



:12.2002 Antoine Schmitt

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_Computer art _Antoine Schmitt states- was first invaded by the image, then by hypertext, and now by communication. All these are transitory trends. The future of computer art lies in what used to be the initial function of computers: in being a place for the existence of processes_. Depending on one_s perspective, the return to modernity proposed by Schmitt and other software art ideologues may be seen as liberating or reactionary: enough of irony, enough of reinterpretation, enough of pastiche. Or, what amounts to the same: the computer is finished as a processor of mediatised reality. The computer is an autonomous instrument of creation. In oher words, of programming.

(...)

Artist and programmer, Antoine Schmitt endlessly hunts down the shape of the being deep inside human nature. He explores new audio and visual manifestations by recreating the forces behind the movements in abstract artificial entities. This work yields installations and software art on Internet and CD-Rom, which have won various prizes and mentions in international festivals (medi@terra 1999, Interferences 2000, transmediale 2001). He was member of the jury for Software Art at transmediale.02 and is the author of the legendary FFT xtra for Director & Virtools. Antoine Schmitt lives and works in Paris.

-Jose Luis de Vicente, from Sonar 2002 catalogue.

Antoine Schmitt participated in Sonar 2002 as curator of *_Systems With Attitude_* within [Interactives A La Carte](#) and as panel member in [Conferences and Debates](#).

Interview of Antoine Schmitt for SonarOnline

- What is generative art? Where do you place yourself within the global software art scene?

If one defines algorithmic art as art where the heart of the artwork is a running system, then software art in general has an intersection with algorithmic art : software artworks where the heart is a running system.

In this context, for me, and this is strong statement and position, generative art is a subset of algorithmic art, in which the artist creates a system that itself creates something (usually in the field of a traditional art : images, moving images, videos, sound, music). So, generative art requires something to be produced, in order to exercise artistic analysis on it, and on the process of creation that led to it. But not all algorithmic art needs a product. My artworks do not produce anything : they just 'are'. My work is not generative art, but it is algorithmic art, in the sense that it is made with algorithms.

What is emphasized in my artworks is not what is produced by the system, but the causes of the actions of the system. The heart of the artwork is the questioning or the sensation created by the cause of what is perceived: "why did it do that ?", "why did it do it like that ?", "what will it do now ?".

- Could your work be interpreted as an updated version of the nineteenth century formalist quest for "art for art's sake", which turns its back on social and historical processes, transferred now to the digital era?

Absolutely. It is a very classical attitude in a sense. Even though it uses contemporary technologies, my artwork, as well as the work of most the artists presented in the selection that I made for sonar, does not talk about the technology, in a way that stands apart from the postmodern attitude where art talks about its medium and its social context.

I believe that software art, especially because of the autonomy of the software systems, yields new ways of handling old subjects like human nature, time, reality, etc... And this is what interests me : hunt down human nature. And the fact is that I do it using software.

Lev Manovitch wrote, I think, that there is a certain nineteenth century romanticism in current software art, which may be a need first step backwards that will eventually lead to a new kind of art using computers. I mostly agree with this statement, and feel like

someone exploring a new field, inventing, with the other players of the field, a new vocabulary and a new aesthetics. This is very exciting.

- Tell us about the "Systems with attitude" selection that you curated for S_nar 2002.

What was its objective and why did you choose the artists that you did?

I tried to focus the "Systems with attitude" selection on algorithmic software art : artworks made with software, and which essentially lies in the confrontation of the spectator to a running process. My wish was to acknowledge the existence of such artworks in the contemporary art field, and to put them under the limelights because I believe that these artworks represent the first explorations what will be the future of software art. The main reason for this belief is that autonomous running systems is absolutely specific to software, and cannot be found in any other medium. The future will tell if I was right.

There are many artists that could qualify for the criteria that I had set, but most of them had artworks only visible online of inside browsers. A strong criteria set by sonar itself was that every artwork had to run offline, and, if possible, not in a browser. Also I absolutely did not want to select any artwork that focuses on technology ("how is it made"), but only on direct confrontation : "what you see is what you see", to quote Frank Stella. This narrowed the search a lot, and explains why I ended up showing two of my own artworks.

All the shown artworks qualify for the "running system" criteria, but they all have at least another facet to them, which gave them their unicity. Some directly referred to infinity, like Tuboid from Driessens/Verstappen, some to the graphics and sound world and interactivity, like Skroll from servovalve. Red Drop from Simon Schliessl, and Retroyou r/c from Joan Leandre are mainly about the nature of computer simulations (mathematical, physical and visual), where Etude Organique 1a from Alexandre Gherban directly points to the semantic limit of movements. Finally, my two artworks, Vexation 1 and the nanoensemble focus on the forces behind the movements.

If one is to extract a new vocabulary for software art based on the "Systems with attitude" selection, I think that the outstanding words would be : autonomy, infinity, rules, essence, forces.

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