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Peter Weibel © C. Hierholzer

- 1 It is possible to draw a portrait of Peter Weibel as an artist, theoretician and curator, but also as an “institution”—an institution acclaimed internationally, and a well of controversy. The involvement of this brilliant figure, who defies pigeonholes, in the art arena for a little more than half a century leaves no one indifferent.
- 2 Peter Weibel was born in Odessa in 1944 and grew up in Austria—a country which would considerably mark his career and his aspirations. It was in particular his boarding-school experience in that conservative postwar Austria—the kind of establishment which Thomas Bernhard has described as a “mind-destroying institution”—which showed him

the limits imposed on us by society, and urged him to broaden, and even go beyond, our capacities to act within this framework.

- 3 Since the 1960s, this quest to go beyond limits was reflected in his writings on art and in his artistic activities, which he developed after studying French literature, and then medicine, mathematics, philosophy and film. As an important figure in Viennese Actionism, Peter Weibel focused on textual processes, performance, video installation, and then interactive installation. His early works already revealed the significance of quantum physics as a source of inspiration: expressing a common issue, traversing art and the natural sciences. The artist questions the perceptions, structures and images of a reality increasingly marked by technological developments, taking the observational position adopted into account. These early and critical questions are reflected in his writings and works, especially in *Observing Observation: Uncertainty* (1973 video installation), in *Das Rauschen des Beobachters*¹[The Noise of the Observer] (written in 1995), in the various exhibitions he put on, and in collective books such as *Jenseits von Kunst*[*Beyond Art*] (1997)².
- 4 Peter Weibel is an “Institution” in particular at the head of the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe, from 1999 onward. “Weibel understood very early on that the most avant-garde art had no fixed place in our societies, and that that place still had to be invented—at every level of art praxis”, wrote Boris Groys, in an attempt to describe Weibel’s stance as a central figure of the *Medienkunst* at an international level. The conception of the role of the ZKM as a research and creation laboratory with projects for exhibitions and major and innovative publications—in particular *Making Things Public*³ devised with Bruno Latour—remains unprecedented, just like the influence of the various projects signed by Weibel, whose hyper-presence is constructed like a hypertext (Ludwig Seyfarth). With the huge and revealingly titled project *Globale* (2015-16), the ZKM celebrated the art of the 21st century as a way of analyzing the effects of globalization. The study of the limits and position of the artist, researcher and theoretician in present-day society seems pushed to an extreme. At the same time, it is very unlikely that Peter Weibel will not pursue this questioning of the limits of a perpetually changing world, whose responses are having a viral effect on the contemporary art arena.

NOTES

1. Weibel, Peter. “Das Rauschen des Beobachters”, in *ARS Electronica: Mythos Information, Welcome to the Wild World*, Vienna; New York: Springer, 1995, p. 8-22
2. Weibel, Peter. *Jenseits von Kunst*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1997
3. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005. Ed. by Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (1072 p.)