1.3.2 The Search for the Laws of Aesthetics

Algorithmic, computer-generated, plotter-printed art pieces such as those discussed here did not compete directly with traditional methods and processes; they were new ways of conceptualizing and producing imagery. This new approach was influenced by Max Bense, a German philosopher and mathematician, who had proposed a theory of "exact aesthetics" that postulated definable laws of aesthetics for which the computer would be the perfect production tool [Bense, 1965]. The goal of uncovering natural geometric relationships associated with beauty was not new—the Greeks had used the golden rectangle thousands of years earlier—but the computer offered powerful tools for investigating rules of composition and isolating aesthetically pleasing factors. The exact aesthetics, once discovered, could be used by the computer to create any number of aesthetically correct visual pieces, and could also be used to assess all past works and all works created for any purpose in the future. The systematic processes pursued by artists such as Mohr belong, according to Bense, to "that class of processes that begin with equal probabilities, and thus purely stochastically, but in the course of which the probability of certain signs being chosen and appearing becomes progressively greater, while the probability for certain others ... progressively decreases and finally vanishes" [Bense, 1965, p. 215].

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Anne Morgan Spalter

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Math in Decision Making