CONT3XT.NET

Re:Interview #013: Monochromacity as a Reflection of Computing Processes in Internet-based Art | Thomas Dreher

Monday, 13 September 2010

A reduction of structure, material, and space; if colour articulates itself, independently of interpretation or context—does that make it autonomous? Monochromacity has been considered the most essential form of abstraction, having provided a source of inspiration for non-figurative and non-representational tendencies in contemporary art, these ideas need to be taken still further in the age of digital images. The following interview with the art historian Thomas Dreher was conducted within the context of the exhibition White, Yellow, Blue, and Black, one Coincidence, and one Object. The show presents eight international positions in Internet-based art that embrace monochromacity as a formal principle without clinging to the ideological aims of earlier artistic avant-gardes. The works on display implicitly address the deconstruction of the digital image via text(code) and explicitly ask whether, in the face of the present image overload, there are ways of escaping the so-called crisis of representation.

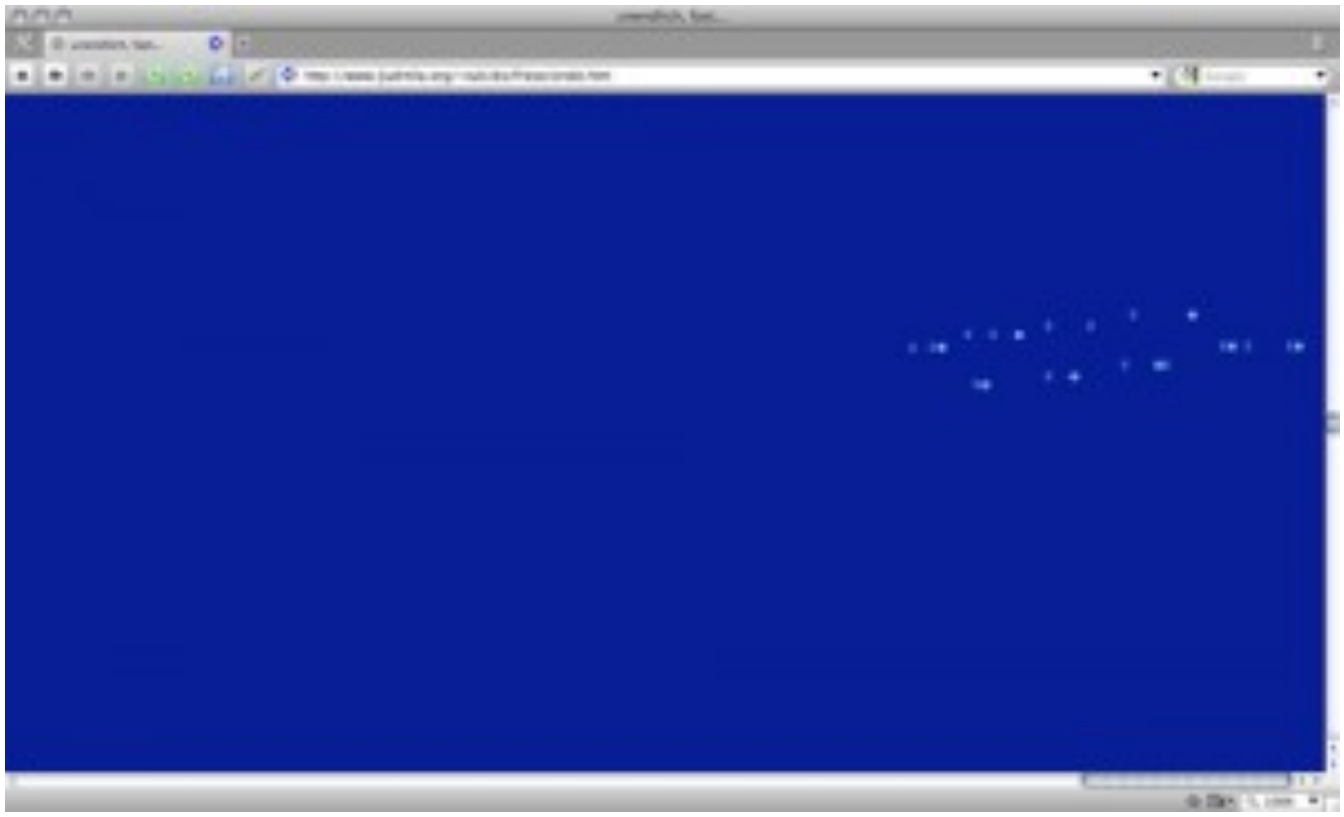
Computer-generated and conceptual Digital Art played an important role within the early New Media Art experiments in the 1960/70s. Do you notice a recent upward tendency towards formal-aesthetic art practices on the Internet with, trends such as the Single Serving Sites or Surfing Clubs?

In the 1960s and 1970s only a few technological projects used electronic media to offer observers insights into whether and how computing processes are involved. Recent reconstructions of early art projects involving computing processes facilitate the reception of works that were widely ignored by the art world of these times. I have noticed that data visualization is the predominant subject of current Net Art. Although I see the current ‘trends’ mentioned above as being peripheral, they are nevertheless interesting as alternatives.

Representation by the use of forms of non-representation—what can artworks such as Jan Robert

Leegte's *Blue Monochrome .com* (1) or Ryan Barone's *International Klein Blue (Google Monochromes)* (2)—both referring to the French artist Yves Klein—contribute to art history regarding the relation between Modern and Contemporary Art?

In monochrome paintings, artists offer models for the relations between the material object of art and the 'esthetic object' in focusing the observer's attention on the relation between the application of paint and the carrier's surface. The reduction to optical, painterly and material problems should provoke discussions about the essence of paintings and—as the next step—about the essence of visual art. Monochromacity offers a model for recognizing the essence of one of the arts in an epoch with a production of art that is bound to specific media for sound, verbal or visual media phenomena.



In *unendlich, fast…* (3) Holger Friese uses HTML to instruct the browser to present a blue field. He interrupts the blue surface by placing signs where they are not easy to find. These signs are elements of an image file. The screenshot is embedded in the blue field. The two signs are repeated several times. They are neither letters of the alphabet nor part of the keyboard: the image file contains a screenshot of a postscript file (4). The signs are dispersed in a color field without recognizable connections leading further between them, while signs in words and codes usually appear in contexts allowing readers to ignore irrelevant semantic fields.

In Codepoetry, parts isolated from codes are combined with fragments of phrases and words (e.g. Mary-Anne Breeze's *Mezangelle* (5)). Particles of codes appear in browser presentations as if codes do not control the output via computing processes but disturb the output. Code fragments in the presentations of Codepoetry can provoke doubts as to whether graphical user interfaces (GUIs) are restricting possibilities of computing processes by making the code non-transparent.

Friese thematizes the relations between codes and presentations in a different way to Codepoetry. The iconic and indexical levels of Friese's unendlich, fast… do not refer to textual parts, while its source code is a specific kind of text: a determined notation for instructions. With its combination of presentation and code with differing characteristics at each level—and with relations between them shown by the traces of signs for the navigation of machines (signs in a screenshot as an image of a postscript file for printers)—*unendlich, fast…* offers a model for Net Art.

With the separation between instructions and output media, the digitization puts a question mark over abstract paintings' de-semantizing reduction to the materialized sign-forms. The de-semantization as a reduction to the material process in the tradition of the classical avant-garde is changed into a specific re-semantization: it divides as well as binding the instructions and computing processes that prepare the

output.

In exploring the controversy between realism and abstraction—between representing and non-representing art works—Max Bense defined the ‘esthetic object’ in *Aesthetica* (6). For the Digital Arts, Philip Galanter revives Bense’s inquiry into the esthetic domain in discussing the relation between information and redundancy again, but now for Generative Art (7). While Generative Art discussed by Galanter foregrounds the production of iconic signs in the time dimension, Digital Art in its full range of possibilities includes multimedia and intermedia processes, making it difficult to reduce the question of the properties defining them as art to the question of the ‘esthetic object’.

If multimedia and intermedia processes call into question the de-semantizing reduction to surfaces exclusively made for the visual perception then, (as authors of ‘modernism’ and ‘formal criticism’) Clement Greenberg’s and Michael Fried’s project is called into question, to define the ‘esthetic object’ by a purely visual medium. Digital processes re-conceptualizations of the relation between code and computing processes and provoke one to regard the search for an ‘esthetic object’ as a special case within Computer Art, while monochromacity appears to be a model of this search and its important function as a project of Modern Art.

In *International Klein Blue* (2) Ryan Barone presents an animated GIF file with eleven versions of the color blue to demonstrate the substitution of the one and final solution (the IKB, patented by Klein) by the variations of digital processes. Yves Klein’s blue loses its importance as an unshakeable reference point, because Barone does not start his realization of a sequence of modified blue tones with the original but with its traces on web pages: he starts and ends with (archived/stored traces of) digital processes. The time dimension as the property of Barone’s digital realization was a negative criterion for Michael Fried, because he regarded this dimension as provoking a ‘theatricality’ (8) leading beyond the reductionist project of ‘modernism’. This kind of ‘theatricality’ became a core property of art works that integrate computing processes. The monochrome field as an end of painting is used by Barone to prepare a sequence of the end’s traces.

Monochromacity in Internet-based Art is generated by standardized color codes and fed by industrialized online resources. Is the autonomy of the artwork on the Internet illusive or—on the very other hand—does it absolutely fulfill Clement Greenberg’s postulation of modernism?

In Net Art neither are Greenberg’s postulates fulfilled nor are concepts of monochrome paintings revitalized.

In *Truth and Process* Philip Galanter transfers Greenberg's 'essentialist approach' (9) (with modifications) as a method to use and explain Generative Art. He defines its essence: "What is essential to generative art is not any particular material but rather the harnessing of process." (10) For methodological reasons I regard his six-years-older non-essentialist explanation of relations between information and redundancy as more persuasive. (7) Monochromacity in digital forms removes the design questions of Generative Art that interested Galanter by refocusing on the relations between codes and the simulation of surfaces, between algorithmic notations and generative processes: these are the fundamental questions of digitization. Pointing to the digital modes hidden by Web 2.0 platforms can be one of the possible tasks of art.

The ciphers of the net participants' IP addresses deliver a data flow to Reynald Drouhin's *IP Monochrome*. (11) These data are used as a source of a visualization process. Drouhin does not present data visualization as a means of a better recognition of external relations but shows a process of transformation. The connection address for computers in telecommunications delivers the external source of a transformation in values of a digitized color scale (RGB values in hexadecimal numbers). The presentation shows the IP addresses as well as the monochrome color fields resulting from the transformation process: from numerical codes to colors.

The work exists as long as these processes are functioning. Preconditions for the observability of these processes are connections to the Internet and color codes compatible with browser presentations. Monochrome paintings have another contextual dependency: the relations of color applications to the material support mounted on the wall (or the wall itself) and its relations to the environment with moving observers. In short: spatial relations in monochrome paintings (for example by Robert Ryman and Gerhard Merz (12)) versus (references to) codes in Digital Art.

Abstract monochrome Internet-based Art is often connected to a complex system of references and associations. Just to name a few examples: in *The Black Website* (13) and *The White Website* (14) by UBERMORGEN.COM as well as in *webzen* (15) by Michael Kargl, the source code plays a determining role or, in Charles Broskoski's *Let's Turn This Fucking Website Yellow .com* (16) and in Reynald Drouhin's *IP Monochrome*, (11) the users and the users' geo-data are bound to complete the artworks. Can we still talk about the critique of representation—or rather about the critique of this critique of representation—as a kind of digital meta-modernism?

In Concrete Art, reductions to a few elements and system criteria (the principles of non-contradiction within the 'Cartesian Grid') are crucial. Digitization presupposes these aspects in systems which are determined by their ability to react to external data. Meanwhile the modernism of Clement Greenberg and

Michael Fried (8) obliged artists to make works for an immediate perception by observers, who were confronted with systems isolated from the environment, Digital Art presents processes of dynamic systems open to react to environmental influences at different and more than just visual levels.

Drouhin (11) integrates observers by using their IP addresses. By a technical assignment to their terminals, the recipients recognize themselves as being integrated into the net and into the art work in the net: they are internal observers. Drouhin's overview of the actual IP addresses of the last observers and the transformations into colors offers a changing index of the last computing processes. The index involves other problems for a visual design than those that can be found in the color fields combined by Richard Paul Lohse (as linear phenomena of rows (17)) or by Gerhard Richter (18). Lohse and Richter arrange their elements on picture surfaces for visual perception, while Drouhin's index indicates the digital processes on a web page and uses more than one visual level: the surface of the browser presentation combines forms and functions (to indicate the IP address when the cursor is moved over color fields and to read the source code).

In Digital Art the projects' openness to external influences is usually the result of their systems' steady internal properties. In the case of monochromacity in Digital Art, the narrowing of cultural and technical questions to machine-readable codes of visualization processes causes a specific form of self-referential analysis—as works of the exhibition *White, Yellow, Blue and Black, One Coincidence and one Object*. demonstrate. The self-referential analysis can be interpreted as a resistance to everyday uses of the Internet comparable to the 'iconoclasm' of monochromacity in the history of painting: the withdrawal of pre-coded and spectacular images acquires a regulative function in the attention economy of Web 2.0.

Intertextuality and intermediality are keywords that frequently appear in theories about Internet-based Art. In Lessons in NetArt (19) you call the Internet a (trans-)medium. Can you be more precise about the term in our context?

Current computing possibilities constitute the transmedium while the Internet has become a part within a 'network of nets' (telecommunications, mobile-phone systems, satellites). The relations between codes as instructions and the formats of output media (texts, images, films, sounds (20)) remain at the center of artistic interest, with a specific focus on changing standards.

In an essay accompanying the exhibition *Postmediale Kondition* (21) Peter Weibel argues that the intrinsic characteristics of different media in the present context are not redundant, but rather that their specificity is becoming increasingly clear—'intermedia specificity' instead of 'medium specificity'?

Rosalind Krauss used the term "Post-Medium Condition" (22) to discuss the Multimedia and Intermedia Art of the sixties. The artists' response to Greenberg's reduction to the delimited flat surface ("flatness and the delimitation of flatness" (23)) as the essential precondition of modern visual art have been combinations of media circumventing the quest for the pure medium. Conceptual discussions of different ways of observing the world have not seldom been the artists' guide to finding criteria for adequate selections of media and media combinations. The modernist project to find the best materialization of visual art's essence was replaced by investigations into possible goals for the development of relations between signs, technical functions and processes.

The human-machine interface is the crucial question of 'intermedia specificity' under the conditions of digitization. This cannot be considered separately from the human-world interface (theory of knowledge and cognition) following Peter Weibel's writings and works (24). The conception of the human-world interface is the precondition for all other concepts of interfaces. Combined with the conception of the human-machine interface are investigations of how technical augmentations of our cognitive capabilities can be realized. These capabilities can be reduced by easily consumable graphical user interfaces (GUI). This is where Digital Art's criticism comes in: persuasive examples keep open the possibilities for alternatives to established interfaces.

You have studied the field of Internet-based Art since its early beginnings. What methods of contextualization and mediation are necessary to integrate Internet-based Art more into the general art canon, where it is still—more or less—considered as a marginal phenomenon?

I am interested in an Intermedia Art that evades the reciprocal dependencies of the art market and museums. These dependencies shape the institution of art, with consequences for art production (and art criticism) becoming increasingly easily recognizable since the 1980s. Canonization is not a step across this kind of institutionalization. Because Net Art projects find observers outside museums and galleries, I can find a plurality of different concepts in one artist's project list, instead of an artist's variations on the same successful idea.

Thank you very much for the interview!

References:

(1) Jan Robert Leegte, *Blue Monochrome.com*, 2008, http://www.bluemonochrome.com (July 25, 2010).

(2) Ryan Barone, *International Klein Blue (Google Monochromes)*, 2008, http://www.ryanbarone.com/ international-klein-blue-google-monochromes.html (July 25, 2010).

(3) Holger Friese, *unendlich, fast…*, 1995, http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/dx/friese/ende.htm (July 27, 2010).

(4) The postcript file had a blue background. Friese took over its blue hue for the enlarged monochrome field. Friese on the graphic-file: "…it is a screenshot of a postscript file (the data structure that's sent to a laser printer). Stars and lines represent the sign for infinity, a horizontal eight, in a form readable for computers.", http://www.fuenfnullzwei.de/art.html (July 30, 2010).

(5) On Maryanne Breeze's (Mez, Netwurker) Mezangelle, http://knott404.blogspot.com/search/label/mezangelle (July 30, 2010).

(6) Max Bense, *Aesthetica I-IV* (1954-1960), Baden-Baden, 1965/1982.

(7) Philip Galanter, *What is Generative Art? Complexity Theory as a Context for Art Theory*. Lecture, 12/11/2003, *Papers of Generative Art 2003 Conference*, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Architettura e Società, Campus Leonardo, Milan, 2003, http://www.philipgalanter.com/downloads/ga2003_paper.pdf (July 27, 2010).

(8) Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, in: Artforum, June 1967, p. 12-23.

(9) Philip Galanter, *The Problem of Evolutionary Art Is…*, in: C. Di Chio et al. (eds.): *EvoApplications (Applications of Evolutionary Computation) 2010*, Part II, in: LNCS (Lecture Notes in Computer Science) 6025. Berlin/Heidelberg 2010, p. 321-330, http://philipgalanter.com/downloads/evostar2010%20-%20galanter%20-%20the%20problem%20with%20evo%20art.pdf (July 29, 2010).

(10) Philip Galanter, *Truth to Process—Evolutionary Art and the Aesthetics of Dynamism*. Lecture, 12/15/2009, *Papers of 12th Generative Art 2009 Conference*, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Architettura e Società, Campus Leonardo, Milan, 2009, p. 216-226, http://philipgalanter.com/downloads/ga2009%20-%20galanter%20-%20truth%20to%20process.pdf (July 28, 2010).

(11) Reynald Drouhin, *IP Monochrome*, 2006, http://www.incident.net/works/ipm (July 25,

2010).

(12) Gerhard Merz and Robert Ryman, in: Maurice Besset and Thierry Raspail, *La Couleur Seule, L'Expérience du Monochrome*, Cat. exhib. Musée Saint Pierre Art Contemporain. Ville de Lyon 1988, p. 134-137, 232 s., 319, 328 ss.

(13) UBERMORGEN.COM, *The Black Website*, 2002, http://www.ubermorgen.com/THE_BLACK_WEBSITE (July 25, 2010).

(14) UBERMORGEN.COM, *The White Website*, 2002, http://www.ubermorgen.com/THE_WHITE_WEBSITE (July 25, 2010).

(15) Michael Kargl, *webzen*, 2009, http://michaelkargl.com/webzen/ (July 25, 2010).

(16) Charles Broskoski, *Let's Turn This Fucking Website Yellow.com*, 2007-2008, http://letsturnthisfuckingwebsiteyellow.com (July 25, 2010).

(17) e.g. Richard Paul Lohse, *Fünfzehn systematische Farbreihen in progressiven Horizontalgruppen/Fifteen Systematic Colour Lines in Progressive Horizontal Groups*, 1950/62, http://www.mkk-ingolstadt.de/content/html_files/podcast.php (July 31, 2010).

(18) e.g. Gerhard Richter, *1025 Colours*, 1974, http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/colourchart/ artists/richter.shtm (July 29, 2010).

(19) See Thomas Dreher, *Lessons/Lektionen in NetArt*, http://iasl.uni-muenchen.de/links/lektion0e.htm (July 25, 2010).

(20) See Mitchell Whitelaw, *Hearing Pure Data: Aesthetics and Ideals of Data-Sound*, in: Arie Altena and Taco Stolk (eds.), *Unsorted Thoughts on the Information Arts: A Guide to Sonic Acts 10*, Sonic Acts Press/De Balie, Amsterdam 2004, http://creative.canberra.edu.au/mitchell/papers/HearingPureData.pdf (July 29, 2010).

(21) "Within this postmedial condition the apparatus world's autonomous worlds, the intrinsic properties of the media world don't become superfluous. To the contrary, the specificity, the worldliness of each medium is differentiated further." Peter Weibel, *Postmediale Kondition: Introduction to an exhibition of the same title at the Neuen Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum*, Graz 2005, http://vmk.zhdk.ch/flz/postmediale_kondition_weibel.pdf (July 25, 2010).

(22) See Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London, 2000.

(23) Clement Greenberg, *After Abstract Expressionism* (1962/rev. 1969), in: Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, Chicago/London 1993/2nd edition 1995, p. 121-134.

(24) Peter Weibel, *The World from Within—Endo & Nano–Over and Beyond the Limits of Reality*, in: Karl Gerbel and Peter Weibel (eds.), *The World from Within—Endo & Nano*, Ars Electronica 1992. Brucknerhaus Linz. Linz 1992, p. 8-12.

–
–
–

Monochromacity as a Reflection of Computing Processes in Internet-based Art | Thomas Dreher' was posted on September 13th, 2010 at 8:30 am and last modified on June 15th, 2011 at 7:09 am, and is filed under 2010, CONT3XT.NET, interviews. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. Both comments and pings are currently closed.

Comments are closed.

« **Group exhibition, Graz/Austria:**
Untitled (The Author Entitles Texts By Experimenting With Art.)
Gruppenausstellung, Velika Gorica/Kroatien:
Weiß, Gelb, Blau und Schwarz, ein Zufall und ein Objekt. »

- This website was set up as a collaborative curatorial, editorial and artistic network in 2006. After more than six years we decided to stop working on this project.

  Sabine Hochrieser
  Michael Kargl
  Birgit Rinagl
  Franz Thalmair

Location : Re:Interview #013: Monochromacity as a Reflection of Computing Processes in Internet-based Art | Thomas Dreher | CONT3XT.NET

Entries (RSS) and Comments (RSS).