 3 into obj. 4: melt obj. 3 and cool in mold to form plastic doubly convex lens with small curvature; take color photograph of ashes' rectangle in yellow light using this lens; develop film - obj. 4 is color negative

Transformation of obj. 2 and obj. 4 into obj. 5: repeat last transformation with obj. 4 (instead of 3), using red light - obj. 5 is second color negative

Transformation of obj. 2 and obj. 5 into obj. 6: repeat last transformation with obj. 5, using blue light - obj. 6 is third color negative

Transformation of obj. 2 and obj. 6 into obj. 7: make lens from obj. 6 mixed with the ashes which have been being photographed; make black and white photograph, in white light, of that part of the white surface where the ashes' rectangle was; develop film - obj. 7 is second black and white negative

Transformation of obj. 2, obj. 6, and obj. 7 into the final obj. (obj. 8): melt, mold, and cool lens used in last transformation to form negative, and make lens from obj. 7; using negative and lens in an enlarger, make two prints, an enlargement and a reduction - enlargement and reduction together constitute the final object

Concept Art Version of Mathematics System 3/26/61 (6/19/61)

An "element" is the facing page (with the figure on it) so long as the apparent, perceived, ratio of the length of the vertical line to that of the horizontal line (the element's "associated ratio") does not change.

A "selection sequence" is a sequence of elements of which the first is the one having the greatest associated ratio, and each of the others has the associated ratio next smaller than that of the preceding one. (To decrease the ratio, come to see the vertical line as shorter, relative to the horizontal line, one might try measuring the lines with a ruler to convince oneself that the vertical one is not longer than the other, and then trying to see the lines as equal in length; constructing similar figures with a variety of real (measured) ratios and practicing judging these ratios; and so forth.) [Observe that the order of elements in a selection sequence may not be the order in which one sees them.]

Concept Art: Innperseqs (May - July 1961)

A "hălpoint" iff whatever is at any point in space, in the fading rainbow halo which appears to surround a small bright light when one looks at it through glasses fogged by having been breathed on, for as long as the point is in the halo.

An "init′point" iff a halpoint in the initial vague outer ring of its halo.

An "inn′perseq" iff a sequence of sequences of halpoints such that all the halpoints are on one (initial) radius of a halo; the members of the first sequence are initpoints; for each of the other sequences, the first member (a "consequent") is got from the non-first members of the preceding sequence (the "antecedents") by being the inner endpoint of the radial segment in the vague outer ring when they are on the segment, and the other members (if any) are initpoints or first members of preceding sequences; all first members of sequences other than the last appear as non-first members, and halpoints appear only once as non-first members; and the last sequence has one member.

Indeterminacy

A ⌜totally determinate innperseq⌝ iff an innperseq in which one is aware of (specifies) all halpoints.

An ⌜antecedentally indeterminate innperseq⌝ iff an innperseq in which one is aware of (specifies) only each consequent and the radial segment beyond it.

A ⌜halpointally indeterminate innperseq⌝ iff an innperseq in which one is aware of (specifies) only the radial segment in the vague outer ring, and its inner endpoint, as it progresses inward.