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## Media Art in Exploration of Image History

The Media Art landscape of recent years is being increasingly seized by a phenomenon which has yet to receive any significant research, classification or analysis: the use of historic media configurations as an integrated part of contemporary media art installations. Internationally renowned artists like William Kentridge, Olafur Eliasson, Zoe Beloff, Jeffrey Shaw, Maurice Benayoun, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, create optical experiments, panoramas, phantasmagoria, perspective theaters, camera obscura, anamorphoses, magic lanterns, etc.

Never before has the world of images changed so fast in such a short span of time. Historical development of images between innovation, reflection and iconoclasm achieve new global linkage and complexity in the 21st century. Digital images became ubiquitous and key tools within the global reorganization of work, but these transformations hit society to a large extent unprepared.

In our most recent present, which has generated conferences and exhibitions with titles like *Image Wars* (New York 2009) or *Iconoclash* (Latour/Weibel 2002), artists venture in a reflective manner towards new measurements of the complex status of seeing – this is the core of the investigation and includes perception, reception and cognition as well as the process of creating images. In the “mine of media history” and the history of image techniques new thinking spaces (Denkraum) are created through new interfaces, displays, hard- and software configurations, often engaging viewers in a form of playful, creative combination.

By definition, Media Art is a relative term that has experienced transformation over time and currently counts digital media art as its newest representative. Film and even television are considered today already as “old” media. These image media still rarely receive public reflection, owing to their dominant cultural position, which play in their creation of collective “reality.” But slowly their predominance fades away and the prehistory of the visual mainstream culture of the 20th century arrives at the surface, trans-

ported not in the least by artists who try to approach the unique quality and emotional-sensuous experience of media.

Based on impulses from the history of perception, media artists today develop emancipatory strategies. What is the significance to the aforementioned artists, on the one hand through quotation, reference and analytic comments, and on the other hand by means of aesthetic distancing, in regard to the media revolution of the last decade(s)? More deeply, it should be asked for the significance found in these works in the form of self-reflections and self-images of humanity: in which way does the perception of the viewer, who has been shifted to the role of user through “interaction” become driven, captured, “misled” or vice versa uplifted and “emancipated”? In which fundamental manner do the newly created image processes differ from their historical predecessors, enlarge them, or even reverse? In which way are they included into innovative experimental and critical contexts that ultimately contribute to the development of a thinking space for reflection of visual strategies?

The evolution of media art has a long history and now a new technological variety has appeared. However, this art cannot be fully understood without its history (Arnheim 2000, Grau 2003, Gunning 2003, Huhtamo 2004, Chun 2006, Grau 2007). Additionally “depth of field” analyses of images can play an important role in facilitating our political and aesthetic analysis of the present (Zielinski 2002). By focusing on recent art against the backdrop of historic developments, it is possible to better analyze what is really new in media art and understand our present – that is the epistemological thesis.

In the past, comparative research studies on the sub-histories of media art could be developed: artificial life (Grau 2001), telepresence (Grau 2000), the principle of immersion and the panorama (Grau 2003) and the phantasmagoria (Mannoni 2000, Grau 2006, Heard 2006) were analyzed; steps towards the analysis of this latest movement in media art, focusing on historic image machines with modern technology and philosophy were made.

Most of my analysis will be based on the method of comparison, which is based on the insight that images act diachronic (but not teleological) within a historical evolution – with detours and contradictions (Gould 1999) but never function without reference (Warburg, Kemp, Bredkamp). Image science is based on three pre-conditions: 1. definition of the object, 2. setup of an image archive and 3. familiarity with a large quantity of images. Analogies or fundamental innovations in contemporary phenomena can be discerned through historical comparison, allowing us to differentiate and to distance ourselves from the phenomenon. Image Science can be seen as an anthropologic narration \*and\* a political battleground where the clash of images is analyzed. Image Science, or Bildwissenschaft is an open field that engages equally with what lies between the images and with the new perspectives resulting from interplay with neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, emotions research, and other scientific disciplines (Grau 2005, Belting 2007, Grau 2007, Grau 2010). This research is also based on the concept of the international MediaArtHistories Conference Series ([www.mediaarthistory.org](http://www.mediaarthistory.org)).