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BODY of KNOWLEDGE

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTS : A New Paradigm for Art and Design?

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The notion of behavior and even the power to act (agency) is becoming increasingly central to contemporary art. But instead of situating behavior on the side of living, as is usually the case, how can we invert the perspective and consider this aspect in connection with the works, objects, dispositifs, and environments themselves? How to analyze, understand, theorize, test, and design artworks that include a behavioral dimension, that is, possess the capacity (especially the “physical” capacity) to act and react in relation to their environment and their audience? While more work is being done on this subject in engineering, it is mainly in the areas of robotics and artificial intelligence, primarily using a functionalist approach and with a focus on representational robots. Relatively little research, however, is occurring in the fields of contemporary art and design.

In the frame of the research project “Behaviors: Strategies and Aesthetics of Behaviors Between Art, Science, and Design” (2012-ongoing, in partnership with Université Paris 8, the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), we proposed the notion of “behavioral objects” : non-anthropomorphic, non-zoomorphic, and more broadly speaking, non-biomorphic roboticized objects that do not intrinsically possess an expressive capacity through their form, but express behaviors by their movement.

The Lecture will address this notion, and retrace a genealogy in the field of art and design – notably going back to the historical avant-gardes and to their intersection with scientific and technological research, from cybernetics to electronic engineering, robotics, from cognitive sciences to computer programming.