

BEM Bad Emser Medienkunsttage  
(Media Art Conference, Bad Ems)

## **Virtual Utopias - Boundless Possibilities? The Relevance of New Technologies in Art and Society**

A conference organised by Künstlerhaus Schloß Balmoral in cooperation with the Institut für Kunstwissenschaften, Koblenz-Landau University, Campus Koblenz.

New means of expression have developed in art, photography, film and New Technologies which have aesthetic and social consequences - or rather should we say that society has developed possibilities of expression which reflect changes in ways of thinking? Media artists who articulate themselves only through digital technologies, take the medium as the message, as an instrument to open up new freedoms. What started as a self-reflexive system around the medium – in this sense a version of l'art pour l'art -, opens its (cyber-)space for new ('think'-)rooms in which text and picture converge, time is measured in real time, the virtual emerges as a new reality and simulation makes possible new forms of being.

The New Media uses the internet and the computer, film, photography and video are alienated, virtual realities are generated and the viewer participates interactively in the construction of New Media works. The question is, to what extent does art benefit from the new technologies and how do they affect its development?

In the nowhere-land of the Net new models of communication, new forms of society and hierarchies, virtual landscapes and architectures arise. Spatial and temporal distance is questioned as is the representation of the body: eternal youth, dream and trauma, idyll and horror, reality and fiction. Are we confronted with the dissolution of the self or the power and manipulation of and over individuals? Are appearance and being interchangeable in these utopias? Do other cultural roles arise through the play with virtual identities?

**The upcoming four part conference looks at the questions at the interface of (Media) Art and New Technologies:**

Part I „Media Culture Virtuality“ is chaired by the media theoretician and philosopher Georg C. Tholen of the Institut für Medienwissenschaften at the University of Basel. The key question here is how far virtual spaces and their boundless possibilities fuse with physical reality and how they influence perception through artistic material - electronic and digital media. In answering this question, there emerges a new appointment of places and roles in the new spaces – the real and virtual world – for both the artist and the recipient. Furthermore, faceless conversations with synthetic appearances cause new forms of (tele)communication which have to be examined critically.

Part II “Media Art – Politics” is chaired by Verena Kuni, lecturer in Art and Media Studies at the University of Trier. In the discussion about the so-called “Net.Art” the question arises whether an art which operates exclusively on the internet and thus denies itself access to the conventional art business shoots itself in the foot. The session attempts to cast light on the role of the internet as an extension of art practice. Here, its boundlessness not only acts as a limitation, as the failure of a complete genre of art, but also demonstrates how the achievements of the internet are being taken in once more by the physically tangible art. In this way, the change, even the dissolution, of the triangular relationship artist-work-recipient is examined and the connected typologising of the “new” (media) artists is analysed.

Part III “Cyber Performance – Art”, chaired by Thea Brejzek, Theatre Studies specialist and independent director in Berlin, looks at the hybridity of the body in performance and virtual environments. Two questions arise: in how far can the body be understood as an interface to virtuality and how does its presence influence the performance space? The main emphasis here is on the questioning of identity which manifests itself on the Net through avatars of the human alter ego and which has a relationship to the real person similar to the one between role and actor. Which effects may the encounters of the natural body with its artificial replacement have, and how will the “re-mapping” of absence and presence affect communicative action at the interface between subject, space and picture?

Part IV “Spaces of Knowledge / Art / Society” is chaired by Nina Zaretskaja of the TV-Gallery Moscow and New York. It examines the quantitative and qualitative possibilities of the internet as an

online archive and networked space of knowledge. The complete knowledge of the world is written into the global Net, being continuously filled with new content: the medium, used subversively to explore new communities of artists, digitally constructs new terms on the basis of randomly chosen textual and pictorial units and offers seemingly unlimited possibilities which resurrect the utopia of encyclopaedic knowledge. Art in the service of science, a game with thoughts to promote new teaching and learning methods - so-called edutainment. Artistic positions, however, question the fleetingness of the new world knowledge and ponder how the Net, independent from place and time, can be used in a democratic society as a field of interaction that lends identity.

These four sessions will be followed by a discussion about the current state of research and artistic ideas. The manifold ideas emerging from the papers make clear that New Technologies have created new ways of expression of aesthetic and social relevance which have long since made an impact on physical art and on society. The object here is to debate the current position with young researchers and artists and to think up tomorrow's utopias in the wake of the creation of the quantum computer.