Arte Contexto, Numero 6, 2005

The post-medial (2005)

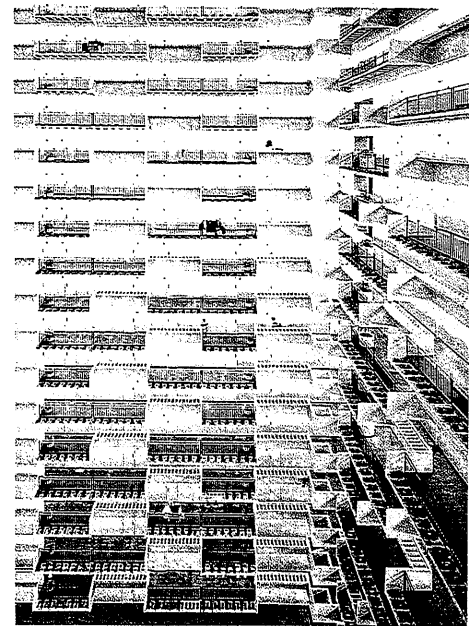# condition

S. 11 - 15

By Peter Weibel*

One of the essential successes of both the new technological media such as video and computers and the old technological media such as photography and film was not only their initiation of new art movements and art media or their creation of new expressive media but their decisive influence on historical media such as painting and sculpture. Therefore these new media not only built a new branch on the tree of art but they have also changed the tree altogether. This is why one has to differentiate between old technological media (photography, film) and new technological media (video, computer) on the one hand and between the arts of painting and sculpture on the other hand, which until recently, haven't even been considered as media at all, but under the influence of the media have become media themselves, the non-technological old media. With the experience of the new media we now take a different look at the old media. With the methods of the new media we also revaluate the methods of the old non-technological media. You could go as far as claiming that the real success of the new media is not stated in having developed new art forms and art possibilities but in giving us new access to the old art media and most of all in keeping them alive by forcing them into radical changes.
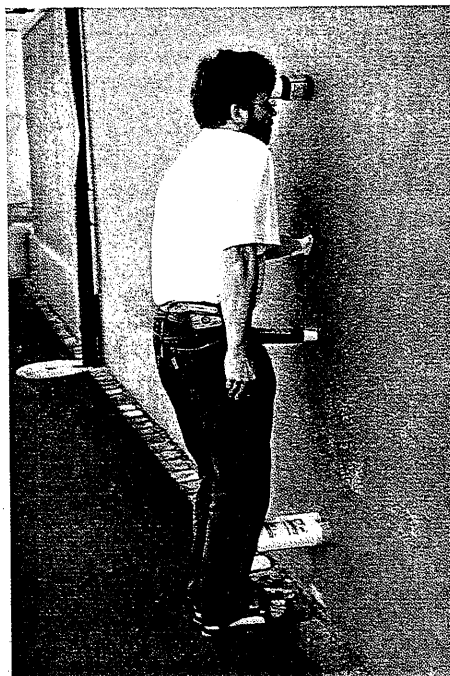
After photography for example appeared as the rival, creating those pictures that show reality as it is actually perceived and even rightfully promising a more realistic depiction, painting withdrew itself after a 50 year battle from depicting the world of objects, concentrating on the intrinsic world of painting (surface, form, colour and the characteristics of materials and technical arrangements from the frame to the canvas) and being triumphant in abstract painting in the first half of the 20th Century. If painting in the second half of the 20th Century (from Pop Art to Photorealism) returned to the images of objects it was done in direct reference to photography. While, before the introduction of photography, painting would refer directly and immediately to the world of objectivity it would after the invention of photography only refer firstly to that world of objectivity as depicted by photography, which is to say the objective and figurative photography and secondly filtered by the experience of the painting-immanent characteristics such as streaming of the colours etc. The experience with film and photography have also led to an exchange with painting, but especially the digital paint programmes

ERWIN WURM. *O.T.* (5 objects), 1998

the new media themselves. The central driving force and the central agenda of the 20th Century art: the crisis of representation, the ceasing of the work term and the disappearance of the author; all this is owed to the appearance of the new media. However, the new media have allowed a lot of new fields of expression and content just by introducing new sign categories such as the index, new materials and new methods, much more private and individual than the old media on the one hand and much more objective and documentary on the other hand. The radical change that happened within the receptive culture in the 20th Century, the explosion of the visual in art and science, they all refer back to the new media as they did not only create new modalities but most of all new grades of freedom.

All artistic disciplines have been changed through the media. Their effect is universal. The paradigm of the media captures all arts. The claim of the computer to be a universal machine, as Alan Turing called his computer design in his 1937 paper "On Computable Numbers", is fulfilled by the media. Just as much as scientists nowadays dream of a computer model of the Universe, of a perfect depiction of the Universe, based on digital calculations, the artists dream of a computer model of art, of an art that can be entirely created by digital calculations. Apart from the calculating thinking whose effects and successes have already captured the entire world –because without these calculators called computers no airport, no factory, no station, no shopping centre nor a hospital could function– now the calculating arts are emerging whose aim it is also to capture the entire world. And indeed the effects and successes of the calculating arts can be seen in exactly the tradition we described earlier, that is the changing of all artistic methods and forms. Not only can the computer simulate all forms and laws of the Universe, not only the laws of nature, but it can also simulate the laws of form, the forms and laws of the art world. Creativity itself is a transcription programme, an algorithm. From literature to architecture, from art to music we see ever more computer-aided transcription programmes and instructions, rules and operating manuals at work. Not only the effect of the media is universal and therefore is all art already post-medial. Not only because the media are universal machines and therefore all art is post-medial, but also because the universal machine requires computers to simulate all media; therefore all art is already post-medial.

The post-medial condition, however, does not make obsolete

or the immediacy of work with a computer and the screen have undoubtedly given painting new impulses, establishing a new computer-derived abstraction in painting. Not only has the Western image canon but of course also the sculpture programme changed through the influence of technological media. We can recognise the dominating influence of computer algorithms and 3D-Programmes going as far as architecture. So the question needs to be raised, whether, at the moment, the new media's greatest achievement isn't actually to have forced the old art media to a triumphant blossoming, building on centuries long tradition with which the 150-year old tradition of new media cannot yet compete in terms of producing genuine masterpieces. You could ask the question another way, which is to ask whether the new media's influence and the effect on the old media and the science of new media weren't presently more important and successful than the pieces of

the intrinsic worlds of the apparatuses, the intrinsic characteristics of the media world. Instead, the specifics, the uniqueness of the media will be more and more distinguished. In the post-medial condition the availability of specific media or the specific characteristics of such, from painting to film, become really prevalent. The computer, for example, can simulate and determine arbitrarily the grade of granulate of a 16 mm film-strip much better than any real filmstrip ever could. The digital simulation of flute tones sounds more like a flute than any flautist could ever elicit from a real flute. A computer can also better simulate the flickering of the writing on a frayed perforation of a filmstrip just as the sounds of a prepared piano. The post-medial computer, the universal machine, seemingly paradoxically but in fact consequently, allows the true realization of the specific richness of the media.

Today any artistic method follows the script, the rules of the media. These media not only span the old and new technological media, ranging from photography to the computer but also the old analogue media such as painting and sculpture, which have been changed and influenced under the pressure of technological media. This is why this sentence, repeated under this precondition, applies: All artistic method follows the script of the media.

The art of the technological media, the art from technical equipment, art that is supported by technical rules, is the core of medial experience. This medial experience became the standard of all aesthetical experience. Therefore there is no more hereafter of the media in art. Nobody can escape is no more painting outside and beyond the media

the new media themselves. The central driving force and the central agenda of the 20th Century art: the crisis of representation, the ceasing of the work term and the disappearance of the author; all this is owed to the appearance of the new media. However, the new media have allowed a lot of new fields of expression and content just by introducing new sign categories such as the index, new materials and new methods, much more private and individual than the old media on the one hand and much more objective and documentary on the other hand. The radical change that happened within the receptive culture in the 20th Century, the explosion of the visual in art and science, they all refer back to the new media as they did not only create new modalities but most of all new grades of freedom.

All artistic disciplines have been changed through the media. Their effect is universal. The paradigm of the media captures all arts. The claim of the computer to be a universal machine, as Alan Turing called his computer design in his 1937 paper "On Computable Numbers", is fulfilled by the media. Just as much as scientists nowadays dream of a computer model of the Universe, of a perfect depiction of the Universe, based on digital calculations, the artists dream of a computer model of art, of an art that can be entirely created by digital calculations. Apart from the calculating thinking whose effects and successes have already captured the entire world –because without these calculators called computers no airport, no factory, no station, no shopping centre nor a hospital could function– now the calculating arts are emerging whose aim it is also to capture the entire world. And indeed the effects and successes of the calculating arts can be seen in exactly the tradition we described earlier, that is the changing of all artistic methods and forms. Not only can the computer simulate all forms and laws of the Universe, not only the laws of nature, but it can also simulate the laws of form, the forms and laws of the art world. Creativity itself is a transcription programme, an algorithm. From literature to architecture, from art to music we see ever more computer-aided transcription programmes and instructions, rules and operating manuals at work. Not only the effect of the media is universal and therefore is all art already post-medial. Not only because the media are universal machines and therefore all art is post-medial, but also because the universal machine requires computers to simulate all media; therefore all art is already post-medial.

The post-medial condition, however, does not make obsolete the intrinsic worlds of the apparatuses, the intrinsic characteristics of the media world. Instead, the specifics, the uniqueness of the media will be more and more distinguished. In the post-medial condition the availability of specific media or the specific characteristics of such, from painting to film, become really prevalent. The computer, for example, can simulate and determine arbitrarily the grade of granulate of a 16 mm film-strip much better than any real filmstrip ever could. The digital simulation of flute tones sounds more like a flute than any flautist could ever elicit from a real flute. A computer can also better simulate the flickering of the writing on a frayed perforation of a filmstrip just as the sounds of a prepared piano. The post-medial computer, the universal machine, seemingly paradoxically but in fact consequently, allows the true realization of the specific richness of the media.

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The art of the technological media, the art from technical equipment, art that is supported by technical rules, is the core of medial experience. This medial experience became the standard of all aesthetical experience. Therefore there is no more hereafter of the media in art. Nobody can escape the media. There is no more painting outside and beyond the medial experience.
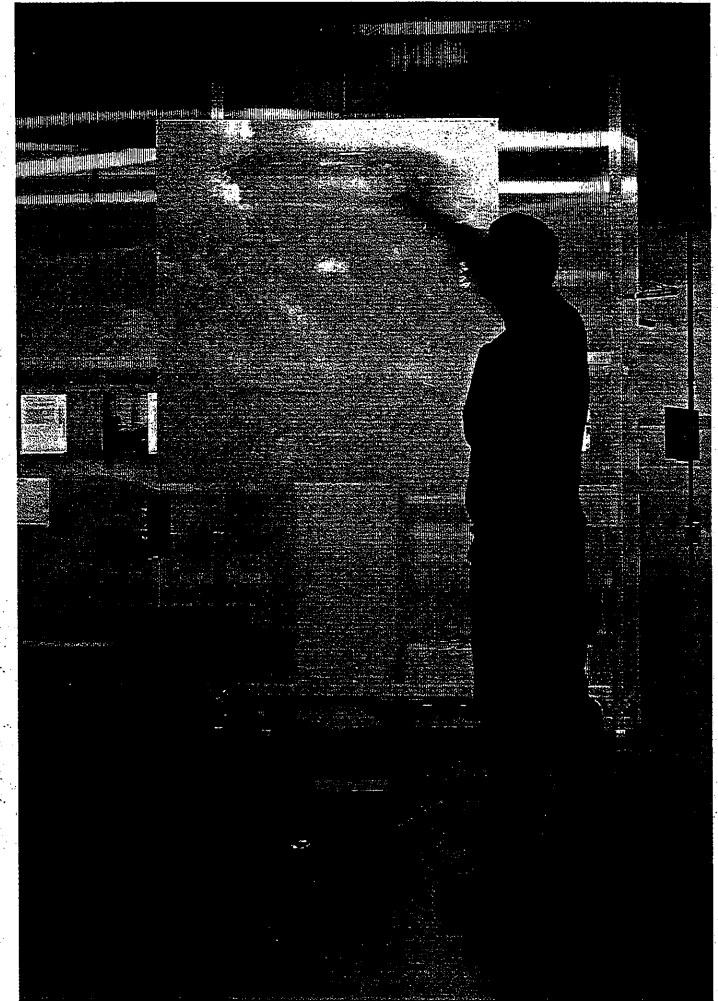

THOMAS FÜRSTNER. Narrative Device IV, 2005, interactive installation.
© Thomas Fürstner, photos: Franz Wamhof

There is no more photography outside and beyond the digital experience. Those photographers who purposefully subdue

photography to the digital media and manipulate and enhance the images, captured by the camera on the screen, provide the most convincing and stunning photographic images, are the most convincing of actual photographers. But those photographers, who also shoot the miniature and model worlds as 3D worlds and digitally rework them, have left the original horizon of photography, the real kingdom of objects and they refer to a meta-level, which is the photographic and digital modelling of the world.

The physical modelling of acousmatic music, the computer based generation of sound in a simulated room, which allows simulating the resonance of the same tone hyper perfectly in different environments, from a church to a staircase and which also create sounds of virtual instruments that actually do not exist, is also expression of this post-medial condition of the media.
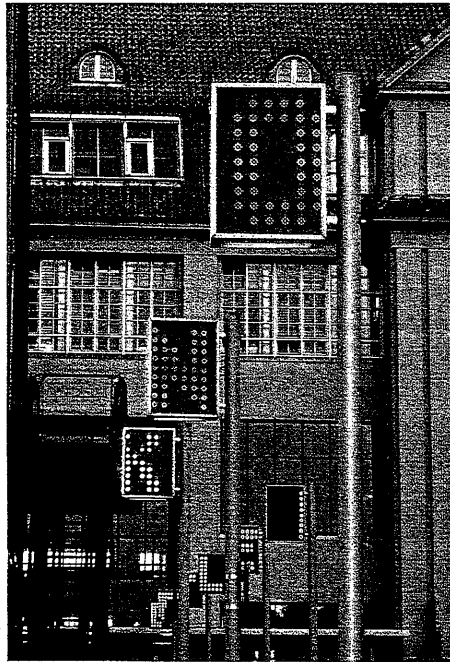
JENNY HOLZER
Selections from Truisms (1977-79), *Living* (1980-82), *Survival* (1983-85), 2003
Light-Sculpture. Courtesy Jenny Holzer. Foto: Ulrike Havemann © VG Bild Bonn

This post-medial condition is –not in terms of media theory but in terms of the artistic use– defined by two phases:
1. The equality of the media.
2. The blending of the media.
The first phase seeks to achieve equality of the media, to create the same artistic recognition for the new media – photography, film, video, digital art – as the traditional media such as painting and sculpture has. During this phase all media, whether painting or photography, very much worked towards the specific intrinsic world of the relevant medium.
Painting demonstrated the intrinsic value of colour, the flowing, dripping and streaming.
Photography demonstrated its ability of realistic depiction.
Film demonstrated its narrative skill.
Video demonstrated its critical subversion of the mass medium television.
Digital art demonstrated its imaginative skills in artistic virtual worlds.
This phase has, in terms of its epistemological and artistic value, more or less ended.
Fortunately, the specificity and criticality of media have completely asserted themselves. Equality of the media, their artistic equivalence and their equal validity has been established by working out the intrinsic worlds of the relevant media, from painting to video. Therefore the medium of artistic expression has become almost immaterial; the focus is mainly set on the artistic expression itself. This is a success of the post-modern condition of the media.
The new second phase, in an artistic and epistemological sense, is about blending the specific intrinsic worlds of the media.
Video is triumphant with the narrative imagination of film by using multiple projectors instead of a screen and telling stories from many different perspectives rather than from just one.
With the new large digital cameras and graphic programmes photography invents unseen, virtual artistic worlds.
Sculpture can be a photo or a videotape.
An event, photographically captured, can be a sculpture, a text or a picture. The behaviour of an object or a person, video graphically or photographically documented, can be a sculpture, language can be sculpture, language on LED-screens can be painting, can be a book and sculpture, video and computer installations can be literature, architecture or sculpture.
Photography and video art, originally only two dimensional, gain

spatial and sculptural dimensions.
Painting refers to photography or digital graphic programmes and uses both.
Film proves increasingly dominant in a documentary realistic depiction, adapting the critiques of the mass media from video. In the chat room the net provides dialogues and text for everybody. The entire text reservoir of the net can be used for individual control of texts, for auto-generative creation of language worlds. The net can also create auto-generative image worlds and the texts can serve as a foil for the script of actors in films or narrators of radio plays or for lyrics of poets. Text, sound and image installations, whether in the medium of photography, video, computers or all of them together, can again be made into films, pieces of music or architecture.
The blending of the media leads to extraordinary innovations both within the relevant media and art. Painting is not revitalised through itself but through the reference to other media. Video lives through film, film lives through literature and sculpture lives through photography and video. They all live through the digital innovation. The secret code of all these art forms is the binary code of computers and the secret aesthetics are the algorithmic rules and programmes. Therefore this current artistic method is to be considered as the post-medial condition, because it is no longer one medium that dominates, but all media influence each other and are mutually dependent. The sum of all media forms a universal medium that contains itself. This is today's post-medial condition of the media world in artistic practise.

Peter Weibel is an artist, curator and new media theorist. Currently, he is in charge of the ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie) in Karlsruhe, Germany.

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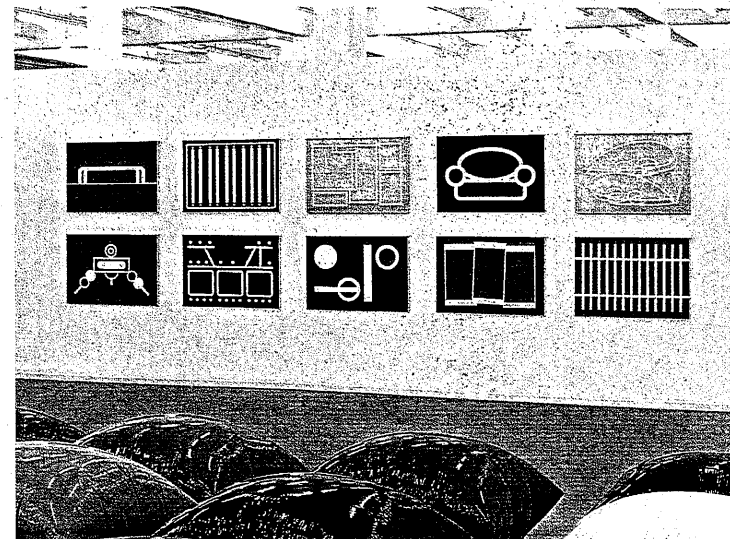
, Survival (1983-85), 2003
ɔmann © VG Bild Bonn

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GERWALD ROCKENSCHAUB. Exhibition View **Funky Minimal**, 1999
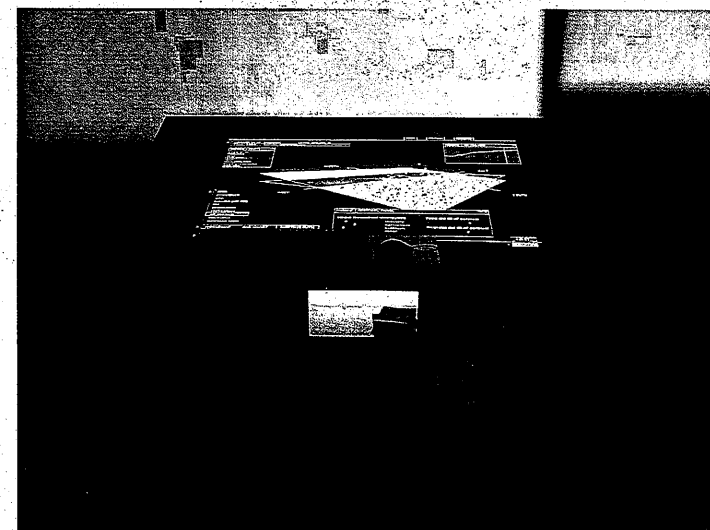
MAIA GUSBERTI, MICHAEL ASCHAUER, NIK THOENEN UND SEPP DEINHOFER. ./logicaland, 2002