

Dieter Daniels

Whatever Happened to Media Art? A Summary and Outlook

In the previous decade, there was a lot of talk about a crisis of media art. Take, for example, theorist Stefan Heidenreich's review of *transmediale* 2008:

Media art was an episode. But since the institutions that support it are still extant, it survives as a dinosaur from the 1980s and '90s. [...] Artists work with any media they choose, from drawing to the Internet. [...] There is a wealth of good art that naturally works with media. But there is no media art.¹

This text provoked considerable debate, which can be retrieved from the archives of the German *Rohrpost* electronic mailing list. Internationally, a similar discussion followed the announcement that same year by Ekow Eshun, director of the London ICA, that he would close the Live and Media Arts Department. His justification read: "It's my consideration that, in the main, the [media] art form lacks depth and cultural urgency."² And in 2010, German media theorist Florian Rötzer characterized media art as a "creature artificially kept alive, lagging far behind expectations."³ Even earlier, some insiders of the media art scene had already struck an ironic distance from it, as witnessed by an exhibition title like *The Art Formerly Known as New Media*, which took place in 2005 in Canada.⁴

The next decade saw attempts at revisiting, historicizing, or even resurrecting it. In 2010, Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham would attempt to legitimize a specification of media art in their book *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, under chapter headings that read "How New Media Art Is Different" and "Why Would a New Media Artist Want to Exhibit in an Art Museum?"⁵ Two years later Claire Bishop asked, "what-ever happened to digital art?" in her essay "Digital Divide" for *Artforum's* 50th Anniversary issue.⁶ Her ideas were responded to by Lauren Cornell and Brian Droitcour's equally polemic



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response, "Technical Difficulties," in the January 2013 issue, which sparked a larger controversy online. In her response to the overwhelming "indignation from proponents of new media" like Cornell and Droitcour in reaction to her article, Claire Bishop clarified that the text was "foremost a critique of the dominant tendencies in contemporary art since 2000, as found in museums, galleries, and biennials [...]. It's not an article about new media or digital art." Nonetheless, she diagnosed a divide between "a mainstream art world that is still invested in the analog" and "a self-marginalizing alternative called new media art that asserts its own relevance for the future."⁷ In other words, according to Bishop, the specificity of new media as a genre claimed by Cook and Graham in 2010 was in fact a self-imposed deficit. Of course, that is the case only if the so-called mainstream art world remains the measure of all things.

Since about ten years ago, the theory of media has seemed to face a similar dilemma: As media art, how can its Translated from the German by Lutz Eitel definition as a separate field be legitimate if media technology has become part and parcel of our everyday life? Put the other way around: can a genre of art or theory exist as an entity outside media technology and its cultural significance, without either explicit reference or implicit dissociation? Isn't every form of theory necessarily media theory today? Doesn't every artwork to a certain extent belong in the field of media art? Take, for example, the series of lectures at the University of Vienna between 2006 and 2008, curated by Claus Pias, with the title "Was waren Medien?" or "What were the media?" A first sketch of the ideas in this text was presented during that series.⁸

Digital technology seems to have embedded or rather (de-)materialized and (de-)constructed some of the debates about and visions of "new media" from the preceding decade, which have been ultimately commoditized and capitalized on by so-called social media and its related hardware. As Andreas Broeckmann, artistic director of *transmediale* from 2000 to 2007, put it:

The notion of "new media" is a concept of the past. A date that can be taken as marking the end of "new media" is the introduction of the Apple iPhone in 2007 [...] The future is

no longer a mystical, utopian site, but merely the time for the next version update that will no doubt arrive and be offered for download, one way or another. And given that we look at the technological developments of the future without doubt, we also look at them without hope. We can speculate that future technologies will not be twentieth-century-type “new media,” and “digital” only in the most banal sense of the word, but environmental or ecological technologies.⁹

Since then, most critiques of media art and theory have thrived on the fact that the genre used to subscribe to the euphoria around new media and the bright future the digital technology seemed to promise during the 1980s and 1990s. These were symptoms of a boundless desire for modernism blazing up for maybe the last time, bracing itself against looming postmodern tendencies.

In the nineteenth century (media) art was already defensive against the radical progress that science and technology had to offer, against their positivist postulations of final truths. This is why Baudelaire, standing at the beginning of modern art theory, championed an artistic “order of the imagination,” where there was no causally established, progressive link from Signorelli to Michelangelo or from Perugino to Raphael. Instead Baudelaire suspected that “unending progress would be humanity’s most ingenious and cruel form of torture.”¹⁰ Whereas the Futurist founding manifesto in 1909 called for the arts to “sing” technological progress, subsequent manifestos from other groups demanded, conversely, that new technologies be used as aesthetic instruments. By the 1920s, artists from the scenes surrounding the Bauhaus, Absolute Film, and Dadaism were no longer satisfied using technologies that already existed, and instead of merely recycling inventions made for other purposes, they developed new methods and objects, often with the help of engineers.¹¹

Falsified theories in the natural sciences end up among the paradigms that have “died out” (according to Thomas Kuhn), while obsolete media technologies end up in the graveyard of “dead media” (in the words of Bruce Sterling).¹² Art, on the

other hand, even if it uses technical media that quickly become obsolete, always has an eye toward the eternal. On this point we also can refer back to Baudelaire, who believed the supreme challenge for modern art was “to distil the eternal from the transitory.”¹³

Today, historians and theorists of science have increasingly come to criticize the separate notions of progress that underlie the arts and sciences, a separation with roots still firmly stuck in positivist self-conceptions. In *Science as an Art* (1984), Paul Feyerabend reached back to traditional art-historical methodology and used it to define a new history model for the sciences.¹⁴ According to him, a belief in absolute progress in the natural sciences was self-deceit, even “totalitarian thought.” Instead, the art-historical model, which allows for simultaneous, alternate developments, would describe the situation of the sciences more adequately. Bruno Latour’s proposition that *We Have Never Been Modern* continued and expanded on these thoughts. His book is first and foremost a critique of the strict separation between nature and society in the modern natural sciences, while also censuring postmodernism as “a symptom, not a fresh solution.”¹⁵ Latour sees an alternative in an interpretation of modernity not as a radical break with the past, a single revolution, but rather as a processual, iterative model where hybrid conditions are continually translated and interconnected. Therefore, arriving at an absolutely modern age that can never be overtaken by the past remains an unrealizable goal. Latour’s theory of science has proven similarly useful in discussions of the arts. In a complex interplay between methods and subject areas, Feyerabend imports art-historical methods to remodel scientific theory, while Latour’s science theory is adopted and developed by art theorists.

This leads us back to the question of how to define media art, since such an interplay between art history and science theory has stimulated artistic practice since the 1960s. “Art, science, and technology” used to be a typical title for diverse international activities that could not be subsumed under the name of a movement or a manifesto, and which offered a critique of technological consequences while still following a fascination with the possibilities of the new technology.



transmediale 2013 BWPWP Mail Art in the GDR, Conference, 30.01.2013 transmediale 2k+12 incompatible transmediale Unarchived, Conference, 05.02.2012
transmediale-11 RESPONSE: ABILITY Was waren Medien? (Claus Pias, 2011), Book Presentation, 02.02.2011 / “What is Live?” — From the Aura to the Avatar, Talk, 05.02.2011
transmediale-07 unfinished Media Art in the GDR? — Independent Film and Media Art in the GDR between 1976-1989, Discussion, SAT 03.02.2007

The “heroic” founding period of what has come to be labeled media art began around 1960, while the term itself was used much later, roughly from the 1990s. Initially there was a convergence of multiple factors that developed, partially independently, from the 1950s through the 1970s, which could increasingly be described as coherent. Belonging to those movements was electronic music of the 1950s (Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, John Cage, the electronic studio of the WDR radio station in Cologne, the music journal *Die Reihe*), open works of art (John Cage and Umberto Eco), cybernetics (in theory as well as experimental practice), reflections on mass media (in literature, art, and music, from Burroughs to Warhol and Cage), computer graphics, the Experiments in Art and Technology group (E.A.T.), the expanded cinema movement, “intermedia” art (fluxus, happenings, the Gutai group), the New Dance (Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown), conceptual art and site specific art (including its manifestations on film and photographs), body art and experimental theater (from Samuel Beckett to Bruce Nauman) and institutional critique and political activism (from Hans Haacke to Dan Graham).

What today trades under the name of media art used to be a hybrid area where multiple interdisciplinary cross-connections and collaborations were possible without forming a common conceptual or strategic identity. Important stimuli for both technological practice and artistic theory originated in simultaneous developments in cybernetics during the 1960s, a transdisciplinary bridging of the gap between the “two cultures” of natural sciences and the humanities. In the 1960s, these contexts were not limited to the fine arts—in the way that media art is categorized today—but as a matter of course included literature, music, and the performing arts. This let the genre survive the crumbling contexts of intermedia art, cybernetics, and the “art, science, and technology” movement, though it increasingly came under pressure to define its special characteristics and to define itself against the more “classical” arts.¹⁶

The work of Nam June Paik is exemplary in this context. In his famous *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television* in 1963, he combined elements of New Music, randomness, the open work of art, mass media, and intermedia to arrive at a partici-



transmediale-04 FLY UTOPIA: Sound & Vision in Avantgarde & Mainstream, 03.02.2004
transmediale '98 Media Art Action — The 1960s and 1970s in Germany, 13.02.1998
VideoFest '95 Multimedia 5 — Weitra, 11.02.1995 / Multimedia 3: CD-Rom, 11.02.1995

patory, totalizing work of art “for all senses.”¹⁷ Paik used and modified pianos, tape recorders, record players, and TV sets for a kind of DIY bricolage that anticipated the future potential of distribution-media-turned-production-media and their new interactive uses. Paik’s complete ensemble—most of which does not survive and has only been documented in black-and-white photographs—can be seen as a precursor to video art, sound art, installation art, and interactive art in equal measure.

This kind of intermediality defined the “heroic” phase of media art, but by the beginning of the 1970s distinct disciplines began to establish themselves more strongly; the craze of mixing media gave way to a quest for media-specific artworks. The reasons for this development today seem like a crude mixture of two irreconcilable theories: on the one hand, Clement Greenberg’s modernism, driven by the paradigm of a self-referentiality immanent to the artistic medium, as well as his judgment against intermedial tendencies; on the other, Marshall McLuhan’s maxim that the medium itself—or the choice of a medium—carries one, if not *the* central message. During the course of the 1970s, the field of media arts diversified, highly specialized scenes and contexts replacing the intermedial blend of the 1960s. Among the major categories were: computer graphics, video art, experimental cinema, and performance art. Each of these art forms started developing a specific identity that would rely on its medial difference from related forms—the aim was to define an autonomous genre by virtue of its technical medium. In video art competitions of the 1980s, juries would still consider experimental film transferred to video as attempted fraud, and in computer art manually complemented computer graphics were seen as gaffes at best.

Increasingly, these genres have been collected under the fine arts umbrella. This may partly be due to pragmatic concerns, since discourses and institutions within the fine arts are more open to experiments than those of music, literature, film, or theater, which are often stuck in a conflict between the avant-garde and the mainstream. Each of these genres has also developed subgenres according to its diverse artistic approaches—for example, in video art or in experimental film, subdivisions have arisen between structural/formal, conceptual,

narrative, and sociopolitical practices. This is comparable to the rivalry between the different, partly national “schools” of electronic music in the 1950s: French *musique concrète* and compositions based on found sound; “serial music,” which was mostly developed in Germany and was based on rigid mathematical concepts (see the above-mentioned journal *Die Reihe*); and American indeterminacy after John Cage, who criticized conventional concepts of authorship.

Within these diverse artistic practices there already lay a problem in defining genres through their use of media technology. Completely heterogeneous approaches were placed in close relation, emphasizing the shared technical format and suppressing the differences in its use and the artistic intention behind it. As one example, Bruce Nauman’s early video pieces were based on performances in front of a camera and were intended to be shown in a gallery context. Their low-tech aesthetics and long real-time durations made them unfit for TV broadcast. On the other hand, almost all of the videos that Nam June Paik produced from 1969 were explicitly made for TV shows, and the use of experimental high-end studio technology—partly developed by Paik himself—was made possible by the financial support of TV channels. Today, these tapes are wrongly viewed by art historians only within an art context,

■ while really they are media theory in practice.¹⁸ Accordingly, Paik started his *Global Groove* from 1973 with the motto: “This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch on any TV station on the earth and TV guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.” To understand the “global channel zapping” simulated in this video, one must recall that in the 1970s, long before satellite broadcasting, television was still a national (or, especially in the US, even regional) affair. The theoretical groundwork of *Global Groove* was developed by Paik three years earlier: “If we could compile a weekly TV festival made up of music and dance from every country, and distributed it free-of-charge round the world via the proposed common video market, it would have a phenomenal effect on education and entertainment.”¹⁹ In this scenario, (media) art would no longer compete for the latest advances in art, but on the contrary *anticipate*

the future of media technology and its repercussions in society. In Paik’s work this occurred through an affirmatively utopian scenario (and elsewhere through media critique).

Paik included implicit media theory in his art as early as 1963 with *Participation TV*. Way back when Germany had just a single television channel, Paik’s work presaged interactive mass media developments.²⁰ These were the days when Marshall McLuhan postulated that media theory should not only analyze the status quo, but instead, if it wanted to be taken seriously, must influence the area under investigation: “Control over change would seem to consist in moving not with it but ahead of it. Anticipation gives the power to deflect and control force.”²¹

Despite the fact that in the 1970s electronic art was supported by TV channels and the computer industry, both of which supplied grants and means of production, its long-term economic base and also its cultural discourse were still with the fine arts and its network of galleries, collectors, and museums. Yet despite this basis, far into the 1980s it remained impossible to even cover the expenses for production and hardware through the art market. Most media artists would thus live within a dual economy and combine grants and other art-world resources with industry commissions or TV broadcast sales. Only a few artists could successfully transfer their work for the television mass medium back into an art context—as Paik did with his 1977 *TV-Garden*, a room-filling installation based on the *Global Groove* video, which he presented at documenta 6 in Kassel and later sold to the Guggenheim Museum. In contrast to Paik, many quite successful media artists vanished from the art scene because their creativity could be used more profitably in the media industry; John Whitney and John Sanborn come to mind here.

The beginning of the institutionalization of media art at the end of the 1960s is an outcome of this situation even if the term itself still wasn’t used. A selection of institutionalized initiatives would eventually include:

—1967–70, Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.)

—1968–today, *Leonardo* magazine

- 1968–80s, Computer Arts Society (CAS)
- 1969–1973, Television Gallery Gerry Schum
- 1971–today, Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)
- 1971–today, The Experimental Television Center
- 1968–today, Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS)
at MIT

These initiatives depended on diverse organizational models and followed different aims. They shared that they were initiated by individuals fighting for a cause, not by public institutions making top-down decisions. They were based on what today we call public-private partnership, a combination of public funds and private sponsors that was uncommon then (if more uncommon in Europe than in the USA). The Center for Advanced Visual Studies was a special case, since MIT functioned as its powerful parent organization, but it later became the standard model for new institutions throughout the 1980s.

All these initiatives developed platforms for the production and distribution of electronic art outside of the established art institutions. At the same time, they explicitly positioned themselves between the cracks of classic artistic genres and concepts of artistic or economic success within the dual economy described above. In the course of their development they met with problems: could the electronic arts defend and extend their hybrid cultural-industrial and artistic-technological position, or would they time and again flounder at the incompatibility of economic and aesthetic criteria?

That this question would remain relevant for the 1980s became obvious during the second phase of institutionalization, which was no longer restricted to individual initiatives but took on larger dimensions and more public cultural significance. Only then did the term media art come into use. Unfortunately, a historical overview of media art institutions is missing to this day, which makes it even more difficult to write a comprehensive history of the term and its multiple meanings.

Here are some major event-based initiatives from the institutionalization of media art in the 1980s, sorted by founding date (without claim to completeness; some are no longer active):

- 1978, Montevideo, Amsterdam
- 1979, Ars Electronica, Linz
- 1980, Video Art Festival, Locarno
- 1981, Experimental Film Workshop, Osnabrück (after 1988 renamed the European Media Art Festival)
- 1982, World Wide Video Festival, The Hague
- 1982, *Infermental* video magazine
- 1983, Time Based Arts, Amsterdam (in 1993 fused with Montevideo to form Netherlands Media Art Institute)
- 1983, Manifestation Internationale de Video, Montbéliard
- 1984, Videonale, Bonn
- 1984, Marler Video-Kunst-Preis, Skulpturenmuseum Marl
- 1984, Hull Time Based Arts (HTBA)
- 1986/87, V2_Institute for the Unstable Media, Rotterdam
- 1988, Videofest, Berlin (renamed transmediale after 1997)
- 1989, Artec Biennale, Nagoya
- 1989, MultiMediale, Karlsruhe

In the context of these festivals and institutions, media art finally began to take shape as a specialized discipline defined by the social network of an international community, who, in different locations, had to win a similar fight against the marginalization of the genre. In a sense, since the 1980s media art has really taken place in a “global village,” spread over the globe but still familial in size. The institutional standing of these initiatives has varied widely: Ars Electronica, for example, received support from the city of Linz and national broadcaster ORF early on and became an official cultural attraction for the area, whereas the Videonale Bonn, initiated by a group of students in a small project room, only very slowly worked itself into stable funding and an institutional haven in the municipal art museum. Often these activities started as one-offs, which met with such success, or were so persistently pushed by the initiators, that they became recurring events. Some of events evolved from the festival stage into more durable institutional forms—Ars Electronica is again a good example here.

The significance of this second phase of institutionalization for the implementation of the term media art became clear in the renaming of the Osnabrück, Amsterdam, and Berlin ini-

tatives during the 1990s. “Media art” had come to stand not for a separation, but for a reintegration of different genres like video art, sound art, and interactive art. In turn, the “global village” increasingly distanced itself from the field of “contemporary art,” and media art became more rarely seen in the biennials and documentas—not to mention the art market and museum collections—than it had been a decade earlier. A central cause for the marginalization of media art within the fine arts context was that, after a period of conceptualism, the latter had become museum-friendly again, with newly opened postmodern museum buildings to house it and a rising importance of private collections in public opinion.

From the end of the 1980s, a stronger interest in connecting media art and media theory became obvious. The reasons for that, besides the fact that media art was disconnected from the fine arts discourse, lay in the growing establishment of media studies as an academic discipline in its own right. The broader public’s growing interest in digital innovations was also important for artistic interventions in the field. Eight initiatives were typical of these developments:

- 1988, ISEA Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts
- 1990–2000, Interface Conference Hamburg
- 1990, HyperKult—Computer als Medium
- Then, during the 1990s, large public institutions explicitly founded for media art finally established themselves. Major institutions of this third phase were:
Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe (ZKM) (institute and foundation formed in 1989; center opened in 1997)
- 1989, Institut für Neue Medien (INM) at the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main
- — 1990, Academy of Media Arts, Cologne (KHM)²²
- 1993, Ars Electronica Center, Linz (AEC)
- 1997, Intercommunication Center, Tokyo (ICC)

As mentioned, a reference model for these institutions was the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) at MIT, since it was connected to a large university and research institute.

The economic power of MIT was a political factor, while the mission of the institution was clearly defined as cultural. This can be shown in two longer excerpts from the concept papers of two German institutions, which deserve a closer look.

Konzept ’88, the founding document of the ZKM Karlsruhe, states:

Because of the distribution and almost limitless availability of new media like e.g. television, radio, video, computer graphics, holography, cassette recorders, personal stereos, CDs etc. people relate to art and also to technology in a different manner today. Art like technology now plays an integral and decisive role in all matters of everyday life and culture. [...] The Centre for Art and Media Technology therefore will be a centre for a human technology. It will develop one of the most immediate manifestations of life in the human spirit—the desire for aesthetic expression—and reconcile it with technology.²³

The founding concept of the KHM Cologne, ca. 1989/90, states:

The academy is devoted to modern methods and technologies of image production and transmission, which increasingly become part of current design and art practice. This especially includes a critical analysis of media culture and a responsible and moral use of mass media.

Objectives:

1. An influence on media developments (through arts, design and sciences). The aim is cultural integration to prevent an expansion that is purely technologically oriented.
2. Promotion of a close cooperation between artists, designers, authors and directors working for movies and TV, scientists and engineers.²⁴

These concepts contain some of the arguments we have already encountered during the above sketch of media art history: themes from the 1960s, like intermedia and the dialogue between two cultures, were now applied to the relationship be-

tween art and technology in the digital realm. The remnants of a Futurist desire for an artistic design of things to come, and a mission to improve the world, were now embedded in a context of social outreach and pedagogy, as opposed to that of the elite avant-garde.

Standard elements of media theory and the philosophy of technology also came into play. The technological optimism of McLuhan, who believed that it was possible to control and change media through anticipation, went together with a characteristically German skepticism of technology that harks back to Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry and Martin Heidegger's warning that technology would make us fall into self-estrangement.

These texts were not artist manifestos or individual initiatives drawn up according to an ideological motivation; these were texts immediately connected to political decision-making and designed with budgets, appointment schemes, equipment depots, and huge buildings in mind! In fact, the programs and projects from the "heroic age" before media art have now, after thirty years, reached the stage of practical politics. This is not due to the persistence of the artists involved. Instead the changes in the media environment have now become so obvious that the necessary reaction from culture and education planners seems almost belated.

Reflecting upon the changes that "new media" brought to life in the 1990s though artistic and theoretical means was a central motive of these founding documents. Still, it didn't become clear how the cultural mission of these institutions would be positioned in face of the growing self-evidence of digital media. Simultaneous with the founding of these specialized institutions, digital technologies radically de-specified. They have become everyday tools, implemented in all reaches of social life, which makes the status of a special institution, designed to develop them artistically, so much harder to justify. It doesn't help that the research mandate stressed in the founding concepts of the ZKM and the AEC since then has gradually been sacrificed for the more effective publicity of event organization.

Another central factor contributing to the current legitimization crisis of institutions founded during this third phase

in the 1990s is that, today, electronic images are largely integrated into contemporary art. In particular, video art pieces are presented in all major survey exhibitions—and they are no longer labeled video art, since the medium has taken its equal place beside photography and painting. While, during the 1980s, video tapes still sold for low standard prices even if the artist was quite prominent, today there is a fully developed price structure for video on the art market, and limited edition copies can demand six-figure prices.²⁵ These market mechanisms repeat the way photography was absorbed into the art market in the 1970s. On the other hand, unlike video, digital media art (interactive art, net art, software art, and so on) is still a tough sell, often donated by the artist for free if an institution agrees to preserve and display it. This has nothing to do with the artistic significance of the work; it speaks of a basically conservative art market that has become the ruling force for museums and private collections.

Even the titles of pertinent book publications suggest a growing separation between video and media art. For example, the World of Art series from Thames & Hudson has four volumes, titled: *Video Art*, *Digital Art*, *Internet Art*, and *New Media in Art*.²⁶ While the "iconic" video medium managed to transition into an art context, processual, experimental, participative media art more than ever remains a specialized artistic discipline. The model of a reintegration of media art genres under a common media art umbrella, which came up during the second phase of institutionalization in the 1980s, seems no longer viable. Today "being digital" is no longer a criterion for artistic or even cultural innovation. New strategies and terms have begun to emerge: in the wake of techno music, the term post-digital has found currency (it was introduced in 2000 by Kim Cascone to describe so-called glitch music, where failures in the digital media are exploited creatively), while in the visual media arts there is a trend toward the "neo-analog," a return to simple DIY techniques.²⁷

This is why the initial motives of a cultural separation between "high art" and media innovation, which led to the founding of institutions during the third phase, are not outdated—but they should be integrated into an overarching cultural research

concept, where art history (for the fine arts, music, film, and theater alike), media theory, scientific theory, and the cultural sciences study the role of digital media from a multitude of perspectives. But the necessities that lead institutions like ZKM and AEC to organize popular blockbuster exhibitions work against this aim. The show “YOU_ser 2.0: Celebration of the Consumer” at ZKM in 2009 above all proved that the exhibition format cannot compete with the possibilities of Web 2.0. The exhibition could not match the goal defined in its program: “YOU are the content of the exhibition! [...] Through their participation, the YOU, the user, has the chance to change the world.”²⁸ The same year was the reopening of the Ars Electronica Center in Linz, whose exhibit “New Views of Humankind” hardly featured any art or electronic media, but rather popular scientific presentations of biotechnology and robotics.

The most urgent questions can today no longer be dealt with in exhibitions, symposia, and catalogue publications alone. Instead they require new formats that use digital media to reach their audiences, as do online scientific platforms, common in the natural sciences. Since 2000, there have been some exemplary ventures, including the platform *netzspannung.org* at the Fraunhofer Institute for Intelligent Analysis and Information Systems (IAIS), which concentrates on online teaching and networking, and the platform *mediartnet.org* at ZKM Karlsruhe, where content is organized featuring thematic complexes, cultural contexts, and work analyses. While these platforms are accepted tools for the distribution of knowledge, their contribution to the theoretical field has hardly been recognized, since art history, media theory and cultural studies are still focused on the book format.²⁹ Both of these online projects were financed through external funding and, unfortunately, after support expired, were not continued or even updated by their respective institutions.

There are few examples of a fourth phase of institutionalization, in which media art is historically defined within the hybrid contexts of culture, technology, society, and science. Institutes like the Daniel Langlois Foundation in Montreal and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. in Linz tried to fulfil the task of making media art accessible in all its complexity, of

documenting and preserving important works, and explicitly integrating new distribution channels of the internet into their approaches and creating extensive online content.³⁰ Both initiatives, however, have been discontinued or cut down respectively, for quite different reasons, before they could make a widespread impact.³¹ The “dinosaurs from the 1980s and 1890s,” to recall the phrase quoted at the beginning of this essay, institutions of the third phase like ZKM or AEC remain established in cultural politics, but they are no longer legitimized through the belief in progress that defined the former “new media.” Names chosen in the 1990s for the departments of the AEC in Linz, like “Museum of the Future” and “Futurelab,” sound old-fashioned already. The other side of this fixation with the future is uncritical self-historicization on the part of institutions (the self-display on the occasion of the ZKM’s ten-year anniversary in 2007, and only three years later, their twenty-year anniversary of the ZKM foundation, as well as the coffee-table book *Ars Electronica 1979–2009: The First 30 Years*).

One decisive challenge for the future of media art is the preservation and documentation of its fragile electronic past. Both analog and digital information suffer from decay, and the newest hardware or software technology ages the quickest because of the perpetual necessary upgrades. The preservation of digital cultural heritage is a topic that has bearing on all reaches of cultural production, but media art may be the most obviously problematic area. Many media artworks depend on individual technical solutions and cannot be standardized to save data or functionality. It is not the acquisition budget that really counts for a collection of media art (often artists will feel it in their best interest to donate works to institutions), but permanent funds to preserve the works over time (either migrated to new formats or otherwise documented, depending on the medium), which has only lately been registered on the agenda of cultural politics.³²

Arguments for the significance of such preservation reach far beyond the context of media art. Select examples of media art can be seen as cornerstones in the development of a historical consciousness of the relationship between media culture and media technology. On the other hand, individual approaches

by media artists that proved innovative in their time can become useful for developing models for digital heritage beyond the standards of video and audio media. Besides the mere preservation of works, media art demonstrates the importance of thorough documentation of artistic intentions, concepts, and contexts, as well as their embeddedness in their historical framing.³³ The institutions of the third phase have so far achieved these aims only marginally or not at all. The most immediate problem today is that both the preservation of the digital heritage and the production or event-based display of new media art have to be paid for by the same budget. This means that, if taken seriously, the preservation of the past will eat up investments in the future of media art.³⁴ The material preservation of media art and documentation of its cultural technological context as a historical phenomenon will therefore require a radical reorientation necessary both for an understanding of media art and its legitimization as a specific discipline in the future.

POSTSCRIPT ON “POST”-NESS

The shifting and often confusing concepts of “post-media” could be taken as a parallel history to the developments in media art presented here.³⁵ Félix Guattari’s 1990 vision of “the beginning of a post-media era of collective-individual reappropriation and an interactive use of machines of information, communication, intelligence, art and culture; the “postmedia condition” of contemporary art that Rosalind Krauss described in 1999; the Post-Media Lab established 2011 at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg—they all seem to share little common understanding of “post-media.”³⁶ While the launch of postmodernism in the 1980s had a huge impact on reformatting contemporary art and its framing in architecture, the post-media status of contemporary art seems rather to reaffirm the status quo and the dominance of the art market as heritage of postmodernism.³⁷

Can the recent epidemic of “post”-ness, including post-internet and post-digital art, provide an opportunity to escape some of the redundancies of the historical media art debates sketched out in this essay? Maybe, but only if post-ness is no longer taken as a temporal category, in the sense of the “old

newness” of media art as the last of the avant-garde, and the post-digital instead becomes as permanent and as pervasive as the digital already is. This non-temporality seems to be the common ground of post-digital practice and recent theories of post-contemporary art, so there is a chance that the divide of what used to be called media art and what used to be called “mainstream” contemporary art will become more fuzzy than ever.³⁸

Translated from the German by Lutz Eitel.

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- 1 Stefan Heidenreich, “Es gibt gar keine Medienkunst!” trans. Lutz Eitel, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, January 27, 2008.
- 2 See Lyn Gardner, “Ekow Eshun and the ICA’s Death Blow to Live Art,” *Guardian*, October 23, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/23/ica-live-arts-closure>; see also Momus, “Is Live Art Dead?” *iMomus*, October 24, 2008, <http://imomus.livejournal.com/409301.html> (all links accessed November 1, 2011).
- 3 *Neue Medien in der Kunst. Geschichte – Theorie – Ästhetik*, Symposium at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Munich, January 21–22, 2010.
- 4 “The Art Formerly Known as New Media,” exhibition, curated by Sarah Cook and Steve Dietz, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, September 18–October 23, 2005.
- 5 Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
- 6 Claire Bishop, *Digital Divide*, *Artforum*, September 2012, 434–41; see also comment thread: <http://artforum.com/talkback/id=70724>.
- 7 “Claire Bishop Responds,” *Artforum*, January 2013, 38.
- 8 See the full program and audiofiles at: <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/claus.pias/aktuell/WasWarenMedien/WasWarenMedien.html>.
- 9 Andreas Broeckmann, “Art beyond the Digital Age,” in *No Internet, No Art—A Lunch Bytes Anthology*, ed. Melanie Bühler (Amsterdam: Onomatopoe, 2015), 320–21.
- 10 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 581.
- 11 See *Artists as Inventors—Inventors as Artists*, eds. Dieter Daniels and Barbara U. Schmidt (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008).
- 12 See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Bruce Sterling, “The Dead Media Project: A Modest Proposal and Public Appeal,” *Dead Media*, <http://www.deadmedia.org/modest-proposal.html>.
- 13 See Walter Benjamin’s analysis of Charles Baudelaire’s *À une passante* from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vols. 1/2, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 547.
- 14 Paul Feyerabend, *Wissenschaft als Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1984). See also his shorter essay in English, “Science as an Art: A Discussion of Riegl’s Theory of Art and an Attempt to Apply It to the Sciences,” *Art & Text*, nos. 12–13 (1984): 16–46.
- 15 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 46.
- 16 Douglas Davis paints a last panorama of these developments in *Art and the Future: A History-Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1972).
- 17 See *Nam June Paik: Exposition of Music: Electronic Television Revisited*, ed. Susanne Neuburger, exhibition catalogue, Museum Moderne Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Cologne: Walther König, 2009).
- 18 See Claus Pias’s attempt to find implicit media theories within the practice of developers of 1960s media technology—theories that proved so operational that they became the foundation of today’s media reality, but are no longer familiar or even available as theory. For example: “Asynchron – Einige historische Begegnungen zwischen Informatik und Medienwissenschaft,” *Informatik-Spektrum* 31, no. 1 (2008): 5–8.

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- 19 Nam June Paik, "Global Groove and Video Common Market," in *Video 'n Videology 1959–1973*, ed. Judson Rosebush (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1974).
- 20 See Dieter Daniels, "Touching Television: Participation Media with Marshall McLuhan, John Cage and Nam June Paik," in *TV Commune, de-inter-trans-* (Gyeonggi-do: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2011), 157–80.
- 21 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 199.
- 22 Many other new study courses for media art, media design, interface culture, and so on could be named here, but this would require its own essay.
- 23 ZKM-Arbeitsgruppe, *Konzept '88*, ed. Michael Heck, trans. Lutz Eitel (Karlsruhe: Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, 1988), 5, 8.
- 24 "Grundkonzept der Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln," in *Studiengang Audiovisuelle Medien, Studieninformation Wintersemester 1990/91* (October 1990).
- 25 See Dieter Daniels, "Video/Art/Market," in *40yearsvideoart.de—Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 to Today*, eds. Rudolf Frieeling and Wulf Herzogenrath (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 40–49.
- 26 As another example of publishers discriminating between genres, the *Basic Art* series by Taschen offers these two separate volumes: Sylvia Martin, *Video Art* (2006); Reena Jana and Mark Tribe, *New Media Art* (2006). The four volumes from Thames & Hudson are: Michael Rush, *Video Art* (2003); Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (2003); Rachel Greene, *Internet Art* (2004); Michael Rush, *New Media in Art* (2005).
- 27 Kim Cascone, "The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-digital' Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music," *Computer Music Journal* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 12–18.
- 28 See the complete program note at <http://www02.zkm.de/you/index.php?lang=en>.
- 29 See Dieter Daniels, "Das Vermittlungsparadox der Medienkunst: Thesen und Modelle zur multimedialen Vermittlung," in *Die Medien der Kunst – die Kunst der Medien*, eds. Gerhard Johann Lischka and Peter Weibel (Wabern bei Bern: Benteli, 2004), 90–104.
- 30 See Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/final-report-by-Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institute-Media-Art-Research->, <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/daniels/LBI-MediaArtResearch-FinalReport.164.pdf>, subsequent project website "See This Sound," <http://www.see-this-sound.at>.
- 31 The activities of the Daniel Langlois Foundation, privately founded in 1997, were heavily curtailed in 2008, and its collection of original documents on the history of media art was transferred to the Cinéma-thèque québécoise in 2011. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, directed by the author from 2005 to 2009, was closed by the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft after only four years.
- 32 As a notable development indicative of increasing institutional awareness as to the importance of archiving and preservation, in April 2016 Rhizome.org received a 600,000-dollar grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund its webrecorder.io dynamic-web archiving tool. transmediale has also received support in recent years for its ongoing archival project, which includes documentation of media art projects it has supported.
- 33 See "Survival and Maintenance of Media Based Art: an Overview of Existing and Developing Strategies of Documentation/Archiving/Conservation," workshop, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research., 2006, see <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/daniels/LBI-MediaArtResearch-FinalReport.164.pdf>.
- 34 In most cases media art institutions do not even sufficiently document their own activities.
- 35 See an overview of the confusion of "post-media" terminology: Andreas Broeckmann, "'Postmedia' Discourses: A Working Paper," <http://www.mikro.in-berlin.de/wiki/tiki-index.php?page=Postmedia+Discourses>. See also Florian Cramer, "What Is 'Post-digital'?", in *A Peer-Reviewed Journal About 3*, no. 1 (2014) <http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318>.
- 36 Félix Guattari, "Towards a Post-media Era," in *Provocative Alloys: A Post-media Anthology*, eds. Clemens Apprich et al. (Leuphana: Post-Media Lab & Mute Books, 2013) 27.
- 37 On the commercialization of video art, see Dieter Daniels, "Video / Art / Market," in *40yearsvideoart.de — Part 1. Digital Heritage: Video Art in Germany from 1963 to the Present* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 40–49.
- 38 The Berlin Biennale 2016, *The Present in Drag*, curated by the New York-based group DIS, embraced post-contemporary concepts, taking over several topics featured by the transmediale since 2010. See the April 2016 issue of *DIS Magazine*, "Post-contemporary," eds. Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik, <http://dismagazine.com/issues/post-contemporary/>; see also Avenessian and Malik, "The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary," *Fear of Content*, IX Berlin Biennale, 2016, <http://bb9.berlinbiennale.de/the-time-complex-postcontemporary/>.