

## History of Art in changing media - Intention and theme of the colloquium files

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For some years now it can also be seen in the arts that the upheaval in the field of media, leaving the analogue for the digital media, is bringing about serious consequences for both cultural production and scientific research. This is especially the case in the history of art which, as a discipline, deals with pictures and, at the same time, is increasingly coming up against artistic productions created with the aid of electronic media. The potential of pictorial coding seems to be considerably greater than that of text coding. A demonstrative proof of this is the internet which, in the long run, is developing more and more to a visual medium.

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In a subject such as art history, which, after much hesitation, has in the meantime started to use electronic-aided applications on a wide scale in the coverage of databases - here one could mention the manifold initiatives of Foto Marburg, the Deutsches Dokumentationszentrum für Bildende Kunst (German Documentation Centre for the Fine Arts) - , in architectural surveying, in the virtual reconstruction of artistically equipped rooms and also in the automatic pictorial content analysis, there was, up until now, something missing, above all, a certain methodical self-sureness. Often one has the impression that things are being done the significance of which is not being accounted for in a humanistic/arts context. Hereby the answer to the methodical question is anything but self-evident and seems to be tangent to the fundamental aspects of the positioning of this discipline.

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Will the digital medium merely bring about a speeding up of the processing of traditional conceptual formulation, possibly a positivistic extension of the problems and the quantitative in-depth coverage? Or does this raise the question here of the influence of the medial principles of a subject on its horizon of issue, - a question which has been pushed to the fore of humanistic approaches - in as much as the medium makes familiar approaches obsolete or edges other, to date unknown or abandoned approaches into the fore? For instance William Vaughan, one of the contributors to this publication, argued well, that under the influence of the new media, history of art could move away from context questions and return more to dealing with the structure of the work of art.[1]. Others see in the forced introduction of databases a compulsion towards stricter structuring which would cause a decidedly changed way of thinking and working - especially in museums.

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When nowadays the computer industry - under pressure - develops automatic image query modules - reference is made here to IBM's "QBIC" (Query by Image Content), a query, directly addressing the image and not a verbal description of the image - the target here is the industrial requirements of, for instance, warehouse coverage and access control systems. However, there may be no doubt about it that the history of

art, which so far has with concepts been looking for secondarily revealed images, now possibly has completely new options open to it - and, at the same time, can develop media-motivated (or -enforced) interests which were not prevalent before. Moreover it can also be observed that, also in research approaches, that are not explicitly digitally orientated, there are surprising parallels to what is here briefly implied with the digitally induced turnaround from language to image: in their Tiepolo-Buch[2] of 1994 Svetland Alpers and Michael Baxandall pursued approaches, whose iconography-indifferent formalism showed really astounding similarities to a "Query by image content".

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Aspects of this development are reflected in this online publication - programmatically in a methodical and not purely artifactual perspective. It's a case of transforming intelligence into information under digital conditions (William Vaughan) and of changed forms of exchange between teachers and students in internet-based study units (Jens Bove/ Britt Kroepelien). Katja Kwastek discusses new forms of intelligence structuring, as they seem to have been predetermined since time immemorial in rhetorical contexts of mnemonics, and with this points out perspectives of alinear description of objects, which are the focus of the hypertextual medium. The project presented by Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss, [netzspannung.org](http://netzspannung.org), could certainly be understood as an attempt at the realisation of such a concept.

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Also media-adequate forms of teaching art-historical contents could be granted a great future if the expert community would engage with the idea of rethinking the entrenched perceptions of covering art-historical contents. (Holger Simon). Systems are presented for the electronic marking of pictorial details and database structures which are line with humanistic issues. (Martin Warnke/ Manfred Thaller). Thaller's plea for less structured data recording might throw some light on the crisis of the computer-aided inventory practice, which is dealt with in Tobias Nagel's contribution.

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Other contributions put automatic pictorial analysis methods to the fore (Stefan Heidenreich), with the museum as a breathing system of networking, which could be a possible stimulus for scientific discourse (Sabine Fabo). Arthur Engelbert's reflections, which go back to his own comprehensive activities in the field of art-historical CD-ROM-production, challenges more the possibilities of a visually orientated image analysis. However, notes such as those from Matthias Bruhn must also be understood as a contribution to the methodical new-orientation of the subject because, at an entirely practical level of project realisation, management competencies are required of the science side, which it innately does not have.

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A reflection well worth considering is that of Claus Pias on the relationship of digital and analogue "intelligence". With the following statement he seems to draw the decisive consequence : "I am very much afraid it will be 25 years before we too know what the new media will have done to the history of art." With this statement (admittedly directed against the tendency of contribution) there seems to be the legitimation for already working with digital systems, if it is not possible to foresee their consequences yet. For, the 25-year span doesn't actually start until the starting shot has been given.

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In the final part, digital art-historical projects are presented, in which some of the topics addressed already seem to be realised. Even if such a selection inevitably has a fragmentary character, and has no pretension of offering even an approximate overview of all existing projects in the German-speaking countries, the presentations should offer an anti-pole to the methodical approach of the lectures in the conference and publication. They are exemplary for the numerous and structurally and content-wise extremely heterogeneous efforts towards a practical application of computers in the history of art and, at the same time, they greatly extend the spectrum of themes of the publication, which were lively discussed within the scope of the colloquium. In 'kunsttexte.de' a young initiative on digital publication is presented, with 'artcampus' a Swiss e-learning project, which is in close exchange with the 'Schule des Sehens' (School for Seeing - see Jens Bove's contribution), and with 'Prometheus', the currently most seminal initiative for the exchange of pictorial data in the German-speaking countries.

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Hubertus Günther's reflections on the chances of three-dimensional architectural visualisation in teaching and the presentation of further Zurich projects on architectural analysis and the Roman 'Lineamenta' database complement the publication with examples from the architectural-historical field, whereby 'Lineamenta' should also display the efforts being made to create high-resolution reproductions of sensitive originals. The presentation of the digital projects of the 'Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels' (Central Archive for International Art Trade) represents the many non-university projects and refers clearly to the problems of archiving digital correspondence. The Trier database 'Memories of Slavery' finally shows how self-evident the inclusion of digital tools can already be in advanced projects as regards contents.

If this compilation of methodical reflections and project presentations has helped to qualify our work and to create an awareness for the methodical implications of the change in media within art history, then we have achieved our objective.

## Notes

- 1 William Vaughan: Computergestützte Bildrecherche und Bildanalyse (Computer-aided pictorial research and analysis), in: Hubertus Kohle (Hg.): Kunstgeschichte digital, Berlin 1997, 97-105.
- 2 Svetlana Alpers / Michael Baxandall: Tiepolo and the pictorial intelligence New Haven / London 1994.