

Book | Medium | Photography

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This volume is the first in a new series in the field of research into artists' publications. Here 'artists' publications' is used as a generic term for all forms of published works of art: from the artist's book to record, video, film or net art. In the course of the coming years, the aim of this series will be to print documentation of conferences and of individual studies devoted to academic developments in this field.

The background to the **Schriftenreihe für Künstlerpublikationen** is the foundation of the Research Centre for Artists' Publications / ASPC at the Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen in 1999 (head Dr. Anne Thurmann-Jajes) following the acquisition of one of the largest European archives of artists' publications, the *Archive for Small Press & Communication* (ASPC) previously belonging to the collector Guy Schraenen. At the same time, research began involving collaboration between the University of Bremen, the Research Centre for East European Studies, which owns its own comprehensive collection of eastern European artists' publications¹, and the Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen; a co-operation later sealed by contract in 2000. The members of the board are representatives of the participating institutions: Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Eichwede, Director of the Research Centre for East European Studies, Prof. Dr. Thomas Deecke, Director of the Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen and Prof. Dr. Sigrid Schade as a representative of the University of Bremen and head of the board (up until 2003).

The aim of this co-operation is to catalogue the range of media employed in artists' publications, beginning with the various archive collections at the Research Centre for Artists' Publications in the Neues Museum Weserburg and the Research Centre for East European Studies, and to analyse the historical contexts, the aesthetic strategies and the media characteristics of those works. The intention is also to make the archives themselves accessible for related research to a wide section of the interested public, students and academics for further investigation.

The participating academics agreed to establish inter- and transdisciplinary research projects in order to do justice to the diversity of forms combining text and image, the various media of artists' publications, their circulation and their function within an international network of artists and collectors, and in order to be able to position them historically and politically.

Volume 1 of the **Schriftenreihe für Künstlerpublikationen**² is a documentation of the international conference **Book/Medium/Photography**, which took place during the exhibition **ars photographica** at the Neues

Museum Weserburg from 1.12.2002 to 9.03.2003.³ The conference was organised in co-operation with the Institute Cultural Studies in Art, Media and Design at the School of Art and Design in Zurich (head Prof. Dr. Sigrid Schade), which also contributed to the funding of the conference and the publication. The choice of title for the conference, **Book/Medium/Photography**, makes it possible to read the terms book, medium and photography individually, but also in combination, meaning that the photograph can be seen as a book medium and/or the book as a medium of photography. The term medium functions like a joint, almost inevitably interconnecting various questions that can be posed concerning artists' publications. We divided the focal points of content and discussion into three fields:

Avant-gardes and Media Discourses

An historical approach to the question of the use of photography in artists' books presupposes a comparison of the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1960s. The transmedia strategies developed since the beginning of the 20th century in photo books, in books by avant-garde artists, in artists' books of the neo avant-garde and in cross-overs into other media and mass media show continuities and differences which must be examined in more detail, as must their respective relations to the effects of technological development and their cultural interpretations. Among other things, therefore, questions have to be raised as to the function of photo books, the contexts of content and form with respect to artists' books and the mass media, and the significance of film and video. In connection with the mass media, we must look at constructions of authorship by artists and also by users and collectors. The effects of the mass media on such self-constructions and ascriptions – including in seemingly private forms such as photo albums –, as well as merchandising in posters, postcards etc. are all reflected in artists' publications.

The Conceptuality of the Photographic Arts

Recognition and discussion of the paradigmatic functions of photography are a precondition for the integration of photography into the production of artists' publications since the 60s, which developed in opposition to established artistic concepts. One essential question is that of the role played by the indexical quality of photography here – that is, the ascribed documentary truth, and the way that this is employed in artists' publications, becoming a theme by means of conceptual strategies. The status of the documentary, the mediality of photography are examined through commentaries and intermedia links in artists' books. Strategies investigated include the handling of historical and biographical 'evidence' (family albums etc.), the citation of documentary photography from scientific and other social fields, and the function of testimony. It is also necessary to consider the strategic effect caused by an alienation of the documentary in the course of fictionalisation.

Narrative Methods – Narration and Narrative Strategies in Artists' Books

The presentation of photographs from diverse origins in the range of settings conceivable in an artist's book – whether these be serial, as a text-image montage, as a citation, comment, documentation, or a fictional use of biographical material – raises questions concerning the mediality of narrative constructions and subsequently the question as to the narrativity of images presently being posed in the discussion on the pictorial turn. The fundamentals of semiology, showing how images (including photographs) create meaning (and also legibility) are often disregarded in this context. In artists' books, artists experiment with various combinatorial effects. The denotation and connotation of photography in the sense of Roland Barthes' play a central role here, which in the 'art context' – for the artist's book – may be played through in an exemplary way. A series of photographs without a text implies a different mode of narrative by comparison to a single photograph with an explanatory text. This is linked to the question of how memory and recollection are thematized in historical-political and individual terms.

The contributions collected in this volume are revised versions of the papers held at the conference. They have been supplemented by an essay by Robert Rainwater on **Artists & Photographs**. Although we allocated the individual lectures to the key themes listed above at the conference, we do not do so in this publication. It emerged that not every essay could be exclusively attributed to one of the chosen themes and that each contributor examined a different combination of those questions we had posed. We leave it up to our readers to pinpoint these within each text. With her essay on the "Paradigm Photography as the Basis for Conceptual Strategies in Artists' Publications during the 1960s and 70s", **Herta Wolf** from the University of Duisburg-Essen systematically accounts for the space that theoretical reflection on the photographic as the media aspect of photography opened up to the Concept Art of the 60s and 70s. Within this space it became possible to take a new look at the economic as well as the scientific and phantasmatic aspects of photography. With the possible transfer of reflection on the parameters of photography to a "completely different term, to which perhaps no perception can ever directly correspond"⁴ (and this would be art), Herta Wolf reveals that its paradigms – economy, indexical quality, relation between authenticity and fake, between time and space, its archive function and its potential for reflection – promoted a recognition of the systemic borders of modern art, by contrast to the path followed by art photography. "In order to become (contemporary) art, photography had to become a paradigm, illustrating all the facets of the photographic such as a) the dumb copy, b) a serial quality, c) reproducibility, d) the pictorial manipulations which can be achieved through photographic techniques – reduction or enlargement and other photo-chemical deceptions."⁵ Herta Wolf shows this on the basis of exam-

ples: a work in the context of the multiple box **Artists & Photographs** (1964) by Mel Bochner and two artists' books by Sol LeWitt.

The following text by **Robert Rainwater**, New York Public Library, gives a detailed description of **Artists & Photographs** as an exhibition and a multiple edition with 20 different artists' publications and an explanatory brochure including a text by Lawrence Alloway.

Anne Thurmann-Jajes, ASPC, locates the avantgarde of the 1960s in a political and historical context. She sees the strategies of artists' publications and the use of photography in the general context given by the political movements of that period. Using mass media design and distribution strategies, artists crossed the borders of the traditional art business. However, seen in the long term, this led to a transfer of the mass media – and these include photography – into the art context. Situating the citation or use of photography in this context, says in a certain sense it has contributed to the fact that art, as one aspect of the circulation of mass media images, lost its traditional art status.

Lech Lechowicz from the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Poland, refers to the Polish neo avant-garde since the 1970s. In the context of the political situation in Poland, he considers the production of artists' publications as closely linked to a reflection on the media and the production of media art, reading this in turn as a characteristic of conceptual art. That means that he also sees the use of photography as part of a general emergence of media art within medialism. In the Poland of the 70s, experimental creativity was expressed within the context of self-referential examinations of the "limits of legibility, of visual phenomena and the debate about image manipulation"⁶. This was founded on the methods of game theory, semiotics and structuralism, and is represented by individuals such as Warstat Fromy Filmowej and the artist Jozef Robakowski. During the 80s, the artistic scene altered in the course of the Solidarnosc revolt and the state of war. The subsequent political opening ended the era of the neo avant-garde, although some artists continued its work, for example in the artists' magazine **Tango**. With respect to the 90s, Lechowicz notes close links between the Polish and the international art scenes and thus a 'globalisation'.

In his text, "Questionable References", **Klaus Honnef** from Kassel University School of Art describes the photographic strategies of contemporary artists and photographers, examining the relation of the image to the referee that has been lost through digital processing. On this basis he reflects on the significance of the contemporary discussion of 'pictorial reality'. The train of ideas from 'fake' to 'fiction' leads through a range of artists including Orson Welles, Sigmar Polke and Andy Warhol, up to the work of contemporary photographers such as Katharina Bosse, Nina Schmitz, Delia Keller, Anke Erlenhoff and Andreas Horlitz.

Barbara Lange from the University of Leipzig discusses the relationship between authenticity and mass media patterns using the example of Nan Goldin's photo book **The Ballad of Sexual Dependency**. She correctly

points out that Adorno's and Horkheimer's differentiation between high culture and the culture industry can no longer be upheld at the end of the 20th century, meaning that this also applies to the attribution of art's subversive potential to high culture and of simple affirmation to the culture of the mass media. Yet she indicates that old orders or gender orders are by no means questioned in the narrative structure of the 'family album' by Nan Goldin, which shows her chosen 'family' of friends from the subcultures of the USA in some very private situations, although the reception of the book on the art scene would have it that way. She argues that the popularity of this photo book is largely due to the voyeurism and lust for sensation which represent the most important components in the consumption of all mass media products.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau's contribution begins by stating that almost all *Alternative Spaces* in the USA, from the 60s to the 80s, have now become institutionalized. By contrast, she attributes a resistance to the artist's book, which gained its specific form at that time, due to its character as a hybrid genre or genus. The conditions of its production, its distribution, its consumption, and also of its perception make it into a suitable medium of representation and self-reflection for marginalized social groups. Since the artist's book has an affinity to the form of the archive, it can take this up in order to draw attention to gaps in social perception and collective memory. Using the example of the book **The Fae Richards Photo Archive** (1996), which invents the story of a black lesbian actress born in 1910 using staged photographs by Zoe Leonard (initially produced as part of a film by Dunye), Abigail Solomon-Godeau discusses the representation of sexual, gender and ethnic identities, absent memories and the presentation of forgotten historical facts, for example evidence of a black film industry. She describes the narrative strategy of the artist's book as a staging of the uncanny, something that has not been compensated for in history. From this perspective, the artist's book is a medium which has by no means lost its relevance, but which is in a position – as a hybrid, self-commentating form – to lend a presence to what is not represented. Artists' books can thus continue to be a part of critical social practice.

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- 1 A selection of these was made known to a wider audience by means of a touring exhibition and catalogue: **Präprintium. Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat**, with multimedia CD, ed. by Günter Hirt and Sascha Wonders, Bremen 1998 and the catalogue of the exhibition: **Samizdat. Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa: Die 60er bis 80er Jahre**, ed. by the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, Bremen 2000
- 2 Volume 2 of the **Schriftenreihe für Künstlerpublikationen** will be the documentation of the conference **Künstlerpublikationen. Ein Genre und seine Erschließung** held on the occasion of the exhibition **out of print** from 4th February to 6th May 2001, curated by Guy Schraenen in the Neues Museum Weserburg. The exhibition was subsequently shown at the cneai in Chatou near Paris, at the MACBA in Barcelona, the Museu Serralves in Porto, the mglc in Ljubljana, the Städtische Galerie Erlangen and the Museum of Design in Zurich.
- 3 Exhibition catalogue: **Ars Photographica**, ed. by Anne Thurmann-Jajes, Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, Bremen 2003
- 4 Here Wolf is referring to Kant.
- 5 Wolf, see essay in this volume.
- 6 Lechowicz, see essay in this volume.