MACHINE-EXPERIENCED SPACE (1999)

Peter Weibel

P. 157 – 171

Editors: In the catalogue Beyond Art, *you state that "architecture begins where space stops." Could you elaborate on how space and architecture relate to each other?*

Weibel: Obviously, the central medium of architecture is space. Fundamental architectural questions explore how to structure space and how to organize reality, whereas classical architectural theory maintains that space has the function of being an interface between the body and the environment. Many architects consider the latter a starting point and say, "Outside it's cold, so inside you need warmth," or the other way around. What I infer from this is that architecture thinks of space as the organization of material in relation to the body. Classical architecture defines the experience of space through the body, whereby the body is the central experience of space. This view extends so far that one of the modernist architects, Le Corbusier, created a model for space and furniture based on the proportions of the body, thus, based on an anthropology of space. My question is if one can interpret space starting from the body, why can the machine not be employed similarly in understanding space?

Interestingly, in all his writings in the 1920's, Le Corbusier claims that modern art is characterized by the state of the machine or, as he says, machinism. In his books, you see airplanes, railways, and cars. His houses fall in between these categories of machines for transportation. Clearly, Le Corbusier based his notion of the house on the machine; he even speaks about apartments as if they were machines. Thus, in modern architecture, there was indeed a consciousness that our experience of space is based on machines. At the same time, because of the long tradition of men living in caves or, as Le Corbusier says, in organized boxes, one still considers the body important.

I believe that the period of the bodily experience of space is completely over at the closure of this century. That phase began at the very moment the telephone and the telegraph were introduced. In the middle of the 19th century, the invention of telematic machines was a critical moment, even more critical than the introduction of cars and airplanes later on, since one could now send a message without any messenger. The basic bodily experience is that when one wants to communicate beyond the local horizon one needs a body. One needs a horse, a ship or the body of a pigeon, in short, one needs a physical body to transport one's message. At once, with the rise of telematic machinery, one can send a message without a body, without a messenger. When technology leaps forward in such a way, it takes a long time for culture to acknowledge and adopt it. Because of that, I have a critical distance towards it, since culture, and even the world of art to a certain extent, always

attempts to defend previous, historically defined experiences against the new advancements of technology. I have noticed that culture and art even tend to cling to the bodily experience of space. It takes a long time for people to understand that the important step in the middle of the 19th century was neither the appearance of cars or of airplanes, nor the transportation of goods or bodies, but precisely the transportation of information. After all, long distance communication without a body means that technology can surpass the limits of physical space.

When I maintain that architecture begins where space ends, that is a provocation, in fact, stemming from the Coop Himmelblau group. Without the provocative flavor, one would say that architecture begins where the body-centered experience of space of classical architecture ends. In other words, space is historically defined as the experience of the body, but now that there is communication without bodies, one deals with the absence of space, i.e. if space would be strictly defined as bodily-experienced space. When working with a computer, however, one enters the realm of virtual space. Thus, the difference between physical and virtual space will disappear once one stops defining one's experience of space through the body. In virtual space, in the so-called geography of networks, one only communicates bodily signs.

As the statement "architecture begins where space ends" implies, the absence of physical space and bodily-experienced space, I am tempted to say that it means as well the negation of architecture. Furthermore, this is precisely the type of architecture which interests me. Normally, architecture is about marked space, but I believe that unmarked space is equally important. The house is a marked space, but what is around the house is the unmarked space dominating and defining the wasteland or the void. Usually, architects draw a line on a map to mark a territory and then start thinking of how they can create a property inside the line. Then the processing of form and the individual style begin.

For example, take Frank Gehry's Bilbao building. Gehry is an architect of marked space, since that building does not have anything to do with its environment. He wants to give his own signature, his mark to the space. In *Cities of Quartz*, the best book about the history of Los Angeles, Mike Davies, a leftist urbanist, demonstrates that even a so-called deconstructivist architect like Gehry builds for power. But what is marked space? How do we mark a space? Another example is Gehry's public library. Normally, a public library is public and open and accessible to all sorts of people from the area. Some people might even come and start spray-painting the building. Therefore, Gehry made a fence around the building, created a fortress with steps of steel, so nobody could harm the library. Instead of a freely accessible public space, the public library becomes a type of private property.

My argument is that if one privileges the marked space too much, the next step is to turn the space from a marked space into a fortress, including surveillance cameras and all kinds of technologies of control. As a democrat, I believe one should do the opposite: if one does not favor surveillance technology, one has to consider unmarked space as important as marked space. This is what I as a utopian teach my students. The emancipation of unmarked space means that there is no place of privilege where one can put his mark. Conversely, one has to notice what is around the place. What, then, does absence of space mean? How could one map the unmarked space inside the mapped space?

The statement "architecture begins where space ends" also means that architecture begins beyond marked space. This is the real sense of Derrida's notion of deconstruction. I remember that, in the 1970's, Libeskind was teaching deconstructivist typography. Before working as an architect, he was involved in teaching the implications of Derrida's deconstructivist theory on literature and typography. Consequently, Libeskind always speaks of machines, for example of typewriters. When one applies Derrida's principles to typography, the first thing to notice is that the alphabet has 26 letters, which is central to the alphabet. Then there are commas, periods, and brackets, which are not so important. However, when one looks at the Internet, there are many slashes and periods. In Internet writing, one perceives the emancipation of the parerga, i.e. the peripheral signs are turning into the main signs. Even when people make marks in books, they return to the age of the Gutenberg galaxy. As one currently views the emancipation of the notes of an unmarked era, the next step will be that architecture's peripheral or unmarked signs must emancipate. Architecture can no longer be built in the sense of here is a house, there is the living room, this is the center, and around the center we organize a space. Yet, the project of overcoming thousands of years of classical architecture centered on bodily experience and physical space could last many, many decades.

Editors: In your theorizing on art, it seems that you remain an ardent adherent to modernist or avant-gardist thought. For example, in the catalogue The Last Picture, *you describe art as a system producing knowledge that continuously transgresses its boundaries. You also consider media art a logical continuation of the avant-garde movement. What premises constitute your conclusion?*

Weibel: Modern art is a reaction to the industrial revolution. Initially, the industrial revolution was nation-based. It started in England with the development of trains, as the industrial revolution was mostly brought about by the transportation of goods. The idea of transporting people came later. Consequently, machines are at the heart of the industrial revolution. Then gradually, with the advance of machines, the telematic machines arrived on the scene but, in the 19th century, they were not available to the masses. My theory is that, to a certain degree, the 20th century made capital for the masses out of 19th-century inventions. Our privileged 20th century, for better or for worse, turned tele-products into mass products for mass communication and mass projection. In the beginning, one person looked into the stereopticon, and then at once hundred thousands of people were able to watch and experience a film projection at the same time.

What do machines ultimately affect? Machines bring about, what I would call, dislocation and de-specialization. Things move from one place, one locus, to another. In art, the first signs of dislocation and de-specialization are of course Cubism and Futurism. Futurism was all about motion and machines. How did the idea of motion emerge? If one observes that something moves faster than oneself, one experiences the world completely differently once one realizes that it is no longer the body itself that moves. So, the machine not only renders the notion of speed abstract, it also gives rise to a different experience of space for the viewer. Even Turner and Monet made many paintings about trains and speed. Initially, many paintings showed the full industrial revolution. There is no landscape lacking signs of industry. However, the bourgeoisie did not like these kind of landscapes. As a consequence, many art movements were falsified by painters who erase signs of industry out of their work in order to please the bourgeoisie. Then they began making peculiar paintings with flowers.

Dislocation changes the position of the painter. Suddenly, motion becomes the subject of art. Futurism engages in questions of how the object moves and the spectator remains static. That the eye of the spectator remains static is taken from the strategy of Muybridge's photography. The opposite, that the object is static, but the spectator moves, inspires Cubism. In fact, the fundaments of modernist art are formed by a reaction to dislocation: the dislocation of the object, creating different phases of motion, and the dislocation of the subject, creating a multiple perspective. In all the Manifests of the modernist movements, one speaks about motion, which is there called dynamism.

The core of the industrial revolution is the telematic machine. This makes one assume that the next revolution will be an information revolution or a post-industrial revolution not based on machines, but on information. If modern art were a reaction to the industrial revolution, then what we are experiencing in our current post-industrial society based on information-communication - whether called a post- or a late- modern era - is how art reacts to the post-industrial information revolution. Easel painting which technique existed even before the industrial revolution, is a spin-off of our own current media such as video and computer art, which are part of the reaction to the post-industrial information revolution. I consider them more appropriate for giving us a clear picture of what is currently going on in art than easel painting. This does not mean I condemn painting, even though Rodchenko remarked in 1920, "This is the last painting of history." Thus, when painters call their own paintings the last painting, it is clear that each painting comes after another last painting. This is a historical mark we cannot go beyond.

Another important phenomenon one ignores, as most people in art history have no interest in the history of science or the history of economics, is that the objects Duchamp brought into the art world are, upon closer inspection, industrial objects. They are definitely not handmade, but ready-made, thus, industrially finished products; they are produced by a machine and not touched by any human

hand during their production. In other words, they are not created by a subject, not created by taste, but machine-produced consumer objects. How does one turn these objects into art? With the classical criteria of taste, craft, and skill? That is not what Duchamp did. As a matter of fact, all the criteria of what art is were abruptly rendered obsolete. What emerges is a theory which states that because of theory, because of interpretation, something becomes art. In other words, if one can say, "After Rodchenko, each painting is a painting after the last painting," one can also say, "After Duchamp, each object of art is a theoretical object." Therefore, whether one considers an object, a sculpture, or a neo-expressionist painting as art, one always has to explain it theoretically in order for these works to have a legitimate reason to exist.

Once again, the industrial revolution created the set of machines which made the experience of the world surpass our bodily senses. If one is surrounded by machines moving faster or seeing better than oneself, one can no longer make actual images of the world. So, after Duchamp's profound reaction to the industrial revolution, one needs to reflect one's own position, i.e. one needs a theory explaining what one cannot perceive. The beginning of this change occurred after the middle of the 19th century. In 1873, James Clark Maxwell made a mathematical equation and said he believed something existed called "electromagnetic waves." He could not see them nor experience them; it was just a mathematical theory. Ten years later, Hertz, could prove Maxwell's hypothesis in the form of an electric spark called "Funk". Consequently, the natural sciences are now spending millions of dollars to prove the existence of particles first proclaimed by theory to exist. Some theorists state there must exist a neutron or a proton, and then other theorists start searching for it. Smaller and smaller elementary particles are being found, all initially created by theory, whereupon technology is deployed to prove the particles exist in physical reality. Thus, in physics, we currently observe the profound change of how theory precedes experience.

The same will happen to the domains of art and architecture. Both art and architecture are very conservative, since they want to stay within the space of bodily "Erfahrung" (experience), "Anschauung" (observation), and visibility. Physics moved away from this, and if art wants to be a part of a contemporary epistemology, it has to make the same move. Duchamp proved by his theory that his objects are art objects. For him, theory comes before experience. Following this, we could say that media art is at the heart of the art world, since media art uses technology, which is part of the post-industrial information revolution. When one is aware that art is a theoretical activity, the new media offer a chance to understand the world.

One of the important features of the computer is its interactivity, which feature makes some people very angry. So, let us speak about interactivity and art. One of the most advanced books about the modern art object is Umberto Eco's *The Open Artwork*, published in the 1960's. Eco speaks of an open artwork, because he is aware that normally an artwork is a closed system. For example, a painting has a

frame. In modern art in the 1960's, there was already a tendency to open up, to dissolve, and to escape from the frame of the painting. But there was still an object to be opened. In the 1960's, artistic activities such as participation, happenings, and Fluxus, foreshadowed the end of the art object. In addition to dematerialization and conceptualization, an open system emerged, a field of action.

This field of action, which we currently call, in a more narrow sense, interactivity, is different from dematerialization and conceptualization, while elements which have not been part of the "art game" are now introduced and freed from prior constraints. In other words, art becomes a social phenomenon where elements previously excluded now start to enter. Thus, the spectator becomes part of the *art object*, where he or she can make changes. John Cage - involved in music as a marked space and silence as an unmarked space - liberates, after Webern, the unmarked space of silence, so that noise enters the field of action. In addition, different materials and different places enter the field as well. Thus, dislocation, one of the central concepts of modern art - albeit rather unarticulated since there is still an art object - designates motion between different places, and motion between different instances of time and space. Therefore, dislocation defines the field of activity. Media art, web art, and interactive computer installations are the first models of the open field of activities, the field of an option to act. After all, one should not act, one could act.

Editors: Do you consider it possible to formulate an ontological definition of media art?

Weibel: I do not think that is possible. The separation of the body and the message implies an emphasis on signs and semiotics. At this historical moment, all media art involves semiotics or a chain of signs. In my opinion, books such as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, i.e. all ontology of art is the last triumph of conservative action against the division of body and message and against the emergence of theory at the expense of experience. In fact, we are dealing now with "Sign and Time", thus with being as a sign - not with nothingness as a negation of the sign. An ontology, a being of media art, would mean being trapped again in the trick of the body, whereas we have to consider the semiotic construction of media art. The point is that when the message becomes separated from the body, it becomes possible to change what one perceives in the interaction, i.e. one's environment becomes a field of variables which can be changed at any time.

For architecture and art, dislocation means that place becomes any place. One can be everywhere at any time. The source of all these changes is human desire. We have a built-in program for dislocation; we create technology in order to give expression to our desire to be dislocated. For me, technology is nothing more than a morphology of desire. Dislocation gives peace to a person when one realizes that a place, the here and now, the local prison, can be changed at any time so that desire does not have to stay in the here and now. One wants to be here, but at the

same time one wants to be somewhere else. Therefore, one goes from place to any place, from here and now to elsewhere, from present time to anytime, from body to anybody. One can say, "I do not want to be my own body - a white, middle-class male - I want to be a woman, or a five-year old, or businessman, or whatever." The Net, as we all know, gives us the possibility to change identities, to have, what I call, an allegorical identity. Then, identity becomes just a position in the field of activities, a position of identity. On the Internet, one is able to construct other identities, to have a contingent identity, to be unfettered by space and time, to be released from being an animal.

My definition of an animal is a being imprisoned in space and time. Human beings do not differ much from animals, but one real difference is that we have invented a technology to jump out of the time and space prison. With our machines, from airplanes to telecommunication tools, we are able to escape the prison of space and time. While my body stays here, my voice resonates over a long distance. Human beings are different from animals, because human beings have the capability to separate body and sign or messenger and message. Conversely, an animal can only live in the here and now, with a coded memory as part of the here and now, a slave of its memory which it cannot erase. For example, a dog is programmed in such a way that before it is going to sleep it has to circle around for a while, because there may be dangerous animals such as snakes in its territory. For a dog living in an apartment, this behavior is no longer necessary, but, as a prisoner of that program, it still circles around before going to sleep. Human beings try to create possibilities to go beyond the limits of the here and now. If architecture does not use the technology that enables it to transgress the hic and nunc, architecture is reactionary. Then architecture keeps human beings trapped as animals in space. Therefore, architecture creates all these glass buildings, where one can look out from the black box and have the sense of not being imprisoned.

When we speak about bodies in space, then sex is the best place to understand and to illustrate the metaphor. Sex is the privileged place of bodily experience, i.e. the experience of a sense of closeness. Both physiology and biology distinguish between "fernsehen" or "telewatching" and proximity, i.e. one has telematic organic senses for distances and senses such as touch for closeness. People believe that sex is about touching, about moving skin to skin. Because of 100,000 years of experience, bodily touch is the essence of sex. Consequently, people think that somebody looking at pornographic magazines or listening to phone sex must have something wrong. If that view would be correct, pornography could only have emerged and been successful because of the pornographic industry providing pornographic material. Yet, when we set ethical and other aspects aside, we see again the morphology of desire: not a desire to touch somebody, but, quite the reverse, a desire to *see* somebody. It is true that people tend to say that looking at pornographic acts is a simulation or a substitution for sex. However, watching pornography is only a substitution of sex from a historical point of view, which makes one believe sex is

merely about closeness. Before the invention of technology, the Gutenberg galaxy was the beginning of the media galaxy. Before the invention of the book image, one could only touch people and see them through one's imagination. But suddenly one could read about sex; there were signs, words and pictures instead of only physical touch. This development evolved into an industry.

Human desire looked for technology to satisfy its desire since sexuality is not only about senses of proximity and of closeness. A part of sex is about distant senses as well, whereby the gaze and the voice emerge as new, partially sexual objects. People enjoy looking at somebody. This is something entirely human that should neither be criminalized nor called a sexual substitution. In fact, it is a process of abstraction, of civilization, that human beings are able to enjoy something through signs. Thus, even in the domain of sexuality, once defined as a primarily bodily experience, we are moving away from ontology. Media industry helped to recognize that sexuality is a profound, extended field of activity. Sexuality, the most privileged domain of closeness and proximity, deals as well with distance, dislocation, fragmentation, partialization, and discontinuity. So, on the one hand, there is the old regime of the body, and on the other hand, there is the regime of machine-experienced space and sign-experienced space. However, one regime is in the process of changing. That is the world of the body and its senses of closeness entering a world of telematic communication. What once seemed to be an eternally closed domain of communication, now turns into a field of open telematic communication.

Editors: In order to break the primacy of Cartesian geometry, you distinguish between two models: a fragmentary shattering and deconstruction of the cube versus Kiesler's organic, biomorphic conception. Which of these two models do you prefer?

Weibel: I prefer the fragmentation and deconstruction of the cube, but I side with Kiesler's biomorphic solution. Kiesler brings in the infinite house and speaks of going beyond the prison of space and time, so he is very close to the rhetoric of my ideas. The concept of the infinity of the house is opposite to classical architecture as a prison of the here and now. Thus, Kiesler feels what is wrong with architecture, but when he attempts to find a solution, he becomes very conservative and refers to the body and to nature and omits machines or signs. When one assumes two regimes, on the one side ontology and biology, and on the other side machines and signs, then Kiesler is on the side of ontology and biology. My favorite model is to shatter the cube on the basis of deconstruction, which is against all these kinds of logocentrism.

Editors: Are there possibly other current theoretical models which, in your view, could contribute to the desired displacement or dislocation?

Weibel: In order to dissolve the cube, I would propose to rely on the concept of algorithm. If one wants to escape the subjective, bodily-centered experience of space, one solution is desubjectivization and liberation of unmarked space. But how to effect that? Possibly through algorithmic principles, meaning that if one makes a basic distinction or a basic option, the rest of the program must follow these rules. For example, when one has two lines, one can say that the room is inside the two lines or outside the two lines. The latter implies an open field. These two options would be a basic algorithm. Naturally, one can make more complex algorithms. I propose to determine new algorithms without deciding what the functions of the rooms are. Just give an algorithm such as hundred rooms of variable size, shift the rooms less than one square meter to the left and shift three rooms more than one square meter to the right. This provides a general algorithm. What are we going to do with ten small rooms? One has to think about that without falling into social programs such as a division of life into working space, living space, eating space and sleeping space. In fact, these functions are no longer valid. Most algorithms of design are incorrect and historically obsolete since many people no longer eat at home and have no families. A living room is then just a facade. The idea of algorithmic solutions would help to devaluate the subjective, historically defined experience of space. An algorithm could be a mathematical model of both the organization of space and the organization of activities. For example, in my case, I only need a library, and nothing else. So, what I am looking for is an algorithm indicating that the center of my house is a library in which one can sleep. Thus, an algorithm could be a method of integrating unmarked space into marked space. It is a way of shattering the cube through an analytic or rational method, rather than Kiesler's biomorphic one, since algorithms belong to the regime of signs rather than to the regime of ontology.

Editors: Which paradigmatic consequence for our future perception or codification of space do you expect of phenomena such as "telematic communication, networks, virtual bodies and multi-media environments"?

Weibel: Cyberspace and the Internet make us experience a fundamental change from closeness to telematic communication. As I said previously, this not only changes our concept of space, but also our concept of identity. Now we can speak of allegorical identity. Prior to that paradigmatic change, we could express ourselves in time as evolution, because of our more or less built-in ontology. One could say that we now have to learn how to construct ourselves. In public figures such as Michael Jackson or Madonna, we perceive the symptoms of such a construction of one's identity. I consider their cosmetic operations as positive, because they show that age is one of the limits of space and time. Huxley - who invented the "doors of perception" - once said: no one gets out of here alive. This is a perfect, metaphorical, and poetic description of the prison of space and time where nobody escapes alive.

When one escapes that prison, one only does so as a dead person: one either has to kill oneself or wait until one dies naturally. Yet, to die naturally is a tragic sentence; one wants to stay in this world but one cannot. When one is inside the prison, one rattles the bars. First we have rattled the bars of space by moving faster through trains and airplanes. Now we want to rattle the bars of time by extending the limits of time through technology. After the revolution of space and spatial reorganization, the next era will be the period of the revolution of time and temporal reorganization.

Why do people die? Strangely enough, there are only two reasons. One is the promise made by religion that people will not really die, but live somewhere else in a different form. The other more rational answer comes from Darwin and his evolution theory. In this theory, evolution would not be possible if people did not die. Without death, all the people in power, all the power elements would just keep on dominating the environment for hundreds of years. In order to destabilize power, evolution had to introduce death so the young were able to evolve. This is the basis of the generational conflict and the basis of the conflict between human beings and nature.

In the Victorian age, people spoke about parallel lives. Currently, through the Net, people may have not only one parallel life, but as many parallel lives and universes as they want. One is able to move from one identity to the other and from one time zone to another. The next step is to extend the passing of time. Cosmetic surgery is only one part of the technology of constructing one's identity and of a possible shift to a longer life.

Editors: In the catalogue Kontext Kunst, *you maintain that the influential art of the 1990's is characterized by an institutional analysis of the context. It is a form of art which thematizes spatial premises and the preconditions of art. In what way does contemporary contextual art research and criticize the mechanisms of space, and how does such art relate to its classic examples (Michael Asher, Daniel Buren) who investigated the "formal limits within which art exists"?*

Weibel: Michael Asher and Daniel Buren are the beginning of what I call "contextual practice". In addition to their theoretical conceptions, they transformed physical space in their work. For example, when Michael Asher removed the wall between the exhibition space and the gallery office, the space changed physically. Even if a sign would say this area is a field of art defined by Michael Asher, that is both a conceptual change and a physical change. Removing a wall is more physical than putting up a sign, but both are physical transformations. The same is the true in Buren's work. When Buren draws a stripe around an artwork on the wall it is a physical action. The stripe clearly indicates the context whereby the wall is the context of the image. In Asher's work, one abstractly observes marked and unmarked space. Asher did a wonderful piece in Munich with color on the floor. Walking from the office to the exhibition space, one clearly notices that Asher wants to free unrepresented spaces such as offices into the realm of represented spaces. In other words,

the gallery activities in the background are as important as the activity of the artist. The critique of the institution and the analysis of the institution takes place on a physical level in space.

Later in the 1990's, people were no longer interested in the physical transformation of space or in space as an area to show critical analyses. Thus, Christian Philip Muller decided to do some pieces based on statistics. Statistics imply categories, whereas sculptures are normally defined by abstract proportions related to anthropomorphic measurements. Conversely, Muller defines his sculptures by the amount of visitors to a museum. For example: 200,000 visitors in Cologne, 300,000 in Düsseldorf and 500,000 in Frankfurt. These measures define the size of his sculptures. So, Muller takes data, not from space, but from cultural institutions, from cultural artifacts. One again notices a movement from physical, historical space to the space of signs. The definition of the physical experience of space, and the definition of the physical appearance of the object, is not defined by traditional space criteria, but by cultural artifacts. Muller moves from the phase of contextualization, which is limited to physical space and bodily space, to the realm of signs, to the data of cultural concepts in order to define the size of his objects.

So, contextualization moves into the direction of ideology; it shifts from visual pleasure to the realm of theory and social exploration. In the 1990's, contextualization means social data and social contexts of art which are normally suppressed. In *The Origin of the Artwork*, a clear example of ontology of art, Heidegger says, "A good work of art annihilates its origin." Then one cannot see who made it, the source is unknown. Well, I maintain the opposite: contextual art means that the source of art should be known and perceived. In other words, art's social context should be visible. One should not annihilate the experience or the theory from whence art comes.

Editors: Which theoretical models of thought constitute the description of art as a strategy of contextualization, and to what extent does this approach distinguish itself from the deconstructivist method?

Weibel: Both methods differ entirely. However, as I said before, the enemy is the same, as both are about deconstructing the white cube. I prefer the methods of the artists I mention in my theory, thus the strategy of contextualization, since deconstructivist architects still shatter the cube as physical space. In my view, the white cube is a place of exclusion. It excludes gender experiences, racial experiences, and colonization experiences. For example, when we enter "a white cube" and see a cross, we relate it to Christianity rather than to Islam. If we would see a voodoo element, we would say it is not art, but folklore. So, in our white cube, there is an extinction of all kinds if human experiences. A reaction to this extinction is noticeable in the young British art scene, where, for example, Sarah Lucas' work is an attempt to collapse class experience.

Deconstruction as such is too much bound to the physical experience of space. When one looks at the architecture of Libeskind, one still sees a formal, morphological deconstruction. I am much more interested in opening up experiences which have been denied and excluded from the white cube up until now. As a matter of fact, the white cube means: white culture, white people, and bourgeois middle class.

Editors: Is it possible to determine (or to frame) the boundaries of an artwork or to structure its optical unity?

Weibel: I advocate open fields of activity; I do not favor boundaries. However, I refer to a certain structure when I speak about algorithms because even an open field must be structured. There are basic principles in systems which show the difference between the system and its environment. One could draw different lines, where one can be closed and another more expounded, and this is already the first type of structuring. In systems, a basic law is if one draws a line, one draws a distinction. This is already a form of structuring. There is no way to escape that. Even a sheet of white paper makes a distinction, because the white paper is surrounded by a wall or another surface. An algorithmic procedure is a most complex structure since it may include other structures. It is not something rigid like the grid. Structure implies probability, living structure, etcetera. It can grow like cells.

I believe if works of art or fields of activity were not be structured in this way, it would be difficult to define them as art. In modern art, there is a pre-contextual phase. When one entered an art gallery, one knew what an artwork would look like. One could say, this is a sculpture, this is a painting, this is a good piece and that is a bad piece. It was very important that everybody knew that "that" was an art object. One could really distinguish it, thus, when one saw a person in a gallery, one knew "that" was a spectator. As a theoretical option, now an artwork is open. Today, one could walk into a show and say, "Where is the artwork?" Looking around to discover art is already part of the field of activity. What I like most about contextualization is that it is a further dissolution of art as an object. Conceptual art is still about objects. Joseph Kosuth first uses the word context in the late 1970's. But still his works imply such things as a photograph, a sentence, and objects. In 1968, I wrote on the floor the word "low"; people who came in and looked at the wall did not see anything. I said, "The artwork is just what you are doing here." That work consists of going around and searching for it. That is a dissolution of the artwork as an object.

Editors: You seem to expect contextual art to have "variable zones and types of visibility". Could non-visual forms of art such as sound contribute to this?

Weibel: I think that variable zones of visibility are much more important than analog technologies of sound. Our culture is built profoundly on concepts of visibility,

from Bentham's famous panopticon to the photograph in one's passport. As long as we live in a society where we are identified by photographs, by fingerprints, by genetic particles, and as long as our culture of surveillance and identification of social communication is on a visual level, I will speak about visual technologies and variable zones of visuality. Our society is not built on acoustic principles with regard to socialization, surveillance, and identification. The Net, where one can erase the source of the message, is the beginning of how one can reconstruct oneself outside the moment and place of visibility. When one enters the possibility of variable zones of visibility, where one does not have a home address to go with one's job - which is so important in Europe - there is a change in social identity. When one leaves the prison of space and time, and moves in the unlimited space of the Net, where one's social identity is a free-floating variable, this will eventually cause a lot of problems for our society.

Editors: To what extent is the concept of Situationism or perhaps a "Situational aesthetics" as formulated by Victor Burgin topical for visual art today?

Weibel: In my opinion, the rediscovery of situationist aesthetics should be viewed together with other movements of radical aesthetics in Europe in the 1950's, such as the Independent Group or the Vienna Group. That will provide a clearer picture of what is going on presently. The Independent Group said, "Today is tomorrow," meaning they had a utopian vision based on (machine) technology. All the subjects I discussed, such as the change of culture through machines or industrial products, are linked to masses and to media. In unknown texts, Richard Hamilton writes about cinematic technology, which was the most advanced visual technology in his day. Today, he surely would redefine his art in relation to cyberspace. But at the time, he defined his art by cinema, television, etcetera, such as his famous work "Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?" I believe that American Pop Art, which was so affirmative of consumer culture, destroyed our conception of Pop Art. The Pop Art concept comes from Britain, where the concept is much richer. English Pop Art is about a machine-built civilization, about all the changes that machines bring into our homes. That is much more complex and advanced than Andy Warhol's ideas. In my view, Warhol's Pop Art is a mastery of reduction, because he himself was addicted to mass media. The repetition of the images of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley cannot be compared with Hamilton's collage work. Hamilton correctly analyzes consumer society while showing televisions and tape recorders, telematic machines which change our communication and our daily environment.

Pop Art deals with machines, information, technology, future, home, etcetera. This is connected to how masses depend on machines and how mass production is machine production. Paolozzi made collages in which the body was changed through the machines. In fact, Cindy Sherman's work or the Chapman

brothers' should be linked to the early collages of Paolozzi. The true core of British Pop Art is the artist's investigation of our technological society, whereas American Pop Art is a confirmation of a segment of consumer culture, and focuses much more on the domain of advertising. Thus, American Pop Art exploits a narrow mass area and is about the anthropology of American consumerist behavior. Andy Warhol is the artist or anthropologist of consumer behavior of the American middle-class. His work is not an analysis of consumer society or of mass society.

It is interesting to group Pop Art together with Situationism (and Guy Debord's famous book) because it refers, in fact, to the most profound analysis of media society up to the present. Even when Baudrillard speaks of the "Agony of the Real", this is a reformulation of Situationism. I believe that Situationism is on the rise again because the more advanced fields in art realize that some ideas have been completely suppressed by the hegemony of the American art market. The American market even stamped on European art its definition of Pop Art, while, in Europe there was a much richer concept. Now younger people are rediscovering Situationism in an urge for legitimization of what they are doing themselves. They try to find predecessors so that they can say, "I am doing the right thing, because I found others who did similar things before." There is always a need for legitimization, a need to search for other sources and inspiration. Therefore, people are going back to the most valid contributions to our culture, such as the Situationist group.

Editors: How do you evaluate "post" theories (post-modern, post-historical etc.) i.e. do you believe in an artwork after the last artwork?

Weibel: What is important to say is that we have reached the end of modernism. I do not care whether it is called post-modernism or second modernism. We have had different attempts to express a general consensus that modernism is not something one wants to stay in forever and that modern art cannot find solutions to our current problems. However, the axioms developed by modern art are still valid. So, in post-modern art or second modern art, we have to transform these axioms rather than distinguish among or forget them. We cannot say, in line with Baudrillard, "forget" modernism, because this would be reactionary. In transforming modern art, we have seen that its structure was often close to totalitarian systems. This is not just a personal failure of one artist; there are structural links. Much modern art was spiritual, obscure, and esoteric. Thus, from Kandinsky to Mondrian we observe that art was often built on spiritual or obscure experiences. However, from a modernist point of view, we can criticize modernism itself, meaning a reformulation of the modernist program. I believe in the method of art, not in the artwork as an object. Therefore, I think it becomes more and more valuable to pronounce the end of modern art and the end of historical avant-garde. This very moment necessitates new methods of art, such as contextual methods, and art as an open field of activities, since one has to include other areas. When a figure like Beuys, even when relying on obsolete

categories like the shaman, could enter the field of politics with such success, this shows that the end of historical forms of politics was already present. Therefore, someone out of the field of art could enter politics with new ideas. Then, in fact, Beuys was already involved in art as an open field of activity. In my view, art can be a method of working in the social field. Contemporary art is a reformulation of modern art, and although modern art sometimes seems to collapse, the rules by which art plays are the rules of modern art.

In contextual art and in the open field of activities of art, the role of the spectator is important. The spectator's role or interactivity is not to change elements of the work of art; it becomes an artwork itself. Quantum theory is the first theory to maintain that descriptions of the world are observer-related. A principle of quantum theory is that when one observes something, one changes what one observes. In the classical natural sciences it is stated as well that things change by the act of observation or the act of description. Art is observer-related, however, contextual art means that the spectator could be one of the contexts. Normally, the spectator or the observer is outside the system as the system, of art used to be a closed system of painting or sculpture. Today, one understands that art is not only observer-related, but also contextualized, i.e. one understands for the first time that we are internal observers. Art introduces two kinds of observers: external observers and internal observers.

Up till now, we have always believed ourselves to be external observers, looking at the world from the outside. Even when we are in the (Platonic) cave, we are separated from the outer world. But now, being part of the art system, albeit on a technical and conceptual level, one realizes, "I am an internal observer of the system I am observing." To be an internal observer means to be part of the system one observes and activates, and at the same time one activates oneself. This is not only a new step in the description of the world, but also in the experience of the world as the experience of oneself. First, while going beyond space and time, teletechnology dislocates human beings. But on another level, teletechnology turns human beings into internal observers. In the natural world, we could easily have the illusion of being external observers. However, in the centuries to come, the electronic world, from the Internet to television, will make internal observers of us. In the electronic world, human beings are part of the system they observe.