

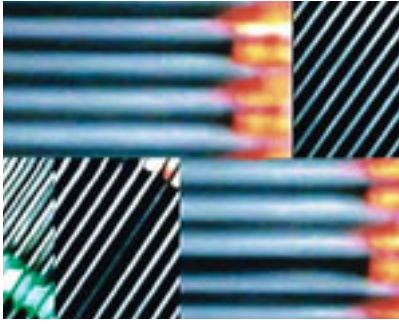
Media Spasm, Meaningless Divertissement and Crash. Future States of Media Education

1. Flogging a dead horse? An Attempt at Self-description of Medial Presence in Art Education

This essay attempts to portray concepts of current media education in Frankfurt, and culminates in a proposal for the future of media education in Frankfurt: a Center for Media and Cultures of Knowledge. The implementation of this proposal by the university is currently pending.

Let's begin by looking at the current state of media education, which is offered at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University as "New Media" in the Department of Art Pedagogy (offering a master's degree as well as training to teach this subject). Then we will take a brief look at the neighboring field of art history, the very confines from which a separate media education must break away. At the 2001 German Art History Convention held in Hamburg, the attempt was made in the face of the omnipresence of information technology and biotechnology, "to win back [for art history] a position in the concert of scholarly disciplines that befits its intellectual potential." It is certainly doubtful that this will ever occur as long as fundamental paradigms like historicity as advocated by the likes of Horst Bredekamp (Bredekamp in conversation with Kerscher, 1998) remain operative. When a process of dealing with media even takes place here, then it is in a form such as Belting's large-scale project "Medial History of Art." The 25th German Art History Convention held in Jena in 1999 mentioned media in its program in last place—introduced by the significant phraseology "and finally." Dealing collectively with the images of both technical and apparative media is defeated by the structural dissimilarity of the images. The immaterial media with their evanescent, processual worlds of imagery are catapulted right out of the discourse. This classical limitation of the discourse also stands in the way of media education, so that the contexts and references for this must necessarily be sought in other scholarly fields.

Those who partake of media-based images are getting younger and younger. According to Peter Weibel, 70% of all visitors to the ZKM are young people. The audience for analog artistic images is aging and slowly dying out (Florian Rötzer, *Telepolis*, 02.02.2001, Studies commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts and conducted by sociologists at Vanderbilt University). In the case of art museums, the number of visitors declined from 30% to 19%, and the number of those over age 60 did not increase because, in the opinion of the sociologists (headed by Richard Peterson), the elderly often have a hard time getting around and have difficulty spending long periods of time on their feet. The researcher traced the disdain for traditional forms of art back to the fact that the younger generation is only looking for a form of play and can only handle "Art Lite" He thus proceeds on the basis of a manipulated generation of consumers that is said to be no longer in a position to bring the desired contemplative manner and civilized behavior to the appreciation of Serious Art. Rötzer, instead of berating the public, calls for integrating into the art establishment art forms that have been excluded: film, pop music and what is actually the Digital Age's newest form of art: the computer game. He proceeds under the assumption that not only are those who partake of traditional art forms growing older, but that the entire traditional sector of art is as well, since it remains dependent upon public subsidies and private endowments whereas the new "artforms" blend in



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with entertainment offerings and therefore also have access to other viewing, distribution and marketing structures. Media education as a non-ideologically infused continuation of visual communication is an outgrowth of these novel structures. Up to this point, the reaction to a complete new world of media has always been merely to implement certain select components of a complete, professional media education.

Unfortunately, in the field of art pedagogical theory, the pedagogy of preservation still prevails. Here, the new media—and especially mani-

festations like computer games—are categorized by a large majority in the field as a harmful activity that keeps children away from their “natural” environment—whatever that might be, since “nature as construct” seems to be an unknown discourse here.

New media are not an aesthetic means of correcting deficiencies in young people’s everyday lives or negative social consequences of structural violence or medial worlds of images and networks. Young people very often generate a special media world of their own. Offerings in the new media do not assume any sort of compensation function; rather, they expand the competence in dealing with everyday media on the part of young people who partake of them. To discuss whether to deal with this fails to take into account the worlds of everyday life that media have completely permeated through a process of osmosis; the point is to come up with concrete plans for how to do so. The decisive question to pose prior to utilizing a new medium in teaching and mediating the encounter with knowledge and experience is: Which unique possibilities do the media structures offer? The domain of media demands new methods of self-description and new differentiations. The hierarchical discrimination between High and Low, between fine art and trivial art, that art pedagogy has adopted from art history not only makes little sense with respect to the new network worlds, but also is simply the wrong approach to the issue. Everyday creativity, pop and cross-cultures are systems of equal value alongside of art, not trendy marginal areas. The truth is that these extraneous phenomena have shifted from the periphery to the center. Since the middle of the 20th century, youth cultures or trivial graphic languages have been exerting a not inconsiderable influence upon the plastic arts and design, since there often exists a very close symbiosis between young practitioners of contemporary art and youth culture and its aesthetic practice.

In order to oppose the assessment put forth by Bredekamp of the media as flickering symptom of decline of the image and agents of the destruction of meaning, media education understood as graphic scholarship must nevertheless establish itself. In Frankfurt, a very solidly grounded course in the practice of art and design in various different analog and digital media is offered. The introduction of a curriculum of training for high school teachers in accordance with a unique German model that makes a separate course of practical instruction in digital media mandatory for all future teachers is imminent.

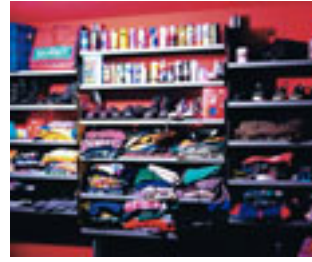
A media laboratory offers latitude for aesthetic design experiments that initially lodge no claims to lead to an exploitable product. The scholarly-theoretical education takes place on the basis of media practice and concentrates on theories of media aesthetics, of the social and political importance of the media, structural analysis of media, and the interdependencies of old and new media. By means of project-oriented learning that stresses research, a high level of basic qualifications in digital communication is imparted to students. The course offerings include introductory and advanced practice of a variety of different media (photography, video, computer graphics, multimedia applications, Web



Media-Konversionen



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design) in combination with traditional media (analog video, photography, with the possibility of transformation into a digital form).

For research on particular objects and issues, there is a material and virtual youth culture archive featuring information and tutorials on the aesthetics of youth culture (www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb09/kunstpaed/indexweb/jkastart.html). The hypertext structure of new media gives rise to a sort of labyrinth that initially necessitates a trailblazer (Bush), a pathfinder in the form of a moderator who can point out a well-established route. The trailblazer works out filters that check the quality of the information offered, as well as information retrieval systems that assist in the selection of information. The complementary capabilities of the trailblazer—not necessarily also requiring programming knowledge and gameplaying with highly developed motor skills—remain helpfully in the background. They impart expertise in the viewing and analysis of information and skills like gathering, storing, organizing, evaluating, processing, converting, and downloading information. Technological and computer fluency does not mean putting the chief emphasis on programs, but rather on the principle and structures of media. To this can be added successfully tested forms of learning like interdisciplinary project work and learning in groups and teams. The criterion of quality for a particular design is its appropriateness to the respective medium, which allows for the possibility of use for a purpose other than the one conventionally intended. Of decisive importance is always keeping in mind the fundamental structures of the medium and the connection to other media because these influence content a priori. Digital media are not neutral tools; rather, they are basic structures that make a deep impression on social behavior and the process of dealing with information. Aside from thematizing the ambivalent economic and sociopolitical circumstances of digital media and their effects, the chief focus should be above all on imparting basic techniques and skills.

A high degree of scholarly reflection shows that this is not primarily a matter of producing excellent artists. Until now, however, the standard of practice has been significantly lower than at a specialized institute and only in the rarest of cases would it qualify an individual to practice a particular profession; often, any sort of reference to a field of application outside of art is absent. The wide-ranging and simultaneously specialized course of training is not oriented on narrowly-defined occupational fields, though; it should, above all, provide a forum and a laboratory for experiments that makes use of the specific prerequisites of media competence that young people possess.

2. Young People as Users of Excellence

The ever more intense medial saturation of the everyday life of children and adolescents as well as the progressively earlier use of the new information and communication technologies by young people has led to a diagnosis in the media theory discourse that the pedagogical relationship between the generations in the family, the school and other institutions is in the process of dissolving or reversing. The younger generation is said to have a head start over the older generation in information and skills in dealing with and utilizing new media (see Lenzen 1996, 8). Bolz (1997, 60). In the definition of a media gene-

ration with respect to a course of instruction at the school and college level, it ought to be kept in mind that in the age of multimedia, the different generations living in dissimilar media worlds have hardly any common points of reference. The older generation of students grew up with one-dimensional (Flusser), non-dialogical, analog media (like TV), so that they generally assume a very critical stance toward media.

Basically, we can differentiate between three forms of media usage:

- a. Affirmative (passive) use employs applications in a goal-oriented, rational way to solve formal problems at work and in everyday life.
- b. Subversive (active) use implies employing a medium for purposes other than those for which it was meant. Kittler referred to this as the “misuse of military equipment.” Hacking, zapping and scratching, typical aspects of computer and music cultures, are youth-specific niches of media usage that are not primarily goal-oriented.
- c. Educational and active use of media for purposes of ongoing personal development or to support the education process ought to ideally combine a. and b.

It is above all the second form of usage that is a particularly adolescent way of dealing with a medium, and has a special function in media education. Utilizing an innovative key technology is a central characteristic of the young media generation. The way young people deal with media is often dismissed as a waste of time since it does not serve to accomplish a specific task. This experimental attitude is also an essential quality of education: a climate that encourages young people to experiment and one that is not of a compulsory nature or defined by a preordained direction ought to be cultivated.

Furthermore, collective playful practice in using media is an essential guiding principle for new areas in the culture of knowledge—for example, gaming.

A person’s age determines how he or she deals with media: speed, amount of time invested, the type of activities pursued and the type of content sought. Thus, the generation gap reveals itself today above all in the chasm that exists between the different generations’ worlds of perception and speed (see Richard/Krüger 1997). Children and young people live in different speeds of perception, but their senses should rather be seen as further developed than as deformed. They test media unconsciously in the sense of Benjamin’s positive concept of *divertissement* (diversion/amusement), which is still an accurate assessment of how people deal with technical media:

“Reception in *divertissement*, which makes its presence felt with growing insistence in all areas of art and is the symptom of deep-seated changes in apperception, has, in film, an instrument that is well-suited to its exercise. (...) The audience is an Examiner, but nevertheless one that is being diverted and amused.”

(Benjamin 1977, 41)

Young users are experienced in dealing with quickly changing images and interaction structures related to new media, and in their playful encounter with these new media, they seek out these systems’ ultimate limits, the transgression of which can lead to either a new creative experience or crash and even destruction.

Children and young people must develop a more selective faculty of perception that filters out the essential impulses from a life full of disruptive factors. When they are navigating in digital worlds of data, they leave the normal space-time continuum behind and enter immaterial, fictional worlds that invite them to experiment and take flights of fancy. Since state-run media institutes and educational facilities cannot compete with the high technical standards of research labs and commercial providers, they must specialize just as certain artists do in working with technologically obsolete equipment—“digital junk”—and shift media-based concepts of knowledge into the foreground. At the same time, they

have to seek new forms of collaboration that offer more freedom in the media field from constricting regulations related to research and teaching.

3. The Center for Media and Cultures of Knowledge: Design as the Projection and Compression of Knowledge

The projected Center for Media and Cultures of Knowledge and the Center for Culture Imagination and Development (initiated by Manfred Faßler, Birgit Richard, Gisela Welz, Klaus Neumann-Braun) is dedicated to research on digital fields of activity (realms of information and interaction) in interdependence with materially defined social spheres and the cultures of everyday life that go on within them. Several theoretical and practical, application-oriented disciplines cooperate without the need for a unifying meta-language that planes down all differences to a superficial smoothness. In its dealings with non-university institutions, the University of Frankfurt model demonstrates a reaction to the shift in the cultural range of knowledge. With research, projects and products connected in a manner taken completely for granted, the selected medial and scholarly areas of emphasis react to the complex interweaving of media technology and communications culture that has been engendered by digital media. The global spread of digital media makes it possible to bring together widely dispersed islands of knowledge in the virtual space of the media. It is said that new languages of observation will allow for the link-up to these processes and the design of a new aesthetic. Dealing with the aesthetics of medial worlds is not a byproduct, but rather a central element. Aesthetics constitutes knowledge: aesthetic systems and visual atlases for knowledge formations deviate from classical principles like those that are valid in databanks. The media as a domain of knowledge, representation and social presence require the design of interactive interfaces that impart momentum to media developments and disseminate knowledge. Designed communication brings the storage structures and human beings that exist within the electronic media space together in a cooperative environment. Meanwhile, a simultaneous observation of media-generated knowledge formation (image-text-space) takes place.

Media design is a matter of the selection of information and knowledge within the framework of communication environments. By the nature of its task, the Center positions itself astride the open interconnections of dynamic and globally dispersed spheres of knowledge. As for the Center's research activities, chief emphasis is placed upon the link-up and construction of media and knowledge. Other key concepts include: participation, collective forms of work, distributed knowledge, platforms and portals. New media contribute to the following sections: media aesthetics/the study of images, cyberatlases as aesthetic systems for knowledge formations, aesthetics of the cultures of everyday life as cultures of knowledge (for example, virtual archive of youth culture, CD-Rom), as well as gender and media (such as the project "On the Construction of the Representation of Women in Computer Games" funded by the Hessian Ministry for Science and Art). The available selection of information and knowledge has become the central resource of cultures. Conditions of access and use of information storage devices are essential for social systems and individuals participating in media communications environments. Therefore, the Center's work encompasses four dimensions:



Web Media



Presentation Katinka Glaser

- Research (on fundamental and collateral topics in the fields of knowledge and media cultures, subcultures, networks, and transnational communication);
- Projects in the area of media design (presentation, e-learning, media-based, dispersed knowledge domains, audio-visual media development, knowledge interfaces);
- Offering courses of study in the above-named fields, which means above all that these will be modularized and designed in a way that is relevant to study and research;
- Development of models planned and carried out cooperatively with individual organizations in the private sector (economic R&D as opposed to scholarly R&D).

The Center is also planning to offer postgraduate study in “Cultures of Knowledge and Media Design” (as a course of study recognized throughout the EU) and “New Types of Online-Offline Communities.”

Current and future media education in Frankfurt can thus be summarized as follows: it is coming along nicely in the description and design of medial interfaces and virtual spheres of communication. Its principles are artificial “senselessness” as illustrated by non-goal-oriented play—that is, an experimental activity that enhances the development of intelligence and the complexity of the structure of synapses (Palm 2001). Playfulness, crossing and switching between different worlds with varying degrees of virtuality play just as big a part in the course of training as the encouragement of simultaneity of complex medial processes and the divertissement of perception, dissemination and its discontinuities. Additional leitmotifs are: waste of time, use of technology contrary to ways advised in its user’s manual, trivia, aesthetic violence, elimination of borders, and crash. Thus, the attempt is underway to make available a laboratory for the production of resistant images and strategies of use, including elements of adolescent design and use of media, their non-goal-oriented, ecstatic modes of design and communication, and the experimental way they deal with media. Moreover, there are plans to produce collective designs for different generations and shared storage strategies. The practice of young people and the freshness of pop and club culture are to be transferred and transformed—without expropriating them—as guiding principles in the field of media education. Since the Center’s field of activity is the triangle at the nexus of science, culture and business, what is called for are trailblazers whose task is to portray the irreconcilable contradictions among these dissimilar social systems via subversive interfaces derived from media, pop and art. The expertise in making selections that is imparted in this way leads to the development of agility in hybrid spaces, whereby the figure of the trailblazer is the one that attempts to mediate between the economic and social realities and the medial worlds and their utopias.

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