THE
MYTH
OF
HANS ULRICH RECK
MEDIA
ART

The Aesthetics of the Techno/Imaginary
and an Art Theory of Virtual Realities

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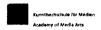The Aesthetics of the Techno/Imaginary
and an Art Theory of Virtual Realities

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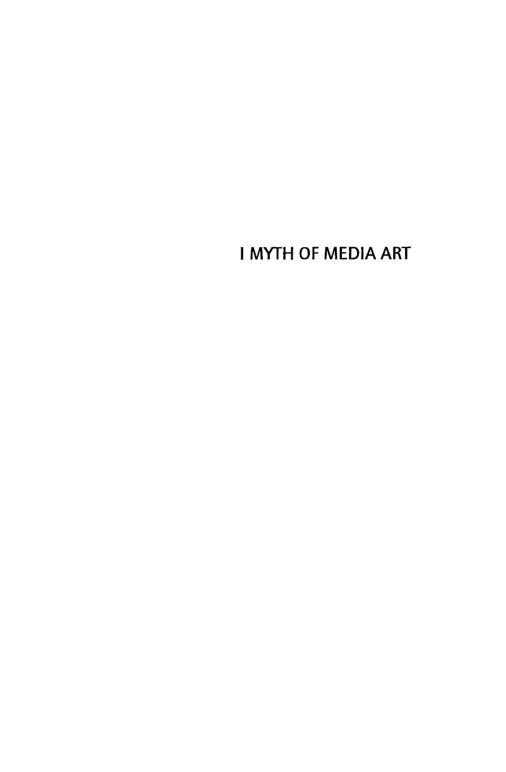 Perspectives on a Criticism of the Political Economy of the New
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I MYTH OF MEDIA ART

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Art is currently dissolving. But into what? Regardless from which angle you view things, it is no longer possible to "pin down" art. It appears that art is no longer simply a form of representation but also action. It has ceased to concentrate on creating images. In fact, it has also ceased to be an excellent medium for the production of images. Images are generally about visual perception, for the latter transforms the data received by the visual cortex. Images are constructed as data clusters and recurrences within the order of perception. Moreover, as facts of a quite different kind, images still belong to the sphere of social signification and that of social bearing. There, they function as facets of visual communication and are part of a mass culture for which art is nothing more than a peripheral phenomenon. We should not forget, however, that images of art still provide a significant high-grade reservoir of models which can be chosen for any number of banal uses. As a result, they are immeasurably more significant than the quantitative presence of artworks in images of current visual mass communications might suggest. For these and numerous other reasons, images can no longer be fetishes of the objective world nor be considered extant ontological facts. And they most certainly cannot be the chief witnesses of the visual world, numinous messengers of phenomenal manifestations, vanishing points of masterful technique, instructors showing us how to discover the visible, and manifestations of the visible within the invisible. Today, all these metaphors which have arisen since Cézanne do not attest so much to the customary outdated nature of taste. In fact, they reveal the pitiful ignorance and stubborn lack of knowledge regarding advanced theoretical views. Naturally, such a stance does not detract in the slightest from the value of Cézanne's paintings nor his artistic achievements. But it certainly pours scorn on those who seek to reduce art to the masterpiece and derive its dynamic momentum from the semantics created through Cézanne of a "beauty parallel to nature". And they do so with a severe theoretical thrust, if only by dint of historical habit and the thirst for a lightness of touch when departing from some arduous salvation of good

taste – at any rate, in the guise of viewing art as the celebration of the "totally visible".

Twentieth-century art draws a logical conclusion from its marginal position in the realm of images and is acutely aware of its problems and prospects. After all, it generously distinguishes between works of art and the visual "presence of something". But not always. And not always with due clarity, but with increasing skill. Today, in light of many contemporary efforts and certainly many contextual projects, the generation of images, objects, works, the visualization of the visible, the persistent creation of transitional objects – in which genius and inspiration quite admirably reveal themselves – this incessant process of maintaining a monument to creative activities only seems comprehensible as some ethnological undertaking, as a very limited magical function. We are certain that we experience art, yet we remain uncertain as to what art actually *is*. It changes. It is on the move. This may provide a basic explanation for why art no longer manifests itself in inert, static images. Indeed, why it demonstrates a diminishing interest to commit itself to permanence or lend itself to an objective form, or in other words, to become a death mask. In a gratifying and invigorating manner, the self-transformation of representational art into action, artistry, and process brings the production of artworks more into line with the old rhetorical disciplines. Denotation and representation no longer serve as a yardstick or model, but rather fluid liveliness and topology – essential aspects of an art embodying altered, transformed, reformed, playfully applied platitudes. The artistry of the artwork gives way to aesthetics, an organon of pleasures, blending the arts and liveliness.

It is no longer possible to provide an exact, consistent definition of what art facilitates. Indeed, even the reference to "consistency" is in itself dubious and indicates our tendency to shy away from the inevitable irritations. Art is an event in the light of certain interests, but it is neither evidence of substance, nor an ensemble of objects, and that is its most disturbing aspect, given that it takes place within its own distinct domain. Perhaps it has become totally superfluous alongside all other actions. But such a view can only be made in hindsight based on its effects and impact. When viewed in progress and as a process, it is evident that art is something special, indeed something singular, and cannot be replaced by

anything else, even though nobody is able to explain what it "truly" is.

We may have to accept the fact that art is per se ephemeral and transitory. However, this would mean that we could no longer accord museums our unwavering trust. We would likewise have to abandon our expectations and demands that art reveal formal knowledge and be memorable. The museum is no longer a supreme storehouse given the relatively few exhibits that reflect a reassuring discourse of the philosophy of history. Since the heyday of modernism, museums have functioned as a throughput for lifestyles, laboratories that present the technological status accorded the senses. The museum has become a venue of ideas, experimental metaphysics and aesthetic sci-fi. Today, the idea of a museum is a hybrid between utopian experiments and the frequently vain self-assertion of arbitrary and ruthless lifestyles in a delirious risk economy which seeks to obscure its mortality by staging frenzied spectacles of contemporary desires.

Consequently, if one were to express the prospects of art using a buzz-word or slogan, the phrase might be "from representation to action". It goes without saying that there can and must be different types of action, and by this, we mean creative action, not merely non-instrumental action. The shift from one to the other allows us to define the points of change for the realm of art, its methods, and the relationship between a work of art and procedure. "Art through media" is a trend which is increasingly concerned with a radical understanding of the machines and technologies which shape civilization. It employs practical, poetic models to promote this understanding, such as strategies of cooperation, ways of dissecting knowledge and identification, cooperation with anonymous forces, and the generation of forms of action in a world which has always been conveyed through machines. To put it metaphorically, an anthropomorphic and objective/factual union, expressed as the rapid rhythm of an animated, holistic machine. This definition of art as action can no longer be used for images, nor understood in a static representative form.

The present study makes a key distinction between "art through media" and "media art" while offering a clear critique of "media art". This difference can be explained as follows. "Art with media" describes a creative process that can define the utilization of media, genres, and materials and the varying work contexts which arise from them. I consciously use the

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term "art with media" to identify such art as is produced to the extent that a choice is made from various possibilities – in other words, that variable forms of media can be used to express or realize art. However, if the use of expressive materials and codes occurs exclusively in line with the specific conditions, logistics, apparatus-based, operative and programmatic determinations of specific apparatuses, media, materials or genres, then such art is necessarily connected to the constitutive generative forms and rules, algorithms, and qualities of these media, instruments, and materials. In the following, I shall refer to such as "art through media". "Media art", by contrast, is too imprecise. It primarily refers to the code of art that is traditionally one of signification and expressivity and relies on the entire range of customary coding in most of the works addressed as "media art" or which claim to be such. The distinction I propose serves not so much a scholarly interest in classification, but is more an attempt to distinguish between technical, aesthetic, and social impact or qualities of the different arts – be they technically advanced or traditional. It comes as no surprise that "media art" continues to claim that art is defined by expression, presentation, and representation, whereas "art through media" highlights interventionist ("collaborative") claims and alternating concepts of action with a focus on process-driven methods and experimental inventions and findings.

Short maxims on art (and its "media character")

Image is not art. An image is not art.

Art is art, other images are other images, other actions are other actions.

Art is a specific type of image and action.

Art consists of the persistent, active, casuistically-created distinction between image and visual presence.

Art is not enabling, but transforming, and consumes creative energies.

There is no compelling reason to apply one and the same name – art – to any number of creative processes.

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Various functions between art and visual culture depend on local conditions.

"Foreign" images can reveal the mechanics behind one's own images in a specific manner by demonstrating their limits.

Normally, the art system produces works of art which confirm the mechanisms by which art functions.

"Art through media", the media of the arts, art as a media theory: These do not describe a state, but a practice, not a domain, but an interest. They do not consist of facts, but indicate the possible connections of real phenomena.

"Art through media", the media of the arts – we should consider them a rhetorical "mediosphere" and a rhetorical linking technique. They are not limited to the expression of pure volition or the logistics of the apparatuses used by the different media.

Basing the arts in the media enables the observer to perceive the manifold and, at times, conflicting crossovers of form, design, and expression, and the variable, contingent conditions (isolated situations, not certainties which can be generalized).

The mediosphere of art can be described by the effects which are produced by the completion of an action – regardless of what technology issues are addressed.

If something is art, it is not because it employs a specific type of media. If artistic efforts bring forth convincing results, the employment of media remains non-specific. It becomes specific when the use of media is altered through specific products and types of action.

In all its depth, art is not only that which is appreciated by the global art system. It reveals its true nature in the virtual world. What appears to be its essential subject and occurrence is a result of its energies and the persistent nature of the irritations it causes.

Art arises from the self-evaluation of a specific concept of visual culture.

No claim can be made in the name of art regarding cultural exclusivity.

"Art through media" is not about some power of order, but the naviga-tion through chaos. By creating a problem, it leads the viewer from the real world to the reality of virtual realities (VR)[1]. VRs are constructs of potentiality which represent conceivable conditions of the real that deviate from one another in certain instances.

Art is an activating force. The VRs it enables are based on the view that art repeatedly attempts the impossible (in a logical sense).

■ From aesthetics of mastery to poetics of diversity – art's inevitable disappearing act from the avant-garde trap

The term "media art" is now well established, frequently used and, proba-bly owing to the apparent easiness of the term, broadly accepted. Coined a good ten years ago in order to open up a new (play)ground for art, the time has now come to subject it to radical scrutiny. The phenomena involved are extremely varied. The many viewpoints and references to traditions which must be considered in the analysis are complex and highly interwoven. Indeed, we could name specific positions and pioneering deeds that en-deavor to link – with appropriate and commendable seriousness – poetry and apparatus, imagination and computation, inspiration and computer science, creativity and imaging technologies, in the manner commentators often simply assert the existence of.

Yet despite these facts and the popularity of "media art", there is no playing down the countless difficulties tied to this term. First of all, the popularity of the concept says little about the significance or value of the works. Not even some subjectively sensed seriousness can delude us into ignoring the fact that even art installations (and one can accord them at least some sculptural presence) violently collide with the conventional idea and conception of a museum of visual arts. This collision causes frictional loss. At times, it may be regarded as potentially productive, but, at present,

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1   Although there is no obvious or pressing stylistic and textual necessity, I shall refer to
     "virtual reality" hereinafter as "VR".

it reflects paralysis and uncertainty. Let us not forget that art, which has completely liberated itself from the need to embody an objective form in a work, unfolds as practical operations in some dynamic global communications networks which are only too willing to change. And in this way, the story of media-based interventions continues as a secret, subversive history of the media that has stood in conflict with the strictly controlled macro-economic media machine.

The key difficulties arise from the conflation of the avant-garde and production technology. "Media art" exudes precisely this aura of being both progressive and serious, both experimental and indispensable, courageous and binding, new and well embedded in convention. The avant-garde element is, of course, alluded to in the promise of art which utilizes the latest technologies, while the sober definition of its media character also applies to its production technologies. In other words, it is like saying "oil art" instead of "landscape painting" or "genre painting". We shall return to this. A typical characteristic of "media art" is the transposition of a typology of statements onto a material or medium. Actually, "media art" consists of nothing more than this reciprocal transposition or, as stated above, a rigid and inseparable conflation of the avant-garde and production technology. And, likewise, it stems from nothing else. Only at first glance does this appear difficult to comprehend.

Let there be no mistake – since the mid-19th century at the latest, art has considered itself "avant-garde". This merely means that art finally accepted its marginal position. Socially, it was no longer important, maintained no favorable alliances with the powers that be, and often rejected society and civilization – and, in return, was despised by society. Yet, in Munch's and van Gogh's generation, both artists and society seemed to agree on one thing – that the psyche of the modern artist was eccentric, psychotic, decadent, endangered, and dangerous. Edward Munch, Vincent van Gogh, Odilon Redon, Victor Hugo, and James Ensor offered their own marvelous, introspective accounts of themselves – that is, tense souls at risk. And the art critics of the day quite literally used the same pathogenic metaphors to describe art. By this time, it became clear that art had lost its pivotal position defining the direction visual culture was to take. It ceased to define things. It controlled neither the image-generating apparatuses

(the most advanced forms of which are incorporated instead into the technical image media beyond the domain of art) nor society's imagination. In fact, it had no desire whatsoever to educate the masses as it did in the centuries following the Renaissance. From this point on, art was something produced for the elite, it addressed specialists and spawned a specific feeling for life. Henceforth, it was linked to the formative powers of society, to the bursts of energy or compulsions triggered by science and technology – not by cooperation, but at best in the form of associations, analogies, or ideologically motivated conflicts. This may sound as if art voluntarily accepted a weaker position, paradoxically binding the appearance of weakness with the thorny success of such an undertaking. However, though not wrong, the situation is far more complex. In truth, we should best construe the history of art as an intractably multi-layered functional complex. It is erroneous to think that individual factors could be isolated and considered the cause of particular effects or that certain causes can be emphasized over other factors that could likewise be causes.

I cannot go into the various aspects and conditions of this history here, but they hinge on at least three decisive factors. First, the crisis in outlook which is termed "European Romanticism". Secondly, the critique of art by a philosophy that strived for pure reflection or thought at the "highest" level which it so ennobled, while rejecting any objectification of subjective thought. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the division of art and technology, machinery, industry, and society which began to take place as early as the mid-18th century. At that time, art was anchored once and for all in the realm of the beautiful – the dimensions of which are both temporal and supra-temporal. The temporal dimension is characterized by the embodiment of styles, of the respective zeitgeist and culture. The supra-temporal dimension is encoded as absolute beauty which is permanent and cannot be subjected to historical critique. Classical Greek art or rather the art of Greek Classicism was regarded as the embodiment of this norm. In 1755, with his choice of sculptures in the Villa Albani near Rome (today part of Rome), Johann J. Winckelmann initiated the process of separating art from the rest of society – a move that was to have major repercussions. It was a process that culminated with the ingenious, successful concept of the world's first art museum – Friedrich Schinckel's original museum in Berlin (which, to this

day, continues to be a binding model for this type of institution). It was a building which presented a number of rooms around a rotunda – rooms in which the sequence of zeitgeists could be studied. In the rotunda, the Greek statues were presented as the aesthetic perfection of the history of art – the ultimate of all extra-aesthetic interests and desires. In the 1820s, Aloys Hirt, an highly influential impresario in Berlin at the time, decreed that these sculptures could only be plaster casts, as eternal beauty only expressed itself as form and not by the stimulus of material existence.

Aloys Hirt was inspired by Hegel's normative aesthetics which were likewise fully cognizant of the art of the day. And Hirt was a well-traveled, self-taught expert and skilful pragmatist who enjoyed the status of an unofficial minister of culture in Berlin. Hirt's decidedly idiosyncratic view of the ideals of beauty during classical antiquity and its embodiment in classical Greek sculpture was that of a programmatic politician devoted to culture. In this respect, Hirt not only demonstrated humanistic enthusiasm, but also the ability to illustrate the interests and needs of the day in a duly populist manner. Hirt played a significant role in developing the concept for a number of Schinkel's museums, and was chiefly responsible for bringing the concept into line with the supra-historical claims regarding aesthetics proposed by Hegel. In other words, Hirt had an immense influence on the history of art, a fact that has not been duly appreciated to this day. Although it took several decades before art history was established as a field of university study, the development that occurred from Winckelmann to Hegel, Hirt and Schinkel resulted in a typology of aesthetic philosophy. This was also reflected in architecture and in a discourse on art which took its normative cue from the philosophical arguments that enabled a supra-temporal notion of beauty. There was no place in this model for the "avant-garde" because art and beauty fulfilled their tasks in harmony with the developmental stages of the world spirit and its maturation. The model allowed no de-centering, dissonance, or disharmony. Art evolved as one of the highest stages of the human mind. It was held in high esteem as a means of finding form for the symbolic within the realm of the visible. Moreover, it had no meaningful task, no goal, and there were no justifications for its existence. At the time, it was considered arrogant to claim that art was a certain form of knowledge with a validity equal to philosophy. It

would have been condemned as tastelessly ridiculous and bereft of meaning, because, as contemporaries claimed, the nobility of art consisted solely in its ability to visualize the ideal. In Hegel's words, art was the sensuous appearance of the idea. The visualization achieved by art depended solely on the artist's skill and dexterity, or to put it more neutrally, the person performing the task. This achievement did not entail countering some fundamental "media-based" difficulties. "Avant-garde", the notion of art being the advance party, going beyond itself – was not regarded as being favorable but rather a defect. This defect was innate to the avant-garde from the outset. And not from Hegel's view, but also from a completely different angle. For art that has radically freed itself from the terror of the organic whole and the truly tasteful appeal of outward beauty, the avant-garde represents an opportunity to champion the fragmentary, the indirect, the incomplete, the "concetto", and the traces of the transitory.

It is exactly in this way that the modernist avant-garde presents its agenda as the deliberate escape of art from itself, realized in its own absence and perfected in the medium of its non-presence, i.e., no longer needing to be present. In the final instance, "avant-garde" is nothing more than the playful break with the suggestive function of aesthetically perfecting and transforming history, a task that it can no longer redeem. Divested of power, art finds its articulation as the "avant-garde" which exaggerates its impotence while vehemently denying its marginal position. The militaristic connotation here is deliberate and means being the advance party in difficult terrain, reconnoitering where the masses dare not venture and skillfully leading those less skilled. However, the connotation also alludes to the unconditional and strident, i.e., insincere self-encouragement of the cowardly and the weakened who defiantly ignore their own plight and confuse courage and crazed daring, who exist on the edge of the abyss and the brink of catastrophe, who ineluctably head for the edge and finally render the abyss perceivable. The avant-garde always fulfills itself in apocalyptic declaration, in the "now" and the "now at long last", in the sovereign deployment of final solutions with the charm of apodictic decisions. In this way, art compensates for its somewhat desolate marginal situation and its loss of power with a quite inflationary self-empowerment. The term "avant-garde", therefore, involuntarily concedes that art exists in places

which are inaccessible and that its lack of followers and consequences is itself without consequence. As a result, it cannot be criticized – a quirk systems theory could have exploited long before it asserted that the function of art was precisely its lack of function within society.

In fact, it is not the rhetoric of self-empowerment that allows art to claim eternal validity, but rather the robust institution of the museum. In addition to being a venue for exhibitions and a place of preservation where invisible warehoused collections and hyped showcased exhibits are held, the art museum is also the medium that predicates the norms. And it is precisely this medium which renders art possible, perceivable, identifiable in the first place. Although art often challenges the despised "bourgeois" institution of the museum with the avant-garde, it usually fails to see that those who storm the museums, the iconoclasts, embody the next generation of the *zeitgeist* in the halls of the museums and play a decisive role in regenerating the museum as an institution as such. The art museum embodies the discourse of art history. It is an institution of taste where value is assigned to the beautiful, art is criticized, works are selected and prizes bestowed on them which correspond to these values. The art museum reflects the attitudes of art as a system, institution, and discourse. Conversely, it also defines the values and standards for art. After all, art is exclusively that which is considered art by the responsible parties – today, we would use the term, "the art system". This is the only enduringly valid definition of art and not, as it is usually assumed, some aesthetic or material quality as revealed in specific works. Art generates the works, their content engender the ideas and the values which attest to the visible reality of art and embody it. Art is rendered plausible by its works, which, logically speaking, should precede them. Otherwise, the empirical works would not be able to embody art at all. This vicious cycle indicates the defining power of the entire system – as well as the compulsion to make such nominal definitions.

The substance of art consists of the methodological generation of genealogies of works, series, groups, sequences, and contexts. There is no individual masterpiece in which all of this is given objective form, even if many dream of some conclusive and final form of contemplation that enables them to recognize the qualities of true art and thus ultimately discern

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its atmosphere and aura, the magic of its pure presence, and the principles of its inner constructs. For masterpieces only arise in the plural, and preferentially, as series. At any rate, "master artists" have always worked to present a convincing oeuvre. The term "oeuvre" is decisive in that it refers to a lifetime of work viewed in hindsight. The number of works an artist creates is not decisive, as any mention of Giorgione, Masaccio, or Vermeer van Delft shows. Rather, the significant feature of a masterpiece is the uniqueness of an unattainable example, the perfected classicism unparalleled by the "maniera" or personal style of any other artist. The complexity of the execution, or what modern aesthetics has always termed the fascination of the "hermetic artwork" (Theodor W. Adorno overused this term and no doubt ruined it for any modernist discourse) plays a subordinate role. The masterpiece's refinement can be combined quite elegantly with certain traits that could be termed "primitive". Masterpieces are not exemplary and do not create types. They may differ quite substantially in terms of execution or "vocabulary". Furthermore, there are no uniform rules defining a masterpiece of art. A masterpiece cannot be "produced" deliberately or strategically, even if the will to create masterpieces is a decisive and indispensable impetus in the development of art. Masterpieces cannot be directly compared. They can only be grasped within the cornucopia in which they shine as outstanding, unique entities. They do possess, however, a few constant character traits.

The concept of the unique and solitary is the brainchild of a Romantic wish, coupled with notions of salvation and immersed in the energy of redemption. Uniqueness is celebrated as a monolith beyond any attribution to an epoch or person, an erratic giant or hermit outside history, embodying the genuine and unmitigated aesthetics with a view to eternity and the absolute quality of beauty. For such energies are expected to embody something absolute. It was precisely in this way that Raphael's genius was construed as a talent that went beyond any influences by material or physical banality. His works are masterpieces which would have arisen even if Raphael had not had hands – simply by dint of his ideas.

Despite all the vagueness as to the essence of art, there are no sensuous, physical, material, or media/material characteristics of art which do not likewise apply to a random number of non-artistic objects. The onto-

logical notion of the artwork's exclusive domain or territory is not a quality of the individual works, but rather the medium that conclusively defines art – the art museum. There is a comparable equivalent for each aspect of an artwork in a parallel world, in an everyday ontology or counter-level that cannot be distinguished from the artwork – either at the physical, biological, or any other existential level. It is not the material nature of the works that makes them objects of art. They must also be objects and "figures"' of a discourse, the contents of a specific body of rules which subjects both production and perception to standards and forms. This was the situation at the end of the 20th century. Anyone claiming the opposite is clearly unfamiliar with the terrain or wishes to ignore it, as he or she applies a different concept of art that refuses to abandon the norms and now dashed expectations. This is acceptable as long as narrow-minded commentators attempt to define the quintessence of art, to prescribe an ontology of the artistic – irrespective of where they are coming from.

It would be absurd to equate the material characteristics of art as a defining feature of the matter and validity of "art" or "artworks". Yet this is precisely what we hear again and again. And this compels me to state: It is *absurd* to regard material characteristics of art as the basis of a binding definition. Does art stand for the material in which it is expressed? Is it only the idea, namely the essence underlying the appearance? Both notions are idealistic and unsatisfactory. And both are based on the claim (which has yet to be proven) that art is by definition a singular, specific, and radically different form of cognition. To give this matter greater depth, let us recall that we do not talk of "pigment art" nor do we speak of "fat art" to reveal something about the work of Joseph Beuys (which it does not). Likewise, we could revive the long dead-and-buried, fruitless debate on "photo art" as a genre. Whether photography or advertising, for that matter, (as was claimed in the 1980s) is art does not depend on ontological characteristics because such do not exist in general for art. Anything can be art – but nothing has to be art. In other words, art depends on aspects that determine that something should be considered art and only art. Quite apart from this, the question is not whether something is art or not, but whether something good, important, relevant, illuminating, shattering, etcetera is art or not. Moreover, the key criterion is not whether "Internet art", "compu-

ter art", "video art", "photo art", "fat art", "pigment art", "oil art", "painting art", "sculptural art" are forms of art. Instead, the question should focus on how the technologies of production, the physical-chemical, bio-technological, media-procedural modes of production and creation enable/prevent/ modify that which through the eyes of a society is termed "art" based on the specific mode and objects produced. This is a question of location and activity, an inquiry into the current moment which is innate in dynamic meanings in specific situations.

Yet this is not the only irritating aspect concerning "media art". "Media art" refers to a definable range of technologies: electronic controls, digital codes, computers, specific hardware architectures, videographies, TV. In this context, the contents, the animated sequences of images and sound always have to be perceived together with and through the programs and devices which produce it. A particularly irritating fact is that the talk of "media art" subtly assumes – and without justification – that art can be experienced as opposed to technologies as specifically media-based and artistically contemporary. "Media art", or so the phrase seems to imply, real- izes artistic statements by means of apparatuses, technical devices, the use of specific ICT, the new utilization of established devices such as TV and PC which function as mass media. In other words, the "media" in media art only applies to the technical side of the medium and not the constitutive part which makes art "art", namely representation, individual articulation, open-ended experiments, the creation of oscillating interfaces between the real world, science, and technologies which focus not on economic exploita- tion, but on other values. The quintessential characteristic of "media art" is often solely and narrow-mindedly defined by its technical or device-driven aspect, and the conditions which make art "art", namely that it exists as a statement or an attempted statement, is completely ignored.

The problem becomes strikingly clear if we bear in mind that all art that was conceptually and terminologically accepted as "art" was always "media art" for it required a form of media. Art cannot exist without means of articulation and representation. All art is media-based, and this basic fact entails that the specific expressive conditions enabled by the materi- al/fabric/media are emphasized rather than the general factual existence of art. Therefore, it would be more meaningful and productive – as I have

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already mentioned – not to speak of "media art" but rather "art through the media". "Art through the media" is a dynamic term which emphasizes the conditions of art's realization, the special conditions of what was once more poignantly referred to as a specific "artistic intention". And here I wish to state unequivocally and unconditionally, i.e., in principle and without any limitation in time, that the reverse of this skeptical hypothesis does not apply. Art does not need to justify or express itself beyond the domain of media conditions. It can never be understood beyond the media conditions in which it physically exists. Despite the wealth of media features which could be incorporated into the definition, I propose that the technical, physical, or chemical determinacy of the work's setting is not essential, but rather the rhetorical linkage of image-based statements with constantly re-modified viewer expectations. Art through the media is a rhetorically differentiated mediosphere. It integrates all possible material states, from archaic to futuristic technologies. This means that the new media determinations enable an insightful glimpse into the existential conditions of art. Taking it one step further, we could claim that only the media determinations allow us this insight. However, the essence of art is not affected by the innovative power or historical dating, the purported advanced nature or novelty of a device, instrument, tool, or apparatus used to realize the media conception, but rather refers to *how* it was respectively realized and staged/produced. The shift from the *what* to the *how* ideally demonstrates how myths are formed, which Roland Barthes characterized in his mythography of everyday life as the shift of meaning to form.[2] "Media art" today is – qua art and qua a discourse based on this – genuine mythical speech because it implies an artifact, the formation of which is never outwardly expressed and perhaps excluded – a techno-fetish that purports to be exclusively authentic and ignores all media/technical materializations.

"The myth of media art" means that a collectively effective independent status to the critical differentiating power of art has given way to the sheer existence of present works, as well as the dissimulation of the conditions in which it is produced. Its absence (secret, intimation, representation, statement) is simulated as fiction. In their desire to be "media art",

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2   See Roland Barthes, Mythologies, tr. Annette Lavers, (Paladin, Herts.), 1983.

i.e., technologically advanced (digitally controlled), these works represent the obvious integration of mass media and current ICT into the sphere of art. The efficacy of their position embedded in communication networks does not just constitute the ideological core of this art. They also draw their mythical power from the pretence that they can convey in a simple, magical way the scientifically distorted miracle of new technologies, one that alludes to intelligent insight or socio-political influence. The mythical core of media art is its claim that art is the aesthetic medium of a populist misunderstanding with a view to the promises/conditions/uses of the developed media apparatuses. This is especially scandalous, as this pretence thrives on the century-long efforts of outsiders – such as Athanasius Kircher, Giambattista della Porta, Alfons Schilling, and the Internet activists of today – who have created an image of the artist as the only individual who insistently questions the philosophically justified function of technology. They are not interested in money or profit, nor some ostensible user or a paradisiacal improvement of the world as demanded by the power-hungry or cults of personal salvation – but the skeptical investigation of a subject by means of experimentally impacting the relationship of body and mind. This experimental impact can be construed as a matrix, one which most major innovations in art and its media history have addressed – from the construction of central perspective via the experiments in perceptual physiology and neuronal functions in the 19th century to the self-encounter training sessions of the body arts in the 1960s. And this includes the extension and projection of all these experiments onto the "expanded" or "virtual reality" of the techno-imaginary, the simulation of a neurally or optically stimulated imagination, the intoxicatingly detached mental agitation of the brain in cyberspace (and its mirrored pretence in the worlds of the mind), the global networks of digitalized data transfer of all possible computer architectures for all possible purposes.

According to the prevalent image, artists are portrayed as individuals who dig deeper, have a broader understanding, and are typically dissatisfied and skeptical. This skepticism is in danger of disappearing through "media art". Though it theoretically belongs to the genre of art and lives off the capital of skepticism, it is often characterized by its perfect lack of understanding and uninhibitedly draws profit from the "experience-hype"

of society. Moreover, it is strongly supported by the natural sciences which have become incomprehensible, and bio-technology which strikes fear into its heart. In particular, the natural sciences (including the most complex areas of life architecture, namely bionics and genetics) quite openly point to their status as a leading artistic and aesthetic domain. These experimental technologies claim to be artistic as they can change nature in the sense of an aesthetic fiction, treating them as actual artistic metaphysics. Science fiction — a version of underscoring the mechanics of scientific plausibility — supplements the art of human creation with a science that not only draws on the Pygmalion effect of the arts, but also the latter's status as an aesthetic (performative, theatrical, dramatic) setting. Leading neurologists, for instance, admit that the sciences increasingly derive their explanatory patterns from the images produced by literature and film, which is reflected in their own research that is subjected to the same compulsion to create images and magic. Thus, the double helix can be explained better by describing it as "Jacob's Ladder" and scientific justifications can be popularized by offering analogies based on cinematic images. Renowned researchers regard experimental scientists as artists. The additional aspect of the "depraved artist" has gone so far that it now functions as the crowd-pleasing illusionist and clown during the intervals of the artistic program for the scientific magic show. It has to allow its credit to be consumed by technology which is transforming life more rigidly than ever before, yet only grasps this as the simulation of fictions. For example, the debate about genetics provides countless insights into the aestheticism of the sciences today and proves their fundamentally unscientific nature. This doesn't seems to bother anyone, for science is no longer the production of insights, but the application of scientific policy, "life assistance" or "life design".[3] In view of Günther Anders' claim in the early 1950s that humans were no longer able to imagine what they were actually capable of producing, "media art" is not as successful in simulating as it is in dissimulating. It reveals itself by denying its destructive tendencies and presents us with the adventure of progress in technology and knowledge in a joyous, often naively childlike manner. And its impact does not rely on the evocation of some new zeit-

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3   See the article by Bernd Graff, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Oct. 31, 2000, p. 23.

geist. The scandal inherent in all the talk about "media art" is its fussy and placating application of technology and its inability to constructively and competently participate in the development of key technologies which will influence our lives in the future– from telematics to bionics, from robotics to nanotechnology. Even if one does not belief in the myth, it is difficult to free oneself from the appeal of the project of an ideological staging of science as a technological theater. Large areas of current "media art" quite shamelessly and unthinkingly produce quaint images. They decorate problems. Construction based on technologies which function according to different criteria is simply an example of an old ideal "expressed" in a new format. As if art can be nothing more than the wish of expression, as some absolute inclination toward expressivity. Yet this is the most effective rejection and distortion of/by art this century. In other words, the "myth of media art" – and I am referring to the mainstream, not singular positions which are, of course, exceptions – suggests proximity where there is blind miscomprehension. Be on guard when you hear the word "interaction" or "interface" – these terms are often used when artists are allowed to "mess about" with an installation in order to participate in the miracle of the procedural. In such cases, viewers are confronted with the sort of media art which cannot be distinguished from the random trivialities on a fair ground – other than by the fact that it lays claim to more exclusive values. Needless to say, it attempts to achieve a higher level than trivial enjoyment. Art as the "artification" of the extant is the basic compensatory lie of what remains "essentially" bourgeois art to this day. It is an art form that longs for the wellness of the mundane, and aspires to overcome it through highly developed, art-like efforts. Given its success, art defiantly becomes a mass media phenomena and resembles TV programming. TV must always be considered the attempt to transform the artistically inadequate self-hatred of the popular into an artificial plebeian song-and-dance act, which, since we create it ourselves, is easier to control than the gradually uncontrollable attitudes of a plebeian culture which recalcitrantly emerges parallel to and independent of bourgeois culture.

■ Navigating, finding, constructing, poeticizing – the artfulness of artistic imagination based on the example of Jean-Luc Godard

With art embedded in the sciences, there are many reasons why it no longer represents specific artistry in inventing, constructing, and developing knowledge. If we consider the massive technological input for certain image-generating processes, it is clear why this apparatus cannot be tied to a form of art which endeavors to set itself apart from mass taste by means of an exclusivity that purports to be of a higher value. However, it is doomed to fail in this undertaking, as the structure of the great apparatus of distraction, the dramaturgical machine of the excitement economy, and the energy-charged manipulation of the collective imagination attempts to achieve an uncomplicated, average, standardized taste. This taste need not attract any special attention nor be founded on some explicit theme. The energy of attention must be committed solely to the wondrous works of the media machine – not its processes and certainly not the conditions under which they arise and the organization which presents them. Such taste can be created by the media, indeed in an unconditional manner – so much is clear from a glance at the century of the "imagination machines"[4] and, in the 1990s, the return to a "late Classical entertainment fascism", as poignantly termed by Peter Sloterdijk in his various polemics in 1999. This may involve a great deal of effort, but the industrialized media conglomerate can only be viewed as the industrialization of feelings and states of consciousness, i.e., as the wide-scale organizational restructuring of the imagination. For this reason, such mega-mechanical procedures leave no room for a notion of art that distinguishes between free and useful art, demanding or enabling art, as the reflexive clarification of extraordinary and complex statements, or as a counterweight to the civilizational simplicity of the binding notions of taste. It is simply superfluous and annoying.

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4   Siegfried Zielinski, Audiovisions – Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999); Siegfried Zielinski: "Time Machines," in: L. & B. (Lier en Boog), Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory, vol. 15, Screen-Based Art, (Amsterdam & Atlanta, 1999); Siegfried Zielinski, "Media Archaeology," in: Digital Delirium, ed. Arthur & Marilouise Kroker, (New World Perspectives: Montreal, 1997).

The unadulterated immanence of the mass media's formation of taste is enough – of course, without complaint or evaluation, recorded as dispassionately as the historical process itself.

The debate between codes and rhetoric anchored in the politics of taste does not so much take place in the domain of the traditional art, but rather in the field of the "seventh art", namely film and cinematography, and later, TV and videography. Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*[5] provides the most comprehensive analysis of this issue. Godard not only presents products, but also cinematographic production apparatuses, motifs, and elements: book/library, line-display typewriters, cutting tables, etc. Poetically structured, he presents an array of a/v montage techniques and forms. He brilliantly plays with the material (and turns all the films into one film comprised of all the films which have been made and some that were never realized). He focuses on a living center, the "power of emotions,"[6] and the viewer. The histories of the cinema exist in the minds of the viewers. It is there that they remain alive and survive. Godard produces a meta-film which not only continually focuses on the numerous films he refers to, but also a typology of their virtual totality, re-arranging their order, and presenting the gestural and emphatic elements that make them recognizable and memorable – in other words, the twists in the tale which memory latches onto. Godard transforms the negative of cinema into the positive of an artistry of self-reflexive vision. He presents the passions of vision without referring to the idea of art or the avant-garde, nor offering a guideline or standard of evaluation. Instead, art *in* film is art *as* film. The entire history of cinematography has seen these arts constantly emerge in a variety of ways. Here, art doesn't only refer to the exemplary character of a successful realization regardless of the trivial nature of a genre or the simplicity of the cinematographic language used. The cinematographic mind of the viewer, as Godard's meta-film portrays it, is a universal appara-

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5   Produced as an eight-part TV series for *Canal plus* and others stations and published as a four-volume book by Gaumont at Gallimard, Paris in 1998. The translation of the texts (spoken by Godard) in the eight episodes, the text of the four-volume book edition with an English translation by John Howe, and a 5-CD set with the soundtrack were released by Manfred Eicher on his ECM label. Jean-Luc Godard, Historie(s) du Cinéma, ECM New Series, ECM Records, 1999.

6   An expression coined by Alexander Kluge.

tus for passionately enjoying images and visual discretion, in other words, a means of visual and mnemonic differentiation. In this context, distinctions cannot be made in terms of Kantian pure forms of universal taste, and certainly not according to the rules of "taste".

A viewer's memory not only stores images but also sounds and text. It is an immense videographic, audio-visual apparatus which evidences a gestural, ostentatious significance down to the level of each individual still. This ideal montage manipulates the significant images which are full of pathos and of memorable value in all directions along the time axis[7]. The use of a large-scale videographic machine – the control panel of each individual viewer – provides the evidence of what Pier Paolo Pasolini termed the "natural semiotics" and the "natural first language" of film[8] and the art historian Michael Baxandall termed the "principle of ostentation", the "ostentatious sign of art".[9] The significant aspect of Godard's work is that the avant-garde function only arises as a technique for mise-en-scène, for elaboration, focusing, and elucidation, but not as its own terrain in opposition to a clearly distinct area of values for "mass taste". This avant-garde function is not a habit, expression, or code, but a precise function, a mode of operation. All too often has Godard's radical thrust been averted by accusing him of avant-garde attitudes and an ideological critique of Hollywood from a fundamentalist perspective, even though no one was able to accuse him as they would have liked, namely by stating that this ideological critique was only an expression of someone frustrated at not being shown due honors – a ridiculous accusation. Such denunciation is completely superficial. For Godard's critique is, of course, far more radical as an aesthetic and political critique. His experimental technique is a method of showing mass culture, the formative "other side", and conditions of cinematography solely within the field of mass taste and not in opposition to something else. Through Godard, the avant-garde proves to be the

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7   This not only refers to the manipulation of individual elements by changing the sequencing, but also to more wide-ranging, i.e., physical manipulation of the time axis itself, thus undermining irreversibility. Time axis manipulation, frequently used in tape recordings, is something many of us first encountered on LPs by the heroes of pop music, namely the Beatles and Brian Wilson.

8   See Pier Paolo Pasolini, Empirismo Eretico, (Milan: Garzanti, 1972).

9   See Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention, (Yale University Press, 1985)

self-differentiation of mass-cultural functions, not its opposite or negation, not a resource for its critique nor a means of overcoming of it. There is no "outside", no innocent, chaste, immaculate territory. Of course, Godard repeatedly and passionately states what cognoscente have known all along, namely that, since 1945, the American movie industry has endeavored to kill cinema and the film per se. Yet Godard is not interested in a discourse on the instructive aesthetic values nor the relationship between the center of power and the artistic marginality of so-called experiments. He aims to achieve something far more radical – imagination as such in its entire social dimension, in other words, the very agency of the imaginary.[10] He regards cinematography as an extensive territory because of his interest in the capacities of the imagination. The commodities which are sold through mass culture are definitely not those which would be harmful to the imagination. And in the same way, experimental films are not the only films in which the imagination is productive. This is art and the challenge – on both sides of the avant-garde equation. And for this reason, imagination must first be elaborated, be poetically possible on both sides before it can truly be applied.

In the process of describing an experimental code in the field of mass taste, or more precisely, in the "cinephile" head of the user of mass cinema, we always encounter the visual grappling with film, but never expressed as deciphering meaningful content, signified by the sequence of images or some "valuable" expression of meaning. For this reason, Godard presents his discursive cinematography as a cinematography devoted to obsessive themes, to all the stories, to cinema in its entirety. His portrayal of cinematography is fictional, transformed into the exposed truth of the fragmentary, the energetic power of dreams and the media in its factory-based production and modification, in which the subversion of wishes can only survive by constantly changing. This is why we cannot describe the wish as being damaged or perverted, but rather permanently remodeled. Godard uses the codes as a machine, the machine as a poetic code. His media ma-

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10 As described by Cornelis Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, (Polity, Cambridge, 1975). See also Erving Goffmann: *Frame Analysis: Essays on the Organization of Experience*, (Harper, 1974) and Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, tome I et II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

chine (which is no less than the endless, ever richer, and irritating journey through our memories of words, images, and sounds) is conceived as the construction of a specific poetry that is neither marginalized in the light of art nor nurtures an ideological critique of denounced banalities in connection with its mass existence, nor honors some unattainable or organic triviality. Godard identifies a far more precise method. He demonstrates how the media machine distorts itself and what can happen if its own intrinsic poetic mechanisms are better elaborated than the economic view of marketable mass goods suggest. And he does this without sharing the opinion that the mass medium must open itself to art or be ennobled by art.

■ From the synaesthetics of utopian modernism to the simulations of a machine theater

Media does not simply entail the aspects of apparatus, technology, invention and innovation. It also refers to the numerous conditions through which the media arose, its roots in the real world and everyday culture, in the habits and achievements of conveying the findings of science, the way life has been influenced by scholarly insights, inventions, and discoveries. If we wish to gain an appropriate historical understanding of the subject, our discussion would have to be broad and consist of many elements that are constantly being changed and dynamically redefined in relation to one another. By citing Godard's theories, I demonstrated how complex the relationship is between the development of technology, visual training, imagination, topological habits (in terms of cinematic genres and the way cinema creates tension), as well as the models of modern technology. Each and every utopia of modernity is fascinated with technical apparatus. However, modernity as a utopia entails that the technical world become mythological. For reasons of space, I cannot describe the specific modern links in depth.

Let us take the following example – not so much to illustrate the episodical nature of media arts but of the substance therein – to shed light on the current state of interaction between the arts, technology, and theater, or in other words, the relationship of software and hardware, imagina-

tion and calculation, fantasy and phantoms. In July 2000, a "synaesthetic, intermedia" music-image-dance production was performed as part of the New York Lincoln Center Festival. The *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung* published a review of the production under the appropriate, if slightly exaggerated, headline "The Spirit of Galactic Electrons. Almost Old and Certainly New Canned Music from the Lincoln Center Festival"[11]. For the first time, a musical instrument was presented that bore a name reflecting the spirit of the times, namely the "Musical Virtual World". Its inventor already had a strong reputation in the world of virtual realities – Jaron Lanier, former digital wunderkind, a young, wealthy entrepreneur, hell-bent on creating art and now ready to establish the corresponding career. With his long dreadlocks, Lanier was superbly suited to the role of a spiritual techno-freak. As a young man, he had made a decisive contribution to the development of data gloves and data headsets under the patronage of NASA. He later ran a company specialized in programming all sorts of VR applications. Some inventions were advanced, patented, licensed, and successfully marketed and omnipresent in a cultural context. After a few years, Lanier, who can play more than 12 instruments and claims to have developed his own amazing technique for playing the piano, changed business plans and decided to promote his talents as a composer and musician. This shifted the balance. While he had focused his efforts on the apparatuses earlier in his career, he now wished to stress the "soft" and invisible inner dimension of the creative production process.

In terms of content, many deemed the performance in New York as being technical razzmatazz that presented little more than a variation of Disney's "Fantasia". Of course, this says nothing about how well-suited the synaesthetic media are for the various methods of generating sounds and images for newly combined expressive realms. "Musical Virtual World" generates processes of interchange between images and tones. Graphic lines are transformed into sounds by a graphic pen dragged across an acoustically sensitized mouse pad. Electronic sounds generate graphic shapes on screen, and the iconography – as we might guess – seems to be based on Surrealism, that eternal pool of stalwart and agelessly new sensibilities:

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11   Jordan Meijas, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Aug. 1, 2000, p. 49.

Miró-like, Ernst-like, Tanguy-like. Lanier took center-stage wearing glasses that surrounded him with the image of planets circling a universe. He himself became a planet with moons in orbit around him. Inside the planet there were psychedelically colored rocks. The movements with the graphic pen were computed to create the vortex of a tornado. The universe started to dance. The hallucinogenic dimension of the "neuronal dance" evidently represented the major aesthetic ambition that gave rise to such a work or made it real. By contrast, the technological dimension can be considered a mere world of media, of machines, or arrangements, a means to an end, technical functionality. The avant-garde intention here went far beyond the media itself and was designed to allow the composition and performance to coincide in the domain of chance, the realm of the aleatory. Correspondingly, the machines had to be placed in a clearly aesthetic setting. As with technologically enhanced music and sound performances, for example, by New York experimental Techno rapper Scanner, the division between stage and auditorium, or between the sounding board and stage is problematic. Of course, it would be easy to do without a stage on which machines stand anyway. "Musique concrète" has long struggled with this problem, as have technically proficient artists such as *Kraftwerk* or Laurie Anderson. What can an artist do if the creative action such as can be perceived by spectators consists of minimal movements turning knobs, pressing buttons, or sliding controls which can no longer be seen from a distance of three meters? Musicians can at least play synthesizers wildly on stage and groups such as *Nice* or *King Crimson* were able to make use of these sound generators as an "expressive" substitute for or an addition to some guitarist or drummer madly moving their bodies while playing their instruments. Robert Moog's synthesizer also permitted such behavior which identified the player as a member of the sixties, even if the instrument no longer conveyed the breathtaking aura of a virtuoso as had its predecessor, the "Theremin".

The "Theremin" was invented by Lew Theremin at the beginning of the 20th century. It was used for trivial soundtracks in horror movies after the Second World War and, then with great virtuosity, by Brian Wilson for various Beach Boys songs. Its technology, namely wireless transmission of electrical voltage or electric fields, was, of course, of great interest to the

military and secret services. Theremin had been supported early on by Lenin, but later emigrated to the US, became the "shooting star" of the New York scene and provoked a scandal by marrying a black dancer. Suddenly he disappeared. Nobody knew whether he was still alive. Only much later, as a result of several coincidences, was it possible to reconstruct the facts. He had been abducted from New York by the KGB and condemned to many years of hard labor working for the Soviet secret services. Theremin spent his years of forced labor successfully working on ultra-deep, depth-sounder submarine identification. Given his ongoing disobedience, Theremin was sent to a concentration camp. Only Stalin's "Great Service Medal" saved him from death and protected him from further harassment. He later went back to teaching physics at Moscow University. In the 1960s, he was tracked down or rather stumbled across by an American journalist. The interviews he gave got him into trouble, as they were mainly published in foreign Western newspapers. He was demoted to an assistant in a Moscow conservatory, lived in a small apartment in the midst of his "Theremins" and taught everything he knew to a distant relative, the daughter of one of his nieces, who is probably the only living authority on the "Theremin" today. The person in question is none other than Lydia Kavina, commissioned by Lanier to play in the performance described above. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Theremin was able to visit the venues of his great successes in the 1920s – and even performed his own compositions and an entire "Theremin" orchestra at Carnegy Hall. And he also met his dear friend Clara Rockmore from years before who had become a master "Theremin" soloist. Theremin died at the age of almost 100 in the mid-1990s – a truly major figure of the century and a rare, immeasurably important example of the constant minor and major interchange between art, technical invention, and science. In the early 1990s, while Theremin was still alive, Steven M. Martin produced a marvelous documentary titled "Theremin – An Electronic Odyssey", containing, among other things, insightful contributions by Robert Moog and Brian Wilson.

Let us return once again to the stage at New York's Lincoln Center. Lanier compensated for being solipsistically or autistically isolated in cyberspace (a technical abbreviation for the cybernetic space of digitally processed feedback and linkages) and the imperceptible nature of the

apparatus which generates the body of art with a secondary level, i.e., a theatrical level. He presented Lydia Kavina and her spectacularly unspectacular instrument on stage. He surrounded the DJs and the sound of cutting-edge dance clubs with exotic electronic items from music history – *Ondes Martenot* and Olivier Messiaen. Zeena Parkins played an electronic harp, Dave Amels a clavivox, Kathleen Supové a clavinet (an electrical version of the clavichord which Bach so loved), John Musot a disclavier. In the spirit of political correctness – which now has a solid footing in aesthetic conformism and guarantees to nip any surprises in the bud – Karsh Kale provided the "multi-cultural element" with his electric tables, giving the performance that Asian touch so necessary for any demonstration of West Coast mythology.

Lanier assembled an entire circus, an exaggeration marked by aesthetic and dynamic form, a production that resembled a museum. For this reason, he placed the two DJs on the stage whose work at the turntables provided a genuine, tangible, gestural complement which is as full of virtuosity as the quality of the sound. We all know that DJs, MCs, and rappers are essentially superior to electronic freaks in terms of the aura they can generate on stage. And Lanier also introduced "Mister Synthesizer" himself, Robert Moog, complete with instrument. Lanier produced his multimedia fantasies with an entire orchestra of electronic instruments, which – as if to paraphrase the cybernetic sculptures of a Jim Whiting that so often have a demonic feel – created a true spectacle. The extensive ensemble was not actually necessary to generate the sounds and images, but helped construe the theater of mankind in the midst of the auto-playing apparatuses and validate the players' existence. Even if this must remain consistently ambiguous. As Günther Anders wrote back in the mid-1950s, the degradation of human beings to the status of a mere "added skill" cannot simply be ignored on command without heaping scorn on human dignity. This is also a typical problem of Stelarc's techno-performances. Objective meaning and subjective intention do not mix – a fact the avant-garde has often encountered en route to popularizing art. Stelarc praises the transformation of anthropology by means of a triumphant synthesis of human bodily functions and machine environments, pre-empting some indistinguishable man-machine connection. Yet, to the unbiased observer, the iconography

of such a synthesis is completely different – as the final ad posted by a human being fighting for his job against the automation of work, trying to ensure his abilities are recognized by anonymous machine conglomerates that are no longer interested in human problems.

In this respect, Lanier's presentation made more ingenious and superficial use of old habits. He staged the orchestra of apparatuses in the context of a museum for the performers. Lanier placed a total of 17 musicians on stage. Their artistic material was well established and had long since extricated itself from its revolutionary uneasiness thanks to its inclusion in an expanded classical canon – Terry Riley's minimal manifesto *In C*. Needless to say, the performance's technical basis called for new, adjusted coincidences and reactive manipulations. But it also produced new possible settings by the conductor. Lanier's intention, or so he formally stated, was to create a "galactic outpouring of the human mind in electrons generated in patterns". This is exactly the fault so typical of "media art" in general. It becomes physically tangible as tons of production apparatus that supposedly enable the mind to float free, surfing untrammeled by any material essence.

The remarkable thing about such nonsense is the fact that the areas which are most popular are those in which cutting-edge music is produced. This also reveals the delicate conditions of a more universal code transport, one that is still based on standards defining "high" and "low" culture. The most incisive productions are those which manufacture, stage, or perform artistic material using advanced technology that hadn't yet been developed when the pieces were composed. For example, the same festival at the Lincoln Center in 2000 featured a scratching version of John Cage's *Imaginery Landscape No. 5* dating back to 1952, originally composed as fragments from 42 albums. According to the general consensus, the piece was successfully performed by the electronic players or "exhibitors" at the "turnable tables". Such unintentional preemptions in the artistic formal arrangements of advanced technologies and apparatuses unknown at the time are most always the exception. Usually, the existing apparatuses influence the generation of the artistic form and take advantage of the innovative effects of the media. Consequently, the apparatus only plays an external or subordinate role. A great work of art is one in which its process-

ing (which entails the unity of advanced semiotic material and functionally differentiated realism) masterfully ensures that the apparatus fade into the background, using it only as a means, and not presenting it for display on stage.

■ Art and the techno-machine. On the idolatry of images and the self-image of "digital art" as organized in terms of mechanical apparatus

A secondary appropriation of the media machine and the technologies by art in a reactive stage with a time lag may appear irritating, yet it is largely unavoidable. Not only does this apply to the content, but also the fact that the forms in which art is presented do not change as quickly as the apparatus with which they were produced. After all, the technological possibilities must always be greater than the established modes of perceiving art. For a long time, the dynamics of art were completely at home in the domain of production. This gradually changed in the course of the 20th century, first slowly and covertly, then more evidently and in a more confrontational manner, and today, quite vehemently under the spell of "interaction". Pragmatic framing has become indispensable even if it says nothing conclusive about the fabrication of fiction at the level of expressive artistic material. Artworks are conceived from the viewpoint of their reception. The artworks are the media of their perceptibility. The activity has changed its position. The decisive factor is the perceiving person. Numerous – and by no means the least unimportant – 20th century art concepts either focus primarily or exclusively on the observer. The actual creativity is the reception, the substantial element is the perceptual and cognitive dynamism of the recipient.

This pragmatic framework is not defined by the symbols with which the works differentiate themselves in the respective media, but by habits and usage. In other words, the stage is still necessary even if the organization of the artistic material radically calls for its abolition. There can be no doubt about the aesthetic pattern for such differentiation. Needless to say, this also applies to the insistence (in the spirit of liberation) to eliminate

the division of stage and auditorium, of the artist and viewer, to liquidate any ostensible accumulation of authority and demonstration of power on the part of the artist. This demand only makes sense if the difference is upheld (and be it only in the guise of a purported background foil). The organization of reception continues to play the decisive role for the impact of art regardless of the materials or media used. Naturally, they do not allow for any form of random perception. However, the primacy of perception applies to all exemplary or singular processes in the appropriation of artworks. This represents the universal element of art, which, being ever present, can be ignored compared with the specific features. After all, there are always artworks. What needs to be differentiated in the individual work can be readily exchanged in terms of its reception, which, by nature, is always identical. As a result, artistic efforts focusing on the perception of the unique character of an artwork are ridiculous and somehow touching, as they conceal the fact that this uniqueness is the most common thing about art from the viewpoint of its reception. I am not making a value judgment here; I simply wish to offer a functional description of a particular scheme. For even this description is exclusively based on the respective existence of the work as it is – at least in the final instance and intention with an expansive desire and wish. However, the argument revolves around the medial side which would lead to different considerations.

Viewed from a different angle, though art clearly lags behind technology, it nevertheless has the far greater reservoir of energy and emphasis in its themes and forms. It exerts a greater appeal. Indeed, it resembles a precious, unique archive of techniques for generating attention – both for the products and for the production methods. Art impacts daily life far more than the influence of expert knowledge. The highly developed techno machine is forced to revert to essentially superfluous, reactionary, and "backward" secondary stage productions and models. This is not meant to be a reproach. We probably discern constants at work here through history that can be observed in a comparative study of the reproduction potential afforded by a Gutenberg press via lithography and the introduction of the rotary press into text- or picture-based journalism to photography and film. With the benefit of 30 years of hindsight, we can also observe the same pattern in so-called "early media art" beginning in the mid-1960s

in video works, installations, and audio pieces created by Nam June Paik, Valie Export, Vito Acconci, Richard Kriesche, Joan Jonas, Laurie Anderson, Peter Weibel, William Wegman, Gottfried Bechtold, Shigeko Kubota, Michael Snow, General Idea, Ian Murray, John Baldessari, and others. This is hardly surprising in light of the production context which is discussed far more rarely than the conventional stylistic influences derived from art history, e.g., the first instances, the breaches, the examples, and the elements within the actual canon. After all, artistic experiments can do nothing else than process the enthusiasm for technology after the fact. Depending on the degree of complexity, art is not capable of analyzing the apparatuses over long periods of time. Likewise, it can neither improve the apparatuses through innovation. The only real possibility was demonstrated by Nam June Paik and Gary Hill who created an "assemblage", an improvised, situation-based combination of heterogeneous factors with tools which happened to be on hand at the time.[12] This improvisational trait of the process in the specific "hic et nunc" may, at times, produce surprising and – with reference to the individual cases of one's own idiosyncratically charged artworks – often outstanding effects. Yet, in terms of the entire machinery, these aspects remain marginal.

Let me cite an example that has since become famous among the "in-crowd". Numerous works by American video pioneers such as Darah Birnbaum or Brenda Miller were made possible by the organizational assistance provided by Richard Feist and his *stand by* project. Though the idea was quite simple, it required patience, circumspection, and conviction in order to be put into practice. Feist was able to persuade the management of IBM to let artists use their mainframes at night; back then, the mainframes were on 24 hours a day regardless of whether they were being used because shutting them off would have been more costly for the company. Everyone benefited and the artists had the opportunity to create their artworks. However, this "zero-budget" approach goes against the grain of how video art sees itself. One of the key reasons for the marginal position of video art is its refusal to regard works in the traditional view as the "carriers of expression", but rather as strictly technological/media

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12   As proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his deliberations on the concept of ‚bricolage' in his book, *The Savage Mind*. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1966).

forms. The tapes are not made available to people for a small rental fee. They are screened in hopelessly crowded, over-laden evening events at so-called "museums of contemporary art" and offered for sale at considerable sums as "limited, numbered, and signed" copies, and are thus promoted with traditional sales strategies.

The early phase of this video art was characterized by the search for other venues and distribution forms which were not related to museums. From today's viewpoint, we must admit that videography still has no home. This applies both to society and the technical medium. One's own personal TV channel is a paradoxical dream, because, though such channels are technologically possible, they preferentially dispense with viewers. By contrast, the content has an enduring value, as the apparatus is used for social critique which often targets the media situation that treated video art as a sphere of media absence. By means of spatial sets, this approach provides a clear media-based situation by the fact that artistic videography differs substantially from video documentary work. The apparatus is part of the artistic product, whereby the angles and shots result in a shift of images and perspective. The producers do not simply place their trust in the properties of a different image which appears on the same old screen. Rather, they attempt to manipulate the programs, to intervene in the logistics, to penetrate the viewer's brain. The focus is on showing something which defines the language of the frame and the devices, the installation and the spatial reference of the technology in question. In addition to its content, the frame itself plays a special role. Richard Kriesche's installation *14 Minutes in the life of...* from 1977 is a perfect example of this approach. Here, five monitors present the day-to-day life of a female worker in the Puch factory located in the Steiermark region of Austria. Five days which always involve the same movements, hand motions, tasks, sequences, and sounds – five days structured in terms of training the body and optimizing physical coordination for the purposes of work and geared to using minimum effort. In this and other comparable examples, the analysis of reality is tied to the media-based reflection on its presentation. Each depiction involves a mise en scène. Each portrayal of reality depends on the indirect quality based on an understanding of realism that relies on new apparatuses, cameras, and cutting tables and, thus, describes how media is used.

This is particularly the case with the electronic technology of videography which simply has no referential basis compared to that of film. Nothing is automatically recorded for videography, but is electronically placed in sync and broken down into electrical impulses. Videography is not a language of images as film is.

Video's method of depicting reality was what made media art's outlook so unique at the time. The use of apparatus is only successful if the apparatus itself can be perceived as the instrument for dissecting reality. This corresponds closely to the old media utopia proposed by Walter Benjamin who held that the fascination with the semblance of the real is replaced by the apparatus-based dissection of the same, whereby the screening apparatus constructively assimilates that semblance. Another typical aspect of the early video scene was its ability to activate the audience, intensify perception, and initiate a public counter-movement for socio-critical projects. Unlike most examples of "new" mediums, the media aspect of video art was only valid in connection with new forms of action and new wishes in terms of the mise en scène. The apparatuses were defined in "media" terms because of their link to the stage. Peter Weibel's early installations represent this link as they are a "stage" for self-presentation and social critique. They politically explore and convey perceptual activities in terms of their openness or their shrouded compulsion to be closed. Here, social reality is conveyed through the media. Political, social, and perceptual theory are incorporated into the language of the apparatuses, as is a theory of action. The works by Valie Export, Richard Kriesche, and Peter Weibel are good example of analyses of social reality which led to insights into the constructive conditions of media apparatuses. Only through these apparatuses does reality appear as such, placed in a frame, formed as a structure, oriented through hermetic exclusion from other sectors of the real.

However, as we all know, a self-organized production and distribution network independent of the art market never came to fruition. The movement remained marginal. Conversely, one could argue that the use of the medium at the very highest level from the outset tapped the potential the apparatuses offered – enabling the permanent processing of cinematographic experimentation (in language and cutting, angle and editing). Thanks to the continuation of advanced experimentation, video art be-

came a marginal and complexly-encoded art form parallel to the television culture which merely repeats the few basic patterns of the mass media. The self-reflective aspect is due to fact that the use of the apparatuses and the language of the medium was perfected at so early a date. This is demonstrated in a number of key manifestoes and reflective texts, as well as countless performances, such as Kriesche's performance *TV Tod III* (1974) which climaxed with the deceptive simulation of destroyed screens.

■ Cyberspace – The hall of metaphors and dreams

Although it is impossible to present an epic portrayal of the cyberspace phenomena here, I will provide an brief overview and compilation. I assume the reader is familiar with the phenomena and buzzwords involved which basically means being acquainted with the zeitgeist and the current state of affairs. Through a combination of activity and observation, a connection is formed between consumer expectations and the fashionable, yet fleeting rhetoric of the present. Many people today are familiar with the development of what began with psychedelic hallucinomania and AI research on the West Coast, which eventually led to a romantic exaggeration of the individual and has influenced the world to a great technological degree. This includes Silicon Valley and Hollywood, the syncretistic magic of bizarre, psychotic, compulsive communities, sects and minor groups, as well as the false belief in a link between the life-affirming West Coast sound, a neurotic craving for media presence, symbolic pathologies, and violent, apocalyptic sects, such as the Charles Manson family. Cyberspace is a key term to understand commercial global pop music and alternative escapism, the vacillation between normative duties, sexuality's violent liberation from love in the name of an egocentric hedonism and a fundamental, xenophobic hatred of the world. At the same time, it symbolizes the obverse of the pursuit of happiness, limitless paranoia, the craving to be noticed, social phobias, glittering wealth, and a persecution complex – namely, the best characterization of what constitutes the American way

of life.[13] Today, pop music still tries to avoid acknowledging the essentially well-known connection between Bob Beausoleil, the Wilson brothers/ Beach Boy clan, Kenneth Anger, and Mick Jagger – to name only one of the fatal swampland symbioses of the day. For those who are looking for a secondary, radical insight into the heart of militant and murderous obscurantism should cast a glance at the seven-day-long annual orgy-mystery play, *The Burning Man*, supposedly based on an ancient Native American rite. This will suffice to see the paranoid phantasms of well established and socialized Americans who briefly drift away from the mainstream, most of whom come from L. A. or are immigrants, who, of course, are even more "American" than Americans. Perhaps America is nothing more than the hysterical exaggeration of itself – constantly, unconditionally, and at any price. It is no coincidence that, thanks to Timothy Leary, a broader public is acquainted with the combination of drug-induced transgressive phantasms and cyberspace as free-floating fundamental individuating experiences of sensation and power. There is a countless number of other figures and references that point to the link between a hedonistic, unrestrained pop culture and cyberspace, such as John Perry Barlow links the Grateful Dead to a "Magna Carta" of digital civil rights and liberties. I have already mentioned Jaron Lanier. Other names could easily be added to the list. In general, it is clearly evident that an intimate connection exists between the hallucinophile, psychotic, and drug-induced subculture in California of the 1960s and the cyberspace ecstasies of the 1990s. The symbolic expression of this is a religiously enthusing and often mystifying rhetoric which describes the vanishing point of some individualistically exaggerated sensation of happiness as an unconditional life-defining maxim. This rhetoric is characterized by a pathos of salvation and an extreme repertoire of kitsch which reveals the slightly soporific yet outwardly aggressive and expansive cult of egomania. The realm of VRs is as dominant here as the fascination which propels us forward in light of what it promises.

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13 For an introduction to this truly vertiginous, abysmal, and breathtaking pathological complex which is confined to the cryptic, see Ed Sanders's report on the Charles Manson group, first printed in 1971 and reprinted in 1991: Ed Sanders, *The Family* (E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1971).

Virtual reality is a term that refers to the technical creation of illusion based on electronic controls and digital data organization. This technical definition needs to be supplemented, however, by an aesthetic variant. VR can be many things, such as the cybernetic self-guiding system of the World Wide Web, the Net, and the Internet. VR is everything that is real without necessarily having to exist in the physical world of human dimensions. We have to make such a qualification because it would be nonsense to speak of a phenomenon which is dimensionless and spaceless, to which the physical laws of space and time do not apply. Speeds verging on the speed of light, in other words optimal forces, are also part of the universe and are subject to Newtonian physics. Just as nanometer-sized operators or robots, though invisible to the eye, still belong to the physical universe and can be measured in and as an extension. An absence of extension would suggest a theo-mythological dimensionless existence of the libidinously experienced energies of subjectivity in the infinite simulation space of VR. Galactic flow, electronic vibrations, and certainly "good vibrations" are what people expect, but even these, though highly effective, are naturally fictitious.

Nevertheless, the expectation of a physically tangible equivalent to hallucinogenic experience and the promises of cyberspace culminate in the simulation of libidinous excitations which tend to be visually supported and realized. Artificial rooms, visual illusions, purported movements, super-fast camera pans – in short, the entire naturalistic cosmos of a perfect illusion of 4-D animation reveals a comprehensive tradition of modern obsessions of visibility and visualization. This obsession is entirely contained in this cosmos. Without it, the technology would have never become as advanced as it is. This is evidenced by the fact that there is no need for a visually suggested space for digitally-based data organization. Instead, space is an anthropological metaphor which signifies the human measure for many technologies and functions as an analogy in everyday life. This is true for the building plans from Vitruvius to the Gothic and Renaissance periods which were conceived using references, shapes, and formal correspondences to the human body. They represented an intimate correlation between the corpus of the building, the human body, and the physical properties of the cosmos (resonance, proportions). This also applies to the

organization of data archives, libraries, and digital signal processing, which rarely engenders new information and communication, but often results in the decoding of semiotic material through the expressivity of solitary individuals. In this environment of simulation, the term "perfect" means that one cannot distinguish the environment from the "real" world. What you see is the embodiment of the visible, the existence of visual phenomena.

Cyberspace is a magical space for the animation of such a naturalistic deception. It represents the triumph of the visible. This is not altered by the fact that the tactile or olfactory dimension have been included. Virtual sex, touch, etc., simply extend the naturalistic triumph of the visual and apply it to the other senses and their sensitive substitutes (afferents). The multi-sensorial connectivity creates the illusion that one is in the real world and yet "only" in an artificial world. However, this artificial realm appears extraordinarily real and, qua *phainomenon* has, since Kant, been imbued with *noumenal*, substantial aspects, and is, therefore, real in the sense of "ontologically appreciated". There is no strict criterion of distinction between perception and hallucination. And, consequently, there is none for that between the ostensibly real and the "real" real. The illusionary image which can be generated by algorithmic, digital means corresponds most closely with the cognitive and neuronal apparatus of human perception. Technologies for creating such naturalistic illusions have always made use of this constructive and constructivistic element – claiming that the image appears "more natural than nature". Since classical antiquity, we have known that the illusion of movement is due to the laziness of the eye. Only in the human brain does cinematography appear as a sequence of moving images with uninterrupted transitions. And since the brain is always within the viewer, the differences between the inner and outer worlds cannot be distinguished as the divergence of viewpoints. There is no established norm for differentiating between an "objective reality" viewed from an external standpoint and a "reality believed to be objectively real" based on subjective experience. This is not surprising. The only surprising thing is the trendy rhetoric which continues to describe the advancements of cyberspace and VR. We have long been familiar with these, either in the form of their antecedents, their earlier innovations, or more or less comprehensive visions. It is astonishing that cyberspace technology can be so

successful by simply staging astonishment at its own illusory depiction of the real and the reality of the visual world of appearance. However, the success of cyberspace is also rooted in the anthropological context of fear and pain which underlie curiosity – and thus, is firmly anchored by neuro-physiological constants and strives for the technical realization of earlier utopias, fantasies, and visions.

Media is formed by historically deviant or variable technologies. It is always historically deviant, i.e., tied to specific contexts. The medium is the deviant and, by virtue of this deviancy, departs from the constant structure of the anthropological in order to incorporate the point of time of possible new action, as a threshold, innovation, and presence. Its deviancy constitutes the medial expression of an energetic organization, characterized by an openness to experience, a strong motivation in natural history, and the human compulsion to make progress. Which is why one might get the impression that media innovations as technological presentations of this anthropological self-alienation are necessary (and then swiftly lose their impact), but cannot be considered genuine, unique innovations on their own.

The rhetorical figures and aesthetic promises of these staged, ultra-modern technologies can be construed as the achievements that necessarily go hand in hand with these projects of curiosity. It is irrelevant whether we believe in the slogans, whether they are accurate or merely a case of "sound and fury". We should rather focus on the investigation of a rhetorical topography, a brilliant linguistic terrain because of its density of expressive figures, and express and classify them as striking originals and nodes. These include aesthetic forms and expressions (*topoi*) generated as digital images in the context of computer animation, digital film, digital videodiscs, hybrid montage (mixes, links) of real and artificial bodies, visual patterns, "magic eye" anamorphoses in the deeper levels of something fascinatingly concealed, digitally and hermetically visible emergence, the cult of enigmatic images, naturalistic 3-D simulations, machine environments that respond to the human senses, real-time manipulations of landscapes and dramatic action within the data headset, the aesthetic trappings of machine-man symbioses and manifestations of cyberspace along with all the visual effects. It comes as no surprise that the pictorial and visual level of such technological formats, spaces, and achievements predominantly draws on the referential

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system of Surrealism and the psychedelic movement that exploited it so excessively. The *topoi* are frequently treated regressively. Kitsch has long been established as a stigma of digital devices and products, signaling a wish for intellectual revenge against the digital revolution. It culminates in the strident claim that production takes primacy over imagination, degrading humans to mere co-existence with and subservience to apparatuses and products. The damage to human superiority by the functional rationality of industrialization and mechanization in the 20th century was merely a passing illusion, an insignificant, temporary accident.

I wish to enumerate several motifs relevant to a "dogma/canon of digital fetishism", not because I wish to provide evidence of this degrading trend nor confirm a triumphant return of the superiority of human imagination. Instead, I wish to portray the aesthetic rhetoric as an aestheticization of the rhetorical. To put it brashly: the art of the techno-machines is identical to the vapid marketing phrases of those advertising them. The aesthetic element in the suggestion – or in other words, the seduction and invitation to visit psychedelically hallucinating cyberspace – is nothing more than accompanying music for the linkage of technology and imagination. And, above all, it is proof of the strangely constant inertia of modern imagination which is still closely associated to the visual and refuses to acknowledge the practice of using abstract form (as modern art has done for years) and the epistemic transformation of the visual. As if the imagination, compared with art, could not tolerate the memory of its subjugation by the Christian formalization of symbols. Which is why it seeks revenge against such symbols while disguising itself as one, highlighting the metaphysical aspect of Christ's body as a metaphysical aspect of the excessive hedonism of individual ecstasy, as the salvational fulfillment in VR, and dissolving it in religious promises of transcendence. In this way, the techno-spaces of the techno-imaginary do not truly comprise a basis for a new art, even if they naturally claim to be such. Instead, they suppress art in the name of the aesthetics of adventure, which art (equally stubbornly and narrow-mindedly) rejects as being retinally fixated and stupid.

If we examine the referential systems of visual techniques and their relationship to the visual arts, we can outline the motives of "digital fetishism". I have headlined each set of insights and each group of key notions with a concept that rhetorically illuminates the thrust of the argument:

Animism

A leading, extremely influential suggestion is that everything depends on everything else. What the principle of animism comes down to is that there is no distinction between the inorganic and the organic. This is true when regarding the human face and the "language of facial expression" by digital morphing technology, which, of course, dates back to the physiognomic transformation of animals into humans and vice versa by means of gradual draw-overs. This technique was first used by Giambattista della Porta and was later perfected by Charles le Brun and Johann Kaspar Lavater. Essentially, it stems from the study of expressive effects, which, in turn, result from the way lines can be used to distinguish things. Graphism and lining later proved to be valuable for criminal studies (Cesare Lombroso), caricatures and even logic, for example, in differential marking and in the concept of form proposed by George Spencer Brown.

Intensity

Visual animism, as described above, belongs to the Romantic period in terms of intellectual history, but in visual terms, is more a part of the Surrealistic repertoire and movements influenced by Surrealism. With regard to psycho-dynamism, it can be structurally construed as a cosmos of omnipotence which thrives on the eternal survival of energy prior to all distinction. For this reason, such a form of vitalism purportedly attains an undisguised intensity in the apparently organic artwork. This image was conceived by Kasimir Malevich in his "objectless world" as the goal of modernism characterized by empathy in living abstraction, pure, undistorted fluid energy, dynamism of a decentralized, accelerated, and universally mobile world.

Rhetoric of salvation

It is easy to mold this organically rampant flow of pure vitality within the artwork to form a surface and then praise it as the aesthetic decor for

correspondingly intense experiences. This is where Romanticism and Surrealism merge as the ornamentation of a rhetoric of salvation. They can be applied as recognizable patterns in the emphatic sense of randomly interchangeable decoration. The famous digital pattern-click, intended to give a vitalistic kick, is no simple metaphor, but the bottom-line promise of salvation – exactly the way medialization has become an expression of the rhetoric of salvation – a linguistic system and generator of physical effects rolled up in one.

Cyberspace principles and ornamental motifs

The visual elements of cyberspace, especially the simulated landscapes produced in the headset, are based on a few principles and a large number of ornamental motifs that draw on the stocks of art history. The first entails the principle of animism, i.e., the concept of "fantasy". In the following, I provide a partial list of terms which is characteristic of the latter:

Flow

The flux of movements and views, emotions and impressions stems from the repertoire of pop art and psychedelic culture which is accepted as a branch of culture, no longer stigmatized as being outside the mainstream.

Narration

The substantive content of VR designed for mass audiences is typically reduced to narrative action and narrative structures of "fantasy" and "fairy tales". Complex narratives are avoided and stereotypes are used, derived from novels of knights in shining armor and the like. On closer examination, we can clearly assume that there are analogies to earlier processes at work here, which is no mere coincidence. In the knightly novels, the process of civilization is presented as the emergence of a state monopoly that en-

forces the final instance of judgment, to which persons assign themselves their own powers. Likewise, the visual experience of visitors in cyberspace is influenced by the rigid and uniform authority of data engineers who have accorded themselves the position of navigators through a techno-imaginary environment that remains incomprehensible and impermeable to the layperson.

Eyesight – power of infinity

The "flying soul" as a non-corporeal, monocular eye is a method of control over history by reproducing "God's eye". We can sense the theological justification for central perspective which extends to infinity, as through the eye of God, the central visual ray illuminates the world, gives contour to all things, and animates the unity of matter, shape, and form. The secular omnipotence, by contrast, is reflected quite simply by reversing the position of God's eye in infinity. The human eye is the powerful opposite of this apparition thanks to God's creation and becomes an organ that can view all things to infinity (and beyond). The result is visual omnipotence that has donned various historical, psychological, and mental guises – in the visual panorama and the predominance of eyesight in modern, everyday, industrialized, technological life, in its infrastructure and logistics, its pleasures and distractions.

Spinning and dizzy heads – Out of the "human cage"!

Overcoming gravitation in outer space – and its simulation or emulation in cyberspace and VR – is subjectively experienced as vertigo. In truth, the feeling that one has liberated one's body from physicality, gravity and the like is the result of visually-supported self-deception. A related motif is the "spinning head" of modernism, expressed by Hendrik Goltzius and Alfred Hitchcock, caused not so much by dizziness, but self-deception, the willingness to stimulate aesthetic simulations before one's own eyes and using one's own body. The perceived feeling of vertigo stems physiologically

from the fact that the eye discerns no horizon, the body and eye move in countervailing gravitational direction, and are thus no longer in any fixed relation to one another. Vertigo has ties to the utopias of constructivism which are marked by free-floating elements in a 4-D world. They appeal to a universal architecture which has liberated itself from the cage of the human body and attained the dignity of orbital decentering. El Lissitzky's transition from space to space/time and the fantastical concepts of his "Proun" period illustrate the challenge and underscore the conviction that art can now be architecture – building the universe as a conversion of society. What constructivism considered an intellectually liberated, de-materialized collective, a coherent metaphysical mind of the collective body, is embedded in cyberspace as psychedelic illusion. The direction of the promise is inverted. The focus shifts away from the self-denial of the deficient human to the human's heavenly celebration in angel-like flight through the universe, whereby the body itself becomes fleeting. Acceleration and visual giddiness ensure that the person ceases to notice his/her body. Returning to the physical world, the body fiercely insists on the impact of vertigo and allows the re-coupled soul and body to experience the laws of gravity and physics by means of a sense of weight and nausea.

Corporeal animosity

The illusion of leaving one's body in a psychedelic trip is evidence of one's craving to transcend the body. Culturally, this plays a crucial role and has broad ramifications. It can be traced far back in history – beginning with the theory of angels as the media conveying divine knowledge to humans via Christian eschatology, Hermes and hermeneutics, and present-day "digital salvation". The unbroken, intellectual history of animosity toward the body represents the signature and fascination of a fundamental, world-negating religion. Its dynamism compels us to work at permanently destroying the world on earth in the name of the superiority of the after-life in the history of salvation. Nothing promotes this better than the constant identification with pandemons, which, like their angelic and paradisiacal counterparts, are a substantive promise made by VR to technically empower the soul with machine-based apparatus and free it from its corporeal limitations.

More natural than nature

Semantically speaking, the gleam of the images can be described and classified in terms of the principle of the icon, the sensuous affinity between the image and the reproduced object. The degree of likeness is measured and expressed by the degree of "iconicity". The visual phantasms of VR aim to generate an enhanced "hyper-realism" or, to be more exact, a hyper-naturalism. In this way, the technical fabrication of the simulated images follows the paradigm of illusion in art, which has, since classical antiquity (as argued by Apelles, Parrhasios, and Zeuxis), been equated the natural power of congenial imitation such as cannot be distinguished from the original. The art of illusion and the calibration of optical deception reached canonical status in the art theories of the Renaissance[14] and had the status of an inviolable official doctrine, the ineluctable true art theory taught in academies until the end of the 19th century.

Generative nature, hieroglyphics

An all-encompassing ornamentalism in everyday culture, canonized by mass taste, has remained popular since the mid-19th century. This can be seen in the preference for aesthetic flux within and between the image metamorphoses, the constant transformation of the inorganic into the organic, the excessive use of digital morphing and the tradition of physiognomic notions of shape on which it rests. Consequently, the theories of ornamentation as a technique for linking irreconcilables – the two worlds, heaven and earth – are as interesting as the meditative techniques of ornamentation used for self-stimulation in Irish book illustrations and the resonance of these in Romanticism. This is especially evident in works by the remarkable William Blake[15], for example, in which the hermetic physiognomic line expresses itself as the language of nature and, with a demonically transgressing imagination (which was new), aspires to achieve

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14   See Ernst Kris / Otto Kurz. "Legend, Myth, and Magic" in: *The Image of The Artist. A Historical Experiment* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979).

15   Outstanding: William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).

a fusion beyond the illegitimacy of all moral constraints[16]. This shows that there is a general limit to morality regarding a form of life whose vitality is aesthetically justified. Ornamentation as a theory of traces, in which nature manifests itself as a universal book, can also be shown to exist in the concealed modernist ornament. By this, I do not mean Art Nouveau, the "cult of the line" or hieroglyphics as developed by Cézanne, Hodler, and Klee. I mean something far more radical, namely the construction of nature as the artifact and of the universals of an artistic syntax which is only superficially self-referential or socially constitutive. In reality, radical classical modernism exhausted itself in an ornamentalism that it claimed to combat and overcome for being purely external and formalist.

Recourses

Alongside psychedelic metamorphoses and constant visual over-excitation, one can find striking repetitive formulas that attract attention and maintain a certain level of attention. These motifs embody popular and well-known plot formats that use the thrill of the horrible or the pleasurable. In VR and cyberspace, "adventure" and "events" are not very different from the sculpted monsters that had graced Roman portals, which, in an emphatic medial form, expressed the fear of the lacunae, of the "horror vacui". VR's art of decorum prioritizes the creation of fantastical images –and, therefore, can draw on the correspondingly broad and valuable treasures of art history. Naturally, formats are tamed, cropped, rendered harmless, and polished smooth – yet their residues and resonance lead users into the warehouse of truly dark Romanticism, to Gérard de Nerval, Francisco de Goya, Charles Baudelaire's aesthetics of hermetic constellations, to the cosmic theory of the correspondence of the imaginary in Edgar Allan Poe, and to the counter-human visions and ruinous post-histoire in the stories of H. P. Lovecraft.

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16 See Oleg Grabar: *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1972); Oleg Grabar: *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Oleg Grabar: *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton University Press, 1995); Ernst Gombrich: *The Sense of Order* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979); Rosario Assunto: *Ipotesi e postille sull' estetica medioevale con alcuni rilievi su Dante teorizzatore della poesia* (Milano, 1975); Rosario Assunto: *La Critica d'Arte nel Pensiero Medioevale* (1961).

VR media as a means of intensified self-excitation

Experiences in cyberspace do not only depend on the visual perfection of simulated images, but also on the elimination of *all* difference from images. "Real-time" – from the point of view of aesthetic effect, and not the technical production end – means nothing more than the immediate objectification (at times, internalization or incorporation) of the objects of the stimulating energies which seize hold of the user's entire emotions. Strategic modulation of an essentially medial tension, such as predominates in the TV age, is based (once again, not just historically, but factually) on the pre-electronic, pre-industrial technologies of an experimental imagination at the highest level, in the "theatrum machinarum", the self-excitation strategies of the Baroque age and its "sacri monti". Individuals physically experienced this "theater of the saints" in the processions up the "holy mountains" which reproduced the Stations of the Cross and was extremely popular at the beginning of the 17th century for their purgative and agitational effect. It is important to remember that in Varallo or Varese, for example, the holy mountains in Upper Italy and elsewhere were nothing but rural populist versions of the transformation of the City of Rome into one path of flagellation that corresponded to one's own body – for the purpose of achieving the highest state of Christian ecstasy. Paying homage to a majestic urbanist concept and offering a synaesthetic and multimedia field of training for such rapture of one's own body was lent final sculptural form by the erotic St. Bernini in the group of statues and installation of St. Theresa in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. This conversion of Rome was also included in the grand design of the propaganda of the counter-Reformation as the conquest of Jerusalem and the heavenly pleasurable enticement of touch. Of course, the self-excitation energies of the Baroque and the action and decorum they generated were attempts to test one's own self-control by facing temptation.

Stimuli based on the mathematical system

The digital and algorithmic generation of a visual presence appears more natural to the human senses than the artistic magic and expression of some marvel. As Surrealism is based on the history of art, the Surrealist surface of the image decor and the psychedelic metamorphoses are inevitably based on the technical-mathematical reference system which is capable of reproducing ostensibly identical images of objects on the surface of the picture. These are still the "mathesis universalis", infinitesimal (constant even for the smallest transition), homogeneous, steady, and empty space of Descartes and the absolute space of Isaac Newton which define the experiential domain of cyberspace in an emphatically conventional manner – *behind* the sequences of images that then appear.

The misconception of the aesthetic as art

The design of the decor in VR and, in particular, the psycho-energetic stimulation of experiences in cyberspace do not wish to forego gentrification by laying claim to art. This is especially true for American mythology – anyone who does anything productive is considered creative, and that, which is creative, is claimed to be art. Therefore, art as "very creative art" has become degraded to the status of an assertive strategy of mass communications. Its task, which is not specific to a particular media form, is to cultivate simple everyday aesthetics as the embodiment of a theory of beauty and disinterested pleasure. This coincides with the animosity Christian fundamentalism shows to things corporeal which mutates into the expansive and sometimes aggressive self-stimulation of the powerful individual whose development is limitless.

Calculated effect

Rendering individual experience sensational by asserting that the VR decor offers the experience of art – and the quality of the phenomenon can

be easily denigrated to kitsch – rests on the universal calculation of effects and logistics of emotions. This was first devised by the Nazis in the form of an empirically verifiable advertising psychology using a media industry product. This was adopted in the potential strategies of the post-war era in the United States – a connection that many shy from acknowledging, but which, even if one only conducts rough bibliographical research, is quite evident. The Nazis developed and perfected modern quantitative, manipulative ad psychology and psycho-techniques – a media strategy that decisively influenced the normal progression of the media in the post-war period. The strategy is still in use today which the mass media in its infantile manner endeavors to perfect along with the sacrosanct validity of viewer ratings.

The claim that people are becoming "dumbed-down" as a result of "mass culture" is itself a notion of the *Kulturkampf*. This does not mean, however, that we can simply deny such an influence. The current form of naivety and the reproduction of clichés may quite rightly be regarded as enriching expressive forms of processual experience, liberated from the compulsion to incorporate a static identity. However, by tying art to a universal culture, one is compelled to doubly code tasks and the experience of ambivalence, as well as concede that, at one end of the spectrum, those influences exist which describe the underlying dynamic of the whole.

Of course, one can raise fundamental, albeit nominal objections to VR's and cyberspace's claims to being art. If art is normatively perceived to be the processing of the impossible, then the decor of the visual stimuli of VR in cyberspace (in its current guise, not in its necessary limitations) would seem to be an art of the possible. This would no longer be interesting owing to the historical perversions of humankind and, in fact, has become obscene in the 20th century. Kitsch, as a position, as suspicion, and as a practice, tends to ignore precisely this. For "kitsch" is not a quality, but the assessment of statements on the relation between things and persons, i.e., a form of expressing judgments and prejudices. The category of kitsch has thus become a weapon in the arsenal used by those who wish to deal culture a deathblow.[17] Paradoxically, kitsch tends to promulgate an

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17   See Umberto Eco: *Apocalittici e Integrati*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1964); Abraham A. Moles: Le Kitsch. *L' Art du Bonheur* (Paris: Mame, 1971); Gillo Dorfles: *Nuovi Riti, Nuovi Miti* (Torino:

emancipated relationship to that which specifically accuses it of not being emancipated. Kitsch refuses to listen to lectures or be psycho-analyzed. It is stubborn and, therefore, independent of any valorizing form of pedagogy, which, as in the case of Hermann Broch, perceives an expression of evil, the bad taste of mass man, and the embodiment of anthropological disgust and the distortion of the human by our baser instincts. Cyberspace practices a form of smooth flow bereft of resistance. Never do we find in it the hurt, disturbed gaze or even its corporeal sense of close-up. For this reason, it attempts to disturb the harmonious form by means of shocks and deformations — if only to a limited degree. But that remains secondary and simply confirms with each instance of deviance that the symmetry always triumphs — a boring notion, if perfected. Cyberspace is admittedly ruled by a sensualistic concept of aesthetics, yet the examples of the "beautiful" as the disinterested common sense are emphatically rejected for the lustful enjoyment of anything other than disinterested sensations and enhanced experiences. As intimated above, the practice of kitsch represents the shameless disrespect of certain if not all principles of bourgeois aesthetics, in particular the break with the dogma of disinterested and desire-less pleasure of the beautiful. Kitsch, consequently, is the real plebian deviance, resistant to normative ascriptions. Its proud stance of deviance tends to be more coarsely stylized rather than its negation of the demonstrative boredom with the object. This desire should be regarded as a form of implicitly tasteless dandyism that focuses on lustful self-contemplation, self-enjoyment, and self-affirmation rather than cognitive interpretation, learning, or enlightenment.

Aesthetics as a mental construct and the representation of "difference" are not contained within the bounds of cyberspace. However, the deliberate attempt to break with the norms of controlling experience, the deliberate divergence of experiential context and the conceptually schematized body, of enjoyable perception of the apparatuses and purportedly extra-technical "authentic" sense, of personal experience and overall experience, of enjoyment and interpretation, of seduction and cognition demonstrate that an autonomous pattern of action cannot simply be re-

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Einaudi, 1965); Gillo Dorfles: *Le oscillazioni del gusto e l' arte moderna* (C. M. Lerici Editore, 1958); Gillo Dorfles (ed.): *Il* Kitsch (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1968).

duced to the seductions of media or be offset by the metamorphoses of illustration in the virtual environment. What we have here is the conscious enjoyment of deception and our fascinated unconscious being suddenly surprised by the technological magic of machines. This an example of the artistic practice of deceiving the recipient and the interactive utilization of the media which normally reflect a special aura stemming from their value in everyday culture thanks to their resolute and uninhibited use. The "in" or "trendy" aspect of something is due to the collaboration of stylizing forces which are not deliberately intended by the apparatus' procedures. The aesthetic counter-magic of the psychedelically trivialized cyberspace shows how the independent enjoyment of kitsch can be an emancipative principle for using media rather than merely reflecting them or bemoaning what media do to the ostensibly endangered individual autonomy. This does more justice to the use of the media than high culture's efforts to offer normative reflection on them coupled with the purported critical contemplation prior to action.

The techno-imaginary is given real shape in VR and cyberspace, and therefore, becomes a space for metaphors. This repeatedly needs explanation. Although countless metaphors are used to propagate experience in cyberspace (i.e., to further its spread), the claim that cyberspace itself is a substantive space for metaphors is not wholly obvious. Nevertheless, technology may not seem to be the cause of this new form of experience – if considered from the viewpoint that is not blinded by the intrinsic value of the simulated senses and their analogue scenarios, but regards cyberspace as a protrusion of the symbiotic interface between man and machine away from contemporary man to technological environments. This ensures rhetorical illustration, creating a link between this technology and the richly shaped new modes of experience of the heterogeneous and mutually infectious coexistence that began with Surrealism.[18] The rhetoric spawns the technology, makes its significant, and lends it a voice. It is never an inherent factor of technology, not coincidental or concurrent, an automatism, or derived function.

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18   See Susan Sontag: "One Culture and the New Sensibility" and "Happenings: An Art of
      Radical Juxtaposition" in: Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus &
      Giroux, 1967).

To define the techno-imaginary as simply an aggregate of apparatuses and devices would reduce it to its instrumental character. Instead, I propose to construe it as a mental guidance system for focal points which we must identify in an interesting process of cultural change. It is not the aspect of apparatuses that is interesting in itself, but the power of metaphorically securing the environment for aesthetic modes of expression. Consequently, we typically find an instrumentalization of thought in the sense of an assertion of specific evidence and a farewell to critique and differentiation. There are now countless examples for a theoretical discourse on VR that ensures illegitimacy. By "ensuring illegitimacy", I mean that speculations no longer need to be justified, but are simply accepted as factual statements beyond all speculation, assertions that suitably explain the technology. This has ensured that justification and legitimation is not necessary. This is one of the major reasons why rhetorical figures sprout in the midst of this technology and why we can understand it in terms of them. For example, cyberspace is said to be a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that confirms the neurological insight that the world is a prison and the brain self-referential. The organism always generates the world as *its* world and its simulation as the projection set for perception. The "world" always claims to be a world of its own. Coordination with the "Other" occurs – according to the constructivistic opinions by Heinz von Foerster, Franciso Varela, Humberto Maturana, and Ernst von Glasersfeld – by means of viability, i.e., testing and confirming the tests, although, given the solipsistic grounding of the constructivist argument, this can at best be construed as a form of emotional coincidence, as a contingent occurrence.

The constructivist argument is not able to truly construe this coordination, i.e., view it from both ends of the spectrum. It remains solipsistic and stationary, i.e., fixated on a hermetically encapsulated individual, and is insufficient for any explanation of the social sphere. This not only applies to the social sphere "outside of ourselves" but also "within our mind". Radical constructivism reduces the question of the brain to the cognitive ego (which itself is a conceptual fiction and makes it difficult to say what it truly signifies) and fails to see that an explanation is needed for why and how the ego operates not only in the mind, but the entire world. The solipsistic principle represents an axiom, not an experience. However, con-

structivism continues to claim that evidence of such experience exists, and in so doing, attempts to divert attention from its own strange usurpation of a principle as an empirical view which can never speak for itself. For this reason, we should distance ourselves further when examining the empirical basis for the theory. This is not the case, and instead diligent and strident repetitions of categories from the first object level are supposed to make up for this. Constructivism is, in other words, incapable of intimating its own blind spots. It is one the those concepts which is incapable of tackling the problem of the monad.

A further example of rhetorical mischief which substitutes its under-standing of signs for the apparatus is the claim that the symbolic and tech-nical unity of the simulated world, the interface with the neurological sys-tem and the technical environment, must be sufficiently guaranteed by the nervous system's digital code, i.e., its unspecific decoding solely in terms of quantities. There is no need for extensive criticism of such assertions. They simply offer pre-theoretical, predefined views. They are based on "previ-ously selected" or accepted prejudices derived from aesthetic preferences or rhetorical assiduity. As a consequence, they are only real to the extent that they unconditionally subscribe to the will for expressive experience and judge what they consider effective and crucial to the technologies. They remain fully within the discourse, they do not distinguish language from thought, "world" from world, nor differentiate reality in terms of the experience-based balance of what initially appear as subjective random constructs and their non-random supra-individual conditions. This not only refers to their articulation, but also the production thereof. Each individ-ual construct necessarily presupposes the unconstructable element of its generalizability – otherwise, it wouldn't be individual. Corresponding to the exclusion of references to the outside within cyberspace, an absolute solipsism is asserted that always encounters the broad agreement of the serialized, but individual willingness to experience.

This applies to the cultural semantics and its tradition of defining con-cepts of reality as the heuristic preconditions for interpretation, as well as a biological theory of compensation. Indeed, Jean Piaget, to whom the constructivists so readily refer, developed such a biological theory of com-pensation, of balance, and of the intermediary apparatuses involved. His

theory can be empirically verified. However, it illustrates that the construction of concepts of "world" are based on constants anchored in natural history and the laws of biological equivalence, and therefore, are by no means individual. Perhaps, at this point, it would be helpful to critically examine Wittgenstein's language-game theory, another genealogical obsession of the constructivists. This theory holds that the individual constructions of the world are quite specific language games, but the construction of the world itself is neither a language game nor a construct created by the individual. By inverting and intertwining the ethical argument (i.e., only life models devised by the individual are capable of being put into practice responsibly and successfully), the theory paradoxically confuses what is essential here. The conclusion is that all empiricism that adheres to ethics is a constructed reality, but not reality in itself and certainly not all reality.

The metaphors of the techno-imaginary are not part of the constructive definition of the solitary world in which the individual yearns for experiential adventure and believes to be isolated. They are expressed in the various components, the attempted approximations of the actions, the way their use is a matter of staging self-production, raised from the level of plebeian enjoyment to that of the aesthetic experience of the artwork. Here, the techniques of metaphorical description are extremely basic. An example: Malevich's Suprematism claims to actually be "cyberspace", if only *avant la lettre*, i.e., as a form of vitalist and modernist flight-energy not shackled to the body, nor interrupted or intensified by military technology and the entertainment industry. The world of perception, so the claim goes, is only a virtual phenomenon. In the *posthistoire*, it is not individuals who exist, but a system, not minds, but programs. Here, "environment" is merely multi-media design with the goal of reducing communications to information, poetry to commands, reading and interpretation to decoding data. The event exists "purely", i.e., exclusively, within the image, and no longer behind it. And therefore, Malevich claims there is no need for a "behind" at all. Computer graphics create the universal image as the totality of all images, in the same way total intoxication in Malevich's Suprematism preempts the absolute technical rationality of data flows, as impervious as they are to semantics. Thus, images become reduced to

"phatic variables"[19]; communication is then generated only by communication, not by something that is communicated or signified. And this does not distinguish communication from its preconditions which are termed "reality", because they cannot be instrumentally grasped to the extent that they enable meaningful statements.

Communication, or so contemporary media theorists often assert, no longer makes use of channels, but coincides with the related circuit plan. All the talk of the "strangely cold beauty of fractals" demonstrates that such concepts pay homage to a theoretical strategy which appears familiar to everyone with a variant on the subjective theory of taste which followed the *cul-de-sac* of taste no longer universally justified in bourgeois aesthetics. However, its focus has shifted from the abstract form geared to desires to that of its natural impulses. It instrumentalizes aesthetic experience. The apparatuses of the techno-imaginary seem perfect for this task since they are supposedly instruments of intensified self-experience. The circle is then closed, linking aesthetic argument, bourgeois enjoyment of art, and a technology in which the "bourgeois" has always created a mass-cultural equivalent, albeit the negative side of the deprecated plebeian pleasures.

The intensive discourse on the beauty of the mathematical and the supposedly "pure forms of nature" can be viewed as Plato's revenge on the current philosophies of abandoning philosophy. These are marked by self-denials in the form of defining such thoughts through kitsch. As elaborated above, this is not the problem. The problem arises as a result of another figure of Platonic thought – its inimical stance toward art. In current discourse, we often hear that art is only a response to the new technical media. The vacillation between image euphoria and animosity toward images shapes large parts of the speculative media discourse. Unfortunately, this vacillation itself remains opaque, pre-conscious, and anti-conceptual. With that said, digital representation – not analog – endeavors to secure the victory of scanning over "outdated" mimesis once and for all. The "image" is correspondingly reduced to the concept of depiction or representation with perhaps the intention of claiming that the "numerical images" are not

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19 See Umberto Eco: *La Struttura Assente* (Milan: Bompiani, 1968); Umberto Eco: *Segno* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Internazionale, 1973); Umberto Eco: *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976).

images at all as they are calculated and represent nothing in ontological terms. Some theorists argue that the flood of digital images actually represents a new absence of images. However, such arguments stem from an inadequate understanding of the mathematical conditions of digitalness. They operate with notions which they transpose from the images onto these new processes of fabrication and calculation. Since these are no longer imaginable, the same must apply to the products of binary processing. Yet, this is mere speculation regarding the problems of imaginability from a completely different angle. The result is an erroneous approach and an inadequate notion of the self. This has nothing to do with the matter at hand, the media, the ontological problems of mathematics, the "nothingness" of "zero" and the like. In light of the fact that general aesthetics of events sever all links to the cognitive claims of art and assert unadulterated experience, the logistics of the binary code are merely a claim to power in such media theory, the attempted domination over that wild anomaly – the visual. After all, the latter's idiosyncrasies include what the computerization of aesthetic experience tries to exclude: fundamental difference, deviation, shifts, irritation, dissynchronicity, impenetrability – as repeatedly asserted in modernist art, hermetic.

The techno-imaginary proves its truly moving, "life-worldly" viability as an essentially rhetorical figure. The aspect of apparatuses refers only to its external presentation. For this reason, the techno-imaginary has two faces – the experience of the individual as the contingent and metaphysics as the exclusion of the contingent. This is reflected by animosity towards the body as a concealed, driving obsession and its wide-scale use to regain sensuousness, corseted by the determinations of reality and thus deemed to have been suffocated. How can we explain this oscillation between naturalistic sensation and mental construction? Precisely with rhetorical figures. But where do they come from, why are they plausible, what gives them sustenance and edge? What prompts us to agree with them? Perhaps the answers lie in all the attempts to find an expression for the natural as we encounter it, which, figuratively speaking, appeals to the way we expect signification and satisfies our need for semantic simplicity.

The metaphorical rhetoric of cyberspace can be compared with other technologically specific or more generally scientific rhetoric. The question

as to what cyberspace's style is can be essentially replaced by an analogous question: What is biological style and the style of biology? Regardless of what the answers are, we assume that such a question is meaningful (and we shall see how far we get with this assumption, as there is no preemptive argument against it. It is only a question of practice). Can we understand cyberspace as a biological function? This immediately leads to the assumption that "shape" is significant. This is undoubtedly where the answer lies. To be a function for humans or relating to humans, it needs to have a form. In other words, functions require packaging, design, material wraps. Indeed, "*Gestalt*" or form is the most rational answer to such questions. And why shouldn't this question apply to cyberspace? As Wilhelm Messerer points out, "in nature, and particularly in animate nature, we see characters in the shape of form."[20] "Poetically, birches have been compared with young girls, for this impressionistically identifies their outward aspect. That is not the entire phenomenon. It also shows that there is a phenomenal unity of data that cannot be reduced individually to some functional context. In like manner, the linden tree seems 'maternal' – as much and as little as a metaphor can express."[21] In this sense, cyberspace is a machine for transcendence. We can easily transpose the argument onto the given metaphorical structures. With regard to the 'strange beauty of the fractal' one can undoubtedly state that seeing is believing.[22]

The return of images has compelled iconoclasts (namely media theorists and philosophers of the history of the rational mind) to adopt the opposite stance and blindly worship images. This now focuses on the aesthetic fact. The eye has finally been banished and the focus has turned to the patterns of unlimited decor of what is essentially virtual psychedelics. The main experimental impact of "cyberspace" for image theory is the way it overcomes the passive attitude of the viewer, promoting the breakthrough of the immobilized and paralyzed body of the televisually banished optical animal. And this is the basis for the rhetoric of technological promise. Technology seems to be nothing more than the materialization of this ex-

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20   Wilhelm Messerer: "Stil in der Biologie" in *Vom anschaulichen Ausgehen. Schriften zu Grundfragen der Kunstgeschichte.* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1965), p. 223.

21   Ibid., p. 225.

22   See Benôit B. Mandelbrot, *Fractal Geometry of Nature*, (W. H. Freeman, 1984).

pectation – incorporated interactivity. Yet this is merely the result of rhetoric which makes technology appear as its embodiment. The rhetoric has long established itself as aesthetic expectation of the movement of the individual through images by means of fabricating the technical universe of images today.

The permanent connection to the major "wish machines" – the unity of image phantasms and apparatus functions – relies on creating and stabilizing addiction. This presumes, for example, that the search engines in the Internet/WWW can offer fulfillment more swiftly than the time required for the corresponding wish to arise. Wishes now seem to be retro-reactive or retrospective justifications given the fact they have already been fulfilled, a mechanism that Günther Anders described as "Promethean shame", as the final embarrassment of humanistic modernity, the madness of the fabrication of history through reason. This is clearly in line with the claim "you live and we offer what you need". The wishes only appear as variables, objects of a vague memory, no longer triggered by a deficit, but wrestled from saturation. While images and events become ever more colorful, the topics underlying them dissolve. They become mere elements of emotive movements, functions of the flow or process of energy. However, the realization of all wishes before they arise paradoxically triggers a fundamental feeling of deficit. A dull impression of overcharge, displeasure, incompleteness, and above all, the individual's dissatisfaction with himself. The broad range of such an incomprehensible feeling was confirmed by a study/network poll by the MIT Media Lab in October 1995 titled "Ten Days in the Life of Cyberspace" on feelings regarding the Web. The survey surprisingly showed how characteristic variables, such as suggestibility and seduction and the stimulation they offer cannot be separated from a feeling of decomposition. The results were typical of the stimulation of telematic networks today – one finds everything and nothing, or, at any rate, too much, but certainly never the real thing, so that one's intellectual apparatus is prepared to revert to the wish machine.

Numerous statements in "1000 Plateaux" by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (and this is key to our discussion) seem to describe the functional mode of non-hierarchical networks under conditions of constant stimulation of the phantasmic in a de-territorialized subject. The realization of

the subjective depends on its willingness to admit its deficiency and then compensate for it with machines of all kinds or be attacked by the same. This shows how and why the surfeit of information and download possibilities increases disquiet and ineluctably leads to frustration by the second. Unfortunately, there is no inner psychodynamic resistance to this process. The network not only illuminates existing paranoia in its own way, but also generates new psychotic exacerbation.

"Virtual reality" is another metaphor that plays a strong role in the spread of cyberspace and related cultural demands and attitudes. The expression describes quite well the interstice between phantasms and reality as promised by the power of the techno-imaginary to generate images in the simulated domain of cyberspace. Initially, the term may seem more scientific and conceptual than metaphoric and symbolic. Yet it is a figure of transposed speech that arises from its paradoxical character and prompts circumspection because of its analytically problematic co-influence of reality and the potentiality of intellectual interest.

Let us analyze the term further. The literal level is clear – the circumscription of potentiality and virtuality. "Virtual" means the possibility of being able to exist. In this sense, "virtual" entails power, possibility, and perception. Consequently, virtual images are powerful, possible, and perceptible images. That more or less sums it up. In terms of quantum mechanics, the existence of virtual states are not compatible with the energy levels. They can arise for a very short time owing to their lack of focus, but cannot be observed. The claim of VR goes beyond this definition as it does not imply conceptual clarity, but some glittering feel, some aural ambivalence.

What does a critical analysis of "virtual reality" refer to? What are the critical arguments? By recognizing what can and cannot be defined, one initially ascertains a series of banalities and an absence, i.e., the opposite of the aura of ambivalence. The critical investigation leads to sober insight, not intoxication, ecstasy, or some psychedelic rush of out-of-body weightlessness. From a philosophical point of view, VR is a banality, but one that is immensely important for the creation of the animate. We derive the preexistent conditional state from that which already exists, whereby the former potentially contains certain reasons for what then could exist.

This can be limited to potential thoughts as formal conditions or to the entire panoply of conditions, or the real-extant genealogical reason for life having been produced in a comprehensive causal chain. Yet none of this changes the logical superiority of the possible over the real. In terms of a category, VR represents ontological predominance of the possible over the real, the greater range of variations than exist, which also implies realization in the individual and includes a denial of all the other equivalent possibilities.

From a psychological point of view, VR is as significant (albeit banal) as the philosophical superiority of the possible over the real. VR marks the transformation of compulsions into a tried and reversible game. It construes projected thoughts as the scope of action and generally regards thought as "trial and error" conducted within the mind. Things appear real if they can be experienced through the difference between project and realization and in specific response with their own dynamics. Anthropologically, VR is also banal – corresponding to the psychological dimension of attempted actions, the dependence on unprotected openings, the reference to the new, the experience of possible construction in a strange field. Anthropology has fundamentally described a similar "human being" with individual psychological dispositions. The human being is deficient and not defined fully. It is by nature not natural. It requires artificially developed technologies to compensate for its instinctual weaknesses. It creates its own environment. Of course, the conditions and laws of nature play a major role. But humans are no match for them; they cannot instinctually rely on them. Therefore, they apply artificial means to counter the rules of nature. This can only succeed at the level of additional observation or examination. As a consequence, human life is always situated in the domain of "architecture", the building and construction of spaces. The process of civilization is nothing more than the assertion of a natural, revolutionary logic, but the differences imposed on humans can only be experienced through artifacts, the knowledge of action within the domain of the artificial. They result in an objectification of nature.

At the analytical level, we can ignore the cases of VR simulating nature. The possibility of unbounded ecstasy corresponds to natural human disposition and can be measured by ostensibly random actions and results.

Adolf Portmann coined the term "extra-uterine Spring" by which he meant that the weak human being develops the basis of experience from natural dispositions which are formed along a learning curve by means of schematizations and abilities. Human projections can never rely on incorporated determinations or an expression of such. They are always experimental, aiming into the unknown, and construed as operating without recourse to embodied protection. The compulsion to openness, the curiosity in the unknown, the emergence from what has been, natural artificiality – these are the characteristics of anthropology and prove just how "naturally" they resemble those of VR. The focus is always on the formation of that which is not yet defined. Whether the context be anthropology or VR, the creation of non-available means demonstrates the natural compulsion to fictionalize. The fictitious is the realm in which the real is portrayed as possible. And only in this realm can one experience it as real. The formation of that which is not yet defined can be construed as the determination of the "human being" by natural history.

This is why human life is so influenced by media. It cannot be imagined beyond media forms, or in other words, human life is always permeated by the mentally and imaginatively real. Nothing is more foreign than the natural, and nothing more natural than the fictitious and artificially staged. And for this reason, humans "by nature" consider the improbable possible. They claim to see ghosts, enjoy giving themselves over to the most impossible deceptions – to the point of suppressing their sense of reality in order to celebrate the possible. Immersed in endlessly spiraling, captivating, disturbing will o' the wisps, the maddened mind finds cultic magic more appealing than a return to sensual reality. It is no wonder that in the 18th century, the century of inventions and "grand narratives"[23], society became fascinated with evil, the cultic titillation of the sublimity of horror, the effect of ghosts and chimera, and unreal forms of human life. From the "language of ghosts" in the 18th century to Robert Musil's adage in the *Man without Qualities* stating that modern Man lives in the thrall of the sense of the possible and is no longer protected by a sense of reality, we can recognize a historical development which only gives more radical form

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23   A notion by Jean-François Lyotard.

to madness. The danger of becoming detached from reality and the loss of order do not point to human alienation in modernity or through modernity, but instead describe the power of madness within all humans which requires neither a specific hermeticism nor the cultivation of evil. It occurs as a result of imagination at the height of its anthropological meaning.

The power of imagination has led to the fact that humans no longer self-evidently fit into a world. In light of the rhetorical or normative values with which the cultural code distinguishes between the baser lusts and higher insights, we can see why the techno-imaginary is so fascinating as the apparatus-based environment of VRs and ambivalent seductions. It is quite simply a technical/experimental lab for human life, feelings, thoughts, and actions. And it also prompts our current analysis and criticism. The argument does not take aim at the dazzling deception, the levels inserted between the imaginary and the supposedly real. It actually criticizes the fact that VR technologies, their dynamism and products are not on par with the anthropological radicality that enables them. In the domain of the techno-imaginary, anthropology ultimately appears purer, more detailed, and more historically elaborate. I criticize the fact that this experience is reduced to some *Biedermeier* level. For if the experiential rush of cyberspace is limited to the cult surrounding personal inconsiderateness borne of West Coast naivety and the banal American myth of "experience", then our insight into the nature of the anthropological is unnecessary as is our attempt to provide it with a technical frame for artificially radical self-objectification.

Ralph Waldo Emerson ensured this ideology a powerful valence with his ideas on "self-reliance". It leads back to an emphasis on the purportedly unconditional power of the self within the cage of individuality. To this day, Emerson's programmatic egocentrism is an effective deed for the imperial and the American imperialist *Kulturkampf.*

Applied to the argument grounded in aesthetic or media theory, "virtual reality" promises the following in terms of its method and the effects of what it creates:

– *VR promises the greatest possible minimization of distance, ideally a complete absence of distance between the observer and simulated artificial environment.*

– *Man/machine communication is based on situational variables, in particular, feelings and variable feedback of the machine-computed feelings into the environment. Technically, this involves the continuous calibration and parallel-rhythmic adjustment of computer time and personal time into real time, but also of real time into personal time. The user can only experience the time of a technical environment if it is first calibrated as personal time. Real time is a concept defining the communication between two systems along data interfaces. The goal is not simply to ensure smooth (ergonomic and semiotic) handling of the user interface, but to regulate the system relations.*

– *The data interface is defined not as a "user interface", but in terms of its task of producing an intensive stimulation of the individual's mental life in a way that can no longer be separated or distinguished from the technical environment. Each suggestion of direct physical materialization of neuronal processes appears as the intuitive self-completion of neuronal, emotional, and physiological processes. This is the only way of achieving a true symbiosis of the human and mechanical domains in techno-imaginary apparatuses of the stimulating environment, which also accommodates the wish for immediate self-modeling and religious delight.*

– *VR promises to perfect the connections between body/mind and the machine, i.e., the formation of prosthetics to an unprecedented degree.*

– *The inversion of the causal chain, i.e., the fictional becomes real. The prosthetics do not extend/replace the body's organs, but are new organs and thus prompt new organ senses.*

"Virtual realities" are the epistemological conditions for something to begin to exist, or literally emerge (from the realm of the possible). And at the same time, they are the aesthetic conditions of the imagination. In terms of their actual quality and function, they must be construed as preceding

any realization. Visualization means transposing them to the domain of the real which changes them. VRs cannot be subjected to the pragmatic text of what is "basically real". They cannot be reduced to this, nor proven, nor falsified – they can only be transposed. The real is an index of the virtual, but not its embodiment. Those who believe VR is aesthetic ornamentation in terms of the effects it generates inevitably confuse the index with its embodiment. This is shaped by the difference in which we find the traces of the "lost" interface which enables the construction and assembly. It has inscribed itself in this difference, however concealed to the untrained eye. It is a cognitive error to confuse the pictorial semblance conjured by the aesthetic magic, the effects of the decor, that which has been processed by computers and simulated by media, with the real of the virtual. The regressive dimension – namely when fiction becomes only too real – is evident in everyday life and hardly needs to be exaggerated. Even if the context of man/machine in cyberspace is something new when the distance variables are changed and space is modeled, we cannot justifiably claim that the status of the image has itself changed. And certainly not if we presume a completely changed understanding of the image (as only a computed, digital abstraction, the mere drawing of a partial place in a determining chain of characters without any possibility of change) which is absorbed fully in the stimulation of the senses, i.e., reduced to the simultaneity of excitations in the body of the user and in the recording techno-machine. Here, the body is first transformed into a file and thereafter exists in a selective, "compressed" form. "Aesthetics" as experience, decor, and depictive structure of the data is intrinsic to all levels of aesthetic and technological argumentation.

A crucial obsession of VR, the digital arts, "media art", and the techno-imagination is to totally simulate the observer, to unleash the actor within the viewer and ensure the breakthrough of the purportedly imposed passivity of the viewer. Of course, there are far more technical possibilities available for this game today than ever before, and the history of this obsession goes back a long way. The technical means have always been used to "liberate the viewer". The active viewer represents something like a secret dream of modern art. The dream of classical art commenced in the Baroque era and has since entailed a synthesis of the media thanks to the

unity of the arts. With the emergence of Surrealism, an independent desire for "interactivity" arose – its obsessively emanative, liberated, erotically overpowering nature trampled everything subjective and relative underfoot. The Surrealists exploded the notion of autonomous art by creating an art that believed itself anchored in this world. The significance of this was the viewer who could experience him/herself. In his extensive volume on Georges Braque, Carl Einstein celebrated Braque as an artist who demanded and initiated a sharp critique of the notion of the artwork.[24] Einstein shows that a genuinely classical self-description of modern art breaks the bounds of the concept of the artwork. He continues by claiming that the artwork is no longer dynamically experienced by the viewer, but obliges him/her to meditatively follow it, a process we could graciously term mimetic or bluntly call enslaving. Einstein goes so far as to claim that the much-praised unity of the classical picture came about by eliminating the elementary processes of the soul and the truly moving intensities of vision. In other words, he resolutely and stubbornly attacks contemplative aesthetics. However, the polemics cannot be reversed. Not every appeal for self-awareness of the intensities of the soul automatically goes beyond bourgeois aesthetics. In fact, one gets the impression that the call for "interactivity" actually supplements the virginal contemplation as disinterested emotions by means of small insertions derived from the plebeian aesthetics of amusement and excitement, libidinous particles of an otherwise much-derided theater of distraction. Einstein condemned such "idolatry" which has been attacked since classical antiquity as blind reverence of the artwork – a sign of the fatal subjugation of aesthetics to the metaphysical. However, he did not demand some experience of art that celebrates the autonomy of the viewer, but rather a critique of the "inviolability of art", by means of which the latter tries to conceal its inability to act.

Carl Einstein proposes that viewers be given the opportunity to change, expand, and modify their approach to art. He argues that the artwork be used as material for human actions enabling it to dissolve, decay, and blend with other works. However, Einstein does not believe that this would justify the end of the illusion of aesthetic perfection by the

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24   For more on this notion, see Hans Belting, *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk. Die modernen Mythen der Kunst,* (Munich: Beck, 1998), p. 392 f.

fact that the viewer arbitrarily controls the works as he or she wishes. If art wishes to live, it cannot be immobile. It must act. It had already done so in the early days of the 20th century – in a manner which, as demonstrated by countless experiments, reveals that the recent enthusiasm for *"Gesamt(data)kunstwerk"* is brash and above all uninformed. Who can forget the synaesthetic experiments carried out by Kandinsky, Scriabin, Schoenberg, and their associates – experiments which were nothing less than intermedial textures linking image, dance, theater, and sound? The key experiments included, of course, those in the areas of cinematography and film. Indeed, we can assign Robert Rauschenberg's erasure of a drawing by Willem de Kooning dating from 1953 to the sphere of action art, not to mention the Fluxus and Performance Art productions a little later. We cannot imagine the arts of the 20th century without further and ongoing clarification of questions regarding the origin of creativity, the critique of society, the functionality of how personal life is shaped, the utopia of social change, the link between the applied arts and architecture, and the elimination of the division between higher and lower, free and applied arts. The search for a history of art in terms of virtualities has thus become all the more imperative – in objective, historical, social, and also theoretical terms. It focuses mainly on the way the panel painting has transgressed into the domain of actions which insists on the dissection of particles of information in the digital universe, that paramount example of VR.

Of course, the VRs and "cyberspace" embrace decidedly different phenomena, such as the WWW transmission network or "Internet" which are playgrounds for specific aesthetic illusions with a specific emphasis on bodily sensations and the promise of experiences of synaesthetic excitation. This excitation probably accentuates the fascination with cyberspace in an aesthetic sense. For the space in which the signals are transmitted (verbally enhanced to a "communication domain") does not itself provide such a basis. Having said that, the determinants of cyberspace cannot be reduced to some private digital sauna of sensory sensations, but denote the fiction of simultaneities – now a reality – as opposed to the customary division into the spheres of space and time. If we examine these determinants more closely, we will understand why the fascination with cyberspace is such an intensified illusion, one that takes hold of the body.

In the following, I shall mention the determinants which effectively describe the broad arena of cyberspace in cultural and historic terms. This description is also a narrative on American mythologies, such as "Go West", expansion, a joy of adventure, and techno-folklore. I shall organize the points (in abbreviated but hopefully incisive form) in terms of rhetorical figures and figures of the imagination.

Destruction of distance

This is the key driving force which has long been desired and is now technically possible – an absence of difference between self-stimulation and the enabling environments. The aestheticization of data space occurs by means of iconically precise references to 3-D clarity and an excessive thirst for images. The goal is a naturalistic deception that is as perfect as possible.

Alliance and fusion

The sensory illusion created by technical stimulations corresponds to philosophical solipsism, the principle of systematic exclusion of the inner individual from the outside. Philosophical solipsism – the assertion of individuality based solely on the ego, the principle of an individually and personally limited view of the world – plays a significant role because the techno-imaginary apparatuses can be interpreted in medical and engineering terms as laboratories to breed better humans. This can apply to both the real human or a playfully simplified human matrix which is evident from the technology, the appearance, and the iconography. It would seem obvious to create an alliance between the isolated ego and techno-imaginative apparatus. Here, the experiment involves making the technology self-reflective. It re-materializes in the physical. However, as "bachelor machines",[25] such a symbiosis results in a third gender, the "man/machine",

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25   See Hans Ulrich Reck/ Harald Szeemann: *Junggesellenmaschinen* (Vienna/ New York: Springer, 1999).

and unleashes immense forces of self-satisfying feedback, a perpetuum mobile with an eternal energy supply without any contamination by the real. This is also proven by the limitless imagination, namely the triumph of purely abstract self-positioning of what is desired as the reality of the fictitious.

Techno-folklore and apostolic information policy

Cyberspace is not only an ensemble of apparatuses. It is firmly embedded in a mythological field and is, therefore, an important element of American techno-folklore. We should not presuppose, however, that religious ferment and energy is concentrated in cyberspace, for example the yearning to break out of the prison of one's body or the omnipresence of news transmitted across the globe at the speed of light which resembles the apostolic information policy of early Christianity with its focus on the wide dispersal of goods tidings. Today, given the fusion of the manneristic and exaggerated sides of European culture, "cyberspace" appears as a substantive, defining component of American culture. This culture is marked by the aestheticization of the fetish character of objects. It can also be regarded as a culture of the unconditional "will to believe", a constant in American intellectual history since John Dewey and William James. Richard Nierbuhr's discussion on "The Kingdom of God" in 1937 presented this constellation with great precision. His argument boiled down to the essential question of whether America's churches are prophets of the universal Kingdom of God and are appointed to preach to and lead a nation that has not yet been redeemed or whether they are guardians of the religious substance of a nation that has already been sanctified. Today, the answer seems obvious. It is the typical American phantasm, the normal madness of a vain and brash confidence that the United States is a "chosen" nation. By preaching that faith should move mountains, we can see what happens if faith does move mountains. To take the argument further, we could describe American culture as a comprehensive transformation of the world, of material occurrences, and cultural behavior into hieroglyphs.

A hieroglyph is a "holy engraving". The seemingly primitive traits of American culture – luster, prestige, money, power, tastelessness, and the more complex traits of schizophrenia and the vacillating extremes of health fanaticism and anti-culinary self-ravaging – are rooted in diametrically opposed facts which lie at the foundation of the culture. A key fact is that it has no history *prior* to technical-industrial mechanization. Another is that through the high-speed endeavors to give itself a history (which naturally entailed self-heroicization), America had to develop signs without recourse to traditions passed down from ages past, signs that had to be comprehensible to people with widely differing backgrounds and languages. American English, with its serializing and stereotypified thrust, provides a good basis. A second, globally effective invention was a visual *lingua franca*. The universal language consists of pictures. This is true of advertising, ad signs, brands, and logos, and is certainly the case of cinematography and film. The "dream factory" of Hollywood fabricates dreams and encodes them in a visual idiom designed to enhance purely typical and sharply profiled characters which are universally recognizable. This might explain the simplicity of the stories, solutions, and feelings conveyed. However, this is not what makes American cinema so successful. Carefully orchestrated actions in the domain of power politics have ensured that the majority of ownership has remained in the distribution apparatus. It is no wonder that even mediocre Hollywood films become worldwide successes – especially when the cinemas are owned by American production companies and – to put it provocatively – other deviant films are no longer shown. To claim that the success is the result of the product is simply false. In fact, the opposite is true. Only after success is made inevitable do the products speak for themselves. This is a basic rule: first standardization, then success. This rule has applied since the creation of the Chicago corn market and American quality.[26] The specifically hieroglyphic nature of American culture means that there is no separating the sign from the thing. The signs and meanings are placed onto the objects. And, conversely, there are no material objects that do not present their status as signs, values, prestige, meaning, and importance. Economic ownership, wealth, and money have an irresistible,

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26 See Marco d' Eramo, *Il maiale e il grattacielo. Chicago: Una storia del nostro futuro,* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995)

exclusive, and defamatory aura, one that is beyond dispute. For this reason, the Trump Tower is not just an example of insignificant architecture, but a picture book, telling the story of the ambition of its owner, and how there is nothing original or authentic in the United States, but only a facade which exists for public consumption as part of an elite world that we are expected to always focus on and be enthused about. The personal profile and career of Jane Fonda could be regarded as a typical pattern here – from the *de rigeur* gestures of revolt in the 1960s to the emphasis on aerobics in the early 1980s to becoming the wife of the immensely rich Ted Turner at the turn of the millennium to her final achievement, becoming a superbly well-to-do divorcee. It is a typical path that exemplifies American ethics, marked by only a few constants: broad public acclaim, money, glory, and fame. This is the dream of making money with abilities as well as inabilities, such as through the mediation of lawyers – another sign of this hieroglyphic culture. This is not meant as a critique or caricature. In this hieroglyphic sense, reality is the exaggeration which becomes a true caricature of itself. We could find any number of arguments and examples here. Such as the legendary lawsuit against the manufacturer of microwave ovens which resulted in immense compensation awarded to the plaintiff who was able to convince the court that it was the responsibility of the manufacturer to include a warning in their instruction manual not to use the device for drying pets.[27] Andy Warhol incorporates this hieroglyphic dimension of American culture in an admirably pure and uncompromising form. It is strange that this aspect of his artistic production has been generally ignored, although he himself never denied it.[28]

The hieroglyphic aspect is characterized by the transformation of the discursive-textual into the semiotic-visual, the elimination of the gap separating the signifier and the signified, and the suggestive search for the direct unity of the sign with what it represents. This may explain why American culture – as exemplified in works by Jeff Koons – has always been

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[27] For more on the materiality of shimmering signs and their historical origin, see Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing. Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture 1880-1940*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

[28] For an exceptional presentation, see Klaus Theweleit, "recording angel's mysteries," in: *buch der könige*, vol. 2, (Roter Stern, Basel & Frankfurt/M., 1994), pp. 424-598.

a vulgar, mass-media-based culture and not one that could be termed a high culture in keeping with Old European criteria. The misunderstandings related to the purported critical potential of Pop Art are manifest proof of this cultural lag.

Unconditional extension of the "ego"

Experience is ritualized in "cyberspace" and construed religiously. Technical achievements are worshipped as if they were magical occurrences. This unity of religious, psychedelic, and material culture demonstrate the complex of the hieroglyphic to be typical of American civilization. "Cyberspace" is typically American if only because its world of images promises immediate reality of the imaginary, i.e., the literal status of an instantaneous, accessible, and unlimitedly available experience. This promise rests on the smooth functioning of opaque media mechanisms. The prevailing opinion holds that media forms cannot be understood but should be judged in terms of whether they serve one's own well-being, prosperity, and prestige. The guiding principle is abstract freedom of choice, the decisionism of the individual, the pure, unscrupulous maximum extension of the individual's power. The personal sphere is everything which the individual succeeds in asserting. The natural right of America's existence is based on staking out one's personal property. Therefore, the focus is on shaping one's own life as "powerfully" as possible. As an "extension of man", power is always justified, irrespective of cost.

Pleasure from the illusion of absent distance

Experience in cyberspace has to be "powerful" by which I mean the perfection of perception of sensory events. Any deeper experience is unnecessary. The "sudden" experience is sufficient and programming is believed to reproduce its shocks. Experience becomes a configured landscape, an integrated, closely confined circuit of data flow, sensory stimuli, and programming in the feedback control system of sensory control and data

processing. In cyberspace, this structure of experience (which, during classical modernism, Baudelaire had linked to some over-trained awareness of stimuli to ward off shocks and intensify the sudden experience of the moment) becomes the preordained creation of distance in the experience of self in the form of the experience of pleasure.

A quick glance at cyberspace and the wealth of animation programs suggest the following framework. The techno-imaginary can be construed as a self-excited and self-exciting metaphysics established in an artificial space in the form of experimental technology as an aggregate and apparatus for stimulating the senses and nerves. This space contains constructed sensory illusions and makes conceivable or desirable fiction technically possible. In this space, the real is always proof of the virtual in that it becomes accessible as illusion generated by all means of effects. Although somewhat confusing (after all, the fascination of the individual experience of suggestive fiction is derived from such confusion), the virtual is more real than reality in light of the extensive technical outfitting of fiction and the staged reality of VRs. This applies to the calculated mathematics of the experience and the purported visual revelation of the secret, the cult of the sensation, the enhancement of the individual reference to experience and the ornamentalization of images for the purpose of a vaguely sustained sensory intimation of art functions popularized in this manner. And obviously, all of this must be programmed in IT, physiologically, neurologically and in numerous other ways – as a real gestalt phenomenon at the level of simulated equivalencies.

■ On the divergence of apparatus, art, and mass culture – interactivity as a gulf and a bridge?

The "computer artist" and winner of the 1987 "ars electronica" in Linz, Brian Reffin Smith, made the following comment regarding the technically based arts: "In general, computer art is the most conservative, boring, and least innovative art form of the 1980s."[29] We could consider this some

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29   Quoted by Jürgen Claus, *Elektronisches Gestalten in Kunst und Design*, (Rowohlt: Reinbek/ Hamburg, 1991), p. 46.

bizarre provocation or a sober, if perhaps polemically formulated, description. However, the statement would not be nearly as exciting if it were only a counter move on the game table of the vanities in order to assert some novelty value – a process which often aims to liven the symbolic exchange on the art market. If it were only another contribution to the well-known internecine jealousy among artists and the pathogenic societalization of art attitudes by means of exclusion and scorn, then the statement would be relatively superficial and certainly not an insight. Instead, the significance of the statement would be temporary and then quickly forgotten. However, if we apply it to the media networking of science, technology and the world (or algorithms, apparatuses, and actions) by means of art, then the statement has a sharp edge. If it only referred to aesthetic surfaces, expression, and statement, then the approach would be overly constrained. Yet when it refers to the formation of artistic efforts to network, it points out a far more essential contemporary challenge facing the arts. Art as a symbolic capacity diverges from technology as the logistics of apparatuses. The spheres continue to drift apart – perhaps even more so. And not only the two spheres identified by C. P. Snow in the 1950s, i.e., the technical and literary intelligentsia. The insights of natural science and hermeneutic originality have drifted apart as much as the everyday survival strategies – those traditional journalistic routines for considering the world and the standardized interpretative patterns for a/v mass media culture which strictly defines the conditions for participation in "events" and "experiences" based on sub-culturally derived attitudes and codes.

In this highly contradictory gap separating the spheres of knowledge and experience, art has lost its constructive capacity compared with devices, science, technology, advances in knowledge – a capacity it had utilized for so many years which it can now only conjure up rhetorically for the techno-imaginary and digital images. In truth, it can no longer lay claim to any representational achievement as such, not even to a world of objects or phenomena of its own which it generates and renders visible. It will not succeed in forging any analytical or synthetic order of elements, for its sensitivities lie solely in its ability to create chaos and no longer in that of modern utopias of order. The truly radical challenge lies in creating so-called "interfaces", enabling forms of action and self-experience, the

conditions and limits of collaboration between humans and apparatuses in a "machine" environment. If art is not innovative in this regard, then it cannot contribute anything to an understanding of technologies by an advanced manner of using them. For it would remain superficial, decorative, naively unaware of its own mendacity. The result would be an irrelevant beautification of the alien which would blunt its edge by the illusionary assertion of purported familiarity. As I have already mentioned, the evil and inevitable talk of "digital kitsch" or "computer kitsch" renders things harmless in an insidious manner if it refuses to grasp art dynamically, as action, potential, and a method of forging links (connections). The objection that something is "kitsch" goes no deeper than the surface. And the truth is that the surface can express what art must achieve to address the real issues – knowledge, action, the reference to society, and the media that shape it. It can no longer be interested in depiction, representation, expression, or creation. In this regard, the suspicion that media art is kitsch not only falls short and misses its target, it indirectly and dramatically reproduces the phantasm of omnipotence connected to real creation or real artistic expression in an age in which art no longer has such capabilities. Of course, artistic concepts continue to exist as art which does not waste its time with apparatuses. However, this entails conceding that the claim inherent to art is no longer valid – namely, that the world is constructively shaped in alliance with transformed technologies, viewed in a new light and modeled to suit new interests, a claim which has drawn on the aesthetic underpinnings of such technologies since the Renaissance.

The conflict between calculation and imagination will persist as long as world art in the Romantic tradition attracts the greater public attention as it has during the last two decades. And with it, the conflict between poetry and technology, art and the apparatuses. This stems from the fact that the arts have drifted away from the domain of technological invention and toward the margins of sensory interpretation. They focus on form and the signification of signs, but only in an amateurish manner, passionately interested like an obsessive lover who has succumbed to the decisive media in the social machinery. Since the 19th century, no one has been able to reverse this split. Some commentators claim otherwise, but this is simply business as usual. Calls to expand the art market hardly ever succeed in

making themselves heard. In the Internet age, we get the impression that those who claim that the Internet is a forum for a completely new art form which will surpass everything which has preceded it are those who have not been successful in the art business to date. Of course, calling for a media revolution sounds a lot better than humbly requesting entry to the previous Olympus of art. When it comes to sneaking their way into that elite group, the multi-media visions and the calls for new *Gesamtkunstwerke* are especially suspicious candidates with their demand for "immersive environments"[30]. These are environments stimulated and simulated by the logistics of apparatuses, in which the human senses are immersed in hallucinatory worlds and can lose themselves in their own giddy existence.

As long as there are new technologies and the potential to utilize them for expanded sensory pleasure, contemporary artists will undoubtedly feel challenged to make use of them in this regard and participate in the discussion about other possible uses. This applies to the artistic intention which must be prepared to submit itself as radically to the compulsion for innovation which it itself initiated, as the arts generally did in the 20th century. They claimed that all existing or conceivable material known in the cosmos or should become known is potentially an expressive medium for art. In the sense of a differentiated sub-system, art in its modernist European form presents itself as a special science parallel to the natural sciences with special insights and experiments, which is, of course, confronted by the claims and interventions of new technologies. The new media obviously appear to counter the dominant position of images of art. Even if this is a lost cause, art is not able to simply extricate itself from the fiction of its outstanding position in the symbolic world. Indeed, it repeatedly extends this claim to apply to new machines, as well.

Exaggerated claims and brash proposals are stridently made. For example, the call for a scientific art was *en vogue* since the days of the Ulm College of Design at the end of the 1950s until the 1970s. The general belief was that the impact and production of art could be computed and thus programmed. The myth that any amateur can create art from a product range of computer graphic devices is still prevalent today, and is com-

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30   See Chapter 1 of Part II: "Immersive Environments – the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' of the 21st century?".

bined with a simple trick. Since it has not yet been possible to formalize non-digital art, the wish for formalization heralds the digital universe or the universe of technical images as new and revolutionary because digital worlds are first generated by such formalization and function with completely new rules. It is no wonder that we can expect the products to be easily computable. The computer makes it easy to succumb to the playful use of elements and rules. It is apparently impossible to eradicate a concept of beauty that tries to gentrify itself by referring to the natural laws of symmetry, and yet is actually only the expression of a mediocre, average taste and an uncertain approach to art. Since the 1960s, we have seen the notion of an automated production of poetry often propagated by relying on some notion of an orderly machine world. This is an attractive approach for those who advocate art which is not created by an individual person, an art without authors, namely direct manipulation of artistic processes by rules or experimental conditions that set the framework. The texts which computers can generate certainly resemble concrete poetry – but only to the untrained eye. Given the preponderance of engineers who call for an anonymous art as the fulfilling function of life as conditioned by mass culture, the "poetic computer" has remained a popular motif for machine creativity and the generation of artificial intelligence. Art has always been a preferred domain of intelligent production, of cognitive *poiesis*. For those who see themselves in this domain, aesthetics is not a means of playing around with the wild anomalies of sensually disparate materials, but the ontology of careful expression. According to the view of German idealism, that which is ordered by virtue of the medium must be based on a plan, an idea, something thoroughly and emphatically inherent to the mind.

The vision of one day transcending the gap between art and life should be seen in the same historical but nevertheless virulent context. This vision is particularly suited to all kinds of speculation – during threshold periods in the development of technologies. Such a vision has never been justified, not even at the level of what it claims is its starting point – the possibility. The notion seems truly Romantic and intrinsically sufficient, i.e., "all separation is painful." Differentiation appears as a threat to the fabric of a single world soul. And it can be woven today using the Turing machine code. The comparison between computer architecture and the ancient art of weaving

has been around for a long time but has been rendered trivial in the age of digital binarism.[31] The abyss which supposedly exists between art and life is an objection which enables the accepted use of technologies which artists attempt to utilize for their need to creatively improve the machines. This, too, is a vision of control and education. This development is based on a superficially revolutionary notion of the effective spread of the media in society through its use in mass culture. At present, we are seeing the emergence of the strangest of plants and most curious of repeat performances. One of the most popular performances (and admittedly speculative and often negligent) is the employment of new findings in the natural sciences for the theatralicalization of the senses. In cases like these, insights only serve to add value to an aesthetic hunger for experiences. It does not exist in itself but only in combination with this surplus. Its value increases in terms of its ability to realize the application of research in the show of perfected consumption and the self-presentation of narcissistic individuals. Only too often do we read that technical sublimation and digital dissolution of the human sensory capacities are possible thanks to the natural sciences which eliminates the well-guarded borders between reason and artistic creativity, as well as those between poetic sensibility and machine stimulation in a technical installation. It is surprising that such appeals are made by proponents of art. "Art from the computer" evidently tends to function as the unpaid promoter of the computer industry. Such arguments help successfully promote the introduction of information-processing machines in a broad, world-wide style. In this way, art degrades itself to being the accomplice of a mega-machine, which, in turn, quashes it.

The decade-old dream of pioneers like Max Bense, Abraham Moles, and Herbert W. Franke may seem a delicate matter today, perhaps even somewhat dubious. It is hard to imagine how such thoughts managed to fire the enthusiasm of artists and philosophers of such caliber. Nevertheless, even until the early 1970s, there was a widespread mania for presuming some universally programmable art, a variable warehouse of fixed forms which were equally valid around the world. Everything about these forms seemed to be only a matter of programming. However, the concurrence be-

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31   Described in detail by Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones* (Bantam Doubleday, 1997).

tween the artist's intentions and their completely identical realization for a specific audience was considered the trademark of a new, true art. The assumption was that the art served to fully and clearly maintain and assert these forms. The dream of exact computability and optimal data flow was just as prevalent here as the idea that the artist merely manufactures series for an audience that no longer has any difficulties with art. Such an achievement would have to be regarded as compulsory décor for everyone, as the elimination of aesthetic difference – and modernity as a whole certainly harbored such a wish.

Nowadays there are many who find this idea rather silly and instead praise a multi-faceted decadence that promotes non-dogmatic concepts with a relaxed, postmodernist, ironically versed and manneristically trained approach. There is also a significant conservative side to this coin. Here we still encounter the idea of objective art. As suspicious as all the banter of computability may be, the dream is once more an assertion of high-brow values, of high art à la Bauhaus, which trickles down pedagogically to the lower grass-roots level of consumers who have finally been liberated from a confined mindset and are encouraged, with some initial practice, to pursue an egalitarian, democratic, aesthetically emancipated life. However, this is fully subject to the artists' control. If we soberly view the situation as it is, we come to conclusion that nothing of this has survived except the notion of the universal manipulability of our needs for creativity by machine environments. Yet, this time, completely for the benefit of the recipient whose wishes one claims to serve. As if the most dignified duty of the artist was to aesthetically wash the feet of random passers-by.

■ The digital artist as an animistic world demon

If we ignore the fine distinctions and regard art as programmatic, we would no longer focus on the authoritarian notions of the artist, but the hedonistic arbitrariness of the consumer. Nothing is more typical of this than the assertion that the techno-machine and digitally generated total simulation of the sensorial-bound imagination are the final realization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a dream which has so far been described rudimentarily and

symbolically. Perhaps the term *"Gesamtdatenwerk"* suggested by the artist and hobby theorist Roy Ascott would be more fitting. Ascott focused on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as can now be simulated, even if the words are not entirely new. "As artists we are becoming increasingly impatient with the individual working modes in data space. We are searching for image syntheses, sound syntheses, text syntheses. We want to incorporate human and artificial movement, the dynamics of the environment, the transformation of the ambient — all of that in a seamless whole. We are, in short, searching for the *'Gesamtdatenwerk'*. It must be the planet as a whole were we work on this and where it is performed, the planet's data space, its electrical noosphere."[32] This may initially sound enthusiastic, advanced, progressively cooperative, universal, and unconditionally open. But why this manic insistence on connecting everything with everything? Are there reasons for this, or only factual energies at work here? Does this not attest to the pathological nature of a type of associative thought which invents syncretistic encyclopedias without ends, meaning or verifiability which encourage the rampant spread of links by dint of a new form of self-organization? At a closer look, such a synthesis reveals two things — first, the artist's desire to control a comprehensively interconnected world including the networking of what we can know in it *and* about it, and second, a purged collective subject as the "true" data artist, as well as the perfected inability of selection.

It is not surprising that a knowledgeable glance at the historical context can mute and relativize such a radical tone. Back in the 1970s, everything on the face of the earth, the planet itself, indeed the entire universe, was declared an artwork. But with the arrival of the universal Turing machine and the absolute validity of the binary code, all difference seems sacrilegious and superfluous, and everything appears coherent and thoroughly shaped. According to its credo, that which exists is regular, homogeneous, relates to everything existing within it, ordered in elements and groups, families of groups, hierarchical, tangible in the popular authoritarian "tree-model". Any other entity or order beyond this arrangement simply does not exist. As Roy Ascott revealingly writes, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the capti-

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32 Roy Ascott, "Gesamtdatenwerk," in: *Kunstforum International,* vol. 103, (Cologne, 1989), p. 106.

vation within a "synthesis" and is exhausted on the part of the recipient in a hallucinogenically exaggerated artificial state. Behind the aesthetic prevalence for pleasure (manifest in the permanent "synthesis" which is active everywhere out in the open), the producer hedges the puppet master's dream of manipulation and calculable, objectively controlled effects. Synthesis, as such, is meaningless, but it often crops up in Ascott's writings as a value in itself, as a purpose and unconditional property. He views the artist as the selective mega-brain who has everything at his fingertips and who can readily combine what is universally available and at hand, and then disseminate it to the recipients. A childish notion full of fantasies of omnipotence. It entails that everything depends on everything else, everything is animated, everything is set in place by the gods in an endless chain of cause and effect. Structurally speaking, this corresponds to the mythological notions of the world's creation as practiced by animistic cultures, though it does not possess their lucidity or special ability to provide a point of orientation in the world.

The digital artist as an algorithmic manipulator thinks his way into the role of an animistic world demon and puppet master of the universe. Such figures of thought demonstrate what a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the like involve. They hinge on a dream of power which has been associated with the artist since the Renaissance, although the artist as such has long since ceased to exist. Which is why they have decided to become artists of life. Today, it seems we have to pay at least a rhetorical fee for the constant amateurism. Even the most simple and banal, the stupidest and most boring so-called "interactive" installations (which, as a rule, do not offer what they promise, my prime evidence to this effect being Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau) disguise themselves as animist miracles and divine revelations of the hermetic nature of the world. In fact, they offer little more than digital Darwinism.

Incidentally, an auditive or visual artwork triggered by the movements of a viewer (or which appears to be so) does not necessarily make it interactive. Programmed inputs are usually generated as identical outputs, i.e., they are simply downloaded in a steady and constantly regulated stimulus-response ratio. A one-dimensional sensor system is all that is needed. Such installations were not called "interactive" back in the 1960s. Even if elec-

tronic circuits were used, everyone knew that linear switching was involved and not cybernetic self-controls, auto-dynamic processes, or, to use Heinz von Foerster's term, non-trivial machines. Non-trivial machines are those in which the results of the first application of the algorithm or computer process is then re-inputted together with a constant and a variable factor and subjected to the same process again. The result is refined in terms of the decisional logic and, therefore, cannot be predicted – even though the parameters are regular and constant. In other words, the regular operations of non-trivial machines are connected with so many different parameters that the result can never be predicted. This has nothing to do with general cybernetic feedback. By contrast, trivial machines are those that always do the same thing in the same way with the same effect. Even quite common kinetic objects – mobile spatial structures in the tradition of Rodchenko and the Gabos – involve artworks that change when they come in contact with the viewer. In material terms, however, the programming is a quite ordinary chain of analog commands and mechanical manipulations. For the viewer, these appear as a concrete abstraction (abstraction within actual specificity) by means of which present and absent volumes can be perceived through positive and negative sculptural conditions, as shadows and movements can be responses to the slightest movements of air. Tactile learning in the response logic of a computer cannot be considered an expression of interactivity.

■ The poetics of *kairos* replaces the politics of *chronos* – conclusion, summary, hypotheses, outlook

If we experience art as something problematic and situationally constructive, or as a rhetorical gesture and heuristic method (seeking, devising) rather than as a compendium, art does not culminate in the generation of images. Forming materials for the sake of individual constructs seems somewhat desperate. From today's point of view, art seems to have systematically deluded itself about its own subject matter. And like art itself, the history of art is perhaps simply the assertion of the effectiveness of this delusion, as which it inevitably regards itself – in later historical phases

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and, thus, as a mannerism. All advanced art is manneristic − not a style, but a specific procedure, not only formation, but also formalization. The fact that many today call for a consistent definition of art is evidence that the theoretical potential for understanding art has already been exhausted. It is out there, disguised, concealed, elusive. Perhaps art is actually a synonym for something not completely comprehensible in the form of a representative entity for what is visualized through it. Visualization is a syndrome of vehement violence, and likewise, a triumph of perception over imagination, a regressive, disempowering insult to the imagination. It occurs at the core of thought about the world. It provides descriptions of models by constructing additional models.

No longer does art solely strives to generate pictures for places. As a result, it has ceased to create images for the museum. The museum as the ensemble of ordered temporal locations is a narrative that has become material. It has become a myth without copyright, a presence with a claim to infinity, duration, and persistence. The art of the 20th century derives its consequences from this and ineluctably celebrates the triumph of its own marginalization. This is the key prerequisite for art not only connected to various styles and arts, but also to forms of life and the quotidian: fashion, sex, music, visuality, graphics, textuality, dance, body cult, environment, society, the media. The focus is not on images, expression, meaning, or representation, but on incorporation, liveliness, and process. The actions which experiment with liveliness make it impossible to separate the activity of art from the essence or character of art. Art itself is now characterized by that desired lack of differentiation to life and thus indeterminacy.

Art has become a foil beyond the art business, an assemblage of methods. The avant-garde, museum positioning, provocation, and constant self-negation can no longer be the motors which move art processes forward. Art as technique, as craftsmanship, as epistemology − today these comparisons, though outdated, can still refer to something. The culminant ideal of the engineer, the all-powerful world builder on God's left or right, or even in his place, is likewise a thing of the past. What perhaps still thrives −counter to the polemic distinction of high and low-brow codes − is the strategy of inscription, the gesture of transgression in the sense of social and poetic bracketing of the utopian sphere. Art can no longer be the

decisive central force of the visual. It must also inscribe itself in other hierarchies of domination. Moreover, it no longer protests in any way against the history of the formation of such dominations.

The dominance of the visual has not only marginalized art, but also enabled it to distance itself from the pictorial fetish. Today, the visual is the cultic field of the visual mass media. Art is now relieved of the burden of representation, or more precisely, the compulsion to represent. Only in this way can it break out of the pictorial prison of the imagination, that strange negative/positive figure of reason.

Art has always been medialization and a rhetorical process with actions devoted to finding new, adapted, innovative actions. For this reason, "media art" as the term for presence only demonstrates that the character of presence has to be eliminated from this awareness. Today, the issue is the historical location of art and the artist, the processing, the full use of a context for action in society and in the present. Just as the late Michel Foucault described Kantian philosophy as thinking the present moment, as a project in the here-and-now, as thought equaling action, as the insistence on the topical, so, too, can we regard art as the gift of the topical in the here-and-now, in presence and the present. Art and the thought of the new, the perspective of the topical are models analogous to those of Michel Foucault's lectures titled "L'art de dire vrai".[33] Art – speaking truly, speaking the truth, speaking sincerely, to be sincere in speaking – this is a description of the moment, of compression, of contraction. *Kairos* poetics instead of *chronos* politics – that would truly represent a renewed revolutionary agenda for the arts, and not the presumptuous belief that they can, should, or must build machines.

Art as the art of finding a place in the present. Meaning is always relational, connected, connecting, cooperating at specific points, present and absent, significant and disappearing at once, a projection and not a representation. In its current potentiality, art finds its own expression. It is precise and can, at times, link aspects and open up worlds. But this cannot be accomplished successively if the expression is represented in the work, couched in a single, coherent and consistent world. I am convinced that

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33   See "Dossier Michel Foucault," in: *Magazine Littéraire,* no. 207, (Paris, May 1984), p. 34 ff.

one world is too little for art, a single theory insufficient, a closed field of phenomena a repelling illusion full of suffering. Theory is not the same as the aesthetic self-assertion of a far-reaching refusal to generate insights, masked by the role of the artist with the customary refinement.

For this reason, "media art" is reactionary. It lends itself to the captivating work, the auratic fetish of subjectification, which, as a draft for action, actually belongs to the process of transforming the textures of the world. And without this process, it no longer signifies or causes the same thing. In this light, the current media situation appears reflected in its prismatic refraction in the arts, as a possibility to more adequately understand the innately dynamic wealth of art – not simply to study it in its historical process, but to see it as effective in a specific disposition, a possibility that is virulent at any time. Medialization means grasping this process as the use of practices, actions, and experiments with the means that are respectively available. In other words, the medial is not defined by an apparatus, device, tool, technical standard, or the like.

Art as action and experimentation would involve an apparatus-based dissection far exceeding the presumptions of "homo faber" and his radical constructivism. After all, the latter not only maintains that humans can only understand what they can themselves build, but, conversely, that humans must first construct the thing before they can understand it. An epistemological inversion and presumption with disastrous results, as bionics and genetic engineering will soon show. Given such an inversion, media art tends to posit itself as myth for the purpose of rendering self-knowledge harmless. The myth is a collective narrative with no author, from which the individual works tower up at points along with the name plates of individuated histories of their creators. Compared with the challenges of a dense process-based, rhetorically elucidating art in the world, media art is a Biedermeier salon, the final reflex of the miniaturized visualization so sweetly trapped in museums which encase and restrict the once so expansive art utopias of the early 20th century. However, it is impossible to liberate technology from life by means of a perfect, self-perfecting or self-controlling machine. All that remains is the fictitious procreation of the machine-like, the automation of the technical. Art which vitalistically evokes its own special nature is a rearguard action, the last self-delusion of

the subjective in a undifferentiating world robbed of subjectivity. From the perspective of this delusion, we can naturally convince ourselves of whatever we like. However, nothing is as dead as the "true" life that evokes itself in the name of creative freedom, cutting itself from insights and asserting one must have an opaque mechanism to be special. Such opaqueness is an artifact, a highly trained and enforced fiction.

Let me conclude with a differently emphasized outline and an expansion of the main hypotheses. Though the emphasis is quite arbitrary, it points out what should now be clear:

- *Art in terms of its media forms is of interest as the specifically inspired ability to link vision, knowledge, and the world. These links reflect the experiences of the evident by means of which art can first occur as the productive force of secrets and surprises.*

- *The insights of art history, critique, and theory can only be successfully tested as regards the senses of approximation, i.e., following the procedures of artistic practices and methods. Like the arts themselves, they appear based on the medium of theoretical reflection and justification.*

- *Art offers no justifications for the exclusivity of images, nor is it fixated on the pictorial. The medium of the image, the conditions for its production and exchange, and the realization of its referential frame are defined by an innumerable set of vectors and factors. Analysis of examples can reveal the singular effect of each.*

- *Art has, as its history shows, the special ability to continually generate new forms of narration, representation, and action.*

- *Art today provokes numerous changes in the structure of experiencing and understanding art. In place of mimesis and representation, we are increasingly seeing construction and action. The customary expressive quality of artworks is giving way to processes and practices. Today, art works with and through the media more explicitly than ever before. The essence of art does not depend on its media or materials. Art is a specific statement.*

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– *Art is no longer the art of representation, but the art of transformation. The core of media-conscious art and art theory, an expansive "art through media" is to take into account the constantly changing claims of art, to evaluate the media of interaction between the statements couched as art and the cognitive insights which artworks claim to contain.*

II MEDIA CONTEXTS:
KEY TOPICS, ARGUMENTS, EXAMPLES

◼ Immersive Environments: The *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the 21st Century?

An adequate discussion of this question would require a comprehensive account of the development of culture, science, art, and technology over the last five hundred years, plus an elaboration of the conditions and particularly the expectations under which this development is the subject of new reflection today. Obviously, this is not possible in a short presentation, so I shall focus on three points:

1. The thesis that, even in an age when the senses are linked to machines, historically older media and technology continue to coexist. The new media do not cause the older media to become extinct in an evolutionary sense. The order of precedence of the media is an integral part of changing hierarchies of dominance. Media forms which have become marginal or peripheral do not simply disappear. What changes is the composition of the central media and, in their wake, the norms of social communication. The computer is an advanced, but by no means unique, attempt to externalize language. Technical implementation does facilitate certain opportunities for an alternative use of culturally relevant archives. However, it does not succeed where the immersion of people, minds, and emotions in technical environments are concerned.

2. The view that the natural human faculties which are subjected to technical immersion are only artificially expanded. Their natural endowments cannot, in principle, be overcome. According to Roger Fry, "biologically speaking, art is a blasphemy. We were given our eyes to see things, not to look at them." Therefore, the contemporary deluge of images represents a severe crisis of contemplation, a failure of the art of observing. The imagination is no longer able to mobilize. It proves unequal to technical production, although technical production was nourished by imagination for a long time. Our dreams may not be on the same level as technology, but our technology is not as dynamic and powerful as our dreams. There is both a shortage and a glut at the same time. This is why many expectations of how art might change technology now increasingly attempt to bring in the observer as the

actor. This was postulated by the "open work of art" long before digital interactivity existed and in a much clearer way. "Reading" images did not come to an end with the advent of immersive image spaces (for example, cinema, cyberspace). We live in a world of images which consume us. Modern art rebels against this by insisting on special powers of cognition. Incidentally, long before cyberspace, Stanislav Lem referred to the theory of "Phantomatics" as "art with feedback".

3. The supposition that the Gesamtkunstwerk *(the total work of art) is not a utopia that can be realized, but the backdrop for all imaginable utopian conceptions in our modern culture. Its usefulness lies in its function as a regulator, not as a practical challenge to technology. The realization of Richard Wagner's* Gesamtkunstwerk *by the Nazis should suffice to make it absolutely clear that it is fatal mistake to take utopian conceptions literally. The* Gesamtkunstwerk *is an invitation to rethink cultural situations, a potential for differentiation, not a program for a blueprint of a total, undifferentiated human being. On the other hand, the 'hot', living thinking inherent in art indubitably possesses an appeal that will not carry over to technology. Under the aegis of art, the cold, technical optics of the seeing machines is supposed to coalesce with a new heat of the senses and consciousness. Art speaks in riddles. This is something which should be preserved and regarded as art's noblest duty. As Jochen Gerz stated, "this is its new social commission – to have no commission and no usability. To be an enigma and to remain an enigma."*

The future cannot be predicted. It is the product of a mesh of innumerable contradictory actions and in this sense, though not in toto, it is always a part of the present. Although a need for prognoses will always exist, looking to the future is not driven by the same degree of urgency in every epoch. It is not difficult to see that more energy is necessary to imagine the future, the more people experience social change in an onerous present as turbulent and baffling. Feelings waver simultaneously between a hope of stability and a hope of revolution. Times of severe crisis are the crossroads where expectations placed in the power of new technologies and retrospective views of the organizing principles of previous and present cultural identity meet.

It may seem paradoxical at first, but both aspects are treated in the concept of the "total museum" — the renewed energy for reorientation of the established archives, of their strategies for appraisal, and the potency of the new technologies in regard to the old idea of cosmopolitism, now computer-aided. It makes sense that both converge on the concept of the museum, for museums and their history are open to all variations on this utopia of a world society, as well as all technological concepts.

The 16th century precursor of the museum already put the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* into practice. It went by the delightful name of *"Wunderkammer"* (the closest English translation is *"curiosity cabinet"* or in Italian, *"Camere delle meraviglie"*), although, at that time, this idea did not relate to the sphere of art, but to the unity of the sciences. The *Wunderkammer* is a collection of objects which belong to various areas of knowledge and spheres of reality. By constantly rearranging the objects into new constellations, knowledge is fostered by producing heterogeneous connections and the cross-fertilization of disciplines. This still applies today as the current desire to revive the *Wunderkammer* can be seen as a reaction to the fissures and alienation that prevail between science and morality, technology and art.

Museums and their archives have grown incessantly and inexorably since the dissolution of the *Wunderkammers*. As true time machines, they have accumulated vast quantities of problematic issues whose significance lies in their compensatory function. They provide cultural identity to the social and political systems of technology, economy, society, science, and politics that are drifting apart.

We live at a time when the continued existence of archives and the question of their future use is of exceptional importance. As a whole, culture has become reflective. It needs the stocks of the archives in order to work through the rules which determine them at regular intervals. These include the rules of architecture, rhetoric, decorum, and naturally, also those governing the use of archives. Aside from the aspects of extended direct access and the establishment of new means of publishing data, the digitization of the archive represents a significant expansion of possibilities of describing the objects. However, this will never mean that these will take the place of the objects themselves. Opening the archives will potentially

reach an ever expanding public. Progressively, scientific work can be accessed. At present, one already has the ability to take a look at research in many different ways. However, what cannot change is the space required for an aesthetic *mise-en-scène* of the objects. This is dependent on the development of sensory experiences that can only take place in the stable anthropological locality of the human body. It would be foolish, therefore, to substitute virtual levels in place of the real arrangements of real objects in a real space, such as using touch-screen or Internet or simply the electronic *doppelgänger* of the real objects. The utilization of both spheres requires real and different spaces and localities.

Specific problems of digitization arise primarily at the level of a totalization of descriptions. In the digital universe, there is a trend whereby all descriptions of history are detached from the historical distance between present and past and transformed exclusively into the temporal dimension of current operations in the computer. In and at the computer, I do not work on historical intervals, rather I process present-day material according to conditions of perception that always take place in present time and never in the past subject of recollection. This is why the para-cognitive, individual criteria of selection are rapidly increasing within cognitive processes. Furthermore, this is a fundamental reason why the technical, externalized-memory machine that works virtually without interruption of the data flow, inevitably induces a new form of forgetting that remains blind because it cannot experience the difference it manufactures. In contrast to forgetting how to forget, I consider human consciousness to be more efficient for it possesses the faculty of not forgetting how to forget. That is why cultural expectations are not tied to the mechanical linking of technology and memory, but to the opposite – their differentiation. This shapes the perspectives of euphoria or critique in connection with the technical universe.

Cultural decay and techno-euphoria are, however, one and the same thing if viewed in an amoral sense. Jean-Louis Comolli formulated this clearly with reference to photography. "The photograph stands as both the triumph and the grave of the eye." The various perspectives that, in turn, change the assessment spring from a particular combination of technology, agencies of mass communication, culture, and social praxis, but never from the inherent dynamism of a single, stylized, and solely causal factor.

Cultural decay and techno-euphoria find themselves in an irresoluble contradiction, that is, they are inseparably joined. They permeate the majority of contemporary scenarios concerned with the media of electronic images and the technical expansion of the museum in a digitized, globally synchronous information society.

In this situation, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is undoubtedly an attractive metaphor for combining expanded communication technologies with the power of new, artificial "spaces", for example, in the Internet. The immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk*, though, cannot consist purely of data. Only the immersion of the senses and the mind in a technical environment would fulfill such a condition. We should not only think of cyberspace here. Multimedia, mixed-media, performance, installations — the whole, ever-growing culture of hybrids of image, sound, space, and imagination, of museums, markets, trade fairs, galleries, theater, and computer — have played with the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* time and again, but without the intention of finally abolishing the borderline between the object and observer, stage and audience, artwork and spectator. This is exactly what the immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk* in technical environments seems to promise.

It is immediately apparent that such a view omits the temporal aspects of "before", "during", and "after" in order to examine the "during" only topographically in a locked, timeless space. The closed space, to which the subject is banished, the immersion within mere phenomena regardless of how these are generated — through an assumed world of things in themselves or through the technical simulation of visual illusions — this is not technical imagination, but simply an "episteme", a theme of knowledge, that is constitutive of the whole of Western thought. Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss this history in detail here. However, it is quite apparent that immersive fantasies have not only a technical background, but also a background in the history of thought. Virtual reality is not the technical enablement of immersion, but the projection of a philosophical mental image onto technological innovations. For this reason, I shall focus my critique on this epistemological dimension.

Although technical immersion does this in general, it is particularly virtual reality that has breathed new life into a fundamental anthropological problem, namely, that the human mind and brain lack an inner

disposition for differentiating between perception and illusion, imagination and hallucination, awareness and fallacy. Immanuel Kant's critique of traditional epistemological theory explains how we only recognize that which our cognitive structures can transfer onto the external world. The thing that is recognized also contains the subject that is cognizant of it and comprehends it. It is all too evident that this conception can be described as the prison of a cold and megalomaniac subject. An escape from this restraining condition can assume any and every form of game with and in created external worlds. The essential point remains the same – epistemologically the object is already an immersion of the subject and vice versa, and not only starting with the advent of technical environments. Even the ongoing feedback that continually takes place in the brain cannot obscure the fact that, although not completely, a considerable portion of the brain is an enclosed part of the body. Sensorial stimuli are "translated" into semantics in the neuronal networks. Only the continual transmission and coding of stimuli and signals which are, at first, nonspecific result in messages. They originate through the synthesis of interpretations of stimuli and parallel recognition patterns. The connection of these recognition patterns to the object that is recognized through them can be viewed as the process of meaningfully remodeling the "real" in the "world". Perceived cognition is always the result of a translation – a construction, at best a reconstruction, but never a mirror or reflection of an external reality that is untouched by it. This may explain why we experience our hallucinations as perceptions. Technical environments created for the immersion of human mental processes can thus be considered not so much the redemption of a subject who is liberated from the pain of separation, but the stimulation of hallucinations whose imaginative power is just as real as its subject or *mise-en-scène*. It follows that inside VR, that which facilitates the exact description, construction, or reconstruction of the real can be monopolized in favor of the imagination. If we accept the notion that the current flood of images is, in fact, an absence of images because these are merely based on digital code signals, we must then distinguish between "image" and "visual presence of something". Unfortunately, time constraints prevent me from elaborating on this distinction further. Against the thesis of technical immersion, it should be pointed out that anthropological conditions

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pertaining to the imagination are just as involved in the validity and use of technical media systems as the functional logic of the apparatus. However, with regard to the fascination with images of a total museum or an immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk* as "expanded art", I think a more essential point is the hope that manifests itself here – the hope of recovering the archaic, ritualistic, and magical dimension of images from their recent cognitive domestication. This means asserting the power of the imagination in a situation where imagination can never again be a unity, but only fragmented and in inner turmoil. The issue behind the spell cast by the images of the immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk* is not only the linking of all the senses in the medium of synaesthesis, the sense of senses, but breaking through the division that exists between empirical-technical and symbolic-magical thinking. VR is magic brought to life by technical means. However, any kind of belief in the success of closed systems is a delusion, a fallacy. Instead of cultivating such delusions, I prefer to force myself to perceive fragmentarily this fragmented world. I am convinced that the imaginary will become real because we ourselves are imaginary. The path of the real and the path of the imaginary are one and the same process, one assumes the form of the other. This reciprocity reinforces the practical idea of the immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk* and technical environments which are expanding into ever larger areas of culture, its memory, and its archives.

Archives are always incomplete. They feed off loss and destruction. Destruction is the cultural norm, the normal case. Usually it comes about through carelessness, seldom through explicit sacrifice – at least not in societies which have not developed social techniques for destroying the unavoidable overproduction caused by human labor. Cultural heritage that has been lost in modern times has been unintentional and disorganized and, as a result, has been mainly connoted with the melancholy of the forgotten. Consider the calculations of Edward B. Garrison, published in 1971. He estimated that at least 80% of the works of art produced in the 12th and 13th centuries must be considered lost. In 1962, the German bibliographer Gerhard Eis published an analogous study on central European medieval manuscripts in which he estimates the losses at 99.4%. These are just two examples of a long list. And everyone can think of some famous instances, like the destruction of the library at Alexandria by fire, the artworks that

perished in the two world wars, or the library of Louvain that was destroyed twice. The same holds for 20th century art. The question is, do we miss anything? The answer is no, because we cannot have any recollection of the "intrinsic meanings" of that which has been lost from view. The greater part of our storage of cultural memory is not constituted by the arrangements or the quantitative aspects of archives and collections but by their intentionality and the classifications and descriptions of the objects, for only these render them visible, identifiable, and, ultimately, usable.

By digitally perfecting the archives, the ideal of the universal encyclopedias (the infinite library of Jorge Luis Borges) has been realized and thus nullified. It liquidates its own opportunity. Apart from waiting longer for even bigger supercomputers, the increasing potentiality means that new criteria of selection must be found at the level of updating. And these are not pre-determined.

The aesthetic values of the new conditions of communication do not evolve from the history of the museum, the logic of the apparatus, or the interfaces between humans and machines. They are simply connotative elements of that which is known as *zeitgeist.*

To conclude, I shall briefly summarize the main points of my argument:

1. Anthropologically, mental faculties are not expandable.

2. Only the artificial systems, the artificial linking of consciousness and their clustering in new infrastructures can be extended, not the capacities of natural neuronal architecture.

3. Natural, ordinary awareness has always presupposed perception to be multi-sensorial and it is thus disposed toward synaesthesis and the prerequisites of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

4. For these natural processing faculties, the Gesamtkunstwerk *becomes an illusionary, hallucinogenic, inundating experience, in which one can submerge oneself, but which only has meaning in its difference to a non-technical space of experience. Simulation presupposes*

two different models. Otherwise, it is a conception that is devoid of meaning.

5. Digitization of the archives compels the formulation of subjective and individual criteria of selection that are only rational insofar as they appear arbitrary and vice versa. However, this is likely to represent only a transitory historical phase.

6. Technical environments have always had a cooperative, but not exclusive, relation to anthropology and the natural history of humankind.

7. The dream of the Gesamtkunstwerk *is a constant factor in the realm of imagination. Its strength lies in its status as a phantasm, not in its positivistic promise.*

8. The history of the Gesamtkunstwerk *comprises all the elements of utopia and dystopia that are possible in conjunction with real powers of compulsion. This dream is not only an attempt to reassemble a lost unity but also that of perfect control of the real by humankind – a dangerous, totalitarian dream.*

9. No technological advance can solve epistemological problems. Media technologies are, as McLuhan recognized, metaphors for the transmission, and thus transformation, of experience. They are not evolutionary forms within a historical chain of media technologies.

The fascination with and the necessity of a digital, museum-like culture is also based on technological experiments to hypostatize the immersion in technical environments or in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but not first and foremost and certainly not exclusively. It is based on the changing condition of production and communication in society, on the changeover from bureaucracy and industrial production (which as yet can only be dimly anticipated but will have far-reaching consequences) to an open network of communication, information, and production. The material preconditions of communication – the interests of subsistence – indicate for all time the limits of the self-reproducing abilities of artificial systems. Therefore, against the current of political propaganda and the techno-euphoric

praises sung by the "symbol worker" (or "sign analyst"), I believe that very narrow limits have been set for the cyberspace navigator and the digital leader as harbingers of a carefree future.

■ Ruin and Utopia or the Desert of the Real: From the Vanity of Pictures to the Distress of the Imagination

Whatever one may think of utopias, whatever their purpose or aims may be – they invariably seem naive. Which should not be taken as a lack of appreciation or respect for Ernst Bloch's philosophy of "Not Yet". For in his writings – and only in his writings – naiveté has an urgent complexity, the irresistible magic of desires accompanied by the knowledge that their intensity is also moving towards the abyss. As a coda to this essay, we will return to the laudable complexity and radicalism of Bloch's philosophy of utopianism, of the Not Yet, and of hope which – for all the impact it has made – has never been fully recognized. His philosophy has its roots in a mythic apprehension of the incomprehensibility of the immeasurable, dynamic natural world, which – as Giordano Bruno also sees it – is the vehement energy that sets all things in motion, suffusing human beings with and as passion. Whatever the case, the searching, insistent, open naiveté on the horizon of Bloch's edifying hope for the utopian is the salt of life, a last niche in the quest for that human quality which is not identity but a quest, that is to say, operates at one remove from itself. If one tries to relate this to the dimensions of the actual world, it seems both despairing and presumptuous. Thus, in their quest for the real, utopias gladly have others share forcibly and forcefully in this tacit despair of the self.

The real is always limitless, in fact, the only limits are the aspects that prevent it from achieving its ideal form. For a long time, it was believed that the incomplete nature of life was what hindered the fulfillment of the imagination. More recently – bearing in mind psychotic and numerous other illnesses – we know, or may at least presume, that "the imaginary" shares the blame here. For the imaginary turns out to be lacking in the face of reality. And it shows itself to be lacking in its determination to dominate reality. Likewise, utopias can do nothing if they cannot transform actuality

to fit their own image. Utopias always have a fatal stake in eschatalogically distorted and instrumentalized Platonism. The ultimate secularization ignores Plato's superior insight which tells us that ideas live in their own world and beyond this one and have nothing to do with phenomenal actuality, with the palpable "here and now" of existence. The notion of turning ideas into actuality is simply aberrant in Platonic terms. And yet, precisely this approach seems inevitable to anyone working in this one, existing, empirical world and who does not wish to abandon it for another. It is "the imaginary" and its language that subordinate actuality to the dictates of masterly concepts. The real always seeks to elude it. In the realms of the imaginary, this elusive withdrawal lingers on as a permanent lack. The general assumption is that this necessarily detracts from the imaginary that is subject to this process in order to exist at all as an entity. But what if the imaginary exists as this very detraction and the experience of it, and does not just consist of it? What if the radical Romanticism – for it is not without reason that this has constituted the basis of all contemporary art for the last 200 years – is right to ascribe this experience to the unattainability of Nature which predominantly operates in a state of withdrawal, making demands, tempting and bewitching mortals? It thus fulfils itself in the real as precisely that which eludes the symbolic, texts and descriptions and only lives as an image – always pierced with the spell of reality, but not providing an actuality able to accommodate this spell. The actual is not the real, since the latter is beholden to the imaginary and not to the existent.

It is easy to see how the imaginary would push aside the actual if the latter resisted being taken over by the depictions of a better or pure life. And it is of no consequence where these depictions originate. Nor is the manner of their individual execution of significance. As in religion, "hopeful" hope appears both aesthetically and socially to be self-contained or exclusive when it regards its own concrete attributes as a "totum", whole and unconditional, or in short, as a generality. As we know, people always see the actual through a wide variety of spectacles, but – through the insight born of familiarity – do not admit that their vision is colored by the characteristics of the spectacles, i.e., by another medium. By contrast, the hatred of the media, the struggle against the characteristics and internal laws of communication (as in rhetoric, dramatization, staging, the press,

reportage, and reproducible images) is a certain indication that we are dealing with fundamental ontologies here, on the basis of which the great intellectual fanatics and revolutionaries – denying the heterogeneous – recruit brutal functionaries to implement supreme order. Therefore, utopias always inhabit the realm of individual and specific presumption. There is no denying, however, that they may well have some function. There is just no general agreement as to what this is. We may naively suppose that utopias strive to turn actuality into something ideal. But utopias, as practical instructions, would negate the actual. They have to despise it, reject it, deny it precisely and unconditionally in its actuality. From this point of view, the actual is specifically not actual, but, measured against the ideal. It is simply the inadequate and not actual, the inconsequential and misplaced. There are astonishingly many – not only Western – variants of such metaphysical bifurcation of the real, based on an ideology of despising actuality.

We can also view the function of the utopian as a means of creating space for experiments and virtualities, for action in rehearsal – along the lines of Sigmund Freud's dictum that thinking is simply weak "action in rehearsal" in the mind – and for games. Utopias then become correctives whose function is not only – for amusement or measure – about destroying the actual in order to finally set free the truly, ultimately valid actuality. This utopian function operates in the midst of the differences in a world that is largely untouched and accepted in its imperfection. And precisely this is the point – the utopian critique of actuality, which urges the unconditional realization of the normative in the name of utopian cleansed ideals, is a function which not only pursues the destruction of the actual but also perceives and accepts this in the context of necessary destruction, as an expression of paradoxical actuality. Evidently, the normal pragmatism that proudly considers itself utopia-immune and has persuaded itself that there is a solution for everything, is in no sense free from this idealization. It simply declares the status quo to be an ideal which it regards as already basically realized, whereas millennial hope ruthlessly devalues the actual and casts it in a negative light. This last variant is particularly attractive to violent energies because the actual becomes increasingly synonymous with that which must, as a matter of principle, simply be destroyed, im-

mediately and apodictically. It is now only the actual that stands in the way of the "factually actual" and prevents its entry into the world. The act of despising actuality fundamentally lives by a notion of the real that annihilates this one existing world to the extent that it resorts to a different, normative, true world which appears as the only "real" world – not in the sense of empirical concreteness, but of normative justification of an ultimately true, that is to say, divinely guided life. What happens in this connection in different religions has always presented a model for the annihilation of actuality and will remain so. And all the more so, because religions do not set themselves up as principles, but as the outcome of real energies, dogmatically legitimized figures of transparent life. Therefore, the religions are concerned with unconditionally producing what they view as the conditioning premise. They propose the nothingness of the world simply by asserting it, arbitrarily. What is more obvious than to test the fundamental nothingness of the world against its practical destructibility, to transfer the normativeness of its critique into the reality of its destruction, in order to break it down into its constituent parts, rendering it ineffective and non-existent? The intervention here seems to be purely a question of mastery of the means. Generally, albeit falsely, this is described as fanaticism. But that is not entirely appropriate. For, in the cause of an ultimately transcendentally proven self-motivation and centered self-conviction, one's own convictions mobilize those energies that – arising out of the end of the destroyed world through a successfully transcendental mission – not only correspond ex post with the intervention but are derived from it in the first place. Therefore, ideological critique of such actions is powerless and helpless. The fact that the most devastating annihilation appears as a positive act of liberation need not be cause for amazement. One can only be amazed at a world which believes that, in order to implement such effects on the basis of unchained self-assertion as world annihilation, we still need the religiously loaded figure of the martyr. Those days are long gone. While the technical armament of the global (self)-annihilation scenarios during the epoch of nuclear weapons needed an apocalyptic *aide-mémoire* in the shape of a controversial assessment of this annihilation, now in our own times with our present-day variety of armament, it is enough to point to the normal progress of actions and events. The problem of the movements,

described by outsiders as "fanatical" concentrations of energy, is that they intrinsically, that is to say seen from within and looking within them, get by without such fanaticism. In the context of rituals – decisive and liberating – the event itself becomes purely functional in that it forcibly instigates the operations that it intends. It is not necessary to justify its means because the ritual principally and consistently dispenses with any such need.

As far as our discussion here is concerned, at every turn, the utopian appropriation of the world under the guise of a supposed need for change results in a "desert of the real", generated by the implementation of the means assembled for the radical enforcement of the utopia. Of course, artists play their part in this, if one persists in accrediting or burdening them with redemptive powers or a mission to liberate the world from its deficits – or accusing them of the same. In other words, artistic utopias also involve the destruction of actuality when they reduce the actual to an expression of an ideal, thereby turning it into a monster of negativity of itself. It is obvious that the positive light cast on utopian notions following Thomas Morus, and particularly the positive turn things utopian took after Romanticism, made the utopias of certain artists look like a means of positively clarifying a distorted, "fallen" world.

It must be clear to any unbiased observer that the Renaissance utopias with their humanist leanings with respect to their creators – Leonardo da Vinci, Leon Battista Alberti, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Antonio Averlino Filarete, to name but a few – and with respect to the ideas and functions they proposed, were always implicated in a belligerent desire for decorum. It is no coincidence that the ruthlessly centralizing utopias of the Renaissance, the mania for centralized structures and geometric order have only been empirically realized twice during the course of history. Once in the military fortifications in Palmanova – now a place of unsurpassed boredom. And again as the panoptic prison on the basis of the transformation of the utopia into surveillance, through an architectural version of Jeremy Bentham's discourse of total observation and perfect control which served as the model for many 19th century prisons, particularly in the United States. Interestingly, at the end of the 19th century when it was demolished, the English prison that owed most to Bentham's philosophy of surveillance was to be found in London on the very site where the Tate Gallery stands today.

Hoping for a utopia of this kind is fundamentally an act of despera-
tion. This applies equally to the artists' utopias and artistic utopias. The
main problem for art is actuality which is not finished and not yet a fact. It
counts little for an artist with outspokenly utopian impulses, and at times,
it may mean nothing at all. Moreover, the reference to artistic aspirations
is striking in areas where one would not wish to come upon the notion or
the interests of art. There is no conceivable argument for a mission, carried
out in the name of art, to realize the "true world" by annihilating the real
world, or at least to set its foundations free. Reverting to art does not help
the utopian cause. Let us take the example of Baron de Haussmann who
redesigned Paris, the leading city of the 19th century, during the reign of
Napoleon III. And he did so in a manner that did not serve liberation, but
the destruction of the uncontrollable elements of old Paris with its innate
hostility to any form of authority. In his memoirs, Haussmann proudly de-
scribed himself as an artist of destruction, as an *"artiste démolisseur"*. But
his name has only been associated by posterity with the glorious beginning
of the cultural modernization of Paris because what he actually achieved
was very different to what he had originally intended. His sights were set
on amassed military dominance and control. Boulevards were created to
this end but never used in this way, for in the age of motorized civilization,
they became the stage of a very different version of social interaction.
One might conclude from this that every plan deserves to fail. But not at
the price of destroying the actuality that it would so gladly sacrifice for
its own fiction. Naive variants of the same notion are no different. Since
there is no remedy for naiveté, and specifically, for that of artistic utopias,
it may be useful to take a glance at the real that still outstrips any utopia
or imagination. Which also means that utopias may become a function
of the relentless scrutiny of actuality, but will never give way to invented,
arbitrary images.

In my search for an exemplary instance of such a utopian deregulated
function of utopian totalitarianism, it was clear to me at first that it had
to be something that has survived all attempts at destruction and has
hence remained independent of the usual plans and time-flows in the cycle
of growth and decay, as something that has constantly been subjected
to major upheaval. This largely intuitive search soon took me to Rome

– historically and imaginatively, empirically and notionally, specifically and generally. For Rome has always been a distinctly theoretical construct, not just a matrix for all later worldly metropolises. It has lived and grown in the midst of drastic destruction. It has survived all upheavals because it was always at their mercy. Ultimately, it has become a model of permanent realignment which goes against the grain of unifying plans that have constantly been implemented and, more or less obviously, have left at least some perceptible traces.

If the argument appears to have been narrowed down to Rome, then this is not with reference to the historical place, but to an imaginary one. Rome is not exclusively a city belonging to Italy or Europe, for, on a much larger scale and separate from that, it is also a model, unparalleled in history. To pin Rome down to one continent would be to rob it of more than half its existential energies. It is not a matter of the usual socio-urban discourse on the cities of the first, second, third and fourth world, that one increasingly comes across in the first, which in itself makes such numbering absurd, not to mention the generally applied values. Rome is ubiquitous. That has been its nature from its earliest beginnings. Therefore, any deliberations on an artistic, not yet realized city are also about Rome and the imaginative model established through Rome. For Rome, as we know it, is not in the least the same as the actuality of the pictures made of and for it. This imaginary, yet real, Rome is largely a creation of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. "His Rome" consists of a collection of all things heterogeneous, of non-simultaneity, of monuments and relics, deposits and transformations. It was in the midst of destruction that it emerged as a living being. Let us pursue the keyword "Piranesi" a little further – in brief, but still with all due respect.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1780) was a remarkable figure of the 18th century in view of his early pictures anticipating the mythologies of Romanticism. A native of Venice, a trained draughtsman and copper engraver who was curious about ancient Rome, the young Piranesi traveled to the capital of the lost empire whose splendor had now long been reduced to ruins and fragments. Having also learned architecture as a young man, and as an admirer of Palladio, he arrived in Rome in spring 1740, barely twenty years old in the entourage of the newly-appointed Venetian envoy Marco Foscarini. Disappointed by the decay and desolation in Rome where

everything was but a pale echo of the picture he had in his mind's eye of this gigantic cosmos, he created an image of the true Rome in a waking dream of its historical grandeur. At a stroke, this programmatic dream replaced the disappointment that, had he regarded it as the actuality of Rome, would have compelled him to leave the city, immediately, resolutely and never to return.

Throughout his life, he remained true to his early insight that utopia only makes sense in the setting of these ruins; presenting it as an actuality and supposed positive totality would be a distortion and deviation. A realized utopia as its own deficit – this has a radicalism about it that does not mourn farewells because it presumes their existence, not regarding them as inevitable, but only perceiving actuality in the light of their existence. Piranesi dreamed of the grandeur of human ingenuity, of a power of invention that was cosmological outrage of a Promethean kind at all forms of limitation. And he dreamed the dream of the city of Rome – returned to stone and living from its own myths – that embodiment of the highest-minded functionalism, always and unconditionally superior to the Greek cult of beauty which architectural historians have so often admired since the Renaissance. Piranesi's preference for substructures, channels, underground halls, supports, prisons, domes, the Villa Hadriana in Tivoli, the house of Maecenas, the foundations of Hadrian's mausoleum, the present-day Castel Sant' Angelo – these preferences find their vanishing point in the resurrection of the true Rome as an image, of Rome as the true image of itself. In the midst of the ruined city, this image conjures up the ungraspable as a hybrid vision of supra-human buildings. Piranesi overwrote his fantasy so that it could do justice to the intended task, utterly committed to invoking the incomparable. And the excessive grandeur here, or rather, its natural and mathematical immeasurability, is indeed incomparable. Only this immeasurability, evoked through fantasy, makes it possible for the incomparability of Piranesi himself to be reflected in the incomparability of Rome which, contrary to expectation, emerges from the decay of its historical grandeur.

The power of the imagination deems itself immeasurable. It is built of the spirit of Rome – Rome as the epitome of human creation, a whole

cosmos and nobler, greater, more sublime than anything conceivable on this earth. The imagination is outraged by constraint. In immeasurable self-overestimation, it revolts against the divine relativity imposed on the human world. But it, too, encounters limits that arise in it of their own accord. No matter how far it reaches out, the principle that forms it is limitlessness. Paradoxically, however, it retains its power in this movement of unstoppable expansion precisely by the fact that the call for immeasurable grandeur can only come from outside which presumably constitutes an ultimate measure. The imagination is always inside and thinks of the outside as the permanently unattainable – from inside. At the same time, the artist in his/her imagination becomes a Titan, denying that he/she is imitating Nature, him/herself the creator of a world according to the laws of fantasy. The achievement of the impossible becomes the program for artistic self-design. In this light, the human being believes that only that which goes beyond every possibility of realization is worthy.

And so it is that the imagination always looks inwards. Just as the dream – in a minimal variation of an idea from Walter Benjamin's "Passagenwerk"– has no edges and no exterior, so, too, is the imagination. The external and the internal view grow into each other – but in Piranesi's series of engravings, "Carceri" there are only interiors in the end. The world of the imagination is also its prison. And not only in the failure of its powers, but also as the realization of its dream. Its world is its own prison. Only within that prison is it truly great. Or more precisely, only in that prison can it exist. It is, therefore, not about an opposition between the imprisoned and the limited, but about incessant and insoluble interpenetration. The unlimited is the prison, the prison is the unlimited. The visionary and likewise realistic prisons of Piranesi are instances of the immeasurability and the self-imprisonment of the imagination. This is readily apparent in the two cycles of "Carceri" by Piranesi and above all in the reworkings of these made between 1749 and 1761 – from the "Invenzioni Capric di Carceri" to the "Carceri d' Invenzione" – the transformation of transcendence into immanence. For the first time (which perhaps marks the birth of modern subjectivity), the subject perceives its irresolvable entanglement in its own internal world.

In our final remarks, let us return to Piranesi's image of Rome. In and through Piranesi's imagination, the irretrievably lost city of Rome becomes

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visible in its absence. Consequently, it is as outstanding a subject for dreams as it is for archaeology. The most highly developed contemporary model of a utopian confirmation of the kingdom of the living thus returns with a profit to the imagination of this visibly invisible Rome. But this is only possible in the dream that the imagination dreams of itself. This dream cannot be separated from the insight into the failure of the imagination.

With this in mind, let us attempt to draw some conclusions. It seems that only the true, black, hard, challengingly darkened, and ardently despairing spirit of Romanticism offers some protection against said temptations. We are not dealing with utopia here in the sense of longing but with its empathy for the distortions of Nature and history as a whole. Nothing will, can, or should liberate us from this evident impossibility. Praise to this black Romanticism and the determined rejection of that dogmatically enforced, however positively meant, change to the world – which persistently and at every turn pursues the purity of its own thoughts by annihilating everything that stands in opposition – are crucial, inevitable, and needed at one and the same time. Without this rejection there would be no future life. What protects one against utopian demands or requirements is generally none other than the whole, bad, actual actuality. The love of the actual is one that does not unify it, but moves and acts in its disintegration, marked by all the potential surprises that only a broken, divided, and unfinished actuality make possible. Only in this unfinishedness is there hope – as Novalis, Kleist, and Goya recognized more clearly than any others. It is only here that the utopian illuminates the self-difference of the unfinished. But the unfinished cannot be fought or set aside, transformed or dissolved without it turning into the desert of the real, into actual devastation.

Artists are definitely builders in the imaginary world. This is confirmed by the fact that out of all the utopias of the 20th century – most notably those of the Russian Constructivists – the ones which remain vital and important never became reality. This rarely had programmatic reasons. The causes were generally situational and coincidental. However, the only chance for a utopia should not consist in being banned and persecuted by a naive, terrorist regime (instead of being elevated to the ranks of state art). Though its thread of actuality is torn, it is no argument for or against the actuality of the visions, but the necessary pledge of their lasting seri-

ousness. The world that opposes them is not only rejected in the name of their ideals. If it appears lacking, deficient, in decline, in short, incapable of operating on the same level as the ideals, then it quickly becomes something the basis of whose existence only consists in being annihilated and in waiting for that annihilation. The artists who limit their radicalism to the visionary in order to produce differences are the true utopians and hence the constructors of the proposed "twelfth city", combative creators of a heterogeneously enriched metropolitan iconography (*iconografias metropolitanas*). Thus, once again, we see the superiority of the true philosophy of the utopian which, for all its naiveté, represents the most intense philosophical – not just psychological – longing. It combines vision with the constantly growing complexity of the symbolic differences that, from the history of hopes, repeatedly demonstrate that their vitality urgently seeks actuality, but that none falls easily into its lap, since none belongs to it and it has no right to own any. And it certainly does not subscribe to intentional or enforced subjugation.

To return at last to our opening remarks, if Bloch's philosophy were only a set of instructions for prosecuting hope, a philosophy of reconciliation, or even a technique for arguing for the as yet unfulfilled, then it would be of no further consequence. But it is a philosophy that relentlessly describes the inevitable step outwards into the open after having bade farewell to all certainties. It is strange that the radical conclusion in Bloch's main work, the *Principle of Hope*, with its emphatic final celebration of the inevitable Nowhere and Not of *Heimat* should never have been seriously recognized in this way. The fact that certainty and return are no longer attainable is the least of it. The most radical and modern aspect of this is that it makes absolutely no provision for regaining these in spite of the knowledge that the farewell has already happened. In the face of such imagination, exposing itself to the pain of withdrawal, these differences live on – in the full, sharpened radicalism of the irreconcilable and of enduring pain. In this movement of actual abstraction, we see the fulfillment of the imagination of the as-yet-unbuilt city, the last true utopia that has nothing to do with the small-mindedness of New Harmony, the garden city and Phalanstère, the glass crown of Bruno Taut, the utopianisms of Hermann Finsterlin and Co. So far, only the Situationist *bricolage* of Constant's New Babylon oper-

ates on the required level. Why? Because it understands the actual, the empirical, and the real, the ungraspable factuality of the existing as something that has to elude each and every description, every picture, every symbol and every imagination. And because it does not annihilate this, but deeply recognizes it. In an almost mystical manner which completely counteracts the long history of despising actuality and of the hatred of facts on the basis of an ideality that erroneously sees itself as superior. Only in this New Babylon does the imagination exist in all its splendor. And with it, the utopia that no longer presents itself as an anti-image of the world, but as a means to recognize the actual. Or in the words of Ernst Bloch, utopia presents itself as a tendency or latent quality of the actual which does not ultimately exist in the form of a component or by virtue of incorporating ideas but − as in Piranesi's work − as the epitome of the unrecognizable, the despised, the dirty, disturbing and distressing. An imagination that does not make the most radical disturbance of itself possible in itself and is not worthy of the name through itself. The heteronomy and the heterotopology, the Other of places and times, the insoluble contradictoriness, the fact that the manifold only exists in the shape of the disturbing and despised, in the form of rejections and the rejected, makes the utopian conceivable and vital.

As the constructive focal point of the "metropolitan iconographies", only this "twelfth city" would truly be the historical place of the artistic imagination, of the movement of utopia and of visions cutting through the phantasms and the traumas. Like New Babylon, it traverses the battlefields and devastation of the actual, of the imagination and the body alike, of the massacre of the bodies and of the wars of the signs. Free, light of heart, and at ease.

■ Work, Time, and Waste: Perspectives on a Criticism of the Political Economy of the New Media

1.

The cruelest aspect of work is that it actually creates, rather than rectifies, a want. This is not merely historical experience but is symbolic of the metaphysical elevation of work. The promise of paradise that it offers constantly descends into the threat of its being taken away from those whose right to it has been forfeited, for whatever reason. At the same time, work is the hinge of the threat to existence. It defines, rewards, educates, orientates, and punishes. To be deprived of work these days is serious because of the admittedly frightening fact that it is solely the – as yet unchanged – link between work and wage that determines the attainment of the means for the necessary meeting of needs. This compulsory relationship is not a capitalist invention. I suspect that it is further evidence of the bogeyman of natural history. However, the capitalist organizational model for this want, disguised as natural history, is increasingly glossed over by culture and aesthetically justified, not least by means of new communication technologies which purport to be "immaterial" – a figure of mystification, to which surprisingly many are all too ready to succumb.

2.

Immateriality and the myth of collective intelligence, so often lauded in media ideologies as the inevitable effect of technology, basically means submitting or adapting to the telematically determined system architectures and hierarchies of commands and processes. The establishment of the system of work, money, profit, and recognition will shift from the Internet and the World Wide Web into individual spaces. At stake is the willingness, enforced by society, to learn the formatting of the new communication technologies with reference to one's own life, possessed and shown as a precondition for all conceivable qualifications, to a certain extent "by one's own nature". Correspondingly, in the economy of information politics and nets, everything that happens is no longer meaningful without reference to culture and communication, and can no longer effect anything.

The individual advance replaces the social safeguarding of work and hitherto standard contract conditions. The declaration of one's own as cultural achievement which entitles one to enter the working world at the level of the latest technological standard, is dependent on the individual's unpaid acquisition of the qualification requirements. The previous services are replaced by the language of commands. This language occupies a prominent position in media theory, in which the final construction of the media – which bizarrely means the computer rather than language – seems to be equipped with the hierarchical construct of military commands. It also has its place in the symbolic/ utopian decorations of standard media propaganda, for example, in the incitement that "everybody must be connected". Those who are uninvolved remain outsiders, stigmatized for failing to support progress. The oft-invoked "collective intelligence" (Pierre Lévy), which propagates a universality without totality and which sees cyberspace virtual realities and free data flow as the embodiment of the French Revolution's utopia of freedom, is based on compulsory postulates. Everyone must be linked to everyone else. He/she must both practice and attest to this, in reality and in keeping with updates. Subjectivity becomes a preordained condition of social possibilities, because the denial of hierarchies and mythic horizontality of the communication utopias is unthinkable without the repeated demand that every member of the global information network continually redesign him/herself, define him/herself, and simultaneously surpass him/herself in the supposedly free playful competition with others. The fascination with this kind of surpassing unites "right" with "left" visions and versions of global net culture. Both collective cooperation and collective intelligence reproduce the conditions of a system feedback which permits no heterogeneous or diverse forms of time, no economies of waste and no insistence on a free but system-immanent waste of time.

3.
The normal operational efficiency that should be continued as a business in the Internet usually acquires information by asking a representative group of people to answer a brief compilation of questions

and interests in the form of a list. The condition is that the options presented are familiar and that a balance between the options sought and the options offered can be formulated approximately. It is suggested that the global information society will be qualitatively dependent on the inclusion of more complex concepts. This can be illustrated by a completely different case, informative precisely because of its strangeness – the archaic bazaar.

This represents a specific model of an information culture that functions in completely different ways compared to the operational efficiency of the factory and office. It also works for tasks that have not yet been mastered in the global economy. The bazaar reveals hybrid forms of time rhythms and expectations of use, a montage of heterogeneous interests and self-designs. Various cycles coexist, overlap, penetrate one another and break up again, e.g., stable and unstable, reversible constants and singulars, permanently localized and selectively dislocated offers and demands. Unclear data or knowledge are the conditions and stipulations. The only available knowledge is the "unable-to-know" principle of concrete stipulations. The quality of the product, the value relations and economy of prices, the diversity of the offers of the day with similar products, and the stock limits of dissimilar products are all factors which change on a daily and often hourly basis. The market possibilities are linked to the ongoing positioning of everyone involved in the business and negotiations. They are located in a turbulent system comparable to that of today's stock markets. The bazaar functions in a way that actually reduces the not-knowing for one person, increases it point-by-point for another and makes it permanently defendable for yet another. Information is not exchanged – one rather seeks a basis that will enable negotiation. It is in this search for information that the ethnologist Clifford Geertz identifies the central experience of the bazaar. "Every aspect of the bazaar economy reflects the fact that the primary problem facing its participants (that is, "bazaaris") is not balancing options but finding out what they are." (Geertz: 80). Trade and negotiation are multi-dimensional and intensive. The individual case is more important than the general rule which fails to become concrete. The bazaar does not function by means of a brief list of options presented to a

large number of people, but rather the opposite, with a large number of neuralgic questions put to just a handful of people. Conceptually, this form of subjective evaluation of abstract models has not yet been used for VR because it represents an entity of a number of heterogeneous, singular sizes at the helm that cannot be easily standardized or programmed. I believe that we should consider the demand for subjectivity, as reflected by these models, as a currency in the cultural habituation to digitalized over-expenditure of time. The vivacity of the bazaar – gesture, language, theatricality, presentation – in short, the culture of performance – is analogous and opposite to the propagated values of the Internet society. What underlies this remains to be seen.

4.

Staged subjectivity and imposed creativity are hidden at the roots of the demands for an aestheticization of subsistence compulsions and the "free subjugation" in the media's new hierarchy of dominance. A decisive and determined change is underway. Symbolic self-discipline is replacing the industrial machine. Creativity is becoming a synonym for heteronomy – "work" as "worship", as always. Today, attempts to stop work, itself the very crisis it appears to give rise to, are expressed no longer in respect to religion but immersion in a technology apparently permeated with religious fervor. Self-styling promises freedom at the point where the drive for individuality asserts itself wastefully, as does its symbolic form, as a gigantic social machine. This explains why images, projections, and logos have replaced the iconoclastic machine of the industry as the motor of cultural development.

In contrast, according to Henry Ford's organization of work systems, the factory is society and vice versa. The desired synthesis between the microscopic system of the ever faster and evermore perfect separation of work processes on the production line and the macroscopic system of consumer rationality according to wage has historically had two dangerous consequences since both could turn out to be dysfunctional for society. Firstly, the curtailment of the individual's power of autonomous decision-making and secondly, the heightening of subjectivity determined by purchasing power.

These two strategies of self-assertion gratified in developed capitalism – the professional career and the narratable biography – were both fulfilled and endangered by numerous factors in Henry Ford's model. Recognition of work was increasingly linked to the staging of purchasing power, symbolic self-presentation, and prestige. The outer representation enforced the pressure of subsistence – separated from work carried out according to the dictate of strict feedback of optimized operational rationality. This model relied on the ideal of subjectivity, familiar from the middle-class Bildungsroman. *The Ford model inevitably gave rise to the very crisis it strived to solve. It standardized professional qualification requirements in respect to people who simultaneously should have been acting as educated and culturally confident consumers in an autonomous sphere separated from work. The requirements of internal company negotiation were kept as brief and elementary as possible, given stereotypical form and modularization, while the qualifications for the use of goods were based on complex education and cultural orientation ability. Henry Ford's model ultimately brought grief because it breached a basic tenet common to both Karl Marx and capitalism – namely, that work can only be productive if it can be experienced, however fragmented, as the development of subjectivity. Henry Ford's model fundamentally brings work into discredit on all fronts. Financially, work is merely an individual insurance of consumer subsistence. To the worker him/ herself, work is exactly the same, only disassociated. In this way, the mechanization of work loses what makes it social. Not least the pride people took in the fruits of their own labor (at least on a rudimentary level). This is no longer possible in either Taylor's or Ford's world. The well-trained, fragmented, disciplined, instrumentalized, improved, and expended body is located in rest-niches, an interim figure between still non-mechanized processes.*

5.
Numerous social strategies are now attempting to respond to this crisis. The society of spectacle has become the most successful model but remains ultimately useless because it intensifies rather than overcomes the crisis. With its permanent splitting up and off

of energies into ever more delirious demonstrations of goods, luxury, and consumption, the society of spectacle has learned its macro-economic lesson from Ford's failure. In this way, work increasingly disappears from the arsenal of life-long security providers, while the stock market and speculation increasingly takes its place. Subsistence itself becomes the capital that must be multiplied and thereby put in jeopardy for reasons of growing poverty. Investment of life resources becomes ever more careless. Only those who can prove their strength still belong to society. The stakes keep rising. It is hard to fully under-stand at present what exactly the intense strain of the efficient work-ing day and the consequently increased value of consumer existence really means, despite the fact that the theoretical fundamentals of the recommended risk games have already been vividly, precisely, and cynically described in 1967 by Guy Debord in The Society of Specta-cle. The imagination has long been unequal to the delirious, inces-sant stream of ever more ambitious demonstrations in the society of spectacle. Several times the gross national product or gross domestic product is turned over by stock exchange speculations every day ever since the money exchange was removed from the gold standard fol-lowed by the introduction of floating rates of exchange.

The delirious capital, the convulsion of life-time and the excesses of the society of spectacle mark the borders of a new territory, entirely remapped since the days of Marx, Smith, Taylor, and Ford.

For those who are now superfluous to society's processes, all that remains is to suffer and bear the pressure of an autonomy enforced by the system for better or for worse. While they are busy working on their subjectivity and self-tasking, traditional and acquired subsist-ence rights in respect to the public are no longer recognized. They are no longer a factor and appear to have become redundant.

6.
Attachment to the company, loyalty, and other resources of a production process founded on and in work have been dramatically devalued in the society of spectacle and the post-Ford economy of continuity and learning processes. This is proved most clearly by the "job-hopping" trend of the last few years, rapidly changing jobs which

no longer merit the title "work" because the respective requirements have always been preventatively delegated to individuals. These are situationally professionalized by constant self-education. The computer is also a reason why professions are no longer possible or even desired. The demand for more personal responsibility even in the lower echelons of the dependent job world illustrates to what extent the pressure of ongoing communicative self-presentation has grown, and also shows that this is no one-off phenomenon but a system-immanent compulsion. To the same extent that the macro yardstick works towards a release from social duties, "on-the-front" work is determined by the duty to self-organize according to company rules and the premise of return on capital. The seemingly progressive collapse of company hierarchies in favor of self-organizing nets in organized team-work basically means a continually demonstrated compulsion to concretize achievement. The jumble of job traits, e.g., being dynamic, risk-taking, and creative, disguises the fact that the desired new, "innovative" social character does not accord with a personal design but the unreasonable demand for flexibility determined by the system that radically differs from the concepts of Taylor and Ford which seem socially romantic in contrast. The reference to innovation, subjectivity, personal responsibility, and dynamics also disguises the fact that the shift from the safety of the professional career and the compensation for the burden with a small but self-made security to the self-organizing team with given efficiency values but without given organizational forms has led to the disorganization of time categories which has a variety of repercussions. Increasingly, every project and team starts off by dissimulating preliminary work and tradition. Superficially, "job-hopping" is an interesting form of nomadism, analogous to the weightless surfing on the data waves of the digitalized information seas in the World Wide Web. In fact, all time rhythms that were linked to cumulative learning processes in the past have been joined together in an impulsive moment of selective self-awareness and instant self-description. It is precisely the freedom of organization that must ensure the fulfillment of the goal stipulations – and, one must add, nothing else.

Not only has life become economically superfluous because it can no longer be financed, but also the work itself that should have financed it. To an absurd degree, politicians of all colors repeat the demand for a reduction in employment figures only to shift work as the most important medium of developing subjectivity back into the center of existence. This illustrates the terrible fear mobilized mainly as a way of repelling the idea that meaningful social organization can no longer rely on work, production, and improvement, but instead on abstaining from work, doing nothing, disconnection, and reduction. Current capitalism no longer wishes to uphold its organization of work in any way, but wishes instead to live on the proceeds of the shareholders. Although this is well-known, it has no consequences in work-philosophical terms. The obvious assumption is that politics is little more than the aim to globally dissimilate this opinion.

The real provocation is not so much the dominance of unemployment, but that work alone enables the acquirement of sufficient money, although it is precisely this that work is, in fact, no longer able to do. The reasons for this go far deeper than capitalism or the Protestant work ethic. The inevitable conclusion is that work must lose its significance, not just for the economy, but also in thought and the imagination. Since work is based on society, the obvious conclusion is that work and wage should no longer be the basic medium of socialization. It also means (and this has hitherto not been fully appreciated) there can no longer be any society broad enough to accommodate everyone as a useful component of the whole. In short, society can no longer serve as a whole because it no longer exists as one. The consequence of this is based on a simple theory that working-time can no longer be the predominant social form of time. The fact that capitalism has found no form for this but has rather distorted the issue into destruction is what makes capitalism so wretched and proves its lack of imagination and its violent interpretation of time, reduced to the production time of serialized goods and values. The destruction of values in war has today assumed the features of an insidious and initially cold civil war in Western Europe. Any criticism of contemporary economics must keep sight of this inevitable destruction, despite

*the distorting effect of these symptoms. This is not destruction in
the traditional sense. It is the previous form of productivity that is in
question.*

7.

*The basic criticism of previous economic theories of the values and
metaphysics of an exclusively value-forming work originates with
Georges Bataille, who has pursued it down a number of odd paths
based on his theories on religion and cosmology. Bataille's model of
economy is founded on a hopeless dialectic of want and waste, in
which waste as the border of the world of productivity is planned
either in the sense of the right of disposal for a select few or an
inconceivable example of negative destruction. In contrast, Bataille
makes the elementary assumption that work was bound up with a
paradoxical double-want long before capitalism; the loss of energies
unleashed by surplus and the absence of a productive destruction of
values in which surplus is no longer represented. Both forms of want
are manifested as work. According to Bataille, work must be discon-
tinuous nonetheless. What the inevitable surplus of vitality cannot
bear is what provides the constancy of work. Scandalously, Bataille
maintains that the ills of the world are founded in its riches. It is
specifically the riches of a particular type of individual who asserts
him/herself cosmologically as a waste of energies, also expressed in
the fact that man is the result of a surplus of energy. "It is primarily
the extreme riches of his/her higher developed activities that can
be defined as a splendid release of surplus. Free energy blossoms in
him/her and continuously demonstrates its useless magnificence."
To Bataille, economy is no longer the organ of the materialization
of lively activity but the task of developing a form of time in which
wasted time is conceivable.*

*Bataille sees work, time, and riches as expressions of energy.
Every system produces more energy than it can use when it sees
itself as the organization of its own self-produced effects. If it fails
to organize forms of productive destruction, the inevitable surplus of
materialization forces self-destruction that then brutally turns back
on the basis of the system – as violence, unbridled abstraction which*

historically takes the form of war. Super-abundance is loss with no charge and nothing in return. A lively system can either grow or waste itself pointlessly. Pointless waste is one goal of controlled loss that man could give to super-abundance in order to prevent the fatality of want turning into negative destruction. Bataille's economy requires a new time ethos that he sees as a cosmological law.

We should take our time when considering the possible media-theoretical repercussions of the altered concepts. The limits of growth are possible rather than real. Liquefying surplus in order to keep realities virtual as a differential power of themselves requires an art of possibility, no longer in the sense of possession, constancy, and preservation, and which no longer leaves the act of destruction up to the dysfunctionalities of a system that is hysterically striving to make these dysfunctionalities inherently inconceivable. Since no system can preserve, model, or exchange energies beyond a certain point, it must expend them. This may occur as the destruction of the produced material values, but this is not the decisive factor. The decisive factor is that over-expenditure of energy represents a form of giving back or giving anew time and energy to the enabling and nurturing forces.

8.

Bataille's theory of economy is ultimately metaphysical for under-standable reasons. Bataille radicalizes the structure of Polatsch, ethnologically examined by Marcel Mauss, which also refers back to the obsessions of the Surrealist transgression in the Situationist Internationale – at the same time as Bataille's later work. Bataille radicalizes Polatsch's concept insofar as giving becomes an act, not just of waste beyond all calculation, but also of giving back. Since it has existed throughout evolution, waste is insignificant. Giving back is more significant in that it represents explicit and additional over-expenditure. This ethos of giving back takes the form of a break or a wasteful intensity. It no longer embodies a productive continuity or continuous productivity. In other words, it no longer takes the form of work and can no longer be converted into work. Over-expenditure and waste precede human existence. The increased productivity of work is unable to provide an insight into the form of time or the structure

of giving back. It is only this kind of time, in reflection and over-expenditure, that can form the natural evolutionary surplus of energy obstructed by work. Work clearly does not belong to the arts of waste and giving back as experiences on the border. This is fully apparent in the current age which seems utterly incapable of making work a break and a form of giving-back, a transformation of itself.

9.

When the reason of the system, rationality of production, and progress have come so far that work is a function of the self-organization of the system, then we have reached a point where capitalism is no longer primarily an economic domain but a political one — a compulsory relationship. But nothing is resolved because it is based on asymmetry and does not allow for a smooth self-maintenance of the system. As ever, entropic deviations mean that basic functions exist in tiresome, unattractive, boring, annoying, even damaging or insufficiently recognized jobs. Who collects the garbage? This question remains the inconclusive metaphor for the basic issue. The rationality effects of the system may appear almost perfect, but the political and social compulsory form which links subsistence and therefore money with work and rented time, still takes the archaic form of a permanent individual fatefulness. As yet, there is no job sharing, no long-term functional elegance of the egalitarian or fair division of the necessary. The radical nature of the time-form sketched here as a proposal for "life as waste" has failed necessarily and systematically because of the link between work and wage. System forming and recognized forms of doing nothing have been neither found nor sought. Is unemployment then the biggest human, economic, and social problem? No, it is the ultimate utopia — an attempt to give oneself the task with which life can organize itself as over-expenditure. Today, time is no longer the form of concretizing work and its equivalents — subsistence and social recognition — but a medium of cultural conflicts that are basically political. This goes far beyond repairs to the time dictate of shortness which are expressed in the presumptuous attempt to allow everyone to choose and modulate timetables themselves. Of course, today's concept of the "new media" is nothing but an area of conflict in the struggle for radically different qualities of time.

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10.
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■ Authenticity in the Fine Arts

Anything which is concerned with art beyond its works – in a media, theo-retical, or discursive sense – must be content, and it seems unconditionally, with a second-rate role. Art consists, or so convention has it, in the sum of its artworks alone. These are products of a genuine, nameable, individual finding, and they embody authenticity. Accordingly, artworks are neces-sarily authentic. Determining the nature of art ontologically, whilst also based upon the historical dispositions of modern, particularly romantic stylizations, authenticity is not only a key category in the production of art, but art's essential, theoretically and empirically indispensable determin-ing factor, both a necessary and commensurate criterion. Necessary, since the unauthentic cannot be art, commensurate, since whatever presents a significant form of authentic quality always has to be art.

As far as the background work of securing, classifying, elucidating, collecting in archives, researching, conserving, exhibiting, and mediating art is concerned, they can, according to this conviction within art, only be secondary supporting functions. They are, of course, indispensable for art's survival, but do not touch upon the nature of art in any way. They repre-sent a form of charitable aid – an offer to be called upon, a promise of protection which, despite material interventions (for example, in the case of restoration into the substance of the original), differ from this ontologi-cally and are characterized by a lower status of being.

In this essay, against such monolithic idealization of an individualized, productive instance of artistic creation, I will present the thesis that the important aspect is not the genealogical dimension of art, but its struc-tural complexity. What many institutions do – media, theories, studios, workshops, debates – to increase our ability to perceive art, is not external to art but an essential factor of it. This is true of all fields and all epochs, not only of the arts of the 20th century. These are based on an extension of aesthetic materials, artists having coupled the idea of the artwork with a radical, even insistent transitoriness of the materialization which embod-ies it. This means that from the start, the restorer must necessarily share the decision concerning the life-span of the authentic work. Museums of contemporary art not only offer evidence of the generalization of the col-

lectible and the acceleration of that artistic invention which is impelled by archive collecting. They also demonstrate – although this is hardly consciously articulated – a transfer of the supervision of form, work, and material of the completed artwork to the guardians of its historical durability. Museum time and effective time – in the case of public ownership of art at the moment of acquiring contemporary art – coincide with the physical durability and half-life period of the materials. Even the responsibility for a guarantee is no longer within the artist's, but the restorer's competence. In the following, the instance of the restorer as an agent of the storehouse of the present for the future serves as the medium for a complex, non-linear logic employed to describe the conditions (of the durability and emergence) of art.

The relativization of authenticity insists upon the temporal precedence of the genuinely creative before the development of its influence and alters the normative gradations in the traditional, ontological foundation of art.

The previous preference for a numerically, chronologically recountable history, the collection of datable records of origin in the form of artworks, their correct linear arrangement – the so-called historically critical hanging – temporally and spatially determined in the modern art museum since the French revolution and Jacques-Louis David's new presentation of the Louvre collections, as in the prototype enfilade architecture of Schinkel, must now give way to an interchanging permeation of the primary and the secondary in the sense of a concentrated and complex configuration of conditions.

To summarize up to this point, the authentic aspect in art is neither a material quality nor is it established by the use of particular media. The authentic is a place of signification in a multi-faceted field of associations. It is created by purposes, concepts, artistic intentions, institutions, expectations, and formed attitudes. The authentic is a part of an aesthetic definition of a problem within specific cultural regulations. It is not evident, but is attributed to a specific discourse, to the narration of art history. In principle, nothing is altered in history's preference for the authentic in the sense of origin. The valences of the authentic have been firmly established.

The problematic concept of the original brought about by digital media and the impossibility of distinguishing between unique-genuine and

reproductive-copied will compel us to accept paradigmatic changes with respect to the authentic in the future. Digital media, inasmuch as it is always symbolic like all non-iconic sign systems, has a non-technically defined traditional reference. But it is the technical definition which is decisive – on an electronic basis – for the problem of authenticity.

It determines a new form of cooperation which transcends the artist's framework of action to date. On this basis, a new, more highly rated role could be established for restoration. It is independent, constructive, and essentially participatory in the creation of the authentic.

1. Criteria, Art History

Because its execution is not bound to any particular materiality, reproducibility is not determined by the sphere of reproduction, but is an exclusive characteristic of the original. This is true of the singular example, not merely of any kind of reproduction. Today, the refinement of reproduction methods appears to have all but reached perfection. One can even imagine – and in the case of the Mona Lisa, this is well-known and has been kept from our perception by corresponding contextual measures (thick protective glass, poor lighting, pretentious guarding) – that all the paintings in every museum have been replaced by copies. The only ones who might be able to notice this are the conservers/restorers. But they may not be immune to bribery. Such rioting and attention are indicative of the significant instance here – not mystic original genuineness, but the media testimony of an attributed validity.

So what is the meaning, what are the semantics of authenticity? Authentic means genuine and guaranteed. Note the difference that in terms of the logic of the predicate, "genuine" is two-staged at most, while "guaranteed" is at least three-staged, i.e., guaranteeing something by someone for a third party; the one who is informed. A guarantee can never pass into self-persuasion, even if it can certainly stimulate an auto-suggestive authenticity with respect to self-referential evidence of genuineness. Authentic, as definitely "genuine", is only the individual for himself, above all, everything in itself. The privileged self-reference and the consciousness of

self which cannot be derived from any objects in the world or from any language, are valid instances of philosophical solipsism dependent on the isolation and solitariness of life in the ego, that is, upon a particular theoretical disposition. The example of stylized experiences of evidence clearly demonstrates the religious contours which are structurally characteristic of all the art of the modern age.

But the cultural or conceptual evaluation of authenticity is always a substitution. The significance of self-references and statements of evidence by another for oneself is dependent on the agent, on mediators, on witnesses.

On the level of the imaginary, it is the narration, the discourse of the other, made concrete in/by pictures, the narration of art, the narration which, as art history, has created a quite specific object (which is why creativity, the capacity for cultural expression or a civilizing force is not necessarily bound to art). One can object to solipsism, at least on the grounds that self-reference neither includes nor demands the perception of society. Inasmuch as "guaranteed" has to be understood as "authentic", the conserver and the restorer become decisive agents and instances of the authentic. They are not only guarantors of that which their work aims to conserve, but also actors who join in the construction of whatever this guarantee embodies. The guarantee must be reliable, credible, granting insight into the relation to the original. It must secure attributes. The ultimate criteria are negotiated in the circle of experts – and only there. This is analogous to the definition of concepts in the sphere of music. The "authentic close" is the creation of a harmonic final conclusion. "Original" is, therefore, a purely temporal concept, while "authenticity" is a concept of modality, a way of being given.

The authentic interpretation is a declaration made by the originator/author himself. The narration of art history in particular is bound to the individual as the instance of intention, as the a priori of all that is intentional. It declares its object – the genesis of modern art – as having emerged from the individual. This reveals a doubling, a discourse of history as the setting of the ego. A meta-discourse of art history as the genesis of the genesis of this ego which, equipped with the power of abstraction, is transferred to the sphere of an aesthetic history.

It is true that the mythically excessive creative power of genius first dates from the epoch of Romanticism. But the self-marking of the individual began much earlier. Although there is evidence of the signing of works in Italy during the 11th century, the history of the quasi documented personal marking by aesthetic creators began hesitantly, and it developed slowly, although steadily. Before the auto-declarative epoch of the historical individual had been arrived at, personal marks of creative individuality had little true significance and lacked an empowering disposition. The magic of the original, guaranteed by the signature, grew parallel to the essential stages in the development of the art system – guild/trade clients, court/patronage/power, general power of judgment/bourgeois taste, trade/auction, market/reviews.

In other words, parallel to that suspicion, fired by the system, that the unstoppable flood of images necessitated the possibility of distinguishing the true from the false, the signature received the power to guarantee. It became a documentary attestation. The artistic discourse became dominated by narration and by the verification of the genuine. In this, the place of the signature in the history of truly existent creative individuals was confirmed. The increased importance of individual skill, the concentration of specialized professional skills and the official evaluation of the artist to the point of an acknowledgement of his true role – making the achievements of individuals accessible to groups – presupposes numerous factors. These form a complex configuration.

But it is characteristic that – both in the case of the reversal in polarity from the material value of the pigments to the individualism of the execution which has proved so significant for modern painting, and in the case of the demands for a national standard of work in sacred buildings of the later Middle Ages – the essential instances for the foundation of knowledge and the securing of prestige were not aesthetic, but legal criteria, codified in contracts.

2. Time, Museum, the Aspectual

In virtuality, museums are form, and in actuality, imagination. The form of production gives collections a specific shape. The virtuality of the archive becomes real in selection and arrangement in the shape of an exhibition. In this, the potential is transformed into the actual. The isolated monumentality of discrete components is integrated into a documentation, a narration. This narration creates a history. For this reason, museum situations both eternalize and make disappear. They take their vitality from an interpenetration of the two. Historically, art forms a comprehensive bracket of meaning due to its elimination from the chain of significant areas of nature, mechanics, antiquity, and art. The pictorial imaginary must become the socially symbolic in order to make space for industry and science and their power to model reality. Its allegorical power is taxed to exactly the same extent as the essential function of art is seen as its lack of social function and effect. It is presented with the highest task at the height of its impotence. It only exists because it is measured in terms of this task – a symmetrical Munchausenism which is the basis of modern art's genuine claim to insight through its self-referentiality, which is in turn based on the complete freedom of all conceivable materials for any artistic form. And vice versa. The achievements of pictorial museums are evident in their almost unshakeable capacity for the handling of paradox. So they collect – regularly, in the name of the extraordinary – the singular products of genius by composing regulations for the comparability of that which is ruined, lawless, and deregulated by genius – and this in stark contrast to the classical academies – in the heightened expectation that their expectations will be disappointed, that is, under the aspect of nonconformity which it is possible to stabilize, of permanence within the constancy of permanent change. The conflict between perenniality/eternity and the temporal/the fleeting is identical to the conflict between an aesthetic completion of history created by expulsion from the field of social action and individual deregularization demanded in the name of genius. A conflict which may be described as the paradox of constancy and discontinuity, the closed and the open, the durable and the fleeting, repetition and uniqueness, but whatever way we look at it, as a paradox.

In terms of the theory of time, this paradoxical museum situation may be derived from a coherent model of art and art history. The great narration of art history suggests that perenniality be treated as a value in itself. However, eternalization also determines two different time modi: the cycle of return (perfection of styles, variation in mastery) and an irreversible renewal (innovation, avant-garde, restructuring of the museum as a result of its problematic situation). Circulating time (regularities, rhythm, return of the same) versus historical time (discontinuity, breaks, creation of new systems, swing to other attracting fields) represents a conflict which forms the two-part driving configuration behind all art of the modern era. The art of modern artists builds more upon historical time, which is why, at least in principle, it collides with the decisive construction of the art-historical discourse. It rescues itself from this with philosophical and metaphysical references ("the new man", a "liberated life", technological utopias, etc.), that is, with meta-theoretical statements of the post traditional with reference to the exploded, divided image. This is even more valid with regard to the media and apparatus of temporality which have arisen from the technological history of the modern age (such as, for example, television and video).

The specifically artistic takes recourse – against the overpowering pressure of mass communication, of a life dominated by technology and a highly ritualized working world – in a hasty rather than quiet withdrawal from aesthetic pressure to intervene in power, to the absolute morality of the artistic subject. Parallel to this, a new haste develops – a continuation of the paradoxes – in the search for inevitable innovation. Hysterically planned sensibility becomes a self-induced drive to find artistic form.

For precisely this reason, authenticity is not a quality of materials and not an isolated, invisible instance of artistic will. Authenticity can and must be read in aspects of signs in which certain attributes of objects are expressed. The pictures do not certify authenticity, but specialized zones in them (creating of types, handwriting, styles, significant aspects, etc.), which are read semiotically as systems of notation and are grasped operationally in diagrams.

The working disposition of a restorer is no different – he constructs a work as the object of his coming intervention and on the basis of conceptual

values. In the last instance, these emerge from the background of aesthetic trends, conveyed norms, and the continuity of convictions established over a lifetime and passed on, which entails unavoidable dogmatism.

The attributive structure of the "genuine" – for it does not exist as a quality, but is produced by a process of referring attributes to aspects and vice versa – indicates that authenticity is not evident, but an authority supported by a discourse and thus lent to works and to authors. More generally, behind the alternating dominances of expression, authenticity is a factor of self-interpretation of the cultural change with respect to hierarchies of education and centralized media (tasks, technologies, the principles of archives, image production processes). Something like a "worthiness for conservation", and not the material itself, is measured against these hierarchies of dominance whether in harmony with or in opposition to the uncertain will of the contemporary artist. The trend towards eternalization is likely due to the fact that we still live in a culture oriented on meaning, even one which is greedy for meaning, a culture of metaphysical references, the imaginary aspect of which has long been defined by art history. Its reference to the superiority of the portrayal by contrast to all technical processing of communication by art-immune information is not as much evidence of the nature of the authentic than of a highly arbitrary, moral rejection of the supposedly valueless, the purely derived and the secondary. Accordingly, technical, mechanical forms and the media of art production tend to be stigmatized as plebeian, and are considered unsuited to eternity as a result of their fixation on pleasure. They are thus denounced as "illegitimate".

3. Art, Durability, Technology, Cooperation

In face of today's variety of working materials and the differences in concepts of art which can no longer be summarized by the term "art", a theory of authentic values referring to the problems of semiotic notation and material configuration is difficult to formulate. Due to the differences in materials, it would have to be sufficiently elastic. And for the coherence of notation, it would require sufficient stringency, that is, it would have to

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be simultaneously open and closed. I cannot develop such a theory in the space available to me here. I shall provide, however, a collection of aspects which are illuminating for the development of a theory, viewing the structural conditions of the treatment of the authentic far more than the breaks in material development and formal contexts of recent contemporary art. The historical change may prove to be unimportant by comparison to the creative forces of a constant of "art" behind all the differences in works.

The variety in genres, materials, and forms may be interpreted – on the contrasting background of the museum – as the location of a connection between the individual work and the great system of notation of a normatively directed art history. This is true both of their specific handling of individual determining characteristics, as well as the creation of the aspectual with regard to the same determination of an object – an interpretation as modification which always points to a unity, here of the museum. The use of materials or media and the employment of specific time structures are not able to define "art" in the sense which I have outlined here. In differing ways and independent of the incorporation of this time in form and material, the temporality of the work refers to the paradoxical time structure of the museum as that vessel which promises to connect the fleeting and the eternal in a future reproducibility of works. The museum's promise of the perennial only exists insofar as radical concepts of art cast doubt upon its validity. The functioning narrative "art history" only has a normative superiority. "Art history" not only originates in pictorial theory, but is also determined by the history of philosophy. An essential aim and a conflict of ideals within this is the divergence between the aesthetic completion of history in the museum and each individual, temporalized, accelerated, fragmented, and isolated effect of artistic strategies and concepts upon history and society. This divergence first realizes the rich field of art and its history. Without the poles of retention and disappearance, archive and production, the latent and the evident, the perennial and the fleeting, the image collection which represents the progress of history, and the scenarios, which incorporate the possibilities of adaptation for the rules of art creation and mediation, would all lack force. The narration of "art history" draws energy for its own dynamics from this polar structure which repeatedly tempts it to underlay pictures with a scarcely demonstrable

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dimension of sense, beauty, pleasure, aesthetic conviction, urbane ductility of the person, etc. On the other hand, it compels us to constantly visualize the fact that relevant drives for the development of art are never intrinsic, but always come from the outside; they are provoked by singular interventions. In the sense of a concentration on the aspectual suggested here, in which attributes of objects are bound to signs of expression, value, etc., one may clarify the way in which expectancies and concepts of art differ. The aesthetic utopia of the modern era has at least two refuges: on the one hand, the negation of art in life and the disappearance of the avant-garde, and on the other, the heroization of the engineer, the construction of new world-creating machines, the great technical dreams, the *invenzioni* since the Renaissance. According to one's own tendency, these expectations are supplemented by constructivist strategies for a reconstruction of the dominating media of the modern technological society or with visions of art as the medium of social revolution, of an anonymous collectivity and the like. The only constant is the interface of the linking of such expectations – "art".

4. Conservation, Interpretation, Transitoriness

The more open the choice of working materials for artworks, the more individualistic and – dependent on additional explicative notations – the more immaterial the assertion of the artistic capability of materials produced as art will be. Concept art, for example, fundamentally and completely evades the idea of proof embodied in a work by maintaining that art is not dependent upon the existence of an artwork, but only upon the conceivability of the extension and continuation of "art", that is, upon the continuation of the narration about and through art. The work is then present only in the modus of absence, as examples such as Manzoni's earth sculpture or Yves Klein's exhibition of empty rooms indicate.

    The specific technical aspects of the development of art in the last decades can be generalized fairly easily. First, they confirm that what can be classified as art is not dependent on the typology or the materiality of the medium. Aesthetic values can only be developed by means of comparison

within a formal context, and the specifics of a particular arrangement, type of depiction, or pattern of formal scenarios. In general, however, to the extent that hardware determine the appearance of the artwork – from the TV screen to computer control, multimedia, the sequential, and installations – it is likely that the artist is no longer an isolated, authentic inventor, but the co-user.

In his own work, the artist receives his role in society in quite a normal way. Restorers, but also conservers who are involved in the first presentation of a complex work with numerous technical, installative aspects, become responsible partners with the artist in his decisions. The traditional artist's studio, therefore, extends to a more complex basis of realization, the cooperative structures of which increasingly correspond to those involved in the production of a film. The colophon of an exhibition catalogue or the credits of a film are the only examples in which all those involved are listed by name. The technical utilization and the complexity of the means of production – in the case of new technologies – necessitate even more intense cooperation; apart from the fact that knowledge of the work can be separated from the process of production. For example, Jeff Koons commissions his works to be made for him; he himself is not involved in their production at all.

Not only this overcoming of one's own work or the multi-reproduction of the media create new problems, but also the hybridization of the artwork. As a sculpture, for example, the medium of video is traditional – the only difference being that TV screens are a different material to marble. But as soon as the screen is used as a medium for the electronic presentation of images, the media situation is extended and a paradigmatically different interface of cooperation emerges – particularly when it comes to repair and restoration. As a program strategy, video does not come into the domain of art, but of the logistics of mass cultural pioneers such as Nam June Paik who saw this distinctly and with a certain melancholy. Nevertheless, the insight did not prevent them from continuing to produce artworks in a penetratingly conventional sense, which mass communication a priori is incapable of altering, and indeed, does not intend to alter. The problem of cooperation becomes considerably more complex in face of completely new interfaces and their artistic use, such as computer nets,

WWW, and the like. Here the demands involved in securing the lifespan of an artwork which either lays claim to this durability itself or has demonstrated its paradigmatic importance for contemporary art, corresponds exactly to the need for cooperation in the development of the work when the artists integrate numerous other experts besides technicians and experts in the information sciences.

There are numerous theoretical and practical problems for a discussion on the status of authenticity, as well as for the dimension of restoration which results from multimedia, inter-media, and installative works. They relate to different levels in the organization of space and time – one might recall the differences between working process, use of technology, production, contextuality, and the message of works by, for example, Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, and Gary Hill, who are without a doubt some of the few decisive figures influencing art today and have altered the contours of "art".

Theatricality of reception, sequential images in space, diffusion and multiplication of viewpoints by contrast to a baroque sculpture by Bernini, for example, provoke the question whether one may still refer to such an installation as sculpture (assemblage, collage, three-dimensional art, etc.), although some of its elements are traditional, and some are determined by new media such as electromagnetic recording processes and their corresponding films.

For as long as possible, one should adhere to the idea that new materials can be interpreted as aspects of the "sculpture" on the basis of assemblage. The assemblage includes all the theoretically relevant problems of a multimedia work with one exception – the time of motion pictures, the sequence of images which cannot be absorbed into the paradigms of traditional art history, into the topography of surface and depth. From the point of view of restoration, such abstraction from the concrete materials must be handled differently in each case, but permits us to see works as the depiction of an idea. Some questions may be added at this point. When one can describe something as an idea, does it not have its place in tradition and is it not therefore possible to see it as something which may be passed on to future generations? Does conservation in its primary sense mean keeping, or (already) handing down? Is every act of handing down not bound to a system of notation for the creation of a systematic and

technically reproductive capacity for manipulation of the chosen objects? This would not originate – which is also true of the codes of the word languages – from the objects chosen, but from their notation in superior sign systems and meta-languages (language for object languages).

Insofar as the intention determines the work, all art is founded on the concept of art. But intention, as Baxandall (1986) demonstrated, is not located with the lonely, isolated subject, but a cultural description of a problem linking individual impulses to a consciousness of form, technological methodology, and the perception of mental dispositions for the regulation of the imaginary. When applied to our topic, authenticity may well be an individual dream, but its "hard" reality lies in the intentional relation of expression in the work, stable form, and a system of guiding principles. That is why the restorer, as one of the most significant instances of maintenance and time regulation, is part of this active interpretation of a problem. The conditions for the preservation of a work must be negotiated, and superficially, this may come into conflict with the will of the artist. Yet if Franz Kafka had not known perfectly well that Max Brod would never destroy his works, he would not have handed them over with orders to burn them after his death. He could have done this himself without any problem if he had really wanted to. The actual words spoken, and the truth behind those unspoken words have nothing to do with this steadfast, if secret cooperation. As a rule of thumb, therefore, expanded with due consideration, the following applies: art is not an invention of the artist. The systematic relations which lead to its production are too complex for this. It is rather sad that we live in a culture which is prepared to surrender almost anything to the prototype of artistic will, but ultimately this only compensates for the fact that an increasingly small number of individuals have an increasingly reduced freedom to make decisions.

5. Future, Restoration, Diminishing Time

The time structure of restoration may be different or exactly the same as the duration of time which the artist grants his works. Some obvious examples of an art calculated for a limited time are works by Dieter Roth,

Miriam Cahn, and Fluxus. Structurally and principally, the time structure of restoration may be seen as directed against the time structure of artistic concepts to the extent ethics and an awareness of a social task are assumed by restorers. The artistic intention – and this is the scandal hoped for, or at least a sensual leap into a conscious paradox – of decay and disappearance is structurally directed against the perenniality of the created artwork. And this in the context of the only institution which ensures a future awareness of artistic concepts, that is, survival in history; without the assurance of which the negation of the promise of the perennial as an artistically actual, destructive, and radical manifestation would make no sense, but also have no further reference for overall responses. And this is infuriating. The more strictly a work can be reduced to an idea, the more one is able to grant power to encroach on future time in order to articulate this idea. This is scarcely likely to succeed without at least using elements of materialization. Restorers and conservers are therefore guarantors of the authentic, coexisting with artists. The authentic is not the original, but whatever may be relevant to hand down, although there are no final criteria to determine this. Each epoch has the right to a radical turn-around of values, just as, with Nietzsche, everything which has come into being is entitled to die one day – and not only the securers of a linear, homogeneous tradition, avoiding waste and decay. Preservation is always the production of an actual form, the shaping of a present interpretation of the content, never simply a protection of its material and objective moments. Therefore, maintenance – from the very beginning, indivisibly and unavoidably – is construction which is always dependent upon external and contextual settings. Restoration, particularly in its aesthetic aspects, is a constructive activity and moves within a normative, legal field of tension. Just as there can be no absolute, private (i.e., isolated from collective interests) ownership of art or works which are decisive for the continuance of the imaginary in a cultural society, in extremis the restorer must act against the declared wishes of the isolated artist when it is possible to prevent the disappearance of an idea paradigmatically articulated and created in the form of a sensually perceptible, exemplary work. To put it bluntly, an artwork belongs neither to the artist who makes it, nor to the person who has acquired it – even if the latter, in particular, has repeatedly contributed to the sur-

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vival of the work. An artwork, however, can only "belong" – idealistically, that is, in terms of content – to that to which it is subject, to the logic of its ideal and formal context. This insight into the functional logic of the imaginary is irrefutable, even if legal judgment may only greet it with a weary or amused smile. Asked whether, in the name of civilization, there are fixed, absolute normative instances of a worthiness for conservation of a physically identifiable object against the wishes of its author, I would clearly answer yes, and I would negate the question whether the law of ownership is one-hundred percent valid. If the artistic will writes off works to transitoriness, then their utilization demands a medium of articulation which survives the physical existence of the work in time. That is, for example, any linguistic description of the work or, with certain limitations, every depiction of it. The permanence of the work has been decisively separated from the intention of the author in any case.

In principle, therefore, the restorer is not a later-born servant, but the present co-author of an authentic artwork. His significance at least corresponds to the role of the producer and sound technician in the case of a musical work, such as that by Glen Gould. This has no authentic integrity true to the score and analogue, that is, in a congruency of the work and interpretation time played as an organic whole, which – passively recorded with a shift in time simply due to technical reproduction – was however reproduced identically with regard to content. In the case of Glen Gould, the "takes" are exchanged regardless of the analogue demand for unity, and at the spatial and temporal location of its original production include mounting and sound sampling in the authentic sound. If the instance of the artist's will is not the moving factor in a restorer's decisions, the basis for its continuation, the measurement of a work's life-span, then it is also true to say that the act of original creation in time cannot be the decisive factor in a definition of authenticity. The legal, ethical, and archival questions are obviously inseparably bound to the philosophical here. In my opinion, two of these appear to be as paradoxical as they are decisive.

First, must everything be conserved which does not demand to be transitory in its concept – whereby the concept of coupling artistic creation with strict transitoriness cannot in itself be transitory – regardless of whether such works will be forgotten some day, or will get lost? Naturally,

only ideas which have been noted have the potential for cultural, that is, durable presence. Principally, however, their objective power of incorporation is not dependent on this.

Second, are there absolute, fixable normative instances which may decide — in the name of civilization — on the worthiness for conservation of a physical object, be it in agreement with or against the declared or presumed wishes of the author? Fundamentally, i.e., independent of the decisive causal and situative decisions in the individual case, only the following maxim is legitimate: restoration must always aim for the best possible and most durable conservation of a material, object, or ensemble for a conceivable and realistic future. This future begins with the conclusion of the restoration efforts. This is true of all possible theoretically supported handling of the original material to be conserved. In fact, restoration is always an exemplification and not a representation, that is, it is a pars pro toto process. All restoration is, therefore, a present day narration for the future in which the power of the narration of "art history" can be measured. In the name of an aesthetic completion of history, it presents a plea for the preservation, collection, and arrangement of essential embodiments of the *Zeitgeist*, and has even included those trends of the avant-garde which disperse radically, which disappear and leave center-stage, which aim to be absorbed into life.

The difference of qualities with respect to works passed on to the future emerges from the quantitative measuring of the life expectancy, that is, an actual attribution of time units in the modus of the future. What may be different is the conditions for the calculation of the future — a speculative guarantee of its durability, trust in the linear nature of its sequence, the quasi natural perspective of reliable survival. However, in an epoch of drastically diminishing time, this represents the essential problem. In terms of the logic of conservation, nothing in the previous problems is altered by video or any other non-digital media.

The decisive problem, that, on a global scale, we are using up the future faster and faster, putting it behind us, the fact that time as a whole is shrinking, is not a prospective problem limited to the handling of art. However, the museum paradox is intensified by the obviously intended reduction in the lifespan of many contemporary artworks, a trend which

generally leads to the avoidance of the paradigms of eternalization. Art would thus become the intensified object of experience rather than of cognitively structurable experience, and the museum would become a stage in between temporalized and fleeting presences. It would be a place which could no longer meet the expectations of representation of symbolically preserved times in the long term, and therefore, no longer follow the logic of incorporations in chronological sequences and series.

However, the problem of archiving and restoring is basically different in the digital field. Here we can and must replicate identically, here the concept of the original no longer makes sense. In face of its subjection to the media, the material is immune and variable and every use of the material and the archives extends rather that wears out. Here the user is no longer the recipient or viewer, but the arranger, producer, director, and engineer. Everything which is objectified, including the artwork, becomes a half fabrication and a constantly alterable, constantly available raw material. Every end product is also starting material, the end form and the raw material cannot be differentiated, either physically or ontologically.

This kind of future will certainly pose new questions, but it will not stop being future, and therefore passing time; as a unity of the linear and the discontinuous. If the future is to be shapeable from the restorer's perspective, then it is because the description of problems cannot be eliminated. Because the traditional must also be set in scene from the present standpoint and is, therefore, the result of constructions, not their genetic or objective precondition, we can assume that the greater the store of artworks made actual which are not identical with tradition, the more capable we are of handling the future which will one day become the present. The materials and forms of whatever is necessary for this must develop along the lines of problem descriptions, not along the lines of existing collections. This demand means that the preserver of cultural heritage is transformed into an operator of meaning, one who creates, retains, modifies or completely alters forms and conditions of reception. He is analogous to the artist, without striving to be an artist in the sense of an authentic originator, since the active, witnessing guarantee of the genuine is always more complex than its generative and genetic affirmation.

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■ Connectivity and Cartography. On Artistic Practice, Labor, Subjectivity, Agency

In the following, we will regard artistic practice as the construction of actions which deploy different cartographies, such as those that are dedicated to the transformation of virtual machineries, of the Net and the coupling of place and dislocation, and to the continuously changing relationship between virtual and real spaces. Artistic practice develops specific methods for generating specific modes of agency. It works concretely within connected cartographies. The problem of how "art" is brought about by its system and its institutions, as the confirmation of what sustains it in constant self-affirmation, is secondary and can therefore simply be taken for granted.

The cartographies are a mold, a form in which their scope, and not abstract keywords, determines the thematic focus, the political positioning, and the establishment of a software for specific agencies in a unity of spaces and time. Artistic practice develops its type of agency through the articulation of concepts of the machine-like and a transformation of the apparatuses which can be described as operating in intermediate states, as a sphere of inter-machines (*Zwischenmaschinen*). Operative forms of a punctual and punctualizing (*punktuellen* and *punktualisierenden*) connectivity cannot take effect without concrete spatial-temporal intersections.

The decisive question is, therefore, how the intervention into inter-machines and the interfaces between operative factors within cartographies are politically effective. The question is not how far artistic practice can be of immediate political effectiveness. Artistic practice as action does not operate in a self-sufficient field, but in that of society, its media and institutions, dispositions and practices, imaginations and machinations. Interventions into digital apparatuses and networks do not take place in the name of the self-reproduction of "art", they do not intend to formulate definitions, but they relate to the entire field of the living world (*Lebenswelt*). This is why the point is not a specific political discourse about labor and subjectivity. The question is how actions can change established discourses and dispositives, practices and politics, how such actions can be generated by the non-interchangeable methods and configurations of a specific artistic

practice. Such artistic actions touch on the kernel of questions which normally relate to the issue of "creativity". How can relevant actions be generated whose political and social development is crucially dependent on artistic processes and the initiation of specific methods? Artistic practice, like other forms of agency, is related to the disintegration and restructuring of society. These processes affect the basic framework of the relationship between labor, communication, and subjectivity, and therefore, it makes sense to develop an additional cartography. I shall attempt to create such a cartography in two steps, first, with a series of comments about key concepts of the current debate regarding labor, action, subjectivity, and politics, followed by considerations on how key contextual categories of current artistic practice would have to be defined in order to change society in its actuality, passing through all its intermissions and incongruities, its heterogeneities and ruptures.

I.

COOPERATION. There is no "collective intelligence" that emerges from the Net – that is pure ideology and mystification. It articulates once again the old fiction of the workers' collective (*Gesamtarbeiter*: literally "total worker"). However, the virtual working collective has never been an experience, but always a construction devoted to the historiographic model of mimesis, the appropriation of the controls externalized in history, i.e., it has been devoted to freedom *as* violence. In the virtual space of asynchronous, de-hierarchized, decentralized, inestimable, heteronomous operations and options, the virtual working collective turns out to be as impossible as any construction of organic, omnipotent, and coherently organizable subjectivity. These are mere fictions resulting from an idealist philosophy of history which advances the capitalist heteronomy, the subjection to operational conditions and parameters of the machine. In the Net, there are no options and certainly no incorporations of the kind implied in the claim that the ideals of the French Revolution have just now and finally been realized in the digital universe. As if these ideals had never been overpowering and dynamized options of force, and as if they had never organized mastery on a grand scale! In contrast to this supposition, the notion of a collective intelligence is replaced by that of a punctualizing connection, the idea of

homogeneous cooperation is replaced by that of a singular intervention, the universal network by the incursion into a transformed inter-machine. In this context, subjectivity no longer offers a sufficient concept. It would only be worth reactivating if it could be turned against the normalizing tendencies of globalised communication in the field of the intermediate stages, i.e., of the Net itself by means of resistance and anticipatory operations.

SOLIDARITY AND TEMPORALITY. On all levels of machinization, solidarity is not based on calculation, but belongs to the kernel of what we call ethos and for which there are no other reasons than those by which the ethos itself is motivated. Ethos may be constituted by produced givens, but it has no derivations. Ethos is not derived from its implements or effects, but of itself. It is not born from experiences, but constitutes them. It expresses decisiveness, but no evolutionary accumulations. Solidarity is a function of the production of agencies. It is neither an aesthetic experience based on the awakening of subjectivity, nor the explicit text of a social logic which constitutes itself from the active potential of the socialization of labor in and by machines. Machines themselves have become dispersed so that only ethos maintains its decisiveness.

CRITIQUE OF LABOR 1. REMARKS ON "SUBJECT". The very description of a claim to "subjectivity" results in a critical stance towards it. Not a critique from outside, but one that radicalizes the principle of subjectivity, i.e., a condition of subsistence, budgeted as an equivalent of money by the allocation of time resources, or the scarcity thereof. And secondly, ontologically rewarded and anthropologically hypostatized by the paradigm of the "homo faber" whose benign variation has always been the "homo faber" – and, therefore, is still recognizable in the deliria of overcoming the body in cyberspace. The emphatic notion of the subject in bourgeois society has always implied turning the cryptic text behind the private acceptance of values into the surface text of a public subject which, in this step of transformation, supercedes its social delusion and its individual privation. The emphatic notion of the subject is the factual experience of the "actual (*eigentliche*) production of history", in which case subject

is always meant as the subject of history and, in the final analysis, its aesthetic production. The facts of labor and the current state of subjectivity which has become the raw material of a mediatized symbolic mastery especially in the information-based, post-Fordist contexts of labor, critically demand overcoming their mystifications and temptations. Society cannot offer work for everyone and it staunchly refuses to provide subsistence without labor, although economically speaking, it could do this. Rather, society prefers to turn work into an embattled good, an object of war. Work's historical dignity has been reduced to the dubious honor of having been integrated into systems of compensation. On the whole, life may no longer be affordable, yet an attempt is made to save it in the form of calculated scarcity. The logic of this scarcity holds that whoever is inside the system occupies a workplace not in order to work but in order to enjoy the mercy of granted subsistence. At the same time, work has increasingly come to be synonymous with the avoidance of quality and the refusal of achievement. Therefore, *"sciopero bianco"* is no longer a weapon but the consensus and status quo, a lubricant in an obviously meaningless system. It has become meaningless because the standard value is no longer labor but profit, not production but waste, not the factory but the stock exchange, not mimesis but psychosis. How could subjectivity once more come to be understood as that strong, emphatic emblem, against or rather through this conjunction? Certainly not in the dialectical sense, *because* subjectivity has become scarcity. Emphatic and unleashed passion, rather than control by the historical constructs of rationality and civilization, have always been the constitutive principles of subjectivity. Its critique becomes historically complete when we realize that the emphatic notion of the subject is precisely what was supposed to revolutionize its discourse. The fact that artists to this day are used as emblems of subjectivity is probably based on the fact that artistic practice offers the model for work in a general sense. It may be that such a description cannot succeed without a residue of "subjectivity". Nevertheless, we can no longer close our eyes to the realization that the discourse of subjectivity has meanwhile become as illusionary as its self-definition. It corresponds to an organic coupling of two codings that historically emerge simultaneously – first, the continuation of the controlled creation of objects during the phase of the subjection to the machine

(consumption of life in dead labor; mechanization as the death mask of a realized, yet disguised productivity), and second, the formation of the subject as a unity of moments which threaten to fragment into extreme disunity and dispersion. Historically, the "emphatic notion of subjectivity" means that the more torn its moments and the more endangered its unity, the more organically its sovereignty is claimed. It is at the same time mastery and force, power and model of control. The historical experience of its disunity has, on the political left, always been compensated by diverting the emphasis onto the crypto-text of de-alienation which supposedly balances *any* disunity. With the publication of Georg Lukacs' *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), it became clear that any claim for a "subject of *Gesamtarbeit*", or "collective work", represented this discursive emphasis and that something that had never been a historic experience was supposed to become a historic expectation. This difference is nothing less than the radical rationale of revolution. Its force originates counter-factually, against the facts, because capitalism has always worked as the annexation of all previous forms of life. Capitalism does not collapse in crises because the crisis is the medium in which it unfolds its dynamics. More concisely, it is the crisis that it produces and through which it keeps itself alive. Capitalism draws its power of defining reality from the scarcity of reality, its inabilities which motivate any destruction of the real with the scarcity which it not only brings forth, but which it indeed *is*. The current calls for the construction of a collective on the level of immaterial labor continues to promote the hope for the systemically enforced, militant crypto-text of the subject, only by other means. This is why a skeptical attitude towards the theory of revolution has its reasons for drawing on the rich stock of apocalyptic expectations and the contempt for reality. In this sense, the situation today is paradoxical in every way. For there is nothing more disruptive to reality than the society of today which insists on work even where work is being destroyed and where the subject can only prove itself through the preparedness to be destroyed. On the other hand, it is deeply shocking to see that capitalism obviously "keeps itself alive" even where it no longer relies on capitalist labor, but where it pushes through overriding models as undisguised dictates of power (resource politics, money flows, direct subsistence regulation). Contemporary capitalism no longer

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resorts to initial accumulation, but produces permanent scarcity. In part, it produces and integrates the socialization of scarcity while suppressing or externalizing it so that no subject can emerge from crisis that might be able to operate in the name of the emphasis of history or the sovereign ability to work. The immaterial factors of economic regulation like planning, information, information processing, the application of knowledge, the transfer of energy, calculation, configuration, order, communication, have therefore been more important for a long time, i.e., even for pre-Fordist capitalism, than a virtual *Gesamtarbeitssubjekt*, or subject of "collective work", which takes shape through the production of things. The crucial tendencies of immaterial labor – subjectivity and self-presentation as an enforced relationship, informational subjection as a claim to subjectivity outside of the guarantee of equivalence – perpetuate the emphatic notion of the working subject into the epoch of its systematic destruction. Against this, one should not set "more subjectivity" but perhaps, the decisiveness of the ethos as an example and primarily in the form of resistance.

MOVEMENT BELOW THE LIMITS. It is evident that the organization of knowledge privileges – and, in particular, the regulation of restricted access to central (digital) databases – has become a crucial model for systemic productivity and will increasingly be one in the future. Parallel to this, we see the far-reaching standardization of the social distribution of subsistence criteria, in which case "distribution" has come to mean "reduce and make indifferent". Symbol processing is becoming the model for the allocation of potentials to act, completely independent from the earlier forms of evaluating capital options at the stock exchange. The incorporation of the rules according to which the knowledge society is realized appears in the form of a surrounding and overpowering panorama of machines and interconnected apparatuses. It makes sense to assume that the notion of the apparatus no longer allows a distinction between software and hardware. Among other things, this means that hardware can be changed through the modification of software. In accordance with their interests, the modalities of artistic agency position themselves below the limits of this system, and simultaneously at their limits. But not in a way that would describe a geography. The point here is not spatial expansion, but states,

qualities, vectors, dynamics. "Limit" is an image for the transitory possibilities of reconstructing the machines, from whichever side these possibilities may arise. Inter-machines are articulations of interventions from below the limits — insofar as they are closely linked and methodically systematized, hence not singular. Methods of the transitory are primarily artistic because they are geared not at the exploitation of systematic conditions, but at intention and intervention, i.e., they design and test a unique type of agency which, as will be discussed later, is neither normative nor instrumental.

PUBLIC SPHERE AND THE CRITIQUE OF LABOR 2. Capitalist organizations can live with the disruption of many distinctions. Doubtlessly, the capitalist economy frequently absorbs large areas and changing forms of the public sphere. The modeling of public space through cooperation and communication increasingly takes place beyond the traditional places of the factory and the workshop which have been abandoned, or more precisely, displaced into regions of poverty. The most challenging critique of labor possible today would be the break with the organization of scarcity, i.e., with labor itself. It remains unclear how entire national economies of wastefulness and productive excess should be conceptualized concretely. Excess which overcomes scarcity would especially overcome the excess which under capitalism can only take shape under the condition of and as scarcity. A critique of labor is a program that depends on the degree and the quality of the public sphere. Only the fixation on wages and money, not the promise of paradise, remains of the dictate of labor. What remains is chiefly the necessity to live by the mercy of the availability of money and other sources of income which have been broadly privatized. Capitalism is made strong by the fact that it is the most primitive form imaginable of organizing life. It operates from the position of producing indifference. Inter-machinelike agency connects a number of already mediatized spaces. A public sphere constructed in this way is crucial for playing with new forms of cooperation between labor and machine. If society still depends on the production of surplus value (form), then the point today is no longer its accumulation but its productive destruction (transformed content). This defines the place of artistic practice in its specific public space. We have to remind ourselves that the public sphere has never been described ex-

haustively through its physical expanse, even if conceptions fixated on this have prevailed, culminating in the grotesque post-Fordist and telematically obsessed conjuring of a supposed "disappearance" of the public sphere, of reality, the material, and the physical. The public sphere has always been a normative construct, a concept functioning counter-factually, a postulation and regulative idea, a recoverable corrective device rather than an empirical realization of an ideal. Following from this, we should briefly consider the individual factors:

– *Cities thrive on multiple sub- and partial cultures. Urbanity is essentially a synonym (and connotation) for dispersed and yet connected public spheres. This, however, does not guarantee its heterogeneity. Because cities are constructs ruled by dominant interests, partial cultures are continuously integrated and dissolved, used, and pushed aside. They are transitional forms in a dispositive, they occupy sites with varying qualities without having a constant substance themselves. In times of horizontal equalization, i.e., during the democratic intermediate phases in the history of republican cities, every partial culture has the task of autonomously combining its unique and determining characteristics with the self-imposed limits of its range of agency and validity. Partial cultures cannot close themselves off from all outside influences for the sake of their own interests (this would rather be a characteristic of monolithic and hegemonial cultures). They need both determining elements which set the limit and the autonomy of the self.*

– *The opposition of an ideal, un-mediatized public sphere against a medial, alienated, manipulative, always "modern" public sphere, is itself the historical product of media and technologies, originating from the opposition, realized within the medial exchange, of an un- or pre-media world as against a mediatized world. The discourse around a true, untainted public sphere only arises with the emergence of public journalism and the rhetoric of the printing press; the founding myth of a free and immediate communication is a philosophical and literary fiction.*

– *The epochs of a supposedly ideal socio-political public sphere, as, for instance, in the Italian city states of the Renaissance and the mod-*

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ern period, have left their imprint not only on the emphatic notion of the public sphere, but also on the notion of urban life itself. On closer inspection, these epochs have not been realizations of this ideal, but rather, epochs of the forceful manipulation of social allegiance by power-conscious elites that had access to means of force and used these without hesitation.

– A society that mentally, socially, and symbolically no longer trusts the validity of a specific public sphere, its function, and achievements actually abolishes the public sphere by speculating about its disappearance. Indeed, only by trusting its suggestive dispensation does it liquidate what is public. It cannot happen in any other way, for the public sphere is nothing but the confidence in it.

– The notion of an ideal public sphere is inseparably connected to the philosophical history of urbanity which makes it a European ideal. Archaic non-European cultures, as well as, for instance, the United States, have never subscribed to such idealized images. There are numerous types of cities whose core is not the Piazza della Signoria or some other stage of a social theater that, through all conflicts, remains committed to the ideals of equality, liberty, and solidarity, and whose consensus would be based on the worn-out notion of communication free of hierarchy and mastery. There are civilizations with important city cultures which have never known a public sphere that would traverse classes and clans (as, for instance, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Islamic countries, China).

In conclusion, we can say that the modern public sphere has been linked to a chain of reversals and mediatizations for so long that it is now impossible to think of the public sphere outside the crisscrossing medial dispositives. The history of mediatizations shows that in the course of its historical development, a real center in the public sphere has increasingly diminished. Instead, it evolves through the interpenetration of different partialities, vectorial movements and uncontrollable dynamics, i.e., a cartography of the topics and formulations of a society as an experiential, conflict-prone, and embattled construct whose evaluations are related to specific positions without referring to or even claiming a fixed space. The mutually

interpenetrating dispositives constitute the public sphere, whether in the form of a physical cooperation or as the coordination of discourses in the digital networks of information. The critique of singularities is formulated from the position of the singular. The classical issues of ethical cooperation can only be formulated from this perspective – protection of the weak and the incorporation of a notion of what is general. The public sphere has thus always been a counter-factual idea, the construction and instantiation of a virtualizing *"volonté générale"* – essentially a concept formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau – and not the accumulated and unified vectorial force derived from the will of everyone (*volonté de tous*). In a similar vein, Ilja Ehrenburg pitilessly insisted that socialism had to be something other than adding up zeros.

Today the public sphere is no longer dependent on the claim to and the presentation of an existing space, but on the formation and the influence, at best even transformation of mediatized public communication processes. The connections of locality and dislocality, of political movements and transformations taking place in the digital sphere, are both an attempt at deepening the experiences of cooperating with machines and, at the same time, restructuring an already media-shaped public sphere. Thus, a temporalized space like that of the Venice Biennial is equally and simultaneously used as an art site, as a site of connecting localizations and globalizations, and as the construction of a stage for the reflection of globalizations and local dispersions. Artistic practice cannot renounce this character of (or claim to) constructiveness. Precisely the intervention into the datascape through the development of open interfaces, the insistence on inter-machines and punctualizing connections can generate, foster, enhance, but also redirect unique local dynamics.

ARTISTIC PRACTICE. "THE POTENTIAL OF BECOMING". This notion of the public sphere also determines the concept of a software that is no longer different from the apparatuses and that enables specifically intended combinations. The public sphere becomes a dynamic force which, in singular instances, also operates within artistic practices. This connectivity makes it unnecessary to initiate an art-theoretically motivated "break with a taboo". The violation of aesthetic taboos is not only the transparent and linear calculation of an art system which has always functionalized every

imaginable avant-garde thrust, but also assumes an archaic model of artistic autonomy as an extension of the material field – an imperial gesture of submission of external territories whose "art potentials" have been newly discovered and which are about to be annexed. The demand on artistic practice to break through its final taboo and completely leave the aesthetic domain and become true operation proves to be a belated reflex of anarcho-syndicalist or situationist dreams of forcing the absolute into existence. This demand is also a paradoxical heteronomy by a regulated art system which automatically turns everything into "art" that relates to "art" – even in the form of the claim that artistic practice has to overcome the space of "art", destroy "art", betray it, make it disappear, and so on. The symbolic public sphere of "art" cannot be fractured in any way. It is stronger than any presumed evidence of reality outside of the artistic practice because it relates to "art". This works, even if it does so by splitting off or offering a mere nominalist claim. The trick only lies in the reality of the staging. However, this does not imply that virtuality can no longer be defined in contrast to non-virtuality. Virtuality relates to the difference between the possible and the impossible, not to a scale of realities. The functional controllability of technical virtuality is as impossible to refute, both as a hypothesis and as heuristics of experimentation, as the historical thesis of the mastery of the social machine over the techno-machine. Heuristics organize virtual operation as a "potential of becoming". This potential is served by interfaces which move between the virtuality of the technological and of society and, therefore, also between an experience of reality and constructive imagination. Algorithms of self-organization and intermediate fields of agency are two of the crucial conceptual aspects of the development and the implementation of such interfaces.

COOPERATION AND MACHINE. "Machine" describes a configuration of elements which are structured hierarchically, statically, and unambiguously in a stringent context by means of a repeatable sequence of commands and dispositions. Often the notion of the machine is taken to be synonymous with the "technical machine" and it is suggested that it controls itself. Yet if we look, for instance, at Lewis Mumford's reconstruction of the history or genealogy of the machine as a dispositive of power, this

confirms the assumption that in the last instance the social machine is the essential element in controlling all machines. This includes the machines of the imagination. Fantasy machines and machines of desire are subject to the dispositive of social control which also integrates the techno-machine. The latter develops its own dynamics and has its materially forceful impact on the formation of many contexts of life. But the social machine is more encompassing and more differentiated than the techno-machine because it embraces the organization of all artifacts which are always an achievement of the social and thus a condition for the technical. Artificial intelligence is neither an instinctive part of natural history nor an anthropological necessity but always a cooperation which is constructively produced by artificialities – the division of labor as a medium of the organization and distribution of power, time, and the potentials for agency. Both culture and civilization certainly have a technical basis, but their internal dynamics are far more complex than the one suggested by the notion of the engineer or the programmer as a meta-artist or creator of a mega-machine. These conceptions are insufficient for describing the notion of the dispositive which cannot be tied to a single mediality. With regard to the digital apparatuses, even these general considerations suggest to artists a skeptical attitude towards all reductive models which use a "heroification" of professional models for the apparently absolute predominance of scientific calculation which is really a specific force that articulates its mastery with other factors and which materializes itself in the form of technical artifacts. If the distance between the artists and the pre-produced parameters of the digital machine, of software and technology, is too small, the artists are degraded to the latter's appendices. The claim for a fully autonomous and also self-sufficient techno-machine is primarily a result of the desire that it can sufficiently describe cultural creativity through the model of the production of material objects, and thus creativity can be generally absorbed by artifacts. The euphoric discourse about virtual realities (which has become more subdued as of late) is based therefore on a fundamental misunderstanding of the sciences and the poetics of the artificial.

II.

EXTENSION, EXPANSION, HYBRIDS. What is seen as a characteristic of the arts of the 20th century throughout many of its stages and instances is even more relevant for artistic practice using digital media. The extension of the material basis goes together with an increased leveling of the distinction between genres and medializations. The state of development of the arts suggests that a general separation of, for example, music, poetry, sculpture, graphic arts, or performance is no longer possible. For decades, the development of the arts has been determined by models which cannot be restricted to the production of representations any longer. Artistic practice or forms of action can no longer be confined to a narrowly circumscribed area of material, expression, and medialization. For centuries, the main concern had been the extension of materials and consciousness, whereas the artistic practice based on media focuses on an extension of models of agency and on a construction of expression and mediation which is no longer identical with the creation of the works. Artistic practice based on media transforms the expectation of consciousness into an experimentation with the formative categories of social and political action. Artistic practice thus surpasses the dissolution of the limitations of a particular material or expressive field. It negotiates between the construction of new methods, the general conditions of the intervention into important social apparatuses, and the experiences of permanent change and steady dissolution. It projects itself beyond the claim of simulations to be an art of illusions, a methodical game. Artistic practice with media generates continuous connections and combinations; it is the invention of matrix and resistance through which new combinations become possible. It articulates itself as a construction of the movements and tendencies made possible by it, as the programming of a form of agency which facilitates new combinations of place, time, and mechanizations through a continuous displacement of the dispositives of the machinelike. Its political implications do not unfold according to a specific plan, not according to directional, instrumental, and ideological actions, but by facilitating creative action.

ART THEORETICAL CONSEQUENCE. Art theory is not a retrospective con-
templation which needs art production as a prerequisite, but is a force that
works within artistic practices and forms a strong potentiality of their reali-
zation. In terms of the displacing action that affects the architectures, pro-
grams, and dispositives of the digital machines and apparatuses, art theory
can be described as a critique of all suggestions of an immersion and tech-
nical implementation of the senses into a new *Gesamt(daten)kunstwerk.*
The discourse about the *Gesamtkunstwerk* attempts to tie radical artistic
practice back into a neo-Baroque sensualism by means of collaging hybrid-
ized deifications of the body. Such euphoric promises of the *Gesamtkunst-
werk* are historically marked as the self-delusions of a totalitarian will to
power by means of "art" and are currently being replaced by a radical
construction of the artistic practice based on media. Promises of the *Ge-
samtkunstwerk* are no longer out of sync with the dispositions of agency
of the inter-machines, but they are compensatory through and through
– supposed saviors of an "art" that remains fixated on the illustration of
the collaged senses – whereas radical artistic practice insists on the il-
lusion, the bringing into play of heterogeneously sharpened senses. The
Gesamtkunstwerk is a fiction which remains committed to the mimesis of a
simulation of machine ecstasies and thus to an institutionally determined,
alienated reproduction of "art". This commitment is manifestly retrograde.
The backwardness is expressed by the insistence on an "autonomous sub-
jectivity", on the efforts of a fictitious subversion of the machines in the
service of a no less fictitious social "total subject" (*Gesamtsubjekt*). The de-
terioration of the doctrines and promises of modernity has been a decisive
marker against the purely formal fraying of the arts and the regressions
of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* salvations. Not least with the aim of radicalizing
modernity as a machinically illusionary critique of the self-delusion of the
controlling subject.

IMPRECISION. No single quality is immediately and unrelatedly available
in the field of cartographies. Rather, terms and what they stand for – both
the subject and the grammatical position of the noun as a given – signify
the task of construction. The point is not primarily one of aesthetic quali-
ties. Imprecision refers to the experience of a movement in apparatuses

and dispositives. In an analogous way, we can speak of terms like collective agency and autonomy. They evolved in the factory, in the paradigm of object-producing (rational) labor, in relation to which the producing force experiences itself as object-determining, and thus powerful, in control of its language – a language which is both the experience of an objective and the production of the object. However, in the dispersed field of creative action, such objects no longer exist. Unavoidably, objectivities have to be produced over and over again. The methods that have been devised for this are oriented towards all sorts of possible reference points, but not necessarily towards the control institution of subjectivity. They do not negate subjectivity, but subvert it according to the vague self-perception that the Self (*das Eigene*) can, but does not necessarily have to be called "subjectivity", as evidence emerges from self-perception which imposes itself as a punctualizing movement, as both fact and medium of the self and the heterogeneous, as an interruption of the subjective. The instantiation of this evidence is trivial in the true sense of the word – materially and existentially given, and thus a condition of the possibility of action. Beside this, it represents nothing that it would promise or lay claim to. The specificity of artistic agency means nothing else, in which nothing is predetermined and that all parameters which define an invention, construction, or method do not delimit the field of possibilities, but still offer areas of indetermination and paths into the open to the degree that the already established is fixed and allocated. The play with contingencies does not operate in the classical modern field of the accidental, but in intermediate states, on intermediate strata. That is why artistic agency operates in the inter-machine and at the interfaces to all other forms of agency which are equally close and distant from it.

AGENCY. Normative and utilitarian agency are not the same as creative agency. Subjectivity is no longer the institution of a hierarchically structured organization of actions and their control which would culminate in the narrating subject of the *Bildungsroman.* Subjectivity is dynamized. It should be conceived of as subjectification which is continuously reworked by the conditions of its mediation, i.e., especially by the virulence of the machine. Processes of subjectification are, at the same time, singular and

multiple. We are always dealing with alternative processes of subjectifi-cation. Invention and heuristics, experimentation and illusionary tests no longer align themselves with the front lines of progress. Subversion has become a dimension of the apparatuses. In Foucault's terms, where there is power, there is counter-power. Intersection and opposition are dependent on the articulation of the singular, but they can also expect a multiplica-tion of singular events at any moment. They are not completed in process-es of resolution. According to Deleuze and Guattari, molar and molecular processes continuously interlace, transform, and recode each other. Appa-ratuses can be constructed by shifts and displacements, by using already existing subversions which need no counter-power of the subject. Artistic agency is not something that gets fixed when sectorial separations are affirmed and simultaneously removed. Under the dictates of immaterial labor, we find forced analogies between aesthetic, political, social, and ar-tistic agency. As long as it remains within the realm of wages, equivalence, and the legitimation of subsistence as social usefulness, immaterial labor exhausts itself in forms of symbol processing which reduce agency to the linear working-through of signals. The distinction between instrumental and symbolic agency is as reductively academic and unproductive a read-ing of the dynamics of interpenetration as was the earlier opposition of labor and language. Together with the dispositives of mastery, the condi-tions of interaction and communication are always – forcefully and vio-lently – inscribed into the sphere of labor. Therefore, subjectivity is always permeated and ruptured, medialized and modeled. It no longer represents a solution to the concrete or how collective configurations of the invisible can be deciphered. Revolution theory is no longer based on the mystifica-tions of the subject. Subjectivity has irrevocably proven to be a concept of mystification. It now has to be subverted itself, turned around as a game of and with itself. The art of illusion is to act and remain on the side of difference. The fact that all earlier forms of agency are in crisis can only mean that we have to dispense with the idea of a dissolution of the crisis in the form of the empty shroud of "subjectivity". The triad of labor, society, and art can no longer be resolved through the concept of subjectivity. This has consequences for all notions of agency. Agency is no longer based on the model of the expression of a virtual subject that experiences itself

as organic in this virtuality. It is no longer the result of a closure. Agency becomes the experience of the dispersed which can only lift itself up in relation to the Other through resistance and friction. Creativity cannot be understood as a specification in the pursuit of goals. Artistic practice as agency no longer serves to comprehend life or to construct the subject, but serves to process the confused traces and markers through which actions and machines inscribe themselves into a field of the dispersed, of vicinity and distance. The production and the usage of artistic methods and the reception in the space of artistic practices no longer reproduces the symbolic mastery of a systems-theoretical, self-sufficient institution. On the contrary, artistic practice communicates on its own account and thus presents, articulates, and displaces problems which are widely known and explosive. Insofar as immaterial labor is no longer tied to the paradigm of producing accumulated values embodied in things, artistic practice becomes conceivable as a continuous opening up of fields of agency. It is no longer concerned with extending mediation, but with interventions which effect radical transformations. Possibilities for this are wide-ranging interventions into software and apparatuses. This might, as a side effect, also give rise to the contour of a subjectivity which no longer falls for the madness of the sovereign production of history and liberty, realized as mastery and terror. In any case, artistic practice articulates possibilities which turn against a communication of mastery in the field of cartographies. It provides reference points and viewpoints of a new construction. Resistant subjectivity is projected in the model of cooperating with and through machines, but also with and through different localizations and dynamics. As a form of cooperation, collective authorship turns the producer into a witness. And it turns creation into commentary, invention into critique. Cartographies are the appropriate medium for this. In them, the logistics of incomprehensibly complex cooperation become visible, step by step, case by case, aspect by aspect. But only to the degree that artistic practice itself opens up a field of social agency. Artistic practice can enter this social field because it relates to an unlimited number of forms of agency in society. It steadily processes in itself the mediations without which no form of reality can continue to exist.

■ Challenges the Media Pose for a Contemporary Design Theory

Nothing is more illuminating for theories of design than the onslaught of new media on the design scene and the reflection on history which it triggers. There are a number of fitting buzzwords we could use to talk about the state of current design theory. For example, the new obsession with "aura" in dealing with art celebrates the isolated and the sterile, such that certain vital themes can only be addressed as something directed against this kind of artistic practice. If the body is one of these themes, then art appears marginalized and oppositional, while the considerable regulatory powers of the imaginary are primarily concerned with producing clever visual design. However, this tends to be taking place more at the fringes of debate on design. Images of the body are in permanent circulation. They are conformist, hot, and fast. Artifacts of the media penetrate directly into the inner human being, with the self no longer truly offering protection by filtering things out for it has become a vacuum – a space for projections. The treatment of the body and its images in sports and in war both serve to enhance the breathless, tortured relationship to our own bodies. The imaginary has established itself as an independent guiding system within the realm of the media, implying that the individual being can no longer suffice in itself. Professional sports with unaltered atavistic cruelty have taken the place of more ancient rituals. Under pressure to obey the authority of mythology, older generations have eliminated the most able representatives of up-and-coming talent because they were seen as competition. This now takes the shape of a shameless dissolution of the body and life into forms which are forced upon us by daily dedication to a vision of things close at hand which is barely offset by the momentary, fleeting public presentations offered. The increasing brutality with which the body is handled – and not only in high-level sports, as theater and ballet are an extension of the torture inherent in the world of sports, although with other means – reveals the gradual militarization of our world of symbols. This is the result not so much of intentional action, but rather of automatic reactions and the logic of the phantasmagoric visual media and their impact on the imagination. The brand names and logos in business and cultural events

which art has produced propagates a concept of art which treats it as yesterday's advertising and reduces artistic intervention to the conceptual level, the two-dimensional level of the relationship of ad copy to image.

In-sight

As one can guess from this brief list of problems, the design euphoria of the 1980s has ebbed. And with it the vehement, public aspect of theories on design which saw themselves as the basis of any general understanding of society. However, this is no reason to feel sorry for ourselves. The avant-garde's view of its role in the 1980s, which considered everything to be a form of design, met the same fate as all avant-garde trends. As we know, these ultimately fail because they become too successful. The utopian core of art and design involves their becoming a part of life. Their success becomes visible at the very point where they disappear. It is the absence of art and design which suggests that they have been successful with respect to their own utopia which is, in turn, the force that drives them forward. The self-sublation of the avant-garde is the ultimate medium of their realization. Their inevitable disappearance forces the very abstractness which marks the end of the avant-garde as the fulfillment of its only possible claim.

By contrast, the situation with respect to electronic media appears to be quite different, as we are dealing with instruments of a new communications technology that is rampant on an international scale. Here, the theories that were so useful for the design discourse in the 1980s, theories on "invisible design" or "minimal intervention" no longer apply, if only because the physical, technological basis for these media corresponds to the last detail to both of these theories without further intervention on the part of designers, at least with regard to human perception. However, if the necessity of design no longer stems from the indifference of the object to be designed but has to be sought elsewhere (as nothing would be produced for the realm of the visible otherwise), then invisible design undermines its own theory. "Invisible design" then becomes identical with what a number of prominent media theorists have referred to as the struc-

turing of the media by a form of logistics that originates in military science and the ability of machines to transcend the capacity of programs to manipulate them. Whatever its claims, the magic word "immaterial" is of little use in proving that a cultural transformation is taking place. Nonetheless, it is representative of the fact that the design concepts of the 1980s have come to a standstill. This cannot be attributed solely to slogan-happy journalism which first discovered the new, telematic, electronic communications media in the 1990s. It is also fundamentally related to the substance of those design theories – such as the archetypal "pattern languages", ecological design, invisible design, minimal intervention, neo-expressionism as an anti-functional formal principle, neo-animism, and the methodological cult of the ugly in the context of the Alchimia and Memphis movements. All these have proved to be essential agents in giving designers a new legitimacy which has finally broken free of the Bauhaus trauma, although ironically a design theory based on systems theory has not been generated to date, despite the general popularity of systematic self-reference.

In retrospect

Though their roots go back far earlier, two theories of the 1980s especially stand out and are crucial to the new legitimacy of designers – "invisible design" and "minimal intervention". There are two sides to these theories, and the problems of the one side have become clearer than those of the other. Those who did not wish to restrict the power and legitimacy of designers to producing useful things, but hoped to expand it to include creating core, power-related areas of high technology and society – i.e., communication, technology, and planning in general – prefer to emphasize the other, less problematic side of the theoretical coin. It was certainly useful to regard design as a factor that regulated action systems and not a polytechnic method or a way of lending aesthetic form to natural resources. However, this ignored the fact that the theoretical description of what exists and the minimalist alteration of the given situation both presume that the world and reality have already been completely and utterly formed, furnished, conquered, and exploited. What both theories lack is the vital recourse

to a notion of a deficient reality that is felt to be inadequate, simple, or even non-existent. In this way, both theories are exaggerated reiterations of ways of appropriating reality which can assume that there is a surfeit of the given. This quality is precisely what made these theories successful in the 1980s and, moreover, linked them to the neo-expressionist genius cults of experimental design that had sprung up during the same decade. The neo-expressionist only superficially professed to aspire to a completely different goal. If manipulating the system of symbols is more important than devising possible physical forms for useful objects produced as design, then the tables can also be turned. Patterns of action, which are supposedly able to dominate the physical qualities of things as they first forge meanings and render them conveyable, seek material at random to use as an agent for that which was previously invisible, even if this is not in keeping with the criteria of "minimal intervention".

Outlook

In the wake of the design wave of the 1980s and the trend toward philosophical aesthetics in the early 1990s, the media trend has meanwhile been heralded as the last of the claims to a paradigm for design theory. Of course, the (intrinsic) claim that something is a paradigm is not necessarily identical to the paradigm itself, but is rather a reflection of the imaginary, mirroring the effects of the media and its own impact. The impact of the media itself ensures the validity of the imaginary. By dint of their sheer presence, the universally standardized media of communication and imagination, which level all idioms, sanction deviance, and marginalize alternative design projects, necessarily seem to be exemplary models, and thus, make the media paradigm seem thoroughly plausible. Any design theory of the 1990s can only be a media theory, and with good reason. This is often incorrectly purported to be the last avenue open to contemporary cultural theory, historical theory, philosophy, etc., an argument which is hardly convincing. Design theory resembles media theory to an extraordinary degree in that design theory retains its reference to main factors influencing society, and therefore has always been aligned with the media,

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although not necessarily by means of a concept of the media. The issue of the media cannot be detached from an inquiry into the basic theoretical preconditions which are at the heart of design concepts, such as those for actions, things, forms of communication, spaces, etc.

There is a key problem linked to the topical relevance of a design theory in the form of a media theory. Design and traditional design theory deal primarily with sensory perceptions at close range, while the media is concerned with telepresence, or presence over a vast distance. Design is oriented to the existence of perceptions, senses, and spaces in the "here and now", while media phenomena are geared toward a presence which has eliminated space or left it behind, and instrumentalized time as pure presence. There can no longer be a "now" when what comes later is no longer strictly related to what came earlier, but instead only generates friction where technically uninteresting deviations from real-time transfer occur. Signals are now sensed based on the binary difference between presence versus absence and not in terms of temporal sequence. This transformation also forces variations in corporeality to become abstractions with the result that the body itself gradually fades away, although it does not disappear in reality. It disintegrates, not as thing in itself for all to see, but in its capacity as a signifier. It crumbles because it no longer has a function, and because of the power of the compelling models and the way in which the imaginary penetrates unhindered into our inner world. As we have known since Lacan, evoking the decaying body is primarily a metaphor for the predominance of writing (the symbolic realm) which is especially susceptible to machine access and has no means of resisting this access. And, seen from a different angle, it aspires toward this of its own accord. Likewise, the motif of obsolescence or the decay of the body appear in current media theories which quickly cross the boundary into undisguised metaphysics. This involves a number of different trains of thought which need not trouble us further here. Unlike these theories, an expression like "decaying bodies" is not used in an empirical sense, but rather is meant to take on a metaphorical, discursive function. The decaying body is a rhetorical field inscribed by images and functions of natural corporeality in order to implement specific socially determined means of regulating that body which has been presented in linguistic and image form.

For any design theory which continues to elaborate on the categorical postulates of "pattern language", "minimal intervention" and "invisible design" in order to describe a decade of unrestrained telematic media, the common denominators of an immaterial world and problem networking underlying the three categories no longer express a strategic intervention or an achievement resulting from applying a knowledge of theory at the empirical level. They are simply facts which have been forced into existence by technology. The expression of a transforming consciousness against the backdrop of the developments in ecological, functional, and political-economic systems in the 1970s and 1980s now appears to have shifted to the "a priori" level which no longer promises to do away with the expert culture, but instead reinforces a new, intense rift between programmers and users. The old theoretical postulates are only available to competent programmers, while they remain concealed to the user. It is extremely doubtful that users will ever be able to regain the previously assumed proximity to the aesthetic expertise of a system "from the bottom up". And, with the introduction of Windows 95, it has become virtually unimaginable. Windows 95 enables data and media to be monitored via a "supplier" to a degree which in former times was unthinkable even in an absolutist system. What converges to form a "pattern language" in minimal intervention, invisible design, and a networked system of actions, is now strictly reserved for engineers. And for the first time, this appears to have made the long-hedged dream come true in which experts have absolute, a priori power over users, a dream that was previously called "modernity". The pre-settings are absent in Windows 95 for they have been integrated into the system logic which no longer distinguishes between hardware and software. Because telematic devices are used each time, this presumes completely networked access to a multi-media integrated user workstation. Intelligent or "adaptable" personal navigators have already been programmed into this system logic. As a result, the software is no longer a program. Indeed, it is nothing less than the entire range of communication. In terms of design theory, what has been built into this system logic fulfils the conditions of invisible design, although this is realized exclusively on the part of an expert culture.

Nonetheless, there are two things which are not determined by this variation on a self-referential absolutism based on system theory – methods of approaching the system programs from an artistic perspective, and corporeal presence which was initially not even considered.

Artistic view

Artists will mistrust any prefabricated data-design simply as a matter of principle, and bring aspects of presentation into play to steer the process of gleaning knowledge on clean-swept maps of previous epistemologies in less than familiar directions by means of playful innovations. As pioneers of the attempt to resurrect design, artists are capable of claiming that their artistic experimentation is authentic basic research. Art uses newly coined terminological and conceptual systems which engineers and programmers can and need not deal with. Replacing the informational with the poetic, putting language in place of that which serves to regulate and standardize, or innovation in place of reductive powers of expression are all artistic tasks, even in the so-called information age. New parameters in unknown territories must be determined, or, conversely, old parameters adapted in familiar maps. The philosophy of navigation is not a domain of a design form which sees itself as a marketing agent of purported trends, but rather the domain of an art form which must first re-expose design achievements. This, however, can no longer be attained by means of the familiar attitudes of creativity or expression, but rather at the interfaces of science, mathematics, and computer science. Groups such as "knowbotic research" provide perfect examples of what it could mean to the development of cognitively relevant programs if art and aesthetics were to appropriate aspects of computer science for their own use. For users who have no other choice but to employ what highly competent engineers have forced upon them via some invisible system design, there is an authority which, while it does not provide access to the information, makes it evident where it diverges from communication – flesh and blood. And such an authority certainly goes against the grain of all media theology of the lost body and all digital doctrines of salvation which promise "bachelor machines" that are telematically unlimited.

We see that design must function as an authority on close-range sensory perception precisely in the information age, or must resume this function once again. Flesh and blood is the basis for a kind of judgment which can otherwise no longer have authority. Perhaps this kind of judgment is completely individual and idiosyncratic and cannot simply be effected through sheer will power. But it constitutes the only possible sounding board for concrete, unique behavior – the socialization of close-range sensory perception. This is not a plea for aesthesis as traditional perception, but marks the basis for a design theory which has completed its march through the media, and thus no longer evaluates problems immanent in the media using a model of standardized production. With the compulsion to lend all production, including the visual and informational linguistic form, a compulsion arises to step up efforts to socialize the criteria using that linguistic form. As a result, the artistic or design-based use of telematic media forces all action-related theory not only to permit hybrid constructions consisting of description and propaganda, theory and practice, analysis and speculation, semantics and apparatuses, but to actually seek them intensively. Discursive practice and poetic construction (and, therefore, initially non-discursive construction) join to form an indissoluble unit. The decisive provocation of a body which takes a firm stand against lending everything media form represents the victory of the intrinsic time of the human system's "organism" over that of the computer system which strives to achieve real time between the input which models things and the modeled calculation process.

No cultural theory offers us a way out here. And, in light of patently pathetic media productions, this applies in particular to the efforts of high versus low culture, of emancipation versus consumer culture, of humanist versus vulgar culture which have once again become seductive. In other words, we are faced with a new variety of "good" versus "bad" forms which occasionally promote themselves as the real trend-setters, the avant-garde measures of all things. "Good form" was followed by an apologetic stance of "ugly form" in the context of an aesthetics of the banal and of invisible design. However, this certainly does not touch on the problems found in media products, and, on the whole, in creating meanings in the social sphere of the attractive and the spectacular where bodies and images of

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the self are staged and modeled. Those who still promulgate the theology of "bad form" over the purported instrumentalism of "good form" are still clinging to a theodicy, not to mention to a modernistic technicism. As it would be all too easy to project exactly this thought onto contemporary media reality, I wish to offer some thoughts in closing with the intent of replacing the utter union of polarities in the dialectic of "good" versus "bad" form with hybrid constructions and mixtures. Hybrids generate contingencies which are of value in themselves and do not merely fuel didactics of goodness or a mythology of evil, both of which remain fixated on a symmetry of normatively ordained values. Morality always proves to be indivisible even if it is, on occasion, insidious when its exclusive purpose is to certify the aims of human autonomy.

The formal view

On the whole, the plea for "bad" form is as moral as that for "good" form. The varying assessments of the designer's role have only changed in terms of their economic value, and this in a world which neither enables design to exist nor permits non-design. Linking morality with bad form will not satisfy the compelling contemporary thrust of the aesthetic. Abandoning the principles has too drastic an impact on any moral dictate. Though the realization may be painful, we have not surmounted the problems of the 19th century. This disturbs us because we would like to imagine this era as being foreign to us. Positivism and linear reason have been transformed into their opposites in a horrible way. Utopia and insanity, two sides of the same coin, have belonged to the established repertoire of cultural debate for a long time. The configuration of "good" as opposed to "ugly" form is more recent flotsam now emanating from a meanwhile immoral principle of progress. However, the fundamental discovery of ugliness as an aesthetic principle was already a central figure in 19th century thought. In his *Aesthetics of Ugliness* of 1853, Karl Rosenkranz attempted to subordinate the empirical independence of the base, the untoward, the uncanny, and the obscene to the category of the beautiful and the good. This occurred a few years after modernity became the subject of discussion as a purely self-

referential notion and without recourse to "antiquity" as initially put forth in Chateaubriand's concept of the "modern". And it took place a few years before the ugly, evil, and criminal took their place alongside the beautiful as equally valid paths to poetic expression, for in Baudelaire's poetry, the beautiful was obliged to forfeit its absolute sovereignty. Rosenkranz attempted to posit ugliness as something heteronomous, as a mere aberration. That would not warrant further mention were Rosenkranz's undertaking not based on visual pleasure and fascination in the phenomena of ugliness. He naturally denies ugliness any kind of autonomy, in particular the status of an absolute. In his opinion, ugliness is merely relative, a "negative form of the beautiful", and cannot be posited as a positive quality. Moreover, the beautiful regenerates itself via a detour through ugliness, because the latter has only an empirical, and not an idealistic thrust. For Rosenkranz, the beautiful remains primary and takes absolute priority.

The general opinion has been divided for quite some time with respect to moralizing on the nature of evil. However, it appears extremely doubtful whether invoking evil as an absolute and autonomous authority is indeed more than slandering "didactic aesthetics" which relieves us of the horror of having to act. Invoking evil is not an act, but rather a metaphor. Far too many have paid homage not to an obsession with what is real, but to the metaphorical charm of the decadent. In any case, it has not only been opportune, but practically imperative on the part of the designer to identify the style of modernity or, conversely, its failure by alluding to the Platonic nature of good form. It is, therefore, too simple to juxtapose the meanwhile clearly identified hopeless sides of "good form" against the hope of their opposites. In fact, "good form" did not merely draw our attention to the capitalist consumption of the 1950s as a faith in science that had been outfitted in utopian trimmings, but also to the prehistory of modern design theory as a true natural history of naiveté. Anyone who studies the relevant treatises of the modernists is hard put to explain why things without a solid epistemological base and which were unable to satisfy a rational criticism of reason have been discussed in the area of aesthetics and not in terms of a neurotic doctrine of coercive morality.

The era of cultivated naiveté is finally over. Today, anyone who praises "bad form" over "good form" obviously has the same level of awareness

as the aesthetic positivists who represent totalitarian life planning in the name of the good and the true, for he still believes in a consistent methodology. However, decrees such as Alessandro Mendini's plea for banal design and the cult of the ugly which no longer sees itself as an inverse form of the absolute of beauty but as a self-sufficient authority, harbor little promise at this point. The problem is no longer having to choose between "good" and "bad" or "beautiful" and "ugly", but rather the very inevitability of manufacturing and its products. Whether good or bad, with or without a basis in methodology, the fact that beautiful and ugly things are made – houses, cups, chairs, cities – is an a priori reality and cannot be avoided. This implies that irrespective of efforts made to achieve a given level of quality, the way in which things and meanings are to be produced can no longer be determined based on distinctions like "good" and "evil", but only through meta-theoretical reflection. This does not mean rejecting "good form" in the name of "bad form", but rather rejecting unavoidable contingencies and complexities. Contingencies are neither necessary nor impossible. Contingency refers to contexts rather than binary codes; "good" is a reference to contexts. It is easy to understand what contingency achieves – the formulation of the next respectively higher-level context that enhances complexity. Turning good form into bad certainly has the advantage of being able to slander designers at random, and usually with justification. However, it is no longer clear what designers can still do, if anything. From the point of view of Genesis, the origin of the world has been nothing more than a tedious self-evocation of good form which rejects contingencies. When it comes to the inversion of good to bad functions, we do not have an option, we cannot simply choose between "good form" and "bad form". It is quite possible that design is in no way autonomous at the level of meta-reflection – neither for the positive nor the negative theology of taste. We are, after all, faced with the task of fundamentally overcoming the problem of theodicy inherent in design. Those who were previously all too willing to place their faith in positive design theory have found refuge among the apologists of "bad form" because the old story of how the scientific design of good form has disgraced itself is simply not funny anymore. Once this becomes clear, the problem of morality fueling aesthetics takes an added dimension. Even those who worship "bad form" – in other words, those who

know what it is really like to expurgate tasks because they are familiar with the blind spot of "good form" – have found their place in the history of the devaluation of aesthetics, a place which has become as prominent as it is obsolete. The celebration of bad form, caught up in a stubborn love-hate relationship with its opposite, and staged ugliness as the only contemporary possibility for beauty, no longer appropriately tackles the problems that are of decisive importance at present.

■ **Art, Utopia, and the Media. Thoughts on the *Lab.*** ***Yearbook for the Arts and Apparatuses***

The media have existed ever since a sense of self-alienation compounded the human awareness of the alien nature of the world. We need media to "mediate" the world because our world often seems to be once removed. They give us access to a world that is constructed out of experiences and hence entirely artificial. The media are not only rooted in history and technology but also in anthropology. As artifacts, they are intrinsically necessary. Art has always played a special part in the symbolic elaboration of these mundanely significant artifacts. It views the media as poetic tools, but lately this has become problematic because the media operate in the context of highly advanced technology. They are not always readily accessible to art. All that art can do is to act as though the poetic constructions in which it uses the media as the tools of its trade will continue to succeed – even in those situations where the media are no longer tools but have become complicated conglomerations of equipment and media, machines controlling other media, machines controlling other machines, chains of operational signals creating other automated links and networks. Therefore, it is not banal to take an anthropological view of these artifacts, for art is never satisfied with a banal presentation of artifacts. Its specific task is to encourage the imagination to flights of fancy, to be profligate with any wealth that comes its way by going beyond production for its own sake.

But these days, when it comes to the much vaunted power of art – be it intermedial, synthetic, simulative, or organic – to integrate the human senses and mechanical devices, science and technology into one vast *Ge-*

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samtkunstwerk, we cannot expect too much. And rightly so, for technology has become far too complex. There is far too high a level of sophistication in a techno-system that exclusively follows its own commands and compulsions and which scarcely seems controllable from outside any more – neither by politics, ethics, aesthetics, nor art. There have only been a handful of cases in which artists were involved in the development of currently significant technological advances.

The union of art and science has remained as much a utopia as any hoped-for convergence of a technology-based world and social equality. The aesthetically liberated, technologically literate person, who is constantly absorbing new technologies, has to be regarded as a self-contained being that surely derives the rhetorical power to move others from his/her own lack of empirical probability. This is a notable source of strength of the arts. The arts mark differences, they articulate resistance, they insist on meaningful notions of a poetic, unconstrained deployment of technological means without these instantly having to be validated by polytechnically effective improvements. If utopia still has a critical function, then it may claim the same privilege that Lichtenberg deems critical without proving superior ability in that field. Art has considerable potential for chaos, as distinct from the hierarchical taming of the media and their reduction to standardized operations. This explains why a crucial element in the poetological practice of orientation by means of "art through media" is the rejection of the fiction of a master medium, a control point, a binding organ, a mandatory schedule, in other words, the rejection of some central power. For instance, it has become clear that telematics (the use of computers for electronic data processing in a grand style) are usually used merely to optimize work situations.

In an age when almost everything is supposed to be synchronized with everything else on a regular basis (at almost any cost) – in a world of mass-media-controlled, global simultaneity and in a hierarchically structured communication society in which communication means the transmission of uniformly standardized chains of signals – in such a world, any striving for artistic praxis is a battle to do something different. Art is not just about forming, but also about creating an independent time-frame, a sensual system that is neither beholden to subjective indulgence, nor to

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the objective demands made by a metronomic world, nor to some well-established exchange of signs and things, customs and inventions. In an age of techno-imagination, artistic practices are no longer directed first and foremost towards producing works, but towards establishing work processes and exploring methods. The path from manifestations of representational imagery to the point where art is about interlinking actions is a thoroughly justified *leitmotif* in "art through digital media", which touches on the issue of equipment and the control signals of mechanized networks of commands, hierarchies, and operations. Art is concerned with the poetic constitution of a social locus where art matters. In other words, art has become a critical reflection of its own locus. And consequently, new technologies and media force art academies and media institutes to constantly review the basis of training they are providing.

With the radical autonomy of art which began in the Romantic period and evolved until the outset of the twentieth century, and with the corresponding weakening in the hitherto recognized art training in polytechnics and academies, the relationship between art, science, technology, and daily life has taken on completely new dimensions. Because of this, the widespread supposition nowadays is that proficiency in the use of technical equipment, materials and apparatuses must be practiced all the more intensely and extensively.

Decades ago, the art historian and long-time mayor of Rome, Giulio Carlo Argan, suggested that contemporary artists distance themselves from their image as isolated artist-figures focused solely on expression and aesthetics, and instead, redefine themselves as "image operators" which would emphasize the technical-communicative side of their work. This call for more up-to-date art training, which was made partly in response to the program at the Bauhaus, has acquired a new relevance in the age of digital technology. Inextricably linked with this is the need to redefine the relationship between the "fine" and the "applied" arts, between art and civilization, "high/serious" and "low/popular" culture. These definitions no longer depend on aesthetic taste but on the possibilities opened up by the advanced use and development of the artist's tools. Numerous attempts have been made to close the gap between art, technology, and the world we live in, and to reconcile the fields of "applied" art and "fine"

art. The Werkbund, Bauhaus, new Bauhaus, and the College of Design in Ulm represent a long tradition of impressive initiatives to produce "fine" and "applied" art by means of the most advanced technological methods and to create links with the advanced sciences. In view of the immense complexity of developments in science and technology, there can be no doubt as to the necessity of finding new long-term methods for art to mediate content and apply technology. Such methods are specially adapted to art. The theories that have emerged directly from art and design play an intrinsic role in project development and implementation. Theory has taken on a significant role in the organization of artistic praxis.

Since its establishment in October 1990, the Kunsthochschule für Medien (KHM) in Cologne has concentrated on the use of progressive methods and practices for artistic endeavors in and with advanced media which benefit numerous concepts, ranging from experimental, avant-garde installations to the mass-impact of media design, television, and film. And also other methods – filmic experimentation, innovative ventures in television, subtle designer experiments, and art that hits home at all levels by means of a conscious aesthetic "deception" – anything is possible. The different levels incorporate polar opposites and extend outwards to their own extremes. The clear distinctions that once separated mass culture and elite art, high and low, subtle and brutish, fine and applied art, highbrow and lowbrow, intellectual and banal, reflective and popular, reflection and pleasure now all meet head-on, chafe against each other, and at best transform and become new configurations. Each configuration is always different and decisively so, but is always open to review and even rejection.

The demands made of an artist's skills when s/he is dealing with digital equipment are radial and delicate. Nowadays a number of serious players in the field maintain that a true understanding of technical equipment – through art – is no longer possible. If this is truly the case, then the works of art controlled by electronics and drawing on digitally concealed components are doing no more than perpetrating a scarcely tolerable, fake superficiality. And indeed, what is known today as "media art" often looks exactly like this. Decorum sinks to the level of mere decoration. The conscious deceptiveness of highly evolved art demands certain attitudes which do not pertain at present. It is clear where this line of argument is

leading – that art is expected to be capable both of comprehending at the highest level and of penetrating the otherwise purely functional, instrumental dimensions of life. Decorum has unfortunately been tainted with the reproach of superficiality. But by definition, a reproach of this kind is only conceivable in a culture where "surfaces" are systematically despised. And this in turn implies a dual ontology – true reality as opposed to simulated reality. Nietzsche rejected the doubling of reality and its caricature in simulation in the name of an artistry of lies and pleasure. Although in a distorted form, this notion of doubling still makes itself felt in the above reproach. It is no coincidence that the model of the building master in art has survived as a reservoir of resistance against the manipulation of signs in a random manner and at random speeds.

In the 18th century, the philosopher Giambattista Vico wrote that one can only understand that which one is capable of constructing. From that point onwards – until Hegel – art was always seen as the sensual manifestation of an idea in the context of controlled fabrication. Works of art were the exteriorization of an idea which then took shape in materials, fabrics, and later in modern media. Art is meant to facilitate constructive comprehension – that is its highest aspiration. This means that from their very first day as art students, artists try to put themselves in a position to construct all the tools they need through their own efforts. The diametrically opposed attitude to this is that the artist is merely an expert in logistics, setting up arrangements, links and collaborations, connections and mediations. In other words, an artist is a strategist of ultimately semiotic scenarios, a tactician making localized, punctuated links, a master of the superficial, capturing signs that are restless and immaterial, floating and process-driven. Of course, both of these positions will be found at the KHM along with many more situated somewhere between these two poles.

No program, or if at all, then a whole array. One theory is not sufficient, one program is too few, one world is not enough. No program then, but perhaps a maxim to resist the many attempts to exploit the sometimes concomitant desire to exert control from centers of medial power. The breadth and power of this aspiration cannot properly be understood from a program alone, the proof is in the products. In 1996, the publication *Lab. Yearbook for the Arts and Apparatuses (Jahrbuch für Künste und Ap-*

parate) was established to provide an insight into the current interchange of intensities, into a web of affinities and intellectual alliances, into a net of nets, of singular convictions and headstrong liaisons. This yearbook was not conceived for the purpose of self-presentation. The majority of the contributions come from external authors, although this is not as crucial as the insistence that their focus should be on the outside world. The aim is to provide a forum run by the KHM for guests and friends – a forum characterized by its openness and the varied nature of its program. The yearbook is neither prescriptive nor explicative. Rather, it presents a panorama that opens up the horizon of interests at the KHM, covering a wealth of topics which deserve attention. And the spectrum can range from the intricate philosophy of Giordano Bruno, the hermetic rejections of Antonin Artaud, Raymond Roussel's wayward machines to the computer background to certain intuitive interfaces, the physics and architecture of others, and a critique of the arts today. Artists have taken advantage of and shaped numerous *cartes blanches*. Whether in pictures or text, in visual sequences or in montages of words and images, whether a contribution is lyrical or hermeneutic, an academic exposé, or a philosophical critique, disparate considerations, diverse forms of rhetoric and different levels are seen here to be equally significant in the development of the arts with regard to discursive praxis and poetics alike.

The discourse of the arts, the unity of theories and methods, the interconnections between experiments and equipment, the evolution of new models of sensuality and time, of technology and content all play an intrinsic role in the arts today. There is no longer any room for the separation of theory and praxis – that tired old fixation, too often and too complacently repeated, a leftover of the stranglehold that different practitioners once had on the arts – nor for the relentless "anti-theory" stance taken by art and design for the sake of the religion of craft skills. Today such attitudes seem hopelessly reactionary and unfit to play a meaningful part in the development of "art through media" which is more a matter of subtle composition, the creation of productive points of friction and energy fields, the discovery of magically interacting parameters. Since 1996, the *Lab. Yearbook for the Arts and Apparatuses* has done its utmost to demonstrate the orchestration of such processes and powers, resistances and coherences, complements and contradictions.

The Lab. Yearbook for the Arts and Apparatuses *appears under the imprint of the Buchhandlung Walther König in Cologne. Published by the Kunsthochschule für Medien in Cologne and friends of the KHM, it is conceived and edited by Hans Ulrich Reck and Siegfried Zielinski, hitherto in alternating collaboration with Wolfgang Ernst, Thomas Hensel, and Nils Röller. Each issue contains dozens of texts and picture essays – analytical and poetic, artistic and scientific, literary and philosophical. Individual volumes range between 200 and 400 pages and contain numerous, mainly black-and-white illustrations. While the* Lab. Yearbook for the Arts and Apparatuses *is mainly a German language publication, all contributions originally written in English are also published in English.*

■ Surface, Moment, Data Flow. On digital photography with comments on Zelko Wiener's "Netzhaut"

The word "photography" literally means "writing in light" and consequently, the verb "to photograph" means "to write in light" – "lighterature" instead of "literature", as it were. Every picture written in light is a photograph. Moving pictures of light enter the state in which movement is "written down", hence the term cinematography. The projection of an image of light treats the carrier of the picture as a diaphanous, transparent plane. The picture is the medium of its own surface. Not in the spatial, but in the temporal sense, i.e., the frozen picture is the moment on which it is based. The fundamental aspect of the photographic image is its invariably passing, fleeting moment. This paradox makes it possible for all conceivable techniques of processing to be applied to the photograph, yet no grain of truth in the guise of a promise can be extracted from it.

Digital photography produces its reality on a screen. The computer monitor displays a batch of surfaces. The photographic image which has been brought onto the surface of the screen through scanning can no longer put up any physical or chemical resistance to interventions in the form of further processing steps. Of course, it has always been possible to manipulate photographs because their very existence is based on manipulation. However, in digital photography, the word "manipulation" is meaningless.

Reality is nothing but an intermediate stage in the sequence of programming, and the data entered are only based on real objects, objectified models, as this makes the compilation of data masks easier. In a growing number of fields, post-production is now no longer separated from the generation of images. The symbolic (the program) does not merely intervene in the imaginary (the image), but actually creates it by means of technology. How can we still call that an "image"? Does this term still make sense? Has it not become misleading and impracticable? Do we have to finally say goodbye to the history of the image as a category? What chances does the theory of the image have today when it starts becoming reflective?

To avoid a number of difficulties, photography can basically be seen as a medium to create diagrams, not analogies. The perception of an image is not a passive process, but active construction. Traditionally, the only thing that involved no activity was the way the images were recorded in a chemical process. By contrast, the digital code of the computer gives us a basal alphabet that may be used for the most diverse purposes. Language, sound, letters, images, graphics can be generated by means of the same processes. From the angle of the computer, the aesthetic differences between the media (arts, categories) invariably involve intermedial interfaces which only have to do with the data process, not with their meaning. The computer clearly shows that meaning is not created in the production process, but in reception. The new aesthetics of virtuality can be read by analysis. VR is the generation of a reality model of its own and as such.

Zelko Wiener is a pioneer of such surfaces. In computer technology, the surface is the most important site for the configuration of statements expressed in shape and images. The digital model is definitely no longer a universe – it has broken with everything that comes from spatial depth. The media interface linking meanings (data) and organs (human beings) is now, in fact, only a surface called a shell, schema, projection. The interface generates references by manipulating pertinent data.

Aspects of technology may be considered as secondary. The output medium can be disregarded, too. No matter how the data is projected onto and fixed on traditional material, the qualities of the image carriers do not change and their materiality remains outside the practice of image processing.

In the final product, the visible image is blurred, or more precisely, the difference between analog and digital which is so important for the configuration of the schema in which data take shape in the production process.

This can certainly be regarded as a serious indication of the speculative theoretical programs based on formal classifications failing vis-à-vis the variable materiality of reality, which, by the same token, will never be strictly immaterial, either. Many of the classifications we have become so fond of are basically pointless. The concepts of "analog" and "digital" may be one of the distinctions about to become obsolete.

By contrast, designations evolving from the angle of the viewer are not pointless at all. Work with new technologies, which Zelko Wiener uses as simple instruments in spite of the complexity of the programs, gives special proof of the fact that, despite the utopian concept of uniform and self-referential modernity, there is no such thing as the dissolution of object references and their manifold subjective contexts.

Human beings and their archaic dimensions re-appear as schemata, specters, will-'o-the-wisps on this surface, too. Are they mere phantoms continually fighting disappearance and auto-destruction? This does not scare people who understand the difficulty of separating the real from the imaginary in a culture of image-centered, technology-oriented media. The spiritualist's dreams are both temptation and destiny to the human being in the cognitive process. They link cognition to the suggestion that we do not only want to be spiritualists every once in a while, but that we are mostly the subject of spiritualist dreams, and basically the media of others.

The new works by Zelko Wiener, mainly easel paintings, show certain aspects and circumstances around environments which permeate what is human and around objects permeated by human action and emotion. The surface is nothing but the medium of such mutual super-positions.

The iconography of Wiener's works is not only characterized by the reworking of screen shots which functions as a filter that introduces the principle of selection to the stocktaking of human actions, but also by existing images which show human beings today searching for their "center" and trying to get their bearings. We can only grasp the complementary duality of the image-generating process in appropriate technical terms if we focus on a message that goes beyond the formal picture and that vacillates between impression and expression.

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Zelko Wiener's pictures are post-produced electronically or manually. The pictures, condensed, complex surfaces, reveal the traces of having been processed. They also bespeak the fact that the processing turns them into physical objects again, and that these can be recorded photographically or electronically in an extension of the process, so the print-outs become objectified material for new print-outs.

The pictures as surfaces form the interfaces of two realities, not just simulacra, immaterial or non-dimensional specters of images, Zelko Wiener's pictures and the keynote he strikes in their titles ("EndBeginning", "Osteolysis", "The Sisters of Dissolution") tell of this inevitable return of reality back to the imaginary.

The titles are not only about the constant longing to get away from the "lonely hearts club", but also imply that the ultimate vital sense of the subject in the computer age will necessarily come with an interior change of veritably anthropological magnitude – or to use another Beatles phrase – "your outside is in and your inside is out".

Images show more than reality, they include its references. The assumption that aesthetic experiences are deformed or even destroyed by new technologies is a recurring feature in the history of imagination and image systems. However, it repeatedly returns to contemporary discourse and materializes as a fear of novelties on any given level with the appearance of unknown types of images and technological processes that have not yet become household words.

The formerly triumphant self-legitimation of symbolically expressive images gives way to the fear that everything real established as a binding plan of life in culture (its term, concept, field) might disappear and be lost to culture – "your outside is in and your inside is out".

Every photograph can be interpreted as the attempt to undermine the distortion of perception by the body, the subject's ruse of self-detachment from overwhelming objects. Once moving pictures had been invented, cinematography and film began to resist concepts because the images might have increasingly taken the shape of conceptual montages. The degree to which concepts were able to keep up with the movement of the images decreased.

Human beings recognize objects via signs, because they need to transform objects into symbols to be able to perceive and interpret them. The demand to give objects their right is a postulate inherent to aesthetics. Treating parts of images as objects is a process of deconstructing the images on behalf of the objects.

What does deconstruction mean? It is apparently a praxis of images, not only a shift in the discourse. Established meanings are shifted. Deconstruction is an attempt to open up the object of a reading (text, image) in such a way that it shows the circumstances of signification through the meaning it signifies. This secondary meaning does not read images as references, but explores them for the machinery that creates them. Zelko Wiener's new works reveal that these differences are no longer visible in the images. As a result, the secondary meaning passes in its entirety to the stories that can be told, the contexts of the images.

Digital images, digital cameras, CD photography, as well as the option to re-work the image once it has been transformed into data all change the theoretical and practical aspects of the image, but not the process of art. We can no longer use the term "image" in the sense of iconicity without being aware of the rifts. The photographic image becomes a raw material, a basic material. Not only advertising, but other fields of our visually oriented culture are increasingly characterized by technical interventions in pictures for which no appropriate aesthetics and epistemology has been formulated so far. In contemporary art, photography has many facets. From sculpture to multimedia approaches and inter-medial photography, there is evidence that photography is not used scientifically or technologically, but semiotically and conceptually, artistically and poetically, i.e., primarily as a process in flux, not a rigid, self-contained medium.

The photographic image, formerly well-defined evidence of a certain reality depicted in a singular way, has now become the basic material for expanded approaches. Thus, it is not only the surface of the image that changes, but also the temporal structure of the photographic process of generating images. The theory of the photographic image used to consider the momentariness of witnessing one particular point of time as the core concept. It engaged with the past in the present. By contrast, the photographic material reflecting the contemporary aesthetics of the tech-

nological image reveals the scene of the present depicted as the result of something directed to the future, namely, an effect. Everything is simultaneously the final picture and basic material.

■ From Observation to a Media Mannerism

In my eyes, Markus Huemer's work "Polke's Pasadena Stones" is of exemplary importance in terms of its reflection on artistic practices. Huemer is a rare example of an artist who has performed extensive studies of art history and combined both artistic practice and art history in a reflective way. This work can be considered typical for his way of dealing with issues of art-form. His opus reflects artistic practices through artistic practice. This is not an external academic reflection, but a close encounter with the important theoretical implications of art as art.

The work

In simple terms, the work is a spatial installation. In his own documentation, the artist calls it a network installation, a net installation. Perhaps this is an adequate and established term for a contemporary installation/spatial-sculptural work. However, we must add that this work is not merely spatial, but also temporal and thus four-dimensional. And it is here that it tackles one of its core problems, namely the question regarding the localizability of actions in space and time.

At first glance, one immediately notices the motion within the projected image, the matrix of this work, and that one is located in two different spaces – network space and real space. We are offered a very playful way of finding out how the production of these movements function through the patterns of this projection and the design of these wandering patches. The image of the projection is a moving picture, a "space-time picture", if one can call such a spatial-temporal image a "picture" at all. Maybe we should rather speak of image sequences.

There are many terms that describe this kind of art, but they are likely to be misunderstood and would obscure the view of another context im-

portant for the analysis of form. I am referring to the complex relationship between the actuality of the spatial reality where the artwork takes place, and what this actual work contributes towards the understanding of prior artistic endeavor. It is not the artist's intention to offer a didactic presentation of such an insight. Yet, through the radicality of a contemporary setup of certain historical concepts and subjects, we will recognize that certain positions within a historical context may have implied much more than what is generally attributed to them. Issues similar to the ones of the present have been addressed in the past – of course, with different technologies and media, but always within the limits of their time.

It is in this context that Markus Huemer's work is full off allusions and insinuations, and the title "Polke's Pasadena Stones" shows that it is deliberately staged in this way. The painting "Pasadena" by Sigmar Polke in 1968 is the starting point for the title of this opus that addresses space and time, or rather this space and another, external one. This Pasadena painting has been analyzed and described both in theory and practice by Huemer through a special interpretation of Polke's position in the pop art scene of the 1960s.

A few analogies

When we compare Polke's and Huemer's works, a number of analogies comes to mind. Both works are based on an existing image. And although Polke's is static and Huemer's is moving, there are similarities and analogies in the visual pattern, in the basic visual typology. Polke's image includes text which is more than merely a caption – it suggests a way of reading to the observer. "The tenth photograph recorded in Pasadena. It shows the moon's surface at the landing site of 'Surveyor 1'. The boulder in the foreground left is 15.0 cms high and 30.8 cms long. The bright spots are reflections of the sun." Huemer's imagery, too, includes captions that exist within a textual dimension of their own –"textual" although we only see numbers. There are obvious formal analogies between the images, and after reading Polke's text, we can conclude that the real stone within Huemer's installation – the stone that started it all – is closely connected to what the text in Sigmar Polke's painting says.

Questions like what it means to program this matrix, how it is achieved on a technical level, etc., will lead to more specialized discussions. Markus Huemer proves that he has acquired the mastership over the technical conditions which is of paramount importance. One might compare the discussion about technical devices, programs, and media to the discussion one would have with Renaissance painters about the subtleties of using various pigments. Discussions of this kind are only a marginal phenomenon in the history of art, because one is more interested in the expression, the content, and the sense of a work than in the craftsmanship and manufacture of objects, media, and devices.

But let us return to the analogies. The above-mentioned stone is the pivoting point of several matters. The motion of the projections – and this is easy to see – have to do with the motion of the visitors around this stone. However, I should now point out a few peculiarities of this installation. It looks as if the positions within physical space were not simply mapped to their counterparts on the projection as captured through a camera, but rather, as if the imagery's motion were derived from signals coming from the Internet. One might be tempted to think that the audience's position is first transferred to the "outside", i.e., into the electronic network of actual digitized and globalized communication. Markus Huemer pretends to visualize network activities in the form of changing patterns that are based solely on the actual position and movements of the audience.

The Internet protocols, furthermore, serve to verify these pretended network activities, yet they are in fact nothing but the products of movements within the physical space and, most importantly, merely part of an image. It is not the Net that is producing an image for the physical space – rather, the physical space produces an image for the Net which can be retrieved from a server.

This is the basis for comparing the textual dimensions of both the images again. Upon observing Polke's painting, one notes that the image and caption, i.e., the pictorial and the textual part of the work, are in conflicting relationship with one another. The question is, what does the image stand for, and what does the text stand for (purporting to certify what the picture shows). This discussion was subdued in 1969 on the occasion of the landing on the moon, but a discussion of those images that testified

the arrival of humankind on the moon would be even more heated today. Indeed, the strange movements of the visitors on the moon are somehow comparable to the equally strange and jerky movements of the projections in Huemer's work. But the decisive factor in both cases is the title, the caption. When analyzing these – considering Markus Huemer's theoretical statement – we notice that the image shows nothing of what the text predicts – and this is true for both works. Here, a core conflict of the theory of imaging has materialized.

Protocols and protocol phrases

When reading the caption of Polke's image – the text being a picture in its own right – one notices that the sentences are simple phrases of the kind that purports to be the elementary protocol of the description of reality in the theory of science. This is ..., it is ..., it has happened there, it behaves in such-and-such manner. Period. Protocols of this kind form the positivist core of a world of facts that can be described by protocols. And this is what has always been attributed to images. Pop art in general, and Polke in particular, questioned these protocolary images: What do these images stand for? These are not the protocols of a description of the world as it is, but rather stand for a specific aspect of imagery as such.

This notion can be formulated along the lines of a hint from Hans Belting, published in the catalog of the great Sigmar Polke exhibition in Bonn in 1998. According to Belting, when painting stands for art, for the arts as a global project, then the images will be subject to an inevitable conflict. To the extent that "painting" stands for art and occupies it, the images become protocols or testimonials of reality. Therefore, art is no longer absorbed into the image of the world, or rather, art no longer represents the world. As an image, it is not an image of the world any longer, not an image for the world. The relationship between realities and the images that testify for the world have become a trap for the arts – either painting as the embodiment of the arts or images as the description of the world. A pictorial description of the world is a reflexive task, not a poetic topic of painting. The pitfalls, the deceptions, the lies, and meta-lies, the lies

about lies about lies, etc., are closely connected to this problem. What is relevant is only the insight into the deception, the insight into what can be recognized as the truth of the lie and what is not a lie in the sense of a purposeful attempt to mislead.

Similar to the protocolary sentences in Polke's painting, the rows of numbers in Huemer's installation claim to convey important information about the functionality of the immaterial network, of the virtual reality of the Internet. There is an emphatic discourse about the Net implying that anyone might be anywhere at any time, that it is possible to overcome the limits of space and time, that there is the free choice of space, apparition, and disappearance, that there is anonymity and invisibility within the Net. Huemer rightly points out that every single place in the Net, at least every server and node, can be localized through the so-called Internet protocols. Moreover, these Internet protocols fulfill the same tasks as the protocol sentences in Polke's painting. Internet protocols verify and document the communication between computers. These protocol addresses at the bottom margin of the projection thus imply the reality of a communication within the Net that has seemingly found its reflection in the visual patterns. In reality, however, this series of numbers marks the movement of the audience on site. To be exact, it marks one movement after the other, or one visitor after the other according to the rules of succession. The following parameters are fundamental to the computing algorithms controlled by the movements. The four numbers of an IP address reflect the one temporal and three spatial vectors. These four vectors allow for a unique localization within our known Newtonian universe. Perhaps a sub-atomic space would react differently, but, of course, that is not accessible to us. Within the Net, a definite means of localization is given by the Internet protocols that can be identified by definition. The recorded – albeit fake – movement of the visitors' motion into the space of the Net is reflected by the identifiability of the Internet addresses.

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Media Mannerism

Let me begin with a critical remark. Perhaps all these new technologies are considered new as long as their power of fascination has not yet been thoroughly analyzed, as the way they work has not been fully understood. The new promise of a network communication limited neither by time nor space is but a metaphysical fiction. Once again, this refers to Sigmar Polke. Just as Polke operated with the unknown moonscape, with the primordial fascination of the technical possibility of transferring images from the moon, Markus Huemer operates on the still widely unknown terrain of the network landscape. The reference, however, does not lie in a continuation of Polke's exploration, although some parts of the latter are quoted, such as the stone, the rasterization, the questions about what is moving in the picture and about the relationship between the text as text and as part of the image, etc. Huemer addresses and specifies these questions in a way that may well be understood as a contemporary version of the fundamentals of Mannerism. This term does not so much refer to the historical artistic period, but rather to what the early 20th century discovered as genuine in these decades of the 16th century. Artists have developed a "handwriting", a style, "una maniera," that – besides showing their virtuosity in both reverence and reference to the grandmasters – make their own individual differences visible and public. Indeed, these personal styles were shaped into a matrix to articulate their proper originality, the individuality of their doing in the most advanced manner possible. Some of Polke's images, too, include a few references to Albrecht Dürer, who, in his time, showed off his own virtuosity by adding some of his drawing details as ornamental loops for the printing press. Polke – now paraphrasing these – identified this as a format-giving possibility and thus gained new access to them. With that, he enabled us to understand the original models as both essential and naive. Huemer's "Media Mannerism", a term that we use in a definitely positive sense, develops such an increase or excess of the artificial in the way Polke developed it.

This background allows for a few further remarks on Mannerism as well as Media Mannerism. Mannerism can be defined as the separation of mere self-referentiality in the use of signs. The signs of Mannerism are tar-

geted towards the deformation and deconstruction of given structures that stand out as being over-saturated in harmonic categories (such as classical symmetry). There is no unique Mannerist doctrine since Mannerism always implies individuality. On a formal level, Mannerism uses all sorts of overacting, overdoing, overtuning, radicalization, and peculiarities. Furthermore, the Mannerist repertoire includes repetition and quotation, as well as destruction of established concepts of shape. For their power of individualization, we can generally regard the modern arts as Mannerist. This is true up to the utopian warps of Subjectivism. Mannerism is not so much a style than a figure of reflection, both an appropriation of traditions and an anticipating construction. Mannerism is the extended consciousness of a crisis and enforces self-relativization of an era, its appearance in the media corresponds to the degree of mediation of the existing environment. The historical Mannerisms underline their resistance to closed doctrines. What does the latter's productivity look like in view of a media-based "Mannerism"? We have to consider how the historical potential of Mannerism to destabilize is used for activating a new view of the arts; how the actual electronic media production can be brought forward within the field of tension opened by increasing demands for order on one and by the practices of a radical deconstruction/ deformation/ transformation on the other. The artistic concepts of Mannerism could develop anti-fundamentalist energies. With these, the arts would be able to regain the communicative power they have ceded both willingly and by chance to a mediated mass communication.

Observation of observations

Let us return to the inner circle of Markus Huemer's work. Another important topic is that the observers are brought into play in an obvious manner. This affects the relation between observation and the actions of the observers in front of the image. In recent years, it has become common to state in a rather colloquial way that the old arts are static, immobile, and authoritarian, that the observer has no chance at all to participate in the process of creation. Huemer explicitly addresses this issue. His instal-

lation is not really about the patterns in the projection which we could as well paint on canvas. The presumed attention of the Net and the activities supposedly transferred to the outside via camera can be observed at any time. This becomes visible when the projection screen shows the red shape, when the visitors enter in concurrence with these movements. But that is not what it's about. Rather, we have to cope with an inversion of the relation. To a certain extent, these movements are "observed" by positions within the virtual space of the Net. The observer does not observe the work of art. Rather, the Net, represented as an image, observes its recipients. Obviously neither Leonardo da Vinci nor Hans Holbein nor any others could have accessed today's techniques of cinematographic simulation and projection – technical means that these artists would have surely adopted for handling critical topics. What is of importance beyond all eras, is the basic interest in getting the observer into the picture in a casual way to a certain place, independent of the various techniques that can be used for this sort of observer activation.

In our present-day situation which is an eminently political one, our position seems to be determined by ourselves being objects of permanent and ubiquitous observation. The number-line joke shows this much more clearly than Polke's conceptual deceptions of 1968. We haven't even talked about whether these IP addresses are red herrings or not. One thing is certain – the Orwellian threat of a nearly almighty political surveillance subject has become our daily reality. Orwell modeled this threat by an adequate technology in his novel 1984 in which he described a horror vision of a psycho-endoscopy. The frightening fact that our position is exactly identified on the Net by the coordinates of the Internet protocols, lies at the level on which the structural dispute between the image, the artist, and the observing position is re-articulated in a way to allow "learning within history". Works like Huemer's are necessary to provide a focus for questions of observation because we have been continuously radicalized in the course of four hundred years of dealing with the staging of the observer inside the stage settings. At least one element can be identified – the individual is always projected to a wall in rear view. Each observer is thus set into focus, each pattern is the avatar of an observer's position. In this context, one might think of the Baroque repoussé, the images by Jan

Vermeer van Delft, or even paitings by Caspar David Friedrich with their persons who look at that reality within the image that we may observe from outside the image's sphere as a representation of the image – a representation of the represented. These are legitimate relations, not in the sense of simple association, but of the focus on many of the former discussions regarding the relationship between the work and its observer, or in other words, a historical differentiation of the image form.

Conclusion

If there were terminology that would befit this kind of art, then it would certainly not be "media art" or the like, but rather "media Mannerism". I would use this term whenever models are developed that refer to such a set of remodeled spatial-temporal coordinates. New possibilities are created that are not used merely as "playful" effects, but link the important content in an way that is appropriately traditional, insistent, and novel. With this media Mannerism, central questions are rendered actual and asked again in a shifted and pointed manner. What does art as art stand for, and what do the images stand for that are protocols of the world? By addressing these questions, we might again enter into a substantial discussion of reality beyond formal gadgets.

■ Imagination, Dream, and Repetition: Bill Viola's "He Weeps for You", 1976

There are numerous descriptions of Bill Viola's installation "He Weeps for You". Here I shall simply borrow the one that best expresses how I feel about the work. I find my own feelings reflected in the words of Andrew Solomon who wrote, "*He Weeps for You*, from 1976, is lyrical and upsetting. You enter a dark room and, more or less by instinct, walk to a small spotlighted area. In front of you is a copper pipe, at the end of which a drop of water is slowly forming. Behind the pipe is a video camera. On the wall to your left is a giant video projection that is showing the drop of water. As

you stand there, trying to make sense of this, you notice that there seems to be a human figure contained in the drop of water. You peer quizzically at it, and it peers quizzically at you: it is your reflection in the water droplet, and as the droplet gets bigger and fatter, your image becomes larger and clearer until it nearly fills the screen. And just as you come satisfyingly close to recognizing all of yourself reflected, the drop fills out and falls from the pipe, and you see your image shattered. The drop hits an amplified drum, and a deep boom sounds through the room, as though a small bomb had fallen. By the time you have reoriented yourself, the next drop is beginning to swell from the tip of the copper pipe, and on the wall, there you are, in it again."[34]

I regard the following remarks and comments as a way to circle and approach Viola's work. The image of going back and forth in different directions occurs to me in this context — a network of passages, stages in shifting one's gaze at different points. This gaze can also be construed as a way of approximating the drop of water, as a means of noticing the process, the formation of time in this space, observing by following the nascent, initially unknown image of your own face projected by the camera onto the screen, inscribed in a tender version, a type of skin, a face that is doubtlessly perceived as a type of landscape. Finally, it is a perception of sound, a synthesis of the interaction of falling water, exploding image and sound, time running away. It is the synthesis of perception at the level of the media forms that are used. The elements in this installation can be perceived as things formed by technology. Finally, it is the repetition of the entire synthesis, playing out the expectations that have arisen and have now been assessed, the production of regularities which by no means prevent us from enjoying the work but instead intensify our enjoyment. The pulsation of the sequences constitutes an elementary, well-defined process which we can easily find exciting and relaxing within the range of our capacities for perception. The following remarks are meant to collect

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34 Andrew Solomon, Bill Viola's Video Arcade, in: *The New York Times Magazine*, Feb. 8, 1998, p. 6. For descriptions and philosophical commentaries by Bill Viola see B. London (ed.), Bill Viola, exhibition cat. Museum of Modern Art New York, 1987, pp. 28-30; Bill Viola, Buried Secrets, exhibition cat. for the Venice Biennial June 11 – Oct. 15, 1995, Venice 1995, p. 26; Bill Viola in: R. Violette (ed.), *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House. Writings 1973-1994*, London, 1995.

different aspects in the hope that they will encounter at a deeper level motifs and strata that do justice to the energy of this artwork. The energy of an artwork can be understood, among other things, as the quality that enables an artwork to create references to the contemporaneousness of the present and the past, to the simultaneity of the asynchronous. In other words, the remarks not only refer to perception, but also to following the movements triggered by the installation in a way that the generation of imagined images and theoretical references no longer severs a mental depiction of these movements from what can be considered atmospherically as a quasi-mythical or quasi-archaic form of experience. This is a quality which many people will certainly attribute immediately and exclusively to the meaning of the spatial installation and its elements. However, the latter can only have a mystical power if it is not separated from the way in which it is organized.

In recent years, much has been theorized and written to counter the dictates of the mirror. This has often occurred – and quite rightly so – in connection to one of Jacques Lacan's early lectures in which he metaphorically and quite unequivocally described the rule of the mirror. Lacan wrote on the projective identification of an ego that felt itself "imperfect with a superior but artificial ego through the medium of the mirror. It reduces the agency of the ego to a fictitious line which the individual can never again expunge, or rather can only asymptotically pinpoint the genesis of the subject irrespective of how successful the dialectical syntheses may be by virtue of which it, qua ego, has to overcome its own lack of concurrence with its own reality."[35] The subject appears splintered by the mirror which, in turn, as an image exercises a compulsion against self-images. Within the ego, the projective self-formation of the subject in the mirror necessitates an identification of the interrupted reference of signifier and signified which the ego experiences as violent. The alternative would primarily entail enduring the body, its frailty compared with the growth in its scope for action, power, and wealth of form. Bill Viola's works occupy an important place in the most recent history of the body breaking out of the gaze fixated by the mirror. Not infrequently – and this is applies to "He

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35 Jacques Lacan, Das Spiegelstadium als Bildner der Ich-Funktion, in: *Jacques Lacan, Schriften I*, Frankfurt, 1975, p. 64.

Weeps for You" – what is involved is an invariably re-modified field of tension between the living and the dead.

Not until death, the final cut, does the montage of life become whole and meaningful. This inscrutable sentence, and I am quoting from memory, was once formulated by Pier Paolo Pasolini. He wrote it in an ostensibly more harmless setting, namely in his semiotics of film, which he understood as semiotics of the real and not of referential signs.[36] This sentence brings various images of thought and categories together, which, the longer you think about it, the more they shift in relation to each other. Death is the final cut of life. It is contained in life, compels the end of life and points beyond it, in other words, death is a part of the life of those who survive. The cut is irreversible. The final montage is determined by this choice in favor of something irreversible. Death and the cut film both engender the irreversible. The film is a medium in which each cut (as the realization of a possibility) is only real because it excludes other possibilities. What becomes visible emanates from that which is now invisible as its basis. Death is a condition of life, because, otherwise, there can be no life. It is present in the process of cutting and absent *in* the edited version and *as* the editing. Cutting functions as montage, it becomes montage, the parts go together, a whole arises. Only by virtue of the possibility of cutting do the individual parts join as a whole. The cutting lives in the edifice of edited images and yet, to the extent that it is the condition by which the whole is possible, also the now invisible basis of it all. The cut is absent and present at once. It gets lost in the depth of the remote and in the darkness of the overly close-up in which we live for a moment. And the same is true of death which causes new life to arise through the disappearance of old life lived to its end, and which is present in life itself. Death is not something which simply ends life, it is *in* life and part *of it*. What is also interesting – and we can find it in Pasolini's sentence, too – is the Western notion of *ars moriendi*, that is, a philosophical fixation on death. Although, of course, this can also be construed as a philosophy of living originality, as a philosophy of birth. The intellectual history of a philosophically sanctioned animosity towards life that is fascinated with mortality, the rhetoric of threat,

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36   See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ketzererfahrungen, Schriften zu Sprache, Literatur und Film*, Munich/Vienna 1979, pp. 169 ff. and 220 ff.

of failure, and of decline serve to obscure, often with a black Romantic gesture, appropriate thinking about birth. Pasolini's sentence is an image of what it means if time first becomes a matrix with the discontinuation of life. Suggested interruptions become illusions. The resonance of the finality of pure facts represents what the discontinued life has become – like water that runs along a pipe in an uninterrupted little stream until it forms a drop at the end which crosses space in free fall to splash emphatically and resoundingly onto the floor or earth. Only the singular can succeed in gaining a life in the flow of such "tears", a life that is a cut in space, and does not first transform itself with its disappearance in death into the darkness of that which has been, into a nothingness which only exists as a result of the now illusionary view of what has disappeared. Only the singular can succeed in gaining a life that no longer has to struggle to survive, a life that can squander itself without sorrow or cares, stepping out of itself in radical selflessness. It would be an offering, a gift, an epiphany. One might be tempted to construe the "he" and "you" in the title of Bill Viola's work according to such thoughts. It could be that the key difference lies no longer between the agencies of personal identities, but between different states of a transition.

On the whole, Bill Viola's art stands out for its philosophy of birth deployed against a myopic rhetoric of death. This emerges in particular in "He Weeps for You" as a reality of processes and images. They contain the basis of what is often rejected as being a propensity to indulge the archetypal and the mystic. This should be cause enough to think for a moment about certain ways images are generated as this will enable us to avoid the danger of referring the images to fixed, deep structures, to sidestep the problems of a collective unconscious. The stance of not bowing before a reference which immediately suggests itself is similar to being able to offer oneself up, to let that which has been created exist as it starts to lead a life of its own. Ideological critique as a stance that deciphers form is usually blinded because it refuses to recognize this. Given that Bill Viola endeavors to create a highly precise form, it is not surprising that his mythical and archetypical interests are repeatedly attacked by such a type of ideological critique for being the reference informing the form. In such cases, the form's reference is imputed to the form as enabling it in the first place,

indeed is conflated with it in a manner which reduces form that shines forth by way of content. "He Weeps for You" addresses a process which shines forth right through the form. It is the same process which binds life together into a whole, owing to death's final cut.

The relationship of "I" and "you" is the terrain in which solitude emerges. One can well imagine that thanks to the movement of the body of the observer (that is, thanks to an "I" which representatively absorbs within it the movements of any possible observer, in other words the "you"), a movement arises which is sensed and thought and continues to echo in both our affective excitation and in the invariability of self-perception. At times, the latter not only follows tracks in which one views one's own face in the image in the drop of water, projected onto the screen. Until the falling of the water drop causes the face on the screen to shatter, which actually says nothing about the real fall of the drop of water when it resounds in one's ears a little later with a slight delay. This is to say that the reality between image and sound is the intrinsic movement of the drop of water, a reality that is either no longer perceived or not yet perceived. One can well imagine that this hiatus between two modes of being (image and sound) and two points in time or sequences is basically the image of the real, which is, of course, something real itself. Accordingly, the movement of the body is motion in which something becomes an idea, which, while bringing a prior state to mind, always moves within the zone between past and future. All that is present is one's own perceived movement of body and mind, and in this movement, one can always distinguish between the two sequential states (the former and latter). It is not the case that the mnemonic image only exists *now* and that the image only arises from that which is presently not present, as it has just passed or is still to come. What we are dealing with here is a qualitatively independent dimension which moves between the dimensions we know. This interim dimension – a domain of the vague, in which, however, exact things occur – is the field of solitude. Solitude – because once the image has exploded, self-perception becomes more intense thanks to the superimposition / interference of the two movements, namely that of sensation (which arises when one recognizes the face in the drop of water as an image of oneself) and of shock (thanks to the exploding image followed by the expectation that something else must follow). This

takes shape as sound and tone, a sound which itself becomes an image that replaces the image that has disappeared and also continues it in such a manner that there is no longer any space to delimit an outside. In Viola's installation, space has ceased to have an inside or outside. The self-perception of the body's movements (visual, gestural, and acoustic movements) is practiced so strongly with the arising impression that no clear schemata can be expressly observed. Instead, the experience of space presents itself as the pure experience of time. Once the installation becomes a form of repetition in which one repeatedly observes one's genesis and passing, and especially the combination of the effects, the schemata re-emerge and their dimensionality are practiced as a game which leads to more extensive repetitions and a deeper insight, an experience that remains intense. This shift is by no means a shift in fundamental determinants, but only in the way the different aspects are linked. What was previously subsequent understanding through astonishment now becomes anticipation, intensive observation of the genesis of an image which now will no longer simply be mistaken but is instead preemptively understood as known. I strongly expect that the qualities of Viola's art which are usually mentioned – the meditative and mystical elements – can be grasped in this installation as this shift in the aspects of how we perceive time and as the interference of specific intensities.

The intense self-reference generated by the specific features of the medium and the choice of transmission devices appears like a revelation of solitude, a loneliness that arises in a sphere of concentrated reduction. The senses are overwhelmed by the impression made by space and time, albeit not in the manner that the senses are overpowered by the physiologically barren landscapes of the desert, for example, when one encounters the concave lower side of the curve of the globe beneath a sky which nothing blocks from view. The exciting effect this has on the imagination has to do with the expanse of an inner space which corresponds to the immeasurable vastness of an outside landscape. This expanse arises from the synthesis of continuity, from the sensation of time flowing with great calm, and from the interruptions, which, in the guise of the falling drop of water, the bursting image of the face, and the explosive sound initially enable us to distinguish between our different senses and between the sequences of the

time of events that lead up to such a climax. Repetition steadily reduces the difference between the ongoing duration of flowing time and the culminating points of the time frame of action, articulated with all the fury of something suddenly standing out in a barren landscape. This aesthetic experience suggests that we should devise a different way of construing archetypes. This is meaningful in the case of a supra-temporal category that is often used in a de-historicizing manner. Archetype is a tempting label for everything which does not fit into the chronological order of linear time, into the matrix of the earlier/now/later, and certainly not into the chains of cause and effect. It also extends to an object-like substance beneath the level of time and to which we have access by means of certain emotional energies. The archetypal need not be regarded as some unchanging substantive treasure trove of images, but as a mode of transformation used by the imagination through all of history. It is something that flickers to life without being a direct revelation, because it links the revelation to that which guides perception in Viola's installation, namely the insistence of the shock as delayed self-cognition. The latter merges with the creation of a framework, the organization of a space for complex procedures, with meditation, with the interaction of a landscape that is superior to the self. The product is a higher state/unity. The concept of the archetype has not been viewed in its entirety, but with regard to only one specific aspect of it as suggested by Carl Jung. The archetype has predominantly been construed as the absolute ontological origin of human thought and sensation, whereby this ontology has been viewed as a type of substrate from which incessantly similar figurations emanate and which, by means of analogously felt sensations, we can make use of in the sense of a universal storehouse of symbols. Now Carl Jung certainly considers this level, but it is only one among several.

In order to adequately understand the concept of archetypes, we must not only think of this tempting concept of a collective unconscious configured in a clear number of symbolic meanings. We must also consider that, for Carl Jung, archetypes are not only images but also mechanisms or energies for engendering images. This is specifically true of transcendental symbols. They do not appear to be numinous, but rather generate emotions, because, although they are external and initially strange, they encounter

a mechanism of the imagination for appropriating and transforming them, whereby the understanding of oneself is also the understanding of the other. Only in this way can one refer to the transcendental experiences which appear in images. Such a reference, or rather, such anticipation of the integration of the numinous into human understanding is something Carl Jung likewise refers to as an "archetype". In other words, archetypes mark a complex field of activities which is not so far removed from a structuralist theory of the imagination as it might initially appear. However, it is obvious that Jung had little interest in clear definitions because he was endeavoring to embrace the entire complexity of experience. And it is equally obvious that in a particular way he definitely preferred a substantialist concept of the archetypal and tended to push the transformational aspects into the background. Nevertheless, the archetype is both substance and image. The imagination brings this image before the mind's eye, and an experience emerges through which the image is experienced as being both external and internal, both numinous and imaginative. Archetypes are "at the same time image and emotions. [...] When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word-picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity."[37] Viola generates this emotionality by technical means, by electrical and electronic, time-based media. Thyrza Nichols Goodeve summarizes the typical link of mysticism and technology in Viola's work: "Such is the odd melding of high-tech video visionary with ancient mysticism that defines Bill Viola's quarter century of techno-spiritualism (1973-1998)."[38] A similar description of the intermediation of technical media and intense inner experience in Viola is articulated by Stephen Sarrazin: "Les bandes et les installations vidéo de cet artiste proposent une expérience intensément intérieur du monde, qui puise à la fois dans les textes sacrés de diverses cultures, dans la poésie mystique, romantique etc."[39] This inner experience is evidently the internal stage of a monad.

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37 Carl Gustav Jung et al., *Man and His Symbols*, London, 1964, p. 96.

38 Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, Cyberpunk meets Anti-Modernist. Bill Viola and the Art of Emotive Conjecture,in: *ARTBYTE,* June-July 1998, p. 24. For a similar description of the intermediation of technical media and intense inner experience see Stephen Sarrazin,Bill Viola, La chaise et l'ordinateur, in: *Artpress,* special issue No. 12, 1991, p. 34.

39 Stephen Sarrazin, Bill Viola, La chaise et l'ordinateur, in: *Artpress,* special issue No. 12, 1991, Paris, p. 34.

The introverted characteristic applies to an entire world in which singular entities can participate. Today, this is not some philosophical or artistic suggestion, but one of the central challenges of contemporary physics, at least from the viewpoint, for example, of Otto Rössler.[40] Viola believes that precisely the early video technology, thanks to its rough-and-readiness, was capable of generating a subliminal vibration.[41] What Viola says with regard to a later work, namely the electronic remake of a Pontormo painting which he entitled "The Visitation" (1995), presents his general understanding of his work and, therefore, also pinpoints an emotional quality of "He Weeps for You". As Viola explains, "in a larger sense, though, the piece comes out of my long-standing interest in the representation of spiritual events, archetypes, and cultural constructions that remain part of contemporary consciousness whether we accept them or not."[42] This is exactly what we mean when we say Viola's work is intended to touch levels below the limits of human perception. Quite apart from the fact that this image of "below" corresponds to the usual ontological archetypology, it by no means expresses an isolated interest in a non-physical symbolism. Rather, it expresses the wish to possess the real flicker of life, as no sign thus far has been found for the real. Anne-Marie Duguet best summarizes Viola's intention when she writes, "for Bill Viola, video is an instrument in the investigation of the real."[43]

According to Sartre, "everything imaginary appears against the 'background of the world', but conversely, any grasping of the real as a world implies the hidden transgression toward the imaginary. All imagining consciousness retains the world as a background to the imaginary that has been rendered void, and conversely all consciousness of the world provokes and motivates an imagining consciousness as a way of grasping the special meaning of the situation."[44] The imaginary does not correspond with the images. Images are engendered by an archetype to the extent that one

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40 See Otto E. Rössler, *Endophysik*, Berlin 1992.
41 See Solomon (note 34), p.6.
42 Bill Viola in conversation with Virginia Rutledge, in: *Art in America*, March, 1998, p. 73.
43 Anne-Marie Duguet, The Videos of Bill Viola: A Space-Time Poetic, in: *Parachute*, 45, 1986/7, p. 50
44 Jean Paul Sartre, *Das Imaginäre. Phänomenologische Psychologie der Einbildungskraft*, Reinbek/Hamburg, 1971, p. 291.

bears in mind the modalities by which images are generated. They move along the interfaces and transformational lines of the imagination. This is the focus of many of Viola's works, and especially in "He Weeps for You" with the focus on the special quality of the universal and the dream-like. This is the place which refers sensations of the archetypal to the properties of dreams and daydreams, to cognition experiencing itself as such. It is a place of images as warm intimacy.[45] The efficacy of such images is usually quite seductive. We can presume a close link between recognition (a central quality of the "archetypal"), because the new is the form in which proximity arises through the images themselves, and, therefore, truth. But this is misleading, for as Bachelard rightly points out, "it would be quite superfluous for such images to be true. They exist. They possess the absoluteness of the image, and they have passed beyond the limit that separates conditioned from absolute sublimation."[46] However emphatically we might put this, it is clear that each person during their lives invariably encounters the mysterious, the incomprehensible, indeed, the uncanny in the everyday simplicity of the extant. No threshold experiences are required here. The search for a purely poetic image unravels as an articulation of this type of mystery. Gaston Bachelard believes dream images play a decisive role in conveying these contents, as they refer in a concentrated artistic formulation to the imagination and its flow. These images are brought together with no references, or very many, and therefore represent poetic experiences. These images are interruptions. By means of exclusion, they tend to demand an absolute sphere consisting only of themselves. "These images blot out the world, and they have no past. They do not stem from any earlier experience."[47] This goes beyond the metaphorical sphere that still refers to something real in a physical sense. The poetic image, however, draws its strength from the non-referential imagination. This strength could be termed the "dream depth" of an image – images of pure imagination, devoid of reference or causality. To put it more precisely, without semantic causality, for I believe that the experience of the absolute image is still a specific form of thought and naturally depends on the physiology of

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45   Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space,* tr. Maria Jolas, Boston 1969, p. 154.

46   Ibid., p. 178.

47   Ibid., p. 233.

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the brain and the nervous system even though we have not yet been able to prove the existence of the individual mechanisms involved. This should be reason enough to remain skeptical toward metaphors used in theory, such as neuronal networks and especially neuronal aesthetics. I prefer the reference to the imaginary status of the image-like to this new suggestion of some metaphorical causality. The image and dream embody realities which appear as autonomous opposites when experienced. Archetypes or images imbued with archetypal power are experienced in exactly the same way. Archetypes are not simple. They appear, they have an effect, they describe results within an opaque dynamism. According to Carl Jung, "an archetype is [...] a dynamic image, a piece of objective psyche which has only been correctly understood if it has been experienced as the autonomous Other."[48]

Imagination creates the image of itself within the depths of the dream image. The way it appears in images, at times, intensively or in purportedly pure form, is exactly how the image of the face appears on the screen on which the drop of water is inscribed in Viola's "He Weeps for You". One can construe the machinery of the complex impact of images as being a procession of apparatuses that generate images. However, the poetry of images is not some interim state, but the expressive form in which the apparatuses take effect. It is no coincidence that when endeavoring to explain dreaming, such apparatuses were assumed to exist, not to mention specific mechanisms, in particular concentration and shifts. In other words, dreaming was conceived of in a similar manner to how we think of the visual. There is only a gradual difference between day and night, between consciousness and the unconscious, for both are based on processes of thought and sensation. The difference is hardly meaningful because, beyond some vague sensation of self, no one to date has come up with a logical definition of consciousness. In this respect, too, artworks such as those created by Bill Viola are significant. They incorporate something into images which cannot be experienced otherwise. In this sense, the works

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48 Carl Gustav Jung, *Über die Psychologie des Unbewußten*, Frankfurt 1975, p. 110, 67ff., 80ff., 94ff.. Also see Jung, *Archetyp und Unbewußtes, Grundwerk CGJ*, vol. 2, Olten, 1984, pp. 46 ff., 77 ff. Also see Gaetano Benedetti – Udo Rauchfleisch (eds.), *Welt der Symbole. Interdisziplinäre Aspekte des Symbolverständnisses*, Göttingen, 1988.

not only evoke the sensations of dreaming, but also dream images. For dreaming should be construed less as the shift of the sentient subjectivity onto uncontrolled or diffuse projective screens and scenic occurrences, and more as the central condition for the imagination and the sphere where it regenerates. "Then the image is given to us anew: no longer as the renunciation of imagination, but as its fulfillment; the fire of dreaming cleanses that which was only the decay of the imaginary to ashes; the fire itself is perfected in the flame. The image is no longer an image of something that is absent and that therefore needs to be replaced; it condenses itself to become the wealth of the present."[49] The act of imagining means putting oneself in the place of everything else, accomplishing the steady substitution of oneself with everything. One is the thing as which one experiences oneself. Imagination is de-subjectification. "The imaginary is transcendent."[50] Imagining means positing oneself as the absolute meaning of one's world in order to experience one's own world as the most relative of worlds, for it is the realm of freedom. The imagination as a dream repeatedly turns into an original movement which unravels in and through dreams. Origination does not designate a beginning, but a quality that is also innate to dreaming. "To imagine means to envisage yourself in the moment of dreaming: to dream yourself as dreaming."[51] Imagination is not an exceptional state, but occurs in all perception. It shores up the agency of the absent, directs perception with a conditioning force. "The imaginary is not a mode of unreality, but very definitely a mode of reality: a 'diagonal' grasp of the original dimensions of being."[52] The image is the agency of representation or denotation, whereas the imagination is geared to an encounter with that which flickers into life in the image. Imagination is thus lively completion and the image is a static refusal or discontinuation of the imagination. Therefore, the "image" of imagination is the sequences, the sequence of images, the way in which images interlock or become one another. It is only imagination which preserves the principle of the living

49 Michel Foucault, Introduction to Ludwig Binswanger, *Traum und Existenz*, Bern – Berlin
     1992, p. 92.
50 Ibid., p. 81.
51 Ibid. p. 82.
52 Loc. cit.

in the construction of a world in the midst of the destructive elements of the image and the phantasm. "For this very reason, the image is insecure, precarious. It is exhausted in its own contradictions: it occupies the place of imagination and all motion that carries me back to the origin of the constituted world; and, at the same time, it refers me to the path of perception in this world and this is my fulfillment. For this reason, reflection kills the image, just as perception kills it, while both the one and the other strengthen and nurture imagining. [...] The image is a cunning artifice of the consciousness that no longer wishes to imagine (create an image). It is the moment of discouragement in the hard work of imagining (imaging). [...] The inventors of images trade the similarities and analogies. The imagination in its authentically poetic function meditates on identity."[53] The dream is admittedly a rhapsody of images, but only a sequence of images to a certain degree. The images in which we remember the dream also distort the dream; they are full of gaps and incomplete. "These facts by no means show that the image is the fabric of which dreams are woven. They only show that the image is a view of the imagination of dreaming; lucid consciousness masters its dream elements in this way. By contrast, in the dream imagining approaches the beginning of existence in which the world originally constituted itself."[54]

Modern art and especially contemporary art based on the media repeatedly criticize an old model of self-certainty (and at times, destroy it)[55]. I am referring to the notion that the "seeing eye" informs the seeing person of the truth about the world, giving him a clear view. Some well-known tropes from the history of this model include Plato's image of the truth appearing before the eye of the soul, René Descartes' clear and unequivocal insights into the metaphor of light in the Enlightenment. To use Martin Jay's accentuation, "vision as a model of truth and as a source of error."[56]

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53   Ibid., pp. 87-9.

54   Ibid., p. 89.

55   See Hans Ulrich Reck, "Kunst durch Medien", in: Hans Ulrich Reck – Wolfgang Müller-Funk (eds.), *Inszenierte Imagination. Beiträge zu einer historischen Anthropologie der Medien*, Vienna – New York, 1996; and Reck, "Bildende Künste. Eine Mediengeschichte", in: Manfred Faßler – Wulf Halbach (eds.), *Geschichte der Medien*, Munich, 1998.

56   Martin Jay, "Was steckt hinter dem Spiegel? Ideologie und Herrschaft des Auges", in: *Leviathan*, vol.1, 1995, p. 42.

The key intellectual basis and enduring reference (be it positive or negative) of the later technological media generation of images is to create eye witnesses capable of truth. This is the case even if the gaze can differentiate between many gestures (soft, tender, cruel) and settings. Throughout history, other notions of the relation of eye, body, and thing have repeatedly arisen. A particularly influential sub-current here is the classical notion of the interaction of the gleaming thing and gleaming eyes, which, of course, unintentionally makes a substantial contribution to understanding current, technologically mediated experiences of light. "The gleaming eyes are [...] to be seen in the context of the doctrine of the *pneuma*, the last proponents of which are to be found, for example, in the life spirits which Descartes deemed intrinsic to the body and responsible for perception and the affects. The divine, the beautiful, the animated. With the classical concept of *pneuma*, we can associate a 'something' whose physical existence is dubious. Within current theories of perception and cognition, there is no place for such concepts. At the end of the 18th century, what was considered 'aesthetics' had to do with the conditions by which perception and thought were possible, whereas today, it is reserved only for the beautiful in art. It would seem as if an entire realm has been elided from perception, in which physical feeling, affects, and emotions, sympathy for other things and others and perceptions that we easily omit to notice are linked together."[57] The agency of the feeling body compels a philosophical critique of the eye and its presumptuous measurement as has been played out in modernist techniques of perspective. Ever since the Renaissance, the device of perspective, of geometrical projection, has substituted a *perspectiva artificialis* for the *perspectiva naturalis* of classical antiquity. The latter was still familiar with the spherical perceptual field of vision and, in particular, angular perspective which makes ostensible size not dependent on distance but on angle of vision. In opposition to the reduction innate in artificial perspective, Merleau-Ponty points out that spatial depth and its permeation is only possible by an extension of the body, which paradoxically also sees the reverse side of the perspectively distorted and distorting objects. "You are always this side of depth, or beyond it. The things are

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57 Ursula Baatz, "Von leuchtenden Augen", in: *Tumult – Zeitschrift für Verkehrswissenschaft*, Issue: *Das Sichtbare*, Munich, 1990, p. 71.

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never one behind the other. The overlapping and concealment of things is not part of their definition. This only expresses my unconceivable solidarity with one of them, namely my body [...] What I call depth is nothing, or it is my part in an unlimited being and initially in a being of space beyond any point of view. The things mutually overlap because they are apart from one another. The proof of this is that I can see depth when I study a painting which, as anyone can confirm, has no depth – and that, for me, it creates the illusion of an illusion."[58]

The crisis of the visible and of observation are not only signs of a crisis of self-observation in art, but also point to art's chance, which, by means of extrusion to include the viewer, frequently endeavors to charge the digital technologies to with promises that the physical will be overcome. Today, complex media environments (media associations, integrated systems, programmed electronic landscapes – from tourism to architecture) are being implemented world-wide under the diktat that even more be visualized and thus subjected to the dominion of the rules of a formal, formalizing, and formatting visibility. The viewer's standpoint is integrated into the virtual space, whereby observation is shifted onto the plane of a higher order and the pressure to visualize becomes even stronger. To the extent that such an augmentation of observation is achieved, the images become active, powerful, and "intelligent". As the images empower themselves, this process generates a critique of reality and more than merely a crisis of representation. "The images, or so it would seem, are becoming 'intelligent'. Yesterday saw us still watching them, and today, they are already watching us. In an interactive relationship in which it is by no means clear whether we still possess the privilege of holding the initiative and being creative, the images test our ability to provide answers. The images demand an identity of their own and struggle to assert their autonomy."[59] Visibility is boosted in a media-based world, compelling and enabling the creation of new abilities to observe. However, this is not so simply new technolo-

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58 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Das Auge und der Geist", in: *Das Auge und der Geist. Philoso-phische Essays*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 26.

59 Fred Forest, "Die Ästhetik der Kommunikation. Thematisierung der Raum-Zeit oder der Kommunikation als einer schönen Kunst", in: Florian Rötzer (ed.), *Digitaler Schein. Ästhetik der elektronischen Medien*, Frankfurt, 1991, p. 326.

gies redeeming the emphatic promise that they will free us from our bodies, putting into practice the final rhetoric of transgression, the ecstasy or empathy of completely new experiences. Instead, they accomplish what Jacques Lacan attributed to the concept of the gaze. The gaze does not influence the controlling, subjugating side to the subject, but functions to inscribe the subject into the field of the visible. The subject itself is the matter of observation by the gaze which constitutes it. The gaze and the eye are antinomies and yet complementary. The gaze dissolves the seeing eye of the observer together with the illusion of the subject and replaces it with writing / the track / the inscription of desire by means of which the subject becomes that which it likewise omits, endangers, or dissolves. The subject can no longer be coherent and the gaze can no longer forge a whole. Instead, coherence is a movement running within the tracks of the gaze which posits desire and dissects the agency of the subject, sticking "to its heels", as it were. The perception of the gaze reveals that which is in between, which binds the fragments of the subject. This movement of binding is a contemporary form of coherence, achieved successively and within a matrix of varying aspects.

Modernist art underwent strong mobilization during the 20th century. Any material, any existing or conceivable object, or any expressible fact potentially became an expressive medium of art. The duplication of positions, gestures and models corresponds to the incredible increase of materials with which works of art can be expressed. Signs have become dissociated from signification, resulting in an intensive mediatization of art and the artistic process - not to speak of the increasing influence of art on life and utopias, society and architecture, politics and nature, environment and the public, philosophy and design. We have become familiar with the buzzwords: "media art", "multimedia", "intermedia", "environments", "video sculpture", "computer-based art", etc. The well-known term "media art" was coined over ten years ago in order to open up a new "playground" for art. It is now time to critically examine what really lies behind this label.

"The Myth of Media Art" deals with key issues of contemporary media art. In the second part of the book, "Media Contexts: Key Topics, Arguments, Examples", art-related fields and significant media issues illustrate the inter-relationship between poetic creation and labor, and artistic practice and economy. Furthermore, the book provides an analysis of fragmentation and totality as diametric poles of a utopian renewal of art, as well as prospects of a media Mannerism, i.e., a renewal of art developed to a meta-level awareness of form in the era of advanced media machines. The book concludes with a careful examination of several works by important artists.