

Hardware/Software-Differentials

Herwig Weiser in conversation with Andreas Broeckmann (June 2006)

Herwig, your recent projects, including the mobile version of the zgodlocator and Death Before Disko, barely hide their hybrid and at times paradoxical mechanisms behind slick and transparent surfaces. Five years ago, the spectacular large version of the zgodlocator installation received a lot of attention for the overwhelming, almost uncanny encounter with the raw materials of computer hardware. How important is it for you to actually build these machines yourself, together with your collaborators?

The projects connected to these machines go beyond what you can immediately see in the installations. What I am after is a long-term exploration of the representation and reinterpretation of the raw stock that fires new technologies. My artistic research is concerned with investigating methodologies for synthesising the materials used for information transport: conductive plastics/metal, silicon, glass fibre optics, magnetic liquids, intermetallic (trans)architecture / rendered materials? These modules will involve, for example, LCD/ liquid crystal structures evolving in electrical fields, micro-structural modelling, polarized light frequencies and chemo-optical properties. The works draw the attention to the hidden body of computer technology and transforms the materials into dynamic kinetic sculptures. In this sense my method could be described as "software-action painting", a successive unmasking of the "invisible", and as a creation of opportunities to experience the 'matter' of digital culture. The relationships I construct are essentially a de-construction in sound and image, re-constructed as "analogue matter?and liquid codes? The increasing superficiality of the technological object masks the actual components that drive the artificial existence of these techno objects. As a consumer society we fetishize the slick design and the desirable, smooth surfaces of the latest computer hardware. My work decomposes and exposes the insides of industrial media modules through the use of software. The software retransmits and writes codes directly into raw materials, such as liquid hardware and varied controllable "streaming" matter.

Your work digs deep into the mechanisms of digital technologies, re-inventing and re-purposing the different elements you find in the infrastructure of contemporary digital culture. And in order to achieve this, you take the research and engineering parts of your projects very seriously. Do you see this 'performative' aspect of your work, in which you develop ideas for yourself and convey them to other people, as part of the projects?

Collaborating with scientists, engineers, and other artists gives me access to their specialised knowledge, but it also helps me to fuse the different levels of technology, culture and art that I want to bring together in the projects. Most importantly, I have developed my works in close collaboration with software and electrical engineer Albert Bleckmann since 1998. My work involves consultation and practical development with a variety of engineering companies and

universities. I am used to producing with a high level of physical complexity, involving a diverse range of activities, materials, the relation between electronic-engineering and programming and its manifestations in experimental interface-concepts as well as media including film, video, sound/image-visualisations and interactive or net-based installations. I combine my artistic intentions not only with scientific disciplines, engineering and computer science but with all forms of interdisciplinarity in these fields. My research involves investigating a relationship of electronic-circuit-systems, active/passive sound and material environments and experimental work with industrial hard- and software.

Your machines are highly idiosyncratic contraptions, technical objects that seem to have their own particular logic but that are different from any 'normal', functional technical apparatus. At the same time they make very specific references to techno-culture and to the way in which we experience the world through the mediation of technologies. How important is the experience of the audience when you are planning the works, and how much do you want to 'control' this experience?

Information is not only switchable, being a series of zeros and ones, but rather the electronic is also a "difference" of real data-flows. The interface is the social and cultural memory of software industry. the virtual in the real-as software-displays a cross-over: the spectator visually interacts in expanded and materialised datascares and fluid screens, here, the interface is a chiasm of soft- and hardware, materiality and immateriality in visual and electronic media culture. Turning the guts of the hardware inside out, the spectator moves through an installation which evokes a duality of experience. Sited externally is the real hardware, electronic networks and drivers for the activity within. Inside, the model is the surface-membrane- a negation of the external skin. This emphasis on transparency metaphorically draws our attention to the materiality of the work: plexi-glass and translucent materials literally take viewers inside the computer to investigate its bodily make up.

www.zgodlocator.org