

Peter Weibel

Gesänge des Pluriversums (Chants of the pluriverse)

with PARALLEL re: VISIONS by Henry Jesionka

Music by Bruno Degazio

Above all, this video is a sculpture; however, not using the classic materials and substances such as marble, wood and fat, but in the relatively substanceless immaterial electronic medium. As such, it does not articulate the space of classical concepts with its constant quantities, but the future relativistic electronic spacetime. Contrary to sculptures made of wood and iron, in which space and time are frozen, space and time relations remaining stable quantities, space and time relations in electronic sculptures are changeable, because in them not only are the images mobile, but the contents of images are also entirely independent of one another.

The relative and changeable size of the objects in the image itself – a thing I call "Skalierung" (scaling) makes it possible to reduce or increase the size of the objects of the world at random. I can then disarrange these objects, free floating symbols of space, and transform them into a new kind of micro or macro architecture. All objects become freely available, changeable in their sizes, and applicable in any desired position. The elements of a landscape and a town turn into micro-chips of space within the electronic sculpture. An example: the largest waterfall in the world (Niagara Falls) in a coffee cup, the continents as clouds beyond the skyline. These imaginary artificial landscapes establish new spatial relations, the entire code of the space becoming available and thus turning into a universe-space (parallel to space-universe). The motion in the images, too—their form in time, their rhythm, not limited to the image itself and to its edition, but valid also for the time-design of the image elements themselves, for their recurrence and their transformation—show a tendency towards a concept of time in which all time elements are freely accessible. This universe-time, in which past, presence and future are virtually equal and flow together in universal simultaneousness, in an infinite. Now also corresponds to the universe-space, the infinite Here. Thus, the electronic sculpture articulates that new space-time that was introduced by the electronic media, it visualizes a new pictorial space. This electronic space-time is the result of the third revolution of communication, the electronic or so-called computer revolution.

Elementary parts of this electronic revolution are the invention of the transistor (1947) and Integrated Circuit, IC, (1958), the starting point of the micro-electronics revolution that is characterized by the fact that operations that used to take an enormous amount of time and space can now be carried out in fractions of seconds and—by means of the photographic process of diminution—in fractions of centimeters. An IC or a chip or a micro-chip is a minute piece of silicon imprinted by photo-masks with 15 layers containing up to 500 chips of 500,000 components, so that it can manipulate electronic signals, i.e. it can store hundreds of thousands of bits of information and carry out millions of operations. So, if a chip can be compared to the aerial photograph of a gigantic city, this is a real model and at the same time a metaphor for the compression of space and time in the electronic age. Microelectronics also created the pre-requisites for the conquest of space by Space Shuttle, etc. The simultaneous progression into micro-electronics and the macro-cosmos was overwhelmingly demonstrated in July 1969, by a single picture, by the landing of man on the moon.

Looking out of the window (a sort of natural screen), I saw the moon, far away and immensely small, and at the same time I saw an enormous enlargement of a small part of this moon on the screen. This collision of natural and artificial images, of natural and electronic space images in which church vaults that could contain hundreds of living rooms, suddenly appear on a small screen in the living room, smaller than the flower vase that often stands on

the TV set, and where events of the past keep being evoked by electronic images into the present time of my living room—this phenomenon characterizes in a domineering way our space and time experience in the age of media culture. "Die Gesänge des Pluriversums" is a kind of metaphysical poem of the electronic space-time of media culture and of the third revolution in communication.

The micro-chip, by diminishing space and time, at the same time constituting an enormous broadening of its capacity, has thus become a metaphor and a model of the electronic world. The structure of the micro-chip is transferred to the majority of forms of life—so many things have become smaller. Also, the micro-chip is the very monument of our time. The new pictorial space, the representation of space in images, has to give visual expression to this compression of space (as compared to natural space) and collage-like shift of the space-significants. This is what one might call the formalism of the new pictorial space in electronic art. Not least because an art form that owes its existence to electronic revolution itself is to visualize the experience of space and time that have been changed by the electronic revolution in communication.

Our visual ode to the Pluriverse is a piece of electronic cinema composed of several parts: of video recordings, photographs, film shots and digital images. The film shots were transformed by optical printer, some of the video parts had been digitally post-produced at various preparatory stages before being transferred to video and once again post-produced digitally (with A.D.O., Quantel, etc).

Thus, the electronic sculpture reflects the actual social changes that technological progress has caused in the conquest of space and time, in transport and communications. When a satellite today can orbit the world in 90 minutes which used to take 80 days or even months, when a taxi drive to the airport takes longer than the flight to another country, then continents shrink to biscuits and cities blow up into mountain ranges. When I am faster in the air-space that is unfamiliar to man than I am in man's natural environment, in the land-space, I will have to rid myself of the concept of natural place, natural space and natural time and admit that our life sphere has long since become permeated by artificial time compressions, by diminutions of space and time, by paradoxical micro-chips and macro modules of time and space. In this constantly and mutually intersecting Liliput-world of time and space where sub-spaces and sub-times tend to change into macro worlds, the concept of a uniform single Uni-verse can hardly be maintained any longer.

For the large seems small, the small seems large; the far-away becomes close and hours turn into minutes. This relativity of space and time is visualized in the electronic sculpture. It "sings" of the experienced time, of the new experience of space and time within technological communication. The visual accentuation of the changed social reality, of the new experience of the city, the new experience of the world through the electronic space-time created by techno-revolution makes our video work seem a sort of cosmological ode because of the simultaneousness and mutual conditionality of the conquest of the micro and the macro cosmos. The ambivalence of being an ode to the cosmos and to the IC at the same time, could be illustrated by the verses of a famous ancestor:

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.
William Blake

Blake's verses also illustrate the metaphysical breath that weaves through the formal discussion of electronic space-time. Blake's verses are also songs on the Pluri-verse. They talk about metaphysical yearning inherent to the search for the Pluri-verse and the ripping up of

the Uni-verse. For if an hour can be eternity, this implies that there have to be several worlds existing side by side. In one world, the grain of sand is a minute part of the cosmos, in another world it is cosmos itself. The realm of things and appearances is not subject to one law only. The realm of law suffices for one world only. Another world has different laws. So, those who want to flee from the world of law change to another world. Only those who wish to be subject to the father's law for eternity dream of a single world, of the universe. Utopia dreams of a multitude of possible worlds, ours being only one of them.

Leibnitz, father of the binary number system, the epistemological pre-condition of the computer, had already propagated with logical consequence the idea of an infinity of possible worlds. But as a law-abiding man he could not justify the free selection of random possible worlds—which would have implied changing the existing world by possibly revolutionary action; he had to leave this to the discretion of the supreme law, to God the Father Himself. And He made the choice for us: He chose our world as the best of all possible worlds. In his work "Candide—the best of all possible worlds" Voltaire has made fun of this compromise. Those convinced that only a single kind of universe is possible, namely the one we live in, can be made out by the titles of their books: "Fitness of the Environment" (1913) or "The Order of Nature" (1917) by Lawrence Handerson. An hypostatization of capitalistic concepts of monopolies and rulership into the cosmology. William James was one of the first, around the turn of the century, to reject the idea of an ultimate single universe: "A Pluralistic Universe" was published in 1909. In 1920, his friend, the American mystic and anarchist Benjamin Paul Blood published the book "Pluriverse".

Because of the ambiguities of quantum mechanics and the Einstein Podolsky-Rosen paradox, the concept of an infinity of universes, of parallel worlds and "manyworlds interpretations" has spread widely among leading contemporary cosmologists such as John A. Wheeler and Stephen Hawking. And John D. Barrow and Frank I. Tipler even write: "The ManyWorlds Interpretation may well eventually replace the Statistical and Copenhagen Interpretations just as the Copernican system replaced the Ptolemaic." (The Anthropic Cosmological Principle, 1986.) The latest cosmological theory, the Inflational Universe, by Alan H. Guth, Paul J. Steinhardt, A.D. Linde and others supports with many new ideas the concept of a pluriverse. In the inflationary model of the universe, it seems possible that the observable universe might have developed from an infinitesimal sphere, practically from nothing. Therefore, the laws of conservation stating that certain physical quantities such as energy, linear momentum, etc. are unchangeable, can no longer have eternal validity. In any case, our observable universe is only a very small part of the entire universe, and it is therefore highly improbable, if not impossible to observe the universe as a whole. On the other hand, it seems possible that, during the first fractions of seconds in the formation of the universe out of nothing, the "big bang" explosion might have created a number of other universes, like bubbles in a glass of soda water. For reference, see "On the Plurality of Worlds" by David Lewis (1986).

The yearning for a pluriverse, the search for new possible worlds is also explained by the desire to solve the lethal conflicts of the old world. Thus, the pluriverse model of the world does not only reflect the new technologically determined experiences of time and space, not only new cosmological principles, but also new concepts of social reality and "condition humaine". The world of media and technology creates several modal parallel worlds in the "real" world.

It is not only new cosmic horizons that are to be opened up but also new social horizons. And it would not befit a work that understands itself as a negation of a single universe with one single law, to be developed by a single almighty creator; the work itself is meant to reflect parallel worlds and revisions. The pluriverse work should reflect several voices, not only the monologue of a pseudo-devine author. The fiction of an autonomous ego is abandoned in favour of a polylogue. The authority of the author is cancelled, the autonomy of the author is

undermined. The problematization of authorship, as discussed in post-modern art and as resulting from collective production in machine-generated media art has to be part of the pluriverse model. Consequently, I have invited Henry Jesionka, who agrees with those ideas of mine, to cooperate with me in this work.

This visible multiple authorship again does not only reflect the multiple models of the pluriverse but also the contemporary conditions of the third revolution in communication. If giant enterprises are governed by hundreds of thousands of stockholders, who then is the responsible owner? The collective art forms of the 20th century, such as film, demonstrate impressively to what extent the concepts of author and of autonomy have become subject to transformation in our technological civilization. Is it not so that a work of art of this civilization ought to take into account this transformation and to reflect the social changes in the concept of the subject? While the ship of sovereignty is sinking? The dictatorship of the ego, in capitalistic competition, where every ego wants to be king and sovereign, is coming to an end. The new, egoless subject enjoys the emancipation of partial instincts that have been advanced by technology. The absolute hierarchical point of view of feudal society is dissolving. From simplicity to multiplicity: the multiple images and models of the pluriverse. The universe with its adoration of the only valid point of view and creator (God) and its only valid absolute conserving law is transformed into a pluriverse and perverse world of numerous points of view. Within the chain of binary ambivalences, however, the feudal society takes on a new form: the hyper-reality of media aristocracy. The ocean in which the safe ship has gone down is fathomless. An artificial rented reality is the shadow of a peaceful outcome in the game of monopolies. The duplicity of media will not only contribute to the spreading of truth but also to its prevention. The world turns into a single city with parks as large as the island of Teneriffa. Islands like this become concentration camps of recreation. After the uniformity of work the uniformity of leisure. The soul vanishes in corporate heaven. Religious iconography turns into the logography of corporate enterprises of today. Perverse and pluriverse world, multiple verse, cantos of the pluriverse.