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Medien Kunst Interaktion

Die 80er und 90er Jahre in Deutschland

Media Art Interaction

The 1980s and 1990s in Germany

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sozio-politischen und kulturellen Standpunkt. Wir müssen uns mit allen Widersprüchen, die aus unserem Weltbild, aus dem historischen Bild der Zeit entstehen, beschäftigen. Wichtig ist dabei, die Differenzen der Widersprüche zu erkennen, nicht das Lösen dieser Widersprüche.

Aus einem Gespräch mit Valie Export von 1992, University of Wisconsin und Dortmund, veröffentlicht in: „Feministische Streifzüge durch's Punkte Universum“, Hutschenreuther/Schurian – femme totale (Hrsg.), Edition Filmwerkstatt, Dortmund 1993, S. 27–35.

1 Valie Export verweist in der Folge auf „Hyperbulie“ (1973) sowie „Bewegungsimaginationen“ (1974) (Anm. d. Red.).

Abb. Valie Export, „Stand Up Sit Down“, digitale Fotografie, 1989; Valie Export, „Selbstporträt mit Stiege und Hochhaus“, digitale Fotografie, 1989.

Valie Export

Differences in the Contradictions – Interview with 'femme totale'

femme totale: As a feminist, the subject, the content, the message of an artwork is of great importance – feminist criticism, of course, was always also media criticism. What value do new, digital media have regarding the relevance of their message? Can they adopt feminist, media-critical positions? Do you also have limits as to how much a computer can be used or limit participation in their further creative development?

Valie Export: As we know, work with video in the '60s and '70s was very important for female artists because, on one hand, the medium was not yet permeated by history or hierarchy and, on the other hand, there was information on forms of representation that are very important in feminist discourse. The media, the new technologies, allow new analyses of the concept of 'truth', of the contextualization of 'truth', the concept of the real, the nature of the real, and the concept of nature.

Participation in this discussion is important in order to work out and determine standpoints. Exclusion from this could possibly be 'deadly' considering that the disappearance of the subject, object is being prophesied in many places. We know that the image of woman has been a construct until now.

Technological media are not just artistic tools. They represent systems of communication and relationships that are in a social, scientific, philosophical, and ideological context. But they also serve as tools for ideology and the desire for power. Technology creates an ideology of how we are to 'read and write' the world just like other tools. But on the other hand, they also show us new forms of communication, of interaction, which we can also view with innovation. As I already mentioned, new technologies shed new light on the problems, be they imaginary, real or fictive. This means the hierarchisation and polarisation of these concepts change. The 'ontology of the image' as well as the image of the woman is in question because, until now, the ontology of the image has been built upon an unchangeable concept of being.

Media images are not part of ontology. Of course, technology, its goal and motive, is not unbiased. It is rooted in militarism, capitalism and patriarchal society's claim to power. It is a consciousness machine and also a power machine. Let us think back to the photographic recordings of Gilbraith, for instance, which assisted in the control and consequently the better manipulation and use of the factory work force.

Mass media colonize our consciousness, our feelings, desires, values and goals for the purpose of manipulation. But people are responsible for the use and invention of technology. They carry the responsibility of the philosophical, social and political relationships between technology and scientific discoveries. It does not dominate us if we defend ourselves against dominance. It is part of us. We are technology. The human being produces the battle fields.

Technology holds dangers and a power that can destroy us. The same technology we use for the production of artistic images can be used for destruction.

Video was not invented by artists, but still had an important input for feminist expression, artistically as well as socially. The accomplishment lies in finding humane aspects, challenging social and political consciousness. We should also ask ourselves how much of nature is being destroyed, decreasing the habitat of a population that is increasing. Nature can no longer serve society, as it has until now, by being assimilated by culture. With this in mind, a quote from an artist admired by the bourgeoisie and who is highly valued by art capitalism, Picasso: 'Nature must exist so that we can do violence to it.'

A subversive employment of technology is breaking with tradition and also with traditional means of production, leaving behind inherited artistic statements and the classical conception of art. It is not about norms that have been exhausted. Artistic works produced with media technologies can no longer be answered with conventional questions of aesthetics, with conventional analyses of the works. With new tools for creating works, the conception of art will also change. The break with tradition also means breaking free from it. Departing from traditional values and ideas, of course, is also implied in the feminist idea.

F. T.: Video was considered a 'female medium' for a long time. What is 'female' about video? And: Is computer art – seen from the point of view of an extensive male dominance of the computer world – per se a male art that bars women entry? Can female artists and feminists conquer this male domain without compromising their own art at the same time?

V. E.: There is nothing female about video. Computer art is not a male art, art is neither female nor male. The starting point of the expression, the contents, the standards, the presentations can be related to gender, to the sexuality of the gender, to social representation and/or non-representation.

If male dominance takes place it also means that women are not trying hard enough to penetrate the media world, to understand the media world and to use it for their own goals. That is also hard work because women were never given or granted anything for free and because we live in a capitalist society dominated by men, in a patriarchal society. Why should one have to make compromises?

Compromises in artistic expression are demanded by the art industry, the art market, the official art exhibition. This is where compromises are called for. Official cultural politics and social politics demand reduction and assimilation.

If new technologies are to be used artistically, the way an artist sees him/herself must change – the image of the male or female artist. S/he no longer expresses herself or himself in the traditional forms of art. That is why the traditional image of an artist can no longer continue.

Politics and society desire the constancy of tradition, the conservative expression. Thus, whoever stays within these parentheses will also persist with traditional image content and image expression despite the computer and other technologies. This is desired by society and is supported by (cultural) politics because it covers up the subversion, the questioning of truth and reality.

The female artist utilizing the new technologies does not just have to change image content, she must also take over the form, the production. This means she must learn to create programs and software for new images. Producing software has an equally important status as working out new content and concepts. Production and presentation are a unified, artistic work process.

Whoever has to think about how presentations will be produced will also dedicate more attention to the contents and messages. That is a difficult task, of course, but is art not also the desire to work?

F. T.: The search for the subject of the woman, for her image, plays a central role in your work. Cyberspace, virtual realities, contain strong tendencies toward the loss of the real world, the body, sensuousness. With this in mind, how would you view the historical dimension of the woman becoming a subject in art and society. Does this tendency toward desensitizing, which also counts on a sort of event culture, present a late legitimacy for what was wanted with Body Art in the '70s – meaning art including the living body?

V.E.: I hope future Cyberspace does not mean the loss of sensuousness. On the contrary, I desire and expect an expansion of sensuousness, new and other forms of sensuousness.

Everything new is also tied to a loss. Our real world is a programmed world, a world dependent upon various conditions that each of us experiences differently – real or unreal. Technology expands the human body to frontiers that have been inconceivable until now. It can also mean the frontier of loss. The boundaries of the senses and their perception are being stretched, our bodies experience an extension. Why should this cause our experience of the body to disappear? Why should a loss of the body occur, as is often prophesied?

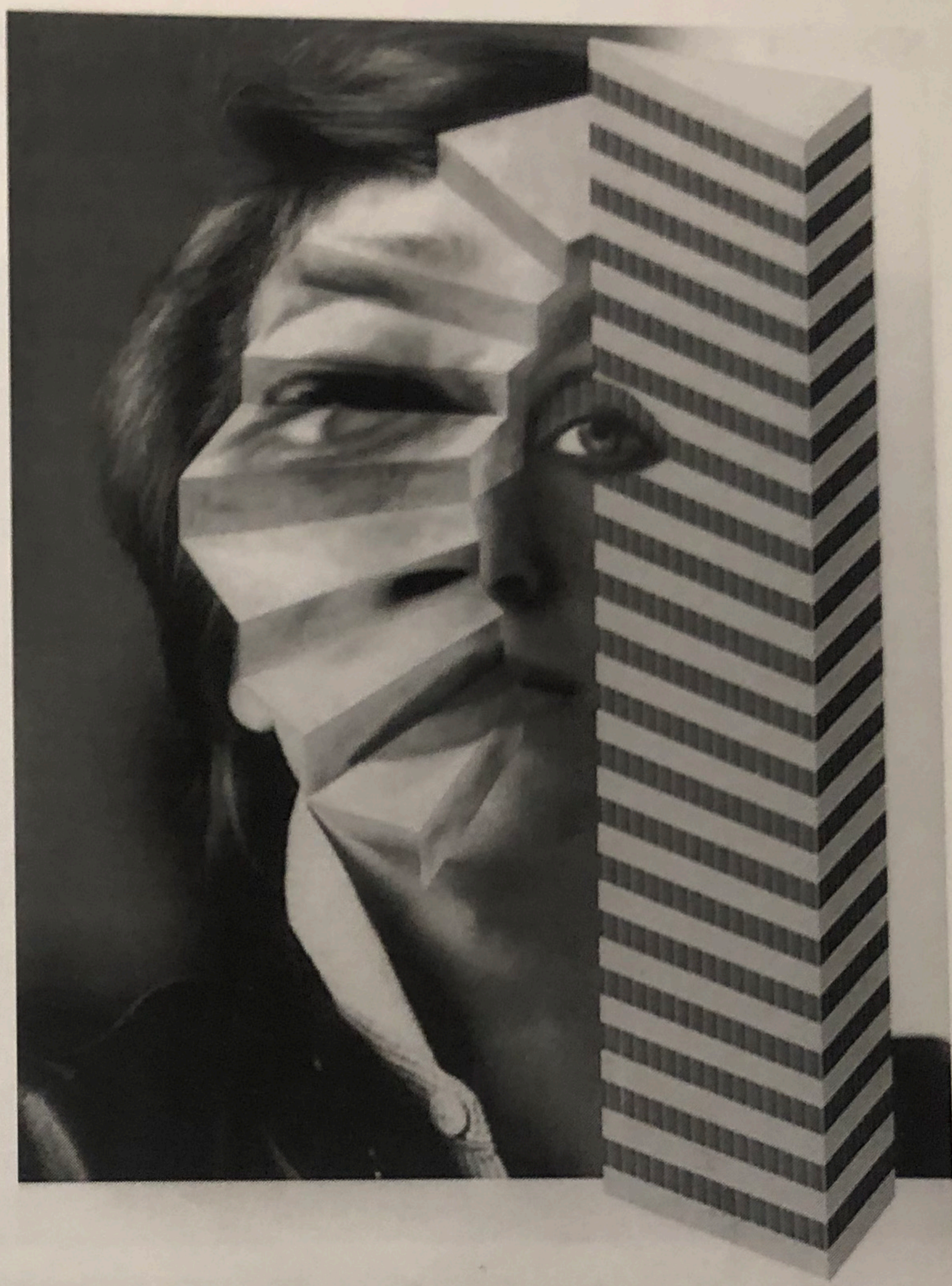
Will there be a division of gender in Cyberspace? It depends upon the programs, on the models created by virtual spaces. Could a new social model not also be created in virtual space? It definitely depends on who creates the models. But the technologies have also contributed to the visibility of the woman as a subject – the way they were used and analysed by women themselves. I do not want to call it the woman becoming a subject because this means the woman was not a subject beforehand.

Her subject status in culture and society is questionable – the old conceptions of the subject that contributed to oppression are what must be broken open. Deconstructing the image of the woman that is defined by mass media and inflicted by culture and defining this image through one's self is the feminist intention.

Body Art and the use of technologies allow the history of the woman in the objective/subject relationship in a public space to be questioned. Expanded Cinema and Body Art, in part, had the same goals as Cyberspace does today.

The concept and intention of my body performances and Expanded Cinema works from the '60s and '70s was to create and realize new forms of communication, to show the body as a sign and carrier of information as personal and social information, and to produce an interaction between the body and technology.¹ [...]

Today, the electronic double can already react to me. For me, that is all very exciting. I see the continuation of the work of the '60s and '70s in this, a further development from participation to interaction. I can also imagine that brainwaves



will be able to influence and change the formation, compiling and sequence of images. An idea that was already conceived in the '60s that is now moving into view again with interactive technology.

In the ego-production of the body the question of female identity and one's own self is also raised. Expanded Cinema and partly also body performances that are connected to technology have created spaces that change perception, the perception of reality, and the real body. Just like Cyberspace's agenda.

In the presentation of the self, personal experience is the most important starting point. This way, new technologies and also the experience with them expand new, different, yet unknown, hybrid technological possibilities.

They also show us the blurring differences between natural and artificial, between determination by one's own consciousness and the determination from outside, the foreign determination.

The artificial image changes the perception of reality. There is, however, no claim to the totality of the truth of reality, neither from the feminist nor from the socio-political and cultural standpoint. We must deal with all the contradictions that are produced by our image of the world by the historical image of time.

It is important in this process to recognise the differences in the contradictions, not the solutions for these contradictions.

From a conversation with Valie Export in 1992, University of Wisconsin and Dortmund, first published in: 'Feministische Streifzüge durch's Punkte Universum', Hutschenreuther/Schurian – femme totale (ed.), Edition Filmwerkstatt, Dortmund, 1993, pp. 27–35; translation by Rosanne Altstatt.

I Valie Export refers during the following to 'Hyperbulie' (1973) as well as 'Imaginations of Movement' (1974). – Ed.

Figs. Valie Export, 'Stand Up Sit Down', digital photograph, 1989; Valie Export, 'Self-portrait with staircase and high-rise', digital photograph, 1989.