TESTeLAB & Guests: Expanded Animation Worlds (work in progress)

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ABSTRACT

TESTeLAB & Guests: Expanded Animation Worlds is a cross-media interface project aimed at "experimenting with connecting the disconnected".[1] In this autobiographically driven examination of high and low culture against a sweeping backdrop of image and media history, traditional media are brought into the digital realm, subjecting them to a productive, artistic kind of hybridization. The panorama – one of the most popular phenomena of the pre-cinema age – is thereby revived, while supposedly obsolete media are also cultivated anew as part of a hybrid "future cinema". This experimental exploration of the potential of movement, time, and sound also serves to enhance the cinematographic experience and questions the basic building blocks of film under new premises.

Keywords: Pre- and Future Cinema, Experimental Hybrid Arts, Expanded Animation Worlds, Synthesis of the Arts, *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Figure 1: SOTTOLAPELLE VITRUVIANO, POSTCARD, THIRD OVERPAINTING, Sketch, 2019

1 INTRODUCTION

The example-setting artistic research project VOYAGEUR DE L'IMAGE / WEGE ZUM BILD / TOWARDS THE IMAGE (work in progress), which is comparable to a dual symphony, is designed for a total of four movements or seasons:

1st movement TESTE SANS FIN: ALIAS YEDERBECK
2nd movement DSDKBM: UNTITLED Shot & Poetry
3rd movement FOOTNOTES: YEDERBECK'S Biopic
4th movement INTERFACE: TESTeLAB & Guests

The hybrid audiovisual media transformation of the 1st movement TESTE SANS FIN: ALIAS YEDERBECK, Expanded Animation Cinema, with twelve panoramic sequences (Entertainer, Flaneur, Viewer, Actor, Resolution, Projection, Anima Techne, Transcendental Animation, Happy End, Doppelgänger, Reminder, The End) and the artist video QU'EST-CE QUE MONSIEUR TESTE? was a first milestone on the way to an artistic fusion of theory and practice.[2] The author was supported in this large-scale cinematographic installation by a team of friends, graduates, and colleagues from the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF (formerly HFF "Konrad Wolf").

The project was originally inspired by the legendary exhibition *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (the propensity for the total work of art) organized by the exhibition maker Harald Szeemann. Here, for the first time, were gathered together European utopias since 1800 that do not restrict themselves to a purely aesthetic meaning, but rather aim at a transformation of social reality into a renewed society: "The most comprehensive work of art is of course the world," says Joseph Beuys, but doesn't leave it at theory. While Schlegel in the 116th Athenaeum fragment only demands that a "progressive", i.e. never-completed "universal poetry" is supposed to "make life and society poetic", Beuys attempts within the framework of a concept of art and science to bring about a real change that is also expanded to include nature and technology, "the Gesamtkunstwerk of a future society".[3] For Beuys, energy is a principle of form, is directly related to sculpture, and sculpture or plastic is synonymous with art.

This highly topical "plastic" playing field between theory and practice with regard to an expanded hybrid "Future Cinema" opens up possibilities for reflection other than language or science: for artistic imagination, self-reflective art, and artistic research are to be understood as independent forms of thinking.[4] Within this fascinating field of play between theory and practice, the way opens up for other areas, apart from language or science, that might be ripe for reflection; after all, artistic imagination, self-reflective art, and artistic research may be seen as autonomous forms of thought.

This form of aesthetic practice deals with the transfer of theory – whose Greek etymology implies looking and contemplating – to the medium of the image, which can be realized only in the dialectic between theory and practice, in the sense of a self-reflexive image that can serve as a model, or, as Jean-Luc Godard

expressed it almost panegyrically in his HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA, by seeing cinema or art as forms that feel, see, and think, telescoping out from the particular to the general in a kind of improvisation.[5] Art, nature, and theory are seen as an inexhaustible pool of models for interaction, not through the contrast between their different modes of representation, but rather in the historical dialogue surrounding them. This form of dialogue requires a "technique", in the primordial sense of the word. In Old Greek, téchne, meaning "ability, art, and craftsmanship", was understood as the practical application of science for the production of goods. The original term téchne did not distinguish between what we split today between the two categories of art and technology. Instead, art and technology were seen as a unified whole, as an "educated" or rather "gebildete" practice – the German term would be more meaningful here – that signaled both the process of "sich bilden" (educating oneself) and state of "gebildet sein" (being educated). Moreover, this was the only sense in which "Bildung" (education) was deemed to inform "identity". Today, BILDKUNST (Pictorial Art or Visual Arts) constitutes the theory and practice of reinventing technology for the study of art and nature, using all of the tools at one's disposal. It is more than just "technical practice", as, like Richard Sennett, it sees "craftsmanship" as "a basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake". What is more, one has to understand one's craft, now that it is no longer self-evident (Sennett 2008).[6]

Nonetheless, Western history, especially the history of ideas, has imposed a strict boundary between practice and theory, technique and expression, maker and user. BILDKUNST, which is grounded in research-based practice and practice-based research, can help to reopen the debate on these demarcations, which are sometimes far too rigid. In this multi-faceted synthesis, reflection and improvisation extend to the individual frame.

Extending the concept of animation, the project centers on an animated cross-media studio archive and the mental image of movement in sculpture, painting, drawing, and photography, so that it comes into play at the point where language takes its leave. After all, what is specifically filmic (what will be filmic in the future) lies not only in movement, but rather in an "inarticulable third meaning", as Roland Barthes wrote of illustrated broadsheets, comics, and fotonovelas (Barthes 1985).

Photographic reproduction of the kind found in "coffee table books", not to mention the Internet, makes the huge pool of art from the ages accessible. This museum is imaginary because it is not tied to a real place: photographic reproduction brings us face-to-face with all of the different possibilities for expression that the world has to offer. To echo André Malraux, we could say that the history of art emerges as a history of "art of fiction" and turns into a "state of motion".[7] The history of art has become a history of what can be photographed; in the wake of painting, photography and film became, to all intents and purposes, a "super-medium" – a universal "time machine" that can transcend time and space. Camera-based images provide the essential interface for working in time-based media. "Photography is film's blood relation, while the synthetically generated image has a greater kinship with animation." (Geßner 2010).

2. EXPANDED ANIMATION WORLDS AS A RENAISSANCE OF ARTISTIC, AUGMENTED, CINEMATOGRAPHIC, AND VIRTUAL SPACE

"Everything is a drawing. A sculpture is a drawing in three-dimensional space. A painting is a drawing with colours. You could say, at least for me this is true, that everything is just a drawing." *Alberto Giacometti*: *Departure to the Avant-garde*, Kunsthaus Zürich[8]

The "Expanded Animation Worlds" are also intended to provide a starting point for further problematization of the relationship between the classical and digital media and theoretical discourse. The highly topical project deals with practical and epistemological considerations and problems of synthetically generated visual worlds and with the phenomenon of "time" in art and architecture or installation, augmented and virtual reality, which can be seen as a sequence of artworks with overlapping form problems. It is about an aspect of time that is characterized by a comparative, connecting, and assembling activity as a pictorial form of an "Ars Combinatoria" unfolds. Under the new, expanded concept of film as "plastic theory", there is also a need to pinpoint where art, entertainment, and science intersect. To this end, W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of the "metapicture" is helpful for exploring the relationships between text, image, sound, and space (Mitchell 1994).[9] The "metapicture" is intended to be a "self-conscious image" that is granted both autonomy and power of a corresponding magnitude. The theoretical is not something that needs to be added to the image from the outside; instead, it is embedded in its references, ambiguities, and cracks, within its very surface. This principle has been applied to various works based on aesthetics, poetics, art, film, and media theory, such as HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA and ALIAS YEDERBECK.

This creation of a "self-conscious image universe" triggers the reactivation of the viewer within the cinematographic 360° installation, in which the active observer perceives and completes the "open work of art" as a self-thinking medium. This fascination with interfaces sees the cracks between media as an opportunity to create abstractions, fashioning concrete images and the way in which they collide into statements about hybrid media and options for perceiving them. The clash between disparate visible elements allows the invisible to be grasped and made visible, thus presenting a comprehensive illustration of highly topical knowledge and the transfer of ideas aesthetically and conceptually within the context of artistic research (Partenburg 2006; Gonzales et al. 2018). The disparate media and their relationships, not to mention the aesthetic couplings and breaks between the analogue and digital media used, are the precise subject of this cross-media transformation: in this case, intermediality could be described as a conceptual fusion "whereby elements of different media are brought together and build a new form that is not the sum of its parts but the convergence into a third form" (Spielmann 1998, 2011).[10] Artistic research is therefore not just a means of unlocking new worlds, but is itself a tool for questioning and taming the upheavals that are currently being caused as technology transgresses its traditional borders. Art and design are ways of interpreting the world, and must be interpreted in turn if they are to be developed: "The future will primarily be a matter for design [and art]." (Flusser 2019)[11]
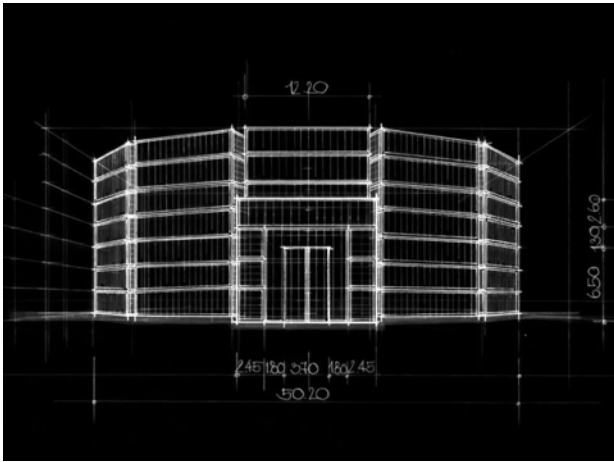
Figure 2: CIRCUS CONTAINER COLLOSEUM, Draft, 2010

Figure 3: ALIAS YEDERBECK, Cutscene, 2011

3. EXPANDED ANIMATION WORLDS' MISSION: CIRCUS CONTAINER COLOSSEUM

The now initiated 4th movement INTERFACE: TESTeLAB & Guests is aimed at filmmakers, performers, musicians, dancers, poets, artists, designers, technicians, academics, students, companies, and other individuals who are interested in the interface between art, design, science, nature, technology, and creativity. Together, they fashion the CIRCUS CONTAINER COLOSSEUM into a contemporary equivalent of a cathedral or a cross-media riff on the idea of the collective *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

TESTeLAB & Guests sees itself, on the one hand, as an open workspace and, on the other, as a university-based "research satellite" and is attempting, in its extended form, to embrace an open laboratory principle in order to explore an experimental approach to material and media development for the very latest "Expanded Animation Worlds". The result is a whole series of questions that have aesthetic, social, and political implications. How does our understanding of evidence and the status of images change overall if we are no longer able to distinguish between real and synthetically generated images? Where can we draw the line between fiction and reality if fictitious images, for instance in virtual reality, become part of our physically lived experience? What the future of the moving image holds and how it might feel is determined neither by the development of ever more cutting-edge production and receiving technology, nor by theory. The aesthetic experiences that are made possible by new types of image and sound must be explored using the methods of artistic research.

For this reason, the success of the experimental TESTeLAB is incumbent on inviting guests from Germany and further afield to take part in and to create "extraterrestrial" spaces that will enrich the institutional framework. A new, twelve-course panorama and full-dome menu, featuring an array of experiments, will be developed in the cross-media rehearsal theater, in conjunction with guests and groups.[12] The multi-perspective nature of the TESTeLAB presupposes that the participants will draw upon their various experiences, skills, artistic languages and nationalities in an interdisciplinary manner. Peter Brook wrote about in his lecture-based classic work, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre* in the 1960s, describing it as the "immediate theatre", which has recently found its way into a number of museum experiments and art scenarios.[13]
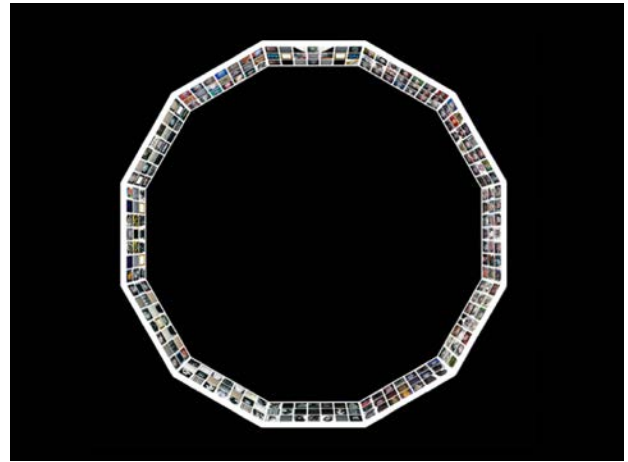
On this basis, the artistic project VOYAGEUR DE L'IMAGE / WEGE ZUM BILD / TOWARDS THE IMAGE will once again be "set up" in the mother ship of the university, so that it can continue to sow its seeds and forge connections, because we cannot dispense with either art or science: "This having to be based [Sicheinrichtenmüssen] in its own results as the ways and means of a progressing methodology, is the essence of the character of [artistic] research as constant activity." (Missomelius 2006, p. 10)

4. EXPANDED ANIMATION WORLDS AS A PLASTIC DISCOURSE MACHINE

"Leonardo da Vinci's symbolic and constructively methodical spirit becomes the model for the transgression and mutual permeation of art and science in an ultimate spirit of interdisciplinarity." *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*, Paul Valéry

The paradigm shift of the digital in new media aesthetics that is arising from the interplay between art, science, and technology, old and new, leads to the emergence of a new kind of media culture: "The hybridization of media has done away with the strict compartmentalization between media subsystems that science has long maintained; it has merged them into complex artistic forms. This finds expression in new approaches to research." (Missomelius 2006)

In 2005, to realize artistic research and experimental projects the author founded the *ATELIER BERLIN PRODUCTION and, in 2006, established the format of the "Transdisciplinary Colloquia" at the former HFF "Konrad Wolf" in the context of becoming a university; the IKF emerged from this format: "The IKF / Institute for Artistic Research was founded in 2008 on the initiative of the then Vice President for teaching, research, and development, Prof. Frank Geßner, with the aim of promoting artistic research in the audiovisual media at the former HFF. With the foundation of the institute, the HFF also sought to connect with the international field of artistic research and with research that had been developing in Europe since 1992. (...) In Germany, the IKF was the first institute for artistic research at a university. In its eleven years of activity, it has been promoting artistic research in the audiovisual media at the Film University (despite the difficult institutional framework conditions in the German area) and a comprehensive international network of partners and institutions of artistic research." (Altmann et al. 2019; 11. TDK 2012).

In cooperation with the IKF of the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, the *ATELIER BERLIN PRODUCTION and other institutions TESTeLAB & Guests should be supported and hold international symposia and conferences in the CIRCUS CONTAINER COLOSSEUM; accompanying events are held to promote artistic and scientific research and to promote and contextualize evaluation and reception: talks, lectures, masterclasses, essays, performances, exhibitions, etc.). In this open format, both aesthetic questions and the consequences of the digitization of BILDKUNST and the audiovisual moving image for the future are investigated. The aim of the transdisciplinary events is to promote artistic and research practice as an equal form of knowledge in academic discourse and to strengthen the exchange between artists and theoreticians in order to encourage new ideas based on freedom, creativity, teaching, research, and experimentation. The upcoming Masterclass Artistic Research 2020 GLOBE PLAYHOUSE is an ongoing initiative for this approach:https://www.filmuniversitaet.de/studium/studienangebot/filmuni-summer-school/masterclass-artistic-research/.

5. "ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS" INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

"We have to try to understand the overall functioning of man. (...) A person sees, hears, and affects himself alone. Physics is purely anthropomorphic." *Cahiers*, Paul Valéry

CIRCUS CONTAINER COLOSSEUM as a place of production and reception, constitutes a practical transmedia space for acquiring the free and unpredictable experiences into the future of the technological image in which 26 international sub-projects are to be united to a playful arranged "bigger" setting. New visual worlds are opened up through the development of an interactive prototype for a 360° panorama and dome installation. The future of the moving image can be walked into and experienced in the audiovisual "sphere installation" TESTeLAB & Guests in a way that stimulates the audience to actively reflect on the aesthetic and technological transformation of our environment. Wholly in keeping with the spirit of the original union between research and teaching in a university setting, the "Expanded Animation Worlds" have taken on the mission of transporting audiovisual media into the future, in a quest to represent and describe how the digital transformation of 21st-century society is being shaped and moderated, in all of its aspects.

FROM ASSISI AFTER PADUA will be the start and end of this move. It tries to be a vivid demonstration of aesthetic, formal, structural, and image-theoretical premises, and together with their combined approaches, both opens up new pathways and closes off others. Bursting through conventional forms of representation and questioning established patterns of perception opens up new spaces of experience, which can amalgamate the personal, current, and virtual into time-based "meta-documentation". The essay films made in this age of the intermingling and manipulation of analogue and digital will only become truly topical in the future, as it is ready to accommodate complex themes and the full range of genres. The essay introduces a conceptual and practice-based way of working as a form of discussion. In form and content, this approach creates a common starting point in theory and practice, as well as providing the foundation for interacting with new partners and building global friendships.

EXPANDED ANIMATION WORLDS is the leading theme of the rhizomatic "sphaera mundi" model of an *animated knowledge* organization in the synthetic planetary system of the work in progress: TESTeLAB & Guests.

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[2] The project ALIAS YEDERBECK was comprehensively restaged in various media forms of representation (installation, DVD edition, app, VR, mobile model) and last but not least as ALIAS YEDERBECK REDUX at the German Institute for Animation Film / DIAF in the Technical Collections Dresden in a paracontextual exhibition with model character: https://www.diaf.de/sonderausstellungen/vergangene-sonder ausstellungen/panorama-vision-film-projekt-installation/ Accessed: 27 July 2019. ALIAS YEDERBECK could already be presented to the public and conceptually described in the preproduction phase (cf. Geßner 2011), but was also presented at numerous international symposia and festivals and received attention in two comprehensive publications (cf. Gessner and Yederbeck 2014, including texts by Suzanne Buchan, Ursula Frohne, Christian Katti, Yvonne Spielmann, Karin Wehn, as well as Geßner 2018, including texts by Fee Altmann, Franziska Bruckner, Suzanne Buchan, Frank Geßner, Kerstin Geßner, Stefan Winter; also see further material and the credits on the project website *ATELIER BERLIN PRODUCTION / TESTE FOUNDATION: www.testefoundaution.org.)

[3] Rein, I., In Kunstforum Vol. 62: https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/ der-hang-zum-gesamtkunstwerk/ Accessed 27 July 2019 with reference to the exhibition DER HANG ZUM GESAMTKUNSTWERK, which was shown in 1983 at the Kunsthaus Zürich, at the beginning of 1984 in the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts in Vienna, and at Berlin's Schloss Charlottenburg.

[4] The exhibition FUTURE CINEMA: THE IMAGINARY AFTER FILM (2003) built a bridge from early forms of cinematography to contemporary or future possibilities of media.

[5] See Godard, J.-L., HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA (1998) as a book with audio CDs in French and as a video with a German language version on DVD (2009) and LE LIVRE D'IMAGE / BILDBUCH (2019). See also Alexander Kluge's thesis in GESCHICHTEN VOM KINO (2007); he considers cinema to be immortal because it is older than cinematic art: "Even if the cinema projectors stop rattling, there will be something that works like cinema."

[6] On the ambiguity of craft in relation to art and authenticity in the field of digital animation production, see Ruddell & Ward 2019.

[7] See André Malraux's gigantic essay as a kind of "planetary art history", which produces multidimensional and multi-perspective thought connections through surprising associations and leaps in time and space (Malraux 1978). Cf. in this context the media self-reflexive work THE GREAT WALL by David Hockney, which, like a storyboard, can be read linearly and non-linearly, making large pictorial-historical and media-technological contexts visible from a bird's eye view, so to speak: "Without colour copiers and printers in my studio, I would not have created THE GREAT WALL. (...) High-tech and low-tech – they depend on each other and are always intertwined. But I want to stress that the hand, heart and eyes work much more complexly than a computer will ever be able to. (...) The world around us is great, beautiful and wide – and we live in it. Now that the computer is helping us to break the dictatorship of the lens, we will look at it with a new view. Others have already noticed that the new digital film is nothing but a new genre of painting. Exciting times are ahead." (Hockney, 2001, p. 197-198).

[8] Podcast on the occasion of the exhibition "Alberto Giacometti: Departure to the Avant-Garde" at the Kunsthaus Zürich 2007: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/giacometti-alles-ist zeichnung.1013.de.html?dram:article_id=166927 Accessed: 19 August 2019. In the essay "Alberto Giacometti and the Invention of Virtual Space", p. 214-219, in Alberto Giacometti: THE ORIGIN OF SPACE 2010, Brüderlin and Wallner presented the thesis that Giacometti was the first to radically question Euclidean space with his art and to open up new spaces, as well as "virtual space", thus revolutionizing the "plastic concept

of space". Cf. also Fondation Beyeler 1999 FACE TO FACE TO CYBERSPACE: THE FACE OF THE WORLD IN CONTEMPORARY ART. In this context, all previously published texts by Giacometti 1999, with introductory words by Michel Leiris and Jacques Dupin; Giacometti 1985, with texts by Alberto Giacometti, Otto Breicha, and Reinhold Hohl, and a biography of the artist with his "representations", p. 24-183: Reproductions of 150 lithographs from the last album project from 1958 to 1965. PARIS SANS FIN forms the artistic starting point for the 1st movement TESTE SANS FIN: ALIAS YEDERBECK as well as for the "novel without words" or the hundred-part sequential "prequel": BERLIN, OPEN STUDIO. Volume I, 2012/13, by Frank Geßner.

[9] Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994). PICTURE THEORY: ESSAYS ON VERBAL AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[11] Villém Flusser's provocative thesis in the "Design-Fibel" VOM STAND DER DINGE. EINE KLEINE PHILOSOPHIE DES DESIGN (Flusser 2019), and Flusser 1996, translated by Roth, N.A. (2011) INTO THE UNIVERSE OF TECHNICAL IMAGES. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. In this context, see also the exhibition BODENLOS – VILÉM FLUSSER AND THE ARTS at the Akademie der Künste Berlin, S. Zielinski et al. (2015).

[12] The first guest of the TESTeLAB is Valencia James, a Barbadian performer who, as an artistic researcher, is interested in mediation between dance, theater, technology, and activism: https://valenciajames.com. The author is working with her on the piece QUADTRIANGLE: Based on Samuel Beckett's QUAD I + II for a dodecagon with motion capture technology (work in progress). As part of the collegiate research group CINEPOETICS: POETOLOGIES OF AUDIOVISUAL IMAGES under the direction of Hermann Kappelhoff and Michael Wedel, Tatiana Brandrup (director), Naum Kleiman (Eisenstein expert), Frank Geßner (concept art, background design), Alexej Tschernij (animation), Katrin Springer, Björn Stockleben (production), and Anna Luise Kiss (research & transfer) developed a virtual reality prototype, which will later be expanded into a platform for experiencing the artistic and theoretical work of the filmmaker Eisenstein. The VR design was presented for the first time at the workshop SERGEJ EISENSTEIN AND THE PLAY OF OBJECTS on the occasion of the 120th birthday and 70th anniversary of the death of Sergej Eisenstein, 22 to 24 November 2018, Brandenburg Centre for Media Studies / ZeM Potsdam.

[13] Locations like the HKW / Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin, which work beyond the boundaries of specialist disciplines with a variety of forms and media such as exhibitions, installations, conferences, workshops, concerts, film screenings, and publications as "a kind of Goethe Institute with a reversed sign" and the ZKM / Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe, become "open fields of action": Cf. Frohne, U. 2006 and Katzmair et al. 2015 as a "rehearsal stage for those who think differently".

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