

Keynote Talk about w/k

Talk: [Peter Tepe](#) | Section: [About w/k](#)

This lecture was held on 27 March 2018 as part of a curated conversation in the Düsseldorf gallery Engelage & Lieder. The host was David Behning. The text has been only minimally revised for publication. I have added reproductions of six artistic works that I presented in the exhibition Kunst und Wissenschaft: Beispiele symbiotischer Verhältnisse (Art and Science: Examples of symbiotic relationships) on display at the Haus der Universität from 16 November 2017 until 31 January 2018. They make no direct thematic reference to the subject of the lecture as is usually the case in other w/k contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

welcome to this brief – scheduled to last 10 minutes at the most – keynote talk about the online journal w/k – Between science and art that I have been publishing since November 2016.

“Science and art” – just like the sub-genre “science and visual art” that is our central focus today – is an old theme. On this subject there have been a host of books, essays, lectures, conferences and exhibitions. In the light of the quantity of contributions addressing this topic, which in the course of the last few years and decades have multiplied considerably, one might reasonably ask whether it is really necessary to launch such an online journal. Are there not already sufficient sites for publishing work on this theme? A start-up only makes sense if it can produce something that previously did not exist – if it is innovative.



Peter Tepe: ...die phantastische Sphäre ist nicht so unromantisch [...The Fantastic Sphere is not that Unromantic] (2014). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Wunderbare] existiert die phantastische Sphäre nicht, oder sie bleibt machtlos“. *Kritik:* Welt B, die „phantastische Sphäre“ existiert, und zwar unabhängig davon, ob diejenigen Textfiguren, die in Welt A leben, an sie glauben oder nicht. Der „Glaube“ an Welt B ist nur die Voraussetzung dafür, dass eine Textfigur mit Welt B *in Kontakt treten kann*. Zur Grundhaltung, die fordert, in der alltäglichen Welt offen für die ‘höhere’ Welt zu sein, gehört auch eine Auffassung von der ‘Bestimmung’ des Menschen. Diese besteht darin, sich *primär* an der höheren Welt zu orientieren und den sich aus ihr ergebenden Forderungen zu genügen. „Klara ist nicht so unromantisch, daß sie die Existenz von verhängnisvollen Kräften bestreitet“. *Kritik:* Klara bestreitet die Existenz von *über-natürlichen* „verhängnisvollen

Aus dem Fazit einer Vorlesung [From the Conclusion of a Lecture] (nach 2000). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

I would now like to show that this is indeed true of w/k. There are numerous artists whose work proceeds along the interfaces of science and visual art. On a global level there are probably several thousand; as yet no one has ever tried to count them. There have of course been widespread attempts to propose general theses about the relationship between science and (visual) art, but also studies of the work of individual artists. However, what has been lacking prior to w/k was a journal in the form either of a book or a website whose declared purpose is to explore and examine the variety of individual connections between science and art along methodologically and thematically comparative lines. In the main, this online journal is concerned with fathoming these connections and registering them as precisely as possible.



Peter Tepe: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [Coping with the Past] (2014). Photo: Jochen Müller (HHU)

Of course, it is legitimate and important to reflect in general terms about the relationship between science and (visual) art. In this, however, our online journal has adopted a new approach. You might say we proceed from bottom up. If a general theory has been proposed we seek to purposefully verify whether it is compatible with what we know about individual constellations. In other words, the journal calls for the variety of artistic positions represented in the realm of interaction to be acknowledged and for these to be taken into account in any theory construction. It is an attempt to offset the appeal of making overtly “reckless” hypotheses. In so many cases, studies proceed from top to bottom. For instance, a philosopher, starting from his own specific philosophical convictions, produces a

corresponding general theory to explain the relationship between science and (visual) art. Here, as a rule, this theory is not assessed as to whether it is consistent with existing knowledge about individual constellations. Instead it is driven by the need to voice a hypothesis about the relationship between science and art that fits this particular philosophy, in conformity with the system, as it were.

By contrast, studies of individual artists published in w/k differ from previous ventures in that from the outset they are guided by the aim to compare and differentiate the individually explored constellations of science and art: this too is innovative.



Peter Tepe: *Der Wolkenvermesser war da* [The Cloud Surveyor was Here] (2015). Photo: Jochen Müller (HHU).

In the rubrics Exhibition and Art history the artists working at these science-art “interfaces” are brought into central focus. For these artists we propose three modes of contribution: a presentation of their art (offering each artist the possibility of articulating and expounding his or her position); an interview with the artist; a text about the artist. w/k predominantly features living artists but naturally, in collaboration with art historians, attention will also be called to artists of the past as well as recently deceased contemporary artists.

We expect participating artists to answer the questions typical for w/k as comprehensively as possible. As work on the studies advances it is not infrequent that artists discover aspects of their work they were not previously so clearly aware of. As a result, the specific approach to each artist’s science-art constellation can open up new possibilities for their work.

One aspect of producing a contribution for w/k is the intensive level of editorial collaboration motivated

by certain epistemological interests characteristic of our journal. It often takes several stages of editing before a version is reached which is satisfying to everyone concerned. But this does not exclude the possibility of further enhancements being made at a later stage.

There are cases where an artist's connection to science is plainly manifest since the artist's work and statements make recurrent and explicit reference to theories, methods or results in this or that branch of science. Here, the task is to outline the evident connection as concisely and comprehensively as possible. But in other cases where the connections to science are obscured endeavours to broaden understanding somewhat resemble the work of a detective pursuing investigations in all directions who occasionally stumbles on surprising evidence.

w/k's programme is not built on a fully formulated general theory describing the relationship between science and art; this can be addressed from a variety of approaches – which does not mean that I myself might espouse one particular theory. The theoretical work preceding individual studies is confined to meaningfully classifying the broad range of science-art connections. In our view, by treating the artists as individuals we can distinguish three basic types or modi of this connection, which in turn offer an infinite number of variations:



Peter Tepe: *Pyramide auf Rädern* [Pyramid on Wheels] (2015). Photo: Jochen Müller (HHU).

The first basic form comprises those individuals who actively work both as scientists and artists. We call them border crossers between both realms. Leonardo da Vinci could be considered the forefather of border crossers. A further illustrious border crosser was Karl Otto Götz, a painter of international standing who in the field of aesthetic issues for a long time also worked as an empirical psychologist.

The second category comprises artists who in their artistic work draw on theories, methods or results of one or another science, but do not practice or publish independent scientific research: *science-related artists*.

The third basic type relates to *collaborations* between at least one artist and at least one scientist within

the scope of a particular project.

Attributing any artist to one or several of these three basic categories is in itself no particular achievement, but it facilitates the process of actually gaining understanding and gives the artist a profile. If he or she can be identified as a border crosser, for instance, it follows that w/k will seek answers pertaining specifically to border crossers.

Over time, w/k intends to record a growing number of interface projects connecting science with art, to recognise them in their specificity and thereby present a survey of the overall situation in the broad field of “science and (visual) art”. And in this way, w/k expects to become the first port of call for anyone interested in this subject. Along the lines of: “If there’s anything you need to know about science-art connections start by looking at w/k”.



Peter Tepe: *Bedrohte Pyramide* [Endangered Pyramid] (2016). Photo: Jochen Müller (HHU).

In order to achieve its cited goals w/k is reliant upon the cooperation of galleries, museums and cognoscenti of the art scene. In the context of today's curated conversation I wish merely, in just a few remarks, to sketch the win-win situation open to gallerists and w/k. In 2018, since we aim to publish two new, German-language contributions per month (I'll leave out issues relating to the English-language section for the moment), the online journal depends on galleries for suggestions about further "interface" artists who meet certain quality criteria and would be suitable for features in w/k. The artists themselves as well as the galleries representing them could in turn find such features in w/k useful in attracting attention and alerting people interested in these artists to previously unappreciated aspects of their work.

w/k itself is concerned with processes of understanding, not economic interests. Our purpose is to extend and deepen knowledge about individual relationships between science and art, not to earn money. Anyway this would prove very difficult since our online journal is available to users free of charge – an aspect we do not intend to alter in the future.

The difficulties facing such an ambitious project are a matter for the following discussion. Together with our committed team of editors – and driven by a degree of idealism that might strike others as somewhat naive – I have simply done what I consider to be right and relevant for our time. But in doing so I have also learnt what it means to constantly find oneself close to the precipice of failure.

Thank you for your attention.

Image above the text: Peter Tepe: Ordnungsversuch [Attempt at Establishing Order] (2017). Photo: Jochen Müller (HHU). 119 x 84 cm. Various materials on chipboard.

Comments on Peter Tepe's painting *...die phantastische Sphäre ist nicht so unromantisch* [...The Fantastic Sphere is not that Unromantic](#): 119 x 84 cm. Various Materials on chipboard panel. The concept of reading pictures is explained in more detail here: [Self-Interview](#). You will also find two more examples.

My lectures used to follow a specific scheme, whatever the topic was: To start with, I gave a speech about 20 to 30 minutes, which I then summed up in a two page outline of the most essential points. I gave my students some minutes to ask questions before moving on to a second speech part. I always prepared a conclusion that I used to project on the wall. While some pictorial objects use some of these summarizing texts as a basis, my artworks do not deal with the content of my teaching and research – the summaries are rather some kind of raw material for an intuitive and improvisational way of working. Some words or parts of sentences were isolated from the text, the rest was painted over completely or partially. My reading pictures are based on the poetical play with certain words and syntactical components from the summary text, which engenders new alienated constellations of sense. However, the source text constitutes an essential part of the work, for in an exhibition it would be shown in an equal size just next to the actual pictorial object. This makes sure that the recipient can recognize certain contents of the chosen lecture and see, by comparing the original and its artistic adaptation, what has become of them. Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Comments on the text Peter Tepe: *Aus dem Fazit einer Vorlesung* [From the Conclusion of a Lecture] (c. 2000): In this lecture various interpretations of E.T.A. Hoffmann's narrative *Der Sandmann* were

critically discussed according to the principles of cognitive hermeneutics developed by Peter Tepe. See also: P. Tepe: *Kognitive Hermeneutik. Mit einem Ergänzungsband auf CD. Würzburg 2007*. [Cognitive Hermeneutics. With a Supplementary Volume on CD]. P. Tepe/J. Rauter/T. Semlow: *Interpretationskonflikte am Beispiel von E.T.A. Hoffmanns Der Sandmann*. Mit Ergänzungen auf CD. Würzburg 2009. [Conflicts of Interpretation using E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* as an Example. With Additions on CD.] Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Tags

1. Border Crosser
2. cooperation between artists and scientists
3. Peter Tepe
4. science-related art