

Freedom in monitoring systems

ON THE OBJECTS BY DIETER BALZER

THE OBJECT. Copies of Dieter Balzer's work could be made, which could not be told apart from his own hand-made originals. It is therefore to be assumed, that he arranges his work in a way in which the unique object is of little or no importance. His tending towards the theory of radical constructivism pleads for this devaluation of the unique object in favour of possible repetition. Seen from this perspective, the formation of the objects might be explained and their connection grasped heuristically. However, the eyes are easily seduced, and they open up a view on paths leading to another world of perception.

AT HOME IN A SYSTEM: The constructive technique that Balzer refers to belongs to a multiplicity of artistic methods of the 20th century, designed to exclude or out-border individuality so as to reveal the visible in as pure a manner as possible without allowing it to be deformed by subjective influences. To these artists, the subjective is seen as something contingent, doubtful and confusing. It should therefore be ignored, suppressed or dissolved, with the aim of allowing for a direct and clear view of the thing, the object, the idea - as of mathematical surface units (e.g. diagrams, logically constructed systems) or of mathematically ordered illustrative models (e.g. architectural construction drawings). The great attraction arising from the use of mathematically oriented methods in conjunction with a simultaneous suppression of artistic subjectivity is imbedded in the circumstance that nearly perfect, and for the eye, hardly improvable executions are made possible. They make a continuous flirt with the absolute possible. At the same time, behind each execution an over-all plan is to be found, which certifies the execution in its gestalt. Beyond this, each system offers a counter-world ('Gegenwelt'), in itself completely ordered and systematic, to crude reality. All points appear at the right place, derived from and pre-conceivable in relation to earlier and subsequent points. Through the unity of the artistic system, the real world's manifold appearances gain a counter-world. For this reason, to the artist's practise, the conception of a system that is in itself logical and solid is equal to the entry into an imaginary world where the plan is given, the array of choices is fixed and the execution is more or less mechanic. Based on the logic of the mostly endlessly variable systems, the executions, in their entirety, could hardly be exhausted in the course of the artist's lifetime; on the other hand, single executions may be repeated with no problem. Prime emphasis is placed on the idea. It directs the appearances and can be seen as the genuinely artistic creation, the execution of which may be taken at any time.

For this reason, artists pursuing constructive, conceptual and minimalist art, in whose domain Dieter Balzer feels at home, believed themselves to be closer to the truth (as is under-

stood) Platonically. Balzer granted priority to the idea's model and the methodical processes as opposed to their materialisation in the sensual world.

As the executions are changeable from time to time, the truth in them may neither be recognized nor stated; because for truth to be recognised Platonically, a certain degree of stability is required. However, all visual elements remain subject to the imponderable. They are not stable and not identical to themselves. It was for this reason, that Plato once banned the visual arts from his ideal order; because the charm that stems from systems is not only to be found in its evident closeness to the truth, but also in its potential to generate, quite as if by magic, a complex field from a simple, clearly arranged order. When it becomes evident, that logical systems may also be used to reduce their own innate logic to absurdity, and to torpedo and confuse themselves, this charm grows. In principle, however, the character of ordered games becomes more attractive so as to counter a day-to-day reality that is deemed diffuse and confusing with an ideal form. Its truth may always remain immanently systematic, but allows for plausible analogies and potential understanding.

THE ARTIST AS INTERPRETER. Two years ago, in the course of a conversation, Balzer said: "The absence of a meta narrative led me to game forms. I am using a system, because it offers just as much freedom as it does handicaps." He introduced himself as an interpreting artist of self-chosen game forms, and defined clearly that which was mostly bypassed by his predecessors: that systems took the place of themes in a musical score which were to be re-played and re-interpreted time and time again. The artist appeared as the composer of a piece who, in interpreting it, brought it into the world of sensuality. But, what was he was interpreting?

As it is, the term 'system' is understood to be an entirety of elements which relate to one another in such a way that any modification to either an element or a relationship entails a modification to all other elements or relationships, here one is dealing with a strictly organised order that does not leave single elements in isolation but always places them in necessary relation to others. If the artist changes the place/placing of one element, the relationship of all other elements changes. Everything is connected. Balzer does not change the inner relationships on a whim, but according to simple progressions (1:1, 1:3, 1:5); in doing so, visible symmetries and inferable mirror images arise that rule the principally harmonic structure of all the objects.

Balzer's compositions are based on the given. The same work could exist in any number of places, in a similar way to photography. For this reason one may differentiate between autographic and allographic art. Autographic art, such as expressive painting, is characterised by the fact that there is no obvious system of notation comparable to that found in music, literature, analogue photography or system-ruled sculpture. It is for this reason that autographic work such as Georg Baselitz's painting and sculpture may not be reproduced in quite as exact a manner as a printed poem, a photograph or an object by Balzer. The copy of an autographic work

lacks the essential characteristics of the original. One will always note divergencies. It is not so with Balzer's work, which is ruled by the idea - the basic score without the fingerprints.

UNEASE REGARDING THE PARADOX. The cult around the unique object, which has been ruling European art since the Renaissance, was at risk. Artists rebelling against this had to get along with paradoxes. Balzer's objects, too, intended to illustrate that what mattered was not the singularity of the material condition, but the compositional authority of the idea (stability), which finally finds a (perfect as possible) counterpart in its interpretational execution as conditioned by MDF-plates and colour foil. However, via the idea's contact with matter, the objects are subjected to the reality of exhibition and lead an almost autonomous life of their own which has been freed from the world of ideas. The entry into the world of exhibition is the beginning of the objects' individual story. This story lends them - through contact with institutions and owners - the appearance of a unique object.

A further paradox is to be found in the circumstance that Balzer did mostly remove the objects from non-aesthetic dependencies and decided in favour of working within theoretic conditions. In service to the idea, he raised himself to the position of master over creation, without making himself recognisable as a person by leaving a fingerprint. Theoretically speaking, his retreat as subject was plausible - as colourfully as he set this withdrawal into scene with the use of the luminous power and resistant nature of coloured foils. Nevertheless, however soberly constructed the objects theoretically may have appeared, they still fed the suspicion that system and idea could not be everything. The vision that is contained in the idea and the system can hardly sustain itself as an artistic project. Evidently there are parameters other than the proximity to truth that are worthy of orienting oneself to.

COLOUR. For this reason, Balzer has granted an increased right of action (Wirkungsrecht) to colours in the last two years, which do, however, cleverly retain his basic construction principle. Initially he did not use colour. His objects were constructed purely and clearly with MDF. In the course of a second, somewhat more relaxed period, he then went on to often construct them in red, yellow and blue and noticed, that the clarity and sharpness of the primary colours already made the constructions hover a little. He has now intensified this very self-given authority of colour with extreme colouration, exactly because it counters the models' architectural construction, suggests associations and may act in an equally subjective and misleading way. This intensity lies within the possibilities of the already created basis and is as such of decided consequence. It does however, as relates to Balzer's ideal-artistic process, represent a turning back or a jumping forward - if you like; because previously, he had granted all the powers of the regulative to the idea and had carefully sought to avoid the objects appearing in an illusionary way. The visitor to the exhibition would stand in front of it as though facing a factual circumstance. The objects were not aimed at the viewer, but were dedicated to the truth immanent in the system.

They were self-sufficient and bore their meaning within themselves. The presently applied colours still stem from industrial production, as does MDF, and are standardised and presented in the way that a ready-made is; there are still no fingerprints. It would appear as though Balzer was contradicting industrial standardisation by employing their means, and further by optically confusing and disintegrating the construction. Since he is now constructing a model and deconstructing the building (structure) with colour; this building turns into construct, equally colour-dominated and out of focus.

PAINTING. Even today, painters are associating themselves with those traditions that follow either line or colour. Balzer pulls the strings together. The original is bound to the concept of the singular and to the concept of a subject. His most recent work emphasises the original, the system's construction less so and the visual impression more so. The artist himself now increases his involvement in form. He can be sensed behind the objects as a person: as one that is making decisions with a highly combinatory skill. With each piece his art creates a pattern. In this case we are apparently dealing with colour-constructions that are within themselves contradictory and afloat. They are in fact securely anchored in the construction but in one's perception appear in a fleeting, ruffled manner like a mirage, however they only seemingly contradict themselves. Balzer's early laying down of clear foundations is flexible and open enough to allow for the contradiction to be grasped as a dynamic contrast.

by Peter Herbstreuth