

User Art \_ Nutzerkunst /// Peter Weibel

In the nineteenth century, the twentieth century was imagined as one of mobilization and personalization technologies. These fantastical visions arrived with the PC and mobile phone. Such technologies have changed art, too. In the twentieth century, the history of the beholders of art and visitors to museums acquired new accents. After 1945, audience participation began to enter as part of the artwork in New Music and in the fine arts. Media art established the participation of the beholder in the creation of an artwork as interactivity between beholder and artwork: in terms of mutual influence (this interaction can be realized on the first floor of the ZKM | Media Museum). In the twenty-first century, through the possibilities of the Internet, the beholder now also generates the content of artworks, which are exchanged and freely distributed online. The beholder becomes a user. Over the next one to two years, the exhibition *YOU\_ser: The Century of the Consumer* will show the first contours of this new user-based art through changing art works and positions.

#### I. Object, use, instructions for use

At the beginning of the twentieth century, modern art redefined the reference to reality, or rather, to representations of reality. Painting cut its ties with the reality of the object world; it became non-representational, abstract (Kasimir Malevich). On the other hand, the object banned from the picture re-entered art as a real object (Marcel Duchamp). In painting, representation of the object world was prohibited, but the reality of the object world was welcome. Sculptors, too, ceased representing the external world. The real object itself became sculpture.

The issue of the depicted object's practical value never came up as long as the object was only a picture. After all, the use of an object that was merely painted was, in reality, not possible. The question of use surfaced with the use of real objects in the art system. If a sculpture is formed from a real, everyday object, then this can also be used as such. With his industrial ready-mades, Duchamp negated the use of his objects. The reversed urinal was not to be used. Duchamp presented it as an aesthetic object. The surrealists also rejected the usability of their aesthetic objects in order to stage their pure symbolic function. Brancusi, on the contrary, saw his handmade sculptures as having a triple use function. A sculpture could also be a plinth for another sculpture or a stool to sit on. The stool, for its part, could be the podium for a sculpture as well as a sculpture itself, or a use object. The productivists around Alexander Rodtschenko also expanded the concept of sculpture in 1920 and produced chairs to be used at a Workers' Club.

Along with the use objects came also instructions for use. Without instructions, most objects are unusable. The instructions for use became instructions for how to act for beholders, turning them into actors. Marcel Duchamp for example, provided exact instructions for how to look at a picture. With the usability of the aesthetic objects, the "user" also entered the picture. Later, the use object was even replaced by the instructions for use (instructions for how to act), which had always implicitly accompanied every object and every art object. In 1968, Franz Erhard Walther met this demand with his book *Objekte, benutzen*. The user took on a central role within the realm of art: the person who completes the artwork, so to speak. As clearly shown by Erwin Wurm's expanded media concept of sculpture, the user, in dealing with the objects, brings about the existence and development of the art work.

Following the beholders' reevaluation as reflecting and creative subjects came their acceptance as actors. As Duchamp stated in 1957, "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the

#### IV. Media art and audience emancipation

Through participatory practices, various art movements transformed the beholder into a user actively involved in the construction of the artwork, its design, content, and behavior. This change in direction toward the receiver became even more radical through the technical recording and broadcasting media—photography, television, video, computer, and Internet. Photography, as a democratic medium that allows everyone to photograph, sabotaged painting as an aristocratic medium and thereby its cult of prominence. Beginning in 1971, Braco Dimitrijevic made a star of the casual passerby, whom he met by chance at a certain time at a certain place, by eternalizing him or her on a huge banner in front of the building where they had met. In a series of further works, he erected memorials to average anonymous people by naming streets after them, hanging their portraits in front of museums, or presenting their names prominently on building façades. In 1972, Jochen Gerz staged a similar emancipation of the anonymous person as antidote to popular culture's and the art world's celebrity cults. He put up posters with the names of eight average people living on Rue Mouffetard in Paris, on the walls lining their own street. The audience participated not only in the production of the artwork, but the audience was also declared as the artwork, or the star. The audience became the content. This was also the case with the video work *Der Magische Spiegel* (1970) from the group *telewissen*, whereby normal people saw themselves for the first time on "television" (actually video) in a closed-circuit installation. Video and computer technology

elevated the participatory options to interactivity in the 1980s and 1990s.

#### V The emancipated consumer as artist

Since 1960, the art world had anticipated and prepared for a change in consumer behavior. The artist handed over creativity to the beholder: giving him or her the rules of behavior. Interactive art works no longer exist autonomously, but only through their use by the receiver, the user. The artist changed from a hero to a service worker, the visitor from a passive consumer to a star. Today, millions of people exchange photos, texts, videos, and music on a daily basis through MySpace.com, Flickr.com, YouTube.com, and in virtual worlds, such as SecondLife.com and blogs. Emerging is a newly structured space for the creative expression of millions of people. Beuys already declared that "everyone is an artist" in 1970. Everyday, millions of people find online platforms for communication, creativity, and art, beyond the authority of publishers, museums, galleries, newspapers, radio, television, and Hollywood, which traditionally decided on the production and distribution of works

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Celebration of the Consumer  
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the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.” (1) The receiver is an integral component in the creative act. The viewer switches to become an artist; the consumer becomes producer.

## II. New Music: Score and performance

The culture of musician (interpreter), has meanwhile achieved a special position in music. We simply have to replace the term “spectator” with “interpreter” and the term “artist” with “composer”: “All in all, the creative act is not performed by the composer alone; the interpreter brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.” The composer writes a score for piano, for example, but it is first the pianist who knows how to interpret and play this score that realizes the work. Composers write music. They write instructions for use for the piano, for example. The interpreter implements the instructions for use and produces the music. In this regard, the new music of the 1950s, (Pierre Boulez, John Cage), which attended to the problems of the score, in particular, and allowed the interpreter great freedom, provided further important roots for the origins of user art.

“In 1957 New Music was the Center of all Arts Movements and Germany was the Center of the New Music,” wrote Nam June Paik in 1999.(2) In fact, the participatory trends in art intensified in the 1950s with the freedom of the interpreter with regard to a score that was often aleatoric or which consisted of direct instructions. In 1960, the composer La Monte Young wrote *Composition #7*: “draw a straight line and follow it.” In 1962, Nam June Paik wrote in his instructions as music “Read-Music - Do it yourself - Answers to La Monte Young”: “See your right eye with your left eye.”

Since Cage, the interpreter’s freedom within the instructions of the score, chance, and uncertainty, have been important themes in New Music. Paik transferred this composition technique from the world of sounds into the world of pictures. In this transfer, the audience stepped into the place of the musician as interpreter or participant: “As the next step toward more indeterminacy, I wanted to let the audience (or congregation, in this case) act and play itself,” wrote Paik in his essay “About the Exposition of Music” in *Décollage*, No. 3, 1962. His video sculpture *Participation TV* (1963) allowed the audience to change the pictures on a black and white television by means of a microphone and a signal amplifier—a key work for the subsequent decades of interactive media art. His work *Random Access* (1963) was composed of tape recorders glued to the wall. Beholders, or users, could walk along with a mobile sound head and thereby generate their own music. They became, so to speak, a pianist who navigated the soundtrack, and did their own. The birth of media art and its participative trends did, in fact, result from the spirit of the music being made around 1960.(3) Action Art (Happening, Fluxus, Performance, and Event) was also influenced by musical problems in addition to sources from painting and literature. It was John Cage’s students who had the idea to transfer the score as instructions to the interpreter, to the audience. In the transfer of participatory principles from the acoustic to the visual arts, it was the audience that moved to the center, as protagonist of the artwork.

## III Action and audience participation

In 1959, fluxus artist George Brecht, a student of John Cage, discovered “Events,” which were made up of mainly binary instructions. The famous *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) from Allan Kaprow, from which the name Happening arose, listed “Instructions” for “a cast of participants.” In 1961, Yoko Ono began to formulate her performances as instructions to the audience. In *Cut Piece* (1964) she challenged the audience to come onto the stage and cut off her clothes. She transformed the art of instructions for the use of objects into the art of instructions for people.(4) The Happening *YOU* (1964) by Wolf Vostell in Long Island, New York was a further example of replacing the art object by

decided on the production and distribution of works. The user becomes the producer, perhaps even the artist. The field of the actor has expanded: with the consumer as activist, comes democratization of creativity and innovation. “User Innovation” and “Consumer Generated Content” influence not only the world of the mass media, but also the world of art. The future’s “Creative Industries” will be the emancipated consumers and users. Art, too, will become a “democratized user-centered innovation system.” A new, emancipated generation of producers-consumers has formed on the Internet. They are users who generate their own content and programs, exchange them amongst themselves, and distribute them freely online..

User art adopts these strategies for the art system. Visitors as users generate contents and programs in the museum; they exchange them amongst themselves, and distribute them freely online and in the museum. The museum and the classical artist are the providers, so to speak: they make the infrastructure available. The user, the emancipated consumer, delivers the content or is the content. Users are “prosumers” (pro/ducers and con/somers).

Twentieth-century art was defined by the paradigm of photography. In the electronic world and its electronic media, the art of the twenty-first century will be defined by the paradigm of the user. We are witnesses to a new receiver and consumer culture that was heralded already in the twentieth century. Information and communication technologies open the doors for a century of emancipated consumers who will also dominate the art world.

## VI. The visitor as user

With the exhibition *YOU\_ser: The Century of the Consumer*, ZKM | Karlsruhe turns to the effects of net-based global creation on art and society. Artists no longer have the monopoly on creativity. With the help of the Internet, the museum can develop to a communicative platform of creativity for all, independent of space and time.(6)

The new installations presented in the exhibition communicate the potential for design by the user as developed on the Internet into an artistic context and enable visitors to emancipate themselves and become users. Following on the heels of participative and interactive media art, visitors as users now generate or compile the content in the museum. From consumers they become producers and program designers and thereby competitors for the historical media monopolists: television, radio, and newspapers. Exhibition visitors can act as artists, curators, and producers. The visitor is at the center of the exhibition as user, as emancipated consumer. YOU are the content of the exhibition! The exhibition offers users a broad palette of participatory options: first, independent navigation through the data world: editing. Second, independent compilation and montage of images and sounds: composing. Third, independent selection and documentation of images and sounds: curating. And, fourth, independent creation of images, sounds, and data: generating. *YOU\_ser: The Century of the Consumer* is user dominated, user edited, user oriented, user generated, and user centered. Will the emancipated consumer as subject decide the history of civilization and culture of the twenty-first century?

(1) Marcel Duchamp, „The Creative Act“, in: *Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts*, Houston, Texas, April 1957.

(2) Wulf Herzogenrath (Hg.), *Nam June Paik – Fluxus/Video*, Kunsthalle Bremen, 1999, dedication page.

(3) Wulf Herzogenrath, „Der ost-westliche Nomade“, op. cit., see footnote 1.

(4) Cf. Jon Hendricks, *Yoko Ono: instructions for paintings by Yoko Ono May 24, 1962*, Budapest, Galeria56, 1993.

(5) GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel: Horacio Garcia-Rossi, Julio Le Parc, François Morellet, Francisco Sobrino, Joël Stein, Yvaral) in: „Stoppt die Kunst“, Manifest, 1965.

(6) Michael Mangold, Peter Weibel, Julie Woletz (Hg.), *Vom Betrachter zum Gestalter. Neue Medien in Museen – Strategien, Beispiele und Perspektiven für die Bildung*, Nomos, Baden Baden, 2007.

actions and instructions for how to act in action art. The “basic idea: to confront the participants, the audience, with the reasonability of life in a satire in the form of a rehearsal of chaos / it is not important what I think—but instead, what the audience takes with them from processes and my image of them” (Wolf Vostell).

Challenging the audience to participate in the creation of the artwork also played a major role in Nouveau Réalisme. With *Métamatics*, the drawing machine by Jean Tinguely from 1959, the audience could make their own drawings. In the exhibition *Feu à volonté* (1961), Niki de Saint Phalle invited the audience to pick up a weapon and shoot at her assemblages. Pierre Restany, Nouveau Réalisme theorist, demanded in a working paper from 1971 for the “Actions-Spectacles,” an “action conjuncturelle: a temporary action, any kind of intervention with the audience, that aims at initiating their participation in several stages (passive, playful, active, co-creating).”

Fluxus, Happening, Performance, and Nouveau Réalisme were not alone in discovering the participating beholder, co-player, and co-creator. As early as the 1950s, Kinetic art and Op-Art demanded the beholder’s participation in the construction of the artwork. “We want to stir the beholder’s interest, to free him, to loosen him. We want his participation. We want to put him in a situation that sets him in motion and makes him his own master.” (5) The beholder has to move to perceive the optical deceptions and phenomena of Op-Art. The beholder is able to activate and change kinetic objects and sculptures. The works enabled early forms of interactivity. *Arte Programmata* (1962, Umberto Eco), which arose in the milieu of Op-Art and Kinetic art, emphasized the role of chance within a predetermined program. Programmed sculptures and pictures emerged. Although these programs were not executed by computers; they were conceptual programs, manually and mechanically realized, they can still be considered key precursors to computer art.

The term “algorithm” embraces the instructions and directions from the various genres of music and art. An algorithm is a strictly defined procedure, directions for how to act, with finite elements and a determined succession that tells a machine or a person what to do. The machine follows a succession of digits and executes a program; a person follows letters and symbols, whether for a cooking recipe, a musical score, or the rules of a game. The intuitive algorithms in the form of instructions for use and how to act became accepted in the arts parallel to the development of computers and machine language and their algorithmic procedures. The *Loopool 1.2* by Bastian Böttcher is an example of a user-oriented talking machine: a hyperpoetry cluster with thirty-two interwoven rhythm and text fragments ornamentally depicted on a graphic surface. Viewers can influence the course of the text by using the toggle button, putting together their own rap song without bringing the steady meter out of beat. Every user can become the author of a rap text.