

# Peter Weibel

## Art as an Act of Cognition

Edited by Jens Lutz and Philipp Ziegler





Rip / Riss

1966

paper poem

**Peter Weibel**



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# Art as an

# Act of

# Cognition

Edited by  
Jens Lutz and  
Philipp Ziegler

With Clara Runge,  
Stephanie Stadler, and  
Patrick Trappendreher

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# Preface

*Peter Weibel: Art as an Act of Cognition*, offers a peek into the art world of Peter Weibel (1944–2023), whose forward-looking oeuvre from the 1960s onward has become a present-day icon of media art itself. The publication covers over half a century of artistic expression, and traces this outstanding media artist's and theorist's migration from material to machines to media, constantly addressing the mechanisms of perception, the autonomous world of apparatuses – a world unto itself –, possible and often imperceptible pitfalls of the visual representation of reality, as well as the relationship between the arts, politics, and economics.

Peter Weibel applies a cognitive and therefore novel approach to art; this position marks him out as a pioneer of media and concept art. His focus was not on creating aesthetic images in the tradition of painting and photography; instead, he was interested in showing how images are actually constructed and why they are so effective in shaping the consciousness of people and their reality. For Peter Weibel, art was a process of cognition, an act of thinking that makes us question supposed truths, and opens our eyes to the ontological difference between representation and reality.

As an interdisciplinary nomad travelling between art and science, Peter Weibel anticipated key developments in the art of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He radically kept on questioning conventional notions of art, and evolved new utopian visions of a free society and individual freedom on the basis of his own technological inventions. The works he created were always political and social, and – as a (media) activist – he translated his public interventions into extraordinary, now historic, public images. Topical issues in this day and age – such as the crisis of Western notions of art, identity politics, defects of democracy, the relationship between power and the law, post-colonialism, gender issues, and violence – were continuously addressed by Weibel. In addition to his artistic works, Peter Weibel's oeuvre encompasses countless books, articles, poems, lectures, conferences, performances, pieces of music, operas, films, videos, festivals, concerts, biennials, and exhibitions. All parts of it are in an intensive dialog with each other. A publication on his artistic works can, therefore, only be the beginning of an in-depth examination of Weibel's work. Or, as the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, a longtime friend of Weibel's, put it: "In order to get an idea of his entire oeuvre, one would not only have to exhibit his artworks but also his exhibitions, and reflect on his reflections".<sup>[1]</sup>

The present publication's narrative follows the trajectory of Peter Weibel's development as an artist in various media –

from literature to photography, from video to Expanded Cinema, from sculpture, sound art, and light art to digital artworks. More than 370 distinctive works by the artist are presented in this volume, supplemented by concise work descriptions by the ZKM | Center for Art and Media's own editorial team as well as by external authors. These work descriptions are richly illustrated with recent photographs as well as images that date back to the late 1960s.

Essays and texts by Hans Belting, Bazon Brock, Boris Groys, Wolfgang Kemp, Friederike Mayröcker, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Pamela C. Scorzin, Peter Sloterdijk, Terry Smith, and Siegfried Zielinski, contextualize and situate Weibel's works for the first time in English within art history, media theory, and philosophical discourses, and elucidates the general impact and influence of his work. In addition, the book draws on the artist's large personal archive, presenting early drafts and concepts of many of his works as well as historical statements and texts by the artist himself.

As a reader, you can read the book chronologically, but you can also flip through the book and its topic-specific text contributions and linger over certain works or topics according to your interests. In addition, a thematic index of works at the end of the book invites you to approach the artworks associatively: the chronology of works in the book is just one approach, just one way of ordering Weibel's diverse body of work. It is also possible to find other approaches to his work. Here, the index offers a tool to discover further connections in the work of the artist. Furthermore, the book functions as a multimedia presentation, as with the help of a mobile device and QR codes, selected video works and artist statements about individual works can be viewed and it is very worthwhile to approach the artist's works through his own words.

The idea for this publication is based on the exhibition *respectively, Peter Weibel*, which was presented at the ZKM | Karlsruhe in 2019–20 on the occasion of Peter Weibel's 75th birthday, and which for the first time provided an overview of large parts of this versatile media and conceptual artist's work. The exhibition was also shown in a modified form from February to May 2023 at the MMCA, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea in Seoul, where it was a resounding success with the public.

There is no doubt that Peter Weibel was a central figure of the art scene and in particular of the media art scene. This publication not only provides a survey of his work, it helps the readers to better understand the key concepts and key moments in the evolution of media art in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

We both worked intensively with and for Peter Weibel for many years, and encountered him as a media artist, curator, theorist, scientist, author, boss, and human being. We are very happy that this book, which he was involved in until the end, has now been fully realized as part of his legacy. Naturally, many people collaborate in such a major exhibition and publication project. We would now like to thank them all.

First, we would like to thank the authors of the text contributions to this book. A great thanks also goes out to the cocurators of the exhibition *respectively*, Peter Weibel, Judith Bihr and Clara Runge, and the project assistants Svenja Clauss, Hanna Jurisch, Lena Reitschuster, and Leonard Sprüth for their tireless efforts in conceptualizing and bringing the exhibition to life. Their dedication and passion for art and culture truly shone through in every aspect of this exhibition.

We would like to thank all the staff members of the ZKM | Karlsruhe, in particular the scenographer Matthias Gommel, Peter Weibel's research assistant Anett Holzheid, Christian Lölkes and Bob O'Kane as Weibel's advisors for all technical matters, his longtime personal assistants Ingrid Truxa and Dominique Theise, the registrar Marianne Meister, Margit Rosen, the head of the department Wissen (Collections, Archives & Research) at the ZKM, and Christiane Riedel, the former managing director of the ZKM. All contributed to the success of this exhibition through directly working on the project or providing support in the background. Their hard work and dedication were instrumental in ensuring the success of the exhibition.

The editorial team of the ZKM provided extensive guidance and support throughout the publication process. Above all, we would like to express our thanks to the coeditors of this volume, Clara Runge, Stephanie Stadler, and Patrick Trappendreher. Their tireless work on this publication, their expertise and attention to detail helped to create a publication that meets the highest standards of quality and relevance.

We would also like to thank the graphic design team of 2xGoldstein with Erik Schöfer and Joshua Kaiss that brought a high level of creativity and technical skill to the project, creating visual elements that are at once engaging and informative.

Our sincere gratitude also goes to the translators and copy editors Patrick Hubenthal, Peter Dahm Robertson, Gloria Custance, and Lauren K. Wolfe for their linguistic expertise and dedication to accuracy that were critical in ensuring the quality of the texts.

Our grateful thanks go to ZKM's video studio, headed by Christina Zartmann, for recording the interviews with Peter Weibel about his works; and to Volker Sommerfeld who embedded the videos in the ZKM website and made them accessible through the QR codes in this book.

We would also like to extend special thanks to Karin Buol-Wischenau, Loys Egg, Idis Hartmann, Ulrike Havemann, Hartmut Jörg, Felix Mittelberger, Ulrike Rieger, Margit Rosen, Miriam Stürner, and Susanne Widl for their support and expertise in realizing this volume.

And we would also like to thank Alistair Hudson, Weibel's successor as scientific-artistic director of the ZKM, for continuing to support this publication project after the end of Peter Weibel's tenure and his unexpected sudden death.

Jens Lutz and Philipp Ziegler

[1] Peter Slotderdijk, "Peter Weibel: Premature Encounters with the World Spirit," see pp. 43–45 in this volume; first published in German as "Verfrühte Begegnungen mit dem Weltgeist. Eine große Ausstellung in Wien ehrt den Künstler, Kurator und Denker Peter Weibel – Anmerkungen seines Freundes," *Die Zeit*, no. 39 (2014).