

**Boris Groys**  
*The Artist as an Exemplary Art Consumer*

The current philosophical, or theoretical reflection on contemporary art is dominated by the discourse about the end of art and the end of art history. Of course, it is by no means a new development. But the reaction of today's art world to that message is relatively new and therefore of interest. The first appearance of this discourse in the 70s and 80s was still met with rejection, or at least with some kind of sorrow by the defenders of traditional art values. In our time these sorrows, nostalgia and disappointments are almost completely gone. Quite on the contrary, the news about the end of art provokes in the art world a kind of open jubilation. The artistic community seems to be fascinated and electrified by this discourse and embraces it eagerly and enthusiastically. At the same time every attempt to defend and rescue art theoretically is doomed to be met by the art community with a certain displeasure. There is something peculiar about this suicidal joy, that needs to be explained.

Actually, if asked about art, philosophy tells us time and again that art belongs to the past, that art is dead, and that we are at the end of art and of art history. Plato already stated this in his dialogues, as he sought to demonstrate that poets don't know what they say and that only a philosopher can speak understandably about truth. And Hegel repeated it once more – in a very direct manner – in his famous »Lectures on Aesthetics:« Art belongs to the past because only philosophy is able to free the true content of art from a specific, finite, objectified, artistic form that isolates this true content from the public, creating an aesthetic distance between the artwork and its recipient. Philosophy, on the contrary, erases this distance and makes truth immediately accessible to the recipient, because philosophy proceeds through self-negation and is therefore able to overcome every concrete, finite form. As Descartes has already shown, the negation of all thoughts is also a thought, the absolute doubt being a part, and even a foundation, of philosophical thinking. It means that philosophy becomes indestructible, absolute, infinite, so that the self-reflective movement of philosophical thought makes every concrete and finite form of truth obsolete.

This is why there is a deep-rooted philosophical tradition of art bashing. The library and the museum are especially preferred objects of intense

contempt for the majority of philosophically minded authors. Rousseau admires the destruction of the famous ancient Library of Alexandria, Goethe's *Faust* is ready to sign a contract with the devil to escape the library – and not to be obliged to read all the books accumulated inside of it, etc. But, of course, there is also a strong philosophical tradition of defending art against philosophy which culminates in Nietzsche's writings: There Philosophy is accused of being iconoclastic, ascetic, intolerant and obsessed with the idea of death. Characteristically, in this tradition the defence of art functions simultaneously as a defence of the finite against the infinite, or as a defence of the forms of this world against their destruction in the name of the philosophical truth. Here we can watch the relatively clear fronts between pro-art and anti-art philosophical options. Pro-art means pro-finite, pro-form, and anti-art means pro-infinite.

However, this traditional constellation is completely changed since the emergence of the historical avant-garde at the beginning of this century, because avant-garde art was conceived from the beginning as an anti-art, as a protest against art and, actually, as a (at least, symbolical) destruction of art. The art of the avant-garde internalized the philosophical critique on art: it attempted to escape its separateness, to transcend its objectified, commodified status, to overcome its alienation, to erase the aesthetic distance between the artwork and its spectator. That is why now it is no longer possible to defend contemporary art using the traditional theoretical legitimation of art understood as a sum of the finite, empirically experienceable forms. There is no use in defending art as art, if art became itself a struggle against art; an anti-art.

This vision of the new, avant-garde art as a destruction of the old art, is expressed powerfully and paradigmatically in a short but important text of Kasimir Malevich entitled 'On the Museum' (from 1919). At that time the new Soviet government feared that the old Russian museums and art collections could be destroyed through the civil war and through the general collapse of the state institutions and economy, so the Party tried to secure and save these collections. In his paper Malevich expresses a protest against this pro-museum policy of Soviet power and calls on the state not to intervene on behalf of the old art collections because their destruction opens the path to new art. In particular, Malevich writes:

»Life knows what it is doing, and if it is striving to destroy, one must not interfere since by hindering we are blocking the path to a new conception of life that is born within us. In burning a corpse we obtain one gram of powder: accordingly thousands of graveyards could be accommodated on a single chemist's shelf. We can make a concession to conservatives by offering

that they burn all past epochs, since they are dead, and set up a single pharmacy.« Furthermore, Malevich gives a concrete example of what he means: »The aim (of this pharmacy) will be the same, even if people examine the powder from Rubens and all his art – a mass of ideas will arise in people, and will be often more alive than actual representation (and take up less room).«<sup>1</sup>

The act of burning art becomes art. And the ashes of the burnt artworks are proclaimed to be aesthetically more interesting than the burnt artworks themselves. But if the destruction of art is art – and even better art – then art as such becomes indestructible and infinite. The famous »Black Square« of Malevich, understood as the trace of a destroyed, burnt artwork, has the same function as the Cartesian radical doubt in philosophy. Art becomes absolute because it includes its negation in itself. Such an infinite art needs no protection, no theoretical defence and no institutional security any more. (Bakunin: destruction is creation.)

Of course, we know that the struggle of the historical avant-garde against art and against art institutions was not quite successful. The art system seemed to be stable enough to be able to recuperate every kind of anti-art. For many this insight meant a deep disappointment and a kind of inner resignation. This explains why the contemporary, post-avant-garde, international art community reacted to the proclamations of the end of art with relief and joy. The dream of the avant-garde now seems to be realized after all – without and beyond any further individual struggle to make this dream come true. And help came again from philosophy as a critique of the notion of creativity.

To quote some examples: Arthur Danto proclaims the end of art in a true Hegelian manner. He argues that today's art made its own definition its main subject, and, therefore, art attained the degree of self-reflection which used to be the privilege of philosophy alone, so that the further, historical, creative development of art becomes impossible. The only possibility which is left to us, is to use or consume the vocabulary of existing art forms. Therefore, the artist loses his or her privileged position vis-à-vis the art spectator. The artist stops being a creator and becomes merely a user of art.

The art theoreticians influenced by the French post-structuralist discourse also put in question the whole concept of artistic authorship, production and control – of course, in a very different manner. In this perspective, the art system, the language of art and the language of art description deconstruct themselves: there is no possibility to differentiate in

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<sup>1</sup> Kasimir Malevich, 'On the Museum', in: Kasimir Malevich, *Essays on Art*, New York 1971, pp. 68-72.

a clear-cut manner between the productive and the reproductive, between the creative and the repetitive. So there is also no need, and no possibility, any more of an individual, heroic, avant-gardistic gesture of revolt against art. The contemporary artist, in a way, just consumes and follows this self-destructive logic of the art system, using reproductive art techniques to demonstrate the ambivalence of the notion of creativity. The theoretical foundation of the closed, exclusive art system seems to be destroyed by this deconstructive argumentation. Art seems to be free at last – infinite, open, omnipresent, always at our disposal and not imprisoned any more inside the confined space of a museum. The difference between the artist and the spectator, or between the insider and the outsider of the art system becomes irrelevant: both are mere user and reproducer of the already known possibilities of making art. Everybody is an artist.

But, of course, at the same time we are watching the accelerated development of the globalized, professionalized art system all around the world. And we are also watching the accelerated construction of new art museums, primarily of museums for contemporary art. The inner contradiction between these two parallel developments is too obvious – and the suspicion of hypocrisy and cynical manipulation arises. (The polemics against contemporary art, which Baudrillard practices now, is very characteristic in this respect.) And it is precisely this contradiction that I would like to discuss now.

Indeed, I would argue that the discourse about the presumed collapse of the art system – the end of art, or the end of art history – follows from a set of too simplistic presuppositions concerning the relationship between the artist and the spectator, which, in a very traditional manner, is still interpreted by this discourse as the opposition between the producer and the consumer. The artist is the producer of art, the spectator is the consumer of art. The art system is producing art, the public outside the art system is consuming art. If that would be the case, the collapse of the myth of artistic creativity should really entail the collapse of the art system as such. But I would suggest that today's artist is not a producer but an exemplary, model consumer of art. The contemporary artist does not practice the production, but the ostensive consumption of art, and the art system is transformed now into a place where such ostensive consumption is demonstrated. Accordingly, the contemporary art spectator does not consume art products produced by the artist. Instead, he consumes the exemplary art consumption – practicing the consumption of second degree.

Actually, the pure destruction of art that Malevich was speaking about is also a kind of extreme consumption and, accordingly, it must also be

explicit and ostensive if it seeks to be art. Avant-garde art has practised a kind of permanent potlatch: To derive the greatest fame the artist should be most radical in the symbolic destruction of art. But Marcel Mauss has already shown that such a radical potlatch needs a special place and a special spectatorship to be effective. The historical avant-garde has transformed the art system – and, principally, the art museum – into such a place of ostensive potlatch, of symbolic destruction and self-destruction of art. From the perspective of the avant-garde, the museum needs old art only insofar as the knowledge of old art is necessary to demonstrate here and now what is symbolically sacrificed by avant-garde itself.

To be sure, in our time the museum extended its space to accept all kinds of ostensive consumption strategies, not only the strategies of sacrifice and destruction. I will try to describe now this new role of the museum, and of the art system in general, using the example of photography in its relationship to traditional painting.

In fact, at the end of the twentieth century, photography finally became established not just as a recognized art form but also as a leading one. The large-format photographic image is today increasingly replacing the traditional painting on the walls of galleries, private collections and museums. The matter-of-factness with which the switch from painting to photography has been recently carried out is witnessed primarily by the nonchalant way in which contemporary photography is assuming the traditional tasks of painting which painting itself is no longer able to fulfil. The painted image has gradually collapsed under the self-destructive strategies and repeated sacrifices by the historical avant-garde. The change of media rescued the tradition of the pictorial image and transposed it into the new historic era. Photography today does in fact do everything that painting did in the nineteenth century. Photography shows us urban life and life in nature, people's faces and their naked bodies, our own living environment, and exotic cultures, wealth and fashion, misery and war. It is neither afraid to appear critical, accusatory, schoolmasterly, nor to seem sentimental, decorative, or aesthetically fascinating. When we now discuss the work of an individual photographer, we usually tend to be concerned with its content, with the photographer's relationship to the object shown, as was common in art criticism before the rise of avant-garde. The photographic image is almost completely immunized against the accusation of being mere kitsch. The photographic image that indulges in everything that is forbidden to the painted image evidently feels no shame about this, and does not find itself in a situation of having to produce some additional apology. Photographic images are effortlessly successful in being accepted

into collections that would quite definitely reject a comparable painted image. Many of Gerhard Richter's pictures demonstrate this problem. If the photographic realism of the sixties could still be seen as a strategy to raise the status of photography in museums and art galleries, painting today only survives when it camouflages itself as photography.

Time and again, the continuously increasing presence of photography and media art (video and cinema installations, interactive art using computer, or Internet, etc.) in museums is regarded as a symptom of the museum losing its autonomy, its alternative status vis-à-vis media-dominated public life. Some commentators saw this crisis quite positively – as a chance for the museum to become more open, more accessible to the broader public, and more integrated in the mainstream media landscape. But many others deplored this development: they saw the danger of the museum losing its independence and its own value and to become merely a part of the commercialized entertainment industry as a kind of Disneyland for the better educated. But in any case, the reproductive practices of photography were said to provide clear proof that the traditional claims of art history are illusory because these practices make it particularly evident that the production of images is by no means a mysterious process requiring a work of genius to be accomplished.

This is what Douglas Crimp has claimed in his well-known essay 'On the Museum's Ruins', with reference to Walter Benjamin: »Through reproductive technology postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum, are undermined.«<sup>2</sup> So, according to Crimp, the new art techniques dissolve the museum's conceptual frameworks, constructed as they are on the fiction of subjective, individual creativity, bring them into disarray through their re-productive practice, and ultimately lead to the museum's ruin. And rightly so, it might be added, for the museum's discourse is purely ideological: it suggests a representation of the historical, understood as a temporal epiphany of creative subjectivity, in a place where in fact there is nothing more than an incoherent jumble of artifacts, as Crimp asserts with reference to Foucault. Thus Crimp, like many other authors, regards any critique of the traditional, emphatic conception of art as a critique of art as institution, including the institution of the museum, an institution which is allegedly purported to legitimize itself primarily on the

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press 1993, p. 50f.

basis of this purely ideological – and at the same time outmoded – conception of art.

It is indisputable that the rhetoric of uniqueness has determined the traditional art historical discourse for a long time. It is nevertheless questionable whether it in fact provides a decisive legitimation for the musealization of art so that a critique of this discourse could at the same time function as a critique of the museum as institution. I would say, on the contrary, that precisely at the historical moment when the artwork loses its immediately recognizable, visual otherness in comparison to a mere thing or to a technically produced media image, the museum becomes absolutely indispensable for our ability to recognize and appreciate art as art. And indeed, the aforementioned accelerated development and the proliferation we have witnessed in the recent decades of museums of all kinds, above all, of »museums of modern art« or »museums of contemporary art«, have paralleled precisely the accelerated erasure of the visible differences between the artwork and the profane object (Duchamp is, of course, the best example of this), or between the individually produced artwork and the technically produced media image – an erasure systematically perpetrated by the various avant-gardes of this century. The less the artwork differs visually from a profane object or a technically produced image, the more necessary becomes the clearly drawn distinction between the art context and the profane, everyday, non-museum context of its occurrence. Precisely at the point when an artwork looks like a »normal thing« or like a media image – such an artwork requires a different contextualization by the museum.

The self-destructive, anti-art strategies of the artistic avant-garde, understood as the elimination of the visual difference between the artwork and the profane thing or the media image, therefore lead directly to the building-up of museums which secure this difference institutionally. In our age, we no longer have any way of differentiating between art and non-art, except by reference to the museum. Far from subverting and delegitimizing the museum as institution, the critique of the emphatic conception of art therefore provides the actual theoretical foundation for the institutionalization and musealization of contemporary art. For the very reason that photography and media production constitutes in the context of our contemporary culture a widespread, impersonal and many-faceted practice, one in which every individual artistic achievement is potentially swallowed up, the indispensability of the museum context holds true for photography, video and computer art as well.

In the »museum of contemporary art« simple objects or technically produced media images are promised the longevity and the recognition they

do not enjoy in life itself. This promise is all the more valid and credible the less these objects »deserve« endurance, the less spectacular and extraordinary they are. The modern museum proclaims its new Evangelium in the first place not for the exclusive, auratic work of genius, which in the world at large has never had any real trouble finding the recognition it seeks, but rather for the insignificant, the trivial, and the everyday, which would otherwise perish in the reality outside the museum's walls. The museum of contemporary art is, in a way, a continuation of the Christian mission of saving, of recuperating the world, practiced under the conditions of the modern secularization and at the same time expanded to mere things.

So if an artist says – as the majority of modern artists have said – that he or she wants to break out of the museum, to go into life itself, to be real and to make a truly living art and not a dead one, it only means that this artist wants his works to be collected, because the only possibility to be collected is to transcend the museum, and to go into life in the sense of making something different from the already collected. The museum is like a church in this respect: initially you have to be sinful to become a saint later on – otherwise you remain just a plain, decent person with no chance of making a career in the archives of God's memory. That is why when you want to free yourself from the museum, you become subjected in the most radical way to the logic of collecting.

Actually, if the museum ever is to disintegrate, then the very opportunity for art to show the normal, the everyday, the trivial as new and different, and in this sense as exciting, will be lost, because the historical experience teaches us that in order to assert itself successfully outside the museum walls, »in life itself,« art must break its connection with the banality of everyday experience and begin to repeat the classical, mythological patterns and established art forms. The successful (and deservedly so) mass cultural production of our time is concerned with alien attacks, with myths of the apocalypse and redemption, with heroes endowed with superhuman powers, and so forth. All of this is certainly fascinating and instructive, but at the same time it keeps repeating the repertoire of images already collected in the archives and museums of our culture. So once in a while, one would like to be able to see something normal, something ordinary, something banal, something not yet collected as well. In our culture, this wish can be gratified only in the museum of contemporary art. In so-called life, on the other hand, only the extraordinary and at the same time repetitive is presented to us as a possible object of our admiration.

So if today the debate about whether photography is art or not seems totally redundant, we owe this new situation solely to the further extension



of the modern art museum as an institution. A photograph made with artistic intent no longer needs to differ visibly from an ordinary photograph in order to be recognized as art. Today the difference is produced by the act of putting it into the museum which is sufficient to move the photograph into the domain of art. The difference between artistic and non-artistic photography is thus replaced by the difference between the museum and non-museum context. This accordingly means that the old question of how a photograph should look in order to qualify as artistic is no longer relevant. Certainly, there are many gradations between a museum and everyday space that are of crucial importance for the relationship between collection and photograph. The more museum-oriented a collection is, the more it can allow itself to contain ordinary-looking photographs with no explicit claim to artistic value.

Traditional painting is produced as a result of the painter's physical efforts. And every individual painting bears the traces of this physical labour. From this there arises the impression of an intimate link between creator and work: the individual pictorial image displays material and physical features that are recognizable as a direct extension of the body, as the irreducible »hand« of the painter, or at least can be taken as recognizable according to the ethos of the painting. In this sense one is justified in saying – and this has indeed been said often enough – that particularly in the era of industrial production, which erases the individuality of the industrial worker in the finished product and thus alienates his work, only art is capable of overcoming this alienation and of allowing the individuality of its producer to obtain recognition. From this we gain the impression that the artist holds a privileged position in society as someone who, exceptionally, performs work from which he is not alienated.

The critique of the notion of creativity and of the creation of a special aura around art therefore also has a certain political component. This critique corresponds to the desire to dethrone the artist and set him on an equal footing with other modern producers. The demands made by the historical avant-garde that painting should reveal its technique and give up any claim to being a work of genius initially had this very goal of achieving parity between the artist and the industrial worker. Among the Soviet avant-garde of the twenties, this demand resulted in artists showing also direct political solidarity with the working class. Accordingly, painting production in the twentieth century (from Malevich and Mondrian through Albers and Sol LeWitt to Buren) became so formalized, mechanized and depersonalized that all traces of the painter's physical presence in the painted work were effaced and the result began to resemble an industrial product. In this sense

geometrical abstraction can be interpreted as a transitional stage between traditional painting and photography, as it is also confirmed by the personal biographies of artists such as Rodchenko or Albers.

The question must now be asked whether obliterating the traces in the work of the painter's physical presence, of his or her individual labour did in fact give the artist parity with the worker. In other words, was it possible to realize the democratic egalitarian dream of the modern era by doing away with the traditional concepts of artistic creativity and of the artist-genius? And was it possible to transcend in this way the institutionalized aesthetic distance between artist and spectator? On the contrary, the example of photography shows that the removal from art of every reference to physical labour that has taken place in the twentieth century has radically distanced the artist from industrial work and has moved art near to management, planning, and – ultimately – the consumer. Direct physical work on the picture, which in the past linked the painter to the industrial worker, has largely been eliminated by photography and replaced by a series of conscious, strategic, controllable decisions about how a work of art should look. The artist as photographer discloses and formalizes his techniques and employs them strategically so that he makes their repetition possible from the outset. The mystery of the unique artist's body no longer hinders the methodological or technical repetition of his strategies. The artist's eye is disembodied: a pure gaze, it no longer works but only decides, selects and combines. If the similarity between photography and psychoanalysis, on which Benjamin once spoke, is valid, then surely first of all in this respect it is much easier to identify oneself with the psychoanalytically disembodied Oedipus than with the Greek king Oedipus. In contemporary photography, the history of painting is repeated photographically in a comparable manner – no longer as a history of gifted bodies but as a history of intellectual attitudes and strategies of a disembodied gaze. Consequently, art museums today no longer function as places in which the irretrievability of the historical is presented, but as archives for storing various visual strategies that can be brought out of storage and reused by the spectator at any time.

The photographer is acting on society's behalf as an exemplary consumer. The visual choices are primarily models for further consumption. What the photo-artist offers to our gaze are not so much definite images as the strategies that defined their selection. The photographer does not offer the works of art to our gaze. Instead, the photographer brings us to see other things with his or her eyes. This change of attitude is revealed particularly clearly in the alternate status of the artist as regards the time economy of the gaze. The massive investment in work, time, and energy needed for the

creation of a traditional work of art was irritatingly out of proportion to the terms under which this art was consumed. After the painter has worked hard and long at his painting, the viewer could consume it effortlessly at a glance. Hence the superiority of the consumer, the viewer and the collector over the artist-painter as a supplier of pictorial images produced laboriously through his physical effort. On the contrary, photography does place the artist on an equal footing, as I already said, not with the worker, but with the consumer and with the collector, as the artist too is now able to produce images in an instant with a simple click of the camera. If more time is needed to take a photograph, then this is the result of deliberate strategic planning – not inescapable and obligatory as it was in the past. Thus the producer of a photograph becomes equal to the spectator with respect to the time economy of the gaze. Losing his physical individuality, the photo-artist gains the privilege of the aristocratic gaze.

The aristocracy traditionally personified the figure of the final consumer who himself no longer produces anything. Only in the context of the aristocratic way of life could art therefore achieve true perfection. One can even maintain that nothing could become art unless it can be used by the aristocracy since it was a definitive, no longer functional usage. Aristocratic taste acted as a model for the whole of society. By assuming the position of the pure observer, of the absolute consumer, the artist compensates for the deepest trauma of the modern era, namely the loss of the aristocracy. Today we might visit a great exhibition or installation as people used to visit palaces of the aristocracy. The visitor is given access to art, but he is not its actual consumer. Rather he takes as his model a certain mode of consumption as demonstrated by the artist in his exhibition, just as formerly the aristocratic way of life acted as a model. The present-day art consumer no longer consumes the artist's work, but rather he invests his own work into consuming like an artist.

In other words, the artist has changed sides. He no longer wants to be a worker producing objects that are then exposed to the gaze of others. Instead he has become the exemplary observer, consumer and user who observes, evaluates, and takes in things that are produced by others. He is a person who finds aesthetic stimulus and interest in already known objects that other people may perhaps find dull and uninteresting. This means that the artist can make anything aesthetically consumable, make it to be considered great, fascinating or cool, to become an object of aesthetic enjoyment. Art becomes an open horizon, the last frontier of the modern economy. Contemporary photography shows that everything can be an object of desire. Carl Schmitt already noted: »The passage from the metaphysical and moral to the economic goes by way of the aesthetic, and the passage of

aesthetic consumption and enjoyment, however sublime, is the most reliable and most convenient way to economize intellectual life.«<sup>3</sup> In the form of photography, the artistic avant-garde becomes the economic avant-garde – the new aristocracy of the modern economy which pushes back ever further the frontiers of the desirable and consumable.

To be sure, if the photographer's attitude is aristocratic, his techniques – as befits our times – are rather more bureaucratic or, more accurately, administrative in nature. The photographer chooses, includes, modifies, edits, shifts, combines, reproduces, arranges, places in series, exhibits, or puts aside. He manipulates pictures just like managers of the large modern companies manipulate all possible data. And he does that with the same objective: so that potential customers can gain a certain vision, a certain perspective.

Thus one can say that the photo-artist stands in the same relationship to the modern company employee and his data processing activities as the painter artist in earlier times did to the factory worker and his manual labour. Just as the painter of those times demonstrated the possibility of recording the traces of individual physical labour in his work, so the present-day photographer lets the aristocratic gaze emerge in the monotony of data processing. The photographer is acting like a bureaucratic institution, a government authority, or a big bank, but also as a unique individual. Thus he establishes the subjective case where it had seemingly disappeared. And this is by no means purely ideological self-delusion or the aesthetization of alienated work. The dream of invisibility, of being able to see everything without oneself being seen, is one of the oldest dreams of mankind. It is certainly pleasant to see, but it is often extremely unpleasant to be seen. Our relationship to the visual is determined as much by scopophilia as by scopophobia. Photography, like modern bureaucracy, gives us a certain promise, that of affording protection from the stranger's gaze, but, of course, only if we take up a position behind the camera, not in front of it.

The museum itself is not simply a neutral and transparent medium for the representation of art, but has its own opacity. Especially as media art takes up residence in the museum, the museum as a medium is put into question in a number of respects, and loses its apparent transparency. First and foremost, the borders between the individual artwork and the exhibition space thereby become problematic and will have to be renegotiated.

I would like to conclude this presentation by drawing your attention to just three ways in which the museum is being called into question by the

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin, Duncker und Humblot 1963, p. 83.

presence of media art in it. First of all: more possibilities to manipulate the gaze to see the world; to see the ordinary in the context of media art.

### *1. The museum's lighting*

Traditionally, the light in a museum comes from outside an individual artwork – and thereby makes possible the contemplation of this artwork. In the museum a perfect day always prevails, even if the day in question is an artificial one. Media art – in the form of video or cinematic installations – has on the other hand, brought night and twilight into the museum. That is probably the most important effect of the musealization of the media. The homogeneous, viewer-friendly lighting of the modern museum has been obscured. The light's purpose is no longer to create the optimum viewing conditions; the exhibition space of the museum becomes, so to say, baroque. The museum as a museum of media art is no longer the locus of absolute visibility it once was. In this museum it is night, darkness and invisibility that are being exhibited.

This raises many issues: for example, what is the status of the entire technical apparatus which makes media art possible? The question is, does this apparatus belong to the work, or to the technical equipment of the exhibition space? This question seems to remain unanswerable in any general terms. (The canvas, for instance, is covered up by the painted image. In the case of media art, the image bearer is not covered up, but merely put into darkness, i.e. covered up and not covered up at the same time.)

And above all, it is no longer the museum lighting that illuminates the artworks, it is now the images themselves (video and computer images) that bring the light into the museum space. Accordingly, one asks whether this light belongs to the artwork or not. In former days, museum lighting was the symbolic property of the viewer; it was in this light that he or she viewed the artwork. Now, the light is becoming a part of the work, and is thus becoming one of the elements controlled by the artist. What is occurring is a shift in lighting modalities, a shift in visibility and in the control of visibility, a shift that is actually still being insufficiently reflected upon.

(And one more thing: the *tristesse* and at the same time the intimacy of the darkened museum space. The museum becomes dark, dangerous and intimate instead of being light (enlightened) and public).

### *2. Time*

Control over the time of contemplation is likewise being passed from the visitor to the artist. In the classical museum the visitor, the viewer, exercises complete control over the time of contemplation. He or she can interrupt

the contemplation at any time, and return, and go away again. The picture stays where it is, remains unmoved and makes no attempt to flee the viewer's gaze. The traditional picture remains self-identical over time. With moving pictures this is no longer the case. Under normal circumstances a film or a video impose their own time of contemplation upon the viewer. When we turn away from the video, we miss something. It is like what happens to us in life, which can be defined as the place in which one misses the most important things. Now the museum too – earlier, the place of complete visibility – becomes a place where we cannot compensate a missed opportunity to contemplate, to see; where we cannot return at any time to see the same we saw before.

Again, a struggle for power arises between the artist and the spectator, a struggle for control over the time of contemplation.

### 3. Value

Actually, this third aspect has already been discussed here at length. The question is, when does the artistic value of the work come into being? When it is being made or after it has been exhibited for the first time? This is perhaps the most difficult of all of these questions – but the most crucial as well and yet, as one is forced to admit, almost an unanswerable question.

Well, now I come to a brief concluding remark. In our time the artist has disappeared as a unique individual creator but at the same he has re-emerged as the subject of the aristocratic gaze, as the exemplary consumer. And the artist, as a media-artist, has also gained much greater control over the gaze of the spectator. Accordingly, the art system of today has by no means collapsed. Rather, it has become stronger and better organized, so that it can function as the place where such an aristocratic gaze can manifest itself.

And turning back to the relationship between art and philosophy, I would argue that today's philosopher functions in a comparable manner as an exemplary consumer of the language – after he had given up all attempts to create new and original languages. Wittgenstein has already sought to eliminate the philosophical doubt by the specific use of ordinary language. And recently, the discourse of deconstruction taught us that we are even not subjects of our own doubt; rather, this doubt originated in the language itself – and we are never able to return to this origin. So if art became philosophical, philosophy is now becoming now increasingly artistic. The traditional competition between art and philosophy compels them to exchange their places time and again.