

# The Body and the (New) Media

The question, whether history and the functions of the new media have contributed to changes in traditional gender images and perspectives, has also been adopted by feminist theories and art productions. On the one hand for example, certain pornographic pages in the internet or some computer games not seldom perpetuate traditional concepts of gender. On the other hand, the question to what extent the net can function as a "subversive site" has also been discussed within the frame of feminist theories in relation to new, especially digital media. Utopian and esthetical concepts that female theorists as well as artists work with have been developed, like for example the figure of the cyborg that is crossing the gender roles.

The internet hardly offers a "completely new space" where other gender identities or libidinous economies would be produced "all by themselves". As a space that cannot be characterized through the traditional notions of "private" and "public" it creates possibilities for communication under different conditions.

Visibilities (as well as controlling gazes) are apparently at first sight separated from the bodies handling the computers without becoming invalid or "out of the game". Fantasy-guided self-portrayals may under certain conditions subvert the effects of attributions in the "real" world of visible bodies. As *fantasies* however, they are at the same time able to articulate and produce a "reality" of the subject with regard to its multitudinous and potentially contradictory identifications.

The new (digital) media does however not just replace the old ones. Interactions and interrelations between the different image processing for example can be acknowledged. Such overlaps should not only be described from a technical but also from a culture-studies' point of view - thus allowing "old" media like photography and film here to become a topic in which the effects of new technological developments are reflected.

In the context of new reproduction technologies for example, new procedures of differentiation can be observed that partly change the field of human

reproduction that is traditionally regarded as a "natural" phenomenon occurring on site of the female-maternal body and separate it from the body. These processes again affect also the images of this body or motherhood in its different medial stagings, transmissions and its gender-specific "attributions".

In the discussions about the chances and dangers of new media and technologies, one traditional figure of speech beside others may repeat itself, that opposes the body as a representative of "nature" to technology. Such a figure has to be problematized against the background of historical research especially from the feminist point of view. It has been shown that "bodies" are being created only in interactions between texts, images and programs or their structures generating and transporting meaning in different ways and in the always already medialized perception.

The mass media may for example transport ideals individuals identify with in different ways and that are constitutive also for self-concepts of the "own" body.

Even in case of a "face to face" contact the perception of bodies again functions as medially transmitted.

"The body" is affected by such production mechanisms even in those aspects that (in retrospective) cannot be completely grasped medially. Those aspects may mark a potential difference towards - normative - representations by media systems. - Media technologies and their applications (in correspondence with the technical and social implications) are without any doubt always objects and locations of fantasy and desire - thus creating another field for media-related artistic interventions!

The paper by the artists Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki deals with their creative trajectory and engagement in feminism and gender politics. Their women-centered "Cinema of the Body" repositions the relation between viewer and viewed in the cinematic process. The inter-media works of "The Angel Cycle" explore the concept of intersexuality as a radical gender identity. In "Sublime Disasters", their latest digital photography work, they approach the "monstrous" body as a visionary subversion of normality.

By exploring her own artistic biography as well Joanna Jones concentrates on her different phases of approaching body and body image and describes the artistic decisions upon the application of different technical media she has been experimenting with since the 60s of last century also in the historical context with other female and male artists: traditional nude drawing and painting, performance, film and video production and last but not least the own body as a tool as well as collage and montage of text and image in the digital construction of superimposed body images.

In her essay "The Construction of Gender in Photographs of Children" Hannelore Schwedes questions the construction of gender in photographs of children relying to a constructivist theory of image interpretation that must re-

spectively consider the complex relationship of ideals as well as their adoption and realization or changes. The family is perceived as a location, where gender roles are being learned and gender-relevant attributions are realized. The family album is the eloquent expression of these processes and as such it makes the identification possible of the characteristics according to gender relations valid in those. Such family pictures are used in public and advertising because a happy family is connected to positive emotions, thus becoming suitable on the one hand for transporting certain normative ideas via the gender relation and on the other hand for transferring a positive atmosphere to the advertised product.

Ulrike Bergermann's essay "Hollywood Reproductions: Mothers, Clones and *Aliens*" deals with the new images on motif-related and technical level that are being developed due to the changed "readabilities" of the body. Due to cloning biological reproduction is no longer traditionally restricted to the female body and the heterosexual act - the technique of image processing, film-technical reproduction have changed significantly at the same time. Digital copies produce identical artefacts, comparable to the genetically identical copies of creatures by cloning. Those irritate the time linearity and hierarchy of generations like the familiar gender roles. Hollywood's science-fiction production gives the answer to that: alien resurrection shows new modes of reproduction, new mothers and new image processing.

*Insa Härtel, Sigrid Schade*

Translation: Sabine Melchert