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with special focus on VALIE EXPORT“

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A TRUTH IN ART IS THAT WHOSE  
CONTRADICTORY IS ALSO TRUE

(Oscar Wilde)

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. VALIE EXPORT – A Biography.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3. A short history of the concept of Performance.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. Performance Studies .....	17
3.2. The concept of liminality .....	20
3.3. Performances .....	21
3.3.1. The subject-object division.....	21
3.3.2. Black Mountain College.....	22
3.3.3. “Lifelike” art.....	23
3.3.4. Happening.....	24
3.3.5. Fluxus .....	27
3.4. Performance and Performativity .....	27
3.4.1. The concept of performativity .....	27
3.4.2. Performativity and identity.....	30
3.4.3. How does representation work? .....	33
<b>4. Body-Art or: the Art on the Body.....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1. Body art of Viennese Actionism.....	38
4.2. Feminist Actionism.....	41
4.3. The Female Body in Performance .....	44
<b>5. VALIE .....</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1. Technologies of the body in VALIE EXPORT’s works .....	49
5.1.1. The female body as sexualized object .....	49
5.1.2. The vulnerable body .....	50
5.1.3. The oppressed body .....	51
5.1.4. The socially and culturally constructed body .....	51
5.1.5. The dead and fragmented body .....	52

5.1.6.	The divided body .....	52
5.1.7.	The two-foldedness of the body .....	53
5.1.8.	The written body.....	54
5.1.9.	The body as source of language and speech.....	55
<b>6.</b>	<b>EXPORT's works as cultural texts.....</b>	<b>56</b>
6.1.	Parody .....	56
6.1.1.	Touch Cinema (1968).....	57
6.1.2.	Genital Panic (1969).....	58
6.1.3.	From the Underdog File (1969).....	59
6.1.4.	The Birth Madonna (1976).....	60
6.2.	Mimesis.....	61
6.2.1.	Body Configurations (1972-1982) .....	62
6.2.2.	Body Superimpositions with Historical Reproductions (1974).....	64
6.2.3.	<i>Venus and Mars</i> (1976) .....	66
6.2.4.	Invisible Adversaries (1977) .....	67
6.3.	Citation.....	69
6.3.1.	Kausalgie (1973) .....	70
6.3.2.	Salzburg Cycle (2001).....	71
6.4.	Symbolism .....	73
6.4.1.	Syntagma (1983) .....	73
6.4.2.	Glottis (2007).....	77
6.4.3.	Heads – Aphaeresis (2002).....	79
6.4.4.	Needle (1996) .....	80
6.5.	The representation of pain and self-harming .....	81
6.5.1.	Hyperbulie (1973) .....	82
6.5.2.	Eros/ion (1971).....	83
6.5.3.	... remote ... remote ... passages (1973) .....	84
6.5.4.	Identity-Transfer (1972) .....	86

<b>7. Back then and today – still a restricted code? .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>8. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>9. Abstract.....</b>	<b>96</b>
9.1. Abstract English.....	96
9.2. Abstract German .....	97
<b>10. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>98</b>
10.1. Books.....	98
10.2. Articles .....	101
10.3. Other Sources: .....	106
10.4. List of Illustrations .....	109
<b>11. Index .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>12. Curriculum Vitae.....</b>	<b>118</b>

## Foreword

Is there anything that cannot be expressed by an image or sign?

(EXPORT, text to the laser installation, exhibition

*Time and Countertime*, Belvedere Vienna, 2010)

During my interdisciplinary studies of American English and Media & Communication, the question raised in the epitaph appeared more than once. What was not obvious is how this question is interconnected with the arts and aesthetics. By virtue of my developing interest in Gender Studies and Body Art, however, over time the relationship between the two assumed a definite form – the academic examination of art and the body becoming increasingly important. My involvement in Gender Studies and my personal interest in the arts converge in the question of how the body can be a means of expressing gender issues in the arts. So my focus is on performance art because artists literally embody their feelings and associations with their gender. Within this topic, my research question is how American feminist artists play with the concept of gender in performance art, how they challenge gender stereotypes and what strategies they use to deconstruct gender norms. The examination of this question is based on the Austrian performance artist VALIE EXPORT and her works. As will become clear throughout the course of this thesis, I position myself within the discourse of gender and tie in with a post-feminist approach. Furthermore, what interests me most is the artistic adaptation of gender differences and the realization of this in a performative context. I chose an Austrian artist for an American Studies topic for the following reasons: EXPORT gave lectures in the United States for several years and worked at several universities, art institutions and art academies, for instance, as a guest professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee from 1983-1987. She also knew important American feminist artists at that time, such as Carolee Schneeman. Furthermore, her works can be compared with U.S. artists like Yoko Ono, Martha Rosler, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and many more. Since this thesis has a limited scale, it is not possible to respond to the whole range of American feminist artists, but I will try to outline connections to the most important ones. The connection to these artists raises another question: how does VALIE EXPORT rework “American” concepts of



performance art into an Austrian context? This question, amongst others, will be clarified in the following chapters.

The first part of the thesis discusses terms and definitions as well as up to date interpretations and developments, which allows a more precise analysis in the following chapters where I examine performance art. Examples of performances will be examined and discussed within their historical context. Moreover, the difference between the two concepts performance and performativity will be identified using Judith Butler's theories, specifically her concept of the performative gender. After that, I will investigate Body Art with a special focus on the female body in performance. In conclusion, there will be a discussion of difference between the rather male dominated Viennese Actionism as counterpart to the Feminist Actionism.

The second part of the thesis exclusively analyses selected works of VALIE EXPORT's oeuvre in comparison with examples of American feminist artists. The sample analyzed is partly based on my personal interest in certain pieces, but also on categories that have been specifically compiled for the analysis. Subsequently, practical examples will be demonstrated and reinforced by theoretical interpretation.

It should be pointed out that this thesis is based on research from a European as well as an American perspective and, therefore, the position it develops is a convergence between how performance art occurs in the U.S. but also in Europe, specifically in an Austrian context. This approach was judged to be valid as it is my aim to show that VALIE EXPORT reworks "American" concepts of performance art within an Austrian context.

## 1. Introduction

### The Embodiment of the Self

I was born in the clinic that belongs to the city of Linz  
I drank at the breast that belonged to my mother  
I hid from the bombs in the land that belonged to England  
I dressed myself in the clothing that belonged to my sister  
I cried after my father's death belonged to the fatherland  
I played with the balls that belonged to the kindergarten  
I have read books that belonged to the bookshops  
I have ridden in trains that belonged to the nation  
I have sat in chairs that belonged to others  
I have lived off the money that belonged to my friend  
I have breathed the air that belonged to god  
That is the life that belongs to me  
I have shouted with the voice that belongs to me  
I have bitten with the teeth that belong to me  
I have scratched with the nails that belong to me  
I have cried with the tears that belong to me  
I have seen with the eyes that belong to me  
I have thought with the thoughts that belong to me  
I have laughed with the laugh that belongs to me  
I have kissed with the mouth that belongs to me  
I have slept with the dreams that belong to me  
That is the life that belongs to me<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> VALIE EXPORT, "*poems*", 31f.

This self-portrait composed by VALIE EXPORT can be seen not just as a retrospective view of her life, but also as a summary of her artistic works. Her performances, video installations, movies and drawings all deal, more or less, with the construction of an image of the self, and with the question for the possibility to construct and to create identity. This self-image of identity can be best perceived in her performances because she embodies the self and carries the inside of the body to the outside, thus making it visible for viewers. The center of her work is always the body – of how it is mediated, conceived, sensed and torn apart – and the body as an object in a phallocratic society, where women only exist as constructs of the male gaze. A society, that is, with all its norms and regulations, created and collected by a male predominance. The woman's image has always been an image of a woman created by man. This statement is not only valid for art history but also for advertising, fashion and amusement. With immediate confrontation, EXPORT operates against this perception of the woman and of female sexuality. In EXPORT's works, the woman is in constant search for an answer to the following question: "Who am I? Where the deuce do I exist when everything that characterizes me as a "woman" is an "incarnate" and reproducible construct?" (Von Braun, 201). EXPORT's works provide an answer to this question. She is where her life belongs to her, where she fully agrees with her body to the extent that her identity and her body form a unity. But the body is not only picked out as a central theme of male construction. It is also a work of art. EXPORT writes and inscribes upon her body; she has her body tattooed with the female symbol of a garter on her upper thigh, calling for a feminization of the arts. Therefore, her body is a communicative tool, a tool she uses to bring meaning into the world. As in Marshall McLuhan's philosophical expression "the medium is the message", in EXPORT's art the body is the medium that carries the message.

On the occasion of the artist's seventieth birthday, May 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, two museums dedicated an exhibition to VALIE EXPORT: the Belvedere in Vienna, and the Lentos in Linz. Vienna chose to do so because the artist works and lives in the city and Linz because it is her native town. *Time and Countertime*. We can simplify the intended meaning of this title to: forward and backward. The title was chosen for an exhibition with the body on the foreground, and it seems to underline the corporal decline and break-up of the body. Forward and backward. In the beginning of life we are children, in the end, we are again. Forward and backward – a life cycle.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the deconstruction of gender stereotypes in the performance art of the Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT and to explore strategies which enable the artist to achieve her goals. Furthermore, my analysis shall show how far the artist adopts an “American” approach of performance art in order to embody her proposition. My research questions and main hypotheses are therefore:

In what way does VALIE EXPORT play with the concept of gender in her performance art? How does she challenge gender stereotypes and what are her strategies to deconstruct gender norms? How does VALIE EXPORT rework “American” concepts of performance art into an Austrian context?

EXPORT works with feminist theories and the concept of gender politics to challenge gender stereotypes in her works of art and to refer to the question of how a woman’s role in society has been determined. She does this by using her own body as a communicative tool and perceiving it as occupying an intermediate position between self-realization and external determination by society. Therefore, VALIE EXPORT positions herself within a discourse of equality where she does not align gender differences, but instead analyses them and confronts herself and the audience with them. Furthermore, the artist engages a specific American performance discourse and appropriates these elements for the Austrian context.

Having identified the historical background of performance art, as well as of Performance Studies, and after having given an overview of the most important events and bench marks in the field of performance, the aim is to analyze selected works by VALIE EXPORT and elaborate strategies that are used in order to challenge gender stereotypes. The focus is not exclusively on performances but also on conceptual movies, videos and installations created by the artist. These works then will be divided into a set of devices which consist of important aspects of artistic theory, such as parody, mimesis, citation, symbolism and the representation of pain and self-harming.

Based on these concepts, there will then be a discussion of the strategies used by the artist in order to deconstruct gender norms. Methodologically, I will use Gender Theory by Judith Butler. Butler is one of the most important pioneers in the field of Gender Studies. She deconstructed gender stereotypes by challenging gender norms, deconstructing gender hierarchies and positioning a new perspective of seeing gender

and sex as constructed by society and culture. In her performances, EXPORT tries to make visible what Butler claims theoretically. Therefore, EXPORT's works can be analyzed against the background of this feminist philosopher's theory very effectively. Additionally, I will use performance theory alongside the main approaches of art history in order to analyze some selected works of VALIE EXPORT.

## 2. VALIE EXPORT – A Biography

It is high time that the women use art as a means of expression to influence everybody's consciousness, to allow our ideas to enter the social construct of reality. The question of what women can give to art and what art can give to women can be answered like this: transferring the specific situation of woman into the artistic context establishes signs and signals that are new artistic forms of expression that serve to change the historical understanding of women as well. (*Split: Reality*, 205)

VALIE EXPORT, Prof. Dr. h.c. media and performance artist and filmmaker, was born in Linz on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1940 under the name Waltraud Lehner. Today, she lives and works in Vienna. In 1967, at the age of 27, she changed her name to VALIE EXPORT, an artistic logo to be used in capital letters only. When I asked her about the impact of the name during the interview I did with her she said that she wanted her own identity, her own name, neither her father's nor her former husband's.<sup>2</sup> EXPORT stands for leaving the secure harbor; it represents her intention to bring her identity into the world. The



name is also registered in her passport. The idea is that women should write their names in capitals in order to become visible in the world.<sup>3</sup> The name EXPORT was also a popular brand of cigarettes – her first object of art. When VALIE EXPORT came to Vienna in 1969, in order to study design, Viennese Actionism was in full swing. She was driven to provide an answer to the group's concepts with her own Feminist Actionism, a counter movement to the male dominated avant-garde.

1. VALIE EXPORT: *SMART EXPORT*, 1970.

From the beginning, her works were based on media, including body performances, digital and conceptual photography, experimental and feature films, documentary films, 'expanded cinema', laser installations, objects and sculptures, body-material interactions and also texts on contemporary feminism and history. From 1981 she has given lectures at numerous European and U.S. universities, art academies and art

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<sup>2</sup> The interview was done via mail on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. EXPORT'S answer in an interview with the *Standard*, May 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

institutions, including: the Art School of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; the School of Visual Arts, New York City; the Art Institute of Chicago; the San Francisco State University; the University of California, Berkeley; the Columbia University, New York; the College of Applied Arts, Vienna and the European Summer Academy, Berlin; just to name a few. Furthermore, she was professor and guest professor at different universities, such as the Department of Visual Arts and Film at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the Media Department of the San Francisco Art Institute, the August Coppola Institute at California State University San Francisco and the Department of Visual Arts in Munich as well as in Vienna. Since 1968 she has presented her work internationally, in solo exhibitions and performances as well as at international art exhibitions. Those include, for instance, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London), the MUMOK (Vienna), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Tate Modern (London), Centre George Pompidou (Paris), documenta 12 (Kassel), the Shanghai Art Museum (Shanghai), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Seoul) and the Biennale di Venezia (Venice). In addition, VALIE EXPORT has also participated in international film festivals, such as the International London Film Festival, Filmex Los Angeles, the Berlin International Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, Women's International Film Festival Montreal and the 6<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of Vancouver.<sup>4</sup>

Today, VALIE EXPORT is one of the most important spokeswomen for the feminist avant-garde in Austria. She was strongly influenced by the developments of the 60s, such as student movements and the feminist movement. Therefore her works of art focus on the repressive elements of society and the alienation of the individual. She announces the conflict of the female self-actualization as well as the social codification of woman. In her works, EXPORT seeks to dissolve objectification of women and to reveal their self-articulation. She also tries to visualize the breakaway from the tradition of within art where women exist as an ideal of the male projection and gaze. A preoccupation with the female body and its identity acts as a leitmotiv throughout her installations, films, videos and performances. She provides these topics with meaning

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<sup>4</sup>Information on the biography of VALIE EXPORT was taken from her homepage ([www.valieexport.at](http://www.valieexport.at)) as well as from the exhibition catalogue accompanying her current exhibition 'Time and Counter time' at Belvedere, Vienna and Lentos, Linz. However, this thesis includes only selected biographical parts of the artist's life as the main focus is not the artist herself but her works and how her performances use the body to deconstruct perceptions of gender.

For more information on VALIE EXPORT's work, see also EXPORT, VALIE. "VALIE EXPORT. Works from 1968-1975" and Szely, Sylvia. *EXPORT LEXIKON*.

through versatile expressions of her own body language. EXPORT's affection for the human body, along with her deconstruction of social, sexual and cultural taboos, are the most significant elements of her work. The point at which she began to use the body as a medium for art coincided with the international movement known as "Body Art", which constituted the first wave of performance art in the late sixties.<sup>5</sup> The development of avant-garde forms of art as well as Actionism, Happening, Expanded Cinema and Performance created opportunities to develop this body language.<sup>6</sup> Having been in contact with the male dominated Viennese Actionism, she soon felt discriminated against and, as a woman, unaccepted in the milieu of male avant-gardists. Although she was not a member of the group, she was still strongly influenced by their actions and rituals. As a counter movement she developed her Feminist Actionism because she felt the need to express her female experience. But she did not eschew the extreme modes of Actionism. Her video *Aktionskunst International*, from 1989, highlights new starting points for the artistic movements, demonstrating how events in the 50s and 60s and provoked developments in the arts. She interviewed the pioneers of performance and action art, including Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Carole Schneeman, Gina Pane and Karen Finley and also philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard. In doing so, she examined the phenomenon of art and its fusion with reality as well as the specific characteristics of Happening, Fluxus and other forms of art. Video and film have always been important issues in EXPORT's art. Her avant-garde movies concocted a cocktail of reality, film and action, the so-called Expanded Cinema. That is an artistic means which exceeded all conventional film projects by expanding traditional cinema and, therefore, expanding reality. The human body, especially the female body, is her film footage. Within Expanded Cinema, the artist breaks with and deconstructs traditional forms of cinema. In this context, Expanded Cinema became known as "a radically liberated cinema" (Eifler, 112).

VALIE EXPORT brought a new female perspective to contemporary art and its issues. The themes in all her artistic works – the search for female identity, the division of body and psyche, the woman as an object in the male world, pressure, class and, last but not least, the performativity of gender and the process of being aware – emphasize vulnerability and inner conflict, but also a search for the meaning of life. These themes

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT – Bild-Risse*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lamb-Faffelberger, 93-105.



are best described and put into context within her performances. EXPORT is her own author; she is the one who is fully aware of and in charge of her body language. What she cannot control is the audience's reaction to her performances.

### 3. A short history of the concept of Performance

#### 3.1. Performance Studies

Despite its international expansion, performance art, as well as Performance Studies, can be considered 'American' phenomena, both in historical and theoretical terms. My focus in my presentation of this field will be on performance and how it has developed in the United States. Marvin Carlson, one of the most distinguished American theater studies scholar, says the following on performance:

The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as "performance", or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself. The difference between doing and performing, according to this way of thinking, would seem to be not in the frame of theatre versus real life but in an attitude – we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance. (Carlson, 70)

The statement made by Carlson shows the importance of performance and the need for a definition and historiography. In the following chapters, performance will be used exclusively to mean performance art, the medium of artistic expression as it was used from the 1970s onwards. RoseLee Goldberg published the first history of performance art in 1979, denoting performance as an "avant avant garde" (Goldberg, 7), which means that artists used performance as a tool to deconstruct categories and identify new directions. Performance, according to her, is,

a way of appealing directly to a large public, as well as shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture. [...] The work may be presented solo or with a group, with lightning, music or visuals made by the performance artist him or herself, or in collaboration, and performed in places ranging from an art gallery or museum to an 'alternative space', a theatre, café, bar or street corner. Unlike theatre, the performer *is* the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative. The performance might be a series of intimate gestures or large-scale visual theatre, lasting from a few minutes to many hours; it might be performed only once or repeated several times, with or without a prepared script, spontaneously improvised, or rehearsed over many months. (Goldberg, 8)

There are two major tendencies in performance art in the form it has emerged in Europe and the United States: on the one hand performances implement banal and every day activities, but on the other hand, they account for different genres of so-called cultural performances. These distinctions were also made by Marvin Carlson.<sup>7</sup> In his view, these banal and every day activities involve the display of skills, whereas the cultural performances contain skills that are coded by culture and therefore interpreted as a certain behavior. The term itself was created by the American Etiologist Milton Singer in 1959.<sup>8</sup> He defined performance as an artistic event with a limited time frame, a beginning, and an end; but also as having a specified program, a set of artists, an audience and a venue. At that time, performance was understood as having multiple levels. One was the cultural level, that is drama and acting on stage, and the other was the level regarding performance as insubstantial, as something people do in their leisure time. However, this view has changed through performance no longer being regarded as entertainment but as a way of creating meaning and reinventing the world.<sup>9</sup> It is nearly impossible to establish a generally agreed definition for the term performance. Goldberg's attempt to define performance is rather broadly based; she tries to not tie herself down completely to one definition. Two important founders of Performance Studies, Richard Schechner and Peggy Phelan, provide more demanding and precise definitions. In Schechner's words, performance is famously defined as "restored behavior", (Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 29) a view of performance that provides a certain distance between the self and the behavior of this self. In other words, it describes the distance between the actor and the role he/she is playing on stage, the embodiment of certain skills. This is a very progressive view of performance, as Schechner has already identified the importance of the physical appearance, the body, in performance art. Peggy Phelan, an American feminist scholar who held a chair in Performance Studies at the University of New York from 1993 to 1996, has authored several books about performance. She is also considered to be one of the founders of performance studies. She provides a rather politicized perception on the phenomenon of performance:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Carlson, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 113-114. For more information, see also Fischer-Lichte, „Performance Kunst und Ritual“, and Bell, *Theories of performance*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Soyini/Hamera, 11-17.

The pleasure of resemblance and repetition produces both psychic assurance and political fetishizations. Representation reproduces the Other as the Same. Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the Other as the Same is not assured. (Phelan, 3)

For Phelan, the concept of performance is very much associated with representation. To her, performance is a means of expressing the self in the world of the Other, and, consequently, combining these two by means of repetition and political provocation. She even sees performance as “akin to language, [as a] universal expression of human signification” (Phelan in Schechner *Performance Studies*, 13). The comparison of performance with language is very interesting in terms of the representation of the self. Life is like a stage; we act our own lives in a stage surrounding and, through this enactment, represent ourselves. When speaking, we use language as a means of expressing our thoughts and needs – ourselves. This is exactly what performance artists do – express their selves through the enactment and representation of one’s self. Performances come about in many different forms and in many different situations, and as a result are considered a “broad spectrum of human actions” (Schechner *Performance Studies*, 2). This spectrum ranges from

ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. (Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 2)

Victor Turner, a Scottish-born anthropologist (who also expanded theories surrounding the concept of liminality, which I will discuss later), regards performance as a

dialectic of flow, that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and “reflexivity”, in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen “in action”, as they shape and explain behavior. (Turner in Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 19)

The focus here is on performance as spontaneous movement. This is the kind of performance this thesis is about: performance as something spontaneous, as something not well planned out, or even not planned and organized at all, as something that is produced out of feelings and not out of preparations. A performance in these terms cannot be planned at all, because feelings cannot be planned either. They just occur and

that is what performance artists like to express and represent. Schechner very much ties himself to Performance Studies in order to explain the concept of performance:

Performance studies is “inter” - in between. It is intergeneric, interdisciplinary, intercultural - and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resists or rejects definition. As a discipline, PS cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently “in between” and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly. This indecision (if that’s what it is) or multidirectionality drives some people crazy. For others, it’s the pungent and defining flavor of meat. PS assumes that we are living in a postcolonial world where cultures are colliding, interfering with each other, and energetically hybridizing. PS does not value ‘purity’. (Schechner in Phelan 1998, 360)

Performance Studies interacts between concepts. It does not only combine performance events like theatre, dance and ritual, it also combines gender, race and class. Schechner’s view is also shared by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. In her article simply named “Performance Studies”, she points out new directions and sources of Performance Studies. New study objects are added, boundaries are blurred and destabilized, and it just draws from so many fields that a definition would not be possible.<sup>10</sup> She also sees a connection to the body, and she tries to theorize about the “kinds of knowledge that are located in the body” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 50).

### 3.2. The concept of liminality

A recent approach followed up by several theorists is the concept of liminality. Jon McKenzie argues in his essay “The Liminal-Norm” that the concept is the most concise answer to the question of what performance actually is. Liminality, that is “a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic ‘in betweenness’ allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed” (McKenzie, 27). Liminality is a term deriving from Latin *limen* meaning ‘threshold’.<sup>11</sup> The ambiguity inherent in this term accurately describes the state of both the performer and the viewer during performances. The participants somehow abandon the ready-made network of categories that show them their right place in society; there are no more

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 43-46.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Turner’s definition of liminality in Turner, 79-87.

checkpoints. “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 79). Performance Studies came into existence with the radically changing mood in artistic and intellectual circles during the late twentieth century. Furthermore, the world was equipped with an ever changing set of information networks with the advent of computers, cell phones and the internet. In Schechner’s view, Performance Studies is an academic discipline to answer the questions and needs developing in this new world. In contrast to other academic disciplines, Performance Studies is more hyphenated, more fluid than other disciplines, it is more adaptable to the phenomenon itself.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3. Performances

#### 3.3.1. The subject-object division

Until recently, the concept of performance has primarily applied to theatre, music and dance. From the 1960s onward, performance has no longer been something that can be identified precisely, boundaries between different genres started to blur and a generalization is no longer possible. Additionally, performers as well as scholars become aware of the subject-object distinction which is considered a very important factor within the development of performance art. In Fischer-Lichte’s view, performance accomplished a situation in which two relations were defined in a new way – the relation between subject and object, that is between performer and viewer, and the relation between the body as material and identity value, that is the signifier and the signified.<sup>13</sup> For Fischer-Lichte, the distinction of subject and object is essential for a hermeneutic approach to performance, because only then can the artifact be an object of free interpretation for the subject, the viewer. But is this not exactly what performance tries to dissolve – the distinction itself? Performance artists like Valie Export or Marina Abramović create anything but an artifact. As so many other artists, they use their own

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 25-27. For more information, see also Schechner, *Performance Theory*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 19.

bodies, prepare it and change it in front of the viewers' eyes. By doing so, the viewer is suddenly involved, he/she is on the same level as the performer. There is no longer a distinction or a boundary between the subject and object any more - the subject *is* the object.

### 3.3.2. Black Mountain College

Performance art expanded in the United States in the late thirties with the emergence of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Although the artistic expression was born in the U.S., the development of European performance art paralleled it in the late fifties when it was widely accepted among artists as a medium to communicate messages to the world. Black Mountain College was a small group of twenty-two students and nine faculty members, meeting in a building surrounded by mountains and valley in North Carolina in 1933 and staying there without restraint. Soon the meeting developed into a summer school that was held every year and attracted artists as well as musicians, writers and dancers, amongst them none were more respected than John Cage, a young musician, Merce Cunningham, a young dancer, and Xanti Schawinsky. Cage and Cunningham started coming up with their own ideas and collaborated on several projects for the summer school each year.<sup>14</sup> One notable event at Black Mountain College presumably created the original precursor for performance art as such. It was an evening performance taking place at the dining hall of the College. The reason it created the precursor was that several artistic methods were used at the same time: Cage read from a doctrine, Robert Rauschenberg, at that time a visiting student at Black Mountain College, played old records and hung paintings he had created overhead, whilst another artist, David Tudor, played the piano, and two more read poetry. In addition, slides and film clips were projected onto the ceilings.<sup>15</sup> The second reason for this being the starting point of performance was that there was no time for preparation. The performers were given time brackets to fill out and "anything that happened after that happened in the observer himself" (Goldberg, 126). By 1956, news of the events taking place at Black Mountain College spread to New York and soon the classes included artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, an American artist who coined the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Goldberg's history of performance art in Goldberg, 121-125.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Goldberg's history of performance art in Goldberg, 126.

term “Happening” (which I will explain later), George Brecht and Dick Higgins. The next step after this so-called New School was Live art, including not only performances but also contemporary paintings. This was the time when Kaprow’s famous “*18 Happenings in 6 Parts*” was staged as a premiere at the Reuben Gallery in New York.

### 3.3.3. “Lifelike” art

“Lifelike” art, as created by Allan Kaprow, is art that is related to everyday life. In his actions, Kaprow highlights and accentuates behavior in ordinary life situations. He, for instance, points out the preparation of a meal or the remaining footsteps when one is walking through sand.<sup>16</sup> As I have said before, performances do not typically involve rehearsal or preparation. Of course, there are performances which are prepared beforehand and, subsequently, put on stage. Much as everyday life involves preparation and practice, performances can need some rehearsal. This thesis, however, explicitly focuses on performances that are individual and, performances that are not deliberately prepared in the majority of cases. In performance art, many events are so-called one-time events. It is this uniqueness, this originality that accounts for performances. Coming back to the definition of performance as “restored behavior,” Schechner claims that although the performative act is unique and unrivaled, its components are still manifested as restored behaviors. I do not agree with this statement because every performance and hence every single behavior in it is unique and cannot be precisely replicated. A performance in one specific surrounding may be very different from the same performance on another day and, therefore, it is not possible to speak of restored behaviors in this sense, at least in my view. Our actions, physical or verbal, may look the same but in truth they are not, they are neither prepared nor rehearsed in any way. Everything, not just the surrounding, but also body language or mood, makes every performance unique. For example, we can look at a performance by VALIE EXPORT called “*Genital Panic*”, performed in 1969. In this performance, EXPORT wore pants with the crotch cut out and went through the rows in a Munich porn cinema in order to show the spectators a ‘real’ vagina. Afterwards, she sat down on a chair holding a gun at the spectators. The same performance was reenacted by Marina Abramović in 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. She did the same as EXPORT did; she sat

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 29.



down on a chair, wearing pants with the crotch cut out, and stared at the spectators while holding a gun in her hands. The picture was the same, but the performance was not. The material and the action itself were the same, but the intended effect on the audience was not. Just take into account the time. EXPORT's performance took place in 1969, and Abramovic's reenactment in 2005, which is a difference of thirty-six years. As we all know, there have been important steps since 1969 including the feminist movement in three waves and, therefore, I do not think that we can speak of a restored behavior here as there is a huge difference between these performances, and because the response in the audience was completely different in 2005 than it was in 1969. Notwithstanding Schechner's claim regarding restored behavior, he himself holds the view that it

may be that a film or a digitized performance art piece will be the same at each showing. But the context of every reception makes each instance different. Even though every "thing" is exactly the same, each event in which the "thing" participates is different. The uniqueness of an event does not depend in its materiality solely but also on its interactivity – and the interactivity is always in flux. [...] Thus, ironically, performances resist that which produces them. (Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 30)

#### 3.3.4. Happening

Performance art, as did Happening, originated to some extent in painting. In the early beginnings, Happenings were action collages and action paintings. The focus was not so much on the body itself but on the complete absorption of the physical expression in the action. The later Happenings then presented the body as their central point. Now, actions focused on the body and how it was integrated in the action. A Happening was, to a certain extent, a performance which focused on the body action of the performer with inclusion of the audience. Allan Kaprow described the process as follows:

The pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further onto the room, finally filled it entirely. Inasmuch as people visiting such Environments are moving, colored shapes too, and were counted "in", mechanically moving parts could be added, and parts of the created surroundings could then be rearranged like furniture at the artist's and visitors' discretion. And, logically since the visitor could and did speak, sound and

speech, mechanical and recorded, were also soon to be in order.” (Kaprow in Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 163)

What Kaprow wants to say here is that everything was possible, and everything that was possible actually happened. Classical harmonies broke down and a new evolution of artistic behavior opened up with possibilities that were not there before. Artists even started to use their own bodies and their own selves as material for their performances. There was a widespread protest attitude among artists and even youth developed their own movement, consider the Guerilla Art Action Group. The protests at that time had the intention of coalescing art and reality. A Happening is beside Fluxus, one of the most important directions of performance – or action art. Some authors, for instance Thomas Dreher, use the term Happening as a synonym for performance. This, in my opinion, is not adequate to describe a Happening. To me it is a very special form of performance, or action art, and therefore these terms cannot be used as synonyms. Participation is a big issue in a Happening. The author invites some or even all visitors to take part in the action. This participation is the border between performance art and Happening as participation is not always the case in general performances.<sup>17</sup>

The term was first used by Allan Kaprow for his performance at the Reuben Gallery, even before it became popular as a term describing spontaneous and unorganized events.<sup>18</sup> Kaprow’s “*18 Happenings in 6 Parts*” was one of the very first opportunities for the public to take part in a performance. The artist invited guests to actually perform in this Happening because he decided that “it was time to increase the responsibility of the observer” (Goldberg, 128). There is neither a rehearsal nor are there any script directions. Happenings are therefore very individual and spontaneous. In Kaprow’s “*18 Happenings in 6 Parts*”, three rooms were divided with plastic walls. The Happening consisted of six parts, of which each part contained three, taking place at the same time. The intervals were two minutes long and there was no applause between the parts. The performers read from plastic cards which they received from the author before the action. In the end, the visitors were left alone with the fragments that had been presented to them in the performance.<sup>19</sup> Because of their individual character,

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dreher, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Dreher on his homepage [www.netzliteratur.net](http://www.netzliteratur.net), 09.02.2011.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Goldberg’s description of Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 128-130.

Happenings are always only performed once and never re-enacted. As the founder of Happening, Kaprow outlined seven qualities of the concept:<sup>20</sup>

1. The line between art and life is fluid, even distinct.
2. The themes, materials, and actions of happenings are taken from anywhere but the arts.
3. Happenings should be performed in several widely spaced locales.
4. Time, which follows closely on special considerations should be variable and discontinuous.
5. Happenings should be performed only once.
6. Audiences should be eliminated entirely – everyone at a Happening participates in it.
7. The composition/sequence of events is not rational or narrational, but based on associations among various parts; or by chance.

The two main differences between Kaprow and his colleagues were that he distanced himself more and more from the traditional view of the world as a gallery. He wanted to carry the meaning of performances to the outside. The second difference was his relation to the body as he objectified the body. For him, physical appearance became important and that was only possible when working with the body, while using the body as an object in art.<sup>21</sup> In addition to Kaprow's outline, Dick Higgins identified presentation forms like Happenings as "intermedia" as in his view

much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media. The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure medium, usually suggests [...] a location in the field between the general area of art and those of life media. (Dreher, 39)

These intermedia actions are better known as Fluxus-events.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Kaprow's seven qualities of Happenings as seen in Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 166.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Allan Kaprow in an interview with VALIE EXPORT in the movie "Aktionskunst International" made by EXPORT in 1989, watched at the Generali Foundation's study room.

### 3.3.5. Fluxus

Fluxus, an art trend coined by Maciunas, means ‘floating’ and transgresses genres, such as music, dance, theatre and the fine arts.<sup>22</sup> Fluxus events are also so called intermedia actions, that is, the coalescence of different kinds of media. The difference to multimedia lies hereby in the transparency of the latter. Multimedia is easily distinguishable and simultaneous at the same time.<sup>23</sup> According to Thomas Dreher, Fluxus derives from Latin and means flowing or the flow. Fluxus is an international group of artists who created simple and non-dramatic events from 1962 onwards.<sup>24</sup> Fluxus, that is a “series of thoughts or concepts, either complete in themselves as work(s), or leading to documentation or to realization through external means” (Dreher, 127). Orienting themselves on art concepts like Dadaism and Futurism, American artists or artists living in the States, like Alison Knowles, Shigeko Kubota, Charlotte Moorman, Yoko Ono, Takako Saito, Mieko Shiomi, and Simone Forti joined the Fluxus movement.<sup>25</sup> Fluxus is, for instance, Land Art and minimal music, with the aim of deconstructing art in order to shift reality. The concentration is on the technical process as well as the musical character.

## 3.4. Performance and Performativity

### 3.4.1. The concept of performativity

The association between performance and performativity is quite obvious in terms of language, but the meaning of the latter is less well understood. Performativity is everywhere; it surrounds us in whatever we do – in daily behavior like eating or sleeping habits, in the media and in language. Performativity also exists in the arts and artists have been working with this concept since long before we even knew that they

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<sup>22</sup> Maciunas was a Lithuanian-born American artist. He is considered the founding father of Fluxus and the New York avant-garde and worked together with artists, such as Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Joseph Beuys. He organized important Fluxus concerts in Germany and the United States and also organized early Happenings.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Dick Higgins in an interview with VALIE EXPORT in the movie “Aktionskunst International” made by EXPORT in 1989, watched at the Generali Foundation’s study room.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Dreher on his homepage [www.netzliteratur.net](http://www.netzliteratur.net) about Fluxus, 09.02.2011.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibid.

were. It is a term with multiple meanings and, therefore, it is very hard to locate this concept and set limits to it. Among Performance Studies, performativity relates to a huge amount of topics, including not only the arts and their associated theatrical performance, but also the construction of social reality with the inclusion of gender and race.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is useful to divide this chapter, to first discuss the definition of the term itself, and then to explore its relation to the arts and the construction of performativity and identity, including a discussion of Judith Butler and her notion of performative gender. How can performativity be connected to performance?

We have already heard that performances mark identities, carry meaning and, in some cases relate to everyday activities in life (see Lifelike art). The concept of the performative was created by John Langshaw Austin, an English linguistic philosopher, who founded the theory of language in 1955 at Harvard University. In Austin's view, everything a human being says or does is an action. For instance promises, curses, apologies, contracts or judgments are actions.<sup>27</sup> To take Austin's words, the

term "performative" is derived, of course, from "perform" [...]: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action. [...] The uttering of words is, indeed, usually a, or even, the leading incident in the performance of the act [...]. (Austin in Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 124)

What Austin wants to make clear here is that the performative does not mean to make a statement, but actually indicates an action. Therefore, to use Austin's words, "[...] to say something is to *do* something" (Austin, 147). Like Austin, Mieke Bal, a Dutch philosopher and art historian, also sees performativity as "[...] the unique occurrence of an act in the here-and-now" (Bal, 176). For her, the two concepts of performance and performativity are closely related, but their relationship is at the same time very tense. The tension Bal refers to lies in the concept of time, as in her view, performativity correlates to the present and actuality, and performance is related to something which is anterior, which is in the past.<sup>28</sup> In addition to time itself, Bal sees a huge importance in memory in order to draw the connection from performance to performativity. For her, memory is something like a bridge from one concept to another, connecting the two of them:

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Schechner's understanding of Austin's concept of the performative in Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 123-125.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bal, 17.

Performance – playing a role, dancing, singing, executing a piece of music – is unthinkable without memory. [...] Performance connects the past of the writing to the present of the experience of the work. [This is] the common-sense ‘use-value’ of both: the interaction between performance, on the one hand, as the skilled and thoughtful production of, say, a spectacle based on the memorization of a score by performers, and performativity, on the other, as ‘the act itself’, in a unique present, where memory plays its tricks. (Bal, 176-177)

Very simply put, we can say that Bal associates performativity with the unique occurrence of an act in the present whereas performance is just the act of playing a role. So, performance is, to a large extent, related to the aesthetics and the mere occurrence of a phenomenon. This is where the concept of restored behavior comes in again. In Schechner’s view, restored behavior is a part of performance as he argues that performances are not fully unique, but rather the behavior is restored and repeated. Having this in mind, a performance could never be performative because performativity is described through the uniqueness of an act. This is why I have argued in the earlier chapter that the restored behavior approach could never be adapted to the whole concept of performance as such, because every single performance is unique and special, at least in my view.

In a different way to Mieke Bal’s approach to the performative, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is very tied to the theatrical dimension of the concept. First, performance and performativity were only looked at in relation to theater, but Derrida argues that performance is much more, it is also ritual, dance and everyday life.<sup>29</sup> Although theater studies and philosophy use the term performative simultaneously, it does not mean the same for Sedgwick. For her, “[...] in its deconstructive sense, performativity signals absorption; in the vicinity of the stage, however, the performative is the theatrical” (Parker/Sedgwick, 168). Researching Parker and Sedgwick’s notes on the concept of the performative, the most important finding is that performativity has a huge impact on the understanding of the construction of identity.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Parker/Sedgwick, 167-169.

### 3.4.2. Performativity and identity

We already know by now that performativity has become a very important issue in the academic field of Performance Studies, as well as in the theatrical sense of performance. What has not been discussed so far is the connection between performativity and identity. The most important aspect within performativity and identity is that categories such as sex and gender, which are closely related to identity, are not considered stable and fixed categories, as Butler and Sedgwick have stressed repeatedly. In Butler's words,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition* of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179)

Thus, Butler performs gender as a "corporeal style, a way of acting the body" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 256). James Loxley emphasizes Butler's statement when commenting that performances, then, create gender identity in a way that they are performed, bringing about the self, to which they refer.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, identity is demonstrated by means of the performance as a set of acts which are unique and special every time they are performed.

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the perception of sex, where sex is understood to be the discrete and factic datum of primary sexual characteristics. This implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as *expressive* of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex. If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. (Butler, "Performative Acts", 161-162)

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Loxley's response to Butler's statement on performance and identity in Loxley, 119.

In other words, all our gendered acts - the way we behave, we speak, we see the world - help us to represent our multiple selves that are so often represented in these performances. For Butler, identities are performative and discursive at the same time; they are discursively constructed by society. Therefore, identity is neither a universal entity nor a fixed and stable possession.

Barker understands identity rather as an “emotionally charged description of ourselves” (Barker, 28). According to Barker, the groundwork for the argument that identity is not a fixed entity is laid in the anti-representational understanding of language. That is to say, language, as a central means by which we understand our world and culture and orient ourselves, does not mirror an object world but rather constructs it. This argument is part of the linguistic turn, meaning that culture is a system of signification and, therefore, reads everything as a sign. Remember Foucault when he defined culture as a set of signifying practices. From that point of view, everything we see can be described as a text, whether it is a dress, a song or a performance. With our knowledge of signifying practices, we can denote and connote all sorts of texts by connecting signifiers to cultural meanings. And, as language does not mirror our world, it does not represent it either. Rather, it constitutes it “through the regulatory power of discourse” (Barker, 30).

Drawing back the connection to identity, this whole argument means that identity indeed exists, but is expressed through signs and signifying practices. Culture is the carrier of all these signs and practices. Everything can be read as sign, so we are not able to perceive reality as something different from representation. This argument can be drawn further in relation to the debate of sex and gender. To take Butler’s view, sex and gender are socially constructed and therefore not stable or fixed at all.<sup>31</sup> They are discursive constructions, meaning constructions of ourselves of how we identify with the world and, subsequently, with our bodies.

The category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal’. In this sense, the, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. Thus, ‘sex’ is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Butler, “Performative Acts”, 157.



takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1-2)

Gender becomes coherent as soon as we see it as a certain norm. The same norms have to be practiced over and over again, bearing in mind that there is always change going on. This is where subversion comes in. There is always potential for subversion and this is exactly where performance artists begin – the point where something is at odds with a norm. As soon as one breaks with a norm in performance, for instance, it is impossible for the audience to make meaning out of it. It is the moment of instability and, therefore, the moment where the artist provokes. Moreover, Butler understands sex and gender in terms of "citational performativity" (Barker, 49), meaning that norms are repeated and brought together in performance in order to create meaning. And, as performativity is a reiteration of a set of norms, "gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect that very subject it appears to express" (Butler in Barker, 50). Gender in life can by no means be put on or put off at will (Loxley, 142). Annamarie Jagose explains in her introduction to *Queer Theory*, that it is very important to reiterate

the fact that gender, being performative, is not like clothing, and therefore cannot be put on or off at will. Rather it is constrained - not simply in the sense of being structured by limitations but because (given the regulatory frameworks in which performativity is meaningful) constraint is the prerequisite of performativity. (Jagose, 87)

Butler is very much aware of such limitations. She writes in *Bodies That Matter*:

Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 95)

According to Butler, it is important to not mistakenly identify this act of constraint as something that is naturally a given, because if we do so "power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds" (Butler, "Performative Acts", 164). When Simone de Beauvoir claims that "one is not born, but, rather *becomes* a woman," (de Beauvoir, 172) she responds exactly to this

model of the constitution of acts. In this sense, gender is by no means a stable or fixed identity, but rather fluid and constituted in time. Moreover, gender is also instituted through the body while bodily actions always constitute the gendered self.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the idea of a woman introduces the fact that the body, and, therefore also gender as well as the woman herself, are cultural constructs. According to Butler, the body is only known as body in connection with its gendered appearance. In Butler's words, "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler, "Performative Acts", 156-157). Therefore, it is not one's act alone to do that body; it is by no means an individual action. Identity is, much like sexual identity, a matter of representation. And this is where power comes in – power as a concept of relations that "permeate all levels of social existence and are therefore to be found operating at every site of social life. [Power] needs to be thought of as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Hall, 50). Power relations exist everywhere – in a family environment, in politics, in economy and in sexuality. Therefore, power functions not like a chain but instead it circulates.<sup>33</sup> Not only identity but also the body is shaped and produced within discourse, according to these power relations. This means that the female as well as the male body are representations in terms of power structures. One cannot be a woman but one can only represent a woman by embodying female attitudes and behaviors, in other words, by behaving like a woman. Sexed bodies are constructions, and, especially the female body is a rather marginal position which seeks to be deconstructed in order to be adjusted. Therefore, the gender we do is performative in the way that it has been rehearsed and influenced.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.4.3. How does representation work?

We have heard so far that identity and the gendered body are both matters of representation in related to a power structure. But how does representation work? Stuart Hall, cultural theorist and sociologist and one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies, devoted himself to the study of representation. Very briefly, representation is "the production of meaning through language" (Hall, 16). Representation, therefore,

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Butler, "Performative Acts", 154.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hall, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Butler, "Performative Acts", 160.

means that language is used in order to present the world meaningfully, to give meaning to the world. In this sense, representation also means to symbolize a certain issue, to stand for something. We all have certain concepts in mind, for instance, what a chair looks like. These concepts are given meaning through language, that is, representation links these mental concepts we have with language, and enables us to identify them either as the real world or as an imaginary world. We may all interpret the world individually and in a different sense, since we may have different concepts in our minds. According to Hall, we share broadly the same mind maps and are, therefore, able to interpret the world in a similar way. But just having a conceptual map in mind is not enough to communicate, we also need to share the same language. As we all speak different languages, we need signs to work as a linguistic system instead. To put it into Halls words: “Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, ‘a language’” (Hall, 19). It is in this sense that the model of meaning is often linked to the concept of the linguistic turn which I have mentioned earlier. People of the same culture carry the same mental maps and are able to make meaning out of signs that they can communicate. This is most evident with paintings and pictures, of course, because we can actually see what the picture represents. Therefore, the

meaning is *not* in the object or person or thing, nor is it *in* the [figure]. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is *constructed by the system of representation*. (Hall, 21)

Languages carry signs and these signs symbolize objects, people or events. They can also symbolize rather abstract ideas which are not clearly coded with an obvious item in our minds. Meaning is produced within the system of language and to the same extent it is produced within performance. Everything can act as a text, and so do performances. A performance is a text made up of signs and signifiers, it carries meaning to the same extent a written text does. These signs – the movements the performer makes, the clothes he/she is wearing, the pictures and installations the performer uses – work as language, and if the audience seeks to understand the message the performance carries, they have to decode it in order to make meaning out of it. This is how representation works and also how performances work. It seems that an artistic expression can always be found through representation, indeed the “*laser room installation*”, 1998/2010, asks:

“Does something exist that cannot be expressed by an image or sign?” This question may remain unanswered.

There are a whole range of American body and performance artists who use the sexed and performative body as well as identity as central themes in their performances, including, for instance, Karen Finley, Carolee Schneeman, Orlan, Cindy Sherman and Annie Sprinkle, to which I will come in a later chapter. All their performances work through power relations and representations, they construct and deconstruct the body and make it visible by encoding it with signs that are subsequently decoded by the audience.

#### 4. Body-Art or: the Art on the Body

The position of Art in the Women's Movement  
is the position of Woman in the Art Movement.  
(EXPORT, "Woman's Art", 205)

1968 – A year not only marking the end of the 1960s, but also the change of social and cultural life in Europe as well as in the United States. The mood of public was full of anger and discontent, irritation and annoyance. Workers and students protested against their regimes with the help of banners and posters. While those protests were basically held against the government, many young artists rebelled against the institution of art in the same way. With these protests, the artists called for a new definition of the arts, in both meaning and function. They attacked galleries more for personal reasons than for governmental ones. With these actions artists wanted to create a new identity and carry it out into the public – art served as a tool for communication. It is imaginable that performance artists felt completely connected to this revolution of art. The artists knew no better option than to use their own bodies as material for communicating the meaning of their works to the outside world. According to Goldberg's history of performance art, artists rejected conventional materials like canvas and brushes and instead, turned their own bodies into artistic tools, using them as material.<sup>35</sup> The art on the body and, therefore, the body itself worked as a kind of second language – a non-verbal language. Most significant amongst these were the bodies tattooed with signs and symbols that carried meaning.<sup>36</sup> The body was now subject and object at the same time, and served as the most important medium of expressing the self. For example, the body was used as a brush to paint, as in Yves Klein's *Anthropometries*, or as the canvas itself, like in Piero Manzoni's *"Living Sculptures"*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Goldberg, 152-153.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Zehethofer, 43.

<sup>37</sup> After putting his own signature somewhere on the living sculpture's body, Piero Manzoni wrote a 'certificate of authenticity' with the following inscription: "This is to certify that X has been signed by my hand and is therefore, from this date on, to be considered an authentic and true work of art." Further, the certificate was marked by a colored stamp indicating the character of the artwork: red for the person as a complete work of art and remaining that until death; yellow indicating that only the marked part of the body would serve as art; green showed the condition the body was in during the action (sleeping, talking, sitting, etc.), and mauve had the same function as red with the exception that it had been achieved by payment (Goldberg, 148-149). Two questions arise when reading this statement by Manzoni. First, is the body only then considered alive when being marked? And second, is the body only then considered a



2. Yves Klein, "*Antropometries*", 1960.



3. Piero Manzoni, "*Living Sculptures*", 1961.

This usage of the artist's body as material and communicating tool became known as 'body art'. Of course, the body was not only used as canvas or alternative for painting material. Self-portraits, bodies connected to architecture, bodies in the environment and even injury of the body are considered parts of body art. According to Thomas Dreher, body art takes a hybrid position between action art, the art of photography and concept art (Dreher, 321). The term includes forms of presentation in which artists act as agents of their own bodies.

#### 4.1. Body art of Viennese Actionism

„Solange das verdammte Zentrum nicht ausgeschaltet ist, gibt es keinen Fortschritt“  
(Günther Brus)<sup>38</sup>

As already explained, the body was no longer only the subject of a work of art but also took the object position, which was the function of a brush or canvas for instance. Especially in the sixties, the body operated to create meaning in a dramatic and



4. Hermann Nitsch, 7<sup>th</sup> „Painting Action“, 1962.

aggressive way. This way of expressing the body was and still is known in combination with the concept of Viennese Actionism, a ritualistic performance group at the beginning of the sixties. Viennese Actionism is Austria's essential contribution to the international development of the avant-garde. Similar to Happening, Fluxus or Nouveau Réalisme, there are intersections between the traditional painting and the works of the actionist group. The main sense in Viennese Actionism is the conscious notion of reality through intensive sensual experience as well as the transgression of constraints and societal restrictions. Most important, therefore, is the conductive work with the human body. The group's main representatives were Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Hermann Nitsch. The four of them formed the Viennese Action Group around 1962. Although they were four completely different artists with completely different attitudes, they showed a similar reaction to the present, which they wanted to change.<sup>39</sup> Today we see this coherence with other art concepts, like Happenings and Fluxus for instance. Viennese Actionism is the examination of the concept of reality and, especially in contemporary Austria, the search for identity. In their actions, the main focus was on the body, with all its sensual and sexual codifications in connection with ritualistic materials like blood and feces. Viennese Actionism experienced its premiere with Nitsch's „7<sup>th</sup> Painting Action“ – stage props were a slaughtered and skinned lamb as well as blood and hot water. The artist crucified the lamb and gutted the dead animal. After that, the inwards were placed on a table covered with white sheets and watered

<sup>38</sup> „As long as the bloody center is not cut off there will be no progress.“ (My translation of Günter Brus' statement read in the exhibition 'Direct Art' at MUMOK, Vienna, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2010.)

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gorsen, 156.

with blood and hot water. The colored outcome of the white sheets coined the name for the action – “*Painting Action*”.<sup>40</sup> What is very obvious with Nitsch’s performances is the concern with human drives. One might now query the need of the lamb at this point. For Nitsch, the lamb was a symbol for the indigenous excess situated at the core of the human being.<sup>41</sup>

Everything that was eliminated, like sexuality and the body for instance, can be found in the subconscious. And that is why the actions of the Viennese Actionists work in terms of exposure of this subconscious. Besides the body and the ritualistic elements in Viennese Actionism, breaking cultural taboos was amongst the most important aspects, perhaps the most important. At that time, the concept of Viennese Actionism was quite political. For Nitsch, the actions included the ‘dream of a mature society’, paralleling also the historical students’ insurrection and political Happenings.<sup>42</sup> The international career started not until Peter Weibel joined the group. In 1966, the Viennese Actionists went to London and anticipated Body-Art aspects:<sup>43</sup> they imported the body as extensively as possible, conveyed aspects of the analysis of the body and put their focus on the self-destruction of the world as well as of the self. Weibel worked together with VALIE EXPORT, although she was not an actual member, and later became her life partner. EXPORT had a completely different notion of the body and, especially of the female body. The body in EXPORT’s work never functioned as an object – and this is the main difference between Viennese Actionism and Feminist Actionism, which was founded by EXPORT.



5. Carolee Schneeman, “*Eye Body*”, 1963.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Dreher, 164-166.

<sup>41</sup> This statement is taken from the guided tour through the MUMOK exhibition ‘Direct Art’ I took part in on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2010, Vienna. The exhibition focused on the Viennese Actionism and on related concepts and artist groups. All exhibited works were contemporaneous. What really surprised me in this exhibition was that there were only three female artists found in relation to the exclusively male dominated Viennese Actionist group. Those three women were VALIE EXPORT, Carolee Schneeman and Niki de Saint Phalle – the exhibition dedicated one work to each of the three female artists.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gorsen, 157.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Dreher, 254.



The aspect of the cultural taboo can also be seen in Carolee Schneeman's works. It is



6. Günter Brus, "Selbstbemalung II" 1965.

not clear if she belonged to the group of Viennese Actionists, since the whole group was male dominated, but she definitely knew the members and was influenced to a certain extent by them and their works. This is for instance obvious in "*Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions*", performed in 1963, where the artist used paint, glue, fur, feathers and garden snakes in order to "merge her own body with the environment of her painting/constructions" (Schneeman, homepage).<sup>44</sup> Schneeman recognized the

male-dominated atmosphere of Viennese Actionism

and came to the conclusion that "the brush belonged to abstract expressionist male endeavor. The brush was phallic" (Electronic Arts Intermix, April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011). In an interview with VALIE EXPORT (Aktionskunst International), Schneeman described her own body as the "starting point of lived action" and made clear that the body is the "origin of the balance of power" (Aktionskunst International). What she wanted to say is that with the body one can break societal taboos and account for a better understanding of art. Most importantly, she felt like she herself existed as a taboo in the world. A third example is Günter Brus' "*Selbstbemalung II*" (self-painting II). Brus wanted to be *in* the painting; he wanted to be part of it. With this performance the artist wanted to show that there does not necessarily have to be a difference between subject and object, just that they can both be the same at the same time. In his words: „Der Akteur agiert und wird selbst zum Material.“<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, he is the center of the painting as he is inside it. On the other hand, there is no center at all as subject and object are the same. In the artist's words, there is no possibility for the center to exist because progress and does not go hand in hand with being fixed to the center.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.caroleeschneemann.com>, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

<sup>45</sup> The actor operates and becomes the material himself. (my translation) This statement is taken from the exhibition 'Direct Art' at MUMOK, Vienna, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2010.

#### 4.2. Feminist Actionism

The body [...] is the cause of sensations. It is more than an instrument of action: it contributes to the life of consciousness and memory in a psycho-physical parallelism of processes that assume meaning and relief only when they are connected. (Vergine, 2000)

The body art of Viennese Actionism, dominated by male artists and ritualistic elements somehow formed the counterpart to the gender specific Feminist Actionism as developed by VALIE EXPORT and other female artists. Before discussing Feminist Actionism it is necessary to briefly define Actionism. According to VALIE EXPORT,

Actionism is a movement in the visual arts which developed from Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel, Action Painting, and Happenings, with its earliest source in Dada. Actionism has been a major influence on Performance Art and Body Art. (EXPORT, Aspects, 69)

At that time, female artists also including North-American influences had a completely different notion of the body and how it should be acted in gendered spaces. One could even argue that the Feminist Actionism is more progressive than its counterpart of the male post-war avant-garde. Examining the body art of Viennese Actionism, we find that the focus was either on the male body as the center of artwork or how it was acting in fusion with the center. EXPORT herself explains the situation of the male dominated sphere:

My first video dates from the Late-Sixties. The Actionists – men – hardly concerned themselves with the new media. I think that abandoning traditional means of expression is liberating for women. Of course, there was also the fact that the form had not yet been marked as male territory, but, more than anything else it was video's temporal and spatial flexibility that attached me: I could see the images straight away. At the center of my work is a permanent challenge to reality and its reproduction, through the confrontation of different means of artistic expression. (EXPORT, Centre Georges Pompidou)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris dedicated a whole room to VALIE EXPORT within the permanent exhibition about female artists. I went there when I was in Paris in February 2011 and took pictures, including the picture showing the Guerilla Girls Activist Group. This statement is also taken from the exhibition.

The Viennese generation acted as revolutionaries and deconstructionists, living in a so-called counter-culture which was meant to express disdain for mainstream societal processes. According to Eifler, the Viennese movements, as such, were an integral part of an Expanded Art Movement spreading all over Europe.<sup>47</sup> It was in this climate that EXPORT started a kind of counter-revolution and created the term Feminist Actionism in order to distinguish her work from the male dominated Viennese Actionism. She started with physical performances in which she treated the body as a sign, but also created a surface with her own body that was open for cultural and societal critique. In an interview with Eifler she explained her newly coined term as something that seeks to “transform the object of male natural history, the material ‘woman’, subjugated and enslaved by the creator, into an independent actor and creator, object of her own history” (EXPORT in Eifler, 111). Ketty La Rocca, an Italian born Body-Art artist, said the following: “The woman has to take a male position in order to produce literature”



(Huck, 31). The same thing counted for the arts – if a woman wanted to be accepted in the world of the arts, she had to take a male position or at least act like a man. EXPORT had this problem when she started with her performances. She was not fully accepted, at least not in Europe.

7. “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?”<sup>48</sup>

Things did not change until she went to the United States, where people reacted more openly to her works. But it was not always like that in the U.S. Just remember the Guerilla Girls, a group of radical feminist artists from New York City, who aimed for the reclamation of feminism by wearing guerilla masks and compiling posters with the question “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?” Met. Museum, of course, referred to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. The question is a rather ironic one as everybody knows the troubles women still had at that time being accepted in society, especially as artists – the Guerilla Girls founded their group in 1985.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Eifler, 110-112.

<sup>48</sup> Picture taken in the exhibition “elles@centrepompidou: woman artists in the collections of the national Modern Art Museum” at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, February 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

VALIE EXPORT and her contemporaries developed a more conceptual attitude toward the body in arts. Female artists began to reject the male coded verbal language through their work on the body, especially with the help of pornography, film and video. It wasn't until then that EXPORT developed her "*Genital Panic*": she went through a Munich porn cinema, wearing pants with the crotch cut out and holding a machinegun in her hand. The picture can be read as a storyboard of the male anguish of the female sexuality. This was the starting point for art and gender politics: during the seventies, women were treated as the unknown and ignored gender, whereas in the eighties the conflict surrounding female aesthetics became increasingly widespread.<sup>49</sup> American artists, such as Martha Rosler, Barbara Kruger, and later Cindy Sherman, started to perform their gender. To take Butler's words, "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler, "Performative Acts", 157). These artists deconstructed gender in order to create a new performative setting. More importantly, they left behind the notion of having a body in the classical sense, because having a body also means being a body and, therefore, doing the body. Butler, who is maybe the most important pioneer in gender politics, put into words what these female artists tried to deliver through their body performances:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. [...] One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well." (Butler, Performative Acts, 156)

This encounter with the body and its performer completely changed the relationship between them. Artists transformed their bodies into works of art by performing them. They were aware of body boundaries and also of the sensibility of the body: they acted the body as the fearing, loving and hating body.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Angerer, 12.

#### 4.3. The Female Body in Performance

The use of the body as a language has returned to the scene of the world around us in new and different forms, and it speaks through altered declinations. The body as triumphant, immolated, diffused, propagated, dramatic, and tragic. The political, social, and mystic body. The body as the site of the extreme. The body as humanity's most ancient instrument for speaking hic et nunc. By way of tattoos, piercings, and citations of tribalism. Through manipulations of organs. The instrument that speaks and communicates without the word, or sounds, or drawings. The body as a vehicle, once again, for declaring opposition to the dominant culture, but also of desperate conformism. (Vergine, 289)

This quote from Lea Vergine, in her book *Body Art and Performance*, introduces again what we have seen so far – that artists use their body as material and a tool for communication in many different ways. The following chapter is going to introduce some examples of how the body was and is used in performance art until coming to the specific modes of how VALIE EXPORT treats her own body. The usage of the body as a non-verbal language became popular among artists in the 1960s, including VALIE EXPORT, Carolee Schneeman, Karen Finley, Cindy Sherman, Hannah Wilke and Marina Abramović, just to name a few. They all tried to liberate the body and deconstruct gender norms from patriarchal delineation in their performances. The feminist declarations of the sixties and seventies attempted to revitalize the female body. The body has always been the object of the male gaze and desire. Men have imposed their image of women upon them, they shaped them and women shaped themselves the same way.<sup>50</sup> As EXPORT states in her manifestation on the women's movement: "The history of woman is the history of man. [...] If reality is a social construct and men are its engineers we are faced with a male reality" (EXPORT, "Woman's Art", 205). But women started to free themselves; they started to fight - to fight for visibility. In contrast to the earlier sixties and seventies, in 1989, "My body is a temple" appeared in bold letters on a flyer showing a picture of a nude black man and the white porn queen and performance artist, Veronica Vera, having oral sex.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. EXPORT, "Woman's Art", 205.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Schneider, 11.

The body underwent a certain shift, boundaries were explored, and the body became a system of signs and codes. This was what artists and authors meant when saying that they made the body visible. For instance, Vito Acconci, an American installation and performance artist, used his body as “a proof that [he] was there - the way a person might talk to himself in the dark. [...] There was an attempt made to “parse” the body: it could be the receiver, the object” (Acconci, 22). Rebecca Schneider has a different approach in her view of the visible body, namely the explicit body. Explicit derives from Latin *explicare* and means to unfold.<sup>52</sup> This expression shows exactly what is meant by visible – the inner body comes to the outside and can be reached by the audience. Explicitness of the body means that the body is living and lived at the time and that was what performance artist wanted to achieve and make public. Strategies used were, for instance, confrontation (pleasure as well as pain) as in Barbara Kruger’s “Accomplishments have no color” or “Your gaze hits the side of my face” and social markings like in Orlan’s “Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan”, a performance consisting of having plastic surgery on several occasions so various parts of the artist’s body can be transformed to be like famous sculptures and ecclesiastical paintings. Confrontation was also a theme in Hannah Wilke’s artistic life: she made her cancer illness visible by a photographic chronicle of her corporal transformation caused by chemotherapy until she died.

Carolee Schneeman was involved in Happenings and in the Fluxus movement in the early sixties. Right from the beginning Schneeman explored taboo- subjects and make them visible, mostly in an erotic way. In 1965, she made a movie called *Fuses* which shows herself and her partner James Tenney making love whilst being observed by their cat, Kitch. According to Schneider, Schneeman is the watcher and watched at the same time because she sees herself making love. “She is on both sides of the keyhole” (Schneider, 74). Another example is “*Meat Joy*” a year earlier, in 1964, a performance in Paris, London and New York with several artists rolling naked on the floor and celebrating the sensuality of their bodies.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ibid., 20ff.

*Meat Joy* has the character of an erotic rite: excessive, indulgent: a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope, brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is toward the ecstatic, shifting and turning between tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon – qualities that could at any moment be sensual, comic, joyous, repellent. (Schneeman, 61)



7. Carolee Schneeman, "*Interior Scroll*", 1975.



8. Carolee Schneeman, "*Meat Joy*", 1964.

So Schneeman breaks sexual as well as cultural taboos and, therefore, places the sexual gaze upon herself. But this gaze is different from the male gaze as we understand it in feminist theories, because this time she herself had the intention to attract it. Maybe the most striking and taboo-breaking performance is "*Interior Scroll*", performed in 1975 in New York. Carolee is naked on stage and fully exposed to the audience, when she draws a narrow scroll of paper from her vagina and reads the text that was on it out



9. Shigeko Kubota, "*Vagina Painting*", 1965.

loud. Schneeman introduces the female body as the origin of energy where all the sensual and sexual feelings come from. To her, the female body, especially the female artist's body, is the source for life with all its positive and negative connotations. Very similar to Carolee Schneeman, female Japanese performance artist Shigeko Kubota performs "*Vagina Painting*" in 1965 in New York. As part of the Fluxus movement, she attaches a brush to her skirt and paints scratches on a piece of paper on the floor.

Both performance artists break the sexual taboo by using the core of female sexuality, the vagina, as material. In a different way from Schneeman and Kubota, Marina Abramović works with pain, with self-harm and with acts of making her body visible. The Serbian performance artist, a well-known representative of Body Art, irritates her audience and breaks social and cultural as well as sexual taboos by ritual aspects within her body performances. In “*Lips of Thomas*” from 1975, reenacted in 2005, she makes her body visible by undressing completely and sitting at a table eating a whole glass of honey with a spoon and drinking a bottle of red wine in slow motions. After that she breaks the glass with her own hand until she bleeds. Facing the audience, she takes a razor blade and scratches a star consisting of five spikes into the skin of her stomach. In addition to that, she takes a lash and slashes herself in front of the audience. Then she lies down on a cross made of ice-blocks. From the ceiling hangs a radiant heater burning onto the carved star, achieving it to bleed again. Abramović is lying there on the cross, bearing the pain, until somebody from the audience comes to the stage and takes her away. It is the audience that sets an end to the performance.<sup>53</sup> According to Fischer-Lichte, Abramović creates a situation in which the audience is put between norms and rules of the arts and daily life.<sup>54</sup> What comes in here is, again, the division between subject and object. The difference is now that the audience is the subject/object and not the performer. First, the viewers sit there, watching the artist punish herself on the stage. Later on, when they realize that the artist suffers from pain and does not stop herself, some of them act by jumping on the stage and taking the artist away from the cross – the audience becomes the actor, the subject. This is, on the one hand, the relation between subject and object, the viewer and the viewed, and on the other hand the relation between the body and the material, the signifier and the signified.

Eleven years later, American performance artist Karen Finley showered her naked body with egg and then threw confetti and glitter on herself until she was completely covered. In this performance called “*The Constant State of Desire*” staged in 1986 in New York, Finley creates her body as a stage “across which she enacts and critiques the cultural dramas of disembodied bodies” (Schneider, 100). She combines the performance with a monologue which she reads out to the audience. This monologue underlines the social impact of the body and the codes society ascribes to it.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Fischer-Lichte’s renarration of Abramović’s performance in her *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 9-11.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Fischer-Lichte’s renarration of Abramović’s performance in her *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 9-11.



## 5. VALIE

VALIE EXPORT is not just an artist, rather is she one of the most important spokeswomen of the feminist avant-garde in Austria. She was not only strongly influenced by the developments of her time but also by contemporary artists, mainly American feminist performance artists. The following quote shall work as an introduction to VALIE EXPORT's artworks, which will then show in what way she embodies feminist concerns in order to carry out her strategy of speech.

Valie arrived at my basement flat, corner of Belsize Park gardens and Belsize Road. Hospitality provisions a budgetary toss-up: something to eat from the greengrocer, the bakery, or a small bag of coal for the tiny gas burning hearth, a flask of scotch whiskey, ten Silk Cut. We didn't require food for our instant rapport; fervid issues of the body to be put at risk, in action; to fracture predictability, aesthetic formalizations, to pull the female body off the art historical walls, out of suppressive idealizations of muse and model. We told each other how we were in risk of losing everything but our art vision: the Austrian government had taken Valie's child from her, as an unfit mother, and considered her unemployable. I was in exile from my partner, home, job. Both fragile, fierce. Together our purposes were confirmed – the potentiality of the destabilizing powers of the female body in our own hands. She had arrived from Austria for her action event at the Filmmaker's Cooperative, then in an abandoned dairy distribution center in Camden Town. [...] The dairy combined atmospheres of flophouse, production center, editing lab, exhibit space, alternative theater, rehearsal hall, and drug den. Valie was going to ayer the floor with windowpane glass, lie down on it naked, crushing it with the movements of her body. (Schneeman, 97)

VALIE EXPORT and Carolee Schneeman cannot only be compared in terms of their appreciation of arts and their declarations they intend to make with the use of the body in performance art, but they also knew each other personally. What Schneeman introduces in the statement above is EXPORT's performance "*Eros/ion*" where she rolled in broken glass. I will come to a detailed description of the performance in the next chapter. EXPORT had been concerned with her own body for years. What she does with her body is that she deconstructs gender norms through acting on them and through making them visible. She confronts the audience with gender stereotypes inherent in our society and uses specific strategies to deconstruct those images. In the following chapter, I will introduce a number of different technologies of the body which can be discovered in EXPORT's works. Those categories were mainly drawn from secondary

literature about the artist. They have great relevance on the following discussion of the strategies that EXPORT uses in order to deconstruct gender norms. This is why I will put my focus on categories that have a specific impact on the topic of gender and gender stereotypes.

### 5.1. Technologies of the body in VALIE EXPORT's works

VALIE EXPORT approached the body in the early seventies through performances carried out with her own body, in its pure and naked form, as material. Similar to Carolee Schneeman and Gina Pane, she tried to tie in with moral concepts positioned in society, and to make those stereotypical images of femininity visible.<sup>55</sup> The body hereby provided the projection surface to deconstruct those stereotypes and to break open related gendered attributions. Within a whole range of technologies of the body which can be found in the artist's works, the most important ones clearly address the topic of the gendered body in societal discourse – in an area of conflicts between societal norms and the male gaze.

#### 5.1.1. The female body as sexualized object

The work of a feminist artist is to a great extent about the gendered, especially female, body as a concrete basis. As EXPORT works with oppression, with pain, with nudity and with the provocative exposure of female genitals, the body she brings up is always sexualized. The female body is, therefore, the core subject in her works of art, remaining in an incomplete state of reiterated and constant reproduction. The most crucial example is "*Genital Panic*" from 1969 where VALIE went through a Munich porn cinema, wearing crotchless pants and carrying a machine gun, showing the viewers the *real* genitals. One might argue that this performance blurred the boundaries to pornography. Challenging the traditionally demeaning representations constructed by the male desiring gaze, the motif of the vulva offers a new archetype of the body, which EXPORT uses an instrument of revelation. "If I hadn't been provocative," says VALIE

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. „Körpertechniken“, 17.

EXPORT, “I couldn’t have made visible what I wanted to show. I had to penetrate things to bring them to the exterior” (“elles@centrepompidou”). With this action, EXPORT places a self-confident statement in a world full of power relationships where women are no more than representations and images of the male gaze – a world where women have always served as sexualized objects in a subjugated tradition caused by the male view.

### 5.1.2. The vulnerable body

The female body and the vulnerable body very often go hand in hand in EXPORT’s works of art. Examples are, for instance, “... remote ... remote ... passages”, performed in 1973, the body performance “*Hyperbulie*”, also from 1973, or the drawing “*the left and the right pain*”, done in 1972. In “... remote ... remote ... passages”, the artist places herself on a chair in front of a picture showing two children holding hands, both suffering from child abuse. On her womb she has a bowl filled with milk. In the course of the performance, the artist injures the cuticle of her fingers with a knife until blood drops into the white milk. What she wants to make clear in this performance is that events from the past will always have great influence on the human being, no matter how long ago they happened. Those events deform and rip our skin; the body is shown in its most painful directness. EXPORT identifies the externality of an internal condition – an amalgamation of past and present.<sup>56</sup> “*Hyperbulie*” shows the artist walking nude and in an upright posture through a corridor narrowed by electrically charged filaments. She has to bear electric shocks as soon as she touches the filaments with her body, but she does not show any pain. Another example, a drawing with the title “*the left and the right pain*”, shows a hand nailed to the wall with five nails, one for every finger. According to Brigitte Reutner, the hand is portrayed as representative of the body.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, “the vulnerable body which can be manipulated is exposed to society’s pressures. At the same time, the subject experiences the body as division between social norm and personal meanings” (Reutner, 220).

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Description of EXPORT’S performance “... remote ... remote” on the homepage of Medienkunstnetz: [www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/remote-remote](http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/remote-remote). April 22nd 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Reutner who wrote the article “VALIE EXPORT – Drawings” for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Time and Counter time* in Vienna and Linz, 2010/2011.

### 5.1.3. The oppressed body

EXPORT's work on the oppressed body can be best understood by her performance "*obsessions*", in 1972. The artist explored the experience of being asleep in her bed, wearing ice-skates. The state EXPORT found herself in was one of physical discomfort caused by the presence of the skates. What the artist felt during the performance was fear and sheer obsession. According to Ragaglia, the skates form a symbolic category addressing both the private and the general.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the skates are part of a certain leitmotif in EXPORT's oeuvre, namely cutting and cuts, just remember the performance I introduced before, "... *remote ... remote ... passages*", and an installation called "*scissors*" she created for the *Time and Counter time* exhibition in 2010.

### 5.1.4. The socially and culturally constructed body

In Susan Bordo's words, the body,

what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend the body – is a medium of culture. The body is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. (Bordo, 13)

Maybe our body itself is the only oppression we have in life. Society inscribes norms to our bodies and we have no other chance as to accept them. If we did not, we would live in constant struggle with society and with life itself. Performance artists, such as VALIE EXPORT, address those conflicts of what is subjectively and socially expected from the body and its subject, the body takes and will always take two positions in life: "The body clearly takes a position between me and the world. On the one hand, the body is the center of my world. On the other, it is an object in the world of the Other." This quote by R. D. Laing used in EXPORT's "*Syntagma*", 1983, highlights exactly the duplication issue the body is in. It can never be acted as our own body without any provision for society and its norms and rules. As already explained before, the body is

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ragaglia's explanation of the performance "*obsessions*", 232.

both subject and object: subject in our own life as we want to live it, and object in the life referred to society as it is oppressed and constructed.

#### 5.1.5. The dead and fragmented body

Performance art depicts human subjects as fragmented entities, a psychic fragmentation that is especially applicable to women. It is no more possible in our society to live the body as a unique entity as we are constantly torn between our own feelings and the pressure from society. Fragmentation is not only a very common feature in the arts but also in postmodern literature – characters are constantly on the search for their identities and for their selves. VALIE EXPORT picks up this theme in her works “*Syntagma*” and “*HEADS – Aphaeresis*”, 2002. Whereas “*Syntagma*” shows female body parts like arms, breasts, feet and wombs in a kind of aesthetic photo composition, “*HEADS*” are skillfully crafted sculptures that look like totems. They are faceless which means that they have no identity. We, the viewers, and the society, have to inscribe a certain identity to the heads in order to resurrect them.<sup>59</sup>

#### 5.1.6. The divided body

Like the work “*Split: Reality*”, EXPORT’S “*Raumsehen und Raumhören*”, 1973, shows a mediated personality as split personality. The camera does not only show the deviation of a woman and her electronic reproduction, but also the manipulation caused by electronic mediation. The picture of the performer underlies a constant shift of the focal distance of the camera. Furthermore, the picture is connected with synthesized sounds: they become louder and clearer as soon as the person approaches, and vanish when the person departs.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the divided body is an important theme in

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<sup>59</sup> Jeanette Winterson addresses fragmentation in postmodern literature in the same way as EXPORT does in her works of art. This beautiful quote from her book *Gut Symmetries* illustrates the fusion of literature and performance art in relation to the topic of fragmentation: My self-esteem is a jigsaw I cannot complete. I get one part of the picture and the rest lies in pieces. I suspect that there is no picture, only fragments. Other people seem to glue it together somehow and do not worry that they have been using pieces from several different boxes. So what is the answer? Is identity a deceit, a make-shift, and should we hurry to make any pattern we can? (*Gut Symmetries*, 113)

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Description of the performance on the homepage of *Medienkunstnetz*: [www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/raumsehen/](http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/raumsehen/). April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011.

“*Syntagma*”. The whole movie is made up of a split screen where either one and the same scene can be seen on both screens or where one scene runs forth and the other one backwards. Bodies are, therefore, split by the power of the screen. This is where identity comes in: we are one person in one body but we have several different identities that cannot be seen on the surface. They are inside us and are only shown when we want them to come out. EXPORT shows these different identities by using media and image screen and thus makes them visible and names them.

#### 5.1.7. The two-foldedness of the body

EXPORT’s two-body theory is best explained in her article “The Real and its Double”. This theory understands the body as being both, subject and object, signifier and signified at the same time. It addresses two different kinds of body duplication: the first one as antithesis of real and representation and the second one as the divided body which has been explained already. In order to make the two-body theory more available, we can compare it with Butler’s theory of having a body, but at the same time being the body. We have the body which serves as our cover but we also are our body, in other words, we perform our body.

As an example, “*Syntagma*” is more concerned with EXPORT’s two-body theory. The two bodies that can be seen in the picture occur over and over again throughout the movie, one in flesh color and one in black and white, belong to two different representational orders. This representation shows a photograph within a photograph. Furthermore, the text that is spoken in the movie derives from two different languages, German and English, spoken at the same time.<sup>61</sup> We can, again, take into account the quote by Laing, which announces the self in the own world and the self in the world of the Other. One photograph shows the self as subject in the real world whilst the other one shows the self of how it is seen as an object by society. Most importantly, as we have already discussed, the body image here is no more than a representation, both sign and signifier.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Silverman, “Speak Body“, 215f.

### 5.1.8. The written body

Writing the body is writing a new text - not with the phallic pen – new inscriptions of woman's body, separate from and undermining the phallocratic coding of woman's body that produces the censure, erasure, repression of woman's libidinal economy. (Dallery, 59)

The concept of the written body is a very strong one in performance art as the body itself is the stage where the performance takes place. Writing the body is marking the body, engraving the body, coding the body with strategies like tattoo, paint or even by injuring the body with cuts that leave marks. The most literal form of writing the body is the tattooed body. EXPORT demonstrates this form in "*Body Sign Action*" in 1970, when she had a garter tattooed on her left upper thigh. The artist describes this garter as follows:

Das Foto zeigt ein tätowiertes Strumpfband auf meinem Oberschenkel. Das Strumpfband erscheint als Zeichen einer vergangenen Versklavung, als Symbol verdrängter Sexualität. Das Strumpfband als Zeichen der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Klasse, die ein bedingtes Verhalten fordert, wird zur Erinnerung, um das Problem der Selbstbestimmung bzw. Fremdbestimmung der Weiblichkeit wachzuhalten.<sup>62</sup>

In "*Body Sign Action*" EXPORT addresses not only the concept of writing the body but also sociocritically covers topics like sexuality, enslavement and heteronomy of femininity through societal pressures. The body is marked; society engraves its norms onto the body. This performance does not have a time limit as it is performed over and over again. The tattoo will always be there and, therefore, it will always declare this body as a performed body. The idea is not that the sign is forever and foremost inscribed on the body, but that it is addressed and made visible consistently.

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<sup>62</sup> The photograph shows a tattooed garter on my upper thigh. The garter appears as sign of a past enslavement, as a symbol of oppressed sexuality. The garter as a sign of the affiliation to a certain class, which demands a conditional behavior, becomes the memory that bears the problem of self-determination or rather heteronomy of femininity in remembrance. (my translation)  
This quote is taken from Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT: Bild-Risse*, 50. Roswitha Mueller did an interview with the artist and quoted her in this book.

#### 5.1.9. The body as source of language and speech

Language as means of expression is not called body language for nothing. The body is the most important source to create speech and expression, whether with the help of signs or with spoken language. EXPORT shows this need for expression in three performances: “*visual text: finger poem*”, 1968, “*breath text: love poem*”, 1970, and “*glottis*”, 2007. The first two examples show fascinating and quite simple performances where the artist speaks a text in sign language (“*visual text*”) and creates pressure by breathing compulsively (“*breath text*”). “*Glottis*”, in contrast, is rather difficult and complicated. In this performance, or rather video installation, EXPORT used a laryngoscope in order to have her own glottis filmed while reading a text out loud. This voice performance addresses the phenomenon of vocalization as speech is formulated. All three examples share the fact that the body is understood as a medium with which it is possible to transform embodied language into an artistic concept.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Buchmann, 227f.



## 6. EXPORT's works as cultural texts

They body of woman is the site where culture  
manufactures the blockade of woman.  
(VALIE EXPORT, "The Real and Its Double"<sup>4</sup>)

The aim of this part of my thesis is to go into detail concerning VALIE EXPORT's strategies of gender deconstruction. Her works, be they performances, installations, videos or drawings, have to be read as cultural texts. Keeping with Stuart Hall, every object is a cultural text and can, therefore, be read as a text. Feminist artists, such as VALIE EXPORT and Carolee Schneeman, "develop strategies of coping with the situation of a missing iconographic tradition to represent the female body other than through the male gaze and as masochistic" (Wilke, 228). Strategies are, for instance, parody, the use of imagery, mimesis and citation. These figures of speech can very well be adapted to works of art when reading them as cultural texts. Since the body is at the center of debates, the following analysis of selected works will look at these works as cultural texts as well as at explicit body images within these texts.

### 6.1. Parody

Simon Dentith calls parody a form of playful pleasures, which points back to the common view of parody as a ridiculing and satirizing element of literature.<sup>64</sup> Parody is not only an important device of postmodern literature, but it is also very common in aesthetics and the arts. Parody ridicules issues in a way which we as spectators find funny, whilst we also understand the serious meaning that lies behind it. To take a different view on parody, Linda Hutcheon defines the postmodern strategy as an "ironic trans-contextualization" (Hutcheon, 32). To her, "it is a combination of respectful homage and ironically thumbed nose" (Hutcheon, 33). Furthermore, parody, like pastiche or irony, emphasizes similarity rather than difference. Within this strategic manner, it is difficult to completely distinguish between parody and irony for instance,

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<sup>64</sup> Dentith, 55.

since one entails the other. In Hutcheon's view, parody operates on two levels – a surface and a background level. What Hutcheon wants to say here is that “parody rests on the recognition of the superimposition of these levels” (Hutcheon, 34). Within the arts, I would argue that parody as a means of imitation also critically distances from strategies, such as pastiche or citation in a way that does not always have to be ironic. VALIE EXPORT strongly relies on parody and ironic repetition within her works of art. She deviates from an aesthetic norm and creates a new mode of representation in her oeuvre.

#### 6.1.1. Touch Cinema (1968)

One of EXPORT's very early works, *Touch Cinema* from 1968, reveals the voyeuristic touch of porn cinema – a movie theater where porn is shown: instead of the darkness inside the cinema, the spectator finds him-/herself in the spotlight of the public. *Touch Cinema* is a performance where the artist carries a small box in front of her body and



10. VALIE EXPORT, “*Touch Cinema*”, 1968.

her breasts are covered by the cardboard. She invites the spectators for a “visit to the cinema” rather than being a passive object of desire. Only the hands are experiencing the situation: every visitor is allowed to put his/her hands in the box and touch the artist's breasts for a limited time span. The parody lies in the visitor's confrontation with the female body and sexuality: while the darkness of the porn cinema provides anonymity, the public nature of *Touch Cinema* causes voyeurism. The spectator is caught in the act of his/her desirous act. EXPORT parodies the sexualized female body through direct confrontation – the female breast is provocatively offered to the public in a humorous act of self-display. On the one hand, EXPORT reveals the dominant discourse of gender in a way that gender stereotypes are constructed and imitated. On the other hand, she deconstructs those gender norms by responding to them directly and, therefore, making them visible and faint. She deconstructs the cliché of a woman as well as the image of this woman constructed by society. Furthermore, she breaks the societal rules by disclosing her sexuality in public. In her own words,

The action represented a liberation from the civilizational burden of the body, a chance to separate the woman's self from her body, to transform the socio-patriarchal gender roles. In this way the female body becomes the creation of the (male) visual apparatus, a work of art created by male eyes. (EXPORT, *Split: Reality*, 202

In a phallocratic society, women exist only as images, as products of the male gaze. This gaze is now made visible, responded to and indicated within the performance. Interestingly enough, EXPORT performed *Touch Cinema* on the occasion of the first meeting of the independent filmmakers in Munich.<sup>65</sup>

#### 6.1.2. Genital Panic (1969)

As said before, the context in which VALIE EXPORT does her performances is very important. *Genital Panic*, like *Touch Cinema*, was also performed in the context of a porn cinema. The artist went through the ranks of the cinema with teased hair, wearing trousers with the crotch cut out, so that her genitals were fully visible, and holding a



11. VALIE EXPORT, "Genital Panic", 1969.

machine gun in her hand. She advised the spectators not to observe the illusion of a naked woman on the screen but instead to touch a real woman. The parody on the female body can be seen as quite pastiche here, since the performance lacks humorous character. Keeping with Judith Butler, the images of woman have been constructed by society. The reality constructed is not the same for every woman and the camera which has constructed this image is the masculine eye. The woman is overlapped by codes and projections created, almost exclusively, by a male society.<sup>66</sup> It is the feminist aesthetics' challenge to deconstruct these projections and societal codes inscribed in the woman's body. In the same way as in *Touch Cinema*, the artist confronts her audience directly with adherent gender stereotypes - she offers her sexuality to the public. Only through doing this are the predominant images of the

<sup>65</sup> Cf. the author's comment on the independent filmmakers in relation to EXPORT'S performance, *Female Trouble*, 180.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. EXPORT, "The Real and its Double", 7.

woman made visible and can, therefore, be deconstructed. EXPORT issues a feminist statement by performing her own gender, revealing it as “a corporeal style, a way of acting the body” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 256). In the same appearance, EXPORT had herself photographed and these photos were later used for poster advertising. Those pants, as well as the machine gun, are devices that are not naturally associated with. This is also true for the exposed vulva: it simply does not suit women to show their genitals. EXPORT did exactly that in order to reveal her vulva, in order to make clear that women just have it, that they do not have to be ashamed of it. For her, the question was not *if* she should show the female body but *how* she should do it. Interestingly, Genital Panic was reenacted by Marina Abramović in 2005. She wore the same pants as EXPORT did, sat in the same position and also held a machine gun in her hand. The difference is that she did not do the performance in the context of a porn cinema but on a stage in the Guggenheim Museum, New York.<sup>67</sup>

### 6.1.3. From the Underdog File (1969)



12. VALIE EXPORT, “*From the Underdog File*”, 1969.

The challenge of the traditional role behavior, viewed as men and women expressing their place in society, and the inversion of balanced power structures are very much relevant to *From the Underdog File*. EXPORT walks her

partner Peter Weibel on a leash through the streets of Vienna’s first district. With this performance, the artist provocatively reveals the relationship between the sexes by openly responding to the existing power structures between men and women in society. She parodies the suppression of women and the dependence on man by reversing the gender roles and turning reality into a power game. The man is suddenly treated like a dog, as if femininity took revenge for

<sup>67</sup> I think this difference is very notable as the context of the porn cinema is more than important within this performance, first and foremost with original performance by VALIE EXPORT as this was the time of the sexual revolution. Watching the video of the re-performance done by Marina Abramović, I noticed that the audience did not run away as they did in 1969. According to VALIE EXPORT, some of them left the cinema in panic. This statement is from a short interview with the artist included in the video. The escape, the genital, the panic – this was a characteristic expression for the time. With Abramović’ performance, the spectators watched quietly, almost a bit helpless.

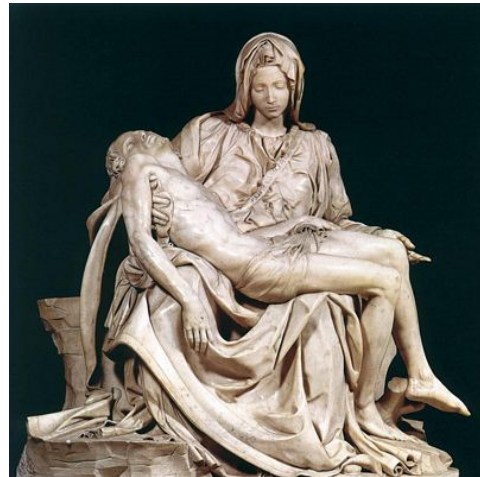
all the years of suppression, repression and invisibility. Now the man is the one to subdue and to obey, the image of the female sexualized object is turned over. Additionally, the title of the performance, *From the Underdog File*, refers ironically to a pamphlet, edited by the Red Cross, with the title “From the Humanity File”. EXPORT does not notice any humanity within the society of the postwar period and expresses this antipathy on a level of animalistic oppression.<sup>68</sup> With the same instinct a dog forages for food, society takes the woman’s oppression for granted. The artist again uses the technique of direct confrontation with the stereotypical image and tries to retain society’s instinct.

#### 6.1.4. The Birth Madonna (1976)

*The Birth Madonna* can be seen as parody as well as mimesis of an existing historical image. This photo-collage represents the content of a famous art-historical sculpture, namely Michelangelo’s “Pieta” in St. Peter’s Dome, Rome. EXPORT parodies Holy Mary holding Jesus Christ in her arms after he had been taken from the cross.<sup>69</sup>



13. VALIE EXPORT, “*The BirthMadonna*”, 1976.



14. Michelangelo, “*Pieta*”, 1498.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Female Trouble*, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/die-geburtenmadonna/>. April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

EXPORT confronts two phases of life with each other: birth and death – the beginning and the end of life. On the one hand, there is suffering from death, on the other hand



15. VALIE EXPORT, "Anticipation", 1976.

there is the image of a mother and what she has to suffer from in her everyday life. The loving and caring mother is suddenly depicted as a woman capturing the merciless reality of a housewife, symbolized by the washing machine. Created and inscribed with societal norms, the woman's image is one of a housewife and mother, caring for her child as well as for her husband. This is the traditional role which is ascribed to the woman and is one that EXPORT seeks to break with in her works of

art. She deconstructs these stereotypical and deadlocked images by representation of what is presumed to be reality. But reality itself is just an image, a construct of what we assume to be real. Another example commenting on the woman's role as housewife is a photo-collage called *anticipation*. The body re-enactment was done in 1976. The title inherently suggests the exaggerated description of the life lived by a housewife. *Anticipation* can be seen in relation to the baby who will be born as well as to the knowledge of all the work that is accompanying this condition. So the collage seems to equate the birth of a baby with housework, symbolized by a vacuum cleaner held in the same position as a woman would hold her baby. Again, the stereotypical image of a woman as housewife is put in an art-historical context.

## 6.2. Mimesis

Mimesis, meaning imitating and reproducing something already existing in a repetitive way, is a very common feature in the arts. Homi K. Bhabha, professor of English and American Literature and Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University, defines mimesis as "a mode of representation that marginalizes the monumentality of history" (Bhabha, 88). In his post-colonial theory, Bhabha elaborates on mimicry and mimesis as power models representing an already existing object. Bhabha performs a subject position resembling the concept of subversive mimesis in Feminist Studies,

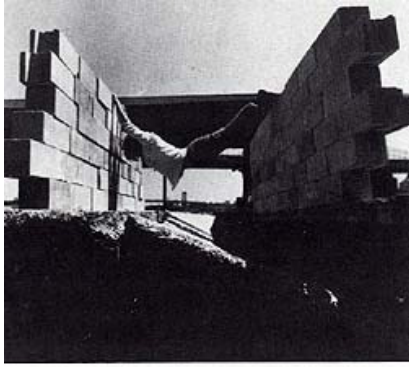
composed by Judith Butler. In doing so he argues that mimesis is an “*ironic compromise*” (Bhabha, 86) which has to continually produce its difference in order to be effective. In other words, mimesis is a concept of repetition which, nevertheless, produces the ambivalence to its imitated object and has, therefore, a disturbing and profound effect.

VALIE EXPORT uses this feature in her works by imitating performances or works of art in a way of adapting her own body to the already existing situation, which means that she does not just copy the action but adjusts it to a new context. In doing so, the artist always bears in mind that gender is not natural rather than performative and constructed. In Sabine Wilke’s words, VALIE EXPORT “works through the iconographic tradition of representing the female body in an effort of consciously reexhibiting these images through mimesis in her performances” (Wilke, 228). To her, mimesis then becomes a strategy of critique for a certain context or situation.

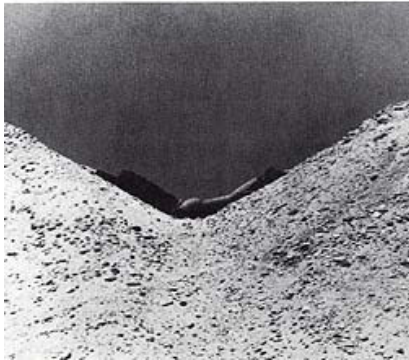
#### 6.2.1. Body Configurations (1972-1982)

VALIE EXPORT’s photography series *Body Configurations* is based “on the avant-garde perception of the body as a performative image, understood as metaphoric platform and alterable public space” (Hallensleben, 30). This aesthetic perception of the body can also be discovered as work on the body. *Body Configurations* consists of different photographic works on the body in analogous situations. Every configuration has its own title, corresponding to its surrounding. Within these performances, the body does not only adapt itself to the architecture surrounding, but also vice versa. EXPORT carried out this conceptual work over a period of time ten years. The initial inspiration for this work probably came from Dennis Oppenheim, a U.S. American performance and installation artist who was also seen as pioneer of the American concept of Body Art. Oppenheim worked extensively with and on his body, including his conceptual photography series *Parallel Stress* in 1970.





16. Dennis Oppenheim, "Parallel Stress", 1970.



The image shows two parallels connected by the body of the artist. Since Oppenheim's art is also famously known as "Land and Body Art", these images illustrate the interrelationship of the human body and the culturally globalized world. Furthermore, the body can be seen as a tool for communicating between human beings as well as between people and the modernized world, as a kind of courtesy to communicate with the world. VALIE EXPORT mimetically picks up this theme in her *Body Configurations*. She interprets Oppenheim's *Parallel Stress* in a gender perspective with the body still at the center of debates. In her works, the body is seen as the female adaption to the male gaze rather than as paying courtesy and being used as a tool for communicating.

She adjusts her body to the naturally given borders in the same way that a woman adjusts herself to the limits given by the man. EXPORT interprets Oppenheim's work in a completely new context.



18. VALIE EXPORT, "Imitation", 1982.



17. VALIE EXPORT, "Nachfügung", 1974.

*Nachfügung* shows the explicit resemblance to Oppenheim's *Parallel Stress*. We have the dune landscape as well as the body as interconnection. Interestingly, EXPORT called her work (see figure 19) *imitation*. This title suggests the mimetic reproduction of Oppenheim's work even more clearly.



A different approach of EXPORT's works is made clear in Hallensleben's article "Corporeal Topographies". He suggests that EXPORT placed the "female body in opposition to often male-connoted public spheres" (Hallensleben, 33).



21. VALIE EXPORT, "Justizpalast", 1982.



20. VALIE EXPORT, "Heldenplatz", 1982.

Public places, such as the Heroes' Plaza and the Palace of Justice in Vienna were male-connoted spaces because it was almost exclusively men working in such institutions. Women, in contrast, had to comply and to adapt themselves to the man's surrounding. This is exactly what the artist wants to show in her photographs – the woman's adaptation to the man and the male dominated public sphere in a phallocratic society. Further works, such as *Incorporation* and *Contribution* from 1976 dwell on this topic.

#### 6.2.2. Body Superimpositions with Historical Reproductions (1974)

This videotape from 1974 portrays the image of a woman as constructed by the male gaze. The art historic image of Holy Mary stands for the tradition of the idealized woman shown in the self-portrait of the artist. These female postures, which EXPORT has already used in her movie *Silent Language*, serve as critical reference to what woman have to suffer in a phallocratic society, dominated by the man. The woman, as an idealized construct, always gendered and always unsure of her own position, is reduced to her stereotypical image. EXPORT's *Body Superimpositions* work the same way as Ulrike Rosenbach's *Amazon*. Interestingly, both works developed at the same time, namely in 1974/1975. Both works are highly experimental and describe society's regression to traditional illusions. The video installations project an image of the Holy Mary or Amazon on a screen.



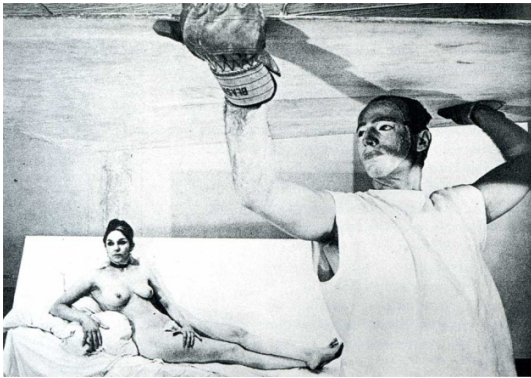
22. VALIE EXPORT, "*Body Superimpositions*", 1974.

23. Ulrike Rosenbach, "*Amazon*", 1975.

The artist then stands in for the projected figure and adopts the same position as the figure so that in the end they match exactly. According to Rosenbach, Amazon's image represents the identification with the power structure in a male society. In the same way the male gaze is on the Amazon, it is on herself. In doing so, the video recording is her mental feedback.<sup>70</sup> As the title of the work suggests, the artist seeks to superimpose traditional images and create new ones. We could also interpret the videotape in a different way: The new image and the superimposed image are the same, suggesting that society's view of women in the 1970's was remarkably similar to perceptions in historical times when the original art pieces were produced.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Ulrike Rosenbach's description of her work of art on <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de> (April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011).

### 6.2.3. Venus and Mars (1976)



24. Robert Morris/Carolee Schneeman, "*Site*", 1974.



25. VALIE EXPORT, "*Venus and Mars*", 1976.

Very similar to her video works in *Body Superimpositions*, EXPORT creates a collage consisting of a famous historic painting, namely Botticelli's "Venus and Mars" from 1483, and a self-portrait, in which the artist takes the same position as the Venus in the painting. Again, her body posture identifies with that of a famous historical woman and clearly represents the unchanged image of woman in today's society.<sup>71</sup> Venus, being the goddess of beauty and love and one of the most painted deities in Greek mythology, represents the ideal woman. Men were pleased when they saw her; they were captivated by her beauty and associated entire love and sexuality with her.<sup>72</sup> Today, the woman is still the image of the male gaze, the portrait of love and sexuality, satisfying the male needs. EXPORT mimetically picks up the topic already approached by the American performance artist Robert Morris in close collaboration with Carolee Schneeman, whom EXPORT knew personally. The performance *Site*, done by Morris and Schneeman in 1974, is a choreographed action and part of feminist performance art. Morris, dressed in white, uncovers a woman, Carolee Schneeman, lying naked on a white couch - for art connoisseurs immediately identifiable as reproduction of Manet's *Olympia* from 1863. After a short combination of movements by Schneeman on the couch the performance was over.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Carr-Gomm, description of the symbolism of the goddess Venus in the arts, 220.

#### 6.2.4. Invisible Adversaries (1977)

VALIE EXPORT's first feature-length film, *Invisible Adversaries* from 1977, points out several strategies of iconographic tradition. With the help of these strategies, the artist mimetically responds to the female body and announces the problem of the defining a woman. The film is about a couple, Anna and Peter, whose relationship becomes more and more complicated through the course of the movie. The problems start when Anna starts imagining foreign elements, called *hyksos*, who invade the human body and make them aggressive. Anna becomes more and more attentive about those *hyksos* in her surrounding and photographs all that is around her in order to convince Peter and her friends that the *hyksos* have already invaded the city of Vienna. She imagines radio news about the creature and is soon obsessed with the image of those elements existing in reality. In her imagination, the *hyksos* invade the human bodies, change their minds and, therefore, change society. Peter is already irritated by Anna's obsession – they argue a lot and their real character soon becomes obvious; it is made visible. Peter talks to Anna in baby talk and criticizes her whenever there is a chance. The traditional image of the woman as the one who has to obey is underlined provocatively. It becomes clear in the course of the movie that the *hyksos* are body doubles, accompanying the body all the time and everywhere. We have already heard about EXPORT's image of the two-foldedness of the body, meaning the different selves we have, we are signifier and signified at the same time. The *hyksos* are precise representations of this image, they are inside us. According to Eifler, the essence of the movie is the “exposure of the all-



26. VALIE EXPORT, “*Invisible Adversaries*”, 1977.  
(Screenshot)

pervasive behavior of aggression. The invisible adversary is made visible” (Eifler, “Film as Text”, 245). There are two important scenes in the film that address precisely this issue. The first one shows Anna in front of the mirror, putting make-

up on and getting ready for a date. In the next close-up, she stops applying make-up –

her mirror image does not. The scene shows the woman looking over her shoulder in the mirror. Anna is standing there, watching her mirror-image applying make-up while she herself is not moving at all. As we will see in further examples of EXPORT's works, the mirror image appears very often, for instance in *Syntagma*, which I will discuss

later. The next close-up shows Anna writing something on a piece of paper. The script is shaded, as if written by two independent hands. EXPORT argues in “The Real and its Double” that the actual double of the real is the body.<sup>73</sup> This double, then, is the masculine power and the societal inscriptions the real, the female, body has to be liberated from. With this mirror image, EXPORT seeks to redefine femininity in a new context. The movie carries on mimetically responding to other works of EXPORT’s, such as *Obsession* or *Body Configurations*. Anna investigates her own environment by taking pictures of everything and everywhere. She reenacts EXPORT’s *Body Configurations* by adapting her body to the environment. Modelled after EXPORT’s *Obsessions*, she walks around in ice-skates and also goes to sleep in them. After twelve minutes, the movie shows a series of shots of Madonna-iconographies, the same as already discussed before. Here we find a mimetic relationship with several of EXPORT’s works in one movie. As in EXPORT’s *Body Superimpositions*, Anna takes the position of the historic female postures and kind of invades them, the same way the *hyksos* invade the human body. Butler understands this performativity of the body as a subversive act:

The “I” that is its body is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the “what” that it embodies is possibilities. [...] As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. [...] Considering that “the” body is invariably transformed into his body or her body, the body is only known through its gendered appearance. (Butler, “Performative Acts”, 156f.)



27. VALIE EXPORT, “*Invisible Adversaries*”, 1977. (Screenshot)

After one hour and two minutes the scene shows the couple’s kitchen, in it a refrigerator containing a baby and a black and white picture of Anna. The woman opens the fridge and comes up with the following question: “When is the human being a woman?” (Anna in *Invisible Adversaries*, 1:02 hours). This question emphasizes the debate about the woman’s belonging in the male-

<sup>73</sup> Cf. EXPORT’S explanation of the body image in her article “The Real and its Double”, 8.

dominated world – a question that also has also a high position in EXPORT's own life. In her works, she embodies the question for her own identity and self-positioning in life. It is EXPORT's concern to liberate the woman from the man's bonds and to show her in an alternative perspective. At the end of the movie, Anna is sure of the two-folded perspective residing within bodies: "I only see fragmented faces. I do not see any humans. Humans have body doubles that walk alongside" (Anna in *Invisible Adversaries*, 1:29 hours).

### 6.3. Citation

Citation as an artistic strategy refers to already existing concepts in the arts by citing them, in other word, by imitating them, but elaborating on them in a different context and reworking them in a different manner. The cited work or concept is, therefore, the point of origin, but the outcome is a different one. The same as in mimesis, citing does not mean quoting, it means imitating but in a different way – this is what makes art subversive. An artist does not create a final work of art, rather are artworks more like works in progress. Art is not finished; it is rather interactive and moveable. The function of this strategy is, therefore, to repeat and to restate an already existing concept in order to emphasize that it is still relevant. Since the already existing concept is not merely copied, the produced one is still a new work of art and exists individually. The following examples will show in what way VALIE EXPORT imitates the work of contemporary American performance artists in order to carry out her strategy of speech.



### 6.3.1. Kausalgie (1973)

Woman is the Nigger of the World.  
(Yoko Ono, statement to *Nova*, a British women's magazine, 1969)<sup>74</sup>

This body-material interaction is split into parts: in two parts a slide is presented, one of them showing the artist with the garter-tattoo on her upper thigh done in the



28. VALIE EXPORT, "Kausalgie", 1973.

performance *Body Sign Action*. In the second part, the silhouette of a man is burned into a large plate of wax where EXPORT lies down and adjusts her own body to the outline of the silhouette. The third part, and this is the one I would like to discuss, is the most important part and shows EXPORT on the stage with a woman. She cuts the woman's clothes with a pair of scissors in tiny pieces until this woman is completely naked. This was done in 1973.

Nine years earlier, Yoko Ono, Japanese avant-garde artist and musician, was the precursor for this performance. In *Cut Piece*, the famous artist sat on stage in her best clothes with scissors in front of her. According to Ono, it was against her intentions to wear the cheapest clothes, so she wore her best ones. She encouraged the audience to come up to



29. Yoko Ono, "Cut Piece", 1964.

the stage and cut out the piece of her clothes which they wanted to have. The idea of giving the audience what it wishes to take is the core part of the performance – the idea that the audience and the artist create the art in equal shares, and that the course of the performance is unpredictable.<sup>75</sup> This is

why Ono reenacted her own performance in 2003 in Paris. The performance varies any time it is performed in a new context. At the end of the performance, Ono sat there naked. Related to the quote by Ono in a British women's magazine, *Nova*, the performance embodies all women who are oppressed and disadvantaged. The woman is

<sup>74</sup> This quote was found on the internet: <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/2680>. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/2680>. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

the one who has to sit there and who has to let things happen. The woman is the one who has no rights. With cutting Ono's clothes, the audience takes what they want, regardless of the artist's wishes and thoughts. The same happened in EXPORT's performance. Although she was the one who took the pieces she wanted to have, the same statement is made. The character on stage is not able to take advantage of the situation. What the performance brings up is breakup – the breakup of power-relationships between the sexes.

VALIE EXPORT cites Ono's work by imitating her work but reworking it in a different context. EXPORT does not cut her own clothes but the ones of another woman. In doing so, she emphasizes that Ono's concept is still relevant to the female bodies today. However, EXPORT creates a completely new performance. The action elaborates first and foremost on the fragmented body and, therefore, can be seen as a semantic analysis of the body by a body demonstration. Ono's body image is borrowed for the action and deconstructed by means of mimesis and citation.

### 6.3.2. Salzburg Cycle (2001)

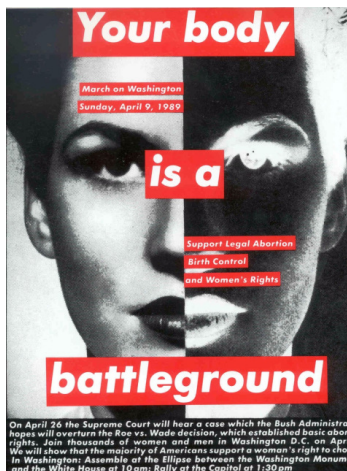
In this digital photography artwork, called *Salzburg Cycle*, EXPORT combines architecture with the human body. Similar to her *Body Configurations*, the body adjusts itself to the environmental surrounding and vice versa. Additionally, here we find fusion between them, a so-called dialogue between the human and the urban space. With this artwork, EXPORT again responds to the human being in society.



30. VALIE EXPORT, “*Salzburg Cycle*”, 2001.



Barbara Kruger, American conceptual artist, very obviously acted as a model for EXPORT's work. Kruger visualizes the subjects of power relationships and the male gaze and tries to bring these two issues together in an artificial context. In her collages, consisting of heads and images of architecture, she creates messages concerning feminist power and women's rights in the world.



31. Barbara Kruger, "Your Body is a Battleground", 1989.



32. Barbara Kruger, "Difference", 1980.

To do this she uses black and white images of human beings pasted over by banners in bold letters, in a beaming red color. Her most famous artwork called *Your Body is a Battleground* from 1989 puts the body into focus. The title of the artwork responds to women's continuous fight for their rights and for their place in society - they are the ones who want to have and should have power over their bodies. Both artists illustrate and emphasize the question of the female image, with representation and the portrayal of the female as object of the male gaze and as an object in the phallographic society. VALIE EXPORT engages in a dialogue with American artist Barbara Kruger by citing her artworks and transferring them in another context, in other words, she puts American concepts into an Austrian context. The function of this strategy here is that Kruger's idea is reworked and elaborated on in a different context and is, therefore, still relevant twenty years later. EXPORT's bodies, like Kruger's are, are still battlefields. The fragmentation and also the signing of bodies with words and symbols still have relevance today; they are significant for the meaning bodies are meant to carry out into the world.

#### 6.4. Symbolism

Symbolism, as a postmodern strategy, includes metaphorical language. The metaphor, as a figure of speech within symbolism, works through explaining one thing in terms usually used for another. Although metaphors are well known in literature, this is not the only field where the figure of speech is used – the arts also make use of metaphors. The arts, especially performance art, use metaphors by embodying an important issue and, therefore, understanding it in terms of something similar or comparable. The embodied action stands for the issue to be explained. To put it into Hallensleben's words, performance art works with the "artist's body [...] used as a textual-topographical metaphor to blend the organic with the constructed body" (Hallensleben, 30).

##### 6.4.1. Syntagma (1983)

VALIE EXPORT's 17 minute experimental film *Syntagma* is considered one of her most important works. The movie not only combines metaphors, but also responds to other works done by the artist in a kind of mimetic and citing fashion, and furthermore it clearly embeds the body in a mode of communication. *Syntagma*, clearly a work on the body, objectifies the body in an ironic, metaphoric and also realistic way. The film has no story, no plot; it is made of fragments in much the same way as the body itself is made of fragments. Concerning the question of having had certain body categories in mind when she made the movie, VALIE said in our interview that *Syntagma* dealt first



33. VALIE EXPORT, "*Syntagma*", 1983. (Screenshot)

and foremost with the deconstruction of mediated images and that this was the main point she wanted to make clear. Of course, body categories would also play an important role in the movie. At the very beginning of the film, EXPORT provides the viewers with the theme

of the body double we have already heard about – the body as belonging to two different representational orders: the self and the public. "The body clearly takes a position between me and the world. On the one hand, the body is the center of my

world. On the other, it is an object in the world of the Other” (Laing, quoted in EXPORT’s *Syntagma*). This epilogue to the movie does not only refer to society as the boundary of the body but also to female speech and women’s position in society as such. According to Eifler, the fact that the movie only deals with one human being, a woman, refers to woman’s soliloquous speech as women did not have anything to say in historical patterns.<sup>76</sup> Put simply, women talked to themselves because they were not heard by the male public. The next scene shows the main character as divided self: the woman meets up with herself, but in a split surrounding. This image is emphasized even more, since there is also a visible split in the screen. Here we have here the image of the self, who is not sure about her belonging in the world. The image of the divided self is not only made clear metaphorically in R.D. Laing’s quote in the beginning of the movie but also in two further examples. The quote by Laing is read by two different voices in two different languages. I would argue that this indicates that the self has two languages, a female language and a male one. The female one is the woman’s language and the male one expresses the societal boundaries the male public forces on the woman. It is the language the male society forces the woman to speak.

The second example is one EXPORT very often responds to in her works, namely the issue of female bodily fragmentation. Mid-way through *Syntagma*, female bodily fragments are shown as photographs within photographs. Like a mise-en-abyme, this representation of a representation evokes the objectification of the woman in a kind of traumatic sense. The body is subject and object at the same time, but still, through the male gaze the woman is only seen as the latter.



34. VALIE EXPORT, “*Syntagma*”. (Screenshot)

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Eifler, “VALIE EXPORT’S Iconography“, 116f. For more information on VALIE EXPORT’s film, see also Curry, „The Female Image as Critique in the Films of Valie Export”.

To put it into Silverman's words, for EXPORT "there is no bodily reality which is not informed by representation, and no corporeal representation which does not have real effects" (Silverman, "Speak Body", 215).

The body is double and split at the same time; it is signifier and signified together. Up



to this point in time, the woman has been nothing than the sum of bodily fragments, nothing than a sheath without any identity. To me, it seems as if it was EXPORT's intention to fragment gender clichés the same way as she fragments the body parts in the film. Those body fragments are shown in two forms: black and white photographs and colored images.

35. VALIE EXPPORT, "Syntagma". (Screenshot) The colored images show exclusively red-painted finger nails and toes, the black and white images do not. Additionally, we have this issue in the scenes where the two female feet are descending the stairs, seeming to be a kind of homage to Duchamp's famous *Nude Descending a Staircase*.<sup>77</sup> One pair of feet has colored nails, but the other one does not. We can assume that the black and white images represent the woman in her own world, in the world of the self. The colored picture represents the woman in the world of the Other, in the world of the male gaze.

Furthermore, this representation is implicated in the scene where the female feet descend the stairs in high heels. High heels are symbols of the female, sexualized body in a world where woman wants to appeal to man. By photographing those body parts, the body is written and made visual - gender-specific zones are picked out and provocatively confront the spectator's gaze. A reality which is only a representation is presented. The bare female feet, as well as the colored feet, represent codes pronounced by society as well as the world of the self. Concerning the stairs, Mueller suggests that they are a symbol of duration, step after step.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the staircase theme is repeated consistently, which also indicates duration.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Roswitha Mueller, *Fragments of the Imagination*, 189.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Roswitha Mueller, *Fragments of the Imagination*, 189.

Another metaphor repeated consistently throughout EXPORT's works is the mirror image. In the scene where the female character walks along the street, passing cars in a row, she is depicted in the cars' side mirrors. Additionally, in the end of the movie, the



36. René Magritte, "La Représentation", 1937.

woman stands in front of the mirror, facing her mirror image. Thus, the image is presented as the body double as we have already seen in EXPORT's *Invisible Adversaries*. The woman examines her mirror image moving while she herself is not moving at all. What we have here is the mirror image as the ideal of the body image – the ideal of a woman as seen by society - while the body image represents the woman in her own world without boundaries. As in René Magritte's *La Représentation*, from 1937, EXPORT presents the way in which the mirror changes the body as the way in which society expects her to be different from what she wants to be. An important sequence in *Syntagma* provides a commentary, constructed as a kind of self-portrait. Similar to the epilogue, two female voices speak the following text simultaneously, but in two different languages - English and German.

I don't smoke for the same reasons others do, because of habit. I am not used to laughing anymore, and my facial muscles would hurt if I tried it again. The pebble at the bottom of the sea is wounded by your shadow. To leave the district of security. To burn the dryness of the vagina. To pursue the harshness of power. To deprive the animal of its fight. Words tear at the shores of my mouth. The desire of my mouth bursts at the cliff of its opening. Recommendations are condemnations. I can't progress, nor do I regress, I only step aside. My eyes are like nuts where all sadness is hidden. Shrapnel of female imagination. I hit a key and the sound of bitter irony arises: music. I hit a second key, and something of will-power ascends. The movement of the arm reaches not only to the shore. It is not enough to put your hand on the table, to set your feet upon the stairs and to count time in hours and desires. (*Syntagma*)

Besides the metaphorical appearance, this quote from the film shows the vulnerability of a woman who is forced into a category she does not want to fit in. Laughing evokes pain, music causes irony. Walking represents an escape from power relationships, but at the same time leaving a secure surrounding. Words cannot be spoken because of deep sadness and condemnation. The female body is not able to take a direction, to make a decision, it just steps aside. Imagination and memory hurt. Leaving the secure zone is metaphorically connected with a dry and burning vagina, and the stairs are connected

with counting time and desires. What this movie shows us is that bodies have never reached and will never reach a state of natural wholeness, of completeness. In EXPORT's works, bodies are fragmented objects, assembled by power and fantasy, provocatively abandoned by civilization.

#### 6.4.2. Glottis (2007)

The power of language shows its trace long after silence.

(VALIE EXPORT)

The glottis, the vocal cords, are symbols of the voice  
they divide two phenomena  
the voice inside, the breath  
and the voice outside  
the phenomenon of vocalization  
of speech formation.

The echo of the hidden vocal cords  
speaks through the visible lips of the mouth.

Turbulences of breath  
formulate the expulsion of air  
that opens the glottis  
tears it apart  
bursts through it

Turbulences that cut into the vocal cords  
that score the banks of the vocal orifice<sup>79</sup>

A recent work, *Glottis*, is part of an art cycle focusing metaphorically on the body as a source of language and speech. The laser installation was part of the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007 where VALIE EXPORT also staged a live performance. *Glottis* shows EXPORT's own glottis filmed by a laryngoscope while speaking a text. According to EXPORT, the glottis is related to male power.<sup>80</sup> Although, we are not able to identify the picture of the glottis as male or female, the artist argues that it has a male

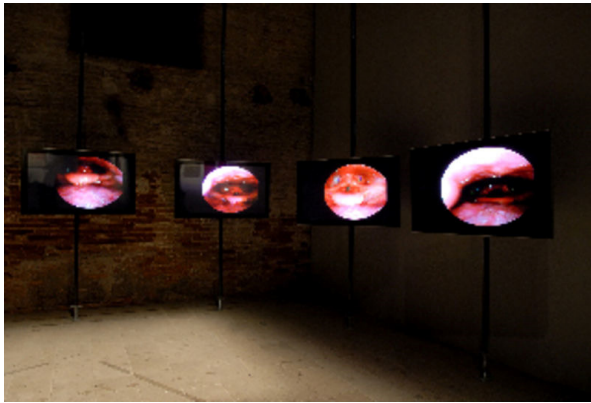
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<sup>79</sup> The quote and the poem are accompanying the laser installation *Glottis* and were found on VALIE EXPORT'S homepage, April 12<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Sichel, description of the laser installation in the exhibition catalogue accompanying the exhibition at Belvedere, Vienna.



gender. The important issue is that EXPORT enforces gender differences in order to deconstruct gender norms. Furthermore, we could argue that the image of the glottis is referred to the image of the vagina – both fleshly and both of the same shape. Then, we could interpret the glottis, the same as the vagina, as exposed to the male gaze. The background of the installation is definitely gender and power relationships between male and female. As the quote at the beginning of this discussion says, language has



37. VALIE EXPORT, “Glottis”, 2007.

power and this power is shown long after silence. By using the glottis as a metaphor for voice, EXPORT wants to make clear that women have a voice, that women have the right to speak and that they have the power to speak. For decades, woman was silent and obeyed

man’s demands. The male voice has long been seen as the fundamental tradition, the “centre or original guarantee of all meanings” (The Literary Encyclopedia<sup>81</sup>), also called logocentrism. In the same way as Derrida tried to deconstruct these traditionally held beliefs characterizing Western philosophies, EXPORT deconstructs gender norms by making the female voice visible.

Now is the time when women shall no longer be silent, they shall have the power to open their mouths and say what they have to say. Maybe EXPORT tags the glottis with male gender because in the past it was the man who had the voice. As other works show, such as *Finger Poem* or *Breath Text*, the woman was not allowed to articulate herself with words in public, therefore, she remained silent. As EXPORT’s poem suggests, the glottis divides the inner voice and the voice outside. Women always had this inner voice, they just could not bring it to the surface – it was hidden in silence. But then, if we speak, the trace of the power of language will be shown for a long time and it will have influence.

<sup>81</sup> <http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=671>, May 26<sup>th</sup> 2011.

#### 6.4.3. Heads – Aphaeresis (2002)

Dead People don't Scream.  
(VALIE EXPORT)

*Heads – Aphaeresis* is a completely different approach in EXPORT's body-related works of art – for the first time she uses traditional materials to create her sculptures: heads, cast in aluminum, bronze and wax, 56 articles all together.<sup>82</sup> They are installed



38. VALIE EXPORT, "*Heads – Aphaeresis*", 2002.

on a platform which is interactively accessible. Still, the focus is on the body, but this time it is not the written, socially constructed or the oppressed body. *Heads – Aphaeresis* is about violence, about war, and the dead and fragmented bodies that it leaves behind. The heads are lacking helmets, a distinctive feature on the battlefield – mutilated bodies remain. Furthermore, the sculptures look like totems, strung on the platform, resembling "trophies of war" (Sichel, 211). Interestingly, the heads are all metaphorically empty - they do not have a face. Normally, they should cry and express their feelings, but there is nothing there - as the title suggests: aphaeresis, meaning that something is missing and does not exist. On the one hand this is because they are dead, and it is just the sheath of the body that remains. But on the other hand, the viewer now has the opportunity to inscribe a certain identity onto the heads and to fill them with life.

The installation includes a video called *Dead People don't Scream*, which shows faces mutilated by policemen, murdered victims and brutal battles. Here we have the reference to the work discussed before, *glottis*. Again, the focus is on silent language and on the body as a tool for communication. Dead people do not scream. They do not have a language anymore and are no longer able to articulate themselves. It is the viewer's task to fill the heads with identity and to resurrect them. *Heads – Aphaeresis* is clearly another work that deals with identity, and the fact that our identity is constantly

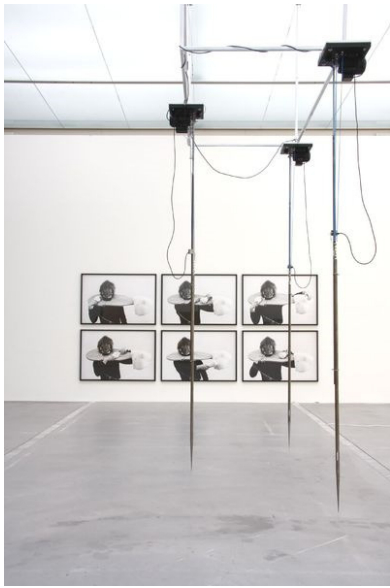
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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Sichel's description of the installation in the exhibition catalogue accompanying the exhibition at Belvedere, Vienna.



changed and predetermined by the prevailing codes and norms of communication and society. The metaphor of the head without a face for the lack of language and power is undoubtedly an important element in EXPORT's body-work.

#### 6.4.4. Needle (1996)



39. VALIE EXPORT, "Needle", 1996.

From the beginnings of her career as an artist, VALIE EXPORT has been working with different kinds of media and different artistic genres. A striking example for the relationship between body and machine is *Needle*, originally from 1996 and reenacted in 2010 for the exhibition at the Belvedere, Vienna. *Needle* is a sculpture consisting of three oversize motor-powered steel needles moving up and down on a red child's dress. The main essence of the work is the needle from a giant sewing machine. The swayings of the needle is a metaphor for repetitive work.<sup>83</sup> This repetitive work is associated mainly with women as sewing of clothes has always been female work. Thus, the identification with female work leaves a mark on female identity as the woman is reduced to the duty of housework and put in the stereotypical category of a housewife. Furthermore, the needle is connected with monotonous work still associated primarily with women. EXPORT elaborates metaphorically on the stereotypical image of the woman as housewife and caretaker for her children. The repetitive work is reflective of women's unavailing efforts to be heard, to be realized as a subject in society.

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Ragaglia, 233.

#### 6.5. The representation of pain and self-harming

My body – the joint, my body – the interface.  
(VALIE EXPORT)

The two most important artistic strategies to query female bodies and body images are the direct confrontation with their patriarchal construction, on the one hand, and the destruction and subversion of these images, on the other – the destruction of the socially constructed images of women. We have already seen various examples for the first approach. In EXPORT's works, the destruction of the body as well as of patriarchal structures and societal representations is always manifested on her own gendered body. According to Zell, the body is the interface between privateness and the public as the body always shows a self image as well as an image of society and, therefore, also the contradiction. Pain is then a consequence of the difference between genders within feminist emancipation.<sup>84</sup> The most important element is the cut – artistic instrument on the one hand and aesthetic matter on the other. The cut as an important element within the performance of the self becomes evident in works, such as *remote ... remote*, *Hyperbulie* and *Eros/ion*. As *Body Sign Action* shows, societal traces have been inscribed onto the human body since long ago. The question is if the completely unwritten and blank body can be found at all.

To take another approach of the body in pain, Elaine Scarry's view is the one of the inexpressibility of physical pain. She offers two explanations for this inexpressibility: first, the person's body seems to have a remote character when suffering from pain as the pain has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface. Second, pain seems to be completely absent from the body.<sup>85</sup> I do not completely agree with Scarry here. To me, the body in pain can be very well expressed, as VALIE EXPORT shows in her works of art. Scarry argues furthermore, that "the normal relation between body and voice is deconstructed and replaced by one in which the extremes of the hurt body and unanchored verbal assertions are laid edge to edge" (Scarry, 143). Pain is then read as power. This is exactly what EXPORT wants to make clear in her performances, such as *Hyperbulie* or *Eros/ion*. Paying attention to the performing artist, one notices that she

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Zell, 69.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Scarry's description of the inexpressibility of the human body in her book *The body in Pain*, 4f.

does not say a word during the action. She communicates the pain through her actions but she does not have a voice in the sense that she talks to the audience. As a bodily practice, pain works in a descriptive way and can only be conceived metaphorically. This metaphorical usage is consequently the literary representation of pain.

#### 6.5.1. Hyperbulie (1973)

*Hyperbulie* shows VALIE EXPORT walking upright and naked through a corridor built of electrically charged wires. Two batteries, one on each side of the gangway, supply the wires with electric current. While the artist walks through the gangway, every contact with the electrically charged wires causes an electric shock to her body.



40. VALIE EXPORT, “*Hyperbulie*”, 1973.

Because of the frequent exposure with the wires in the narrow gangway, the artist’s body is so exhausted that she almost gets out of the corridor. Hereby, the corridor symbolizes a narrow-minded community, a kind of “coterie”. This community is described as a course of human dressage.<sup>86</sup> Everyone that tackles this path experiences violence, oppression and authority. First, EXPORT walks upright through the corridor but in the course of this process the body experiences more and more electric shocks and is in the end so exhausted that the artist has to crawl out of the corridor on her knees. The argument hereby is that the electric shocks illustrate abuse by society – every moment the human being does not observe the laws and norms given by society he or she experiences this abuse. Furthermore, the abuse inscribes norms and codes onto

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Description of the performance on <http://www.urban-infill.com>. April 17<sup>th</sup> 2011.

the human body, the same as in everyday experience. EXPORT defines her own body in this performance as the carrier of societal signs and meanings and illustrates the functionality of human communication with societal mechanism of oppression. With the adoption of the human body, EXPORT adverts explicitly to the woman's situation in society. Self-determination in life, especially as a woman, is only possible with immense will-power – in order to reach the end of the corridor. Another argument is that the woman is reduced to the image of an animal.<sup>87</sup> This becomes evident in the end of the performance when the artist crawls out of the corridor on her knees – she gets out of it like a tamed animal, exactly the way society wants her to be. The motif of female oppression and dependency is applied.

#### 6.5.2. Eros/ion (1971)

The title of this body-material interaction derives from two important phenomena. First, Eros was the god of sexual love, beauty and fertility in Greek mythology. This association with EXPORT's performance responds to the woman as object of sexuality and fertility. Second, erosion means the degradation and damage of the surface of the earth. The earth's surface can be associated with the surface of the body. Through the abuse received from society, as we saw in *Hyperbulie*, the body is made vulnerable and sensitive.

In *Eros/ion*, VALIE EXPORT rolls naked on an expanse covered with glass splinters and finally on a white sheet of paper. The small cuts on her body leave their marks on the white sheet – blood, similar to Yves Klein's traces of the human painting brush.<sup>88</sup> The injuries were minimal as the glass splinters were very thin. EXPORT's own description of the performance is the following:

I first rolled naked on the glass sheet, then in the glass splinters and finally on the paper screen. The cuts in my skin resulting from the slight abrasions caused by the broken glass are openings to the intima (sic!), to the inside of the veins, the inside of the body ... the body is a projection surface when viewed from outside ... the incisions are openings to the inside, they open up the image, they are the cut on the projection surface of representation, namely the 'body', cuts in

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT – Bild-Risse*, 58f.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

the image of the 'body', surrendering itself to the gaze. The symbolic function of the body is cut open. (EXPORT, quoted in De Preester, 365)

From a feminist point of view, this quote shows that the body is the battlefield for the battle of self-determination. Thus, the aim is to abuse the body as well as society. The



41. VALIE EXPORT, "*Eros/ion*", 1971.

artist bears the heteronomy acted out by society by defining the context in a new way and by imputing the body a new meaning of the inscribed codes and norms. Especially women had and still have to fight for self-determination and autonomy. I asked the artist at the opening of her

exhibition at the Belvedere in Vienna if it hurt when she rolled in the broken glass. She answered, no because the process of aesthetics is one of overcoming the pain. She concentrated on the transformation of societal norms and bodily inscriptions so much that she did not feel anything apart from will-power to perform societal pressure on the human being, especially on the woman. Additionally, we have already heard about the cut as an important element within the aesthetics of performance. Broken glass always means cutting and pain. The fact that the artist cuts her skin voluntarily shows how we, as human beings, are able to overcome societal and cultural pressure.

### 6.5.3. ... remote ... remote ... passages (1973)



42. VALIE EXPORT, "*remote...remote*", 1973.

Similar to *Eros/ion*, the main focus of this performance is also on the cut and on cutting material. The installation consists of a projection and a basin filled with oil. The surface mirrors a film showing the artist VALIE EXPORT herself. She is sitting in front of a huge picture showing two children who suffer from child abuse. The pictures are

taken from the police archive for abuse. For 16 minutes, the artist injures her cuticle with a razor blade and subsequently puts her bleeding fingers in a bowl filled with milk which she carries on her lap. This action is accomplished repeatedly within these 16 minutes. Without knowing the association to the two children, the performance conveys sorrow and violence. It is the dismay about the abuse in which EXPORT injures herself. This action can be compared with Viennese Actionism as, for instance, Chris Burden shot himself when doing a performance against the Vietnam War. Such actions and performances convey certain powerlessness. According to Ragaglia, EXPORT often engages in acts of self-harm as a means for the traumata we bear within us and with which we are forced to live.<sup>89</sup> As the title of the performance suggests, EXPORT injures her cuticle in a very absent manner, as if she was remote-controlled by an invisible hand.

What is very interesting is the use of the symbolic and the metaphoric in this performance: the milk acts as a metaphor for the healing power of motherhood after being injured and pressured by the phallocratic society – the milk as a place of retreat



43. VALIE EXPORT, "remote...remote", 1973.

from harm and violence. Furthermore, EXPORT uses oil in several performances and installations, such as *compulsion* and *Kalashnikov*. Oil is a material that is not fluid but stringy, once in it, it is no longer possible to move. The oil responds metaphorically to compulsion on the human body, inflicted by society like greasy, sticky oil. By injuring herself, EXPORT opens her skin with the razor blade and makes the past as well as the present visible. The word *passages* is inscribed back-to-front in the film itself. It responds to the different phases and passages in life, from childhood to adulthood.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Ragaglia, 234.

#### 6.5.4. Identity-Transfer (1972)

EXPORT's *Identity-Transfer* is not clearly considered a performance that brings pain



44. VALIE EXPORT, "*Identity-Transfer*", 1972.

and self-harm to the foreground. Still, the action can be embedded in this context as issues, such as pain and violence, can be identified in the subliminal. In this sequence of photographs, VALIE EXPORT poses as a female victim of violence. She embodies violence of any kind which women experience at the time of the performance and at present. Talking about performances, we always have to bear in mind the transitory character of the action. The performance itself is over as soon as the artist stops performing; neither can it be reproduced in exactly the same way ever again. What stays and

persists is the message the artist wants to get across by means of the performance. *Identity-Transfer* is an action still very effective today as nothing has really changed over time. There is still violence in our society, especially women are still raped and seen as the weak gender. I argue that there will not be any apparent changes in the near future. Similar to Dennis Oppenheim's work from 1970, interestingly bearing the same name of *Identity-Transfer*, EXPORT responds two years later to the phenomenon of identity being something fluid, something changeable. Keeping with Judith Butler, identity, like gender, is generated in time and created anew through the "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, "Performative Acts", 154). We create identity by acting our body, our gender, in short: our self.

## 7. Back then and today – still a restricted code?

Architectural language is a system of signs,  
cut in space and time.<sup>90</sup>  
(VALIE EXPORT)

Setting: Cube EXPORT. The cube is a transparent space, a glass area located in the city railway arch 43, Vienna. This space is an independent architectural area inserted under the bridge of the city railway-construction. Moreover, the whole cube is made of glass, just like the connecting components, in order to respond to the contrast of the closeness of societal systems. Art in the open space is the code word here. The cube's transparency allows the view from both sides of the bridge, and therefore creates the connection between pavements and roads as well as people walking by. Furthermore, the gallery is like a promenade exposed to the viewer's gaze. I argue that the sculpture's fragility is reminiscent of the fragility of the human body that I already discussed in my thesis. Just like the human, especially the female, body is exposed to the male gaze, the cube is exposed to the curious, sometimes insulting glances of society. VALIE EXPORT sees the cube as a virtual space, as an area for art in the open space – an active room. But the cube is also controlled. Just like the human fragile body, it is controlled by the walls of the bridge from each side – it is space that is open yet completed at the same time. Additionally, the gallery can be experienced by walking through it, it can be changed, and codes can be inscribed.

This cube is the setting for performances, acts and exhibitions today. On January 13th 2011, the performance group TOXIC DREAMS (note the spelling in capital letters here) re-enacted VALIE EXPORT's *Restricted Code* from 1979. The production by the "Tanzquartier Vienna" premiered EXPORT's performance with the new name *Understudy – A reformulation of Restricted Code*. Within this understudy of EXPORT's performance, the most interesting topic is the question of differences and similarities of 1979 and 2011. Underneath, we have two descriptions of the performance, one from 1979 and one from 2011.

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<sup>90</sup> Quote taken from VALIE EXPORT'S article "The Transparent Space", 137.



Technology/material: a person in evening dress in a cage made out of battery-charged electric wires, a small child in a cot, a bird in a transparent glass cage, a seven-month-old dog in a transparent glass cage, a hamster in a transparent glass cage, a meal for the people. Table, chair, cutlery, glass, wine, food for the animals. Two video cameras, six monitors, a switch, microphone, loudspeakers. (VALIE EXPORT Archive, quoted in the program of TOXIC DREAMS)

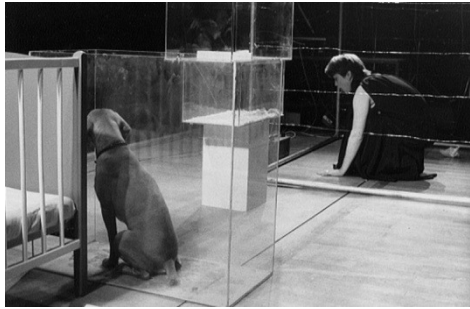
This is the description of VALIE EXPORT's performance in 1979 followed by the one of the understudy re-enacted by TOXIC DREAMS:

Technology/material: a person in a dark suit sits on a dolly-track and can be moved forward and backward, a sixty three years old man from Tehran sits inside a crib, two fishes in a transparent fish tank, a trained dog on a small round carpet. Two video cameras, one underwater camera, four large monitors – split screen, one preview monitor, microphones, loudspeakers. Light bulbs around the inside glass frames.  
(<http://toxicdreams.at/archive/>)

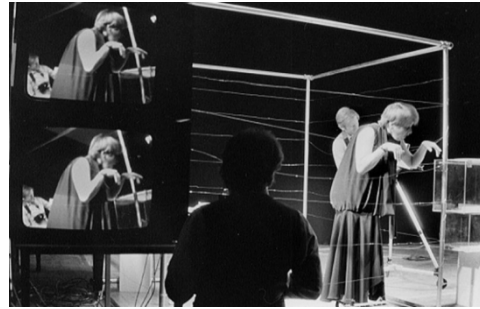
Basically, the two descriptions are very similar. The clothing is, apart from seasonal fashion, the same, namely evening dress. Furthermore, the installation is almost identical, with the slight difference that in 2011 technology is more advanced than it was in 1979. What immediately stands out is that in the 2011 production, the main actor is a man, whereas in 1979 it was a woman, the artist VALIE EXPORT herself. Even more important than the gender question is the fact that the other actor, a second man, is described in great detail. What is emphasized is his age and his ethnical origin. In my opinion, it has no relevance to the performance whether the man is sixty three or fifty years old. Just as irrelevant is his ethnic background. Why then, does the 2011 production underline that the man is from Teheran? One can only assume that either the performers wanted to point to today's societal situation of humans being reduced to their race and gender, or their aim was to exaggerate and underline the situation of what it was like in 1979.

The performance is made of three parts: *Eating*, *Copying the event in the room* and *The condition of trace*. The starting point is the evening meal for the human beings and the feeding of the animals. Both performances show that in the course of the action, the human's conventions and eating manners increasingly correspond to those of the

animals. VALIE, as well as the performers in the 2011 production, starts to eat with her fingers and turning to the orifices of her body: she starts to belch, to cough and to spit.<sup>91</sup> Later, she starts to imitate the child's and the dog's movements and merges with them. She is completely caught up in the animalistic behavior.



45. VALIE EXPORT, *"Restricted Code"*, 1979.



In the production by TOXIC DREAMS one camera is always directed on the main actor while the other one allows the viewer the direct comparison of the graphical material broadcasted on a divided display screen. The performance analyzes the different facilities of human body-expression and how they differ from those of animals rather than linguistic codes. So the difference of the natural expression of the body and the body language determined by society is questioned. What is a natural expression and what is an animalistic one? Which expressions are natural, which learned or inscribed? Superimpositions, such as "Make a similar or identical version of ... rather than creating something original," and "Mind your table manners," are shown to the viewers and try to answer those questions.



46. TOXIC DREAMS, 2011.



47. TOXIC DREAMS, 2011.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. EXPORT'S description of the performance from 1979 in the program.

In our society today, creating something new it is still not always the easiest way to express this, to act in a way others would not dare. The safer way is to imitate something that already exists, to stick to a certain predetermined program of habits, in other words: to stick to the rules. This is also where gender and power come in. Women are still not completely undetermined, they are still not free. There are countries where women do not have any rights, where they have to obey what the man says, where they do not have a voice. Power relationships between the sexes are still in the foreground and at the center of debates. VALIE EXPORT responds to exactly those questions of power relationships and power structures by performing her own body to set societal debates. To her,

der Körper als Ausdrucksmedium ist ein restringierter Code. Weil die Gesellschaft über den Körper Kontrolle über das Individuum ausübt, Körperkontrolle demnach Sozialkontrolle wird. Die Unterscheidung zwischen tierischem und menschlichem Körperverhalten, zwischen tierischem Körperausdruck und menschlichem Körperausdruck ist also ein ideologisches Axiom der Sozialkontrolle. Das Abgeben von den sozial sanktionierten Körperbewegungen, Körperverhalten wird demnach auch bestraft.<sup>92</sup>

What we can take from this quote is that we are still determined by societal forces, by societal codes, inscriptions and norms. If we do not stick to the rules we will most certainly be penalized and discharged from society. The performance by EXPORT as well as the re-enactment show that we are determined by society to such an extent that we do not know anymore what is natural and what is not. Without the existing prescriptions, we would act on instinct, we would act naturally. In contrast to that, rules and regulations by society are so firmly positioned on our bodies that we cannot move and escape. We go on living in this inflicted scheme until we break out and go back to our natural behavior. I argue that up to this point it will be a long and difficult journey. Coming back to the question before, I would also argue yes, our society is still a restrictive code. Making similar and identical versions of something already existing – this is exactly the way society wants us to be. As long as we do not speak up but meet

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<sup>92</sup> This description in German was taken from the program handed out at the performance on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011. “The body as a medium of expression is a restricted code. Due to the fact that society exercises control over the individual, the control over the body becomes social control. The differentiation of animalistic and human bodily behavior, of animalistic and human bodily expression, is, therefore, an ideological axiom of social control. The depositing of those socially sanctioned body movements and bodily behaviors is thus penalized (my translation).”

society's requirements as we are asked we will have a peaceful life. As soon as we try to act out our natural behavior instead, we will meet society's limits.

## 8. Conclusion

### Imaging her Erotics<sup>93</sup> or Transnational Art?

Performance art, Life Art in the broader sense, is the permanent artistic producing which is not or does not just appear as a graphic artistic object. It is the art of living and of constantly reproducing life and its surroundings in a new way. Performance art is work in progress, the imperfect act of embodying the self which only becomes a whole issue through interplay with the spectators. The body is always the most important issue within performance art; it is considered the stage where the action takes place, being brush and canvas at the same time. In other words: the body is both the place where the performance takes place and the material which is needed for the action. During the action, all elements relate to each other, forming a unit which then comes out in the performance.

Levels of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal or the need for larger rhythms carried visually by an independent figure which moves in relationship to the overall environment – shifting dimensions, layers, levels. Every element contributes to the image. The active qualities of any of one element (body, light, sound, paper, cloth, glass) find their necessary relation to all other elements, and through conjunction and juxtaposition the kinetic energy is released. (Schneeman, 49)

VALIE EXPORT's works are works about the body, with the body as the main source of meaning. According to Roswitha Mueller, EXPORT's works adhere to another phenomenon relating to the body, namely to the disappearance of the body as described by Baudrillard in the 1980s.<sup>94</sup> Whereas in most postmodern works the body is considered the signifier, "in EXPORT's work the focus is on the body as existential ground of every woman. [Most works are] about the signifying power of the body, not about the embodiment of the signifier" (Mueller, *Fragments*, 193).

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<sup>93</sup> Title taken from Carolee Schneeman's book *Imaging her Erotics*.

<sup>94</sup> Description of the phenomenon of the disappearance of the body in Mueller, *Fragments of the Imagination*, 192f.

As I have argued in my paper, VALIE EXPORT positions herself within a discourse of equality. Not through alignment with the differences between the sexes, but through analyzing them and confronting the audience with those differences she deconstructs gender norms in a way only performance art is able to do. This demonstration of the differences, of course, provides allows us to get away from the presumption of a naturally given binary gender order. Performativity, as it is defined, directs us not only to linguistic elements but also to other symbolically mediated interactions. As a result, forms of expression, such as voice, gesture and facial expression as well as movement gain in importance. In the course of a so-called performative turn within the social and cultural sciences, debates about the meaning of aesthetic and corporal forms of communication are taking place.<sup>95</sup>

The artist VALIE EXPORT does not fix gender identities; instead she consistently positions her identity differently. This makes the body the place where discourse happens. Not only the artist herself but also the spectators create these positions of identity in that they interact in the performance and assign meaning to the embodied actions. What is then made visible through the positioning of herself in different identities is the presence and diversity at the same time – this is what the artist calls double-bind. The important statement by R. D. Laing quoted in EXPORT's *Syntagma* shows exactly this phenomenon: "My body positions itself between me and the world. On the one hand, it is the center of my world, on the other an object in the world for the others" (R. D. Laing quoted in *Syntagma*). In my interview with VALIE, I asked her about the presence of the double-bind phenomenon in her works. She answered: "This sentence is clearly defined and responds to my works which are always double-bind works and which I also describe as such."<sup>96</sup> As already discussed, the bodies in EXPORT's works always belong to two different representational orders, namely the societal order and the order of the self – it is the image of our body seen by ourselves and at the same time the image as seen by the others, by society.

What is criticized a lot and what also became clear within the discussion of various works by VALIE EXPORT is the "problem" of pornography and voyeurism. The artist has often been accused of pornographic work and subsequently had to justify such

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Description of the performative turn in Fischer-Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen*.

<sup>96</sup> The interview was done via mail on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2011.

content. I argue that her works cannot be seen as pornographic in any way. The artist is considered as founder of Feminist Actionism and was highly influenced by the works of the contemporary group of the Viennese Actionists. With the unleashing of *Genital Panic*, EXPORT activated a wave of irritation. The gaze is dragged back and forth between different shocking zones, but the artist's provocative attitude and her self-confident position bring about a rebound of this gaze: despite her nudity, the gaze is not able to become importunate. This is where the phenomenon of the double-bind comes in: presence and diversity are adherent at the same time. I, therefore, agree with Kristine Stile's argument when she says the following:

Expropriated from its function as an extension of the phallus, the firearm punctuates the grammar of EXPORT's gestural language with a threatening tension between erotic availability and extreme danger. The erotic intention for the viewer to consume and sexually possess the femme-fatale is held at bay by EXPORT's metaphorical castration and appropriation of the phallic weapon against the patriarchal regime of sexual possession and subjugation of women. (Stiles, "Corpora Vilia", 18)

Within her performance, EXPORT shows what is otherwise hidden; she demonstrates and presents her genitals because they are naturally given. We are not ashamed of our hair or of our legs, so why be ashamed of our genitals? This is just another societal compulsion to overcome. With her actions, she tells the (female) world that genitals are nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody talks about them – so why not show them? Of course, she displays her erotic parts to a certain extent but this is within a specific context. That is why I argue that EXPORT's works are by no means pornographic works in the conventional context.

I hope to have shown how VALIE EXPORT uses her body in performances in order to deconstruct gender stereotypes and norms adherent in our society. As the analysis showed, the artist uses strategies, such as parody, mimesis, citation, symbolism and the representation of pain and self-harming in her works of art to give meaning to her body performances. There are various examples, also discussed in this thesis, that show similarities with works done by American performance artists. Those are, for instance, Carolee Schneeman, Yoko Ono, Barbara Kruger and Karen Finley, just to name a few. EXPORT cites works done by these artists and metaphorically responds to them. Furthermore, her works had been cited as well; just think of Marina Abramović reenacting EXPORT's *Genital Panic*. Although VALIE is an Austrian artist, was born

in Austria and began her work in Austria, she expanded her art transnationally, especially in the United States. She worked as a guest professor in the United States, she met performance artist Carolee Schneeman there and increasingly gained in importance in the States. Today, her works are on show in museums all over the world: London, New York, Paris, Barcelona, and Venice, just to name a few. I would argue that EXPORT not only expanded her art transnationally, but that she even assimilates ‘American’ issues and reworks those ‘American’ concepts in an Austrian context by citing and imitating American performance artists and additionally being cited by them. According to VALIE EXPORT, her aims are “to overcome boundaries, to break through them. Art should always be transnational – my art is transnational” (EXPORT in my interview with her).<sup>97</sup>



48. Yoko Ono/John Lennon, December 1980.

Feminist writer Natalie Angier writes about the struggle between men and women that “there is a constant push and pull between the sexes: women fight to have control over their physical bodies as well as their places in society, while men fight to maintain their dominance over women in society” (quoted in Calak, 156). I argue that although our society has

changed to a considerable extent, feminist art still meets society’s boundaries. On the other hand, artists such as VALIE EXPORT and Yoko Ono extravagate boundaries and provocatively contradict society’s norms and pressure by performing the unknown and what was previously thought impossible.

<sup>97</sup> The interview was done via mail on April 24th 2011.



## 9. Abstract

### 9.1. Abstract English

“The Performed Self” - this thesis focuses on gender in performance art, and how gender stereotypes are challenged and deconstructed in the works of the Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT. The artist works with feminism and the concept of gender politics to challenge gender stereotypes and to refer to the question of how a woman’s role in society was/is determined. She does this by using her own body as a communicative tool and perceiving it as occupying an intermediate position between self-realization and external determination by society. Furthermore, the artist engages in ‘American’ discourse on specific issues and appropriates those for the Austrian context. Similar to U.S. performance artists, such as Yoko Ono, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and Carolee Schneeman, the body is always at the center of debates within EXPORT’s works – the body of how it is mediated, conceived, sensed and torn apart. The body is an object in a phallocratic society where women only exist as a construct of the male gaze. This society is, with all its norms and regulations, created and collected by a male predominance. VALIE EXPORT uses specific strategies, such as parody, mimesis, citation, symbolism and the representation of pain and self-harming, to deconstruct the gender norms that are prevalent in our society. Two phenomena are hereby considered most important: human fragmentation and the body as material and canvas, in other words, as a communicative tool.

## 9.2. Abstract German

„Das performte Selbst“ – Das Augenmerk der vorliegenden Arbeit ist auf das Geschlecht in der Performance Kunst der österreichischen Künstlerin VALIE EXPORT gerichtet. Sie arbeitet mit dem Feminismus und der von Judith Butler vertretenen Konzeption der Geschlechtertheorie und Geschlechterpolitik um Geschlechterdifferenzen und Stereotype in unserer Gesellschaft aufzuzeigen und aufzubrechen. Um diese Geschlechterstereotypen zu adressieren, verwendet die Künstlerin ihren eigenen Körper als kommunikatives Werkzeug und verwendet ihn als eine Art Zwischenglied um die eigene Selbstverwirklichung und die Fremdbestimmtheit durch die Gesellschaft voneinander zu trennen. Weiteres beschäftigt sich die Künstlerin mit dem Amerikanischen Körperdiskurs, nimmt bestimmte Positionen des Amerikanischen ein und setzt sie in den Österreichischen Kontext. Vergleichbar mit U.S. Amerikanischen Künstlerinnen, wie zum Beispiel Yoko Ono, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman und Carolee Schneeman, ist der Körper immer das wichtigste Merkmal in der Kunst VALIE EXPORTS – der Körper, wie er vermittelt wird, erdacht wird, gespürt und in Stücke gerissen wird. Der weibliche Körper als Objekt in einer patriarchalen und männlich dominierten Gesellschaft existiert als Konstrukt eines männlichen Blicks. Es ist eine Gesellschaft, welche mit allen ihren Normen und Regeln, von einer männlichen Machtstellung erschaffen wird, und dieser unterliegt. VALIE EXPORT verwendet Strategien der Sprach- und Kunstwissenschaften, wie zum Beispiel Parodie, Mimesis, Zitation, Symbolik und die Darstellung von Schmerz und Selbstverletzung um die vorherrschenden Geschlechternormen, welche sich in der Gesellschaft festgeschrieben haben, zu dekonstruieren. Zwei Phänomene sind dabei ausschlaggebend: zum Einen die Zersplitterung des menschlichen Körpers und zum Anderen der Körper selbst als Material und Projektionsfläche zugleich. In anderen Worten: der Körper als kommunikatives Werkzeug.

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Figure 1: VALIE EXPORT: *SMART EXPORT*. [www.valieexport.org](http://www.valieexport.org). 1970. April 23rd 2011.

Figure 2: Klein, Yves. “*Antropometries*“. 1960.  
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Figure 3: Manzoni, Piero. “*Living Sculpture*“. 1961.  
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Figure 4: Nitsch, Hermann. “*7<sup>th</sup> Painting Action*“. 1962. MUMOK, Vienna.  
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Figure 5: Schneeman, Carolee. “*Eye Body*“. 1963.  
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Figure 6: Brus, Günter. “*Selbstbemalung II*“. 1965.  
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Figure 7: Guerilla Girls. “*Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*“. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. February 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 8: Schneeman, Carolee. “*Interior Scroll*“. 1975.  
<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>. April 23rd 2011.

Figure 9: Schneeman, Carolee. “*Meat Joy*“. 1964. Ibid. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

Figure 10: Kubota, Shigeko. “*Vagina Painting*“. 1965.  
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Figure 11: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Touch Cinema*". 1968. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

Figure 12: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Genital Panic*". 1969. Ibid. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

Figure 13: EXPORT, VALIE. "*From the Underdog File*". 1969. Ibid. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

Figure 14: EXPORT, VALIE. "*The Birth Madonna*". 1976. Ibid. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 15: Michelangelo. "*Pieta*". 1498. <http://www.google.at/images>. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 16: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Anticipation*". 1976. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 17: Oppenheim, Dennis. "*Parallel Stress*". 1970. <http://www.google.at/images>. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 18: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Imitation*". 1982. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 19: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Nachfügung*". 1974. Ibid. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 20: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Heldenplatz*". 1982. Ibid. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 21: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Justizpalast*", 1982. Ibid. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 22: EXPORT, VALIE. "*Body Superimpositions*". 1974. <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/koerperueberblendungen/images/2/>. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 23: Rosenbach, Ulrike. "*Amazon*", 1975. <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/glauben-sie-nicht/>. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 24: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Venus and Mars*”. 1976.

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Figure 25: Schneeman, Carolee. “*Site*”. 1974. <http://www.google.at/images>. April 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 26: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Invisible Adversaries*”. 1977. (Video, Original, Color, 104min). ARGE Index. Screenshot.

Figure 27: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Invisible Adversaries*”. 1977. Ibid. Screenshot.

Figure 28: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Kausalgie*”. 1973. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 29: Ono, Yoko. “*Cut Piece*”. 1964.

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Figure 30: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Salzburg Cycle*”. 2001. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 31: Kruger, Barbara. “*Your Body is a Battleground*”. 1989.

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Figure 32: Kruger, Barbara. “*Difference*”. 1980. Ibid. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 33: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Syntagma*”. 1983. (Video, Original, Color, 17min). ARGE Index. Screenshot.

Figure 34: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Syntagma*”. 1983. Ibid. Screenshot.

Figure 35: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Syntagma*”. 1983. Ibid. Screenshot.



Figure 36: Magritte, René. “*La Représentation*”. 1937.

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Figure 37: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Glottis*”. 2007. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 12<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 38: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Heads – Aphaeresis*”. 2002. <http://www.lentos.at>. April 12<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 39: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Needle*”. 1996. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 16<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 40: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Hyperbulie*”. 1973. <http://www.valieexport.org>. April 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 41: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Eros/ion*”. 1971. Ibid. April 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 42: EXPORT, VALIE. “*remote...remote*”. 1973.

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Figure 43: EXPORT, VALIE. “*remote...remote*”. 1973.

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Figure 44: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Identity-Transfer*”. 1972. Ibid. April 21<sup>st</sup> 2011.

Figure 45: EXPORT, VALIE. “*Restricted Code*”. 1979.

<http://www.valieexport.org>. April 25<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 46: TOXIC DREAMS. “*VALIE EXPORT’s Understudy – A reformulation of Restricted Code*”. Private picture from the performance on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 47: TOXIC DREAMS. “*VALIE EXPORT’s Understudy – A reformulation of Restricted Code*”. <http://toxicdreams.at/archive/>. April 25<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Figure 48: Yoko Ono/John Lennon. Picture taken by Annie Liebovitz in December 1980.

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Ich habe mich bemüht, sämtliche Inhaber der Bildrechte ausfindig zu machen und ihre Zustimmung zur Verwendung der Bilder in dieser Arbeit eingeholt. Sollte dennoch eine Urheberrechtsverletzung bekannt werden, ersuche ich um Meldung bei mir.

## 11. Index

- Abramović 17, 19, 39, 41, 42, 53, 54, 88, 99
- Acconci, Vito 91
- aesthetics 3, 24, 38, 51, 53, 78
- American 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 13, 18, 22, 30, 36, 38, 39, 42, 56, 57, 60, 63, 66, 87, 89
- American feminist artists 3
- artistic strategy 63
- Austin, J.L 94
- Austrian 89
- avant-garde 9, 10, 22, 33, 36, 42, 57, 64
- Bal, Mieke 91
- Barker, Chris 91
- Beauvoir, Simone 91
- behavior 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, 23, 24, 49, 54, 61, 83, 84, 85
- Belvedere 3, 6, 10, 72, 73, 74, 78, 92, 94, 97, 98, 100
- Bhabha, Homi 91
- Black Mountain College 17
- body 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 93, 94, 95, 98, 99
- body as material 89
- body double 67
- Bordo, Susan 94, 95
- Botticelli 60
- boundaries 15, 16, 38, 39, 44, 68, 70, 88
- Butler, Judith 91, 94
- citation 7, 50, 51, 65, 87, 89
- communicative tool 6, 7, 89
- construction 6, 23, 25, 75, 81
- cultural texts 50
- deconstruction 7, 11, 50, 67
- Dennis Oppenheim 57, 80
- Dentith, Simon 91
- divided self 68
- Dreher, Thomas 91, 99
- Duchamp 69
- Eifler, Margret 95
- embodiment 14, 86
- equality 7, 86
- Expanded Cinema 11
- EXPORT, VALIE 10, 92, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105
- female body 11, 29, 34, 39, 41, 43, 44, 47, 52, 53, 56
- Feminist Actionism 4, 9, 11, 34, 35, 36, 87, 95
- Feminist Studies 56

feminist theories 7, 41  
 Fischer-Lichte, Erika 92, 96  
 Fluxus 11, 20, 22, 33, 40, 41  
 fragmentation 47  
 gaze 10, 40, 41, 44, 52, 69, 77, 81, 87  
 gender 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35, 37, 39, 43, 50, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 69, 72, 80, 82, 84, 86, 87, 89, 94  
 gender norms 3, 7, 43, 52, 72, 89  
 gender politics 38, 89  
 gender stereotypes 8, 43, 89  
 Gender Studies 3, 8, 91, 107  
 Goldberg, RoseLee 92  
 Guerilla Girls 36, 37, 102  
 Hall, Stuart 96  
 Hamera, Judith 96, 98  
 Happening 11, 18, 20, 21, 33  
 heteronomy 49, 78  
 Hutcheon, Linda 92  
 iconographic tradition 50, 56, 61  
 identity 6, 9, 10, 11, 17, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 47, 63, 69, 73, 74, 80, 86  
 imagery 50  
 irony 51, 70  
 Jagose, Annamarie 92  
 John Cage 17  
 Karen Finley 11, 30, 39, 42, 88  
 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 97  
 Lentos 6, 10, 92, 94, 97, 98  
 liminality 15, 16  
 logocentrism 72  
 Loxley, James 92  
 male gaze 6, 39, 41, 44, 50, 52, 57, 59, 60, 66, 68, 69, 72, 81, 89  
 Marshall McLuhan 6  
 McKenzie, Jon 97  
 Merce Cunningham 17  
 metaphor 67, 70, 72, 74, 79  
 metaphorical language 67  
 Michelangelo 55, 103  
 mimesis 7, 50, 55, 56, 63, 65, 87, 89, 90, 99  
 mimicry 56  
 mirror image 61, 70  
 mise-en-abyme 68  
 Mueller, Roswitha 92, 93  
 object 6, 9, 11, 16, 17, 22, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 66, 68, 77, 85, 86, 89  
 oppressed body 73  
 oppression 44, 46, 54, 76  
 pain 75, 93  
 parody 7, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 87, 89  
 pastiche 51, 53

performance 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 60, 63, 64, 65, 67, 71, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 91, 93, 94, 96, 106  
 performance art 3, 4, 7, 12, 14, 17, 20, 31, 60, 67  
 performance artists 14, 15, 88, 89  
 Performance Studies 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 93, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99  
 performative gender 23  
 performativity 4, 11, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 62  
 phallocratic society 6, 52, 58, 59, 66, 79, 89  
 Phelan, Peggy 93  
 postmodern 47, 51, 67, 85  
 power 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 44, 47, 54, 56, 59, 62, 65, 66, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 84, 86  
 R. D. Laing 46, 68, 86  
 race 14, 15, 23, 82  
 René Magritte 70  
 representation 7, 14, 27, 28, 29, 30, 48, 51, 55, 56, 66, 68, 69, 75, 76, 77, 87, 89  
 restored behavior 13, 18, 24  
 Scarry, Elaine 93  
 Schechner, Richard 93  
 Schneemann, Carolee 93  
 Schneider, Rebecca 93  
 self 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 25, 28, 31, 34, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 48, 49, 52, 59, 60, 63, 67, 69, 70, 75, 78, 79, 80, 85, 86, 87, 89, 96  
 self-determination 49, 78  
 self-harming 7, 75, 87, 89  
 sex 8, 25, 26, 27, 39, 91  
 signified 17, 42, 48, 61, 69  
 signifier 17, 42, 48, 61, 69, 85  
 Silverman, Katja 98  
 society 6, 7, 8, 10, 16, 26, 34, 37, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89  
 stereotypes 3, 7, 43, 44, 52, 53, 87, 89  
 subject 16, 17, 27, 31, 32, 35, 42, 44, 45, 46, 48, 56, 68, 74  
 subject-object division 16  
 superimposition 51  
 the Other 14, 46, 48, 68, 69  
 theater 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22  
 Turner, Victor 99  
 United States 12, 13, 17, 22, 31, 37, 88, 107  
 VALIE EXPORT 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 19, 22, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 61, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 106

Venus	60, 104	60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74, 77, 78, 82, 86, 89
Vergine, Lea	93	
Viennese Actionism	4, 9, 11, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 79	Women's Movement 31
violence	73, 76, 79, 80	Writing the body 49
vulnerable body	45	Yoko Ono 3, 22, 64, 87, 88, 89, 90, 106
woman	6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 28, 37, 39, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59,	Yves Klein 31, 32, 77
		Zell, Andrea 93

## 12. Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Stephanie Hopf, Bakk. phil.

**Born:** 19.09.1984 in Traunstein - Bavaria, Germany

**2004:**

High School Diploma School of Linguistics and Social Sciences

“Annette-Kolb-Gymnasium” – Traunstein.

Graduation subjects: English, Biology, German, Religion

**2005-2011:**

University of Vienna

English Studies – focus on Linguistics and Gender Studies

Media Studies

Psychology

**2009:**

University of Copenhagen

Study abroad via the ERASMUS program (Six months)

Graduation in Danish language course

**2010:**

University of Vienna

Excursion to the United States in line with English Studies:

“Live(s) on the Mississippi”. In cooperation with Prof. Dr. Fellner from Saarland University and students and professors from Bradley University, Peoria (Three weeks)

**2011:**

University of Vienna

Graduation in Media Studies – title: Bakk. phil.

Theses: *Female Advertising – Elderly women in the media.* (2009),

*Sport Stars in the media surrounding.* (2010)