

KARLSRUHE
Immaterial Communication

(2002)

S. 50-67

Participants: Ursula Frohne, Boris Groys, Peter Weibel.

A discussion on the theoretical consequences of exhibiting "moving images" in visual art contexts. These images escape the modernist idea of visibility and, instead, demonstrate invisibility. That marks the end of a modernist point of view and its accent on material production (the process of creation). Since current post-modernist (media) art focuses paradigmatically on immaterial communication (the side of interpretation), the attention has shifted from the instance of the creator to the instance of the spectator. Thus, a new *mise-en-scène* aesthetics emerges with key words such as performativity, theatricality, and narrativity. What remains, though, is the conception of a critical *avant-garde* proclaiming that art should distance itself from the dominant strategies of the media.

INVISIBILITY

Boris Groys

What strikes me as specific for our time is an increasing inclusion of video and film into the art space. For example, in the *Arsenale* part of the most recent Venice Biennial, video installations predominated. That is a fascinating development in many aspects since bringing movies into the art space and into the traditional museum space is meant to produce a condition of invisibility, thus a lack of vision, inside the exhibition space. Two parameters play a major role in this phenomenon. The first parameter is rather obvious since it deals with the first affect of video and film, which is eliciting darkness and twilight in the museum space. When new media art comes into the museum, the museum space is put in the dark. This sort of night brought into the museum is an entirely new development. If we look at the history of the museum collection, there always was a stable condition of visibility. This is the first time we are confronted with darkness in the exhibition space.

What is even more important in this respect is the second parameter, dealing with time. It is structurally impossible to see an exhibition with video works in its entirety. Even if an individual video is short, let's say fifteen minutes, it is physically impossible to see all the videos in exhibitions as let's say the Venice Arsenale. So, the spectator goes into one space, looks for a few moments at the video, and then goes to the video in another space. That means there is a fundamental lack of vision since we are physically confronted with presentations which cannot really be seen. It seems that artists working with video and film presuppose the impossibility of seeing the work because of the huge requirements in time, and since they exhibit hours and hours of film footage in the art space. That

is what for example Fischli and Weiss did in their hundred-hour show. What interests me is why there is such lack of vision, such invisibility. In other words, why does the development of the museum space move in the direction of producing invisibility rather than producing visibility as it has always done?

Two techniques are applied in producing this kind of art. One is recording, where the camera works in one's absence. The other approach is ready-made Duchampian, where documentary material is brought into the museum. Thus there are two artistic devices: automatic recording and ready-made documentary. It seems to me that we now have reached the second stage of mechanization of visibility. The first stage was machine production of images or art objects such as Duchamp's ready-mades. In that stage, the spectator was always a human spectator in the sense that it was someone who really observed the work. One could question the subjectivity of the producer, but never the subjectivity of the spectator. Duchamp's view guarantees somehow that art is on the side of the spectator. Today, machines substitute for the spectator - rather than the producer - in automatically recording, evaluating, and transmitting images. That artistic process is a reflection of the lack of vision produced on the side of subjectivity as an effect of the mechanization and automation of the function of the spectator. The human spectator has been replaced by a machine spectator. So, we are massively confronted by machines - archiving machines, recording machines - which do the work without human intervention. That phenomenon results in political discussions about inclusion and exclusion, and about what should and should not be recorded. I believe that precisely the lack of vision, demonstrated by contemporary art in its production of invisibility, is something which reflects the insecure and problematic status of the spectator in the condition of our contemporary civilization.

Editors: Would it be a conscious strategy of the museum to show such an abundance of moving images? Could it be perceived as a critical and deconstructive approach or is it rather an effect of a situation or a stage?

Groys: It is the effect of a situation where models of perception are in a state of transformation. We used to have two models for looking at images. In the first model, the image is stable such as a painting or a ready-made and the spectator moves, whereas in the second model, the spectator is stable and the image moves. For the first time we are now in a situation where both the image and the spectator move. Of course, that leads to the impossibility of vision since, in order to have vision, one needs a secured point.

Weibel: It is indeed astonishing that movies are shown today in the museum. In the classical discourse on museum architecture, one always talked about the importance of daylight. Now the museum concept has dramatically changed with respect to light and darkness. In addition to the paradox Boris Groys worked out on visi-

Concepts on the Move - in a Pooy Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory
Volume 17,
Amsterdam and
New York
2002

bility and invisibility, I would like to stress the modification of the museum's function by turning from a daylight dependent museum to a darkness dependent place. One could ask why it is not enough to show movies in movie theaters. One answer is that there is a kind of movie produced today which is out of place in the movie theater. The museum has to assume what art houses did before and show advanced movies. As a result, the museum's main function of showing paintings has lost its primacy, since paintings do not make sense in dark museums. Thus, at the cost of traditional production, the museum's transformation from daylight into darkness implies that it has to take over that part of the production in society which, as advanced visual production, no longer has any other place. When artists invade new phases of visibility and invisibility, both the artwork and the art space turn out to be new equations about light and darkness. Take for example Douglas Gordon's work showing 30 minutes of darkness and 10 seconds of text. The new equations between visibility and invisibility which seek refuge in the museum seem to be a defeat of the film industry. Apparently, that industry failed to create an institution for advanced cinema, so that the cinematographic code is further developed in the museum world, where it became part of visual culture. In the museum, visual culture seems to have found a place for protection, reproduction and archiving. It is fascinating to see how the museum turned from a white cube into a black box.

The limited possibility to see the work in its entirety, Boris pointed out, also evinces the end of an illusion. When one enters a traditional painting museum, it is difficult to see all the works, yet possible. That mere knowledge has been a wonderful illusion. Today, with film and video works, that illusion is gone. One enters the space and one knows immediately that one must make a selection. It is strange that the process of selection, formerly the curator's task, has become that of the spectator. Once the museum was a protected space of vision and selection constructing a history with a proven canon where one could observe masterpieces. Today, the spectator has the burdensome responsibility to select works and to decide whether to view a work for ten seconds or ten minutes. Since nobody can judge a work in ten seconds, masterworks will be overlooked.

The insecurity of the spectators is related to their substitution by machines. I would like to add to Boris' statement that the machine also makes the classical museum lose its space-based character. A painting used to be a two-dimensional element in space. Now that our vision is becoming time-bound rather than space-bound, the museum itself is changing as well from a space-based institution into a time-based one. That will have an enormous effect on both the people in charge and the spectators. The introduction of cinema and video works into the museum and the change from a space-bound to a time-based vision, with which people have not much experience, cause many insecurities and instabilities. Boris stated that the machine observer is replacing the human observer. That process demonstrates how vision now connects with time rather than with space. The production of invisibility by time invites the question of how long something is visi-

ble and how long something is invisible. We could conclude that today time is superior to vision. Although the work could be seen, it becomes invisible under the conditions of time offered today. So, we are not dealing with a classic form of invisibility. The dominance of time over vision is produced by machines. The superiority of mechanization, machines in command and the replacement of human time by machine time, is another indication of the abdication of the subject. Even the ZKM Center for Media Art as a time-based museum is a product of the triumph of the machine and of the industrialization of the cultural domain. Culture has always been the last island without industry. There was speed, rapidity, and hurry everywhere in society, but the museum has always been characterized by meditation and contemplation. That also belongs to the past. The museum is now in the twilight zone, a twilight constructed by the economy of time. Such economy of time reigning in the domain of art has been made possible by the inclusion of cinema in the museum.

Groys: I would like to make an additional point. In dissociating the notion of art from the notion of visibility, one assumes that making art is identical with the production of visibility. Today, art is the production of invisibility, where it is artificially producing the frustrating impossibility to see. What interests me is precisely that art shows its incapacity, dissociates itself from its very fundamental condition, and begins to operate with invisibilities of different kinds. I believe that that process is still in an initial phase now that new museums are built and new possibilities are opened up for that kind of work. So, we are at the beginning of artworks which systematically explore what can be seen and what cannot be seen, and how to operate with invisibility in the context of the art domain.

Frohne: You mentioned the dissociation of art from visibility. Doesn't that invisibility already begin with conceptual art? How would you distinguish your notion of invisibility from earlier developments that tended in that direction?

Groys: I believe that conceptual art is a visualization of writing where the idea of sentences introduced a traditional, platonic dimension of evidence into the traditional art space. My friend Kabakov reacted against such forms of evidence and began to produce many written texts. His idea was to produce such an overkill of texts, that it would become structurally impossible to read them all. So, people in the exhibition space became completely frustrated while missing an explanation and sensing a mental disarray. I do not recognize a similar attitude in, say, Douglas Gordon's work.

Weibel: Conceptual art could indeed be understood as textual visualization, whereas at the same time, in its very best moments, it was a first attempt to make clear that we are moving into a phase of dissociation between art and visibility. Of course, art has always been the domain of visibility and for hundreds of years the

verdict was that the verbal and the visual should be separate. Apart from periods such as the Baroque, art was not allowed to introduce words into the image. The modernist period, especially early Picasso and the techniques of the ready-made, started emphasizing the verbal in the image. That was the beginning of the dissociation between art and visibility, although the radicality of the gesture was weakened by stressing the visual aspect of the verbal. But in spite of that emphasis on the visual aspect of writing, one could speak of an attempt to question art and visibility.

Frohne: I believe that, from the 1960s on, the intentional desire of artists to deal with the non-visible has been articulated in different attempts. Today, that desire seems to be reconfigured in video aesthetics or film aesthetics inside the museum.

Groys: Look at what happened in the Islamic culture. That culture tried to eliminate any visuality and created a sort of conceptual art where text replaced visual images. I once discussed with Kosuth that his work could be understood in an Islamic sense.

The problem of invisibility is related to Heidegger and Derrida's view that visual art does not depend on space but on time. The question is not what kind of space we can find, be it in writing or in something else, but how we depend on time as the limitation of human existence. In that sense, the invisible cannot be transformed into the visible, since we cannot see what happened before birth and what will happen after death. Thus, the major point is that visuality depends on time. Film and video are the media which make that absolutely obvious.

Editors: What about the desire of the spectator? Isn't it rather striking that, compared to how spectators have reacted to avant-garde art in the past, spectators do not protest, "We do not want this kind of art"? Instead, they meekly walk around in dark spaces such as the Arsenale, where they are only frustrated by the lack of time, not by the sort of work. Could there be a desire for a paradigmatic shift, which could perhaps best be described as a desire for audiovisuality?

Groys: When you watch people moving in the exhibition space, you see they are moving to the light. That reminds me of Heidegger's notion of "Lichtung" as an open space in the dark woods. The strange thing is that the exhibition space itself is entirely dark whereas the pictures produce the light. What actually takes place is a technical "re-auratizing" of art and a sort of re-romanticizing. Thus, people agree with video and cinematic imagery, because it has a sort of technically produced aura, which Benjamin once described as being lost in technically reproduced art. In today's exhibition spaces, there is an immediate glow, which Heidegger describes in his philosophy. People are attracted to these glowing images. You see the crowd moving from one light to another light like insects. People react to the light sources, rather than to what is shown. This metaphor of light in the dark is so

powerful, so traditional, and so religious, that people accept it. At the same time, the light immensely romanticizes and sacralizes the entire exhibition space.

Frohne: What you describe as the numinous quality of the museum space in darkness and the extraordinary light certainly is an attraction. At the same time, I believe that the public entering today's museum and its new configurations is also fascinated by the narrative and the displayed characters which are important parts of the new video statements. There is a strong psychological attraction for the microdrama's taking place in these video features. Perhaps there are associations and equations with what the public sees on TV and in the movie theater. Thus, the public is not only attracted by the small plays they witness in the museum, but is also touched by the alienating quality of the works, which somehow puts them at a distance. That ambivalence is very challenging and interesting. The return of the narrative into contemporary art through these new media is a very important aspect.

Groys: These works absolutely represent a new form of avant-garde which returns many things to the spectator such as aura, narrativity, imagination, and dreaming. When you walk from one black box to another, that is precisely what you think is happening: you are dreaming. At the same time, one could ask "Why is it avant-garde?" The answer is, "Because it is completely technically produced." There is not one element in those works which is not explicitly engineered.

Frohne: You mentioned before that the museum space has become a locus of retreat for those articulations, which no longer find a place in, for example, the movie theater. Therefore, aspects excluded from other spheres of public life or visual display reenter the museum. Perhaps themes such as romanticism, psychological outcast situations, and (pseudo) religious aspects as parts of reality without a specific space reenter the museum as well in the form of video installations. I wonder whether the museum will become some sort of exile place.

Groys: What is happening is a privatization of the cinematic experience. The cinematic experience has always been a collective experience. Now, in a new form of individualism, people want to be alone with the movie. When you walk through an exhibition space, you always see someone sitting alone at the corner watching a video. That person has a sense of being a private, isolated spectator. That feeling is comparable to how you read a book, a feeling you never had before in the movie theater. The experience of private videos and computer processing increases the personal in the collective cinematic experience, whereas the official movie theater turns more and more into a club with shops and restaurants. In other words, the cinematic experience becomes increasingly collective as a mundane event and the experience of cinematic vision moves more and more into the direction of an individualist one.

Weibel: From the beginning of the museums of modern art, movies have been included in the museum and its spaces. Tragically, only in Europe the importance of that has never been understood. What is the danger of museums opening their doors to movies? Then the museum is entering new ground.

To come back to narrativity: narrativity is part of theatricality and performativity. These are categories denied by the dominant doctrines of modernism. Modernism was against "performance", against "body art", and against "theater". That was the core doctrine of modernism. However, what you can observe now is that the most relevant part of modern art has always been connected with those forms. Following Greenberg's formalist interpretation of modernism, it was easy to only stress abstract art and its color, surface, and form and line elements. As a consequence, all the other elements spreading in different directions were suppressed by a somehow reactionary ideology. Now the moment has come where we can see that maybe the most relevant part of modernism - and I agree with T.J. Clark that we have to say farewell to the idea that there is only one conception of modernism - such as performativity, theatricality, and new ways of narrativity are defining a new era. Why? When programming forms of cinema, one discovers that new modes of performativity and narrativity are bringing back perspectives on productions which have been suppressed in the past. In comparison, gender studies, black studies, and gay studies are ways of the academic expression of researching suppressed perspectives. There are many artists, for example Isaac Julian, a black English filmmaker, who shows us that we have suppressed certain artistic perspectives. In dealing with such elements of suppression, one casts a new perspective on narrativity. Narrativity is not something which can be understood in the pure formalist doctrine of modernism. The point is that bringing movies into the museum implies bringing in new themes. If the museum wants to show these new themes, it cannot do that by showing classic painting and sculpture since most painters and sculptors are slaves to the doctrine of modernism. Only media artists massively introduce new themes. So, if the museum wants to be progressive in its themes, it has to turn to experimental cinema and new media.

THEATRICALITY

Ursula Frohne

In my view, one of the most striking features of our everyday experience in contemporary culture is an increasing theatricality that seems to pervade all spheres of public and private life. Diverse social phenomena such as the advent of entertainment culture, fashion hypes, trend-creations of lifestyle and gadget cults, celebrity culture in politics, the branding of bodies and products and the fantasies associated with themed entertainment destinations constantly produce new patterns of identification. These blatantly toy with the aesthetic potential of prefabricated "mise-en-scènes" and have elevated the "show-effect" to become one of the dominant paradigms of our social relations, and public and private rituals. The omnipresence of

the media and their global disseminations have given these forms of self-presentation and "spectacularization" an almost obliging social power. Thus, they provoke all kinds of aesthetic imitations of media-based role models, ranging from the calculated public self-display of one's own persona in the realm of the everyday to performances on the political stage. With the blurred boundaries between art and fashion and the rise of the cinematic experience, a number of contemporary artists have been reflecting on these aspects of an increasing theatricality of our scopes of agency by analyzing the performative patterns that circulate in the mass-media. These artists react with diverse strategies of appropriation and deconstruction to the cultural mainstream that has a media event as such and in which the distinctions between fiction and reality, actor and spectator virtually dissolve in favor of a seeming (or fake) "interaction" between the public and media events. Through the twin lenses of contemporary art practice and cultural criticism, these artists examine the loss of reality (that already Kracauer referred to in his remarks on the effects of the entertainment industry on the shop assistants) that develops its all-absorbing power in the stage gleam of the media.

Andy Warhol's series of "Screen Tests" from 1964/65 is an early document of the individual's self-awareness in the presence of the media, generating a theatrical self-presentation that connects the everyday persona with the virtual "star". In these film sequences, that pretend to be professional "screen tests" with candidates that apply for a role in a movie, Warhol gave visitors to the Factory and his friends the opportunity to pose in front of the camera, as if these people were meant to be "real stars". This series is an early example of the internalization of the gaze of the camera as a result of the all-pervading influence of the mass-media. As John Miller has phrased this effect: "The stage is already inside the heads of the public". This theatricality of the everyday was made possible by the perforation of the dividing line between outside and inside, as much in spatial terms, as Beatriz Colomina has shown in her book *Privacy and Publicity* (in the sense that modern architecture is conceived like stage sets and their inhabitants perpetually have to play themselves), as in terms of individual identity (in the sense of Judith Butler's concept of "gender as a corporeal style", more an "act", as it were, which is more intentional and performative than a naturalized given).

A general increase of scenic images, in photography, video and installations that reintroduce narration and dramatic patterns into the visual experience, implies a general interest in these aspects of theatricality that evolves from the relation between the viewer and the subject of his or her perception. Well-known examples by Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Tony Oursler, Tracey Moffat, Sam Taylor-Wood, Thomas Struth, Isabell Heimerdinger, Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler to name only a few, reveal in their works the structural features and reverberative qualities of performing in the sense that the subject of perception provides the means of being seen in a particular way. They confront the spectator actively with the media-based patterns of pose, drama and pseudo-authenticity, creating a situation in which the relation between the viewer and the subject of the look is

defined as a construction of the self-monitoring power that the potential viewer actually imposes on the individual's self-display.

First steps by artists in this direction to introduce the aesthetic qualities of theatricality into their visual concepts evolved in the late 1960s with performance, action, happening and other live events that aimed to integrate the viewer into the scene. In these activities, we can already locate first structural features of an "event quality" that involves the viewer in the experience of the observed. Today's images have profited from these synergetic tendencies that have created multiple interchanges between the performing and fine arts up to the present – if those old genre distinctions can still be applied. When Bruce Nauman began to work with professional actors in his video installations of the early 1980s, he constructed situations that verbally and psychologically escalated to the point where the viewer got involved into the emotional confrontation of the actor's play. Michael Fried's concept of theatricality, used to attack minimalist art, transfigured into an *intentional* theatrical display of body and space. This scenic aspect has been perpetuated in the 1990s by artists such as Sam Taylor-Wood, Gillian Wearing, Perl Hirshman, Monka Oechsler, Pierre Huyghe, Maureen Connor, Vanessa Beecroft, Isabell Heimerdinger, and Eija-Liisa-Ahtila, in the way that they stage micro-dramas that psychologically and physically (in the sense that some of the installations are built like a room or stage where the viewer inevitably becomes part of the set) involve the viewer on the level of his or her growing self-awareness in the face of the characters on display. I would argue, therefore, that the photo-series by Cindy Sherman, Tracey Moffat, Yaka Shonibares or Jeff Wall are early articulations of this art-specific development of performative visual concepts, that are actually embedded in a general social economy of a stage (or media)-oriented performative culture in that they (re)construct fictions of filmic clichés, and genres of public self-display created by the desire to be inside the gaze of mass media. In their referential languages to fast-changing trends of self-display, they visualize the process of an increasing internalization of media emissions, that constantly pervade our personal aesthetic preferences as well as our most intimate desires.

In as much as they contest the facile charge of voyeurism, they visualize each subject that performs or poses to meet the gaze of other people, and create a theatrical situation: the viewer is confronted with the material display of the body and involved in the "scene" of visual communication. In our current media culture, this pattern could be extended to the model of an internalized viewer who is identical with the gaze of the media that triggers the subject's self-monitoring, in all moments of its private and public display.

Kaja Silverman has proposed a structural analysis of precisely this situation with regard to the theatricality of everyday life. She argues that every subject who poses an offer to the gaze of other people, performs a "photographic transaction". As the subject anticipates the moment of being looked at or "photographed" (by a real or imaginary camera), he or she adopts the form of a "pre-photographic

photograph". In this sense, the pose is a Gesture by which the subject offers him or herself to the gaze already in the guise of a particular environment into a stage. Silverman ascribes this effect to the "reverberative qualities" of the pose: "The representational force which the pose exerts is so great that it radiates outward, and transforms the space around the body and everything which comes into contact with it into an imaginary photograph... The pose always involves the positioning of a representationally inflected body in space, and the consequent conversion of that space into a 'place'." (*Threshold of the Visible World*)

Let me conclude by rephrasing Nauman's truism *People Die of Exposure*, that these mentioned examples of current visual practice offer dialectical readings of our media addictions and criticisms and open up a number of ethical and political perspectives on issues such as shame, humiliation, social mimicry and social experiment in relation to the growing desire of being "in the media" as one of the driving cultural forces in the era of event-capitalism. Or to give Andy Warhol the last word as he stated in *Popism* on the shooting of Chelsea Girls: "It was so for real, that I got upset and had to leave the room — but I made sure I left the camera running."

Weibel: When you describe the influence of media culture on fine art and the theatricality and participation which emerge because of the interactivity of media art, I wonder whether you do so from a critical perspective. In modernism, the autonomy of art was also defined as such because it created its own world of forms, which then later were imitated by the popular arts. Today something happens the other way around, since the art world is influenced by and takes models from mass media and mass culture. How should we relate to such developments?

Frohne: It is a matter of becoming aware of certain mechanisms in grasping our relation to media culture. It is important to find a way of creating the possibility of positioning yourself in the intertwining play of media reception, response and consumption. That could necessitate a critical view, but not automatically.

Weibel: The boundary between mass media production and artistic individual production becomes increasingly blurred. In general, people know who is at the origin of, for example, Jeff Wall or Cindy Sherman's work. However, the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art has shown Benetton posters as artworks. Should we say, then, that Benetton is at the origin of a work of art? Or when someone like Douglas Gordon employs the movie *Psycho* in his work, is the next step perhaps to accept that *Psycho* itself is an artwork which should be shown in the museum as well? And would people like Chris Cunningham who works for MTV, thus a mass medium in the public culture, suddenly belong to the domain of art?

When boundaries really are blurred, that should imply that artists show their work not only in an exhibition space but also on MTV. But that never happens. The point is that the transformation of the museum into a time-based invis-

bility, as Boris has described it, could open its door so that, strangely enough, mass media can enter the museum. First there is avant-garde cinema, then, at a certain moment even commercial video makers could enter the museum space. That is the danger I see.

Groys: I would like to make two comments. First of all, one regarding theatricality. There are many reconstructions of Mondrian's studio. Mondrian was absolutely theatrical and so was the whole of Parisian modernism. Also Pollock and his dances are extremely theatrical. So, modernism is something entirely different from what Americans believe it to be. Americans took European modernism out of its context and, in that operation, erased the history of European high culture. So, that form of European modernism is more about the psyche of American academics and how they put certain examples of European art into a different perspective.

That brings me to a second comment. I would not say that modernism in itself was suppressive or reactive. For some time, a number of American academics did not see clearly what European modernism really entailed. Those differences in conception always referred to contextual matters. Similarly, the mere fact that popular culture's procedures emerge in the museum context does not mean that the boundary between museum culture and commercial culture becomes obliterated. Rather, it becomes strengthened. The contemporary notion of the museum as institution rose together with the notion of the ready-made. Today's museum is still about showing things in different contexts, which is the function of the museum of our time. In a museum context, one can show things in an entirely different system of relationships and in an entirely different history. That is how the museum works today and that is what makes it interesting. As a curator, you have to answer time and again the question of whether works are shown in an interesting, contextually different manner. The museum itself is still a space open to many different things.

Weibel: Your radical contestation of the American version of modernism is very seductive. There is the famous book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, and now we see that one of the thefts was also wrongly defining what modernism is. I would like to elaborate on the definition of the open context. Could such an open context, which works in the museum for let's say Duchamp's *Fountain*, also work in the private home? I would say no. But how could we define the difference? A furniture piece in the museum, for example a Tobias Rehberger work, would that be an artwork in the private home as well?

Frohne: The question of contextuality is fascinating in Louise Lawler's photographs, where she basically documents artworks in private homes or in corporate contexts. Those photographs show that the work's meaning really changes in those different environments.

Editors: You referred many times to the notion of avant-garde. What is the mean-

ing of such notion in our contemporary context? Is it perhaps a political awareness of subjectivity? And how would you compare current avant-garde activities with the strategies of the previous ones?

Groys: Avant-garde is about technicality. It begins with a reflection on artistic, technical processes and analyses of technical devices in image production. For example, cinema installation techniques are tools to analyze cinematic illusion, to analyze conditions under which the image is displayed, and to analyze the conditions of perception. So, artists involved in that are doing the same work Picasso or Malevich did in relation to the painted image. The reflection on technical procedures becomes immediately political, because spontaneous artistic manifestations are redefined as an application of a very well-defined technical means. That implies making decisions. If you think you are a genius, you produce your work out of a private awareness; you are not political, because there are no decisions related to your work. However, once you begin to reflect on your work and start seeing the production of the artwork as a system or a chain of decisionmaking, then it is canonically political.

Weibel: The title of our workshop is "Concepts on the Move". I think we agree that new territories such as narrativity, performativity, and theatricality are concepts on the move: concepts that emerged from the true history of modernism. Those concepts will push further on their way to something different.

Groys: If we speak about "Concepts on the Move", I think that the point to be stressed again is about visibility and art. Art moves away from visibility, and visibility moves away from art. For a very long time they moved together and now they move in different directions. I think the same could happen to the notion of the autonomous object.

Weibel: I see what you mean. For many years, the true vision of visibility significant for modern art was abstract sculpture, for example, Brancusi. Everybody then spoke about the autonomous quality of avant-garde sculpture, but today it looks old-fashioned and reactionary. Avant-garde art is now moving toward theatricality and performativity.

Editors: To come back to Ursula Frohne's statement: the notions of performativity and theatricality seem to refer, in your view, to the staging of subjectivity. Do you propose a new definition of subjectivity?

Frohne: I referred to a prefabricated subjectivity, which is already a product somehow of mass media emissions. In contemporary art, reflection on these aspects is taking place. For example, in Douglas Gordon's work, where a conceptual way of deconstructing clichés in reducing the speed of the movie is deployed to construct

an awareness of the spectator. Because of this, the spectator is actually involved in the process of combining the filmic images. Of course, Gordon employs a video technique to do that, since it is technically impossible for film to produce such effect. These are technical methods creating a certain conceptual, critical distance towards the mainstream media impressions we are constantly bombarded with and confronted with. In that way, the spectator could discover new views on their daily media consumption.

Editors: You mentioned that we live in the age of event-capitalism. What do you mean by that?

Frohne: The current media culture is defined by increasingly more event-oriented concepts. If you zap through the television channels you will easily discover the kind of pseudo-integration of the spectator by suggesting that this is real time. You can observe the embarrassment of people or sometimes it is even the intention of the game shows to produce embarrassing situations, so that the viewer will get the thrill of watching that embarrassment. It is no longer the narrative of a crime story that necessarily creates the thrill you are looking for when zapping through the channels, but rather real life events where people are willingly tortured by embarrassment. All these effects that you encounter when you go through television channels is part of that event-capitalism.

Editors: Antonio Negri's book *Empire* seems to evoke an enormous interest for the political in the art world. Is the term event-capitalism related to that new interest? Perhaps we could come back to that later.

DETACHMENT

Peter Weibel

By studying conditions of cultural production, translating the observed modifications of these conditions, and predicting future artistic practices, one is also involved in questions around problem fields and possible solutions. In such a process, concepts are on the move. In the 20th century, with the introduction of the media machine, the classic quadruple of art, society, politics, and economics changed. Today, we have a fifth element. The classic four concepts are linked with media technology and different problems and answers are raised. In fact, there are modern questions and modern answers, and postmodern questions and postmodern answers. One of the modifications concerns the modern question of who the author is, since machines have transformed the author's position. Around 1839, Fox Talbot published the first theoretical article on photography based on the famous question of how a work of art can be created without the hand of the artist. That is what Barthes and Foucault defined as the ultimate postmodern question. However, it is not a postmodern question. In fact, authorship is the major question of mod-

ernism, which emerged with the introduction of the machine. Suddenly, a machine could autonomously produce a picture, and that became the classic problem of modernism, even enhanced by the word autonomous. Thus, what is the true post-modern problem? The spectator. We have to discuss the spectator in the context of interactivity, participation, and visibility. In other words, we have to concentrate on the framework of the spectator.

Another modernist question focused on the concept of creativity. When people describe Picasso, one of the heroes of modernism, the key word is creativity. Today, however, the problem of creativity has been replaced by the problem of interpretation. It is easy to be creative, but very difficult to be interpretative in the sense of processing and understanding art. The machine is able to produce hundreds of objects every day, so creativity and authorship have turned into problems of the domains of economy and politics. Economy has to decide what copyright is since copyright is a capitalist definition of creativity and authorship.

Thus, the concepts of our time have to imply both the spectator and interpretation. Since today's mass media and mass entertainment promise that everything is allowed, a major question is how the spectator deals with that. When one enters the mass domain, one is allowed to become whatever one chooses. In fact, that is a new law prescribed by the mass media and mass culture. One could call that phenomenon event capitalism, or empire. A basic idea in Negri and Hardt's *Empire* is that "everything is allowed". There is no limit to what one can watch with respect to intimacy, and to what one can buy and become. In such a situation where the mass media and popular culture tell us everything is allowed, art has the duty to say that is not the case. That is a very strange development in the domain of art. What we discover now is that 19th-century avant-garde art, unknowingly and in a Leninist way, was the promoter of mass media even when artists such as Mallarmé said, "We have to detest the masses." In fact, by stating we are allowed to show nudity, the avant-garde prepared the very axioms of mass culture. Thus, the avant-garde has functioned unconsciously as the motor of the mass media, since the concept of freedom as defined by the avant-garde has been assumed by the mass media. Today, art has a new option in being the only place where one can hear something is not allowed. That position could be compared to what was once the task of religion, but now even religion explains that everything is fine. That position of saying no is one of the possibilities for fighting against empire.

The production of the autonomous object is another element at the heart of the classic avant-garde. Current art forms have a link with economy, which means that new economy and new media have prepared the ground for a time-based activity. Today, economy is not so much about the production of objects as about the distribution of communication. In a similar mode, the art world has shifted from the concept of production to the concept of distribution of communication. Net art has shown that the art product is immaterial; it is not an object, but just a field of communication. The shift from the modernist production of material

objects to the postmodernist production of immaterial communication is one of the basic ideas Negri and Hardt try to define in *Empire*. Immaterial labor is a key word in their work, which I would not call economic theory, but rather economic poetry. - In fact, we are still waiting for a critique of capital in postmodern times. - In *Empire* one can notice the beginning of "everything is allowed".

Another notion connected with the modern avant-garde is critique.

Classic critique was characterized by the desire to affect change in the thing criticized. One wanted to articulate a critique that could be understood and accepted in a sort of Habermasian way since communication, dialogue and consensus were the basis of rational democracy. Today, the rules are different. What we are approaching now is a critique formulated in such a way that it cannot be accepted. When critique denotes the unacceptable, there is no chance to find consensus. That is another topic of *Empire*. We realize today that the critique of the classic avant-garde served to stabilize the system or the empire. The empire is the center with a periphery or a fringe around it. The fringe is the energy needed to expand the center. It makes the empire very grateful that its critics did the labor empire could not do by itself: to draw attention to the fringe and its problems, to legitimate the fringe, and to expand the fringe. The critics once exclaimed "abolish the state." That is exactly what transnational companies needed since they want a global empire where no state can hinder them. Thus, unknowingly, modern critique served Empire. Artists, which Gramsci already called experts of legitimation, worked similarly in legitimizing the activities of global economy. Even when Negri and Hardt's *Empire* is limited to poetry, I would say at the same time that it is an important theoretical attempt to put forward an unacceptable critique. Once again, unacceptability is one of the fundamental principles today not only of critical theory, but also of critical art. Today, the theoretical and artistic avant-gardes refuse the name "fringe elements", outsiders. Instead they enter the center in the name of democracy.

In a situation where critique can turn into something unacceptable, art can turn into something novel as well and enter into an alliance with mass media or science; the expansion of visual culture into new territories incited a so-called science war where scientists defend their territory by begging that artists and theorists stay within the frame of reference of their own concepts and stick to their own classic models. The zones of invisibility and performativity demonstrate that the best of the art system is moving into novel territories and novel concepts. At the same time, these zones destabilize what other people believe to be science.

When one looks critically at visual art and attempts to position its fundamental concepts on the move, one inevitably notices that art has left its territory. Visual art is moving into new territories while transforming the framework of the spectator and incorporating concepts from other fields. One could easily say that visual art's alliance with the mass media and the "allowed" is an art practice of complying to the exploitation culture of the mass media. One could easily discuss what is reactionary and what is not reactionary in the art world. However, the art

world is no longer a pure world. In order to follow its subtle distinctions, it is very important to observe the concepts on the move I just described.

Groys: I believe that the history of the modern avant-garde is not a history of freedom, but a history of increasing restrictions, moving from "you should not paint images" to "you should not paint at all." From the beginning, the history of the avant-garde has been a history of introducing new taboos rather than breaking existing taboos. Negri's book *Empire* has a similar problem. The book is a combination of Deleuze's "body without organs" and the movie *The Empire Strikes Back*. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, there is an omnipresent imperial force which is part of all people. The whole idea of the movie is that at some point in time the positive hero understands that the same force also lives inside him and then he becomes a victor. That idea resembles Deleuze's body without organs. Everything is one body, although one believes oneself to be an isolated body. At the moment one understands to be part of the body, one is safe.

I have always hated such ideas, since they seem to be leftist and radical, whereas they are just a hedonistic and folkloric sort of edition of the love parade. Absolutely everything terrible in our culture is described within the Deleuze-Negri ideology; not as a negative side, but as a positive one. In their view, the real act of rejection of society is to be happy and to have fun. Reading Deleuze is like a Bacardi Rum advertisement. It is an advertisement without body: one never sees Bacardi Rum; one only sees that everybody is happy. Happiness can be Communism, it can be Empire, and it can be Anti-Oedipus. So, contemporary advertisement is Deleuzian: they advertise good feelings without reference to any objectivity. Of course, that is aesthetically connected with the idea of abstract expressionism. The sensibility of a French philosopher, including Negri, is an abstract expressionist sensibility combined with wrongly understood mass cultural advertisement.

The real critical position is to be more unhappy than any other. For example, if you are unhappy, because you cannot really paint a good Venus, you decide to paint a black square. That kind of rejection is at the same time authorization and individualization. I think that we should redefine the notion of possession in these terms. Authorship does not mean that you produce something, but precisely that you reject something by not doing something. That is why you are an author. After all, authorship is a reduction.

I am rather tired of attacks on the notion of possession. Most of what authorship means is that you are responsible for what you are doing. In that way, people can point at you and say: this person did it. That sort of authorship cannot be found in politics - the party did it - not in economics - it is a general trend - and not in advertising - the public does it. So it is only a very small portion of society that takes responsibility for the things they are doing. It is a good thing to make oneself responsible by the act of reduction, rejection, and ascetic self-isolation.

Weibel: I am glad that you correct my notion of modern avant-garde. True avant-garde was indeed characterized by the notion of rejection. When Coca-Cola says "enjoy", that is neither a license, nor a permission, but an obligation. People must enjoy and be happy. When you are not happy or enjoying yourself, you are a failure. It is indeed important to reject those obligations.

Groys: What French philosophers want to do is to replace technicality with eroticism. However, true avant-gardism begins with dissociation from eroticism and replacing it with technicality. Lyotard once said that money and sexuality flow together. Political power and economic power are the same as erotic power. The entire French philosophy is an ideology of contemporary capitalism rather than some sort of neo-liberalism. Deleuze and Lyotard seem to be excellent authors for the contemporary manager.

Editors: If art is the only place of rejection and being critical, the question arises as to what the transcendental conditions are which offer this specific domain the possibility to be critical.

Weibel: Art owes its possibilities to its marginality. In our current society, there are two options: art for the masses, or, taking a different direction, marginalized art. The price we have to pay for that is that the people in power think that art is something irrelevant to the reproduction of power in society. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, artists had the heroic illusion they employed the mass media for their own glamour. Today, we know that the career of an artist has nothing to do with mass media, in fact, the mass media can only endanger that career. So, the relevance of mass media for art is zero and vice versa. It is exactly the dissociation of the art system and the mass media which permits art to be critical at the price of being marginalized and not accepted.

Groys: In order to be critical, one has to have distance. One has to dissociate oneself from the object of criticism, and at the same time have that object in front of one's eyes. And that is precisely what artists do. Perhaps other people could also be critical, but art is in a better position precisely because a good artist is capable of creating a distance.

Weibel: That distance again shows a shift in concepts. Classic art was defined by fascination. In that definition, spectators observing classic art would become dislocated in time and space and forget who they are. In fact, while viewing classic art, the spectator would have a religious experience. Such experience was also created in a monstrous way by the Hollywood film industries. Hollywood has learnt from classic art what kind of buttons to press and how to force a smile or tears in a machine-type production. That turned art into the producer of distance and detachment. When artists follow Hollywood strategies they end up like Bill Viola, who

misunderstands media art or even all art when he employs Hollywood effects. Viola's work takes the spectator away while simulating an extremely reactionary sort of empathy. In interesting art, spectators are not inside the artwork, but outside of it while producing a distance between themselves and the work of art.