

Presenter: Peter Weibel

Title: Epistemic photography. From Observation to Surveillance.
(The title of my essay would be "Photography and the Administration of Data")

There exists a painting by Carol Rama with the title "Vedo ... Vedo" ("I see ...I see", 1966) that shows a series of marble eyes stuck to the canvas and looking at the observer. This picture anticipates the theories of W.J.T. Mitchell in his book "What do Pictures Want?", 2005, that claims that pictures have their own life. Already the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan asked at the occasion of a sardine can floating in the water, whether not only we look at objects, but also objects look at us. All these statements hint to a paradigmatic change: The shift of vision to observation. The shift was introduced by the advent of photography. Through photography a new consilience started with the observer and the observed because for the first time it was evident that an apparatus was the interface between viewer and object, between the observer and the observed. A third medium was situated between the observer and the observed. Since then an increasingly comprehensive technology of data surveillance and -control, of data storage and -distribution has started.

Born in Odessa in 1944, Peter Weibel studied literature, medicine, logic, philosophy, and film in Paris and Vienna. He became a central figure in European media art on account of his various activities as artist, media theorist, curator, and as a nomad between art and science. Since 1984, he has been a professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. From 1984 to 1989, he was head of the digital arts laboratory at the Media Department of New York University in Buffalo, and in 1989 he founded the Institute of New Media at the Städelschule in Frankfurt on the Main, which he directed until 1995. Between 1986 and 1995, he was in charge of the Ars Electronica in Linz as artistic director, and from 1993 to 1999 he commissioned the Austrian pavilions at the Venice Biennale. He was artistic director of the Seville Biennial (BIACS3), in 2008 and of the 4th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, in 2011. From 1993 to 2011 he was chief curator of the Neue Galerie Graz, and since 1999, Peter Weibel is Chairman and CEO of the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. He was granted honorary doctorates by the University of Art and Design Helsinki, in 2007 and by the University Pécs, Hungary, in 2013. In 2008, he was awarded with the French distinction "Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres." The following year he was appointed as full member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts Munich, and he was awarded the Europäischer Kultur-Projektpreis [European Cultural Project Award] of the European Foundation for Culture. In 2010, he was decorated with the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class. In 2013 he was appointed an Active Member of the European Academy of Science and Arts in Salzburg. In 2014, he received the Oskar-Kokoschka-Preis [Oskar-Kokoschka-Prize]. From 2015 onwards, he is curator of the lichtsicht 5 – Projection Biennale in Bad Rothenfelde.