A Technological Difference, Not a Difference Of Method. On the Notion of Programming in the Arts of the 1960s

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Abstract

When electronic computers caught the attention of artists and art theorists in the 1960ies, the idea of a "rational", "scientific" or "programmable" art was in the focus of interest. The technology seemed to offer a way out of the much criticized arbitrariness of post war abstract art and its alleged social irrelevance. This paper explores the use of the concept of "programming" both on the base of historical theoretical texts as well as of the actual handling of computers by the artists. The consideration of the use of self-built analog or hybrid devices to which artists referred to as "computers" not only allows for deepening the discussion of the idea "programming" in the artistic context, but for adressing the methodological problem of approaching so called "computer art".

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