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BULLETIN OF THE COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY



At a recent meeting of the CAS, the subject of the BSC80 Computing Exhibition provoked the discussion of some interesting and serious issues. Three members were sufficiently concerned by some of those issues to send in the following letters.



This article was produced using a FABER-CASTELL 499 Fine pen on SUMMIT Series A4 ruled narrow feint and margin paper made in Great Britain by the Dickinson Robinson Group.

Although artists are prepared – often expected – to make reference to the media they use in the preparation of a work of art (oil on canvas, lost wax, etc.) a growing number who work with computers show a reluctance to give credit to the machines they use. Manfred Mohr at a recent CAS meeting told us he was no longer going to mention the computer in connection with his work. His reasons were straightforward enough and will not surprise other artists working in the medium:- all too often people think that the art is created by the machine and this predisposes them to view the work in a way that is often unfavourable to the artist and his intentions.

A piece in one of the national newspapers about some of my own work which – almost incidentally and in a minimal context – had involved a computer began: "Even Leonardo could not match the mental wattage of one of the creators of this painting." Since a quarter page in a colour supplement is a gift horse whose dental problems should not, perhaps, be too closely examined I'll leave readers to come to their own conclusions regarding the above quote (though mention in passing that the part about current drain is indubitably true).

In fact my own experience of using the term computing in reference to my work is, on the whole, favourable. The librarian of my local library (in a small midlands town) told me she had been amazed by the response to my recent exhibition there. The title of the show – "Artist and Computer" had apparently attracted unusually large numbers of visitors, and the work, together with the documentation I had provided to explain the processes and ideas that interest me, had provoked unprecedented discussions and arguments over the issue desk. It is this kind of response, from people who are not usually members of the "art public", which I find interesting. Apollinaire points out that during the Renaissance it was not unusual for the products of the great studios to be paraded through the streets before being installed in their patrons' homes. He goes on to compare this public response with the reactions of the Parisian of his day to the rickety biplanes that just about flew in the sky above their heads. Nowadays we would probably think of Sputnik 1, the 69 moon landing, close-up pictures of Jupiter, the F.A. Cup Final and, of course, the beast that is creating its own myths as it explodes into our world – the computer.

Artists, more I suspect than they ever realise, have always documented their times – how could they do otherwise? The art of recent times, viewed by someone as yet too closely involved in the period to be in any way objective, certainly reflects the changes that have taken place in society and its attitudes since the last war. This has occurred during a period when

the romantic attitude (the concept of the artist as an outsider preoccupied by his own work and problems — be they emotional or logical) has become more rigid and the artist has become least involved in the society he inhabits.

My own attitude is that the artist has a responsibility to try and make his work relate to society. During the last hundred years a wholesale alienation of the public from contemporary art has come about as the consequence of the lack of responsibility of critics and the apathy of artists. Unlike many of my contemporaries I do not see this "bridge between art and life" being constructed from currently fashionable "socio-political art" where the artist produces his documents within the context of the art elite. At the other extreme some artists are working in the equally fashionable Community Arts and producing (with few but notable exceptions) banal entertainments which, in themselves, are alright I suppose but certainly miss elements which I feel are necessary ingredients of art.

On the contrary — or in the middle perhaps — I don't think it's necessary to make such great compromises: in the former case with content; in the latter with one's audience. It's enough to try and get the work seen outside the art scene and make sure that its backed up by material:—games, explanations, descriptions and documentation that will help the uninitiated (or at least provoke them!) to come to some understanding of what, it cannot be denied, is both an allusive and elusive language — that of art. In this context the benefits of a reference to computers outweigh the problems. The complaint that the association with computing invites questions of a technical nature is, of course true. However, in my experience, this is true *of all media*. These questions are generated by inquisitiveness and it is up to the artist, in the answers he provides, to direct this interest to the problems and ideas which he believes have a greater significance. Simply to remove the labels which stimulate an enquiry — however misplaced it may be — doesn't solve any problems but merely ignores them. There is a real threat that it could serve to reinforce the esotericism already rampant within the arts. I am also concerned that many members of the art establishment (in Britain at least) still find it hard — if even possible — to accept the computer as a tool or a medium for artists. They are not going to be convinced by silence but, on the contrary, by sincere and open discussion.

Paul Brown 14-5-79



STATEMENTS

- 1 'Art' done by, with or in spite of a computer should be judged as 'art'. The computer does not justify or validate that which would be unjustifiable or invalid had it not been associated with a computer.
- 2 'Art' should itself be judged as an activity in the world; it is not a special case.
- 3 It is essential to discuss, formulate and recognise an idea of progress in this activity.
- 4 The C.A.S., while engaging in all its other activities must also be aware of and act upon the above.
- 5 If 'art' is to be considered with respect to computers, attention should be paid to the relations between people and computers.
- 6 People who say they use computers in 'art' should be as aware of current debate, paradigm, philosophy, discourse in 'art' as should any other worker in the field.

QUESTIONS

- A Do most people agree or disagree with the above?
- B If others agree, what can be done about the present (sterile, backward-looking, unaware, mystificatory, etc., etc.,) situation?

Brian Smith

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Quote: "The Society aims to encourage the **CREATIVE** use of computers in the **ARTS**".

ART IS REIFICATION.

i.e. the work of art is the result of a process which transforms an idea into a form that can be experienced by others through one or more of their senses.

The artist operates on at least these two levels; the idea and the form (artifact). The quality of the work will depend both on the quality of the idea, and the perfection of the form. Creativity and imagination are essential to both of these levels; no amount of technology will substitute for them. If the computer is to be employed in a non-trivial way in the arts, it must be as a means to stretch the mind (the idea) and/or the resources (the artifact). If it does not do this its use cannot be justified as creative.

Dominic Boreham
Slade School of Fine Art
University College London

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PAGE FUTURE

In the last few years, the responsibility for running the C.A.S. and publishing Page, has rested almost entirely on two or three members. Due to pressure of work, the frequency with which Page has appeared has sadly, but unavoidably decreased. With the disappearance of publication dates and deadlines, contributions for the Bulletin have also dwindled, and although the C.A.S. continues to meet every month at Russell Square, members whose only contact with the Society is through Page, must sometimes wonder whether they will ever again be asked for membership subscriptions.

Never fear, this sorry state of affairs is about to change. Starting in 1980. Page will become a quarterly, appearing regularly in January, April, July and October. It is hoped that the establishment of regular publication dates will encourage members to contribute papers, articles, news, etc. The Bulletin will remain at A4 size, but the number of pages will increase, partly to improve the layout, but mainly to provide more space for in-depth articles, and information on current events and developments. Ultimately, the value and quality of the Bulletin depends on the material that you submit.

The greater part of each issue will continue to be devoted to a main feature, focussing on a specialised area, or the work of a particular artist, composer, film-maker, etc. In this way, Page will perform three main functions: to provide news of current events, as a forum for debate, and as a valuable archive of all the important work being done in the creative use of computers in the arts. There will be special editions of Page when there is a need for a medium beyond the usual printing methods, such as colour printing, or the inclusion of sound recordings, etc. A special edition is being planned for stereoscopic images, using red and green printing and spectacles for channel separation. Anyone working in this area who would like to contribute some original work, is invited to contact the Editor.

Following the C.A.S.U.S. edition of Page 41, the next English edition will be published in June 1979, and will feature the recent work of the English artist, Dominic Boreham. Page 43 will be the first of the new quarterly editions, appearing in January 1980. It is being planned to document the views, ideology, beliefs and work of major contributors to the computer-assisted arts, and is to be published in time for the BCS80 Computing Fair. (see below). Future issues will feature new work by Chris Briscoe, Julian Sullivan, Manfred Mohr, and Peter Beyls, among others.

The Society has been reluctant to ask members for subscriptions, since Page has been published so infrequently. All the 1979 editions are accordingly being mailed to members free of charge. In 1980, when Page becomes quarterly, subscriptions will run from January to December.

PAGE 43 SPECIAL ISSUE

The Society will hold their second annual exhibition at the BCS80 Computing Fair in January. To co-incide with this event, PAGE 43 will be published as a special edition. The issue will be devoted to statements (both artistic and verbal) by those involved with computing in the arts. It is hoped to include all the artists who have made a significant contribution to the state of the art, and/or who wish to make a statement of their position, beliefs, etc.

PAGE 43 will therefore document two main areas, encompassing an international survey of contemporary computer-assisted art, and a statement of the attitudes, aims and beliefs of those actively engaged in creative computing today. Anyone who wishes to contribute to this edition is invited to send typescripts and photographs to the Editor by 30 September 1979.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PAGE

Articles, papers, news, reviews, pictures, should be sent to the PAGE EDITOR. Copy should be typewritten. Photographs should be of good quality, high contrast, and preferably the actual size intended for publication. A4 pages will be laid out with 1 inch margins, leaving a maximum size for photographs of 6¼ x 9¾ inches. Please document photographs clearly on the reverse, with author, title, subject, etc., and indicate which way up they should be. PAGE is printed on A4 paper in Univers.

Contributions for PAGE 43 must reach the Editor not later than 30 SEPTEMBER 1979.

AIMS AND MEMBERSHIP

The Society aims to encourage the creative use of computers in the arts and allow the exchange of information in this area. Membership is open to all at £2 or \$5 per year, students half price. Members receive PAGE four times a year, and reduced prices for the Society's public meetings and events. The Society is a Specialist Group of the British Computer Society, but membership of the two societies is independent.

Libraries and institutions can subscribe to PAGE for £2 or \$5 per year. No other membership rights are conferred and there is no form of membership for organisations or groups. Membership and subscriptions run from January to December. On these matters and for other information write to John Lansdown or Kurt Lauckner (U.S.A.)

COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY ADDRESSES

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LONDON MEETINGS

7.30pm on the 1st Monday of each month at John Lansdown's office, 1st floor, 50/51 Russell Square, London WC1. Members and guests welcome. No charge.