

The Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

In late 2004 the Amsterdam-based World Wide Video Festival, founded 30 years earlier, lost its funding and essentially closed its doors. Although decisions such as these are always to some extent political, one of the deciding body's more salient complaints about the WWVF was that 'video art' as such had become so incorporated into the mainstream that the continued need for a specialized festival had evaporated; video art, in other words, had become art.

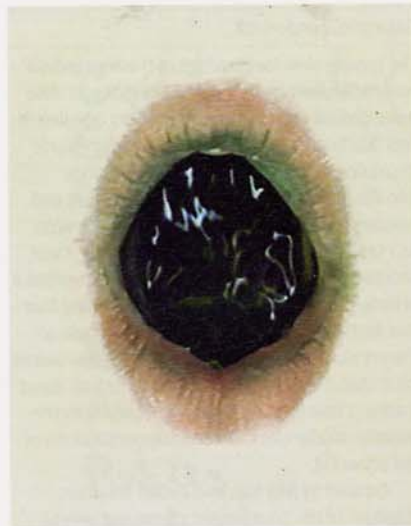
The same can perhaps be said of its inchoate cousin, media art: a bank of flatscreen monitors, a recording of a dance piece, an interactive Internet project, some live VJ-ing - it's all good, and it's all media art. And centres that house and display these works are becoming equally ubiquitous, from Banff to Vancouver, from Karlsruhe to Gifu. A case in point is the Netherlands Institute for Media Art - or, to give it its full name, The Netherlands Media Art Institute/Montevideo TBA, with TBA standing for 'time-based art'. That gangly mouthful speaks volumes about the cloudiness of any such institute's mission. One wonders how much its brief would change if the word 'media' were deleted from the name. Is David Lynch, who

recently switched from celluloid to digi-camcorder for his 2006 film *Inland Empire*, now a media artist? Does Beck's release of interactive music DVDs make him a media artist too? Foregrounding the technical details of production seems a spurious blueprint for categorization. Like video art, media art is neither a genre nor a movement, and classifying art works in this way is as arbitrary as arranging them, say, alphabetically. Perhaps more instructive today would be a grouping based on congruent affinities, instead of hardware predilections.

But fortunately the widespread absorption of media art's infrastructure into the background of everyday life means that in works such as those of Peter Bogers the hardware doesn't become the focal point, or a tool for spectacular presentation, but rather a way to examine our world in more detail. Bogers began using video in the 1980s to record his live performances, initially as a means of coping with stage fright, but he has since grown into a multimedia maestro, seamlessly integrating video, performance, soundscape, sculpture and installation. Yet the technology is never employed for its own sake; instead, it illuminates details that would otherwise remain imperceptible. In much the way that time-lapse photography has revealed starfish to be infinitely more mobile than

Peter Bogers
Human87
(detail)
1988

Video still from mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

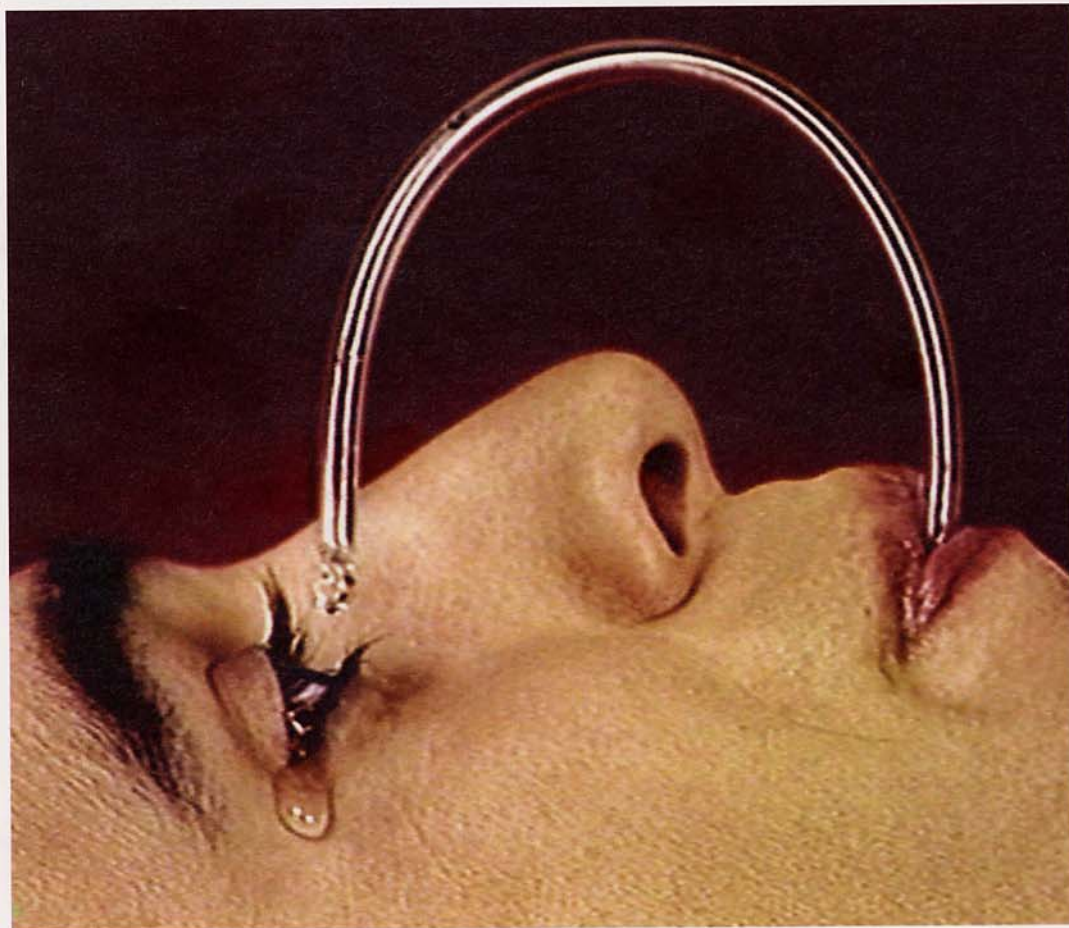


Peter Bogers
Portrait
(detail)
1992

Video still from mixed media sculpture

previously assumed, and filters have allowed humans to see the otherwise invisible images beamed to Earth from the Hubble telescope, Bogers uses technology to zoom into the granular level. In *Rhetorica* (1992), for example, he mimics his baby's murmuring, searching for the generative grammar at the roots of all language. Likewise in *Chorus* and *The Unified Field* (both 2006) dozens of voices in nearly as many languages speak, sing and breathe in concert, lending these pieces a liturgical quality that transcends language by first deconstructing it. Trying to decipher the individual snippets, which were collected via satellite radio and the Internet, is possible, but ultimately a fool's errand; the grains themselves are meaningless as 'content'. It would be easy to view pieces such as these two, which are compiled from hundreds of unrelated slices from the media maelstrom, as more tedious ruminations on information overload or on the inanity of TV in general. But no judgement is taking place here, just an attempt to distil from these ingredients the features that are common to all cultures - such as language or time or violence - and a chance for us to comprehend better the smallnesses that compose them.

Bogers has in fact been breaking things down into their component parts for years - not only sounds and images but also the human body: mouths and ears and hands and eyeballs appear throughout his works, suddenly untethered. This is done in part to challenge people's reflexive need to impose order on the parts they see, the way a grandmaster will immediately see a chessboard not as individual pieces but rather as a whole, a unified field of sorts. Bogers highlights this desire to unify disparate elements by continually atomizing and then reassembling them. But instead of becoming a Babel-like chaos, the result is a universal chorus, a media-art Esperanto that's refreshingly apolitical.
Douglas Heingartner



Peter Bogers