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"Postmedia" Discourses. A Working Paper.

1. Introduction, Two Hypotheses, Summary

The notion of "postmedia" has been the subject of debate for several decades. The following text will try to highlight the main trends of those debates. My first hypothesis is that there are three different conceptions of "postmedia" which need to be looked at separately and which have to be understood as distinct: the notion of "post-mass media" (as conceptualised by Félix Guattari, Howard Slater, a.o.), the notion of the "post-medium condition" of contemporary art (Rosalind Krauss, Nicolas Bourriaud, a.o.), and the notion of the "digital as post-media" (Peter Weibel, Lev Manovich, Domenico Quaranta, a.o.). These three discourses will be introduced in the following sections, not with the aim of offering full, let alone critical analyses, but in order to facilitate a more differentiated approach to the notion of "postmedia". My second hypothesis is that there are significant interferences between the different conceptions of "postmedia" and that interesting insights can be gained from a comparative reading of the three discourses. At the end, I will hint at some of these interferences in order to suggest epistemological vicinities and distinctions between the three concepts, and in order to mark potential starting points for a discussion between the three rather separate discourse communities.

2. Post-Mass Media

In the short history of "post-media", the term was probably first deployed around 1990 by the French psychiatrist and philosopher Félix Guattari who used it to call up the image of a "post-mass media age" in which the regime of the mass media of the 1980s and before, would be overcome and replaced by a situation in which individuals and groups would have access to their own multiple channels and means of expression. Guattari had this vision even before the arrival of the World Wide Web, but based on his experiences with Italian and French pirate and community radio, and the French proto-Internet *Minitel* system. Guattari's discourse on post-media forms a relatively small part of a broader, "ecosophical" conception which pleads for a combined transformation of social, psychological and environmental aspects of the contemporary condition. Importantly, Guattari connects the notion of post-media to forms of subjectivation that are *not* tied to the mass media's commercial mega-structures which construct homogenised media consumers, but to a heterogeneous media ecology in which diverse and singular subjectivities and collective assemblages can emerge.

Throughout his writings, Guattari refers to the mass media with contempt, qualifying them as a stupefying machinery that is closely wedded to the forces of global capitalism, and that is co-responsible for much of the reactionary hyper-individualism, the desperation and the "state of emergency" that currently dominates "four-fifth of humanity" (Guattari 1995, p. 97). Guattari makes a passionate plea for a new social ecology and formulates, as one step towards this goal, the necessity, "to guide these

capitalist societies of the age of mass media into a post-mass medial age; by this I mean that the mass media have to be reappropriated by a multiplicity of subject-groups who are able to administer them on a path of singularisation" (1994, p. 64). To induce this "shift away from oppressive mass-mediatic modernity toward some kind of more liberating post-media age in which subjective assemblages of self-reference might come into their own" (1989, p.98), Guattari explicitly mentions the "technological development of mass media, especially their miniaturisation, the lowering of their costs, and the possibility of using them for non-capitalistic ends" (1994, p. 65). The "age of planetary computerization" (1989, p.103) is an era of "a monstrous reinforcement of earlier systems of alienation, an oppressive mass-media culture and an infantilising politics of consensus" (ibid.), but more than the previous historical phases, this age also holds the potential of radical change for the better. "All of this, I repeat, provided that society changes, provided that new social, political, aesthetic and analytical practices allow us to escape from the shackles of empty speech which crush us, from the erosion of meaning which is occurring everywhere (...)." (1995, p. 97)

A decade later, around 1998, and already under the impact of Internet- and digital media-based communication and distribution media, this motif was developed further by the British cultural theorist Howard Slater who described "post-media operators" as the media practitioners and activists who work in the dispersed field of independent music, print, image and online production. Like Guattari, Slater defined post-media practices or post-media operations in opposition to the mass media. In his attempt to describe specific practices, rather than pointing to a general media-ecological situation, Slater claims that post-media practices are characterised by small, diverse, distributed networks of operators who make use of the then new, digital means of production and distribution. Post-media practice grows out of the networked activities of passionate individuals and groups working in local and translocal contexts and using such media as magazines, record labels, websites, club events, mailing lists, etc. Differences in these networks are not eliminated but relished. Post-media practice is characterised, according to Slater, by a critical attitude towards the media in use, acting in lateral rather than vertical configurations, and an acceptance of the processuality and continuous transformation of context and practice.

Guattari's understanding of a post-media age as an historical context for political media activism and for the concept of "tactical media" has recently been re-appraised by Clemens Apprich. He refers to the history and theory of media activism as it was pinpointed by the positions of Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Jean Baudrillard around 1970, harking back to Bertolt Brecht's "Radio-Theory" of 1932. We might add Walter Benjamin's considerations about new forms of authorship and of participation in his 1934 essay, "The Author as Producer", to this genealogy of post-media practices. Apprich suggests that in the post-media times of the early 21st century, when electronic and digital media increasingly permeate all walks of life, the practices that were understood as distinctly "activist" or "tactical media" in the 1990s, have become part of "everyday (post-media) life". In media theory, writes Apprich, the "transformation of classical media structures towards new collective assemblages of enunciation (...) was accompanied by a dialectical movement: first in the 1980s, postmodern media theory jettisoned Karl Marx's critique of ideology and abandoned

all hope of an emancipatory use of media technologies, and, subsequently, the tactical media movement of the 1990s rejected this quietist standpoint of (academic) media theory in order to re-invent new forms of media activism. This 'double disengagement' ultimately opened up new fields of counter-hegemonic agency, thus enabling a variety of media practices that are still valid in a post-media era."

3. Post-Medium Condition of Art

At the end of the 1990s, US-American art critic Rosalind Krauss used the notion of the "post-medium condition" to point to a shift in the production of art that took effect around the 1970s and that meant the undermining of "medium specificity" in contemporary art. The artist through whom Krauss first analysed the post-medium condition in 1999 was Marcel Broodthaers, to whose work "Voyage on the North Sea" she devoted a notable essay. In a more recent volume from 2011, called "Under Blue Cup", Krauss picks up the theme again and develops her critique of post-medial art practices at greater length, critically contrasting post-medium practices with the work of several artists – like William Kentridge, James Coleman, Ed Ruscha, Christian Marclay, Sophie Calle, or Harun Farocki – all of whom Krauss ennobles as, literally, "knights of the medium".

Krauss develops her argument with reference to the art critic Clement Greenberg who had infamously insisted on "medium specificity" as the hallmark of modern painting. "For Greenberg, the nature of a medium was established by brute positivism: painting is flat; sculpture is three-dimensional and freestanding like an object; drawing is the cursive tracing of edges and boundaries as opposed to painting's access to color and penumbra. Greenberg's specificity is empirically tied to a physical substance." (Krauss 2011, p. 7) Rosalind Krauss seeks to establish a critique of artistic practice that uses a more complex notion of "medium" on the one hand, and that on the other hand holds on to a conception of specificity which she contrasts with the notion of a "post-medium condition". In order to gain such a more complex understanding of the mediality of art, she introduces alternative concepts like "technical support", "automatism" (Stanley Cavell), or expressions like "figuring forth". The post-medium condition, "characterized by the term installation art, is engaged in the constant rehearsal of Duchamp's inaugural gesture – the entry of ordinary components into the context of some form of aesthetic institution, whether museum, gallery, or art fair – in order to ask, once again, the general question – "What makes this *art*?" – rather than the specific one of the medium." (2011, p. 32) Instead, Krauss focuses on artworks and settings of their presentation that support the possibility of "perceptual judgement": "The white cube is the base we touch with our eyes, the way the edge of the pool is the surface against which we kick in order to propel ourselves back through the water." (2011, p. 86) Her heroes are the "knights of the medium" whose works she analyses, teasing out the ways in which they re-invent what art can achieve through a particular medium: "The inventors of technical supports as a new form of recursivity are challenging the post-medium insistence about the end of the space specific to art's autonomy, what conceptual art dismissed as the white cube; instead they rely on the resistance of its walls to penetration, the way the sides of a pool provide the swimmer with a kicking post against which to propel himself in a new direction." (2011, p. 25)

Krauss critically comments on the discursive shift from "medium" to "media" at the hands of 20th-century media theoreticians who she calls "Cassandras of the medium": "*Under Blue Cup* has relied on the historical importance of the aesthetic medium as the specific *support* for a given practice – artisanal, academic, industrial. With the advent of modernism, this insistence on *specific* mediums – as the recursive source of the object's meaning – became absolute. *Absolute* then became *obsolete* at the hands of the media's most famous theoreticians, Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler; for the former, media are modern communication vehicles, while they are technical storage, translation, and transmission systems for the latter." (2011, p. 35)

Krauss' analysis of the post-medium condition of contemporary art was affirmatively quoted and shared by the French critic and "Relational Art" curator Nicolas Bourriaud. Bourriaud, however, draws radically different conclusions from this analysis: while Krauss insists on the artistic inferiority of works that do not display and reflect their own medium specificity, Bourriaud is convinced that the "post-media condition" is part of a liberating transformation of the arts, away from the modernist corset towards what he calls "alter-modernity", a modernity not in the hegemonic Western tradition, but one that mixes its themes and theatres as much as it mixes its styles, materials, and media. Bourriaud suggests that the "post-media condition" should be whole-heartedly embraced, instead of – like Krauss – holding on to an obsolete and, as he suggests, *Kitsch* understanding of medium specificity. Bourriaud reverses the Greenbergian thesis and asks: "What if the contemporary form of *Kitsch* was nothing but the enclosure of artistic theses in the golden frame of tradition? And what if true art was defined by its very ability to escape the determinacies of the respective medium? Or put differently, it is today not necessary to fight, like Greenberg, for the preservation of an avantgarde that circles around the specificity of its means, but for the indeterminacy of the source code of art, for its dissemination, so that it can prove to be unassignable – in contrast to the hyper-formating which paradoxically characterises *Kitsch*." (2009, p. 150)

4. Digital as Post-Media

In a discourse that presents itself as unrelated to either Guattari's or to Krauss', artist, curator and theorist Peter Weibel proposed in 2005 a conception of the "post-media condition" that is less aesthetic than technological and social. He describes an historical lineage in which the applied and media arts have inherited a subaltern status from the Greek *techné* and the Roman *artes mechanicae*. While the techniques of calculation, automation and the machinic were, until recently, derided just as manual labour and crafts were in the past, the success of digital technologies has brought about a reevaluation of these techniques also in the arts, analogous to the liberation of people from the lower orders of society through the social revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Weibel describes the historical process which led to this reevaluation and in which Diderot's *Encyclopédie* and later the new "culture of materials" triggered by Picasso, Tatlin, Eisenstein and others, played a crucial role. Importantly, Weibel claims that

the traditional media of the fine arts only became recognisable *as media* under the influence of the technical media: "We have to distinguish between old technological media (photography and film) and new technological media (video and computers) on the one hand and the arts of painting and sculpture on the other. Until now, the latter were not considered to be media at all. Under the influence of the media, however, they came to be regarded as such, i.e. as non-technological old media. With the experiences of the new media we can afford to take a new look at the old media. With the practices of the new technological media we can also embark on a fresh evaluation of the practices of the old non-technological media. In fact we might even go so far as to say that the intrinsic success of the new media resides less in the fact that they have developed new forms and possibilities of art, but that they have enabled us to establish new approaches to the old media of art and above all have kept the latter alive by forcing them to undergo a process of radical transformation."

Without mentioning Greenberg, Weibel goes on to describe the process through which painting consequently receives attention as a medium with particular aspects and characteristics which result from its material and technical specificities (like the technical dispositif of canvas and frame), or from competing conventions of representation in the technical media, like photographic realism. More recently, the digital computer is further transforming the conditions of making images or sculptures: "Nowadays all of art practice keeps to the script of the media and the rules of the media. This notion of the media comprises not only the old and new technical media, from photography to computers, but also the old analogue media such as painting and sculpture which have been transformed and influenced under the pressure of the technical media. This explains why we can rightly say that all of art practice keeps to the script of the media."

The post-media condition, according to Weibel, not only brings about a transformation of the meaning of individual media, but it also leads to new combinations and mixtures of artistic media: "The secret code behind all these forms of art is the binary code of the computer and the secret aesthetics consist of algorithmic rules and programs. (...) The computer, as it were, can simulate not only all forms and laws of the universe, not only the natural laws; it can also simulate the laws of form, and the forms and laws of the world of art. Creativity itself is a transfer program, an algorithm. From literature to architecture, from art to music we are beginning to see more and more computer-aided transfer programs and instructions, control mechanisms and guidelines for actions. The impact of the media is universal and for that reason all art is already post-media art. Moreover, the universal machine, the computer, claims to be able to simulate all of the media. Therefore all art is post-media art."

The idea of a retrospective transformation of the understanding of "old" media through the experience of "new media", was also put forward by Lev Manovich in a rather tentative text of 2001 that proposes the notion of "post-media aesthetics," i.e. the application of concepts derived from digital media (data organisation, storage, software, interactivity, information behaviour) to the history of art. More radically than Weibel, Manovich claims the possibility to review historical art practices through the lense of digital technologies, though the focus of his argument lies on the suggestion

to develop a set of aesthetic criteria that are suited to the structures and affordances of digital media.

This technological understanding of the media also motivates the more moderate position taken by Siegfried Zielinski who sees "art after the media" as something that is still in the making, as "an art of experimentation which needs the media neither as legitimation nor as special sensations, but which neither blocks its eyes, ears and cognitive tools from them." (2011, p. 124) In his book entitled "After the Media", Zielinski presents something of an intellectual biography in which contemporary art seems to have played only a secondary role. His comments on "after the media"-artists like Armin Linke and, as the only more extensively discussed example, the Chapman Brothers (p. 158-164), are rather cursory and do not match Zielinski's variantological contributions to an understanding of the "media before the media".

An argument that combines Weibel's argument about the struggle for social recognition of media art with Manovich's claim for new aesthetic parameters deriving from digital technologies, has been put forward by Italian critic and curator Domenico Quaranta who was also the first to juxtapose the "postmedia" notions of Krauss, Guattari and Weibel/Manovich. Quaranta's main focus though lies on the relationship between the "New Media Art world" and the "Contemporary Art world", and on reasons for the lack of recognition of the former by the latter. This theme has also been analysed by Edward Shanken who more explicitly looks at the historical development of what he regards as a split between "Mainstream Contemporary Art" and "New Media Art". Quaranta raises important questions about the necessity to open up the discourse about artistic media towards practices that engage "the media". However, it is questionable whether the emerging media ecology under the "post-media condition" – whichever version you go by – is well described with the 1990s concept of "the information society". Quaranta writes: "our postmedia world (...) in which it no longer makes sense to distinguish (...) between art which uses computers and art which doesn't; a world in which on the other hand it increasingly makes sense to distinguish between art that acknowledges the advent of the information society and art that retreats to positions typical of the industrial era we are moving out of. It is according to this distinction that in a few decades' time we will be able to identify the academia and avant-garde of the present day." (2013, p. 212) Even Weibel cautions against an overestimation of the impact of media art in the art world: "We could therefore be tempted to ask whether the effects of the new media on the old media have actually been more successful than the works of the new media themselves."

5. Interferences

The previous sections have offered no more than superficial scans of complex and diversified discourses which would each deserve further attention. In the comparative effort of this text, I would like to point to at least a small number of instances where interferences between the three discourses can be observed, instances which hint at articulations, connections and divisions between them, and which would each require a much more elaborate discussion than I can provide at this stage.

Krauss vs. media theory: Rosalind Krauss epigrammatically identifies "*three things*" which occurred around 1970 and which jeopardised the "specific medium": "postminimalism and its rejection of the minimalist literal object (...); conceptual art and its declaration that the object was now supplanted by the dictionary definition of *art* as such (...); and Duchamp's eclipse of Picasso as the most important artist of the century." (2011, p. 20) She frequently returns to these pivotal *three things* and adds two more in the course of her argument: the rise of poststructuralism and deconstruction as a fourth (p. 24), and "media" as a fifth (p. 37). Enigmatically, Krauss had suggested that her book, "Under Blue Cup," might itself be such a fifth thing (p. 25), but this denotation is then left to the impact of the "Cassandras of the medium", McLuhan and Kittler (cf above). The discourse on the "post-medium condition" of contemporary art is thus, according to Krauss, tangentially implicated by the media theoretical discourse that fuelled Weibel et alii's conception of the "digital as post-media".

Post-media as hybridity: Juxtaposing Weibel's "post-media condition" and Rosalind Krauss' "post-medium condition" elucidates how Weibel looks at the technological development and focuses on the technical aspect of artistic practice which, under the condition of the digital "post-medium", takes place in a medial continuum. He writes: "Consequently, this state of current art practice is best referred to as the post-media condition, because no single medium is dominant any longer; instead, all of the different media influence and determine each other. The set of all media forms a universal self-contained medium. This is the post-media condition of the world of the media in the practice of the arts today." Krauss, in contrast, looks at individual artists, their practice and at the way in which they deploy "technical supports" and invent aesthetic concepts, shoring art up against the indistinct post-medial flood that Weibel embraces. Krauss and Weibel have different conceptions of mediality and of materiality, which also means that not only their respective appraisal, but also their very understanding of what constitutes "hybridity" is different, a concept which has yet another inflection in the writings of Nicolas Bourriaud.

Recruiting Bourriaud: Nicolas Bourriaud's metaphoric references to network and computer culture as inspirations for his own curatorial work, are quoted by Domenico Quaranta in an attempt to recruit Bourriaud and his anti-Kraussian position into his own argument about postmediality. We should be wary though that Bourriaud would have rejected the technologically determinist understanding of post-mediality that Quaranta adopts from Weibel and especially Manovich. Bourriaud has been avoiding the notion of "medium" altogether and instead developed the non-technically determined notion of the "radicant" – a tactical rhetorical move not dissimilar to Krauss' adoption of terms like the "technical support" and "automatism".

Krauss, Weibel, and the medieval guilds: Rosalind Krauss seeks to extract her own conception of the "medium" both from the Greenbergian modernist understanding of the self-referential art object, and from Media Theory's empty vessel. Instead, she suggests, as a model for her medium, the understanding that the medieval guilds had of the affordances of their materials and objects, and the rules that applied to their production. (2011, p. 3-7) This image of a collectively held conception of the medium resonates with Weibel's appraisal of craftsmanship and the tradition of *techné* and *artes mechanicae* which, according to Weibel, are rehabilitated by the emergence of

the technical media in the arts. However, what mainly attracts Krauss to the guilds is the dialectics of material, processual and symbolic difference which gets executed in the process of art making, whereas Weibel is fascinated by the historical breakdown of social hierarchies in the process of technological progress.

Slater, Guattari and conceptual art: Whereas Félix Guattari speaks about contemporary art only superficially, Howard Slater has occasionally written about contemporary music and art, especially conceptual art, in order to develop a discourse that takes the Guattarian ecosophical thinking as a framework for thinking through artistic practices. In this vein, he has sought to rescue a particular *political* strand of conceptual art which Slater (2000) has contextualised with the debate about post-media, without, however, making reference to the prominent position of Rosalind Krauss.

Subjectivities: The *three discourses on postmedia* speak of significantly different notions of subjectivity. For Guattari and Slater, post-media practices and the age of post-media are associated with subjectivities of groups, of ever-unfolding differences, of heterogenesis and collective assemblages, signified by the horizontal distributions and connections of networks. Krauss focuses on practices of the autonomous individual, whether this individual is acting as a self-conscious artisan among artisans, or as an artist inventing and deploying a medium. Bourriaud conceptualises the notion of the "radicant" in opposition to both the "radical", rooted in the notion of the modern individual, and against the (Guattarian) "rhizomatic" notion of a heterogenic, distributed subjectivity: instead, the "radicant" is a trajectorial subjectivity, it is singular, yet without local roots and under constant negotiation. (And, like Krauss' knights, the radicant is probably able to perform as an actor in the art market...) Finally, Weibel's conception of the subject is probably best described as *social-democratic*: "The ultimate effect of all this is to emancipate the observer, visitor and user. In the post-media condition we experience the equality of the lay public, of the amateur, the philistine, the slave and the subject. The very terms 'user innovation' or 'consumer generated content' bear witness to the birth of a new kind of democratic art in which everyone can participate." It depends on your perspective, and expectations, whether you regard these "postmedia operators" (to borrow Slater's term) as media activists, or as revolutionary and liberated workers, or as adapted creative consumers.

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Note

This paper is a work in progress. Some of its ideas were first presented in a seminar at Leuphana University of Lüneburg in the spring of 2012 and at the "Unneeded Conversations" symposium at the Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto (FBAUP), in May 2012. The text will be included in: Unneeded Texts, Vol.2, Porto, [i2ADS](#), 2018 (forthcoming)

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Berlin/Lüneburg, 7 July 2013

A revised version of the argument of this text was presented at the workshop "POSTMEDIA Discourse and Intervention" at Technical University Berlin, on 20 June 2014 (organised by Christina Vagt). These are some of the sections that were added to the original text:

add. 1: re: Rosalind Krauss on the "post-medium condition"

Krauss seeks to establish a critique of artistic practice that does three things: it suggests (1.) a more complex notion of "medium", and (2.) holds on to a conception of specificity which she (3.) contrasts with the notion of a "post-medium condition". Krauss engages with postmodernist art and suggests a sort of post-Greenbergian modernism. Her analysis focuses on a number of artists who "invent" a particular medium and its aesthetics, like Ed Ruscha the medium of the car, or William Kentridge the medium of animation, or James Coleman the medium of the projected slide.

I would like to quote another paragraph which sums up the intention of Krauss' book, and which highlights both the seriousness and the particularity of her position; I believe that it would be interesting for us to take the impetus of her critique and discuss the aesthetic and ethical aspects of mediality that she raises:

"Under Blue Cup is an act of remembering, an insistent "who you are": a crusade to think back beyond the onset of conceptual art with its Ubuesque fanaticism; a shrug of the shoulders at deconstruction's dismissal of the "self." Its concern is those very few artists who have had the courage to resist the aneurystic purge of the visual, a purge meant to bury the practice of specific mediums under the opprobrium of a mindless moralizing against the ground of art itself: the aesthetic object which it abjures as mere commodity, and the specificity of the medium which it shuns as inadequately philosophical. Under Blue Cup will call the defenders of specificity the "knights" of the medium." (Krauss 2011, p. 32)

It is worth remembering that a decade earlier, in her 1999 essay on Broodthaers, Krauss had been more ambivalent in her attitude: on the one hand, she was more critical about the notion of the medium, and on the other, less damning about that of the post-medium. (cf Krauss 2000, p. 55-62; qu Halsall 2008, p. 117) It must also be mentioned that, unfortunately, Krauss' critique of some contemporary artists is marred by a simple lack of technical understanding which makes it impossible for her to discern and understand the medium specificity and aesthetics of electronic and digital techniques – which I believe exists, if in a hybrid form, and should be addressed in an expanded notion of medium specificity.

add. 2: re: Weibel on the "post-media condition"

Weibel claims that the traditional media of the fine arts only became recognisable as media under the influence of the technical media: "We have to distinguish between old technological media (photography and film) and new technological media (video and computers) on the one hand and the arts of painting and sculpture on the other. Until now, the latter were not considered to be media at all. Under the influence of the media, however, they came to be regarded as such, i.e. as non-technological old media."

This is, I would say, not true. When Clement Greenberg decreed the medium specificity of modern art in 1960, he was maybe doing that under the impression of the electronic media that Marshall McLuhan began to analyse around the same time. But Greenberg had raised the issue of the artistic medium already in 1940, and then he used the reference of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's "Laokoon" of 1766, which already in the 18th century provided an analysis of the differences between the artistic media of sculpture and poetry; even if Lessing – and before him the 17th-century art theorists involved in the dispute on the Paragone between painting and sculpture – even if they did not use the word "medium" at the time, their's is certainly a media-critical attitude *avant la lettre*. The history of the technique of central perspective, analysed by Erwin Panofsky and others, is another proof against Weibel's claim, as is the history of what art historian Victor Stoichita has called the "self-conscious" image. Thus, there are media in the arts, even before the electronic and digital media. But the flawed claim that Weibel makes is symptomatic for an attitude that wants to affirm a historic and paradigmatic change with the advent of digital media. – We can maybe speculate later about the ideological reasons why media theorists like Weibel, Manovich or Kittler, for that matter, insist on the supposedly total change that the digital medium has brought about. (...) Moreover, it might be interesting to compare Weibel's totalising notion of media hybridity under the rule of the digital master medium, to Bourriaud's concept of artistic nomadism and translation. Methodologically, I would suggest that for such a comparison we must look at the theory, at the technology, and at the artworks.

add. 3: re: Historicisation

My main argument here today is that all three positions – Krauss, Weibel, Guattari – are distinctly historical, and that they relate their respective notions of "post-media" to situations and phenomena that belonged to a particular, now past situation; my suggestion is therefore that "post-media", in all its three guises, must be taken as an historical concept that cannot automatically be adopted in a debate on art, media and society that seeks to be contemporary in 2014.

Rosalind Krauss situates the emergence of the "post-medium condition" around 1970. She identifies "three things", as she calls them epigrammatically, which occurred around 1970 and which jeopardised the "specific medium": "postminimalism and its rejection of the minimalist literal object (...); conceptual art and its declaration that the object was now supplanted by the dictionary definition of art as such (...); and Duchamp's eclipse of Picasso as the most important artist of the century." (2011, p. 20) We can add the philosophy of deconstruction to this list, as well as the advent of

"Intermedia" art in the late 1960s. Krauss directs the thrust of her rather emotional anti-postmedia argument against the "installation art" which, even when she writes in 2011, she still sees most prominently represented in Catherine David's documenta X exhibition of 1997.

In contrast, Bourriaud's exit strategy from the rearguard critique of the postmedium condition, and of post-modernism, has been the suggesting of new concepts, like the radican, and altermodernity.

Félix Guattari introduced the notion of post-media in response to the age of mass-media which, when he talked about around 1990, was itself a relatively recent phenomenon that we can now maybe date to the period from 1960 to 2000; the protracted ending of this tentative time-frame is marked not only by the mass-access to the Internet after 2000, but also by the introduction of satellite TV and radio in the early 1980s, the founding of Al Jazeera in 1996, and the generalisation of "tactical media" strategies in advertising and marketing. Since then, the media ecology has changed so much, that I find it difficult to still refer to our time as a "post-mass-media era" in a sense that Guattari had in mind – that's unless we are ready to also discuss Facebook, YouTube, and, most of all, the Google suite of services, as "post-mass-media".

Similarly, the universalist understanding of digital media as promoted by Lev Manovich, Peter Weibel and others was born out of the spirit of the 1990s. The so-called "digital media" are not universal, not unified and not dedifferentiated; they are not post-specificity, and their's is not an aesthetics of some universal digital post-medium; of course, software plays a role that has massively changed the rule of the game, but for computer-based art, more factors come into play than the structural homogeneity of code processing; and there are many social fact and activities, mediated or not, whose aesthetics is not primarily predicated on the digital medium. Moreover, the normalisation of the digital – what is currently being debated as the "post-digital" –, turns the idea of a particular "post-media aesthetic" itself into something of the past, a past in which it seemed yet possible to say what "media" actually were.

I believe that for an effective explication of the present, and in order to trace the new differentiations, we need to work with concepts that don't primarily set themselves off against a mythical past – be it "mass media", "modernist medium specificity", or a "pre-digital".

add. 4: re: Subjectivities

A notion that looms behind the debates on postmedia is that of how media construct subjects, whether as observers, listeners, users, or as producers, authorial artist-subjects, or groups. For Guattari and Slater, post-media practices and the age of post-media are associated with subjectivities of groups, of ever-unfolding differences, of heterogenesis and collective assemblages, signified by the horizontal distributions and connections of networks. Krauss focuses on practices of the autonomous individual, whether this individual is acting as a self-conscious artisan among artisans, or as an artist inventing and deploying a medium. Bourriaud conceptualises

the notion of the "radicant" against both "the radical", rooted in the notion of the modern individual, and against the "rhizomatic" notion of a heterogenic, distributed subjectivity: instead, the "radicant" is a trajectorial subjectivity, it is singular, yet without local roots and under constant negotiation. Finally, Weibel's conception of the subject is the postmodern citizen of late capitalism: "The ultimate effect of all this is to emancipate the observer, visitor and user. In the post-media condition we experience the equality of the lay public, of the amateur, the philistine, the slave and the subject. The very terms 'user innovation' or 'consumer generated content' bear witness to the birth of a new kind of democratic art in which everyone can participate."

I'd like to raise the question, what we can learn from the concept of media as machines of subjectivation, and from the connection between postmedia and the postmodern critique of subjectivity? What would be a political anthropology of postmedia?

add. 5: re: The Technical

Another topic that could be addressed more explicitly and in greater detail is that of the technical. What are the media that Guattari and Slater are referring to, and what are their technical specificities, their affordances, their aesthetics? Against the idea of the universal medium of the digital, Alessandro Ludovico has recently argued, in a discussion on the "post-digital", that the digital is not a medium, but a mode of transformation of each of the existing media, of radio, of TV, of text, and that it represents not their subsumption into one, but their hybrid transformation. From this might follow the question, how digital media technologies are specific? And we might possibly learn something from the Kraussian desire for, and insistence on "media specificity". What does it mean, on a media-theoretical level, if Nicolas Bourriaud claims that the concept of media specificity has to be given up, and replaced by concepts of "rootlessness, travelling, and translation"? A related issue is that of materiality – and thus the set of questions that Lyotard raised with the exhibition "Les Immatériaux" in 1985. I can now only offer this as a speculative idea, but what would such a "political ecology of immaterials" be?

add. 6: either / or

The term "postmedia" was born from a particular juncture in the late 20th century, at which the mass media were yet in a saturated situation, yet unchallenged by the Internet, and the network media were already imaginable but their economic regimes had not kicked in; we are past that juncture, and "postmedia" has become nostalgic.

or:

If "media" are the technical supports of representation and memory, communication and consciousness, then "postmedia" holds the hope that there are alternative ways to imagine and make them, and the subjectivities that they engender. (... and perhaps – perhaps! – this is what Rosalind Krauss means by the "invention" of a medium, which would make her knights, and herself, "knights of postmedia".)

"Individual pioneers invent new instruments, new methods of work, revolutionizing the traditional forms of production."

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1923-26 (publ. 1936, repr. 1981, p. 343)