



festival concept

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Checked Reality

Work at the Interface Continues

The festival concept for 2019 invites art practitioners and their producers to check the currently accessible reality and to continue to question what happens at its interface. It is precisely there that perhaps the final redistribution of power is taking place before man capitulates to the almighty machine steering emotions, rearranging thoughts, and lying to the senses - but in whose interest?

On the other hand, this time Pixxelpoint is directing its pixel of light at the question of whether checked reality - reality that may easily be checked off as valid - is even still possible. Have the omnipresent technologies finally been affirmed, established, and accepted in all fields of intimate as well as social life, politics, the economy, and culture? The hegemon that is the smartphone and the masterful minds of its software architecture and data algorithms and flows have already prevailed in consumer culture at large. But how can science, art, and education continue to co- or re-shape reality, and what kind of interface do they need for genuine contact therewith - if reality even exists as such any longer? These are the questions that Pixxelpoint is posing this year to practitioners as well as theoreticians as it opens its doors to all media buffs and art fans, as well as accidental passers-by.

A review of current practices and discourses shows that it is artists who are best (or worst) equipped to be relied on as having a broad understanding of the past, and thus that we can follow their gaze into the future. Software and machinery furnish our work, entertainment, and intimate routines, we learn on (or about) them, we dedicate institutions to them and build corporations and organise mechanisms of power around them. But do we truly understand modern machines and the software that they run, beyond the polished interface and standard user manuals (but use that is profitable to whom?). Are we capable of using tools to critically analyse them?

Perhaps the sole remaining means of checking reality is to directly address the present body through a Massumian experience brought back into the field of the *Politics of Affect*. It is as if a new canon has been established, with the apparatus merely confirming it. And it is left to art as such to see above and beyond the unbearable

lightness of the microprocessed being. And to do that, it must look a decade or two back, just like Pixxelpoint will do on its twentieth anniversary. With critical self-awareness, it will continue to seek out aestheticized entertainment in artworks, but instead of opting for the resigned (Hessian) laughter at the end of all realities, perhaps we can also rely on Sloterdijk's maxim (*Critique of Cynical Reason*): Whatever cannot withstand satire is false!

By that we mean the recurring human mistake of (too frequently) projecting our wishes onto machines without machines being able (or willing) to realize them. Techno-optimism is returning as a shattered mirror image of the bizarre mosaic of our weaknesses, follies, and nonsense. In that, the caressing technological metaphors are utterly unnecessary for the freezing spirit; they may even be dangerously misleading. The data form is merely a system of efficiently - and with a purpose, be it business if not political in nature - interconnected databases, machines, servers, memories, and controllers. Here, at the dusk of the age of monetized knowledge, information is being transformed into a weapon of mass realization. It is based solely on the hyper prevalence of computers and mobile devices, which beget not just psychological but also physical violence. Human, perhaps even humanitarian, deliberation should therefore resist engaging in computational thinking beyond the traps of the New Dark Age (James Bridle), which does not bring anything good: just like oil in the previous century, in the 21st century data and ownership of data (and the flows thereof) will determine our social ecology. This is because data is relentlessly biased towards the preservation of old colonialist and capitalist hegemonies.

Instead of affirming the self-satisfied armchair criticism of new media discourse or being resigned to using the media toy of the moment, Pixxelpoint 2019 swears by the user as the person responsible for interactions at the interface, even as the interface becomes (yet again) increasingly elusive, abstract, and even (for marketing purposes) shrouded in mystery. The mechanisms and algorithms that serve us information and impulses collect and embellish (self)images in our name. And when man finally sees the self(ie) stripped of the digital interface, beyond the invisible and omnipresent technologies (Donna Haraway's *The Reinvention of Nature*), unreal artificial intelligence, the broken internet of things, unfathomable cryptocurrencies, and fake news are hardly helpful.

The 20th iteration of the festival therefore calls for a (re)action in the public space by way of an affirmation of the performative. With a renewed focus on the written and spoken word, it restores faith in the understanding of technology. Not only does it raise the prospect of critical thinking, it makes an appeal to the duty to think critically beyond solutionist illusions as to new technologies forever lightening our workload and beautifying our body. Pixxelpoint this time places *artificial art* over artificial intelligence, as a sophisticated form (not of mathematical, but) of aesthetical and ethical minimisation, perhaps even compression between the artist's input and the user's output. Or is it vice versa?

While in 2018 the festival concept located the "intelligent observer" - authors as well as visitors - front and centre, Pixxelpoint 2019 will home its inquisitive gaze in on the person responsible, the participant, who should take responsibility for contact with the author not just through his or her work, but also through the event *in situ*. While quickly reviewing the two decades of this diverse annual event, the festival will take aim at multiple current new media (artistic) practices and critically observe their historization in the broader social context. It is also necessary to take responsibility for interaction at the interface - even as it becomes (yet again) increasingly elusive, abstract, and

mystified. The artist, the theoretician, the producer, and the consumer should go beyond just meeting in a celebratory or even carnivalesque mood in the Pixxelpoint space-time. To paraphrase last year's curatorial concept, the central issue in view of this continuity could be phrased in two stages: *Can our actions, or at least active deliberations, truly affect the environment and objects, and change their meaning? And should we do this in interdependence with the other, the fellow human* - as long as he is still real? The responsible observer will be challenged by the 20th Pixxelpoint with an invitation to actively collaborate at the (albeit occasionally ridiculed, but therefore precisely) meaningful interface within artworks and artistic processes. If not necessity, at least the possibility of in-depth contemplation of work at the interface should be reflected in the breadth of the selection of artworks and artistic processes, and in their placement in the events of the festival's days and nights.

Pixxelpoint thus continues to scrutinise the broad field of exploration of creative contemporary intermedia production, which touches on the interdisciplinary connections of artists with key intersecting areas of science and art, the investigation of artificial intelligence and robotics, and algorithms and advanced software environments. It primarily deals with their impacts on the human body and contemporary society. How has the role of the (responsible, critical) user of media technologies and mediatized content changed in these (two) decades? Is reality still truly accessible, let alone checkable? Or has the development of cybernetic applications in robotics and automated systems advanced so much that we are (already) relegated to speaking (only) about the passive observer, an artificially intelligent entity?

The festival will continue to strive to establish synergies between - as well as contrasts with - the media art scenes and names in the wider region. It will examine some of the most contemporary creative practices in the world and seek out their reflection in the triangle between art, science, and technology: this is precisely where the partner project MAST is developing new technologies for innovating between man and machine. And it will assume that it is precisely in approaches that are based on artistic deliberation - and work - where truly innovative solutions for a better ecological and social future reside.

Aside from the central gallery exhibition of multimedia installations, videos, and fine art, this year's Pixxelpoint will be staging performances and other site-specific interventions at locations as diverse as streets and playrooms. In this manner, artistic practice will not just be positioned adjacent to the social reality of the urban environment; it will also be embedded in the media-art critical discourse through public discussions and the international symposium MAST. Finally, in addition to a short topic-specific film programme, the festival will be reviving the spirit of Pixxelmusic, which will offer up a special musical event on each of the eight nights, from electronic exploration at the intersection of sound and image, to conceptual raves and even ethno jazz accompanied by farmhouse fare and excellent wine!

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